

Things Analog and Digital

Introduction

This paper comes from the intertwining of different trajectories of speculation about special effects and computer graphics imaging that I have been pursuing for several years now.¹ What has enabled me to discover the structure through which to crystallise at least some of these speculations in this paper is two recent texts in which these interrelated phenomena of the special effect and computer imaging are examined. The first is Vivian Sobchack's "At the Still Point of the Turning World: Meta-Morphing and Meta-Stasis" in which she insists on the "uncanny" nature of the effortless transformation visualised in the digital morph effect, an effect which seems to defy the perceived coherence and continuity of human subjectivity but which also "calls to the part of us that escapes our perceived sense of our 'selves' and partakes in the flux and ceaseless becoming of Being".² "Thus", claims Sobchack, "the morph is not merely a visible representation of quick and easy transformations of matter in time and space: it is always also an oxymoron, a paradox, a *metaphysical object*".³

This "metaphysical object" invites, indeed requires philosophical consideration in the search for an explanation of its paradoxical quickchange. Sobchack identifies the paradox in the digital morph's ambivalent impression of having overcome bodily integrity and subjective identity while at the same time evoking a sense of a more obscure and perhaps more essential quality of things (including human beings) as matter in flux, that is, as pure potentiality beneath any actualisation as a determinate entity. My paper is in no small part an attempt to respond to this invitation of the morph to consider the nature of things in the era of digital imaging or, more precisely, to inquire into what 'digitality' gives us to think about things, including our 'selves'. Further, Sobchack's suggestive allusion to Martin Heidegger's quest for the meaning of Being has inspired my foray in this paper into his work on the nature of "things" as a way to frame this metaphysical paradox of the being of the morphing thing.

The second text that I would like to cite here as having a galvanising effect on my meandering speculations in this terrain is Samuel Weber's recently presented paper, "Special Effects and Theatricality".⁴ In this paper Weber reflects on the term "special effects" and the conceptual relation this term names to what he calls "theatricality". Weber examines theatricality as a process of creating a space or of "taking place" that subtends and enables theatre to exist. While it occurs in the theatre as traditionally understood, theatricality is not limited to the space of conventional theatre but is also to be found in other processes where "theatres" are created such as the military "theatre of operations". As the military comparison suggests, this taking place is understood by Weber to be a "problematic localisation" because it is always directed at "securing the perimeter" of a space that is intrinsically unstable. Theatricalised space is always the space in which a certain scene is "staged", that is, actualised as both a determinate, local space and as one which is other than what, where and when it is.

An "effect", says Weber, "is an intentional work that makes something out of something else, producing an event outside of itself". This "effectuation" is, consequently, always an outwardly directed process, one that requires a recipient or an audience to constitute it as effect through their being affected by it. The special effect must take place before the viewer to be essentially what it is. Its representation of "extraordinary appearances"—this is one of the meanings of "special" in the term "special effect" that Weber gleans from the etymology of "special"—is always directed toward the film's potential spectator. As a theatrical event, the special effect always shows us not only the thing it represents, but the "presence of representation", as a medium through which we are shown things.

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But having made this claim, Weber immediately reminds us that this presence of representation is always only “virtual” in the special effect because, as a theatrical representation, “it depends and is constituted not just by the objects it represents, but by the effects it produces: not just by its past but by its future”. The special effect “entails the immediacy of the virtual” rather than any direct, unmediated presence of representation. That is, it stages cinematic representation and what it offers to view is not so much a true picture of representation today as the effort of the cinema to determine the nature of the space in which its representations appear, including the place of the spectator before which they appear. As I hope to show in this paper, this space, and the place of the viewing subject “within” it, is not fixed or stable but dynamic and subject to significant transformations.

With this in mind, I want to consider the special effects from two significant “effects films”, John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982) and James Cameron’s *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), in order to make some remarks about what passage the cinematic image has traversed between the analog and the digital special effect. Because these effects theatricalise cinematic representation, stage it as a space that is determined in its effort to affect its spectators, they offer us this possibility of thinking about what the cinema strives to effect through its work of representation.

