

## Materiality and time in Zack Snyder's *Sucker Punch* (2011)

**Adrian Konik**

Department of Journalism, Media and Philosophy; School of Language, Media and Culture; Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa

E-mail: akonik@nmmu.ac.za

The focus of this article falls on the extent to which the digital time-images – or silicon-crystals – of Zack Snyder's *Sucker Punch* (2011) function as a form of counterinformation within contemporary control society, where digital information otherwise comprises the dominant technology of continuous control. In this regard, after recalling Tania Modleski's argument concerning the subversive potential of certain horror films, and after establishing that Snyder's cinematic works continue along this critical trajectory, the historico-discursive context out of which *Sucker Punch* emerged, and to which it responds, is detailed. To this end, relevant works by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze are drawn upon, in which they theorise, respectively, the dynamics of segmentary disciplinary/bio-power, and the post-World War Two transition to continuous control society. And particular attention is paid to Deleuze's concern over the reduction of individuality to dividuality within the latter context. Against this backdrop, the silicon-crystals of *Sucker Punch* are then analysed as a composite digital reconfiguration of four analogue *hyalosigns* thematised by Deleuze in his *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, before their status as counterinformation is considered – both in relation to the contentions of David Rodowick, and on the basis of the interplay between materiality and time which such silicon-crystals entail.

**Key words:** movement-image, time-image, analogue, digital, silicon-crystal

### **Wesenskap en tyd in Zack Snyder se *Sucker Punch* (2011)**

Die fokus van hierdie artikel is in watter mate die digitale tydbeelde – of silikoon-kristalle – van Zack Snyder se *Sucker Punch* (2011) funksioneer as 'n vorm van teeninformatie in die hedendaagse beheersamelewing, waar digitale inligting grotendeels die dominerende tegnologie van volgehoue beheer uitmaak. In aansluiting by Tania Modleski se opvatting rakende die ondermynende potensiaal van sekere rillers en nadat vasgestel is dat Snyder se kinematiese werk voortbou op hierdie kritiese ingesteldheid, word die histories-diskursiewe konteks gedetailleerd waarin *Sucker Punch* ontstaan het, asook verwys. In dié verband word die tersaaklike werke van Michel Foucault en Gilles Deleuze betrek waarin hulle onderskeidelik teoretiseer oor die dinamika van die gesegmenteerde dissiplinêre/bio-mag, asook die oorgang na die Tweede Wêreldoorlog na 'n volgehoue beheerde samelewing. Spesifieke aandag word geskenk aan Deleuze se problematisering van die vermindering van individualiteit na dividualiteit binne die breër konteks. Teen hierdie agtergrond word die silikoon-kristalle van *Sucker Punch* ontleed as 'n samegestelde digitale herstrukturering van vier analoë *hyalosigns* wat deur Deleuze getematiseer word in sy *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, asook op die basis van die wisselwerking tussen wesenskap en tyd wat sulke silikoon-kristalle omvat.

**Sluitelwoorde:** beweging-beeld, tydbeeld, analoog, digitaal, silikoon-kristal

**O**n account of the imbrication of its narrative with sublime digital images inspired by computer/video games, Zack Snyder's *Sucker Punch* (2011) remains a technically spectacular film. Yet, while few would disagree with this, upon its release many also felt that an excessive focus on such formal features displaced emphasis on plot and character development, to the ultimate detriment of the work as a whole. Accordingly, while some disparaged the inconclusiveness of its narrative, and others lamented the ostensible puerility of its plot, widespread disapproval was also expressed for the perceived fatuousness of its characters, whose two-dimensionality was said to limit audiences' ability to identify with them. However, amid this deluge of derision, it was largely forgotten that the very features of *Sucker Punch* that drew such stern criticism were hailed elsewhere – in the work of Tania Modleski, for example – as the hallmark of *new* popular critical cinema. And because of this collective amnesia, the manner in which Snyder's film also extends the critical elements of popular cinema highlighted

by Modleski, beyond the realm of the movement-image into the domain of time-images, was similarly overlooked. The consequence of this, in turn, was that the adversarial aspects of *Sucker Punch* – which constitute a nuanced form of counterinformation – went largely undetected.

In the interest of addressing the above deficits, and with a view to exploring related issues, this article begins by negotiating the relationship between Tania Modleski's argument in "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory" and Snyder's *Sucker Punch*, against the backdrop of his earlier film *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) and in terms of Gilles Deleuze's theorisation of movement- and time-images. Next, and because the subsequent analysis of *Sucker Punch* requires contextualisation, the transition from segmentary disciplinary/bio-power to continuous control society will be considered, with reference to various relevant works by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. After this, the four silicon-crystals in Snyder's *Sucker Punch* will be analysed, in relation to four of the (analogue) crystals of time that Deleuze, in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, identifies within the films of Max Ophüls, Jean Renoir, Federico Fellini, and Luchino Visconti. Finally, David Rodowick's thematisation of the different ontologies, and corresponding political significance, of digital and analogue technology, will be discussed, along with the extent to which the silicon-crystals of Snyder's *Sucker Punch* comprise a form of counterinformation within the context of contemporary control society.

### **From the crisis of the action-image to the birth of silicon-crystals**

In "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory," Tania Modleski argues that, while the open-ended orientation of certain horror films serves to "thwart... audiences' expectations of closure," their drastically minimised plots not only run counter to all that is understood as "essential to the construction of the novelistic," but also often head in the direction of *jouissance*, which effectively makes possible the comparison of certain horror films with *avant-garde* art.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the way in which the "undeveloped characters" of such horror films render "narcissistic identification on the part of the audience... increasingly difficult" is not construed as a deficit, but rather as crucial for the establishment of critical distance, through which the associated subversive political content of the material is allowed room to surface. Through this reading strategy, Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, for example, emerges as "a critique of capitalism, since the film shows the horror... of people quite literally living off other people," while George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* emerges as a painful indictment of consumer society and the subjectivity it produces, through representing "the will-less, soul-less masses as zombie-like beings possessed by the alienating imperative to consume" (Modleski 1986: 695, 696-697).

In 2004, Zack Snyder made his feature film debut with a remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, in which he arguably developed further the zombieism-consumerism metaphor. To be sure, the narrative of Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* remains very similar to the plot of Romero's original. That is, a group of survivors escape the zombie hordes by barricading themselves into a shopping mall, where they then become progressively enamoured of the consumer items around them, and are thereby drawn into an increasingly hedonistic way of life. However, Snyder's film differs from Romero's original not only through the critical reflexivity which informs it. Critical reflexivity evinced by the cameo roles of some of the actors who starred in the 1978 film, along with various allusions to its features<sup>2</sup> – which from the outset explicitly establishes the equivalence of zombieism and consumerism as a code, rather than letting it emerge gradually as an implicit theme. In addition, in contrast to Romero's film, the aggression of the zombies who attack with frightening speed and agility, along with both the increased number of survivors in

the mall, and the augmented diversity of their range of consumer predilections, all allow for a far more intense exploration of the transformation of subjectivity under late/advanced capitalism.

On the one hand, such exploration arguably remains very valuable at a socio-cultural level, because of a dearth of accessible, 'critical' cinematic material in the contemporary era. However, on the other hand, in accordance with the very historical dynamics that underpin it, which will be elaborated upon shortly, it is also important for such popular 'critical' horror cinema to proceed beyond its above parameters – something which Snyder's later film *Sucker Punch* arguably does. That is, on the one hand, in an era where critical cinema has either been domesticated through its co-optation into formulaic art cinema,<sup>3</sup> or developed into increasingly abstract and theoretically-orientated forms of counter-cinema that tend to lack popular appeal (Wollen 1972: 504-507), such horror films are important, both because of the critique of late/advanced capitalism which they offer, and because their popularity derives largely from the incisiveness of this critique. And a great deal of their poignancy in this regard derives from the crisis of the action-image which informs their narratives. As Deleuze explains in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, movement-images (indirect images of the passing of time) involve perception-, affection- and action-images. In other words, images which *implicitly* represent how time passes for the characters in a film, in relation to what they see, how they are affected by it, and how they respond to it. While examples of movement-images range from the critical cinema of Sergei Eisenstein informed by Soviet optimism, to 'mainstream' Hollywood film informed by the principles of classic realism, they can all be identified by the predication of their narratives on the possibility of effective agency.<sup>4</sup> However, because the devastation of the Second World War shattered so many cultural sensory-motor schemata, and because this disorientation was concomitant with certain elements "internal to art, to literature and to the cinema" that sought "to limit or even to suppress the unity of action [and]...drama," a crisis of the action-image ensued. For Deleuze, this is reflected most saliently in Italian neorealism, where one encounters characters who continue to be deeply affected by what they see, but who cannot respond to what confronts them, because the novelty and gargantuan dimensions of the catastrophe are such that its dynamics defy comprehension (Deleuze 2004a: 209-210, 215-219). Accordingly, this gives rise to a "new breed of signs, *opsigns* and *sonsigns*," in terms of which "a pure...optical or sound situation becomes established in what we might call 'any-space-whatever.'" Within this context, "sensory-motor connections...loosen, unbalance, or uncouple," and thereby inhibit the characters' ability to respond, in a way that precipitates a "crisis of the action-image" (Deleuze 2005: 5-6). Similarly, in horror films, the failure of the victims to respond adequately to the obstacles which confront them and threaten their survival – be they zombies or the chainsaw-wielding character of Leatherface – is explicable in terms of the crisis of the action-image, particularly insofar as such obstacles comprise metaphors for the excesses of capitalism. That is, the protagonists' clumsy attempts at self-defence, their inability to run fast enough, and/or their panic-induced paralysis, all of which usually lead to their gory demise, are not simply genre conventions that function to heighten suspense. In addition, against the backdrop of Modleski's argument, they also serve to represent, and indeed thematise, the helplessness of individuals in the contemporary era, in the face of the overwhelming forces of capitalism, from which they can neither run nor hide.

