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*The Telepolis—a prehistory*

Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything they preserve the scope to become a theater of new, unforeseen constellations.<sup>1</sup>

Urbanists also speculate about the processes weaving together Third World cities into extraordinary new networks, corridors and hierarchies.<sup>2</sup>

The body of citizens came to be the most important meaning of the term *polis* in ancient Greece as a polis.<sup>3</sup>

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The so-called “ghost cities” of China, new and yet standing uninhabited, echo inversely the ghost cities of America’s industrial belt—hollowed out into bankruptcy (Stockton, Detroit). Yet these two types of ghost city, that of tomorrow and that of yesterday, give way to another which is more literal than each and traverses each: that is what we call sometimes the *mediapolis* or the *telepolis*. That is, the circuitry and data harvesting, screens within screens, social “networks” of hashtags and corporate media-streams which de-define terms like dwelling or socius or public space and engineer consumer imaginaries in hyper-industrial societies. These and related transmissions—innumerable CCTV cameras with face recognition, digital clouds—create seeming communalities which form and reform incessantly and irrespective of place, and at times language. They are intimately associated with imaging in its mutant logics (since it never meant some snapshot coalesced). Any screen that is projected onto or through screens its scene of projection, so to speak, and has long migrated into

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Naples,” in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London & New York: Verso, 1985), 169.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Davis, “Planet of Slums,” *New Left Review* II, 26 (March-April, 2004), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Entry for “Polis,” Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polis>, accessed 25/11/14.

nano-ipods and handsets as perpetual body parts, then into interfaces with the neural and mnemonic platforms of each. To speak of a *telepolis* today as ghostly is not to deny its hegemony. It is simply that it does not require concrete public spaces, traffics in *mnemonics*, and in a specific sense does not “exist.” Like corporations—which today are not just “persons” in American jurisprudence but, following “Hobby Lobby,” subjectivities with emotions, religious, and in favor of “family values”—the *telepolis* might seem one of today’s super-organisms, itself pure technics, out of whose non-existence the “real” is generated. There are not *telepoloi* with names or succinct borders, though there does exist a town in Iowa named Mediapolis, which poses different questions.

In replacing any public space or town square or church of the past, or even theatre, something like the screen had become new “public space.” It is mobile, capable of generating itself and adapting, addictogenic. When Hurricane Sandy knocked out power to downtown Manhattan, its stunned denizens shuffled north along First Avenue looking, first, not for food but for a Wi-Fi station or cell phone signal—a long zombie parade uptown to Starbucks. Thus the deferred question: can we speak of this new *telepolis* as, in any way, a “city” at all, or a parasitical occupation or disoccupation of it (or was there an “it”)? This question would be posed along with the most popular tropes today for naming a collective disindividuation of the “citizen,” of “politics,” of memory formations. Sometimes these terms—such as that of being blind to what is there—apply to how global citizenry blank before climate change, effects that stand outside the tele-circuit by kind and genre. Henry Giroux speaks of zombification or disimagination,<sup>4</sup> Bernard Stiegler incisively of a capture and invasive disruption of the “sensible” itself (a “*proletarianization* of the senses”<sup>5</sup>)—each implies an effective capture, toxification, and shaping of collective behaviour yielding today’s neo-feudal klepto-mediocracies. The implication is that the supplement (techno-media) has displaced the host (person, voter, “subject”), or shaped a new caste (“proletarianized”) that is, going forward, disposable (Giroux): in turn, realities are conferred where they correspond to some stored filmloop, much as

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<sup>4</sup> In Henry A. Giroux, *The Violence of Organized Forgetting: Thinking Beyond America’s Disimagination Machine* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> In Bernard Stiegler, “The Proletarianization of Sensibility,” *Lana Turner Journal* 4 (2012), <http://www.lanaturnerjournal.com/archives/prolsensstieglar>, accessed 25/11/14.

America's "West" was a cinematic product. Nothing here exists, or is marked, that has not been cinematized in an extended sense. Yet this turn is also a point of capture by another, and since the state is now a hybrid and rogue entity, and the corporations faceless, and Potemkin "capitalism" itself digitally gamed, rigged by central banks and financialized debt, hence mutant, there is a question of the designs of these controls—and a "culture of distraction" or disrupted "attention" (Stiegler) that appears spellbound. A global civilization that, faced with irreversible tipping points impacting extinction events, accelerates, may or may not be called spellbound to or by a specific addictogenic screen.



Graphics by WilliamBanzai7 (Zero-Hedge.com)

The *telepolis* can thus not be literalized. Not as Facebook, Twitter or Weibo any more than so-called mainstream, state or corporate media. When the "Occupy" movement arose, the anti-trope resonated because it migrated to everything quickly as if everything were in advance invacuate: occupy Wall St became occupy Universities, or "museums," or "oneself," and eventually, "occupy everything." The anti-trope of occupy resonated virally, as if the premise were

that one had no place, no power, not only in global financial decisions (and the kleptocracies of today) but no public space even—for which Zucotti Park would be a Potemkin foothold due to a legal technicality in New York law. It would, nonetheless, rise (and disappear) as a media event above all. When it was erased from the screen and its activists identified, it would go as quickly. As a supposed new premise of “democracy” (the so-called Facebook and Twitter “revolutions” in the Middle-East, or elsewhere, found the tools quickly gamed and incorporated), the *telepolis* has the ability to erase or paralyze in its trance-repetitions and enclosure. The post-democratic mediocratic West is said often to run on this theatric mechanism by which a choice is pretended to, a ritual played out, in an environment staged by corporate puppeteers. In the Presidential election cycle of the U.S. it was forbidden to discuss “climate change”—the very question that defines the future of the megalopolis in the “Anthropocene” era. The manner in which “climate change” has been engineered to be ignored, not only in denialist media, but unwittingly by its proponent’s language and strategies—always several steps behind—recalls the degree to which the technogenesis of the biospheric “climate crisis” is not only linked to and occluded, but accelerated by a *telepolis* which, like the corporation, has no body and requires neither food nor sleep.