I have chosen two “things”, one created through analog special effects work (the alien in *The Thing*) and the other a key moment in the development and promotion of digital visual effects work in film, the T-1000 cyborg from *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Both entities have the extraordinary ability to transform themselves rapidly from one thing to another. Indeed, they are never seen “as they truly are”, but only in the guise of some creature or person (or material object in the case of the T-1000), or in an in-between state as they change from one imitation to another. Steve Neale has said of the thing in Carpenter’s film that it amounts to a “collocation of special effects”,⁵ As special effects, they each represent and display themselves as the epitome of what work was achievable through the latest techniques and technologies of their day.⁶ While this is true for both “the thing” and the T-1000, it also means that both special effects theatricalise film’s work of imaging things in general. In doing so, taken together they can provide some insight into the shifts that are in train between an analog and a digital space of cinematic representation.

The Thing

I would like to begin by looking at one of the most remarkable (and exemplary) sequences from Carpenter’s film in order to characterise the analog processes employed in creating the extraordinary “thing” effects in the film. In this sequence a member of the small Antarctic research station team, apparently suffering heart failure, is revealed to be the thing through a rapid series of mutations so bizarre that eventually one of the characters looking on is led to exclaim, “You’ve got to be fucking kidding!”. The ailing team member is prepared for heart defibrillation treatment but on application of the apparatus his chest cavity suddenly opens up like a huge mouth and bites off the arms of the treating doctor. The now revealed thing begins to mutate by expelling material out of the opening toward the ceiling. This material forms into an abject conglomeration of nascent imitations of a variety of organisms. As the other team members react by burning the monstrosity with a flame thrower, the head of the “original” human imitation severs itself from its body and slips unnoticed to the ground underneath the table on which it had been laid for treatment. It then mutates into an arachnid-like creature and attempts an escape from the flamethrower. It is at this point that it is noticed by one of the team members (Palmer) who utters the classic line.

Palmer’s exclamation is a richly reflexive moment in the film that expresses the audience’s collective astonishment at this point as much as that of the crew members who also witness this

unbelievable transformation of a man into so many non-human things.⁷ The alien is a thing inasmuch as it is an indeterminate entity. This indeterminacy was the key theme animating makeup effects supervisor Rob Bottin's conceptualisation of the effects for the film. It represented a significant difference from the original concept of the alien formulated by artist Dale Kuipers. Kuipers' alien amounted to what Vivian Sobchack has called a "recognisable 'other'" in her book on science fiction, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*.⁸ Bottin says that Kuiper's design was "basically a big bug.... To me, because of the title, I expected something a little more like a *thing*".⁹ The most definite thing that can be said of Bottin's thing is that it is decisively non-human. Its thingness lies in its not being a "who", a human being, but a being about which one can only ask "what" type questions, to recall Martin Heidegger's description in *Being and Time* of the most fundamental distinction between different kinds of beings.¹⁰ But its extreme threat to the human rests in its ability to appear exactly like a "who" unless threatened or challenged into a defensive tactic of transformation.

If it is not a human being, it is clearly a biological organism of some unknown and undefined species. The revulsion it is able to incite in the spectator arises from its visceral violations of the discrete bodily form of self-contained individual identity.¹¹ This biological thing's gruesome metamorphoses foreground a particular sense of the cinema's power of visualisation. A tremendous labour and an incredible utilisation of materials is evident in these spectacular transformations. The work done on the monster's effects is displayed and celebrated in this sequence which calls on the spectator to acknowledge this work through Palmer's line. Materials used in creating *The Thing's* "collocation of effects" include: clay, foam latex, metal machinery, cabling, heated Bubble Yum gum, strawberry jelly, mayonnaise, cream corn, melted crayons and food thickener.¹² *The Thing* represents something of a culmination of analog special effects techniques on the eve of their radical transformation and partial demise at the hands of computer imaging and digital visual effects technologies. It employed all the existing modes of special effects production including video blue screen compositing and stop-motion effects as well as Bottin's extraordinary makeup and model work.