However, on the other hand, it is also important for such popular 'critical' horror films to proceed beyond such parameters, not only because the dynamics of late/advanced capitalism continue to become ever more nuanced and sophisticated, in ways that stand to render such cinematic themes and motifs maladroit, or worse still anachronistic. In addition, such development is in a sense unavoidable, because the crisis of the action-image, while initially negating effective

agency in the manner described above, also subsequently precipitated profound reflection on what it means to *be* in *time*; reflection which in turn gave birth to cinematic time-images. As Deleuze advances in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, such inability to respond, or the collapse of agency, did not simply produce paralysis but rather effected a ‘mutation’ of cinema, from indirect movement-images of the passing of time, to direct images of time passing, or time-images.<sup>5</sup> Although at first glance somewhat nebulous, the latter concept makes more sense when it is remembered that, for Deleuze, such passing of time is synonymous not with the consecutive instants of clock time, but rather with processes of transformation that are related to the advent of *new* thought. In other words, thought which makes possible a transformation from old conceptual frameworks to new ideas. This process is infused with obstacles, conflicts, problematisation, and most importantly, invention, and it may just as easily be related to an individual’s personal life journey as to a societal transformation. And because new thought always emerges from negotiation with previous ideas, “time-images reflect not the triadic operation of perception–affection–action that is characteristic of movement-images,” which only *imply* the passing of time. Instead, time-images *explicitly* represent how time passes through a direct revealing of “the interface that constantly occurs between the virtual world of the past, and the actual world of the present” (Konik 2011: 16). In this regard, Deleuze draws heavily on the work of Henri Bergson, particularly *Matter and Memory*, in which Bergson argued for the indiscernibility of the past and the present, which results in our experience of *duration*; the *duration* of particular periods of learning and of our lives in general, considered retrospectively. This is made possible because, although the actual present passes, it passes into the past which always remains virtually present, in circuits of varying degrees of relaxation that are always ready to contract, in response to actual stimuli, in a process which makes ordinary experience intelligible (Bergson 1962: 128, 210-212). On the one hand, what this entails is a constant, normal process rather than an occasional or mystical experience, and it is regularly evinced by our daily repetition of tasks that we learned to complete on previous occasions, and indeed by our ability to converse with each other against the backdrop of sentiments expressed moments earlier. In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze elaborates further, advancing that the virtual world of “a ‘past in general’ ... is like an ontological element” into which we leap, because it is “only ... once the leap has been made, that recollection will gradually take on a psychological existence: ‘from the virtual it passes into the actual state’” which informs our activities in the present as part of our *duration* (Deleuze 1991: 57). However, because of this, time can seem to stand still when there is little by way of new thought. That is, when we encounter the familiar, recollect how to act in relation to it, and carry out the activity effectively, we are not so much thinking as repeating – albeit with those marginal differences demanded by nuances of the changing context. And within such a context, time can seem to move very slowly and life in general can appear to play out at plodding pace. On the other hand, when we encounter an *opsign* or a *sonsign*, even though we dive into the virtual past and scour the relaxed circuits of previous experience, we find nothing that can contract and render intelligible that which confronts us, and hence we are unable to act effectively. Yet, while this may manifest itself in temporary paralysis at the level of movement-images – limited as they are to the indirect representation of the passing of time (in terms of perception-, affection- and action-images) – at the level of time-images, a direct image of the passing of time reveals intense activity. This activity entails the desperate interface between the virtual and the actual that occurs in relation to *opsigns* or *sonsigns*, and which can potentially allow for the rapid passing of time, defined in terms of the emergence of *new* thought.

In many respects, the concept of the time-image advanced in *Cinema 2* therefore comprises an amalgam of ideas communicated by Deleuze in his previous works, two of which in particular would be helpful to recall at this juncture. Firstly, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze evokes

Heidegger's pronouncement that: "What gives us most cause for thought is the fact that we do not yet think," before going on to assert that "thought is the highest determination," and that "stupidity (not error) constitutes the greatest weakness of thought" (Deleuze 1994: 275). He then effectively defines the passing of time in terms of such new thought, explaining that "there is always a time at which the imagined act is supposed 'too big for me,'" but that this is followed by "a becoming-equal to the act, ... a doubling of the self and the projection of an ideal self in the image of the act." Understandably, after this, "what the self... become[s] equal to is the unequal in itself," which necessarily fractures the I that existed before and for whom the imagined act was previously thought 'too big' (Deleuze 1994: 89-90).<sup>6</sup> Secondly, this process of temporal progression remains largely contingent upon accidental obstacles, and the violence which their presence visits upon thought, an issue which Deleuze elaborates upon in *Proust and Signs* when he argues that: "What forces us to think is the sign[...], the object of an encounter." In short, this "creation is the genesis of the act of thinking within thought itself[; it]... does violence to thought, ... wrests it from its natural stupor," and forces it "to interpret – to explicate, to develop, to decipher, to translate a sign" (Deleuze 2000: 97), which at first resists such stratifying comprehension. And the series of such events, which always remain indissociable from one another, produces a new kind of subjectivity, defined in terms of the unique *duration* that is made up of the series. Consequently, the related concept of 'folding' is crucial within Deleuze's *oeuvre* because, insofar as it concerns "the production of new kinds of subjectivity," it is imbued "with explicitly ethical and political dimensions." It entails the "forces of the outside" being folded "inside" the subject *by* the subject, in idiosyncratic ways.<sup>7</sup> Historically-speaking, this was thematised already in the Platonic and Hellenistic-Roman concepts of "self mastery," through which "they invented subjectivation[.] taken to mean the self-production of one's subjectivity,"<sup>8</sup> and the concept of 'folding' continues to "allow... Deleuze to think creatively about the production of subjectivity" (O'Sullivan 2005: 102-103).

Arguably, Snyder's *Sucker Punch* proceeds beyond the critical parameters of the horror films thematised by Modleski, not only because it operates generally against the backdrop of the above, but also, more importantly, because it reflects specifically upon both the *dissolution* of unique duration within the context of 'control society,' and the concomitant *reduction* of "the individual... to an object with no resistance, no capacity to 'fold' the line of modulation" (Marks 2006: 209). In this regard, the film concerns the horrific, illegal lobotomisation of a twenty-year-old girl, after she is wrongly imprisoned for resisting her stepfather's sexual advances. And there is significant evidence in the narrative to suggest that such lobotomisation – like the cannibalism in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and the zombieism of *Dawn of the Dead* – operates as a metaphor for certain reductive and debilitating processes within the contemporary era. Processes which diminish individuality into the 'dividuality' associated with the 'societies of control' decried by Deleuze, and marked by the very two-dimensionality of character which the critics of *Sucker Punch* ironically condemned. *Sucker Punch* therefore entails a much more circumspect cinematic exploration of the transformation of subjectivity under late/advanced capitalism than that found within the powerful, yet clichéd, parameters of Snyder's earlier film *Dawn of the Dead*. However, any attempt to analyse *Sucker Punch* in the above terms is rendered proportionately more difficult. This is, firstly, because the dynamics of 'control society' – and for that matter, those of disciplinary/bio-power out of which it emerged – are relatively more complex and less recognised than the dynamics of capitalism. And secondly, because Snyder's *Sucker Punch* involves a composite digital reconfiguration of four analogue crystals of time (theorised by Deleuze in *Cinema 2*) into silicon-crystals, which mirror the processes of folding reflected in certain of these analogue crystals, but ultimately emphasise the difficulty of folding the line of modulation in the contemporary era. In view of this, the former needs to be elaborated upon, before the latter can be discussed.

## **From segmentary disciplinary/bio-power to continuous control society**

Before engaging critically with Snyder's *Sucker Punch*, it is necessary to consider the context out of which it emerged, and to which it in many ways comprises a response – a context informed by both the legacy of disciplinary/bio-power and the new dynamics of control society. To begin with, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault maintains that the French Revolution in the eighteenth century ushered in a widespread transition from 'sovereign' society – orientated around monarchic power that was wielded clumsily through spectacles of public torture – to 'carceral' disciplinary society. He chose the latter nomenclature over the more common concept of 'democratic society' because, for Foucault, a positive appraisal of the related societal changes in purely democratic terms leads to the transition being attributed "too readily and too emphatically to a process of 'humanization'" (Foucault 1991: 3-7). To be sure, democracy did emerge in various forms and to different degrees within disciplinary society. However, Foucault quite correctly argues that beneath the veneer of democratic respect for human rights and dignity, there also existed powerful mechanisms of control. These included overarching anonymous bureaucracies, pervasive forms of hyper-specific spatio-temporal regimentation, and invasive techniques of panoptical surveillance. And these mechanisms effectively rendered society carceral in orientation, and together functioned to produce docile, disciplinary subjects. Within this context, power was "exercised by surveillance rather than ceremonies," because the panoptical gaze followed disciplinary subjects in the newly demarcated areas of the enclosure, functional site, and partition – which situated them in increasingly specific spaces at exact moments in time. In addition, in many cases, forms of panopticism also ensured that the very movements of individuals' bodies corresponded meticulously to the regimented model of a drill, so that their actions could be reproduced mechanically and in precise accordance with highly specified and exhaustive time-frames (Foucault 1991: 135-156, 200-209). In short, for Foucault, the model of the prison – which was the form of disciplinary punishment that replaced the public torture of sovereign society – became the blueprint for the subsequent organisation of schools, barracks, factories, hospitals, etcetera, and correlatively facilitated the constitution of a subordinate subjectivity analogous to penal subjectivity, across the entire social spectrum (Foucault 1991: 298-308).

The concept of *individuality* – so fundamental to democracy – is thus advanced by Foucault as an ideological product of disciplinary society.<sup>9</sup> That is, while in "the feudal regime... individualization is greatest where sovereignty is exercised," within the "disciplinary regime... individualization is 'descending,'" because the more "power becomes...anonymous and... functional," the more "those on whom it is exercised tend to be...strongly individualized." And this not only led to "each individual [becoming] a 'case'" through the "documentary techniques" which proceeded from disciplinary examination – a "case which at one and the same time constitute[d] an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power" (Foucault 1991: 191-193). It also made possible "a new organization of...*individualizing* power" [emphasis added] (Foucault 1982: 334). Of course, this individualising power had its roots in "Christian pastorship," which had involved "a peculiar type of knowledge between the pastor and his sheep [that]...individualizes." Accordingly, the pastor had to "be informed as to the material needs of each member of the flock[, to]...know what each of them does...and...what goes on in the soul of each one" (Foucault 1979: 142-143). However, in the disciplinary era, Foucault argues, this "power of a pastoral type...suddenly spread out into the whole social body[, ]...found support in a multitude of institutions," and led to the emergence of "an individualizing 'tactic' that characterised a series of powers: those of the family, medicine, psychiatry, education, and employers" (Foucault 1982: 335).

Yet, the significance with which the disciplinary individual was imbued came at the expense of the expansively imaginative spatio-temporality of pastoral power. In his discussion of this issue, Foucault gives due consideration to the “form of political literature” that emerged in the eighteenth century and which, by “address[ing] what the order of society should be,” rendered “architecture...of considerable importance” in such transformation (Foucault 1982: 349). For example, in “The Eye of Power,” published subsequent to *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains that while “previously, the art of building corresponded to the need to make power [and] divinity...manifest” – such that “architecture manifested...the Sovereign God” – within the later disciplinary context “new problems emerged.” Now it became “a question of using the disposition of *space* for economic-political ends,” and of how panoptical architecture could contribute toward such ends, which was also bound up with a new perspective of *time* [emphasis added] (Foucault 1977b:148). Certainly, within the new disciplinary regime, “all the minutiae of Christian education...found their place easily enough.” However, this was only achieved through the drastic reduction of their epic/mythic imaginative spatio-temporal horizons,<sup>10</sup> insofar as they became subordinated to “a laicized content, an economic and technical rationality [involving a]...mystical calculus of the infinitesimal,” which was tied up with “the meticulousness of... [disciplinary] regulations” (Foucault 1991: 140). And this entailed a monumental rupturing of epic/mythical spatio-temporality, on account of the *de facto* disciplinary usurpation of the Sovereign God of Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Correlatively, while the efficiency of the social body became of paramount importance, the related individual disciplinary ‘ascetic’ exercises – which constituted the means of its salvation – did “not culminate in a beyond, but tend[ed] towards a subjection that has never reached its limit” (Foucault 1991: 141-156, 161-162), and which remained empirical and prosaic, rather than epic or mythical in orientation.

Importantly, though, such disciplinary subjection was not *continuous*, insofar as the individualising knowledge obtained thereby was something that had to be acquired from a wide array of sources, each of which was situated in a different position of hierarchical observation, within the broad array of diverse disciplinary spaces between which the individual moved. Moreover, within each space, varying evaluative criteria existed, which obliged disciplinary subjects to constantly adjust their behaviour, not only in relation to the general requirements of the different enclosures through which they moved, but also in relation to the specific requirements of the functional sites and partitions where they were temporarily situated. Similarly, change in rank within these spaces brought with it a further amendment of requirements with which the disciplinary subject was obliged to comply (Foucault 1991: 141-149). Disciplinary individuality was therefore highly complex in orientation, insofar as individuals constituted themselves differently in relation to the many spaces in which they were situated, both at different times of the day, and at different times in their lives. Consequently, while disciplinary power may have been exercised more efficiently than sovereign power, it was nevertheless still plagued by certain deficits. In particular, the logic underpinning the much-vaunted disciplinary ‘dossier’ on any given individual – compiled as it was from an array of accounts of an individual’s behaviour in different domains – remained thoroughly inductive, and hence its summations could only ever be probabilistic. It was therefore always susceptible to potential criticism, not only because of the irremediable narrative gaps which haunted it, but also because the cogency of any dossier-based summation of an individual was predicated on the belief in the *efficacy* of contextual interfacing, which was something that could never be guaranteed.