The *telepolis* encircles any political imaginary—and therefore is crucial to the new experience of the “city” as a meme. Unlike Benjamin’s reading of Poe, in which the experience of the modern city is the exposure and vaporization of interiorities and “experience,” here readability is not even in question from within the circuitry flows.<sup>6</sup> The word “politics” derives from *polis*. A *telepolis*, however, is a place *without necessary place*, an atopos bearing a general cover of innumerable networks and counter-networks without place (“Shanghai,” “Memphis”). In a discrete way this clown-mimes a Hegelian *Aufhebung* of the *polis*—much, if inversely, to how St. Augustine’s City of God posits the ghost that takes over from the collapse of Rome. It is not for nothing that theorists like Agamben, or the trend of biopolitics, stage an effort to recover the polis, and hence the “political,” with the odor of bad faith or nostalgia. That poetic premise

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” trans. Harry Zohn, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4: 1938-1940, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 27.

seems to continue, endorse, and perform a type of mourning, which unwittingly accelerates the depixilation of affect—much as the best willed utopist criticism and “social justice” memes unwittingly accelerate the same ecocidal processes as corporate denialism. More symptoms? Today’s discourse of retrieving “affect” for a wished-for re-ontologization of the relics and debris of subjectivity—is caught in the same relapse. From here “affect” cannot but be a citation of a literary effect, phrase, or rendition of a recollected “affect,” it cannot but be affected.

Perhaps, just when the word “polis” seems to proliferate and be attached to innumerable things—*micropolis*, *kleptopolis*, *mediapolis*, *astropolis*, *technopolis*, *necropolis*, *ecumenopolis*, and so on—it is the Western term “*polis*” itself that has undergone a curious invacuation?<sup>7</sup> It is difficult today, perhaps, to separate this open enclosure from some event or other of the real present, so one does not wander into abstractions too soon. What present, however, or when, since if time and space are produced as effects within the telepolis (anywhere), its relation to what is outside of it, if anything, is fictionalized. Take “2014” as it may be written of from a hundred years hence, clearly a turning point of sorts, yet with those events missed or blandly remarked between Justin Bieber D.U.I.’s. At random, then: let’s note it is the first time Western states passively acknowledged irreversible global warming and, by the numbers, ecocide—and their response, interestingly, has been acceleration (higher emissions still). Do not be distracted by the outbreak of resource wars, the collapse of international law, the reversion to hi tech feudal klepto-oligarchies with random televised genocides; and do not be distracted by the acceleration of destructive climate shifts ravaging economies and migration—mega-drought in California or China, broken arctic ice shelves, global contaminations and extinction events, collapsing marine food chains, and so on.

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<sup>7</sup> Justin Read analyzes the telepolis as generative of a “unicity” of sorts, a system without politics, and hence, a sort of *apolis* at the same time: “the Unicity is the line at which the world reaches absolute network integration, the mutual embedding of seemingly diverse informational networks into a complex systematic singularity”? See Justin Read, “Unicity,” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change*, v. 1, ed. Tom Cohen (OHP, 2012), <http://openhumanitiespress.org/telemorphosis.html>, accessed 25/11/14.

Nice, but let's conjure somehow something else the future will wonder over—hyper-economics stuff: after the dust settled from the 2008 financial crises, we found the most massive wealth shift since Genghis successfully engineered, and finalized. It is quite irrelevant to note with wonder that 85 individuals now have the wealth equivalent of the bottom half of the global population—and the water wars are barely beginning. It is equally irrelevant to moan and cluck about “inequality,” which assumes there is some cycle that starts with equality, however relative, to return back to, in essence, that is to read from the past, whereas all today must be read from and back from the non-futures of “climate change” itself. This is where *climate comedy* emerges, much more illuminating than the rhetoric of mourning, apocalyptic terror, or prophetic finger wagging. Of course, one might say the corporations and some decimal of the famous “.01 %” had been flooding the Anglo nations with climate denial media during this period—enough anyway to neutralize a surge of attention (not to say panicked alert). But, of course, *they* know and knew, even Big Oil is fully aware and plans accordingly—with a Plan B, should international transport collapse, say. Now for the climate comedy: what does a massively engineered wealth shift under cover of “financial collapse,” during a period of massively disseminated climate denialism, have to do with the secret that, in fact, tipping points have passed? It would perhaps have to be made into an HBO series to be taken seriously or even cognized: we have just witnessed a species split, the to be genetically enhanced caste fitted for survival in decades, controlling resources, and the disposable populations. Unlike past “class” systems, it returns rather to caste, not a “proletariat” or “precariat” with revolutionary import this time. Nano-engineering, “science,” Big Data farming, the accelerated robotics, hyper-weaponization, genetic engineering, it is all privatized. Hence the badinage about “inequality” is a canard: it is not cyclical, temporary, or reversible. So, those looking back in a century will not be, well, “us.” It might not even be “them”—the genetically advanced humanity 4.0 that takes on the burden of species survival (recall, James Lovelock predicts a population of 700 million by century's end, and the 2003 Department of Defence report squashed by Bush (in it, the “war on terror” was dismissed as a pinprick), population culling. The lack of response, today, to discrete genocides or “Human Rights” exertions or the long unexplained delay in aiding African Ebola outbreaks, give a flavor of this (the most recent generation of American youth is marked as 15% less “empathetic” than the preceding). So, what then does the telepolis, this ghost

city, to do with accelerating ecocide, the invisibilities of “climate change,” or the pretence of dwelling?

