

Heroes, Monsters and Values

Heroes, Monsters and Values:
Science Fiction Films of the 1970s

Edited by

Michael Berman and Rohit Dalvi

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

Heroes, Monsters and Values:
Science Fiction Films of the 1970s,
Edited by Michael Berman and Rohit Dalvi

This book first published 2011

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2011 by Michael Berman and Rohit Dalvi and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2692-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2692-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Science Fiction Films as New Generic Myths	
Barry Keith Grant	

Introduction	1
Michael Berman and Rohit Dalvi	

PART I: HEROES IN HISTORY

Chapter One.....	19
The Corporate Challenges to Recovery of the Individual and History	
in <i>Rollerball</i> (1975)	
Michael Berman	

Chapter Two	29
The Nature of the Female Hero in <i>Alien</i>	
Jan Marijaq	

Chapter Three	41
Performances of Spectacular and Stressed Embodiment in <i>Star Trek</i> ,	
<i>The Motion Picture</i>	
Maureen Connolly	

PART II: MONSTERS OF TECHNOLOGY

Chapter Four	57
<i>Colossus: The Forbin Project</i> : The Evolution of a Monster	
Jennifer Welchman	

Chapter Five	73
<i>Zardoz</i> and the Problem of Infinity: Heidegger and Levinas	
beyond Death and Love	
Drew M. Dalton	

Chapter Six	89
The Tragic Life of Sol Roth: Why He Won't Just Eat <i>Soylent Green</i> and Shut Up Rohit Dalvi	
PART III: VALUES IN DISRUPTION	
Chapter Seven.....	109
Who's Your Daddy? <i>Star Wars</i> and the Ethics of Lying John Richard Harris	
Chapter Eight.....	123
Choosing Goodness: The Many Moralities of <i>A Clockwork Orange</i> Stephen Brown	
Chapter Nine.....	139
Winning Is the Only Standard of Excellence Left: <i>Death Race 2000</i> and the Dissolution of the Virtues Brian Lightbody	
Chapter Ten	151
<i>Beneath the Planet of the Apes</i> : Killer Apes and the Status of Nature Keith Sudds	
Chapter Eleven	169
Religious Transcendence in <i>Logan's Run</i> Sam Flatbush	
Chapter Twelve	179
<i>The Man Who Fell To Earth</i> : The Messiah and the Amphicatastrophe Andrew M. Butler	
Contributors.....	197
Subject Index	201

PREFACE:
SCIENCE FICTION FILMS
AS NEW GENERIC MYTHS

BARRY KEITH GRANT

IN ISAAC ASIMOV'S *PRELUDE TO FOUNDATION* (1988), Hari Seldon wonders why "so many people spend their lives not trying to find answers to questions – not even thinking of questions to begin with? Was there anything more exciting in life than seeking answers?"¹ Seldon's musing articulates the essential project of both philosophy and science fiction, so it is no surprise that philosophers should turn to science fiction films, as they do in this book, to tease out fundamental ethical and metaphysical questions. After all, philosophy and science fiction are fellow travelers on the same galaxy quest to understand the universe and our place within it. Philosophy's passion for truth and knowledge is conveyed in science fiction's sense of wonder; at the same time, in the specifics of their extrapolative premises, works of science fiction are, as the very name of the genre implies, philosophical hypotheses.

But why should the philosophers in this book be drawn to science fiction movies of the 1970s specifically? Was this not the decade that saw the rise of the blockbuster mentality in Hollywood? Indeed, toward the end of the decade it was largely the huge box-office success of the science fiction blockbusters *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977), *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), *Superman – The Movie* (Richard Donner, 1978), and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Robert Wise, 1979) that were largely responsible for dramatically transforming the American film industry into the blockbuster and high concept mentality. And did not the decade end with the debacle of Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1980), widely seen as marking the end of the so-called New Hollywood renaissance?

Clearly, by the end of the 1970s there was, as Phil Hardy has noted, "a radical shift in the tone of the science fiction film from the bittersweet questioning of tendencies within modern society to an unabashed celebration of escapism, gee-whizz heroics and innocence."² Nevertheless, the same decade that gave us such execrable exploitation as *The Thing with Two*

Heads (1972) and big budget bombs like *Damnation Alley* (1974), based on the novel by Roger Zelazny, also saw the release of a startling number of important and innovative science fiction films, many of them discussed in these pages, including Lucas' *THX 1138* and *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), *The Omega Man*, *Silent Running*, *A Clockwork Orange* (all 1971), *Slaughterhouse Five* (1972), *Soylent Green* and *Phase IV* (1973), *Zardoz*, *Dark Star*, *The Stepford Wives*, and *Terminal Man* (all 1974), *A Boy and His Dog* and *Rollerball* (1975), *Logan's Run* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), *Demon Seed* and *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1977), Philip Kaufman's excellent remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), and *Mad Max*, *Alien*, and *Time After Time* (all 1979). Every year of the decade saw the release of at least one significant American science fiction film. Individually they run the ideological gamut from conservative to subversive, but as a group their politic differences are symptomatic of a decade that saw the American film industry undergo rapid and profound change.

Of course, science fiction literature was also changing radically, not least as a result of feminist theory and its influence on women writers, beginning with the publication of Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* in 1969. LeGuin's novel opened the stargates for women to write about space travel. Described by science fiction critic Carl Freedman as "the book with which sf most decisively lost its innocence on matters of sex and gender,"³ it initiated a wave of feminist science fiction from such writers as Joanna Russ, James Tiptree Jr., Marge Piercy, Connie Willis, Kit Reed, and Octavia Butler. Pamela Sargent's three anthologies of feminist science fiction, the *Women of Wonder* series, published between 1974 and 1978, provided solid evidence of a feminist "movement" within the genre. By the 1970s, then, women science fiction writers could boldly go where few had before; writing science fiction that in various ways challenged the genre's traditionally masculinist bias. Novels such as Russ's *The Female Man* (1974) and Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) targeted the very language of science fiction as a masculine discourse, not only by featuring female protagonists, but also by experimenting with unconventional narrative structures.