Effects visualisation is represented in the thing as a great labour: labour in the sense not only of work and a workforce but of painful, agonising struggle. The labour pains of the thing are evident in each of its transformations: out of its various orifices come unearthly screams of agony as it visibly stretches, strains, ruptures and erupts into new forms. These "birth-deaths" are accompanied by liberal splatterings of blood and other viscous fluids. The cinematic medium is theatricalised in this staging of the labour of the special effect as a work of transformation, of the reworking of one thing into another for the spectator. Films make representations for the filmviewer, and this work is special, difficult and spectacular. Cinematic representation is hard work with real raw materials: human and non-human.¹³

The Hypergenre Thing

At a wider, meta-filmic level, this staging of cinema's labour of reworking also has something to say about generic transformation and hybridity. *The Thing* is one of those films that could be called hypergeneric (to use Jim Collins' term): that is, a film which consciously incorporates elements from diverse genres in a reflexive play that is a central part of its textual strategy and its appeal to spectators.¹⁴ *The Thing* quotes from 1950s SF (its "original", Christian Nyby and Howard Hawkes' 1951 film, *The Thing from Another World* is explicitly cited) and also includes character traits and costume from the Western, narrative elements from the psychological thriller, as well as being itself a merger of Horror and Science Fiction. The alien itself is arguably the most profound attempt ever conceived to represent visually the paradox of genre: like "genre", the thing has no identity in itself.

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but must always rely upon exemplifying its attributes from specific instances. Each new form it manages to assimilate becomes another attribute or set of attributes it adopts as proper to it, so that it has no independent or stable identity but mutates each time a new example of it appears. The thing is an extreme, hyperbolic instance of this assimilationist logic, one which makes it eat all kinds of others in a hypergeneric expansion and perpetual reinvention of itself.

This hypergeneric productivity "effectuated" so spectacularly by Carpenter's *The Thing* is close to being a commonplace mode of mainstream big budget filmmaking by the time James Cameron makes *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* in 1990. *T2* is itself hypergeneric in its blockbuster conglomeration of chase movie, thriller and the 1980s SF/Horror fusion. But if hypergenre has become just another genre, the accelerated and deliberate mixing of genres and styles in the wider audio-visual culture has had significant implications for the interpretation of the nature and significance of film and other media production. The proliferation of electronic media and digital imaging forms is counted as central in analyses of these shifts in contemporary media culture in relation to theories of postmodernism, the information age and the digital revolution.

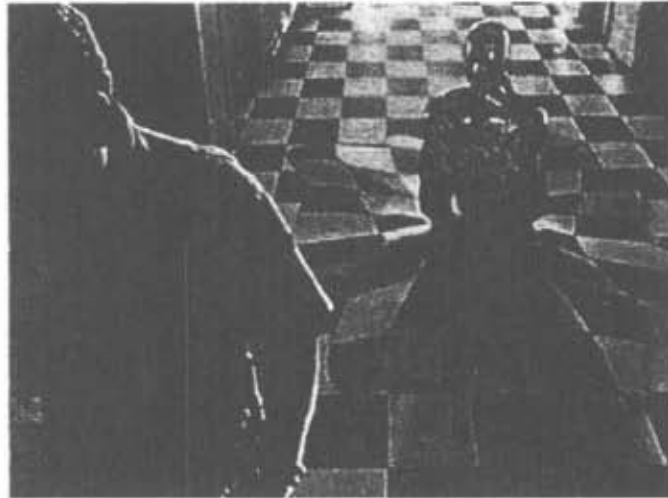
One way of thinking about the contrast between the T-1000 and Carpenter's thing would be to see the fluid ease of the T-1000's transformations as a figure of contemporary cinema's habituation to cross-generic hybridisation. Instead of the spectacularly painful and awkward transitions the thing endures in order to reinvent itself, the T-1000 slips into an amorphous, homogeneous material that has dissolved the differences between individual entities and specific genres of existence. Generic mutation has become a smooth routine in *T2*.

The T-1000

T2's digitally produced special effects, and above all the T-1000, theatricalise a major transition in the cinematic image in relation to which the move toward hypergenericity could, and indeed should be thought. In order to elaborate on this claim, I want to consider the effects sequence from *T2* in which the T-1000 emerges from its disguise as a checkerboard linoleum floor to duplicate the figure of the Mental Asylum security guard in order to articulate the way it stages a new notion of the work of imaging in the digital milieu.