However, because the transition to disciplinary society entailed the increasingly pervasive exercise of power over people’s lives,<sup>12</sup> and because this agenda grew in momentum over time, before long the above problems deriving from the elisions and questionable cogency of the

dossier were, at least to some extent, addressed by the emergence of bio-power in the nineteenth century. As Foucault indicates, bio-power “does not exclude disciplinary technology, but it does dovetail into it, integrate it, modify it to some extent,...use it by...infiltrating it, embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques” (Foucault 2003: 242). And in this way, bio-power soon began to approximate a more continuous form of societal control. On account of its orientation around sexuality, it did not so much involve a series of regimenting or surveillance technologies, imposed from without upon an initially unwilling subject, who had to be trained over time into a state of docility. Rather, it comprised a mesmerising discursive mirror, as it were, in which people’s most intimate energies were framed and reflected back to them, in a focused and ostensibly edifying manner. Indeed, the clarity of these reflections was often experienced as so overwhelming that it effectively hid from view the extent to which the metaphors and idioms of bio-power were the product of creative discursive artifice. As Foucault advances in “The History of Sexuality,” through this process bio-power came to “act...as the formative matrix of sexuality itself as the historical and cultural phenomenon within which we seem at once to recognise and lose ourselves” (Foucault 1977c: 186). Its captivating power in this regard becomes clearer when one considers the deployment of sexuality, which Foucault elaborates upon in *The Will to Knowledge*. This deployment emerged under the auspices of bio-power and framed sexuality in terms of four anchorage points: the licit liaisons of the Malthusian couple for the purposes of procreation, and the illicit neuroses, preoccupations and predilections of, respectively, the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, and the perverse adult (Foucault 1998: 103-105). Within the four quadrants of this discursive mirror all sexualities were caught and reflected, less in moralistic terms and more in a scientific idiom, which was couched in concern for the present health and future well-being of society, and which was embodied in a range of institutions dedicated to addressing all manner of anomalies related to reproduction. Within this context, it was advanced that, “spoken in time, to the proper party, and by the person who was both the bearer of [the anomaly]...and the one responsible for it, the truth *healed*” [emphasis added] (Foucault 1998: 67).

Understandably, the degree of financial investment required for this endeavour was not only immense, but also grew exponentially over time, as the related discursive dynamics, “having broken free of a long period of harsh repression, a protracted Christian asceticism, greedily and fastidiously adapted [themselves] to the imperatives of bourgeois economy” (Foucault 1998: 158). What this involved was the “development of a medical market in the form of private clientele[, and]...the explicitly moral and scientific – and secretly economic – exaltation of ‘private consultation’” (Foucault 1976: 166). And through all of this, society transitioned from the erstwhile deployment of alliance to the modern deployment of sexuality; that is, “from *a symbolics of blood* to *an analytics of sexuality*” (Foucault 1998: 148). The erstwhile deployment of alliance had been “built around a system of rules defining the permitted and the forbidden,” in the interest of “reproduc[ing] the interplay of relations” and defining “the link between partners,” in a way that ensured “the transmission or circulation of wealth.” However, all of this was displaced by the new deployment of sexuality, which “operates according to mobile, polymorphous, and contingent techniques of power” that facilitate “a continual extension of areas and forms of control,” through an emphasis on “the quality of pleasures.” And this rapidly became “linked to the economy through numerous and subtle relays, the main one of which... is the body...that produces and consumes” (Foucault 1998: 106-107).<sup>13</sup> In sum, what emerged through the deployment of sexuality was “a new knowledge...characterized by...examination, organized around the norm,” and carried out “through the supervisory control of individuals *throughout* their existence” [emphasis added] (Foucault 1973: 59) – in relation to that sexual part of themselves which was reified as both an enigmatic wound that could never be healed,



and the source of all meaning and personal truth. Notably, this entailed further diminishment of imaginative spatio-temporal horizons of possibility, because beyond the reproductive health of the social body – which remained a key issue of public administrative concern and resonated with the disciplinary social agenda – there also emerged a new, widespread, solipsistic fascination with the pursuit of personal sexual ‘truth.’<sup>14</sup>

However, according to Gilles Deleuze, the discursive basis of disciplinary power – with which such bio-power was thoroughly integrated – had already begun to break down before the Second World War. To be sure, this did not involve any sudden disappearance of disciplinary technologies; on the contrary, Deleuze indicates that, because of the relatively recent transition to “societies of control,” one still today encounters “all kinds of things left over from disciplinary societies, and this for years on end” (Deleuze 1998: 17). Nevertheless, as he explains in his “Postscript on Control Societies,” an array of “new forces moved slowly into place” around this time, forces which then “made rapid advances after the...War” through “ultrarapid forms of apparently free-floating control that...[took] over from the old disciplines” (Deleuze 1990b: 178).<sup>15</sup> Admittedly, these ‘free-floating’ controls remain informed by the axiomatic of capitalism. As Deleuze and Félix Guattari indicate in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, such controls “organize...all the decoded flows, including the flows of scientific technical code, for the benefit of the capitalist system and in the service of its ends” (Deleuze and Guattari 2000a: 233), in a dynamic that pervades the contemporary era.<sup>16</sup> And this pervasiveness, in turn, derives from the way in which “the capitalist axiomatic establishes relations and connections between decoded flows, that are otherwise incommensurable and unrelated, and subordinates these flows to a general isomorphy” (Toscano 2005: 18). This is elaborated upon in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, where Deleuze and Guattari suggest that, “to the extent that capitalism constitutes an axiomatic...all States and all social formations tend to become *isomorphic* in their capacity as models of realization.” Consequently, “there is but one centered world market, the capitalist one, in which even the so-called socialist countries participate” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 436).

Alexander Galloway points out in *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*, that there is strong support for Deleuze and Guattari’s above periodisation, ranging from Ernst Mandel’s use of “the concept of Kondratieff waves to examine what he calls the era of late capitalism[,] beginning in approximately 1945,”<sup>17</sup> through the ideas on late capitalism advanced by, among others, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Fredric Jameson,<sup>18</sup> to Manuel Castells’s documentation of analogous processes of decentralisation in *The Rise of the Network Society*,<sup>19</sup> among other texts (Galloway 2004: 23-24). Thus, the transition to what Deleuze calls *continuous* ‘control society’ can arguably be traced in relation to money, on the one hand, and to information technology, on the other hand.

That is, on the one hand, while disciplinary society “was always related to molded currencies containing gold as a numerical standard,...control society is based on floating exchange rates, modulations depending on a code setting sample percentages for various currencies” (Deleuze 1990b: 180). Historically-speaking, this began under the auspices of the Bretton Woods system, which lasted from 1946 to 1973, and in terms of which the currencies of participating countries were fixed against the US dollar, with the dollar in turn fixed against gold at \$35 per ounce (Montiel 2009: 161). The transition to a thoroughly speculative/fluid economy occurred with the termination of the Bretton Woods system, which was replaced with what Peter Gowan calls the “Dollar-Wall Street Regime.” This regime dissociated the US dollar from the gold-exchange standard, and elevated it to the global reserve currency. At this point, the practice of fixing exchange rates between the main world currencies was abandoned, with the consequence that

the “US government [could]...move the exchange price of the dollar against other currencies by huge amounts without suffering the economic consequences that would face other states which attempted to do the same” (Gowan 1999: 19).

On the other hand, the exponential economic growth made possible through these changes was concomitant with a heightening of Cold War political tension between the capitalist ‘West’ and the socialist ‘East,’ which in turn saw the production of information technology as a key part of US defence strategy.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, the threat of nuclear attack from the Soviet Union – which reached an unprecedentedly high level during the Cuban missile crisis<sup>21</sup> – resulted in a US demand for ‘second strike’ capability, or the ability to coordinate a nuclear response to an initial nuclear strike, even though many telephone and radio communication networks had been destroyed. In this regard, Paul Baran of the RAND Corporation,<sup>22</sup> “in a series of papers published between 1962 and 1964,...developed his concept of a ‘network of unmanned digital switches implementing a self-learning policy at each node, without the need for a central – and potentially vulnerable – control point.’” In doing so, “not only did he describe all the basic features of a packet-switching network, but he also addressed the Quality of Service issues associated with carrying voice on the network” (Wheen 2011: 127-128), and thereby initiated the technological experimentation that would give rise to the internet. Indeed, after ARPANET (or the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) was “launched in 1969,” its “creators... believed that the true power of computers was not in their ability to compute, but in their ability to create communities by providing a new means of communication” (Long 2006: 74). And this attitude went on to dominate the approach to computer communication from the first rudimentary electronic mail sent in 1971, to the introduction of Web 2.0 in the late 1990s, which entailed “a more open approach to the Internet, in particular user generated content, such as blogs, podcasts, [and] social media” (Quigley 2011: 115).

However, in contrast to the optimism of theorists like Henry Jenkins, Howard Rheingold and Mark Poster,<sup>23</sup> who see in social media a panacea for many social ills and deficits, Deleuze argues that the orientation of our society around information technology is a development which for the first time in history makes possible a *continuous* form of societal control. To understand Deleuze’s concern, it is important to remember that, as indicated above, the principal reasons for the creation of the internet were to maintain control in the event of nuclear devastation, and to extend control through co-ordinating a nuclear reprisal against the Soviet Union. And this same principle of defensive decentralisation is now utilised to protect information from destruction, through acts of war, natural catastrophe, or the chronic deterioration of archival material. Moreover, while disciplinary power was predicated on the segmentary manual compilation of such documents – with all the elisions and errors that this implied – control society has emerged through a constant automatic accumulation of such information in digital form. “Whereas disciplinary power was exercised in loci of enclosure – in the factory, in the schools, in the military, in the asylum – control is [now] exercised virtually everywhere: marketing information, for example, is collected wherever and whenever people shop, travel, pay taxes, register to vote, and so on” (Holland 1998: 71). Thus, notwithstanding the pessimism that Deleuze’s perspective entails, it is increasingly understood that he “has much to contribute, especially by establishing a connection between control society and computers (a word hardly mentioned in Foucault, if at all)” (Galloway 2004: 22). For Deleuze, then, we are “moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication” (Deleuze 1990a: 174). Within this context, a “man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt,” within a world “no longer directed toward production but toward products, that is, toward sales or markets,” in a way that is “essentially dispersive.” In other words, in contrast to

disciplinary society, where “you were always starting all over again (as you went from school to barracks, from barracks to factory),” within control society, “you never finish anything” because “business [and] training [are]...coexisting metastable states of a single modulation, a sort of universal transmutation” (Deleuze 1990b: 179, 181).