What then marks this “telepolis” today? How does a sub-species of the telepolis, the manner in which cinema allegorizes the city, offer a commentary on it as it evolves? What, moreover, if there were no “city”—no *polis* in the originary sense of a citizenry—just when the word *polis* proliferates to accommodate the most material and totalizing variations (even *logopoloi*—cities of words). Does the *telepolis* of consumer-citizens denote a sort of *apolis*, a final inversion of the Greek concept or term, *polis*? How does it represent or *see itself*, if at all, on the screen, or in cinema, which was the 20<sup>th</sup> century agent and cipher of this transformation of experience, and which we might as well name the *cineapolis*—that is, the ways in which cinema identifies the “city” with its new public space of the screen, since it also generates animation, “life”?

## II

It was Walter Benjamin who linked the experience of the modern city—whose allegory was to be 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris—to the “shock” of media technological advance and its trauma to memory formations. The premise of Western “experience” would be that of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For Benjamin, such a shift into a world of anonymous circuits and citations is marked first in Poe’s *Man in the Crowd*. The setting for Poe’s narrator’s attempt to read the crowd or the mass of life in London devolves to his pursuing a single figure who appears criminal for not obeying any of the sign-systems (fashion, class, occupation). The narrator begins by coding and reading every social type and dress, then finds the model short-circuits. He finally becomes identified with the unreadable figure being tracked, and finds himself criminalized—a mere “I” of the crowd (or iCloud, today?), void of subjectivity. I was reminded of this text when I was in London recently, and it seemed to me that the ensemble of touristed citations recalled Songjiang’s “Thames Town” (rather than the reverse)—much as London (“The City,” as it calls itself) has devolved, post-Empire, to the banking mafia center of global klepto-finance for which “The City’s” touristic presentation (a sequence of citations of buildings, historical

times, famous places) is something of a front.<sup>8</sup> Poe's text discloses a radical asubjectivity in the city's circuitry, used by Benjamin to elaborate his trope of cinematic "shock." Benjamin links this "shock"—echoed still in Naomi Klein's "Shock Doctrine," only as a principle of predatory corporate finance—to the foreclosure of experience as such, to psychoanalytic trauma, to mechanical reproduction. It marks the experience of a foreclosure of "experience" as category that is suspended, disinflates. The latter is now dependent on the public stream of robo-commodified signs—memory exposed as artificial memory, technics. In turn, the latter cites itself as originary trauma, interrupting any origin narrative or progression of cultural mnemonics. Poe's narrator devolves to defeated horror as he circularly tracks and become identified with the criminal, unreadable "man in the crowd." Yet, why criminalized? He falls into a circular labyrinth, himself becoming an unreadable transparency, finally re-iterating the German citation with which the text opens: *Es last sich nicht lesen!* It does not let itself be read! More, it is all criminalized—the supposed reader first of all. At the inception of the *telepolis* the latter withdraws from legibility as a premise, as it does from law. One begins, there, in a different economy of hacked mnemonics, fashion indexes, vaporized interiorities as hashtags. What occurs, then, when *unreadability is the point of departure* and any imagined trauma masks that implied by the *telepolis'* already being fully in place. But, again, why "criminalized"?

The *telepolis* appears, in this sense, as an invisible but encompassing techno-organism—without outside, without body, a hologram of hyper-industrial

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<sup>8</sup> A.A. Gill, an ex-Londoner, reflects on how today's "London" market's tropes of itself: "No city's exported image lags so far behind its homegrown veracity than London's, so let's start with what you're not going to find. We're all out of cheeky cockneys, pearly kings and their queens, and costermongers. You're not going to find '60s psychedelia and the Beatles in Carnaby Street. There aren't any punks under 50 on the King's Road; there are no more tweedy, mustachioed, closeted gay writers in Bloomsbury, no Harry Potter at King's Cross. There aren't men in white tie, smoking cigars outside Pall Mall clubs and there isn't any fog, but you can find Sherlock Holmes's house on Baker Street." He adds there never was a Dickensian or Shakespearean "London" as is marketed, a common global symptom of auto-branding or marketing. One can get all of these together in Las Vegas, for instance. See A.A. Gill, "My London, and Welcome to It," April 28, 2012, <http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/life/travel/my-london-and-welcome-to-it-633494/>, accessed 25/11/14.

herding. It is primarily, after all, mnemonic, cognitive, and perceptual (which is also to say, aesthetic). It determines what is visible and depends on screens. It is spectral, perhaps a ghost city, which ties into a particularly Western history of the word polis. Chinese words for city remain essentially material and allegorical—characters allied to the market, or to fortresses, or the relation of the city to the surrounding earth. In the West there is a split within the word from its Greek origin and it is begun in philosophy’s use of it as a socius and participatory organization of human citizens. *Polis* was distinguished from any entity with a tyrant or king, referring instead to a constitutive citizenry. It could be addressed ideally (Plato’s *Polis* or “Republic”) or pragmatically (Aristotle), without coinciding with a particular place. This rift widens along the lines of the metaphysical distinction of body and spirit (or mind) that pilfers the West—having routinely mistaken its own ghosts for theological entities without. “Rome” gave the idea of the *polis* a core figure: it was the capital, the head (Capo) on the body, and like the head it was the centre of cognition, archives, decision. It was the locus of the eye. Again, with Augustine’s *City of God* (and the sacking of Rome) this split severs: the “Rome” of the spirit would be independent from and rise with the body’s collapse. The head is cut off but then all the more empowered. It is spirit, which requires its own technologies. When Freud looks for a trope for “the Unconscious” in *Civilization and its Discontents*, he chooses “Rome.”<sup>9</sup> Its layered archeology and catacombs replicate the archive of traces and paleonymies of the former. “Rome,” Capital of *the* Empire, is decapitated as the premise for the *telepolis*’ rise or disclosure, not just first as the new Church, managing the spirit, but eventually the scintillating screens and the latter’s artifice of “light.”

Yet this narrative by which the telepolis induces a foreclosure of interiority, by taking over its techno-circuitry and exteriorizing all—the same way if money becomes fully electronic it will become “transparent” (to the system)—is erratic, since it may only disclose that the former never was the case. That is, that *humans* had always been framed, inhabited, and driven by artefactual memory structures—each narrated as “origins,” ideologies. Here, mourning itself becomes a trap or relapse, that furthers the ecocidal accelerations itself. Rather

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<sup>9</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey, Standard Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 18.

than worry that corporations are fraud-fronting as “persons,” they might ask why “we” have assumed the neural pulsions, referential haze, and affective patterns of mini-corporations: the true joke of “Hobby Lobby” isn’t that of the monster alien robot sneaking its nose under the tent like a camel, but its mockery of the empty and fraudulent manner in which so called human persons (subjects, voters) are already like “them.” Some of the artificial memory structures, *aka* systems of inscription, would be texts (Homer, the Bible) and engender the era of “the Book,” and the printing press—the “Reformation” being a shift in legibilities. The *telepolis* would never not have been there, perpetually nascent, already implied, driven by technics, within the techno-genealogies and techno-evolutions which subtend “history.” These subtend and precede and platform any “historical event,” in the same way today that a certain drive, extractivism, and perceptual settings that co-define any “Anthropocene era” (a bad term) precede, shape and exceed any narrative of Capitalism as the dissembling totem.

Bernard Stiegler indexes an *archi*-cinematics, “older” than *arche*-writing, and script by millennia, first apparent in cave paintings. Once thought of as mimetic attempts representing beasts and hands, these sites are now seen as cinematic auditoriums in which lines, shadow, movement, the manipulation of the torch, the identified images of the hunt flicker on the illuminated wall scene—generating group mnemonics, or archive. The animated figures identified (bison, mammoth), become the then hunted images in “life.” The first megafauna to enter cinema are in turn the first to become extinct. With the 20<sup>th</sup> century arrival of a literally machinal era of cinema this apparatus becomes fully exteriorized, the screen as public space. “Cinema” would not be the invention of 20<sup>th</sup> century machines displacing an long-running “era of the Book,” but a technics organizing perceptual mnemonics, the “we,” techno-organs such as “consciousness,” *mimesis* as a default, the hunt, visibility, violence, the “eye.” The model is codified with Plato’s Cave, and spills out in the multi-plexes offering all services to patrons, at the very point that cinema finally dissolves into neural systems, implants, interactive interfaces, “cinema’s” death and zombification (Hollywood’s franchise entertainments), older than any hieroglyphics yet crudely digital as a moving assemblage of strikes, marks, lines in advance of mimetic contracts. And yet, for Stiegler, the vector of a “proletarianization of the senses” is not (only) the consequence of a digital and hyper-industrial “short-circuiting” of time and attention. It is already inherent in

a projection oscillating between stereotype and traumatype—the control and marketing of Hollywood’s “consciousness industry” and cinema, which apprehends and destructively marks all the complicities of its frame.



Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc cave paintings in the Ardèche.<sup>10</sup>

For Stiegler, then, *arche*-cinema is necessarily older than (*arche*) writing, and represents a site of self-initialization—of history, of technics, of art, of writing, of the subject to come, of what he terms *technogenesis* or *mnemo-technics*. The movement of trace-lines and shadow (or artficed) light coalesces as so many points or marks—anticipating digital pointillisms, including letters or pictograms or faces or animal figurines. It initializes animation. This is one resonance that the metaphor of “fog” had had in early cinema and beyond.<sup>11</sup> This can appear why the dynamics of digitalization (and pixels) serve a certain side of its production and emerges from it. A cinematization of “life” since the second

<sup>10</sup> See Marc Azéma, *Le Préhistoire du cinéma: Origines paléolithiques de la narration graphique et du cinématographe* (Paris: Errance, 2011), cover image.

<sup>11</sup> In Hitchcock’s *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* (UK, 1927), for instance, the form of the serial killer emerges from, and recedes back to, faceless, the hanging particulates of refracted light that the “fog” names and is.

world war would extend, in addition to the reconfiguration of the visual, to techno-genocide and atomic blasts, drones and the surveillance apparatuses of today—from which any notion of “privacy” is expelled. It includes, necessarily, the cognitive trances that today’s hyper-industrial post-global societies are shaped by, the mediocratic spells, for instance, that prohibit responding to climate catastrophe or answering for our inter-dependencies with organic “life.” One might speak more meaningfully of a “*cin-anthropocene*” era, which would in part account for the ability of today’s citizens to regard their own, supposedly “anthropogenic” disarticulation of the biosphere as if as dissociated spectators. Cinanthropic consciousness is at one disadvantage: it, the effect called “consciousness,” is itself produced by technologies of memory that themselves are not human or organic or technically alive. Which may be why American citizens are so unruffled by something like the Supreme Court’s “Hobby Lobby” ruling—it kind of makes sense, these headless but well meaning automata divorced from the interests of living bodies or communities or species: they discretely appear kind of like “us” (or so “we” project).

### III

But if the telepolis never quite exists, and cancels the concept of polis it inhabits; moreover, if “it” adapts, incorporates, refreshes as an evolving technic organization and hyper-organism (on its own); if, in this sense, it is also its own front and inescapable façade, to be hacked and engineered for palliative control, pre-emption, mnemonic implantation, profit and “security,” then it itself doubles at once as putative dwelling and invading alien. Thus *cinema* has no choice but to mark itself as absorbing and generating—seeing itself as—the “city.” It does so repeatedly, endlessly, allegorizing the screen itself. This creates the sub-species one can call the *cinemapolis*. In this it (cinema) only reflects on its own agency within the historical *mise-en-scène* it speculates on and within. This is fully marked by and as the screen of Lang’s *Metropolis* (Germany, 1927)—together with the double-sided “politics” of the image (stereotype as control, overt “proletarianization”) and the traumatype’s revolt—with its symmetrically lined windows so many privatized screens in what marks an *archi-tecture* of (the) image. Organized from a hive of traces, these arrive compartmentalized in hierarchies of power. Randomly, other iconic examples include Polanski’s *Chinatown* (USA, 1974), reflecting on the criminal founding of the megalopolis

to come (not just L.A., but implicitly Hollywood) in the theft of water, soil, and light. One must read these films, today, from the perspective of the Anthropocene era—the geological era not only of man’s complete possession of the earth, but implicitly of his own extinction. (*Aside*: it is never good to be given a geological epoch named after you, since it assumes a backward glance to do so.) In Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (USA, 1982) the same L.A. is fast-forwarded and transgresses the full spell of techno-cinematic logics: the sheer prosthesis of the eye and memory, the insensate humans and “more human than human” replicants,



Fritz Lang’s cine-*Metropolis*

L.A. is advanced in climate change, not the California of mega-drought but its inversion, a tropically wet, Asian-inflected megalopolis in which the energy source of oil is produced within—the earth a contaminated enclosure for which “off planet” work is desirable. Memory is displaced onto photographs, meant to reassure, such as those which line Deckard’s piano yet, in fact, precede his lifetime and proliferate as a history of photography itself before and outside any

living identity. Animal life has become rare, traded away or eaten, replaced by perfect but expensive replicants—living museums of the extinct, passed in black market trading. The replicants themselves, however, are young (under four years old, developing human emotions), cite Milton by heart, are unlike the humans passionate to “live,” and love loyally. They are, as the advertisement for them says, “more human” than the burned out human forms on the streets—ignoring a half-naked woman being shot (if a replicant), bored by a violent sex show with a cyborg python. The corporate police centre above the pollution clouds (no “state” is indicated) oversees the “little people.” The screen becomes the citational hub-bub of time-travelling fashion styles and the architecture of early civilizations (Mayan pyramids), wrapped in the debris imagery of earth history and power. In this city the replicants are the “skin jobs”—what references figures on any screen, here in rebellion.



*Blade Runner's "City of Angels"*

But then, there is the City of Angels (L.A.), and there is, well, New York—which is to say, in a telecratic sense, Rome. “Rome” will always have been a ruin, a recollected sovereignty, the Capital or head, locus of the eyes and cognition, rimmed with sense apertures. It is the Capital of the (Western) Empire

providing structural DNA in law, language, architecture, cities; and it is the Holy *See*. It is the *Capo*, even when it may appear in practice or fact headless. (One pulls back from reading the reality shows of the Colliseum cinematically.) Nonetheless, cinema after “the war” can claim or usurp “Rome’s” mantle—emerging from “*the war*” as the new imperial manager of global memory and ghosts (what will devolve to television and telemarketing). Psychoanalysis makes a public grab for this role, post-war, which is also a grab to inherit the authority of religion and of the Church (a later “Rome”). Yet it can be brushed aside as a pretender by cinema, for which “spirit” is technologically generated. This subtext haunts Hitchcock’s *Spellbound* (USA, 1945)—where the “spell” of the title applies to the cinematic trance, to post-war amnesia (PTSD), and to the new condition of cinematic modernity.

#### IV

*Spellbound*’s cipher character is the amnesiac Gregory Peck who arrives as an imposter “new head” of a psychoanalytic asylum (society). The narrative quests for a “new head”—that is, a new cognitive order following the obliteration of Rome and Europe. In fact, never arrives, and it seems preoccupied with hold the previous “new head,” the one whose identity the amnesiac Peck assumes, was pre-emptively murdered before assuming the roll of head of Green Manors. For the amnesiac who is prodded to recover his memory, any memory or identity, things revert to the one place-name he remembers as a train station. It is the word “Rome”—but it is not clear if that is in New York, or Georgia, or Italy (over which, it later turns out, the character will have been shot down in a flaming transport plane in the war). There are a triad of competitors for this new crown for global control of memory and ghosts—the core of cognitive power in the global post-war order. They include psychoanalysis itself, as the new science of the mind (it thinks) and the Church, the authority of old “Rome” and the spirit as light. The third is cinema (or, say, Hitchcock), which is the foregone victor in advance of the opening screen’s scrolled text marking this celebrated “Caesar” as assassinated before the narrative opens. (The opening scroll cites from Shakespeare’s without naming *Julius Caesar*—just, “Shakespeare.”) If an Emperor once held power, and the Pope then held power, now the source of control lies in the levers of an invisible apparatus (the projector) that, faceless, technologically shapes and defines “spirit” in the electronic screens of

globalization. This attends the motif of fratricide associated with Gregory Peck’s supposed originary “trauma”—with the series of lines or bars, a differential sequence or serial signature of “cinema” itself.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the “new head” is frozen and mimed as the face on the screen itself, Peck’s for instance, in teeth-grinding identity-less trance or spell, the talking heads you watch on television telling you about the world. The ones you think you like to identify with.