This morph from floor to human is a display of the state of the art power of digital visual effects that corresponds to the showcasing of the ultimate analog effects of makeup, hydraulics and pneumatics in *The Thing*. If the T-1000's metamorphosis is less visceral and more elegant than that of the alien thing; so too is this sequence's reflexive solicitation of the spectator. Instead of the overt theatrical appeal of Palmer's "You've got to be fucking kidding?" line, the checkerboard floor "gag" is, at one level at least, more of a quiet in-joke amongst specialist CGI practitioners. The checkerboard pattern is a standard surface rendering option in 3D computer imaging software packages. It is a "procedural texture"—generated mathematically as a dynamic simulation covering the moving 3D model—often used in order to test the success of surface rendering effects on animated 3D models (that is, to check for tears or faults in the application of the surface to the model). The effect in this case was achieved by a different process involving the distortion of a photographed background plate of a real linoleum floor which had been scanned into the computer. It used specially developed software which employed 3D geometry to push up a "virtual mannequin" from underneath the flat surface of the studio set floor.¹⁵ Morphing then occurs between the 3D tiled figure and the imitation security guard double through the intermediary liquid metal "man". As a then state of the art piece of computer imaging, one which entailed the digital translation and mutation of cinematographic, analog images, this effect shows off the superiority of its photo-realism to that of the then standard CGI surface rendering options.

At a wider level, the checkerboard floor morph stages the “digitality” of digital visual effects as that upon which the spectacle of cinematic imaging now rests. Composed of a field of squares



alternately black and white, the floor schematises the computer screen’s field of pixels and, more fundamentally still, the simple alternatives of the binary code—“off” or “on”, “0” or “1”—that are the building blocks of digital circuitry in computer chips. This effect celebrates the ability of digital-based imaging to pass from the computer screen to the movie screen successfully, and *vice versa*. Moreover, it indicates that this passage is one in which the digital and the analog are not simply opposed, but are defined in relation to each other.

In his classic essay, “Analog and Digital Communication: On Negation, Signification and Meaning”, Anthony Wilden makes this point about the interrelationship of analog and digital “languages” when he states that digitisation

“involves a code, and any code considered in its totality is an analog of something (a “map” of some “territory” or other). In the case of the digital computer, the machine processes are analogs of mathematical formulae which are digital representations of the behaviour of some system or other.”¹⁶

These mathematical formulae, for example the algorithms which produce a digital visual effect, are digital to the extent that they rely on a precise mathematical language of equations which attempts to represent a particular “problem” in “a finite number of unambiguous ‘words’”. Finite definition is the key element of digital representation where, as Wilden points out, “either/or” propositions and those that distinguish between “A and not A” are fundamental.¹⁷ This mode of representation is pictured in the sequence from *T2* as having its basis in a field of discrete black and white squares. But these squares make up a total field, the analog, continuous space of the film frame. Taken as a whole, the space of the film frame is an iconic sign that represents another space, that of the film’s diegetic world. All the best efforts of the effects people is aimed at achieving a convincing level of realism at this level of the film frame as analog sign of an existent world.¹⁸

The checkerboard digital effect demonstrates the scope and ambition of CGI, that is, to develop a flexible syntax of discrete algorithms able to realise the potential of what Wilden attributes to higher

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level digital languages such as natural language or mathematics, namely the potential capability “of taking over or replacing the analog in terms of both form and function”.¹⁹ These algorithms would enable world analogs to be composed through a digital representational system that was “essentially autonomous and arbitrary in relation to ‘things’”.²⁰

This autonomy in relation to existent things is figured in the quicksilver materiality of the T-1000.²¹ This metal liquidity resonates with the pure potentiality of digital imaging. Its open-ended morphological possibility arises from what Sobchack has called a “sort of primal digital soup” that is the end result of digitisation’s “reduction of all input to a single and fundamental binary code”.²² The paradox of digital materiality is visualised in this strangely amorphous thing.²³