An important consequence of this transition to control society is the diminution of emphasis on the *individuality* that was so important within the erstwhile disciplinary context, as an ‘object for a branch of knowledge’ and a ‘hold for a branch of power.’ Now, because the spreadsheet rather than the dossier has become of paramount importance, and because the consumer’s spending power rather than the vitality of the social body takes precedence, what one encounters in control society are less individuals and more “numbered bodies of coded ‘dividual’ matter to be controlled.” Bodies that use a “dividual...electronic card that opens this or that barrier,” depending “on the computer that is making sure everyone is in a permissible place, and effecting a universal modulation” informed by the axiomatic of capitalism. And while “individuals become ‘dividuals,’ ...masses become samples, data, markets, or ‘banks’” (Deleuze 1990b: 180-182).

Thus, if there is one thing which differentiates disciplinary/bio-power from control society, it is their different relationship to idealism. Idealism still persisted in disciplinary/bio-power society. Initially, it took the form of quasi-religious commitment to those disciplinary tenets that were believed capable of ushering in the ‘best of all possible worlds.’ And later it featured not only in the normative measures of bio-power, which sought to augment the health of the social body, but also in the postulation and pursuit of personal erotic ‘truth’ under the auspices of the deployment of sexuality. In contrast, in control societies, commitment to anything but the economic bottom line in terms of the axiomatic of capitalism is now a source of embarrassment, because such sentiments are construed as indicative of naiveté on the part of one who has yet to grasp the *realpolitik* of the new order. In many respects, this involves even *further* diminishment of imaginative spatio-temporal horizons of possibility, because it effectively truncates the already reduced horizons of disciplinary/bio-power idealism. Arguably, this process comprises a crucial means of transforming disciplinary individuals into dividuals, or economic matter capable of producing and consuming within an ambit of hyper-efficient transactions – where deep, long-term commitment to any ideal is eschewed as an obstacle to facile, short-term interests that facilitate dynamic purchasing patterns.

Thus, from a Deleuzian perspective, those who see the internet and social media as means by which *individuals* – despite their respective positions around the globe – can engage with one another to create new and meaningful relationships, are guilty of a contradiction of sorts. This is because the level of involvement with information technology required for such relationships to be established, is indissociable from the reduction of the individuals concerned to ‘dividuals,’ whose correspondence with one another is then rendered all the more unproblematic and congenial, the more it is informed by capitalist imperatives. In this way, “rather than encouraging a real social engagement[,],...control societies threaten to turn the individual into an object with no resistance, no capacity to ‘fold’ the line of modulation” (Marks 2006: 209).

### **The four silicon-crystals of Zack Snyder’s Sucker Punch (2011)**

Arguably, the narrative of Snyder’s *Sucker Punch* concerns the encounter, on the part of a disciplinary/bio-power subject, with the new constraints of control society – constraints which *actually* succeed in reducing her to dividuality, despite her desperate attempts to respond to them

*virtually* by thematising epic/mythic space and time as imaginative alternatives. In this regard, her attempts at resistance prove futile because the speed, power and unexpectedness of the new processes of dividualisation constitute a ‘sucker punch’ – an unanticipated strike against which she cannot adequately defend herself – that renders her not simply docile in a manner akin to a disciplinary/bio-power subject, but also incapable of even imagining opposition to the new status quo.

The *fabula* of *Sucker Punch* is tragically simple. A young woman of twenty, Baby Doll (Emily Browning), along with her younger sister, become subject to abuse at the hands of their stepfather after the death of their mother; abuse which rapidly escalates when it emerges that their mother left all of her wealth to the two girls. Although Baby Doll resists her stepfather’s ensuing sexual advances, she not only proves incapable of protecting her younger sister from being killed, but is also subsequently accused of her murder and sent to a psychiatric institution. Here, her stepfather bribes a corrupt official to have her lobotomised before she can give her statement to the police, and in the seconds before her creative capacity is destroyed through this procedure, she desperately imagines a series of alternative realities in which she still has time to work toward her escape. However, these fantasies culminate in her imagining herself caught in the last instance, and receiving a punch to the face – a virtual event which coincides with the actual completion of the lobotomy, toward the end of the film. The film closes with her in a catatonic state, unable to appreciate the later arrest of the corrupt official who facilitated the operation.

Notably, the narrative is historically situated at the moment of transition from disciplinary/bio-power to control society. It is possible to argue for this, because the above surgical procedure is clearly the transorbital lobotomy first developed in 1946 by the American psychiatrist Walter J. Freeman – who initially used an ice pick instead of an orbitoclast – to treat his patients “for emotional distress and moodiness” (Finger 1994: 293). Yet, the ease with which the lobotomy is carried out in the film indicates a general acceptance of the procedure, which only occurred several years later, after the opposition of Freeman’s colleague, James W. Watts, had faded from memory.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the main vehicle featured in the film, a Chrysler Imperial LeBaron, was introduced in 1958, indicating with even more precision the period in which the narrative is set.

That the lobotomy functions within the narrative as a metaphor for the dividualisation indissociable from control society, emerges quite clearly from the *sjuzhet* of *Sucker Punch*, which involves a complex array of three deeply imbricated virtual worlds that effectively comprise the past-present continuum of the protagonist, Baby Doll. These systematically represent her attempts to respond not only to the spatio-temporal and discursive confines of disciplinary/bio-power, within which she finds herself incarcerated, but also to the dividualising reductiveness of the emerging control society, which threatens to destroy her imaginative capacity. Arguably, within the context of the film, critical reflection upon these historical shifts and their effects on subjectivity arises through a series of silicon-crystals. However, what is striking is the way in which they involve a digital composite of four analogue time-images which Deleuze, in *Cinema 2*, identifies in the films of Max Ophüls, Jean Renoir, Federico Fellini, and Luchino Visconti – time-images which evince the emergence of new thought which *thinks* the passing of time, albeit at different speeds.<sup>25</sup>

In Ophüls’s *Lola Montez* (1955), there occurs a reflection of proximal stasis, insofar as the narrative deals with an actress portraying the sensational events of her own life, night after night, to captivated circus audiences, such that her actual present becomes subordinate to her virtual past, in a process which seems interminable.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, in Renoir’s films, one

encounters a partial destabilisation of such virtual hegemony, and hence the gradual passing of time. As Deleuze explains, in Renoir's work "the crystal is never pure and perfect; it has a failing [and]...is always cracked" (Deleuze 2005: 82), and this allows for time to escape and move on. For example, in *The River* (1951) – set alongside a river in Bengal, India, after the Second World War – three young girls initially become infatuated with, and hence subject to the virtual hegemony of, a war veteran, but this hegemony is eventually broken. And while their overcoming of such virtual hegemony comprises part of their respective actual paths to maturity, it is concomitant with and mirrored in the war veteran's escape from the virtual hegemony of (his memories of) the war, which allows him to leave India, and return to America to get on with the rest of his life.<sup>27</sup> And beyond this, in the wake of such cracks in the crystal, one finds in Fellini's films, for example *8½* (1963), an intense and highly dynamic negotiation between the actual and the virtual. Within the context of this narrative, the director's actual present crises, which relate to the film he is trying to make, and issues from his virtual past, all intermingle with immense rapidity and fluidity – in ways that evince the great speed with which time passes during any creative process.<sup>28</sup> However, in contrast to such frenetically creative virtual-actual interplay, in Visconti's *Ludwig* (1972), the solemn caveat concerning the insurmountable power of historical change is thematised, insofar as a systemic destabilisation of virtual hegemony occurs, which precipitates the passing of an entire era. This takes place when King Ludwig – who for years has squandered his kingdom's wealth on palaces and art – is declared insane and dethroned by new political forces that are no longer willing to live beneath his heel.<sup>29</sup>

Arguably, all four of the above analogue crystals identified by Deleuze (2005: 80-94), each have a digital counterpart among the four silicon-crystals of *Sucker Punch*. But, as will be discussed, these silicon-crystals also differ in important ways from their analogue predecessors, and it is in such difference that their political significance for the contemporary era lies.

#### - **The first silicon-crystal**

In the opening scene of *Sucker Punch*, one encounters the first silicon-crystal, because although the film is presented as a stage play, it is simultaneously indicated that the central protagonist, Baby Doll, is not aware of this, and is instead trapped within the first virtual world of the narrative – far more intensely than the main character in Ophüls's *Lola Montez*. That is, while a proscenium establishing shot shows her sitting on a bed upon the stage of an old theatre, with her back toward the audience, as the camera pans around to her right and focuses on her face, the audience and the entire theatre disappear, and are replaced by the enclosing walls of her bedroom, with an evening storm raging outside her window.

However, as the narrative proceeds, it becomes clear that this *first* virtual world – unlike *Lola Montez*'s virtual past – is not the product of an idiosyncratic duration, but rather the homogenous discursive product of disciplinary/bio-power. This much emerges when one considers her immediate spatial context. One of the key disciplinary technologies employed from the eighteenth century onward, was the "delineation of a particular family form as an 'indispensable instrument for political control and economic regulation'" (Smart 2004: 101), and this delineation manifested itself concretely in the construction of the bourgeois home. Within this disciplinary enclosure, the patterns of spatial arrangement to a large extent "assume[d] specific identities for men and women" (Lang 1994: 260). In this regard, although "marked wholly as 'private,'" such "domestic space [wa]s itself divided architecturally between 'public' (e.g., dens, dining areas) and 'private' (e.g., bedrooms, bathrooms)" (Feder 2007: 41). And

while the former operated as functional sites, the latter operated as partitions which, in turn, were subdivided further into the relaxation and/or contemplative spaces of men (Hayden 1984: 8), and the work and play spaces of, respectively, women and children (Jackson 1985: 235-236). Moreover, “the addition of a second story...increased the ability to create hierarchical space within...elite urban houses...[, with t]he stairs provid[ing] a natural barrier separating the upper floor rooms from those on the ground floor,” while the “rooms in the upper story allow[ed] those who...access[ed]...them to undertake surveillance” (Jamieson 2002: 125-126). Yet, despite the enhanced privacy of the upper rooms, just “like the inhabitants of the Panopticon, who take on the roles of both watcher and watched, members of the household similarly assume[d] both roles,” with the consequence that transgressions against disciplinary – and for that matter, bio-power – tenets, were countered by forms of “correction necessary for restoring the discipline that animates the observation” (Feder 2007: 41). In this way, “the individual to be corrected” existed in a field “between the family,” on the one hand, and “the school, workshop, street, quarter, parish, church, police, and so on,” on the other hand (Foucault 1999: 57-58) – a field made possible in many respects by the design of urban homes.<sup>30</sup>

Despite this combined orchestration of domesticity by disciplinary/bio-power, the different orientations of these two discourses also often led to conflict. And this is evinced in the narrative of the *first* virtual world of *Sucker Punch*, when disciplinary power and bio-power emerge as two mirrors, opposite each other, which refract the image of the individual back and forth between them in a plethora of contorted forms. As indicated in the *fabula* above, while Baby Doll has been constituted as a disciplinary/bio-power subject on account of her discursive formation, she is also damned through her disciplinary identity and the related juristic procedures surrounding inheritance, because they lead to her stepfather attacking her in a drunken rage, when he discovers that his wife left her entire fortune to her and her sister. To be sure, Baby Doll’s resistance to his sexual advances is legitimate in terms of the normativity of bio-power, as is both her exercise of panoptical surveillance through a keyhole – during which time she sees him approach her younger sister – and her subsequent attempt to prevent him from abusing the young girl. However, the latter endeavour requires her to contravene a number of disciplinary spatial tenets, which contribute to her later being construed by the authorities as a “delinquent” (Foucault 1991: 264-270). In short, she not only breaks out of her second-storey bedroom window, scales down the outside of the building, and then breaks into both her home and her stepfather’s study; in addition, she also steals his pistol and then fires a warning shot near him, to halt his abuse of her sister. Ironically, these spatial infractions on her part – although orientated around preserving bio-power normativity – also lead to her being categorised under the first anchorage point of the deployment of sexuality, namely that of the hysterical woman. The consequence of this, in turn, is that she is, firstly, sedated under the combined authority of the representatives of disciplinary/bio-power (namely the police and the paramedics), and secondly, incarcerated in a mental asylum. However, because of the profound injustice of her incarceration, her recalcitrance continues within the asylum, and the audience later learns that she not only started a fire and stabbed an orderly, but also stole his master key and helped another inmate to escape. But, reflected back and forth in the opposite discursive mirrors of disciplinary power and bio-power, this recalcitrance is not viewed as legitimate opposition to the injustice of her situation. Instead, it ends up legitimating the initial decision to incarcerate her, and indeed to subject her to a lobotomy.