While science fiction film can hardly be said to reveal the same progressive attitude toward gender at the time (*Alien* is the most notable exception), similarly seismic shifts were also taking place in popular cinema generally. Within the span of this one decade, cinema exhibition moved from the urban movie palace to the suburban multiplex. This new exhibition context of the shopping mall, along with the introduction of the saturation release strategy for blockbuster movies, radically altered

cinema's place within the American cultural landscape. But more important for our purposes, at the same time the decade saw a reinvigoration of genre filmmaking, including science fiction, as the result of several converging factors. The studio system continued its progressive decline initiated after the introduction of commercial television and the Paramount Decision, both happening in 1948. By the time the X-rated *Midnight Cowboy* won the Oscar for Best Picture of 1969, the Production Code, the system of self-censorship instituted by the studios in the early 1930s, was essentially defunct, replaced by the newer rating system. A film such as Donald Cammell's *Demon Seed*, in which a woman is imprisoned, raped, and impregnated by a computer, would have been all but impossible to show with the Code in place.

Even as studios began to lose their power, film directors, who during the studio era were contract employees like editors, art directors, and focus pullers, were gaining significant prestige and clout in the post-*Easy Rider* (1969) period as artists with personal visions. The new regard of "the director as superstar," to quote the title of a 1970 book of interviews with filmmakers,⁴ was the result of the contentious but nonetheless widely influential "auteur theory," which had taken hold of the popular imagination. In the US Andrew Sarris, longtime film critic for New York's *Village Voice*, introduced the approach, which had originated with French criticism in the pages of *Cahiers du cinema*, to North America as the auteur theory. Initially, many were shocked by the auteurs' passionate embrace of Hollywood films, and the mention of directors like Howard Hawks, Frank Tashlin, Vincente Minnelli, Nicholas Ray, and Samuel Fuller as artists with complex worldviews alongside such sacrosanct figures as D.W. Griffith, Carl Dreyer, and Sergei Eisenstein. By the 1970s, the popular conception of auteurism had transformed the director into an artist, and movie credits accordingly changed so that up front the film was "signed" by the director.

Thus, even as the studios continued their collapse, there emerged a new generation of directors, cineastes with a more contemporary sensibility but who were interested in making genre films, once the glory of Hollywood's golden age and the kind of movies that had inspired them. New Hollywood was receptive to their projects. However, their approach was now informed by a new, more critical awareness of generic tradition. As Jean-Luc Godard has said, once you can make movies like the ones that made you want to make them, you can no longer make movies that same way. Collectively known as the "movie brats," many of this group, which included Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, William Friedkin, Peter Bogdanovich, Francis Ford Coppola, and Martin Scorsese, had studied

film in university and were knowledgeable about film history and theory. These directors made revisionist genre movies that consciously reworked classic traditions. Robert Altman's career in the 1970s is emblematic of the fresh approach to genre at the time. During the decade Altman seemed to work his way with deliberation through the classic genres. The ironic war film *M*A*S*H* and the screwball comedy *Brewster McCloud* (both 1970) were followed by the subversive western *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971); the neo-noirs *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and *Thieves Like Us* (1974); *Nashville* (1975), a socially critical musical; and – yes, science fiction as well – with the futuristic *Quintet* (1979), an unjustly neglected work in Altman's oeuvre.

Friedkin's *The French Connection* (1971), Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973), and Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) famously took the crime film in new directions, but it is, I would argue, the cinema of the fantastic that experienced the most profound revisioning. George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) started a stunning cycle of science fiction and horror films in the next decade, which included his own subsequent *Jack's Wife* (1972), *The Crazies* (1973), *Martin* (1973), and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). Along with Romero, Brian de Palma's *Sisters* (1973), *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974), *Carrie* (1976), *Obsession* (1976), *The Fury* (1978), and *Dressed to Kill* (1980), as well as the best work of Larry Cohen, Wes Craven, John Carpenter, and others, in different ways reversed horror's traditional conflict between the normal and the monstrous, startlingly locating the latter within the former rather than distinct from and in opposition to it.

For popular culture theorist John Cawelti, the changes in the period's genre films were so profound that he wondered whether the traditional film genres had exhausted themselves, hypothesizing that "the cultural myths they once embodied are no longer fully adequate to the imaginative needs of our time."⁵ So, for example, given the compromised wars and botched operations that have characterized the American military since the Korean conflict in the 1950s, American viewers have found it difficult to accept without irony such genre conventions as the cavalry in the western coming decisively to the rescue—as it does in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), made shortly before World War II, when the platoon appears out of nowhere in the nick of time to save the day. Evolving political consciousness has since exposed the classic western as colonialist and racist, with Manifest Destiny no longer necessarily meaning westward the path of civilization but instead the genocide of First Nations (American Aboriginal) peoples. Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970), released at the beginning of the decade, decisively marked the end of the classic western

with its depiction of Native Americans as “human beings” and the cavalry as savage murderers. The film’s depiction of the infamous massacre at Washita was clearly influenced by the Mai Lai Massacre during the Vietnam War only two years earlier.

It is no coincidence that the rising popularity of the science fiction film happened simultaneously with the decline of the western. Having once been the mainstay of Hollywood studio production, the western declined precipitously after the revisionist and parody westerns of the 1970s. While George W. Bush succeeded to some extent in invoking the rhetoric of the western to bolster domestic support for his war on terrorism after 9/11, in the post-Vietnam era westerns no longer carried the mythic appeal they once did. But if contemporary viewers tend to snigger at the convenient and comforting appearance of the cavalry in *Stagecoach*, essentially the same convention more recently has enthralled spectators watching Han Solo return at the last moment to join the outnumbered rebels for the final showdown with the Death Star in *Star Wars*.