Martin Heidegger’s ontological speculations on the being of things are invaluable in the elaboration of this paradoxical materiality. According to Heidegger in his famous treatise, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, one of the most common understandings of a thing is, precisely, matter (*hylē*) that has form (*morphe*). “In this analysis of the thing as matter”, says Heidegger, “form is already coposited”.²⁴ Heidegger argues in this essay (first given as a lecture in the 1930s) that this notion of what a thing is arises first and foremost from the commonplace notion of “equipment” as intentionally formed matter. Moreover, he claims that the “matter-form” structure of the thing seen as a piece of equipment has become in modern times the dominant way of understanding all things, and indeed all beings:

The matter-form structure, however, by which the Being of a piece of equipment is first determined, readily presents itself as the immediately intelligible constitution of every being, because here man himself as maker participates in the way in which the piece of equipment comes into being. Because equipment takes an intermediate place between mere thing and work, the suggestion is that nonequipmental beings—things and works and ultimately all beings—are to be comprehended with the help of the Being of equipment (the matter-form structure).²⁵

Heidegger’s account of this generalisation of the being of equipment so that it comes to determine the nature of all kinds of things anticipates the critique of modernity and modern technology that he was later to develop as a central theme of his writings in essays such as “Overcoming Metaphysics” and the “The Question Concerning Technology”.²⁶ In a similar vein to this argument about the extension of the thingness of equipment to all things, this critique stresses the way in which in the modern age there is an increasing tendency to view everything, both natural, man-made things and even humanity itself, as part of the potential resource pool for the systematic maximisation of an ever-expanding technological exploitation of materials. Samuel Weber has translated Heidegger’s term for this tendency, “*Bestellbarkeit*”, as “the susceptibility of *being-placed-on-order*”.²⁷

In its “primal” amorphous potentiality, the T-1000 identifies this trajectory of the overflowing of the “equipmental” essence of thinghood into all beings as a *technological* trajectory, in the terms of Heidegger’s understanding of technology. The T-1000 is no longer a particular thing, but the material resource to be anything: human, manufactured, natural, biological. As such it is no longer comprehensible as an individual piece of equipment, such as is still the case with the T-101 cyborg robot played so convincingly by Arnold. This overflowing is an extreme instance of the dominant conception of the thing as formed matter—it is totally available to be formed for any purpose—but in its extremity the concept of the thing tends towards dissolution. In the T-1000, matter and form are no longer coposited.

As digital special effect, the T-1000 stages the dissolution of a certain accepted sense of what the cinema—the modern representational technology *par excellence*—produces. The work of the cinematic image theatricalised in and through the T-1000 then is no longer the work of effectuation:

the making of something out of something else in an immense labour of the transformation of materials such as was displayed in the agonised mutations of Carpenter's alien. It no longer involves transforming one material into another but the transformation of materiality *per se*. The imaging of things is staged as a relatively effortless actualisation of the inherent manipulability of digital "matter" that is susceptible to being brought forth in any form.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

The passage of the film image in the T-1000 special effect from material transformation and effectuation to a paradoxical pure digital materiality has implications for the status and significance of the analog form of cinematic representation. As discussed above, Wilden states that the analog is defined by its always having a relation to "things" so that the sign of an analog or iconic communication "has a necessary relation to what it 're-presents'". The increasing utilisation of digital imaging and its arbitrary relation to the "things" it represents, illustrated by the liquid autonomy of the T-1000 effect's appropriation of photographed "reality", calls for a rethinking of the cinematic representation of things.

This rethinking is a large project that extends beyond the scope of this paper. What I will do by way of a conclusion is to indicate a pathway for this rethinking consistent with my formulation of the dynamic space of filmic representation. It would be important in the pursuit of this pathway not to ignore the continuity implied in *The Things* and *T2*'s staging of the work of the cinema. Neither the thing nor the T-1000 are "present" in a pro-filmic sense. The filmic re-representation of them as imagined entities is in both cases a work of theatrical effectuation (as Weber describes it) because they depend on the spectator for their constitution as representations. Conceived in this way, cinematic representation is always a contingent, "virtual", unfinished, unstable process of "self-determination".

To investigate in a comprehensive fashion this digital reordering of the analog world of objects, images and spectator-subjects would entail, at the least, further forays into Heidegger's writings, in particular those specifically addressing the centrality of representation in the modern era and, above all in this regard, his famous essay "The Age of the World Picture".⁴⁹ In that essay Heidegger speaks about representation in ways that invite detailed consideration in terms of the passage toward the digital image I have delineated here. What I have been describing as the special effect's theatricalisation of the place of cinematic imaging resonates with Heidegger's account of representation as a dynamic and unstable process of positioning the viewer-subject before the world of objects, a world that becomes a picture in the modern era of the dominance of visual media.⁵⁰ Samuel Weber makes clear, through a re-translation of key terms and passages in Heidegger's essay, the emphasis Heidegger places on the conflictual nature of the structure of representation (*vorstellen*), which "consists in a highly ambivalent oscillation of bringing-forth (*her-stellen*) and setting-before (*vor-stellen*), with the aim of securing the foundations of the subject *at* and *as* the center of things".⁵¹

The instability of this positioning of subject and object is indicated by the constantly accelerating pace in which modern mechanical communications have covered the world in and as representations.⁵² For Heidegger (as is made more explicit in subsequent essays on the essence of modern technology), it is not the modern communications media that cause this crisis of human subjectivity. Rather, the proliferation of media representations (along with other phenomena of modern technology such as large-scale engineering projects, mass production, rapid transportation, etc.) is the manifestation of the problematic trajectory of modern western metaphysics which, since the time of Descartes, has placed the human subject at the centre of things. The subject is positioned as the substantial ground of Being through which all other beings are understood and dealt with. The

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essence of modern technology, which Heidegger names in "The Question Concerning Technology" as *gestell* ("setting in place" or "enframing") is, like the conflictual process of representation, a dynamic and destabilising process which actually undermines the security of the human subject's position at the centre of things in its expanding colonisation of all kinds of beings as resources for technological advance.¹¹

For the purposes of our inquiry into digital imaging in this context, it would be necessary to explore the relationship between the digital and the process of "enframing" Heidegger identifies as essential to modern technology, through a careful and rigorous reading of the key Heidegger texts on technology, representation and modernity. The goal of this reading would be to discover the way in which digitality has contributed to the destabilisation of the position of the subject in the world of things. Inasmuch as digitality is capable of undoing the mutuality of form and matter in the basic conception of a thing, any thing, it represents a potentially significant exacerbation of the process of *gestell's* transformation of all things into a technological resource pool (standing-reserve) of pure potentiality.¹² The human subject is not quarantined from the effects of this transformation.

To put it all too quickly, then, where the subject is to be placed in relation to the technological ability to bring forth *anything* as image today is the question posed by the spectacle of the T-1000's quicksilver digital materiality. Beyond the thing's challenge to the fundamental existential difference Heidegger describes between "who" and "what" entities, the T-1000 effect theatricalises the dissolution of things *as* entities, human or non-human, living or non-living. The things that make up the film's world are set before the spectator-subject as potentially interchangeable and re-formable representations without any particular substantial referentiality. Where in the world will the spectator be in the technological age as (digital) picture, that is, in the age when the world will be made in the image of digitality?

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NOTES

¹ The first of these trajectories can be traced back to when I was first "taught" *The Thing* in the context of deconstructive theories of framing and genre determination as an undergraduate student at the University of Sydney in the mid-1980s. My thanks to Alan Cholodenko, Rex Butler and Keith Broadfoot for their extraordinary and challenging work back then, and for introducing me to the vast and theoretical resources lying beneath the visible tip of that most profound of filmic icebergs.

² Vivian Sobchack, "At the Still Point of the Turning World: Meta-Morphing and Meta-Stasis", in Sobchack (ed.) *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 136. This essay and the book of which it forms part have gone a long way toward filling the relative lack of rigorous theoretical inquiry into the impact and significance morphing and digital visual effects in cinema in the last two decades.

³ Sobchack, *Meta-Morphing*, p. 136.

⁴ Samuel Weber, "Special Effects and Theatricality", paper presented at the Fourth Presidential Symposium on "Special Effects", Stanford University, February 2000.

⁵ Steve Neale, "You've Got to be Fucking Kidding!": Knowledge, Belief and Judgment in Science Fiction", *Alien Zone*, ed. Annette Kuhn, London, Verso, 1990, p. 161.

- ⁶ As Angela Ndaliansis has pointed out in her essay in *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change* entitled "Special Effects, Morphing Magic, and the 1990s Cinema of Attractions", this conscious display of the special effect as effect is in keeping with what she calls, after Tom Gunning, the "attractions" tradition of cinema. She argues that this early cinema tradition was revived in the blockbuster entertainment films of the 1980s and 1990s through the medium of special effects sequences: "Contemporary effects cinema", she claims, "is a cinema that establishes itself as a technological performance, and audiences recognize and revel in the effects technology and its cinematic potential" (p. 258).
- ⁷ Neale's text (cited above) is about how films like *The Thing* produce and authorise their representations of unbelievable narrative events. But it has a rather fatal flaw in that it does not perceive all levels of the kidding around that the film is engaging in here, because Palmer, the character who utters the line, is already "the thing" at this point in the film. That it is the alien "who" utters this line which appeals to the common viewing experience of both characters and spectators adds another level of irony to this already reflexive and sophisticated meta-textual communication that is not addressed by Neale.
- ⁸ Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, New York, Ungar, 1987, p. 23. Sobchack is actually referring here to the alien in the first *Thing* movie, Howard Hawks and Christian Nyby's *The Thing from Another World* (1951). In contrast to the short story that was the basis of the screenplay, John W. Campbell's "Who Goes There?" in which the alien was (like Carpenter's version of the story) "a creature which could assume the human shape of the people it attacked", the original film portrayed "an extremely recognisable 'other', something definitely detached from Man, something concretely different to be afraid of" (p. 23).
- ⁹ Bottin quoted in David J. Hogan, "The Making of 'The Thing', and Rob Bottin's Eye-popping, Razzle-dazzle Makeup Effects", *Cinefantastique*, vol. 13, no. 2/3, Nov-Dec 1982, pp. 48-75., p. 52.
- ¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1972, p. 71: "Existentialia [Heidegger's term for the "characters of Being" of *Dasein* which are defined in terms of its existentiality] and categories are the two basic possibilities for characters of Being. The entities which correspond to them require different kinds of primary interrogation respectively: any entity is either a "who" (existence) or a "what" (presence-at-hand in the broadest sense)".
- ¹¹ David J. Hogan in "The Making of 'The Thing'" notes that "Ironically, the film's makeup effects—by most standards its strongest selling point—proved to be its biggest liability" (p. 74). The film did poorly at the box office, and this has been blamed by some on the excessive nature of its effects of bodily liquefaction and mutation, and on the contrast between this monstrous alien and the cute alien in the box office blockbusting *E.T. The Extraterrestrial*, released just prior to *The Thing*. On the topic of body horror, there has been much written on horror and SF film discussing how these abject monstrous effects destabilise notions of the human body as a separate and stable envelope containing human being. Much of this work mobilises psychoanalytic and social theories of subjectivity in interpreting the monstrous deformations found in these films, particularly those of the 1970s and 1980s. Stephen Prince has written about *The Thing* in this vein, mobilising the social anthropology of Mary Douglas and Edmund Leach in characterising the alien monster as a visible figure of the pollution of indeterminate, different entities that contaminate the stable order of a social community founded on the regulation and exclusion of radical difference (see Stephen Prince, "Dread, Taboo and *The Thing*: Toward a Social Theory of the Horror Film", *Wide Angle*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1988, p. 19-29).
- ¹² Hogan, "The Making of 'The Thing'", p. 57.

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- ¹¹ The visible presentation of cinematic representation in pre-digital imaging as laborious and temporally irreversible is a central theme elaborated by Sobchack in her analysis of the implications of the digital morphing effect in "At the Still Point of the Turning World: Meta-Morphing and Meta-Stasis". I am indebted to her account of how analog special effects and conventional editing techniques impart a sense of the labour of those who make them (editors, actors, make-up specialists). Sobchack goes on to discuss how the digital morph appears to elide and indeed eradicate this labour from the experience of the effect because of the apparent effortlessness and, therefore, the potential reversibility of the morph. The morph effect amounts to a kind of escape by the film image from what she describes as the "gravity" of the image's relation to real temporal and effortful existence: "gravity as a value of photographic indexicality to a spatial and material world, to the visibility of particular human and representational labours, marked by change in space and time, and to human mortality" (p. 137). She goes on to describe the morphing of the liquid metal T-1000 figure in *Terminator 2* as having a meaning that has "nothing to do with human temporality—or matter" (p. 137). While she focuses on the temporal aspect of the morph's differential relation to human being, I am more concerned in this text to think about what it signifies about matter and the work of the cinema in making images out of things.
- ¹² Jim Collins, *Architectures of Excess: Cultural Life in the Information Age*, New York, Routledge, 1995. For an account of the hypergeneric film, see Chapter 3, "When the Legend Becomes Hyperconscious, Print the Array".
- ¹³ The designer of the software was Tom Williams at Industrial Light and Magic. See George Turner, "Terminator 2: For FX, the Future is Now", *American Cinematographer*, vol. 72, no. 12, Dec 1991, p. 62-69, for a more detailed description of the process.
- ¹⁴ Anthony Wilden, "Analog and Digital Communication: On Negation, Signification and Meaning", *Essays on Communication and Exchange*, 2nd Ed., London, Tavistock, 1980, p. 157.
- ¹⁵ See Wilden, p. 161-162.
- ¹⁶ The status of the realism of a film's diegetic space and its transformation under the increasing employment of digital imaging is a major subject of debate in critical and theoretical interrogations of contemporary film. See, for instance, Stephen Prince, "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory", *Film Quarterly*, v. 49, n. 3, Spring 1996, p. 27-37, and Lev Manovich, "Reality Effects in Computer Animation", *A Reader in Animation Studies*, ed. Jayne Pilling, Sydney, John Libbey, 1997.
- ¹⁷ Wilden, *Essays on Communication and Exchange*, p. 165.
- ¹⁸ Wilden, *Essays on Communication and Exchange*, p. 163.
- ¹⁹ As with the mutations of the thing and of body horror more generally, the T-1000 has been the object of extensive and varied interpretation in terms of theories of how individual subjectivity and social-political identities are changing in the contemporary age. See, for instance, Roger Warren Beebe, "After Arnold: Narratives of the Posthuman Cinema", *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change* (cited above). Doran Larson, "Machine as Messiah: Cyborgs, Morphs, and the American Body Politic", *Cinema Journal*, v. 36, n. 4, Summer 1997, p. 57-75, and J. P. Telotte, "The Terminator, Terminator 2, and the Exposed Body", *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, n. 20, Summer 1992, p. 26-34.
- ²⁰ Sobchack, "Introduction". *Meta-Morphing*, note 1, p. xxii.
- ²¹ This paradox of the material existence in "space" of the digital "thing" is analogous to the temporal paradox of the digital entity's effortless and reversible metamorphoses which Sobchack explores in depth in "At the Still Point of the Turning World: Meta-Morphing and Meta-Stasis".
- ²² Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", *Basic Writings*, trans. William Lovitt, ed. David Farrell Krell, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 159.

- ²⁵ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, *ibid.*
- ²⁶ See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York, Harper & Row, 1977. "Overcoming Metaphysics" is reproduced in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1993.
- ²⁷ Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*, Sydney, Power Publications, 1996, p. 79.
- ²⁸ A great deal of labour is of course involved in creating these effects but this is not shown in the "taking place" of the effect. An indication of the human labour required is to be found in the production histories of films with groundbreaking digital effects, if not in the effects themselves. For instance, George Turner recounts how the digital effects staff working on T2 doubled from the inception of the project to the time of its completion ("Terminator 2: For FX, the Future is Now", p. 62).
- ²⁹ Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture", *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, cited above.
- ³⁰ See Samuel Weber, "Mass Mediauras, or: Art, Aura and Media in the Work of Walter Benjamin", *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*, for a brief but illuminating analysis of Heidegger's "World Picture" essay.
- ³¹ Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, p. 80
- ³² In "The Age of the World Picture" Heidegger cites the radio in this regard, along with the abolition of distance made possible by air travel, understood here as another mode of the representation of the the world as a new system of relations between (formerly distant) places (p. 135).
- ³³ See Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York, Harper & Row, 1977, p. 19 ff.
- ³⁴ Heidegger's term for this resource pool created by modern technology's ordering of the world is *bestand*—most commonly translated as "standing reserve" (see "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 17).

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