## - The second silicon-crystal

However, within the disciplinary/bio-power confines of the asylum in which Baby Doll finds herself incarcerated, there occurs a second silicon-crystal, which to a certain extent parallels the ‘cracked’ analogue crystal of Renoir’s *The River*. During the process of her introduction to the asylum, she is brought to the common room, called the ‘theatre.’ Here, all the young female inmates are left to interact with one another at certain times of the day, while on the stage at the end of the room a dramatisation of their respective struggles is performed, with various inmates playing different roles at different times. By chance, the dramatisation being staged as Baby Doll enters the theatre – in which another inmate, Sweet Pea (Abbie Cornish), serves as the protagonist – is reminiscent of her own recent struggle, replete with a similar bedroom arrangement to that of the opening scene of the film. And in this she recognises, however tentatively, the clichéd nature of her own suffering. That it is not unique to her, but rather a construct of her society, a series of events that play out time and again, around the world, because of the analogous disciplinary/bio-power arrangements that exist in the ostensibly different societies, and which perpetuate and propagate the hierarchical dynamics and discriminatory categorisations that precipitate situations such as hers.

Arguably, this realisation constitutes the key to her escape from the hegemony of the *first* virtual world of disciplinary/bio-power, which she has hitherto construed as self-evidently legitimate and hence incontestable. That her encounter with such dramatisation is indeed of deep significance to her character is evident in the way in which, later, she imaginatively duplicates its dynamics, even casting Sweet Pea in the role of protagonist once again. This occurs when Baby Doll is strapped into a chair and awaiting her lobotomisation. In the second before the psychiatrist delivers the blow that drives the orbitoclast into her brain, she effectively extends her opposition against disciplinary power, from a rejection of disciplinary *spatiality*, to a rejection of disciplinary *temporality*. What this involves is her escape from the actual ‘ticking clock’ of disciplinary time – or Chronos – into the labyrinthine virtual depths of Aeon,<sup>31</sup> more often associated with dreams and recollection. Within this domain, the remaining second before her lobotomy is carried out, is protracted into the remaining hour or so of the cinematic narrative, where it is characterised by intense and complex virtual activity. That this involves a time-image – or more correctly, a silicon-crystal – is clear, because at this point Baby Doll is neither asleep and dreaming (which would comprise an *onirosign*), nor awake and recollecting (which would comprise a *mnemosign*). Rather, she is absorbed in scouring her virtual past for a means of responding to the actual *opsigns* and *sonsigns* of the impending lobotomy procedure, and through this process the virtual-actual interface becomes progressively more intense, resulting in highly creative and expansive imagistic thought on her part.

However, unlike the ‘lines of flight’ made possible through the cracked crystals of Renoir’s films, which allow for idiosyncratic duration to subsequently unfold,<sup>32</sup> Baby Doll’s escape into Aeon, in many respects, involves her inadvertent further immersion within the clichés of bio-power. That is, not only does she rearticulate her situation, by imagining Sweet Pea (instead of herself) strapped into a chair on the verge of being lobotomised. In addition, she also renders the procedure a pantomime and situates the chair on the stage in the ‘theatre’ of the common room, where she first saw Sweet Pea perform – a stage which she *now* imagines as existing in a brothel, to which she is later brought as a new erotic dancer/prostitute. Accordingly, while the asylum becomes a brothel, the orderly becomes a pimp, the inmates become showgirls, and her stepfather becomes a priest who removes her from an orphanage and hands her over to the pimp to become one of his performers. To be sure, in imagining things in this way, Baby Doll presents a series of challenges to disciplinary/bio-power. As Foucault explains, “in...hospitals, psychiatric or not

– which were designed for healing – sexual behaviour, sexual activity, was forbidden,” because it was thought that the relevant authority “should take responsibility not only for the particular function it exercised over individuals but also for their existence as a whole” (Foucault 1973: 82). In contrast, Baby Doll not only negates this through rearticulating the asylum as a brothel, and hence as a domain centred on sex, but within this context also imagines herself as a veritable master of erotic dance – the uninhibited sexual intensity of which mesmerises all audiences. Understandably, this involves a further challenge to disciplinary/bio-power, because while, on the one hand, on account of her small stature, virginity and name (Baby Doll), she is regarded as a child by those around her, on the other hand, her performances comprise an expression of masturbatory desire, insofar as they involve her alone on stage, gyrating and moaning, under the spell of an ostensibly deep and enigmatic sexuality pulsating within her. In imagining things in this way, she both inverts the disciplinary/bio-power valorisation of “the productive body [over]...the pleasure body,” and defies “the eighteenth century...crusade against masturbation” that was “directed primarily if not exclusively towards adolescents and children” (Foucault 1974: 53-54). As Foucault points out, “we have had sexuality [only] since the eighteenth century, and sex since the nineteenth[;]...before that was...the flesh,” related to sin and focused upon in the confessionals of pastoral power (Foucault 1977a: 211). And while such sex and sexuality were not the aspects “of the body which the bourgeoisie [sought]...to disqualify or nullify,” they nevertheless were aspects “which troubled and preoccupied [them]...more than any other” (Foucault 1998: 123). In effect, it is this cautionary circumspection that Baby Doll flouts, and she thereby renders her erotic dancing an act of resistance against disciplinary/bio-power. Yet, because she has only the tired repertoire of clichés from the deployment of sexuality to draw from, while she evidently proves capable of combining them in a mesmerising fashion, she arguably fails to “invent with the body, with its elements, surfaces, volumes, and thicknesses, a nondisciplinary eroticism – that of a body in a volatile and diffused state, with its chance encounters and unplanned pleasures” (Foucault 1975: 227).

### - The third silicon-crystal

However, the intensity of her erotic dancing, and the corresponding mesmerising effect it has on all audiences within the *second* virtual world of the brothel, are only achieved through Baby Doll’s displacement of her immediate surroundings by a further, surreal *third* virtual world, into which she escapes to achieve the requisite unselfconsciousness that lends to her dancing its captivating dynamism. Within the narrative, this process occurs through a third silicon-crystal, which to some degree parallels the highly dynamic analogue crystal of Fellini’s *8½*, insofar as it similarly involves intense and rapid actual-virtual negotiation. However, unlike in Fellini’s film, where the delusions of grandeur in question are highly idiosyncratic, being drawn from the unique duration of the director Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni), in *Sucker Punch*, Baby Doll’s fantasies, yet again, are the product of pastiche. This is because the *third* virtual world remains thoroughly reliant on the digitised epic/mythic spatio-temporality and plots of various popular contemporary computer/video games.

This *third* virtual world is made up of a spectacular series of four surreal realms, in which Baby Doll is obliged to undertake (initially alone but later with others) tasks which are epic/mythic in orientation. The deeply compensatory function of such fantasies is, of course, quite understandable; not only for Baby Doll – radically confined as she is by disciplinary/bio-power constraints and on the verge of being lobotomised into dividuality – but also for many ordinary people in the contemporary era, for whom her situation functions as an allegory. That is, within



the digitised environ of control society, and against the backdrop of the legacy of disciplinary/bio-power – both of which entail the drastic reduction of spatio-temporal and imaginative horizons of possibility – the themes of many of the most popular computer/video games situate players in fictitious worlds which attempt to negate such a deficit. Via the avatars of the various protagonists, players pursue tasks which, even when they are not *mythic* in orientation – through being imbricated with all manner of deontological imperatives – nonetheless remain *epic* in their parameters.

Of the wide array of possible sources of inspiration for the *third* virtual world, the following four computer/video games highlighted by Adam Rosenberg, in his “Sucker Punch: The Video Game Levels of Zack Snyder’s Mind,”<sup>33</sup> lend particular clarity to this issue. To begin with, while *Mortal Kombat* by Midway Games is set within a fantasy universe consisting of six realms (of which earth is one), and concerns martial arts tournaments in which the stakes are nothing less than the freedom or enslavement of the entire universe, in *Heavenly Sword* by Ninja Theory, players wield a sacred sword – originally delivered to the earth from heaven by a legendary messianic warrior – in an effort to defeat the forces of evil. And the martial skill found in both *Mortal Kombat* and *Heavenly Sword*, continues as a central theme within both *Armored Core* by From Software and *Gears of War* by Epic Games, even though the respective plots of the latter games shift in scale from mythically salvific to epically political in orientation. In *Armored Core*, players become mercenaries equipped with a mecha (mechanised armoured body), which they pilot either to attack enemy installations, or to defend designated installations from attack, while in *Gears of War*, players form part of a team of soldiers tasked with saving the remaining humans on the planet Sera from attack. In many ways, the themes of both *epic* empowerment and *epic* responsibility loom large in the respective plots of these games. In the first, players are officially freed from those disciplinary constraints which induce docility, and concomitantly imbued with superhuman mobility and gargantuan destructive capacity. In the second, players are entrusted with the salvation of a desperate group of humans who have no one else to turn to. It is moreover quite telling that, in the case of *Gears of War*, one possible protagonist is Marcus Fenix, a former prisoner who – like his namesake the Phoenix – is afforded the opportunity to rise from the ashes of his life and redeem himself. Thus, while the possibility of *epic* empowerment and *epic* responsibility stand to appeal strongly to those who, within contemporary control society, continue to feel the legacy of disciplinary/bio-power in the form of docility and suspicion, the prospect of redemption is conceivably no less important. This is particularly so in a world where the avowal of religio-ontological experience and commitment has increasingly become the object of derision.

In the four surreal realms of the *third* virtual world of *Sucker Punch*, there exist counterparts to all of the above. In the first surreal realm, Baby Doll is required to defend herself against attack from gigantic samurai robots, something she succeeds in doing by finding herself possessed of incredible mental and physical abilities, in a manner akin to a protagonist in *Mortal Kombat*. The childlike nature of her fantasies notwithstanding, as mentioned already, they allow her to apply herself unselfconsciously to her dancing, and thereby to gain the respect not only of Sweet Pea, but also of three other showgirls, namely Rocket (Jenna Malone), Blondie (Vanessa Hudgens), and Amber (Jamie Chung), with whom she then plans escape.