The scene in *Star Wars* where Luke Skywalker returns to the homestead to find his aunt and uncle killed by storm troopers was intended by Lucas as homage to the memorable scene in Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956) where Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) discovers the bodies of his brother’s family after an Indian attack. Lucas’s adaptation of western genre conventions for his space adventure marked the beginning of science fiction’s sustained usurpation of the western’s convention and iconography. Indeed, many science fiction movies are essentially transposed westerns, with space becoming, in the famous words of *Star Trek*’s opening voice-over, the “final frontier.” In the lawless expanse of outer or cyberspace, heroes and villains wield laser guns instead of six-guns, space cowboys jockey customized rockets instead of riding horses, and aliens, as movies like *Alien Nation* (1988) and *District 9* (2009) make clear, serve as the swarthy Other in the place of Indians. A few years after *Star Wars* there appeared a cycle of science fiction adaptations of famous westerns, including *Outland* (1981), a version of *High Noon* (1952) set on a space mining station instead of a frontier town; *Enemy Mine* (1985), a remake of the liberal western *Broken Arrow* (1950); and *Battle Beyond the Stars* (1980), a remake of *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), itself a remake of Akira Kurosawa’s *The Seven Samurai* (1954).

Western movies first appealed to audiences at a time when modernity was eliminating the frontier. Today, we live in an increasingly technological environment, an era in which the big sky of the western has been all but blotted out by a new mythic sky, one more likely to be “the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.”⁶ Because now we are more familiar

with computers than horses, and more likely to visit the new digital frontier than what remains of the wilderness, the classic western has been largely supplanted by the science fiction film in popular culture. Even a cursory glance at recent Hollywood releases and announced future projects indicates that, at the time of this writing, in the second decade of the 21st-century, the genre shows no signs of losing momentum with either film makers or audiences. But it is important to remember that it was the science fiction movies of the 1970s that truly brought the genre from the level of B-quickie to mainstream blockbuster. And that even if these films functioned as new generic myths for the mass audiences that some of them attracted, they also provided, as this collection of insightful essays so fascinatingly reveals, much to provoke our sense of philosophical wonder.

Bibliography

- Asimov, Isaac, *Prelude to Foundation* (U.S.A.: Bantam Books, 1991).
 Cawelti, John, "Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 260.
 Freedman, Carl, "Science Fiction and the Triumph of Feminism: Barr's *Future Females, The Next Generation*," *Science Fiction Studies*, no. 81 (2000).
 Gelmis, Joseph, *The Film Director as Superstar* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1970).
 Gibson, William, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1984).
 Hardy, Phil, *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Films* (New York: William Morrow, 1984).

Notes

-
- ¹ Asimov, Isaac, *Prelude to Foundation* (U.S.A.: Bantam Books, 1991), 244-245.
² Hardy, Phil, *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Films* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 290.
³ Freedman, Carl, "Science Fiction and the Triumph of Feminism: Barr's *Future Females, The Next Generation*," *Science Fiction Studies*, no. 81 (2000), 278.
⁴ Gelmis, Joseph, *The Film Director as Superstar* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1970).
⁵ Cawelti, John, "Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 260.
⁶ See the first line of William Gibson's foundational cyberpunk novel, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1984).

INTRODUCTION

SPACESHIPS, ALIENS AND LASER GUNS, the constitutive paraphernalia of the science fiction film appeals, repulses and entices with action and violence. Sexuality is often thrown in with good measure, supplementing the lures of science fiction films. But the genre of science fiction is more than enormous explosions and fast speed chases. Science fiction challenges its consumers to think, reflect, question and explore. From the graphic depictions of violence raised to an art form, *Rollerball* or *A Clockwork Orange*, to the retelling of classic stories, such as fear of the unknown in *Alien* or the return of the prodigal son/creation in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, the selection of films discussed in this anthology exemplify all of the above qualities. While these films are intended to produce profits, and many of them did so with fantastic national and international box office returns, they also catalyzed elements in our understanding. They drive us below our preconceptions by forcing our conceptions to the fore, often taking them to extremes, such as the absurdities satirized in Corman's *Death Race 2000* or the *Frankenstein* inspired terror represented by the cold calculations of purely rational, machine intelligence in *Colossus: The Forbin Project*. These films push and prod us in directions that are uncomfortable, unacceptable, and sometimes outrightly abhorrent. Yet we return to them again and again. As Umberto Eco describes, there is an attraction to the repulsive, an appeal of that which is ugly from which we cannot look away. The movie industry has come to understand this: we readily consume such fare. The ugly is taken within; *Soylent Green* embraces this insight, institutionalizes the extreme, making cannibalism palatable.

Science fiction can present the extremes of the human condition, taking it to the limits of our imagination. Cutting through our everyday reality, it can turn over our assumptions and show us the underbelly of our world, that darkness, the void, the nothingness that haunts our existence. Yet these films do not merely devolve into mere nihilisms, for many buy into the promises of science itself, that the rational ends in enlightenment: in *Alien* there is survival through the fires of terror; *Rollerball* seemingly demonstrates the victory of individuality; truth (almost) wins out in *Soylent Green*; maturity is realized for the protagonist of *A Clockwork Orange*; and love and responsible acceptance bear beautiful fruits in *Star*

Trek: The Motion Picture. The night side of our lives revolves into the day side. This is the ebb and flow of human being. Ultimately the genre of science fiction explores this being that is human. It is our own imaginative self-interrogation, a means to reflect ourselves back upon ourselves. In essence, science fiction is reflexive, and hence the door is not only opened to philosophy, but philosophy is actively called for in examining these imaginative depictions of the human.