Grand Central Station in *Spellbound*—whence all tracks depart

The new “Rome” would appear to be New York City, in “the Empire State,” tele-capital of the new American sceptre, particularly Madison Avenue’s then monopoly of media and tele-marketing. Only it never quite appears to clinch that overlay (“Rome”), just as the “new head” never quite arrives. When Hitchcock makes his cameo in an Empire State Hotel we see the sign from the street—a rectangle like a brass screen reflecting traffic on the street. New York is called

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<sup>12</sup> See Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies*, Vol. 1: *Secret Agents* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), esp. 44-64.

the Empire State, and the word “Empire” marks power, while the stationary logic of the screen reflecting mixed traffic, or transport, comments on the cinematic trope of transport. By the time of a later film, *North by Northwest* (USA, 1959), which opens in New York, that will be a traffic jam, the deterioration of cinema to tele-advertising logics (represented by screen icon Cary Grant, as advertising executive). *Spellbound*’s transposition from the spirit as religion and the Church (the Angel Gabriel evoked to name a ski resort of snowy white surfaces) to the material, technological premises of machinal transport is depicted in a shot of Grand Central Station. A first try at Penn Station flunks, so we are redirected to “grand central.” As the name says, this is the ground zero of New York City’s train system, trains being Hitchcock’s favoured figure for cinema. Light streams through giant Cathedral-like windows. The light traverses a series of bars or grids, the same serial lines that send the amnesiac Gregory Peck into “psychotic” trances. Tiny humans below buy tickets, as to a theatre. The giant space of the hall itself marks that this new public space is the screen itself that holds this image and which the viewers are spellbound to. Yet Grand Central Station is peculiar: all tracks depart from there, but no trains pass through Grand Central. This “Rome” to which all roads or tracks would lead is itself not going anywhere as the psychic point of departure only for all these cinematic rides. The streaming light is just that, light waves, the new spirit as artificed “light”—together with the religious power it confers, mistakenly—which is produced by machines, electricity, the conversion of oil into “light.” The *new public space of the screen* is dissected in this shot. It is allied to empire, but also to the church; it subsumes psychoanalysis as a pretender; it is allied to a war that supposedly just ended—and yet, the banner on the wall is readable in huge print: *Buy More War Bonds*. Whatever bonds, bands, or bounds are in question, this spell projects Peck’s amnesia not only onto the suppression of what just took place—the absolute devastation of the old empire and of Rome—or the cinematic trance of the public, but an absence or evacuation of identity, memory, subjectality, a “zero” effect. Moreover, the real “war” is not over (“Buy More War Bonds”), it is just displaced into cinema itself, to emerge as the war not between ideologies, territories, empires, and such, between men, but that which cinema tracks and abets between “men” and the outside of the *telepolis*, “life,” earth, time—what is called, later in Hitchcock, the “bird war.” Yet this shot also indexes all transport and activity, all cognitive power, and all the traffic of images and data to machines indifferent to direction,

anthropomorphisms, face, or content. Recall those vehicles of transport—trains, like buses elsewhere. Their windows are like screens to look out; they move, the translation of cinema (“movies”), yet the passengers are stationary; and these passengers are, nonetheless, in a sort of container.

V

This leads to a final (less random) sample—since it is less well known. It is a Brazilian film that performs yet another role in this combinatoire. It does so by a kind of dolphin flip back in, and through, simulating documentary about a singular, disruptive media event in Rio itself. It attempts or performs in advance of itself a kind of *cinemacide*, seeking to halt, hijack, or step outside what we will call “the bus.” The bus condenses the trains in *Spellbound*, though the real forerunner in Hitchcock’s work would be *Sabotage* (UK, 1936), where Hitchcock attempts simply to blow the *telepolis*’ bus up with a time-bomb, explode cinema (stereotype) as a suicide bomb turned upon itself. It fails, mis-times it necessarily since the bomb is of time, turns out the aura or lights.

*Ônibus 174* (*Bus 174*, Brazil, 2002) by José Padilha and Felipe Lacerda is a work in which a sort of allegorical documentary focuses on the real other city, the slums and favela of Rio—and the unique event of a slum-kid hijacking a bus and, in the process, hijacking public media itself, which records the event. This actor within the real, Sandro do Nascimento, is playing the role of a movie “hijacker” he had seen the previous night, is aware that the only redemption in the *telepolis*’ order of citizens is to become visible, on the screen, and he is seen, by an interviewed sociologist, not as hijacking this bus (media) but virtually suiciding in order to become, in effect, a media image—made “famous,” after death, which Padilha’s film accomplished to excess (Sandro now has his own Wiki page and a movie made about him in Brazil). He had become the actor in his own docu-drama (*Bus 174*). He virtually plays “himself” (or the street kid though the cops name and project as “Sergio”), much as “he” is subsequently played by a professional actor in a Brazilian commercial film, an attempt to exploit and contain the exploded narrative as the story of a damaged youth. The impossibility of what Padilha calls a “*theoretical* documentary” returns us to the “planet of slums” (Mike Davis) and the relation of the non-person, the excluded,

Agamben's "bare life," the telepolis itself.<sup>13</sup> In José Padhila's *Bus 174* the real "Rio" both is already telepolitically defined and the *cinemapolis* of the screen. The opening camera shot itself approaches this cinemapolis from without. The camera or lens eye arises from the sea surface in approaching land, rushing then panning over the mountains until it drops over the ridge to enter the world of the favela and then downtown Rio: the impoverished world of ant humans pressed up the mountain walls.

Thus the media stream is interrupted in *real time*: the *public bus* is in fact hijacked by the street kid in revolt, Sandro—a sort of Hamlet of the favela with a gun who would tell the hostages to behave as if he were going to shoot them. It is a "real" event, yet the footage (and interviews) weave a meta-tapestry of citations making the screen, and film, the "bus" in question. Since Rio is defined both by its split of social reality into those in and out of the bus—that is, the *favela* world, which Agamben too facilely allies to "bare life" or the camps, certainly—and a socio-imaginary derived from *tele-novelas* and *el Globo* media, the film performs the hijacking of cinema by cinema that the doomed Sandro performs. The film manages to run through citations of successive TV genres by cutting the real footage of the event, including the snuff film performed by the police on him, after one rushes Sandro when leaving the bus and shoots his hostage by mistake. To drive this home, a pan moves to the tele-towers high over Rio spiked into the primeval mountaintops—figures of surveillance and transmission of the circuitry. Faces are ceaselessly blurred to deface identity, encompassing the "invisible" street-kids to gangsters to police: the eye provokes concealment (from the camera itself). There is a recurrence of phones, cameras, communication gadgets, video-game screens, communication towers, and of course, a hijacked bus whose lined windows cite or imply so many screens. The hijacked bus caught in the frame is (also) the telepolis' containment. The passage through all "media" moves to a different sort of underworld—having started in the open air of the mountains, outside of "life." This appears in a hostage's writing huge letters on the window, inversely, with lipstick, messages on the glass, and devolves through sign signals used for the deaf, and the typed archives

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<sup>13</sup> See Cecilia Sayad, "Narrative, Visibility, and Trauma in *Bus 174*," in Vinicius Navarro and Juan Carlos Rodríguez, eds., *New Documentaries in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 96.

of the court tracking Sandro's printed records. And it continues down to the grotesque sunless prison called "the vault," emptied but covered with unreadable graffiti—the bare inscriptions in the underworld of "the city," marking, too, the materiality of the footage.

Sandro taunts the police, trying to spur them to act, by telling them that his act is "*not a fucking movie*"—while it is. This claim is made on the part of the director, for whom this "theoretical documentary" wants to refuse all relapse into fiction, into mere movies, by inserting the real of Sandro into the visible. It also marks Sandro as directing, improvising, a media event within the bus, claiming to want to kill out the window, then telling the hostages to act as if it were so—act as if. This insistence that it is "*not a fucking movie*" describes the suicide of cinema Padilha practices that would halt the medium itself. Sandro represents the non-person shut out of the image economy, "*invisible*," warehoused in prison vaults, streetkids massacred by cops like vermin at Candelaria, yet not entirely shut out, still with cellphones and video-games and action movies, like the hijacking film Sandro watched the night before his "*act*"—only instead of a bus it was of an airplane.



*Ônibus 174*

The hijacking or "real" time capture of Brazilian media with the bus, takes us into the heart of media itself. Writing on the windows of the bus, the *script* leads

to the police archive, the writing on the walls in the jail cell, the inversion of white for black in a second anonymous prison, underground and lightless—a crypt for the storage of warehoused human life, an *abiopolitic* enclosure. The meltdown through media into marks on a lightless wall is repeated in the final visit to a prison in which negative light reverses sides, and inhuman warehoused life is embedded, a shot that analyzes and assimilates the public bus, vehicle of a media world from without. “Sandro” as performative thus doubles as a “new man” (if not new head), a zero cipher in rebellion capturing and penetrating the media bubble—holding it hostage as a bus in fact.

The camera dissociates itself from all this at the same time, from the city and its human drama and cinematized enclosure. It is mourning the *whole*. And not. This we see, again, in the opening pan. The lens emerges as the visible over water, as animation, or the origin of reflected light and “life.” It derives its *technogenesis* from a bond with light, with the sea surface, swooping over a primeval earth before descending into the favela and city: from the air, citing Rio, the imperial cinemapolis, as heir to the descent in *Triumph of the Will* (Riefenstahl, Germany, 1935) or the Rome, say, of Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (USA, 2000). Only the identification of the lens with the technogenesis of light disidentifies it with humans—and with, as we see again and again, a technics associated with the genesis of light and animation. That is, “outside” the cin-anthropocene, aware that the parenthesis of accelerated human disappearance is linked to this spell, to cinema and its hidden master, oil, to the spell and capture of the telecracy that displaces, again, the cinematic “Rome” of *Gladiator*—the public space of actual plazas, cities, monuments, centres of travel.

This logic and performance of cinemacide—a faux documentary on the revolt of the *homo sacer* within the telepolis—echoes elsewhere. As with all these works, what we call “cinema” here dissociates itself from the “city” that it explores, is itself not a human agent, and identifies the screen as involved with the broader trajectory of a representational dilemma. In this case, the containing bus with windows that is interrupted in transit, hijacked, marks the dilemma of what is now called the “Anthropocene era” as a cinematic impasse.<sup>14</sup> The era of cinema,

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<sup>14</sup> The “Anthropocene” is the new term given by geologists and turned into a global meme for the geological era of “man.” It manages to imply “his” total dominance and his

the era of resource extraction, the era of electric lights and exponential digitalization, is that of the “Anthropocene” as defined today. Cinema preoccupies “life”—a sort of afterlife caught in Justin Read’s exitless “unicity, the flow of data void of interiority or political orientation, for which there is no “body.”<sup>15</sup> Rather, *arche*-cinema was never not “life.” The city is always a Benjaminian ruin, and not only when it appears in and as image: it begins there, and assimilates whatever comes near its power circuits. That includes new micro-organisms that nano-photography can haul in to the archive of use and registration, together with your private messaging. I’ll conclude by returning to the dilemma posed by the word “occupy.”

## VI

This totalization of *the telepolis* is not the result of techno-evolutionary process, arriving finally with the digital era. It is inherent in the appearance of telepoloi as such—even were that disseminated from cave walls. The absence of “the political” arrives at a certain *apolis* whose enclosure and circuitry is intrinsically bound to logics of “population culling,” resource depletion, catastrophic global weirding, the inundation of coastal cities that New York’s real Grand Central Station was recently reminded of. This *totalization* generates its Sandro-like counter-posture.

How to get off or on the bus, or enter the frame which the citizen itself is inscribed and produced by? It is not possible, which introduces a new logic. That logic is similar to the movement from ecological thought—the hopeful alarmed intervention attempts of environmental sustainability—to the ecocidal thought, how to integrate the emerging picture of irreversible ecocide and extinction into

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extinction in the same breadth (never a good thing to have a geological era named after you, since it implies a backglance from afterwards, one among others).