This is a crucial part in the film, because it constitutes the central overlapping point of narrative threads which derive from all *three* of the above mentioned virtual worlds. In short, while Baby Doll later communicates her plan to escape to the four other girls within the *second* virtual world of the brothel, it is predicated upon her earlier mystical encounter with a wise man (Scott Glen), during her foray into the first surreal realm of the *third* virtual world, mentioned

above. Moreover, while he told her that in order to escape she would require four objects, namely a map, fire, a knife, and a key, as she relays this instruction to the other girls, the images which she recalls are drawn from the *first* virtual world of the asylum. That is, she recalls a map of the hospital against the wall of the corrupt orderly's office, the master key which he hangs around his neck, the lighter in the hand of another orderly stationed at a gate, and one of the cook's knives on the kitchen table – all of which she saw in the days preceding her lobotomy. After this, each of these items is pursued by the girls in both the *second* and the *third* virtual worlds simultaneously. While Baby Doll distracts different audiences with her dancing in the *second* virtual world of the brothel, Sweet Pea slips away to photocopy a map of its passages, Amber steals a cigarette lighter from a prominent member of the audience, and Rocket attempts to take a knife from the kitchen. However, because Baby Doll can only dance unselfconsciously and enthrall audiences to the requisite degree by placing herself in the surreal *third* virtual world, on each of these three occasions, she rearticulates the combination of her dancing and the three girls' covert activities in spectacularly epic/mythic terms. These involve, firstly, their collective foray across a World War One 'no man's land' to retrieve a map from a German bunker (which draws on *Armored Core*), secondly, their collective attack on a castle to retrieve fire-producing crystals from the throat of a dragon (which draws on *Heavenly Sword*), and thirdly, their collective attempt to defuse a bomb on a train before it can detonate upon arrival in a futuristic city (which draws on *Gears of War*).

The latter, in particular, emerges as another point of narrative overlap between the different virtual realms, when this surreal *third* virtual world fantasy is interrupted by the death of Rocket, on the kitchen floor of the brothel in the *second* virtual world, at the hands of the cook. It is during this scene that the deeply compensatory function of the surreal *third* virtual world emerges, insofar as Baby Doll immediately rearticulates Rocket's pathetic death in the kitchen as a heroic self-sacrifice on the train. A demise which she, moreover, imagines Rocket willingly submitting to, instead of seeing her as a victim of murder. In certain respects, this adumbrates Baby Doll's own fate within the context of the *second* virtual world. Although she initially seems to be on the verge of making an escape, as she stabs the pimp, steals the master key from around his neck, starts a fire to distract everyone, and then flees with Sweet Pea – using the map the latter photocopied to work her way through the brothel's maze of corridors – she is ultimately obliged to stop short of success. This is because, in the final instance, she realises that only one of them can escape because of the number of henchmen stationed outside, and she draws attention to herself while Sweet Pea slips through the gates undetected. Then, after a brief confrontation with them, as already mentioned, Baby Doll is punched in the face – an event in the *second* virtual world which corresponds with her actual lobotomy in the *first* virtual world.

#### - **The fourth silicon-crystal**

At this point, the fourth and final silicon-crystal – which to some extent parallels the analogue crystal of Visconti's *Ludwig* – occurs, and with it, the critical edge of *Sucker Punch* finally emerges. As already mentioned, in Visconti's *Ludwig*, a systemic destabilisation of virtual hegemony takes place when King Ludwig, who for years has squandered his kingdom's wealth, is declared insane and dethroned by new political forces. Analogously, in *Sucker Punch*, there occurs the destruction of the *second* and *third* virtual worlds that Baby Doll created, as a compensatory response to the *opsigns* and *sonsigns* of the lobotomy procedure. This destruction takes place after she is declared insane in terms of disciplinary/bio-power, and accordingly individualised by the new historical forces of control society. In short, she finds herself incapable

of responding effectively to these new forces, because she neither understands their parameters nor comprehends their dynamics. Consequently, they strike her in the form of a ‘sucker punch,’ while she desperately focuses her attention elsewhere.

Arguably, it is no accident that her attention proceeds from, and in a sense remains underpinned by, masturbatory preoccupations – which in the case of *Baby Doll* involve her erotic dancing, through which she accesses the surreal *third* virtual world of epic/mythic spatio-temporality. Nor is it coincidence that her imagistic fantasies within this *third* virtual world are consonant with (and in some cases representative of) the plots, themes and visuals of certain contemporary computer/video games. Rather, in terms of the narrative of *Sucker Punch*, her focus in this regard serves to thematise not only the political paralysis which derives from the solipsistic preoccupation with sexuality, engendered through bio-power. Beyond this, it also renders highly conspicuous the political vulnerability which derives from compensatory immersion in the fantastical worlds of computer/video games. Games which, for all their intense dynamism and multi-layered mystique, prove powerless, within the context of an encroaching control society, to halt the process of dividualisation – a process for which the procedure of lobotomy in the film, serves as a terrifying metaphor.

Ultimately, all of this is powerfully underscored by the fact that, in contrast to the idiosyncratic durations reflected in the four analogue crystals, identified by Deleuze within the films of Ophüls, Renoir, Fellini, and Visconti, the duration to which *Baby Doll* has recourse remains worryingly homogenous and prosthetic in orientation. That is, throughout the film, her duration remains thoroughly informed by either disciplinary/bio-power clichés, or the computer-generated kitsch of control society. Thus, even before the hammer falls, it would appear that her lobotomisation is already a *fait accompli*.

### **Time-images and the problem of silicon-images**

David Martin-Jones’s contentions concerning the immense political power of time-images become quite understandable in relation to the above. This is because of the way in which they counter many processes of homogenisation – from efforts to establish disciplinary/bio-power normativity, through endeavours to form national identity, to the proselytising of religious fundamentalists, etcetera. That is, time-images not only reveal the “protagonist...as constantly coming into existence, a discontinuous entity who...simultaneously exists in multiple times,” and who thereby defies such processes of reduction (Martin-Jones: 2006: 27). In addition, by emphasising the uniqueness and *difference* with which time passes for each one of us, time-images also thematise the impossibility of any such overarching ‘molar’ organisation succeeding in its efforts to contain an interminable ‘molecular’ flow of desire (Deleuze 1972: 219). Rather, the actual predilections of any desiring body – individual or social – are by definition understood as unpredictable, on account of the infinite array of (idiosyncratic) virtual variables which can always be brought into play in new combinations. And these demands, deriving as they do from a unique *duration*, have the potential to always exceed any normative organisational parameters.

At the same time, though, the political significance of the contemporary transformation of individuals into dividuals within control society, also becomes worryingly clear. This is because, while time-images emerged after the middle of the twentieth century, making them coterminous with the advent of control society, they were still primarily a reaction against disciplinary/bio-power, rather than against the features of control society – which at that stage were still in their infancy. After all, insofar as they also operate within an ambit of intense and deep interiority,

time-images draw heavily on precisely those dimensions of disciplinary individuality that were produced through composite processes of examination and confession. Yet, through their incisive self-reflexivity – involving an awareness of unique *duration* – time-images also reveal as illusory the great disciplinary/bio-power dream of the *integral* and *definable* individual, because they thematise instead the radical processes of molecular difference which lie at the heart of any individual, and which render each an interminable ‘work-in-progress.’ In fact, it is not inconceivable that, insofar as cinematic time-images initially thematised such ‘folding’ in relation to the disciplinary/bio-power context, they also comprised part of the critical process which helped draw to a close the disciplinary/bio-power era. However, within the context of contemporary control society, the more individualised people become, the less possibility there exists for time-images to function in such a politically antagonistic fashion. This is because a decreasing resonance between the dimensions of time-images and the individual’s experience renders the former increasingly unappealing – or even unintelligible – to the latter. In other words, reduced to controlled economic matter in terms of the axiomatic of capitalism, in a way that robs them of precisely the intense and deep interiority to which time-images refer, individuals easily become “object[s] with no...capacity to ‘fold’ the line of modulation” (Marks 2006: 209).

This issue has, to some degree, been broached by David Rodowick in *The Virtual Life of Film*, in which he considers the different ontologies of analogue and digital media, and weighs up their respective capacities to elicit an awareness of *duration*. According to him, the tension between them is neatly encapsulated by Babette Mangolte in her “Afterward: A Matter of Time,” when she asks: “Why is it difficult for the digital image to communicate duration?...And why could the projected film image do it so effortlessly in the past and still can?” (Mangolte 2002: 263). For Rodowick, the answer to these questions lies with the ontology of celluloid – an ontology indissociable from the limitations of the medium in the face of time and light. Celluloid film, “as a spatial record of duration,” always “demonstrated a constant fascination for...*durée* as lived time, both physical and psychological.” In terms of this, while the camera afforded one the opportunity to capture “contingent encounters with the flux of history and everyday life,” the corollary of this was that the spectator was rendered “a passive viewer yielding to the ineluctable flow of time” (Rodowick 2007: 151, 170, 177). As such, implicit in the use of this medium was an appreciation not only of the irreversibility of time, but also, correlatively, of the *duration* of those people whose movements and expressions – once captured on film – comprised the poignant vestiges of a lost moment; a fleeting existence unavoidably shared by cameraman and spectator as well. Moreover, while such passed time continued to hold its authority over the present, insofar as subsequent editing of footage remained largely restricted to arrangement rather than radical alteration of the *mise en scène*, such authority was also always subject to the siege of time, on account of the inherently fragile nature of celluloid.

In contrast, today, “we no longer seek to overcome our temporal alienation from the past in digital cinema,” primarily “because the electronic screen expresses another ontology,” namely one characterised by a “will to power in relation to the world.” Indeed, the vertiginous excitement of digital space stems from the infinite possibilities it contains, and the “sense of controlled, continuous, and open-ended movement” it affords us. Accordingly, because “digital synthesis” can produce “an image of what never occurred in reality,” it constitutes “a fully imaginative and intentional artefact” (Rodowick 2007: 166, 169, 171, 174). Not beholden to time in a manner akin to celluloid film, it treats time as a malleable material. For example, in digital post-production, the gaps in old ruins can be filled in or whole ancient cities can be recreated, while the light can be modulated to the desired effect and seasons can be changed; even prehistoric creatures can be reanimated and brought into conflict with contemporary humans.<sup>34</sup> The consequence of

this is that “causal links to physical reality have become weakened,” and that “the experience of duration has lost its preciousness,” because “nothing endures in a digitally composed world” (Rodowick 2007: 171, 179).

Thus, it is no longer *duration* that is contemplatively shared between actor, cameraman and spectator – as was the case through the medium of celluloid – but rather *information*. It is not simply that “as digital capture...makes photography more...like information...our experience of filmic duration disappears.” In addition, the momentum behind such transformation of photography is increasing relentlessly, tied up as it is with the development of communication technology that only knows temporary limits, in terms of present “availability of computing cycles, storage capacity, and bandwidth” (Rodowick 2007: 147, 163). The end result of this is a primary focus on the present as a dynamic space of instrumental action, in relation to highly modified and virtually mobile digital images, rather than as a domain of contemplative thought, in relation to the celluloid images of the past, which were resistant to change and cumbersome on account of their physicality. Moreover, through the negation of *duration* indissociable from this new approach, there has occurred the concomitant reduction of all things and people – all “matter and minds” – to the level of “information” that can be traded and shared within cyberspace (Rodowick 2007: 146, 175). A domain that is immune from the ravages of time because it effectively exists ‘nowhere.’ In light of this, Rodowick ponders, in *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze’s Film Philosophy*, whether or not “the time-image [will] persist as a contestatory force in relation to what Deleuze called control societies,” or whether it will “be displaced, for good or ill, by a silicon-image” (Rodowick 2002: xvii).