This anthology is structured with three main parts. The first section examines the nature of the hero as well as his or her role in history. Traditionally heroes in film are portrayed as individuals who struggle with the forces of darkness, evil, antagonists of every stripe, etc., and in the end are victorious even if it costs them their lives. They have come to serve as media icons, figures of action and adventure, righting the wrongs of the world. Of course, as the times have changed, these “moral” exemplars are depicted with human shortcomings and frailties, yet in many ways, the more human the character, i.e., the more limited in power and/or ability, the more heroic they seem. In these regards, three films exemplify these dynamics: *Rollerball*, *Alien*, and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

The first entry by Michael Berman focuses on the cult classic, *Rollerball*, which was released in 1975. While an unfortunate re-make was sadly attempted in 2002, the original film deserves a better recovery and rediscovery. The film is essentially a futuristic science fiction dystopia that tells the story of the world’s premiere Rollerball player, Jonathan E. Set in 2018, the world is ruled by a globalized corporate consortium of companies that control various sectors of the industrialized economy: food, energy, entertainment, etc. Big business has all but eliminated warfare and social conflict, but with some steep costs: individual freedoms are radically curtailed; persons are slated for various positions; and classes have basically become static. The corporations recognize that communities need an outlet for their aggressive tendencies, and thus they institute the professional sport of Rollerball. Thinly masked as gladiatorial games, Rollerball is a violent contest of opposing teams. The game is designed to grind down individuals, and to show that only concerted (corporate) behavior is the means for success. In this context, Jonathan E is introduced: he is an individual who excels at the sport, having unmatched success. He thus becomes a celebrity in his own right, an individual amidst the corporate, which grants him certain privileges over and above other players and others. His unfolding experience over the course of the film leads him to ask questions, to seek to rediscover why his world is the way it is, and thus sets him on a collision course with the corporations which wish to hide and cover the past and their own rise to global

dominance. This chapter explores these tensions and dynamics of recovery/rediscovery between the individual, as exemplified in Jonathan E, and the collective, corporate world authority of *Rollerball*.

Jan Marijaq's contribution explores the heroine of *Alien* (1979). One might think *Alien* is a typical horror movie masquerading as science fiction. The action is choppy, the dialogue stilted at times, the focus is on startling and scaring the audience—with one exception—the hero and sole human survivor is a woman. Marijaq asks whether or not Sigourney Weaver, as Warrant Officer Ripley, is a credible hero. First she provides a historical context in which to understand women and their role in the real world in the years leading up to the release of the film. Then Marijaq examines the nature of the hero, through both male and female eyes. Specifically, Marijaq looks at the portrayal of women in fiction, then science fiction, and how that portrayal changes when women authors start selling in significant numbers. She is then in a position to discuss how women are presented in the science fiction movies of the 1970s. Having set this stage, Marijaq documents the storyline and action sequences of *Alien*, and how the movie portrays the *female characters* (there are actually two women in a crew of seven). One is left with some ambiguous answers about the heroine's status. Does she really escape the mold of sexist stereotypes or does she merely exemplify them? In either case, our understanding of the nature of the hero is significantly challenged.

This section concludes with Maureen Connolly's piece. Much of Connolly's research interest involves examining issues of embodiment, in particular, spectacular and stressed embodiment. Her essay critically addresses these questions: How is stressed and/or spectacular embodiment enacted, enlisted, embraced, resisted in *Star Trek, the Motion Picture*? How is it "read"? And to what purpose? Connolly proposes engaging these questions through analyses of several selected lived relation pairings in *Star Trek, the Motion Picture*. Connolly bases her analysis in Richard Lanigan's and Tom Craig's communicological application of semiotic phenomenology, i.e., by identifying and describing norms and inscriptions, discerning what counts as a sign and/or how the body functions as a sign, and further disclosing the larger system of signs within which these are produced and re-inscribed. Within this semiotic phenomenological approach to cultural phenomena, Connolly loosens the intentional threads using three powerful (and, Connolly believes, related) ingredients of cultural semiosis: Ernst Cassirer's mythic consciousness, Julia Kristeva's subject in process/on trial, and Victor Turner's (unbearable) liminality. Connolly provides at the outset a framing of her theoretical premises. This is followed by a narrative summary and political-cultural contextualizing of

Star Trek, the Motion Picture, all of which set the stage for her ensuing semiotic phenomenological analysis.

The essays in the second part address the monsters of technology. Ever since Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* (1819), the horrors of reason have taken on many shapes. No longer need terror be tied to the supernatural, for the exploitation of the natural by science has become a real source of fear. In Shelley's novel the monster is the product of one man's mind. The creature chooses, or is perhaps fated to follow a path of doom and destruction, murdering as it deems fit, in order to inflict suffering on its creator. Hence we are provided a synopsis of the cycle of technology: intuited creative leap, amazing productive potential, and then the impact of the full range of negative consequences entailed by the implementation of the first step. Implicit in this cycle is the positivist attitude that science can provide the technological fix for what ails humanity, even when it is of our own design. But as we uncover the harmful costs we have slowly come to understand that this optimism is fundamentally misguided. The films that illustrate these issues include *Colossus: The Forbin Project*, *Zardoz*, and *Soylent Green*.

The first film here predates and prefigures the popular *Terminator* franchise (films and television series, as well as computer games, comic books and novels). The computer Colossus is clearly a progenitor of the shadowy Skynet. As much as these computerized monstrosities jeopardize human existence, we find a near "opposite" problem in *Zardoz*. The perfection of immortality granting technologies aim at preserving humanity, but as the film unfolds, humanity becomes its own self-destructive monstrosity. The salvation promised in techno-science shows its other face; hence technophobia becomes a fear realized. Herein the existentialist refrain looms large: we as individuals and communities are mortal. How should death then be faced? Any answer that one gleams from this film is further radicalized in *Soylent Green*, wherein human death is not merely foremost in the plot structure and struggles of Charleton Heston's character, for death becomes institutionalized, is given a face and form, *and then* that form is transformed for the literal consumption of and by humans. Yet this shocking plot device barely touches the meaningful flesh below the skin of the film. These films show us that the monster is not merely produced by humanity, but that humanity is its own creation and such a creation is monstrous.

Jennifer Welchman begins this section with her essay on *Colossus: The Forbin Project*. From their first appearance, science fiction films have played upon our ambivalence towards the innovations science has made in our lives. In the 1970s, ambivalence began to be expressed about effects of

scientific innovation upon human nature and human evolution. *Colossus: The Forbin Project* is an early and most notable example. This is the story of the creation of a super computer with a mind of its own that announces that it will henceforth rule the world: humanity must conform to its dictates or die. Colossus declares it will be loved and respected as a god and promises peace if it is obeyed. Forbin, its creator, replies, "Never." The threat that Colossus represents is not simply that science may spawn monsters capable of eliminating our species. It is that science could contribute to the evolution of a yet higher species, superior to human beings in the one respect that had hitherto marked us apart from all others: intelligence. The prediction is that artificial intelligence will make human intelligence (and humanity itself) an evolutionary dead-end. As such, Colossus is a unique form of monster differing significantly from the gothic horror monster genre so often employed in the science fiction horror movies of the 1950s-60s. The classic gothic horror monster is a creature whose existence defies the normal operations of nature, and whose unnaturalness explains the peculiar affective responses we have to them: fear combined with loathing or revulsion (this marks them apart from monsters of fantasy, which however horrific they might be in our world are perfectly normal in their own, e.g., the dwarfs, elves, and ents in *The Lord of the Rings*). By contrast, Colossus, though artefactual does not represent a violation of the laws of the natural sciences, but is instead presented as their logical outcome. In consequence, the affective response the film generates is not the fear and loathing characteristic of gothic horror monsters. It is instead classical panic fear, i.e., fear of the ancient nature god Pan. This is the fear that comes over people in wild, uncultivated places. It often begins with a feeling of being watched, but from where or by what one cannot tell. In a sense, it does not matter, for what one fears is not any particular threat, such as a bear, cougar, or wolf. Wildlife is simply the mode through which the capricious and unpredictable animating *intelligence* behind them, Pan, manifests himself. Distinctly then, panic fear is a generalized fear of spaces controlled by intelligent agencies more powerful than humanity. The film creates this kind of response by employing a form of *subjective camera*. The audience observes Forbin as Colossus does, from multiple perspectives through its many camera eyes, creating the impression that Colossus, like Pan, is everywhere and nowhere in Forbin's environment. Thus we can also see why Colossus predicts that it will ultimately be worshiped as a god. As humans once worshiped Pan, the god of uncultivated natural species, Colossus expects to be worshiped as the god of artefactual spaces. We can also see why Forbin insists that Colossus misunderstands the situation.

Human beings feared Pan. But instead of loving him, they resisted his influence—reducing his sway by reducing the wildness of their surroundings. Colossus too will be feared, but not loved. For the characters in the film, however, resistance seems useless. The message is that the only way to resist Colossus is to forestall its evolution.

Drew M. Dalton's take on *Zardoz* (1974) works within similar insights. There can be little doubt that one of the primary goals of the modern project, at least as originally conceived, was to gain enough knowledge about the operation of the world to enable complete human mastery over it. This mastery of course had a very specific aim, to overcome the limits that the natural world placed upon human life and projects. Indeed in many ways modernity as a philosophic movement could be summarized as the attempt to make humans into gods, unlimited in their scope and power, infinite in their capacity and life. In *Zardoz* we see a world in which this project has been realized, at least for a few, and with horrific results. There are the Immortals: a community where all limits have been abolished—a world without death and in which all work and communication is possible by thought alone. Unfortunately, as the film demonstrates, in such a world not only does life lose its meaning, giving way to the endless malaise of ennui, but meaningful identity qua singularity is also lost. The Immortals are denied any privacy, any interior life or dissent because of their telepathic link to one another. In this way the film explores the problem of the modern project and the troubles that a life without limits, a life lived in the grip of the infinite, presents. Specifically, it provides a clear counter-case by which to explore Martin Heidegger's claim that limits, that is, death, is not an imperfection within human nature, but precisely its perfection, and that such limits, far from threatening the individual, serve to demarcate and preserve singularity. *Zardoz* gives us an imaginative way of understanding Heidegger's critique of the modern project.

Curiously, the film also suggests the dangers of Heidegger's position. It also presents a community wherein death still exists as a possibility and the modern project has failed; life here is lived determinately towards death. With the Brutals, in contradistinction to the Immortals, we see a world driven towards its limits, indeed embracing those limits as a good commanded by a god. Like the Immortals, this tribe is presented as equally identity-less and faceless—stuck behind masks and living in a state of constant war and murder. The film thus provides a site for exploring Emmanuel Levinas' rejoinder to Heidegger and a post-Heideggerian renewal of Descartes' vision of the infinite. Levinas contends the problem of Heidegger's position is that by denying the infinite value in

the formation of human meaning, Heidegger's ideas (like Descartes') lead to the loss of identity, which ultimately gives way to a kind of murderous world, where values and ethics have no hold. Dalton uses *Zardoz* as a means for reflecting upon the goals and projects of the modern world, exploring Heidegger's critique of those projects, and finally examining the limits and dangers of such a critique via Levinas. The unifying trend in his analysis examines the problem of the infinite and how these respective philosophers treat this problem.

Death is again thematized in our next entry, but in a different fashion. Rohit Dalvi contends that the dynamism that drives *Soylent Green's* plot in actuality attempts to distract the audience from the main problems posed in the film. Essentially, the film employs a ruse to prevent us from seeing that something is profoundly wrong with modern human society. As Dalvi forcefully argues, cannibalism, the eating of recycled people-meat, is the least of society's sins when compared with women who are reduced to being "furniture", mere objects of consumption as things to be used for pleasure, when books have virtually vanished such that thought and expression have been all but annulled, and when protests are dispersed by using front loaders to scoop up dissents as political freedoms and human rights are swept away by authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Where the basic semblances of humanity are so completely eroded, the moral shock of consuming human flesh pales in comparison to the real and present dangers presented in the film.