<sup>15</sup> “*Everything* in the world has entered into the flow of informational networks: finance and communications, of course; but also transportation (we can go to anywhere from anywhere on the planet); energy (generated and utilized anywhere in the world); production (things can be manufactured anywhere and consumed anywhere); agriculture (food can be grown anywhere and eaten anywhere); and so forth. Ultimately, life itself has been informationalized and networked: the meaning of life is no longer a metaphysical question, but a physical process of metabolism (transmission of genetic information).” See Read, “Unicity.”

the optimal thinking of today. Like Padilha's lens, it tracks and touristically archives the "twilight of the Anthropocene" and the inescapable correlation between the era of cinema, the cin-anthropocene perhaps, and a programmatic ecocide that had long correlated image capture with extinction (the megafauna on the cave walls, to begin with). How might cinema, after its death in the digital transformation of all archival logics, think extinction, its role in that (or the production of the human (as imaginary construct), the "Anthropocene"), and shift the cognitive inscriptions to a site at which they could not return back or relapse, and escape the charade of projecting affect, mourning, identification, face, and re-initializing the imperial Roman capo or anthropomorphic "head"—as the camera finds Rio cast? Hollywood cannot do that, nor would its corporate financing miss a chance to cast a new spell of distraction—climate disaster films, post-apocalyptic romps, Biblical environmental allegories turned against "man," showing him as stupid or deserving of cleansing from earthly life, yet always with a survivor, always with a future opening again, always with a narratorial position that separates itself from what may have just been glimpsed. Only by leaving the *telepolis* as confine, rendering it globally fluid in location, borders, class, societies, mafias—as Cormac McCarthy and Ridley Scott's *The Counselor* (UK/USA, 2013) does in presenting the experience of extinction and irreversibility, or as Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* (Denmark, 2011) does by crushing the last man of the telepolis from the technical outside before which it is nothing at all, the astronomical, the galactic perspective, before which all the projected affect of the screen viewer or art-fetishized estate that the whole occurs on is mere cowering in the magic tent of cinematics. But then, the impacting planet, like the film named *Melancholia*, mocking the entire reflex of projecting face and affect and denial, is marked as the trajectory of cinema itself, a non-human agency—as one could say, too, of that prosthetic device, programmed to track and eat, the eye.

This logic is the concealed Gordian knot that recently made the "occupy" meme at once viral and interesting. The evacuation of political content is what made it, well, "political." One witnessed an endless sampling of sprouts: Occupy Universities, Occupy Broadway, Occupy Farmland, Occupy any named city, Occupy Language (particularly tell-tale) and so on—as well as, for a time, "occupy everything." The only thing Occupy could not occupy as a hypothesis was itself—without agenda, degraded by corporate media, tagged as a "terrorist"

formation, it turned spectral. Was “everything” so dis-occupied, preoccupied, spellbound and void of public space or dwelling, inhabitation even, to begin with—a ghost of itself seeking to find a body, a place, anywhere, “everywhere”? It is accidental that one of the “occupy” modes would be a zombie march—mocking both the corporatocratic lockout and the status of the would be telepolitician. Like Bartleby’s “I prefer not to,” the viral *meme* cannot stop being repeated without any content aside from an obverse non-logic. The word pertains



Corporate Zombies walk, Occupy Wall Street, New York, October 3, 2011. Photo: Frank Franklin, © AP

to dwelling, work (occupation), military occupation, but it also implies there is no space, no place, to occupy (the exclusion of the 99 per cent). The theoretical appropriations of OWS (Occupy Wall-Street) that were gearing up to make this the seed-site of a socialist or left resurgence (Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein’s projections before [and sadly, still, after] she discovered “climate change,” Michael Hudson’s theoretical contributions) have also gone quiet. Real as the bodies were in the streets, the interruption would survive, or be erased, as a matter of the screen, which another show might replace temporarily.

But the word remains perverse. “Occupy” would occupy what cannot be occupied or already is occupied, in the military sense—a telecratic *totalization*

without outside or access. It signifies the word's implicit inversion: it would disoccupy a structure without outside or inside, hence without speaking a "political" agenda that would be translated and captured. (The media had, subsequently, co-operated in a campaign to caricature and divide, spinning it for the public as hippieish druggies, a collection of unworthies, separated out.) That is, it mimes the cinemapolis' counter-space, the symptom and infection of the *apolis*.

Perhaps, because the telepolis excludes nothing, and is to be the refuge even of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's rural masses, *there are no cities*. There are mega-infrastructures and telecratic networks that keep that ghost-word-promise in play as its own auto-immune phantom. Thus the speculation, today, not on the future megalopolis that will absorb world populations alone, or the possible eco-cities innovators like China design (Tianjin), but something independent of these: the "sentient city" that tracks and designs each individual's data, consumer behaviour, face muscles.<sup>16</sup> At the point of a sort of noon-time of totalization and, from the point of view of climate change (the "climate lens"), peak anthropoid; at a moment, say "2014," when the tipping points would be past, and the vortex accelerated; at the moment of defacement, the telepolis like the Corporation under "hobby lobby" mocks and projects having any face at all.

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<sup>16</sup> See Will Doig, "Are 'sentient cities' that track your personal data to design your life for you on the way?", [http://www.alternet.org/environment/155195/are\\_%22sentient\\_cities%22\\_that\\_track\\_your\\_personal\\_data\\_to\\_design\\_your\\_life\\_for\\_you\\_on\\_the\\_way\\_](http://www.alternet.org/environment/155195/are_%22sentient_cities%22_that_track_your_personal_data_to_design_your_life_for_you_on_the_way_), accessed 25/11/14.