Arguably, it is possible that, within control society, the time-image will be displaced *for good* by silicon-images *only* when such silicon-images involve counterinformation – of which the silicon-crystal is an important expression. Counterinformation should, from the outset, not be confused with the silicon-images of popular computer/video games. While their change in status is not inconceivable at some point in the future, for the present moment such games remain largely imbricated with the informational matrix of control society. At a formal level, they remain purely informational on account of their digital synthesis, and at a thematic level, they allow for the kind of negotiation of identity only possible in the *wake* of both disciplinary subjectivity, and the idiosyncratically ‘oppositional’ individuality reflected in analogue time-images. In this regard, the much vaunted negotiation of identity which takes place through gaming (Cassell and Jenkins 1998; Turkle 1984; Turkle 1996; Yates and Littleton 2001: 82-97), is arguably only possible because identity no longer matters, insofar as it no longer serves as a ‘hold for a branch of power,’ like it did within the disciplinary era. Instead, within contemporary control society, what matters is the channelling of economic dividuality, and in relation to this, the above negotiation of identity through gaming serves as a highly expedient marketing means.

Rather, counterinformation comprises the antagonistic opposite of the kind of information in control society that facilitates dividualisation; information that entails two important features: firstly, a diminution of imaginative horizons of possibility to accord with those options that are, or that can be, informed by the axiomatic of capitalism; and secondly, a negation of the body as something subject to time, involving a displacement of mortality in favour of an emphasis on the immortality of cyber-interaction and -inscription. In contrast, counterinformation is orientated around, firstly, an emphasis on spatio-temporal openness as an adversarial concept, in the interest of broadening and deepening precisely those imaginative horizons of possibility which the information of control society (following disciplinary/bio-power) has diminished; and secondly, an oppositional thematisation of embodiment, along with the temporal limits of mortality. In the interest of achieving the first goal, it is not sufficient for counterinformation to simply augment the

spectacular images of expansive spatio-temporality found in computer/video games – or for that matter, films like *Sucker Punch*. This is because, as already discussed, enthrallment with these images comprises a compensatory practice that, through ornamental silicon means, tries *in vain* to counteract the progressive reduction of imaginative horizons of possibility, which is the legacy not only of disciplinary/bio-power, but also more recently of control society. Indeed, insofar as this compensatory practice propagates the very information that functions as the technology of continuous control, it ironically helps smooth the process of transition to dividuality. However, when such enthrallment with silicon-images is characterised *as* compensatory, and placed within the context of an encroaching control society – albeit implicitly through the dialectical means of Eisensteinian intellectual montage – a type of information that effectively counters the prevailing line of modulation is produced. For Eisenstein, “intellectual cinema” involved “the combination of two ‘depictables’” in order to “represent...something that is graphically undepictable” (Eisenstein 1929: 30). And, similarly, when both spectacular silicon-images and our fascination with them are thematised as fragile *synthetic* products, perched precariously upon delicate *organic* matter – such as blood and brain tissue – which lack the immortality of cyber-activity because they remain subject to time, something ‘unrepresentable’ is precipitated. This is because the expansive spatio-temporality of such spectacular silicon-images is revealed as a compensatory spectre playing out on a glass ceiling, as it were, at the very moment when this ceiling is shattered through the conflict of such montage – the dynamic of which leads, in turn, to an emphasis on spatio-temporal openness as an adversarial concept. Arguably, such openness is adversarial insofar as no representations within the repertoire of control society currently exist to readily rush in and fill the gap. On the contrary, the *duration* recently marginalised by digital *information* thereby returns to centre-stage, where it remains a haunting open wound that both refuses to be healed, and – at least for a while – resists submersion beneath the waves of digitality that pervade control society. Understandably, this agonistic process, involving a remembering of the forgotten dialectic of materiality and time within the context of control society, is indissociable from the second goal of counterinformation mentioned above, namely an oppositional thematisation of embodiment, along with the temporal limits of mortality.

Some purists might argue that thematisation of duration through such digital means involves a prophylactic engagement with time, so to speak, which is moreover ultimately doomed to fail. This is because, as Rodowick indicates, it cannot communicate duration directly – in a manner akin to analogue technology – but is rather condemned interminably to translate duration into and out of binary code; the very process of which renders duration equivalent to any number of other experiences, in a way that robs it of its primary ontological power (Rodowick 2007: 120). Yet, by way of response, it is important to remember that the information of control society may be opposed “not [by]...the work of art, but [by]...counterinformation,” and that such counterinformation “is effective only when it becomes an act of resistance” (Deleuze 1998: 18). In advancing this, Deleuze not only indicates the possibility of digital resistance, but also the pre-eminence of digital over analogue resistance in a world dominated by digitality, where a failure to digitise leads both to invisibility, and correlatively to ineffective resistance.

On the one hand, counterinformation is understandably dissimilar to art, because it cannot ever involve a pre-conceptual percept or ‘body-without-organs,’ which shocks us when we encounter it, and challenges us to stratify it and render it intelligible – in the process of which we necessarily become different from what we were before.<sup>35</sup> This is because, at a fundamental level, “in its numerical basis, digitally acquired information has no ontological distinctiveness from digitally synthesised outputs that construct virtual worlds mathematically through the manipulation of a Cartesian coordinate space” (Rodowick 2007: 167). However,

on the other hand, in a manner akin to art, counterinformation can nevertheless be something deeply transformative in its evocative affectivity; something which facilitates a ‘folding’ of the line of modulation within contemporary control society, through countering the information that otherwise prevails within this context, as the technology of *continuous* control. And silicon-crystals – such as those found in Snyder’s *Sucker Punch* – are an important expression of such counterinformation, because of their capacity to succinctly thematise the disparity between, on the one hand, our actual embodied duration, and on the other hand, the virtual digital information that so mesmerises us, and to which we hopelessly aspire.

## Conclusion

There is some truth to the criticism that the creative imagistic possibilities opened up through digital technology stand to displace the experience of reality as durational, embodied and unwieldy, which analogue technology previously communicated. However, correlatively, one must also be wary of the idealist trap of associating too closely the capacity of analogue technology to record duration, with the capacity of the human mind to remember duration. Indeed, upon closer consideration, it would appear that memory has far more in common with digital creation than it does with analogue recording. After all, our recollections of the past are seldom as stable as celluloid images, and instead far more prone to inflection, contortion and colouring, in relation to any number of present pressures. And just like certain of our recollections have in the past produced incisive critical thought, through the poignant juxtaposition of conflicting images and sounds – derived from our previous experience but altered according to the needs of the critical composition at hand – so too digital technology can produce critical thought, through the contrasts it establishes among the audio-visual material it manipulates.

In this regard, the critical *jouissance* of *Sucker Punch* derives not from its more spectacular scenes of imagined violence, but rather from their juxtaposition with the swift, cold, surgical simplicity of the lobotomy, alluded to by the faint trace of blood that rises gently from the orbitoclast after it is dropped into a basin of water, following the procedure. The stillness which ensues is haunting, not only because it contrasts with the tremendous clamour and activity of the preceding *second* and *third* virtual worlds, but also because it marks their utter and irreversible negation. That is, unlike in the realm of contemporary computer/video games, where play can be resumed time and again, the destruction of the soft, spongy tissue of the frontal lobe of Baby Doll’s brain – through the uncannily succinct motions of the orbitoclast – marks the end of a game that is irrevocably over. Although within the film, subsequent reference is made to additional variants of *second* and *third* virtual worlds, these are clearly the imaginings of the inmate whom Baby Doll helped to escape, and their soft sepia tones and elegiac tenor stand in stark contrast to the dull, unseeing stare with which Baby Doll now greets the world.

Admittedly less visceral than the images of those horror films – *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Dawn of the Dead* – which Modleski advanced as involving a *jouissance* critical of capitalism,<sup>36</sup> the lobotomy is arguably no less macabre in its connotations, and correlatively no less political in its implications. And in relation to this, it is possible to extend Modleski’s argument to forms of cinema apart from those of the horror genre, and to consider how such films critique social formations other than that of simple capitalism. In the case of *Sucker Punch*, the blood around the orbitoclast emphasises irreducible embodiment within a digital world that denies mortal limits. And it thereby comprises the requisite oppositional counterpart to the contextualisation of the expansive spatio-temporality of the *second* and *third* virtual worlds as

compensatory virtual responses – on the part of the protagonist – to the actual informational *opsigns* and *sonsigns* of control society. Without the blood, the latter virtual worlds would have constituted an exciting but apolitical celebration of digital imagistic possibility. But through the blood, these virtual worlds are situated both within the context of an irreparably limited duration, and *as* the imagistic products of a transient being, who tries in vain to use their kaleidoscopic colours and forms to conceal from herself her own human fragility. The latter point is underscored all the more through Baby Doll’s final, fleeting and fragmentary memory, before she is lobotomised, which is of her dead sister’s blood on her right hand.

In closing, Snyder’s *Sucker Punch*, via its reconfiguration of time-image technology into silicon-crystals, presents an innovative example of counterinformation within the context of control society. And on account of its exploratory orientation in this regard, the film is arguably ‘nomadic’ in the Deleuzian sense of the term, insofar as it involves a new and critical perspective on those digital dynamics of control society that otherwise inform the contemporary era, and which are generally construed as self-evidently legitimate. As Deleuze and Guattari explain in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, one “become[s] a nomad...in relation to one’s own language” when one makes “use of the polylingualism of one’s language, to...oppose the oppressed quality of this language,” through finding oppositional “points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which language can escape” (Deleuze and Guattari 2000b: 19, 26-27). Further, Deleuze advances that “what Kafka suggests for literature is even more valid for cinema, in as much as it brings collective conditions together,” and “itself produces collective utterances” that prefigure a people who are yet to come (Deleuze 2005: 213-215). A people of tomorrow who will be informed by the critical observations and different possibilities that are thematised today. Against this backdrop, not only does the political importance of the counterinformation expressed through the silicon-crystals of Snyder’s *Sucker Punch*, become apparent; in addition, what emerges with clarity is the critical significance of such silicon-crystals as a new weapon – or war machine – for use by the nomads of a new era.

## Notes

- 1 “When *jouissance* is translated into a critical category – Roland Barthes’s ‘text of *jouissance*,’ for instance – it is usually seen as an aesthetic effect of the high-modernist avant-garde, arising in a moment when a text frustrates a reader’s drive for narrative *plaisir* and becomes impenetrable, resistant to discursive syntax” (Fink 2005: 39). Analogously, when the narratives of horror and other films – like *Sucker Punch* – frustrate audiences’ desire for the “spurious harmony” that reinforces the “bourgeois ego,” and instead allow things to ‘fall apart,’ as it were, the mainstream entertainment “processes of identification through narrative continuity, and...mechanism[s] of closure” are critically countered (Modleski 1986: 695-696).
- 2 For instance, Ken Foree, Scott. H. Reiniger and Tom Savini who played the roles of, respectively, Peter, Roger, and a motorcycle outlaw in the original 1978 version, feature briefly in Snyder’s remake as a televangelist, an army general, and a country sheriff, while a store in the mall is called ‘Gaylen Ross,’ after the actress by the same name who played Fran in Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*.
- 3 See Comolli, J. and Narboni, J. 1969. “Cinema/ Ideology/Criticism.” In Easthope, A. (ed.). 1993. *Contemporary Film Theory*. Harlow: Longman; and Bordwell, D. 1979. “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice.” In Braudy, L. (ed.). 1999. *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press.