The third section focuses on three films that employ disruptions in our values in order to tell their stories. The five futuristic visions of these films, *Star Wars*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Death Race 2000*, *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, *Logan's Run*, and *The Man Who Fell To Earth* spit our own modern values back in our faces. The hedonism and individualism that so characterize Western culture are pursued into extremism. The iconic *Star Wars* is used to show how certain commonsensical notions in ethics are actually turned upside down. The second of these films, the one by Stanley Kubrick, is deliberately shocking with its glorification of violence, but nonetheless remains appealing because of its subject matter. It touches upon, without clearly judging for or against, qualities that are so indelibly human: aggression and rationalization. This is followed by Brian Lightbody's treatment of Roger Corman's cult classic. This film is clearly satirical in its depiction of violence and politics, but one passes through this viewing with a gut shot: the ideal of individualism, the rugged goodness of self-reliance and survival, is parodied by the obvious co-opting of the singularity of the person. Corman's hero simply becomes that against which he fought. Keith Sudds's radical take on the *Planet of*

the Apes franchise undercuts the obvious racial allegory in mining the metaphysical assumptions that guide the depiction of nature in these films. The violence of this fictional world originates as a reaction to human destructiveness in pre-ape history. The resignation to the repetition of violence is explicitly doubled in *Logan's Run*. Sam Flatbush's unorthodox treatment of this film brings to the fore the darkness that characterizes human religiosity, while paying lip service to the goals of transcendence. Andrew Butler's insightful reading of *The Man Who Fell To Earth* rakes us over the coals of authenticity and the nature of messianism. All of these films challenge our assumptions about what is ethically and morally valuable. Are we cast into the post-modern predicament by these films where meaninglessness reigns supreme, where violence is inescapably as much a part of the ethical good as it is opposed, where even the path to heaven must be marked by blood (as we know the path to hell is marked by good intentions), or are there avenues for overcoming such constraints and limitations? Is there hope in the maturity that seems to dawn on Kubrick's protagonist? Can a successful *coup d'état* shrug off its own means for success? Is there a pure strain of race or religion that is right, correct and good? With these values in disruption, these films are ripe philosophical material.

John R. Harris's chapter opens this section with an analysis of one of the most iconic films of the 1970s, George Lucas's movie *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977). Harris contends that commonsense morality tells us that good people do not lie, and bad people do. We think that those who are deceptive have done something morally blameworthy whereas those who are honest are morally praiseworthy. In *Star Wars*, this commonsense view runs into trouble. There are a great many lies told in *Star Wars*, and those lies are told almost exclusively by those characters who supposedly good. Harris explores the morality of lying and the lessons that *Star Wars* might teach us about that subject. To do so, he employs the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant

Kant forcefully argued that one is never morally permitted to lie to another. Two (possibly related) reasons are offered for why lying is never permissible. First, Kant argues that we cannot universalize the practice of lying. That is to say, while there may be circumstances in which one might wish to lie, if one were to consider what would happen if everyone in similar circumstances were to behave as one does, then the very practice of lying would be undermined. Essentially everyone would know that people lie in circumstances like one's own, and so no one would believe anyone else in similar circumstances. Because we find that we cannot imagine everyone lying in these circumstances, we know that lying is

rationally unjustifiable. Secondly, Kant argues that it is wrong to lie because, by doing so, we fail to respect the rationality of those to whom we lie. When one lies to another and attempt to get the other to act according to false reasons, one has failed to respect the other as a rational agent. One has treated the other as a mere means to one's ends, to help one get what is wanted, rather than treating the other as deserving respect in his or her own right.

The lies told by morally good characters in *Star Wars* are illustrative of two important objections to Kant's absolute prohibition on lying. First, we may think that if, by telling the truth, we may lend assistance to a nefarious plan, then we may lie. In *Star Wars* a character (Princess Leia) is asked to reveal the location of a hidden base. This hidden base is the center of the rebellion that is seeking to overthrow the tyrannical empire that rules the galaxy. In this case many of us may abandon the commonsense truism that it is always wrong to lie, and now may argue that in circumstances like these one *ought* to lie to protect the lives of the freedom fighters. In another scene the protagonist, Luke Skywalker, is told that his father was killed by one of the empire's most vicious leaders, Darth Vader. We discover in the immediate sequel that this too is a lie, and as it turns out (spoiler alert) Darth Vader is Luke Skywalker's father. We may think that such a lie was necessary at the time in Luke Skywalker's development, and that the truth could have led the young hero away from good and toward a path of evil. Yet, despite the intuitively plausible belief that in circumstances like these one may lie, it is clear that Immanuel Kant thinks that we must tell the truth. Harris explores various nuances of the cases presented in *Star Wars* and how these nuances might affect the moral evaluation on these lies. He concludes with various suggestions about how Kant's view may be altered to accommodate cases like these.

Stephen Brown's essay broadens the engagement with moral philosophy. He examines four competing moral visions that hold within Kubrick's controversial work, *A Clockwork Orange*. First, there is the vision of the (anti-) protagonist Alex, the very embodiment of original sin and/or the unrestrained id. Alex takes sadistic pleasure in inflicting pain on others. Secondly, there is a version of Christian existentialist moralism, which is represented by the prison Chaplain who contends that moral "goodness is chosen". Thirdly, there is the amoral behaviorism of the doctors who treat Alex's criminal tendencies as problems of health to be "cured." Finally, there is the political expediency of the minister of the interior, whose manipulative use of "moral" language shows him to be closer to Alex than to anyone else in the film. A central thesis of this chapter is that the film

presents several competing moral visions without adjudicating among them.

Death Race 2000 (1975) is a futuristic dystopian movie similar to *Rollerball* wherein sport serves as the opium of the masses. The most popular sport in this alternate future of America—or in the film, the United Provinces of America—is the Transcontinental Death Race. The Transcontinental Death Race is a dangerous car race in which drivers compete by driving from “sea to shining sea” in the least amount of time. Much like the later movie *Cannonball Run* (1981), the race takes place over several days: all drivers are expected to rest at prescribed pit stops in order to service their vehicles, to record the points each has accumulated that day, and for the public to digest the gory series of events from the completed racing leg. Though the relationship between time and points is never fully explained in the movie (an important lacunae which serves to substantiate Lightbody’s thesis), it is clear that drivers are also judged by the number of points they accumulate. Points are rewarded for mowing down any pedestrian stupid enough to be on the roads when the most popular sporting event in the United Provinces of America is taking place. The film is unabashed in its depiction and glorification of violence.

The anti-hero of the film is the driver Frankenstein (played by David Carradine of *Kung Fu* (1972-75) fame). He is the Government’s entry into the race and is by far the most successful driver having won the most races. The name of Frankenstein is well suited to this driver, because he has been created (surgically reconstructed by the Government’s best surgeons) and extensively trained to fulfill one goal only: to win the Transcontinental Death Race. Frankenstein represents a microcosm of the film’s new Government of America: just as Frankenstein is a designed assemblage of machine parts and man, so too America is now nothing more than a political state with one goal—to maintain order at all costs. The United Provinces of America no longer represents “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” It is simply a motley collection of ideals torn out of the narrative that once provided the whole with meaning and significance. For example, the separation of Church and State which has long been considered an ideal division in order to insure the proper functioning of the American government and society no longer holds. In its stead is one bi-partisan Government ruled by the cult-like figure of Mr. President (who loves everyone and who in turn is loved by everyone). So too America’s love of cars and cross-country driving (a clear symbol of freedom and independence, reminiscent of the ideals of manifest destiny and the spirit of the Western frontier) has been yoked to a bloody and brutal gladiatorial-like sport where the only possible winner is the

Government's entry. In sum, the movie seems to suggest this tension, between competing and sometimes contradictory American virtues and values, provides meaning, significance, and worth for the citizenry and the country as a whole. The United States in this movie appears as bizarre or comical because the over-arching narrative that serves to give meaning to the tensions that once existed between competing American values no longer exists.

Lightbody argues that *Death Race 2000* is a clear warning of what may occur when we no longer have a narrative for virtues. Virtues, as understood by Aristotle, are excellences (*Arete*) in that they promote human happiness, individually and collectively. The point of the film is to demonstrate that when an over-arching narrative no longer holds together this set of virtues in tension, we can no longer make sense of our government, our society or ourselves. When Frankenstein himself says in the film, "Winning is the only standard of excellence left," we become unmoored from that which provides the very possibility for individual and political flourishing. We are basically left with a critique of (capitalist) gain and reward. The pay-off counts, profit matters, that is, the ends justify the means. The meaningfulness of the means here is reduced to vacuity, for they are merely the virtues that gain us the goal of winning—at all or any costs.

In the next chapter, Sudds shifts the critique of values to a possibly extra-human perspective. In his essay, Keith Sudds reviews the first sequel to 1968's *The Planet of the Apes*, *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970). His intention is to examine the film in the context of the changing cultural and political landscape of the 1960s and 70s as these aspects are reflected in the genre of science fiction. In particular he concentrates on the decline of confidence in technological/industrial society, with its attendant threats of environmental catastrophe and nuclear holocaust. Science fiction, he suggests, acts as a bellwether to cultural trends, foreseeing rather than influencing public perceptions.

Apes are the dominant species of the world of *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*. This first sequel begins with the penultimate scene in the first film, where it is revealed that human beings are justifiably repressed by the apes, not because the apes are merely violent and intolerant, but because humans, in a previous era caused an environmental catastrophe that led to the ascendancy of the apes. The apes, far from being grateful for this, are fearful of the humans because of the human predilection for destruction. In the final scene of the first film the hero finds the truth of this accusation. The sequel then examines the aftermath of this event. The conclusion of the film, claims Sudds, leaves one with the distinct

impression that humankind is irredeemably destructive. This depiction of humanity which marks a departure in science fiction away from the modernist optimism of so called Hard SF, towards a deep pessimism about the actual future of our species.

Sudds' intention is to show that this film foreshadows the current environmentalist movement, which he claims is a part of a post-Enlightenment, or as he terms it, post-humanist, politics that represents a decline in confidence in modernity. Sudds defines modernity as the child of the 18th century Enlightenment, which proposed that humankind could take control of its destiny through science and reason, and transcend the "superstition" of religion, replacing it with the creed of secular humanism. Through the 19th century and well into the 20th century, the Enlightenment creed of modernity held dominance as the world lined up to pursue the industrial "Horn-of-Plenty", and its promise of boundless riches for all. However, despite the unprecedented rise of prosperity and the rights of the common person, improvements in real personal freedoms in the west, following in the wake of two disastrous world wars, a depression and the development of apocalyptic technologies, all coupled with the perceived destruction of the natural world (e.g., the depletion of mineral resources, the western elites began to withdraw from the overweening confidence of modernity, and looked to the natural world for redemption. Sudds reveals the misguidance in this endeavor.

In closing this section, Flatbush's essay returns us an anthropocentric viewpoint in its analysis of *Logan's Run* (1976). The film depicts a future utopian/dystopian society housed within a self-contained metropolis. Set in the far future, the inhabitants of the city are the descendents of those who had survived global catastrophes and wars. But given the limited resources within the city, Logan's society has inherited the institution of Carousel, the forced/voluntary culling of those who reach the age of 30. Each citizen has a life clock crystal implanted into their palms, which dictates their levels of social responsibility as the colors change and "mature". In their last year, the life clocks begin to blink, and the citizen must prepare him or herself for their final social act, the participation in Carousel. This public ritual involves the "aged" citizens who don appropriate impersonal garb and attempt to reach "renewal". The actuality is that Carousel is the practice of voluntary euthanasia that maintains the population levels in the metropolis and prevents undue stresses on the city's limited resources. Citizens, generally speaking, agree to this state of affairs and look forward to attempting "renewal". The indoctrination of this belief into the populace is a key means for maintaining order in this city-state. The belief itself propounds that at the appropriate time (30th

year), each citizen must attempt “renewal”, the chance to be reborn, reincarnated into the next generation. Despite the complete lack of evidence for anyone surviving the attempt, most of the citizens cling to the hope, the mere possibility. They are lulled into accepting the doctrine because of the hedonistic lifestyle afforded them by the mechanized and self-sustaining infrastructure of the city. However, there are a few who do not accept this doctrine. They question *renewal*. An alternative myth develops around these rebels, the *runners*. They wish to escape to *sanctuary*, appropriately symbolized by the Egyptian Ankh. This underground movement is harassed and targeted by the *sandmen*, the futuristic law officers, of whom the film’s hero Logan is one. The sandmen receive their orders from a centralized computer system (which also runs the Carousel gallery of death). Logan is charged with a secret, essentially undercover assignment, to find sanctuary so that it can be destroyed. The ensuing adventure takes Logan out of the city into the world beyond, which has reverted to sheer wilderness that has overgrown the historical vestiges of (20th Century American) human society. This experience is both enlightening and shocking for Logan in that it makes him realize that the citizens have been kept in bondage, oppressed by the machine run insulated society of the city. He returns to the city to lead his fellow citizens towards freedom and lives unconstrained by the artificiality of Carousel’s premature euthanasia.

This chapter explores key religious themes evoked by *Logan’s Run*. The power of faith in renewal is exploited in the ritual of Carousel. The critique of human sacrifice is barely hidden by the hedonism of Logan’s society, yet this is never clearly addressed in the film’s critical moments. Furthermore, Logan’s return from the light of the outside world is reminiscent of both Plato’s description of the Cave Allegory in the *Republic* as well as the *Torah*’s depiction of Exodus. Logan is that compassionate Socratic teacher and Mosaic prophet who returns to the world of darkness in order to lead his people out of bondage. The film concludes with the deliverance of the citizenry from ignorance and pain, to life, freedom and salvation. In this vein, the allegorical power of the film points to the promised land devoid of suffering, which can be taken as a critique of hedonistic materialism (the fruits of capitalism realized in a mechanized world) or a Buddhist-like solution to the suffering caused by attachments to objects, ideals, and the past. *Logan’s Run* thereby serves as both a warning and exemplification about religious notions of transcendence for it can be ideologically exploited for power (Carousel) or existentially lived in the renunciation of ignorance and material fetters.

Andrew Butler provides as insightful interpretation of *The Man Who Fell To Earth*. A dominant mood of films between the late 1960s and the mid to late 1970s is their open-endedness, the failure of the restoration of an old equilibrium or the arrival of a new status quo after periods of crisis. They deny both the consolation of the happy ending and the catharsis which comes with the tragic ending; instead, they offer a contrast with what J. R. Tolkien labeled the eucatastrophic. In *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, we have David Bowie starring in the lead role as Newton, an alien adrift in a society like his own but still hostile, on a mission to save his own race, as well as possibly humanity. He stands in a long line of alien messiahs and saviors visiting Earth in science fiction. Newton offers new technology as uplift, while raising money for his own ends, transforming these gifts into economics. Humanity's reaction varies from the indifferent to the hostile, as Newton caves in to human sin.

Butler discusses Newton's position in relation to the philosophy of Levinas, who situates being in the ethical relation to the other, and draws on the Jewish tradition of locating the meeting with God in the face of the other as widow, orphan, stranger, or alien. The response to and for the other, which contains with it an encounter with God in the shape of infinite otherness in the *a-dieu/adieu*, can come with a cost for the self. But in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, humans largely reject the call of the other, and thus the other (*qua* messiah) is rejected and left to fend for himself. After his neutralization by American capitalism, he is cut adrift. The ending, with the alien as a drunken poet/washout, is neither eucatastrophic in the sense of evangelizing joy and triumph, nor in the cathartic sense of a metaphorical or literal crucifixion which would lead to transcendence, ascension or resurrection. Its unsatisfactory ending—very much in line with the spirit of the period, but soon to be displaced by the likes of *Star Wars*—rejects both grace and damnation, as well as the concern for the other. Hence we see the heart of ethics ripped out of human relationality, and left bleeding, yet still pumping on the screen.

Our anthology opened with a preface dedicated to some reflections on the nature and meanings of these science fictions films from the 1970s. Barry Grant, the widely read and recognized authority on film, presents an essay that touches upon the themes of our previous chapters. His insights further challenge our presuppositions about heroism, monstrosity and valuation. His analysis serves to enlarge our understanding of the human condition, which merely reinforces the basic assumption behind all of the essays collected in this volume: film, especially science fiction, illustrates and interrogates what it means to be human. Whether set in far off distant places and times or in contexts closer to home, film as a creative effort

holds up a mirror for us, reflecting our natures, emotions, desires, aspirations and very being. Such depictions elicit a broad range of reactions, from those that comfort to those that are utterly disturbing, the day and night of our existence. But in all cases, that with which we are presented is human essentiality.

Hence we are returned to the philosophical. Human essence is a proper area of philosophical investigation. The mode of expression that is film requires numerous elements for its production, distribution and consumption. As a primary and fertile method, philosophical analysis and interrogation can be used to articulate the meaning(s) of human being as depicted in the showing of film. This anthology stands at the crossroads of expression for herein science fiction, philosophy and film come together in the project of human creativity. Creativity expresses not only who and what we are, it also points to what we can become, our inspirations and aspirations. Join us then as we investigate these worlds of imagination.

—Michael Berman and Rohit Dalvi
Brock University
November 2010

PART I:
HEROES IN HISTORY