- 4 Classical realist films operate within “a set of formal parameters involving practices of editing, camera work, and sound which promote the appearance of spatial and temporal continuity” (Stam 2000: 143), within which the protagonists act in meaningful, goal-directed ways. The presupposition of *agency* is *as* essential to such films as it was to the critical Soviet cinema of Sergei Eisenstein, even though the latter employed *montage* – or the introduction of productive conflicts into the shot – to counter such ‘classic realist’ cinema (Eisenstein 1929: 24-39). In this regard, while Eisenstein’s approach to film was still predicated on the *agency* of the audience, insofar as they were expected to create meaning in relation to the conflicting images, the narratives of his *Strike* (1925) and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), among others, are also predicated upon an analogous belief in the capacity of individuals to *actively* resist oppression.
- 5 Already in *Cinema I*, Deleuze argues that “the new image would therefore not be a bringing to completion of the cinema, but a mutation of it” (Deleuze 2004a: 219).
- 6 Deleuze advances this as a dynamic, Nietzschean ‘third’ order of time, which opened up in the nineteenth century. This not only supplanted an earlier ‘second’ order of time, operative in the eighteenth century and orientated around the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, which entailed “the speculative death of God [and]...the fracture of the I.” In addition, it also further effaced an even earlier first order of time, which Deleuze maintains was still expressed in the seventeenth century by Descartes, for whom time was something that exists and unfolds under the guarantee of God (Deleuze 1994: 86-90).
- 7 See Deleuze, G. 1993. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. London: The Athlone Press.
- 8 This issue is paramount in Foucault’s *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, in which he argues that, within the context of the first/second century CE Hellenistic-Roman ‘cultures of the self,’ it involved a turning toward oneself, in “a reversion that takes place in the immanence of the world[;]...a liberation from what we do not control so as finally to arrive at what we can control,” and to “establish...a complete, perfect, and adequate relationship of self to self” (Foucault 2005: 210).
- 9 “The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called discipline” (Foucault 1991: 194).
- 10 Epic/mythic spatio-temporality is referred to here to address the following ambiguity. For Mircea Eliade, the term *in illo tempore* “describes th[e] time of sacred origins which is recoverable through ritual,” and “in the Christian tradition, mythic time can be illustrated by the sacrament of Communion, which effects an annihilation of historical time, as it were, and a transubstantiation of substance” (Greenway 2008: 13). However, “the *illud tempus* evoked by the Gospels is [also] a clearly defined historical time – the time in which Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judea... When a Christian of our day participates in liturg[y]...he recovers the *illud tempus* in which Christ lived...but it is no longer a mythical time...[Yet] we should add that, for the Christian, time begins anew with the birth of Christ,...[so that h]istory becomes *sacred history* once more – as it was conceived...in a mythical perspective, in primitive and archaic religions” (Eliade 1987: 111-112).
- 11 On the one hand, Christian space involved epic/mythic vertical and horizontal axes. While the vertical axis ranged between a heaven imagined somewhere beyond the vault of the sky, and a hell that existed somewhere deep below the earth’s surface, the horizontal axis spanned the earth’s surface. And while this horizontal axis was divided up according to an imaginative geography, between the domains of Christendom and those of the pagans (Said 1985: 53-62), the failure of the latter to convert to Christianity, along with the failure of Christians to live faithfully, were similarly construed as punishable in terms of the vertical axis. Arguably, the spectacular architecture of such condemnation was most saliently expressed through the Catholic Church’s teaching that the faithful – whose spiritual ardour was sufficient to earn them salvation – would be additionally rewarded with the opportunity to gaze down upon and enjoy the *eternal* sufferings of the damned. Even “for Tertullian” in the second/third century CE, “a very real part of the joy of heaven is to be the sight of the sinner in hell” (Barclay 1998: 184), and a millennium later, under the influence of Thomas Aquinas – who advanced an analogous view – this teaching became instantiated as part of official Roman Catholic doctrine (Ebenstein 1991: 254, 257-258). On the other

- hand, indissociable from such vertical and horizontal spatial axes, there existed Christian epic/mythic time, informed by the vast temporal parameters of the Abrahamic tradition (Hughes 2012: 71), which stretched from the very genesis of the world to the final apocalypse foretold in Revelations. This time-frame was not only gargantuan in proportion, but it also, by default, imbued all humble acts of faith, performed by ordinary people at their respective moments in history, with sublime significance, as immeasurably valuable steps along the road toward spiritual salvation.
- 12 Although the scaffold was initially replaced with the semio-technique of punishment, “orientat[ed] around a multi-layered dialogical didacticism” that was aimed at educating people about the inevitable negative consequences of committing crime, the latter was soon replaced by the “great dull monologue” of disciplinary incarceration. One possible reason for this is that, because the didacticism of the semio-technique was predicated on a belief in responsible agency, it was incompatible with the extension of disciplinary power which sought to effect docility across society (Konik 2009: 31).
- 13 Foucault qualifies his assertions by advancing that “it is not exact to say that the deployment of sexuality supplanted the deployment of alliance...[W]hile it does tend to cover up the deployment of alliance, it has neither obliterated the latter nor rendered it useless” (Foucault 1998: 107).
- 14 Foucault speaks of this as the “austere monarchy of sex,” which has obliged us to dedicate ourselves “to the endless task of forcing its secret, of exacting the truest of confessions from a shadow” (Foucault 1998: 159).
- 15 As Deleuze points out in “Control and Becoming,” Foucault “was actually one of the first to say that we are moving away from disciplinary societies, [that] we’ve already left them behind” (Deleuze 1990a: 174). However, it nevertheless remained for Deleuze, among others, to theorise what sort of society we currently inhabit, and the type of society we are proceeding toward.
- 16 “For example, the coding of sexual relations through marriage, the church, morals and popular culture...has been decoded in capitalist society.” However, while, on the one hand, this is “a good thing, making possible new kinds of relations that were excluded by the coding regimes in question,” on the other hand, “the recoding that would take place in non-capitalist societies to recapture decoded flows is replaced by the process of axiomatisation.” This is most saliently evinced in the degree to which sex is now for sale and powerfully imbricated with consumerism (Roffe 2005: 36).
- 17 “The Kondratieff wave has forecasted booms and busts better than most economists... Kondratieff, a Russian, was exiled to Siberia in the 1920s for theorizing that capitalism had 55-year evolutionary cycles, which purged it of excesses” (Fisher 2008: 190).
- 18 See Adorno, T. W. and Horkheimer, M. 1997. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso; and Jameson, F. 2003. *Postmodernism Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- 19 See Castells, M. 2010. *The Rise of Network Society*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- 20 “Some scholars argue that the Cold war began in 1917-1920 with the first ideological, political and military clashes between the U.S.S.R. and the West. But most scholars...believe that it makes more sense to place the start of the Cold war in the mid-1940s when, as a result of victory in World War II, American and Soviet leaders had the military power, the economic resources and the determination to engage in a far-flung and intense...struggle for influence” (Levering and Botzenhart-Viehe 2001: 2).
- 21 “The period from 1958 to 1962 was probably the most dangerous phase of the cold war;” while 1961 saw both “the building of the Berlin Wall [and]...the Bay of Pigs fiasco,” the “Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was potentially even more dangerous.” In relation to the latter, it has been argued that Krushchev’s decision to situate “medium- and intermediate-range missiles in Cuba [w]as a way of avoiding massive investment in long-range strategic forces” (Bowker and Williams 1988: 15-16).
- 22 “The RAND Corporation (an acronym for research and development) [was a]...think tank...composed of top scientists and theorists,” and it was “established after World War II by high-ranking air force officers and others with an interest in national security issues” (Rose 2001: 153).
- 23 See Jenkins, H. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press; Rheingold, H. 2000. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading*

- on the *Electronic Frontier*. Cambridge: MIT Press; and Poster, M. 2006. *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- 24 Although Walter Freeman initially collaborated with the neurosurgeon James W. Watts on the development of prefrontal lobotomy procedures, which necessitated complex surgery (Suchy 2011: 38), Watts subsequently “severed his relationship with Freeman over [the] issue of psychiatrists performing the transorbital lobotomy” (Gach 2008: 397). This was because the proliferation of such lobotomies – made possible by their relative technical simplicity – posed weighty ethical questions for Watts.
- 25 See Konik, A. 2011. “From Ruination to Renewal: The Critical Value of a Proto-Crystalline Regime in German Expressionist Cinema,” *South African Journal of Art History* 26/2 (2011): 15-44.
- 26 Similarly, in Ophüls’s *La Ronde* (1950), the character played by Anton Walbrook both orchestrates the unfolding of the narrative by directing the other characters *and* plays a role himself – which includes addressing the audience – such that there exist no actual wings adjacent to the stage sets that can offer any of the characters a respite from the virtual hegemony of the plot. And this theme of virtual hegemony is continued in Ophüls’s later film *Le Plaisir* (1952), which – in relation to three separate narratives – deals with the inability of different characters to free themselves from attachment to their respective objects of desire.
- 27 Similarly, while the narrative of Renoir’s eighteenth-century period piece, *The Golden Coach* (1952), concerns the way in which an actress, Camilla (Anna Magnani), escapes the virtual hegemony of her golden carriage by learning to relinquish her attachment to it, the narrative of Renoir’s *French Cancan* (1952) concerns the successful stage performance of a young Cancan dancer, Nini (Françoise Arnoul), after she manages to free herself from the restraining virtual hegemony of the two men in her life.
- 28 Similarly, while the narrative of Fellini’s *Roma* (1972) concerns the way in which contemporary existence in Rome is inextricably tied to and informed by the past of this great city – a past which makes its presence continuously felt in dynamic ways – Fellini’s *Amarcord* (1973) explores the analogous relationship that an individual has with his own past, which also always remains powerfully present.
- 29 Similarly, in Visconti’s *The Leopard* (1963), the forces of history are not only political, but also biological, insofar as Prince Fabrizio Corbero of Salina (Burt Lancaster) is struck by a mysterious illness toward the end of the narrative. Analogously, in Visconti’s *Death in Venice* (1971), the cholera outbreak functions as a metaphor for radical, unstoppable change, when it claims the life of Gustav von Aschenbach (Dirk Bogarde).
- 30 These dynamics are elaborated upon further by Feder in the following way: “A women in each house located along orderly...streets, preparing dinner for her family in the space recognized as that to which she ‘belongs,’” – namely the kitchen – with “the kitchen window giving on to the front yard so that she can watch her children play,” and so that “those outside may also look in” (Feder 2007: 39).
- 31 “Chronos – actual, spatialised time – is both measured and produced by the humanly invented clock. Aeon is the virtual existence of duration itself. Its transpersonal force is powered by the élan vital of evolving life[.]... the unlimited flow of past into future” (Powell 2007: 140).
- 32 “A line of flight is a line of escape from any fixed and stable order,... a zigzag, unpredictable course that disrupts the coordinates of an organized space[; it]...is the nomadic line of a smooth space[.]...a line of becoming-other, of metamorphosis and constant transformation” (Bogue 2007: 130).
- 33 See <http://www.g4tv.com/thefeed/blog/post/711304/sucker-punch-the-video-game-levels-of-zack-snyders-mind/>
- 34 See Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (2000), Alexander Sokurov’s *Russian Ark* (2003), and Steven Spielberg’s/Joe Johnston’s *Jurassic Park* trilogy (1993/1997/2001).
- 35 For Deleuze, the works of Francis Bacon are a good example of such transformative art. His paintings have “neither a model to represent nor a story to narrate,” and they escape the figurative by moving “toward the purely figural, through extraction and isolation.” In doing so, they constitute “a zone of indiscernibility or undecidability” that both demands and resists stratification, and thereby comprise a ‘body-without-organs,’ as it were, that “eliminate[s] every spectator, and...every spectacle” (Deleuze

2004b: 2, 13, 21). Every spectacle, because his works are figural rather than figurative; every spectator, because nothing in any spectator's experience prepares them for the encounter, such that they are obliged to become different

through their attempt to engage with and stratify what they see before them.

36 See note 1.

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**Adrian Konik** is an associate professor of Cultural Studies and Film Studies in the Department of Journalism, Media and Philosophy, School of Language, Media and Culture, at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa.