DON'T LET THE FUTURE PASS YOU BY
ITERATIVE DYSTOPIAS ON THE POSTMILLENNIAL SCREEN

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ABSTRACT

In the decade 2001-2010, films which presented spectacular futures dominated the box office. In contrast, Code 46 (2003), 2046 (2004) and Inception (2010) conceived immediately recognisable tomorrows, pessimistic futures firmly rooted in the socio-historical present. Despite their divergent production backgrounds, differing story arcs and disparate aesthetics, this thesis contends that these texts are key, early examples of a new subcycle of films it titles Iterative Dystopia. Using a social science fiction criticism methodology, this thesis conducts an interdisciplinary investigation which draws on science fiction genre analysis, dystopian narrative theory and contemporary sociological concepts to define the formal characteristics of the collection and offers fresh readings of the texts.

This thesis finds that Iterative Dystopias are defined by the theme of perpetual liminality, an original concept developed following the work of sociologist Arpad Szakolczai. Iterative Dystopia’s perpetually liminal protagonists trace iterative paths across their narrative arcs, searching for an alternative to the continuous transitions of lives lived in this in-between state. Their goal is personal. They just want a place to call home. In direct contrast to the conventional dystopian protagonist, these characters are seeking their utopia within the familiar. These characters are, however, thwarted in their attempts to find a sense of belonging.

Through a close textual analysis, this thesis explores three of the narrative environments in which these characters conduct their quotidian existence: the home, the relationship and the mind; and establishes that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are frustrated by paradoxes. They reside in Foucauldian heterotopic places and are uncomfortably exposed in their performance of their everyday. They seek solace in their relationships, but find their communications hampered. Their verbal and haptic exchanges produce multiple, contradictory meanings which this thesis explores through Fritz Senn’s concept of dislocution. They seek refuge in their memories, but their minds are sites of control. Working from Ulrich Beck’s definition, this thesis defines these characters as uncertain and
contrasts them with the anxious, alienated protagonist found in the conventional dystopian form. Ultimately, Iterative Dystopias retain a glimmer of hope in the ambiguities that remain as their credits roll.

In conclusion, this thesis finds evidence that, far from being limited to films which garnered theatrical release in the postmillennial decade, the Iterative Dystopia subcycle continues beyond the bounds of this study.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. the thesis is fewer than 100000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

Blythe Victoria Chandler
I would like to express my gratitude to all the members of the Screen Studies department at the University of Melbourne who have had a hand in getting me from first year to now. In particular, I would like to thank: Mehmet Mehmet and Di Sandars, your enthusiasm sparked my passion to continue in this field; Felicity Colman, your confidence in my ideas and your non-conforming reading suggestions stirred me to think outrageous thoughts and pursue all possibilities; Wendy Halsem, your practical critique and support to hone my arguments and structure taught me the pragmatism I needed to complete the project at hand; and Tim Laurie, your critical rigour has marked my thesis and the generosity that you showed me both with your ideas and your time have been invaluable.

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INTRODUCTION: Iterative Dystopias

In late 2004, unmotivated by anything other than the desire to see a good movie, I found myself at the cinema. I watched two films in close succession, Michael Winterbottom’s *Code 46* (2003) and Wong Kar-Wai’s *2046* (2004). Both were set in the near future, and it struck me immediately that these films, which diverged wildly in terms of their story arcs, aesthetics and production, seemed somehow to be saying the same thing. Some years later, Christopher Nolan’s *Inception* (2010) affected a similar response. This research originated as an attempt to determine exactly what it was that I felt these films were articulating and to seek out other texts which might be doing the same.¹ In this curious constellation of postmillennial cinema, I had assembled a small selection of films which conceived immediately recognisable tomorrows. They depicted pessimistic futures, firmly rooted in the postmillennial decade into which the films were released. Each film clearly exhibited the hallmark Fredric Jameson identifies as anchoring the dystopian narrative form: these narratives evinced the ‘if this goes on’ principle articulated in the title of Robert A. Heinlein’s 1940 dystopian novella.² They were futures framed as the next logical step for humanity.³ Against the background of a decade in which the cinema flirted with spectacular futures, a period in which popular films reinvigorated the technique of obliquely exploring sociological concerns ‘but always in the guise of entertainment’,⁴ I found these texts to be all the more frightening in that they operated diegetically in the realms of the almost-possible.

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³ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London; New York: Verso, 2005), 198. In developing his taxonomy of utopian narratives, Jameson invokes Heinlein’s story to characterise ‘dystopia’ in this way, and to distinguish it from anti-utopian and apocalyptic narratives. I discuss this point in detail in chapter two.

This thesis contends that *Code 46, 2046 and Inception*, though an unlikely ternion, can and should be considered as early examples of a cinematic subcycle that I entitle *Iterative Dystopias*. I argue that each film works alongside the dystopian narrative tradition, manipulating and refiguring key diegetic conventions. These texts display ‘dystopian sensibilities’. It is, however, their narrative theme—perpetual liminality—that distinguishes these films as a coherent collection of texts. In each of these texts the utopia for which its protagonist is searching is an existence beyond their own perpetual liminality. They covet a life which is no longer characterised by continuous transition and uncertain play.

Chasing a goal which is only able to be defined negatively, their journeys are tainted by a lack of clear telos. The subcycle’s protagonists remain suspended in a state of infinite restlessness, the narratives refuse closure. These characters spiral towards their film’s ambiguous conclusion. Their journeys form layers, not of closed-loop duplications but of iterative change. While each of the texts analysed enacts this in a strikingly different way, the subcycle’s protagonists are all depicted revising their quotidian experience, ‘altering’ it with each repetition rather than simply replicating routine. It is in these iterations that a glimmer of utopian hope remains within these otherwise pessimistic texts. Each of the

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6 The theme of perpetual liminality that coheres the subcycle, the narrative layering within the diegeses which is the result of the protagonists’ performance of their everyday life, and the personal nature of the dystopia articulated by these films are explored in turn in chapters two and three.

7 This thesis works with a simple definition of ‘iteration’ which follows Derrida’s assertion in “Limited Inc abc” that ‘[i]teration alters, something new takes place.’ Although the term carries more precise, specific meanings as it is applied in fields as diverse as linguistics and mathematics, my intention here in using the term is to suggest (as I have done in text) that an iterative process is one in which the desired outcome of repetition is positive change. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, USA: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 40.

8 The association that I assert exists between iteration and hope is evident within Judith Butler’s work with the concept. In her recent discussion of sex as a ‘ritual practice’ for example, Butler writes that ‘it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labour of that norm. This instability is the deconstituting possibility in the very process of repetition [which results in] a potentially productive crisis.’ In other words, in allowing for contingency and chance in the repeated, or repetitive, process, iterations open up the possibility for positive change. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 10.
three main chapters of this work explores a different narrative environment in which these
caracters pursue a path out of their perpetual liminality—the home, the relationship and
the mind—and the ways in which these are shaped by the formal devices used across the
subcycle. Through a close textual analysis which integrates science fiction genre analysis
techniques with a thematic investigation drawing upon contemporary sociological
concepts, this thesis offers new ways of reading these films.

On an industrial level, the diversity of the texts analysed in this thesis is undeniable. The
earliest film released, *Code 46*, was directed by prolific independent British filmmaker,
Michael Winterbottom. The film was produced with funding from BBC Films for a meagre
budget of less than US$8m,\(^9\) by Winterbottom’s production company Revolution Films,
and distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s specialised art house division, United Artists. It
made a substantial loss at the box office.\(^10\) It envisions a future in which the planet is
wracked by global warming and the political system has devolved to corporate
totalitarianism under the control of The Sphinx. Central to the narrative is the
systematisation of procreation, positioning *Code 46* within the tradition of bio-political
cinematic dystopias such as *THX 1138* (1971), *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1990) and *Gattaca*
(1997). This diegetic world has firm footing in the assumed viewer’s socio-historical
present,\(^11\) however, a point which is reinforced through the film’s realistic visual aesthetic.\(^12\)
In light of Winterbottom’s stated intention to construct a near future that was ‘more of a
parallel to the world of today’,\(^13\) alongside the intellectual consistencies evident across his

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\(^10\) *Code 46*’s global box office takings are listed online as totalling US$285k.
(http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0345061/boxoffice;
http://www.boxofficemojo.com/people/chart/?id=michaelwinterbottom.htm)
\(^11\) Producer, Andrew Eaton states that ‘[i]t’s hardly anything in the film that doesn’t have some
basis in current fact. In the case of climate change and some of the technology, we’ve taken a few
leaps of imagination, but they’re not a million miles away from what exists now. “*Code 46*
\(^12\) Eaton notes both budgetary constraints and Winterbottom’s preference for shooting on location,
as factors in the decision to avoid ‘futuristic studio sets’. Ibid. In asserting that *Code 46*’s aesthetic
is realistic, I disagree with Deborah Allison who casts the film’s visual style as ‘cold and stylized’.
Deborah Allison, *The Cinema of Michael Winterbottom*, Genre Film Auteurs (Lanham: Plymouth:
\(^13\) “*Code 46* Production Notes.”
broad-ranging oeuvre, contemporary readings of the film focused primarily on its politics.

At its narrative core, *Code 46* is an ill-fated love story between the protagonist, insurance investigator, William Geld (Tim Robbins) and the criminal he is charged with identifying. The plot begins with William aboard a flight to Shanghai. He has been despatched by The Sphinx to uncover the source of fraudulent travel documents, *papelles*, which individuals are using to cross borders without the sanction of the regime. Infected with an empathy virus which enables him to read minds, William interrogates staff employed at the factory from which these documents have originated. Although he immediately determines that Maria Gonzales (Samantha Morton) is the guilty party, William uncharacteristically finds himself lying to protect the woman. Inexplicably drawn to each other, the couple spend the night together, before his own visa expires and William is required to return home to his wife and son having failed to solve the crime.

Weeks later, following the deaths of several travellers linked by their use of these counterfeit visas, William is again sent to Shanghai. This time Maria is absent from the factory. Determined to find her again, William locates Maria at a medical clinic, but she has no memory of him. In consummating their affair, the pair has inadvertently broken *Code 46* which prohibits procreation between genetically related individuals. Maria, it transpires, is a clone of William’s mother, and their union an Oedipal revision of William's desire to (re)create a home. As a result, the regime has compelled Maria to terminate the pregnancy which resulted from their one-night stand and has removed all memory of their liaison. The bond between the couple overrides this obstacle, however, and they embark on a second, equally ill-fated, iteration of their relationship. At its culmination, the

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narrative frames William’s affair(s) with Maria as anomalous behaviour induced by the virus. The plot is resolved with William’s memory of the relationship and his aberrant behaviour removed. He is returned to his nuclear family and Maria is exiled from her home. In this conclusion I find ambiguities, rather than closure however, and throughout this thesis, I cast William’s relationship with Maria as evidence of William’s iterative search for a place to belong. This is a story about a character’s quest for a foundation on which to build a path out of his perpetually liminal existence.

In many ways, 2046 could not be more different. Directed by Hong Kong ‘auteur’,16 Wong Kar-Wai, the film was produced with a budget of $15m. A co-production between Wong’s Hong Kong-based Jet Tone Films, Shanghai Film Studios, Paradis-Orly Films (France) and Classic (Italy), it was shot on location in China, Hong Kong and Thailand, taking four years to produce. The film premiered in competition at Cannes Film Festival in May 2004, before being re-edited for wider release. Sold into multiple territories by Fortissimo Films, 2046 was distributed through Sony Pictures Classics (US), Tartan Films (UK) and Mei Ah (Hong Kong). While Winterbottom is renowned for the political thread which runs through his oeuvre, Wong is recognised for the poetics of his work.17 Where Code 46 renders the future as a visually-indistinguishable tomorrow, 2046 offers a hyperstylized version. The film is set predominantly in late 1960s Hong Kong, where the film’s protagonist, Chow Mo-Wan (Tony Leung) writes futuristic stories while holed up in a cheap hotel. It is in this strand of Wong’s episodic, nonlinear narrative (but without this context), that the film opens. An elevated monorail whips between the high-rise buildings of a shimmering city. Dominated by glass and steel structures, this elegant CGI imagery colourfully re-imagines...

16 I follow Stephen Teo in designating Wong Kar-Wai an ‘auteur’, acknowledging the contested and contentious history of auteur theory within screen studies. Importantly, following Timothy Corrigan, each of the directors whose work is considered in this analysis could be argued to fall under his category of ‘commercial auteur’, however, I use the term in this instance in acknowledgement that Wong is distinctive within Hong Kong cinema production. Stephen Teo, Wong Kar-Wai: Auteur of Time, World Directors (London: British Film Institute, 2005). Timothy Corrigan, “The Commerce of Auteurism: A Voice without Authority,” New German Critique, no. 49 (1990).

17 Stephen Teo notes that that Wong is ‘is usually regarded as a visual stylist’ but argues that he ‘cannot be separated from his Hong Kong heritage’, while Gary Bettinson’s more recent monograph seeks to distance Wong’s work from the culturalist critique which he argues dominates analysis of Hong Kong cinema, specifically addressing his oeuvre as ‘artworks’ or ‘aesthetic objects’. Teo, Wong Kar-Wai: Auteur of Time, 4-6. Gary Bettinson, The Sensuous Cinema of Wong Kar-Wai: Film Poetics and the Aesthetic of Disturbance (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015).
Metropolis (1927) urbanscape. As Stephen Teo points out, however, it is a representation which ‘transforms the mundane into the extraordinary...[but] without losing its sense of reality’. These are futuristic images which not only reflect the film’s cinematic forebears, but also present-day Hong Kong. Aboard this train sits the protagonist of 2046’s mise-en-abyme, Chow’s alter-ego, an unnamed character played by Takuya Kimura (conventionally referred to as ‘Tak’). Like William Geld, he is a man on a journey. The quest that takes him to 2046 is the search for lost love. Tak is travelling to the future in order to revisit his past because, as the voiceover informs us ‘nothing ever changes in 2046’.

Although 2046 cannot be characterised as a ‘love story’ in the same vein as Code 46, as Wong has been quoted, it is a ‘story about love’. Across the film’s tendrilous plot structure, Chow pursues intimacies with multiple women. In each storyline, Chow repeats his past with revisions. Reprising a character from Wong’s earlier film In the Mood for Love (2000), the protagonist forms connections in 2046 which refashion, reconceive and reflect his relationship with Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung), the object of his desire in the previous narrative. Chow’s relationship with his lost love’s namesake, Su Li Zhen (Gong Li), his various interludes with Bai Ling (Zhang Ziyi) and the science fiction stories he creates for the doppelgangers in 2046 are layers over this original love story. Each affair is an iteration in which he is pursuing a glimmer of utopian hope, that he might find existence beyond his present circumstances. In 2046, the protagonist (literally) writes his future, nostalgically imagining a ‘possible tomorrow’ as ‘a projection of his melancholic

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18 Teo, Wong Kar-Wai: Auteur of Time, 151.
19 Stephen Teo notes that it is only in the printed materials that accompanied the film’s release that this character is referred to as ‘Tak’. Ibid., 138.
21 I argue that Wong’s imagery is ‘nostalgic’ here to support my argument that, despite its divergence from the realistic imagery in Code 46 and Inception, Wong’s depiction of the future is an ‘extrapolation’ from the present. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the categorisation of 2046 as nostalgic in detail, however. Furthermore, significant scholarly attention has been given to the importance of time and nostalgia within Wong’s oeuvre, see: Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, “Trapped in the Present: Time in the Films of Wong Kar-Wai,” Film Criticism 25, no. 2 (2000); Gina Marchetti, “Buying American, Consuming Hong Kong: Cultural Commerce, Fantasies of Identity, and the Cinema,” in The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity, ed. Poshek Fu and David Desser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
present', in an attempt to escape his quotidian experience. In this sense, 2046's futuristic strand directly extrapolates from Chow’s present. It can equally be read as an extrapolation of the viewer’s present, in that it is a representation pervaded by the uncertainties entwined with this portentous year for the people of Hong Kong, despite its visual divergence from the realistic aesthetic of Winterbottom’s film. Furthermore, in this strand of the narrative (and the text as a whole), I read the character of Chow as a man who is searching for a sense of belonging. Like William Geld, he is seeking a stable foundation upon which to build the path out his perpetual liminality.

In stark contrast to both Code 46 and 2046, Inception is a Warner Brothers blockbuster produced with a budget of $170m. It was directed by filmmaker with a Hollywood filmmaking pedigree. Marketed aggressively, it was released onto (northern hemisphere) summer screens and achieved international box office takings approaching one billion dollars. Similarly to Code 46, Inception imagines a near future identical to its assumed viewer’s socio-historical present day, with the exception of its primary conceit. In Dom Cobb’s (Leonardo DiCaprio) world, it is possible to enter the mind of another through their dreams in order to alter their thoughts. Separated from his family and exiled from home for allegedly killing his wife, Inception’s protagonist agrees to use this technique to destroy an energy mogul’s corporate competitor. In exchange for Cobb’s success, the business man, Saito (Ken Watanabe) promises to use his influence to clear Cobb’s name. With a small team assembled, Cobb embarks on his odyssey across this ostensibly classical Hollywood narrative. Through an act of inception, Cobb intends to implant an idea which will convince Robert Fischer (Cillian Murphy) to dismantle his father’s company and thereby earn his reward—his safe passage home. Like William Geld and Chow Mo-Wan, I read the character Dom Cobb as a man searching for utopia. He is yearning for a

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23 The year 2046 holds particular significance for Hong Kong audiences as it marks the final year of the fifty-year period of ‘no change’ to the Hong Kong way of life, promised by China following Hong Kong’s transfer from British to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Pauline Loh, “Hong Kong: Fifty Years No Change,” China Daily (2011), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-07/03/content_12824494.htm.

24 Box office results for Inception are published as exceeding $290m in the US domestic market and $825m worldwide. (http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=inception.htm)
place to belong. Unlike his counterparts whose perpetually liminal existence is one in which they re-live a love story with multiple women, Cobb is arrested in his love for his wife Mal (Marion Cotillard). Mal, however, is doubled in the text. She bridges fantasy and reality and, as these realms merge for Cobb, Mal must be read as both alive and dead. Assimilated within this character, therefore, are both the sense of belonging Cobb is searching for and the obstacle he must overcome to achieve it. As a result, versions of their relationship are conducted iteratively across time and space, in layers of revisions.

*Inception* also diverges from the other films analysed in that Cobb firmly believes that his utopia is located at home with his nuclear family. The narrative reinforces this through the chimeric images of Cobb’s haloed, faceless children playing, which reoccur throughout the film. Further, it is with his children in sight that Cobb’s diegetic journey ends. His memories are infused with both tangibility and illusion, however, and while Cobb supposedly achieves his goal and secures his reward (not unlike the conclusion of *Code 46*), this plot ends on a note of determined ambiguity. In the last moments of the film, Cobb seeks confirmation that he has returned to his place of belonging, via the totem of reality that he carries with him as he navigates his dream worlds. He sets a top spinning on his dining room table. The top bobbles and with a rapid cut to black the film ends. While physics dictates that the top will inevitably fall, the cinema ensures that the toy keeps turning forever. In this ending reality and fantasy are definitively merged, requiring Dom Cobb to continue his iterative search for a foundation upon which to build his path out of perpetual liminality.

The protagonists in *Code 46, 2046* and *Inception* spiral through their narratives towards ambiguous conclusions. Each character is searching for a sense of belonging. In their quest for utopia they trace an iterative path across their texts. Despite their unlikely industrial and aesthetic association, I argue that, in these characteristics, *Code 46, 2046* and *Inception* share an allegiance with each other that distinguishes them as examples of the *Iterative Dystopia* subcycle. Using this modest assemblage of films this thesis undertakes to explore the formal devices used within this subcycle which shape their theme: perpetual liminality. It is through this concept that I characterise both the nature of journeys undertaken by *Iterative Dystopia’s* protagonists and associate the conflicted and
conflicting representations of the places they inhabit. Importantly, the texts examined in this thesis are not intended to be an exclusive, or definitive, collection of films that can be affiliated in this way. Many of the motifs that I will investigate throughout these chapters can be identified beyond the conclusion of the first postmillennial decade, in more recently released films, including titles such as *Source Code* (2011) and *Divergent* (2014), suggesting the continued application of these ideas. This research is intended to offer a foundation for ongoing analysis. What this thesis seeks to contribute is a new paradigm through which to view these films.

Against the blockbuster background: A fantastic decade

This subcycle’s narrative focus on the future was far from anomalous within the context of postmillennial cinema. Throughout the decade 2001-2010, the global box office was dominated by the fantastic. Films set in the future proliferated throughout this genre, and post-apocalyptic narratives flourished. In reflective pieces published as the decade came to its end, film critics widely promulgated assumptions regarding the influence of 11 September, 2001 and the subsequent Wars on Terror, alongside major environmental disasters and the Global Financial Crisis, on an industry focused on the unreal and the


26 The designation of fantastic as a ‘genre’ is contestable. Rosemary Jackson, for example, adapts Todorov’s seminal definition of the fantastic (a literary genre operating between the poles of the ‘marvellous’ and the ‘uncanny’) arguing for its categorisation as a literary ‘mode’ which operates between the ‘marvellous’ and the ‘mimetic’, a negotiation between and combination of the worlds of ‘fairy story, romance, magic, supernaturalism’ and the ‘real’. Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, New Accents (Routledge, 2003), 33. James Walters conversely refers to the fantastic as a ‘genre’, but one that is ‘messy’ and ‘unpredictable’ and therefore sits uncomfortably with genre studies goals of definition and measurement. James Walters, *Fantasy Film: A Critical Introduction*, Berg Film Genres Series (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2011), 2-5.

27 The distinction between post-apocalyptic, dystopian and anti-utopian narrative will be discussed in detail in chapter two. For an investigation of the popularity of post-apocalyptic narratives in the postmillennial decade, see Sanchez-Escalonilla, “Hollywood and the Rhetoric of Panic: The Popular Genres of Action and Fantasy in the Wake of the 9/11 Attacks.”
inauthentic. They argued that social uncertainties were influencing production and consumption which trended towards comic book adaptations and monster films. These perceptions regarding the social atmosphere influenced critics' viewing choices too, with films that sought to avoid, confront or reflect catastrophe garnering praise. In their best-of-the-decade lists, critics relished diverse representations of the impossible, with the Lord of the Rings trilogy directed by Peter Jackson (2001, 2002, 2003) and The Dark Knight (2008) featuring alongside Wall-E (2008) and Pan's Labyrinth (2006). These films were, however, highlighted alongside films with mimetic resonance: those which directly addressed a political moment which had been defined by the concept of ‘terror’, United 93 (2006) and Kathryn Bigelow’s The Hurt Locker (2009); and those which addressed social uncertainties in their puzzle-like narrative structures, including notably Christopher Nolan’s Memento (2001) and Wong’s In the Mood for Love. This argument regarding the


29 More recently, scholars have responded in a similar vein to the popular cinema from the decade. Anjali Pandey specifically argues that the creation of fantastic enemies is a ploy to ‘subconsciously if not consciously...[sanction] real killing of real ‘enemies’ on the ground.’ Anjali Pandey, “‘War on Terror’ Via a “War of Words”: Fear, Loathing and Name-Calling in Hollywood’s Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq,” Alternate Routes 23(2012): 52. Less provocatively, Kevin Wetmore argues that the popularity of the horror genre post 9/11 rests on its ability to offer viewers the opportunity to interpret and understand real-world fears, whether the outcome is catharsis or a descent into nihilism. Kevin J. Wetmore, Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema (New York; London: Continuum, 2012), 201. Frances Pheasant-Kelly argues similarly that, fantasy films ‘resonate’ with audiences and ‘their narratives may have offered resolution and perhaps some closure...[through their capacity] to explore traumatic issues in different, “safe,” but yet discernibly familiar forms.’ Pheasant-Kelly, Fantasy Film Post 9/11, 182.


31 The rise in popularity of complex narrative structures which began in the 1990s has been investigated by various authors and is tied directly to contemporary culture by Warren Buckland who argues that ‘experiences are becoming increasingly ambiguous and fragmented; correspondingly, the stories that attempt to represent those experiences have become opaque and complex.’ Warren Buckland, Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema (Chichester, UK; Malden, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1. For detailed insights into this cinematic form, see, for example, Allan Cameron, Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema (London; New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2008); Fiona A Villella, “Circular Narratives: Highlights of Popular Cinema in the ‘90s,” Senses of Cinema 3(2000).
relationship between an atmosphere of social uncertainty and the consumption of fantastic cinema appeared to be confirmed at the box office. Monopolized by big-budget franchise films, of the worldwide top fifty grossing films for the period, only three could not readily be categorized as a fantasy adventure film, a comic book / superhero film, an animated kids’ film, or a science fiction film. It was with these postulations regarding social uncertainty as their backdrop that the production of futuristic films flourished. The majority of these were special effects-driven and organised around pronounced genre conventions. Spectacle was primary and any concern over the narrative ‘what if?’ could be immediately sublimated by an aesthetic ‘wouldn’t it be cool if?’ should the viewer choose. These visceral, kinetic, plot-driven

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movies created significant cultural noise.\textsuperscript{36} In amongst this, however, there were films which constructed thought-provoking possible worlds,\textsuperscript{37} and screened in contrast to the implausible futures presented in their counterparts.\textsuperscript{38} Of these texts, most maintained audience comfort levels, distancing themselves from the assumed viewer’s sociological present-day experience by way of, amongst other techniques: a post-apocalyptic temporal rupture,\textsuperscript{39} an off-Earth spatial transfer,\textsuperscript{40} or a seismic technological shift to the ‘maybe one day’, a distant ‘tomorrow’s tomorrow’.\textsuperscript{41} These were films which thought the unthinkable, but, in using these narrative techniques, they retained the capacity to either distract the audience from, or normalize, the ‘disasters’ they imagined, largely fulfilling their remit of allaying anxiety that Susan Sontag has argued is the required role of science fiction fantasies throughout history.\textsuperscript{42}

I locate the Iterative Dystopia subcycle within the context of these postmillennial films which focus on the future. The existence of this cinematic cycle, within the phenomenally

\textsuperscript{36} I refer here to titles such as \textit{The Matrix Reloaded} (2003) and \textit{The Matrix Revolutions} (2003); \textit{Cloverfield} (2008) and the box office record breaking \textit{Avatar}, for example.
\textsuperscript{37} That is not to suggest that blockbuster texts cannot / do not provoke cultural (re)consideration. As Booker argues with respect to 1990s/2000s science fiction, however, the ‘estrangement from reality provided by the projected world’ of spectacular technologies which offers a new perspective also has the potential to render any political message less threatening for some viewers. M. Keith Booker, \textit{Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture} (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006), 265-6. See also Benjamin Kunkel who specifically argues that ‘most people’ know how to enjoy B-movies ‘without taking them too seriously’. Benjamin Kunkel, “Dystopia and the End of Politics,” \textit{Dissent}, Fall 2008.
\textsuperscript{38} I consider this distinction between possibility and plausibility in chapter two, within the discussion of the films’ ‘dystopian sensibilities’.
\textsuperscript{39} Consider for example: \textit{Children of Men} (2006) and \textit{Equilibrium} (2002).
\textsuperscript{40} This spatialized distinction between ‘the already possible but not desirable’ and the ‘fantastic science fiction set elsewhere, which may be desirable but not realizable’ is viewed by Sicher and Skradol as a key to differentiating between the dystopian form and the science fiction genre. Efraim Sicher and Natalia Skradol, “A World Neither Brave nor New: Reading Dystopian Fiction after 9/11,” \textit{Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas} 4, no. 1 (2006): 156. For filmic examples of this, see: \textit{Solaris} (2002), \textit{Moon} (2009).
\textsuperscript{41} Examples of this include films such as: \textit{Minority Report} (2002), \textit{I, Robot} (2004).
\textsuperscript{42} Although Sontag’s essay treats the science fiction genre with respect to this argument, she argues that her broader thesis regarding the ‘imagination of disaster’ is applicable across genres (though their mechanisms for achieving the goal of allaying anxiety differ). It is therefore relevant in the context of films which work outside, or alongside, science fiction. Sontag, “The Imagination of Disaster.”
popular fantastic genre, is fundamental to my definition of these texts as a subcycle. Moreover, it is the critical and popular attention that films within the wider future-cycle have received, that I argue warrants scholarly reflection on Iterative Dystopias. While I maintain throughout this thesis that the subcycle of films that I identify is a distinct subset within the futuristic cinematic cycle, it is the texts’ thematic coherence which is the compelling aspect in defining these films as a collective. In this thesis, I offer a reading which suggests that the key to understanding these films lies in their representations of the protagonists’ quotidian existence. It is through this that the subcycle’s engagement with the concept of perpetual liminality is realised. It is the intention of this thesis to establish the primary features of this theme, its mode of expression across the texts and discuss how these films work with, and against, the dystopian narrative form in a manner which I contend directly engages with the socio-historic era of their release.

A word on postmillennial context

Within the postmillennial decade a nexus of factors converge which I argue form these individual films into a constellation of scholarly interest. Both cinematic and sociological context are critical to the readings which I advance. The designation of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle as postmillennial within this thesis requires qualification, however. While it is clear that the development, release and reception of individual films rarely aligns with specific historical markers, as I have asserted, throughout the decade 2001-2010 there was a clear popular turn toward the consumption of fantastic and futuristic cinema among global audiences (whose viewing produces collectable data). My decision to define this collection of texts as a subcycle is specifically mindful that the examples I

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43 I consider the merits and limitations of defining these texts as examples of a ‘subcycle’ in ‘Defining the subcycle’, chapter two.

44 The term global audience requires two caveats. First, I acknowledge that there are geographic locations in which access to screen-based media is either limited or not prioritised among populations. Thus, cinematic popularity is largely a designate which accounts for the tastes of European, American and Asian viewers. Its limitations are therefore similar to Beck’s thesis on uncertainty which I also rely upon as context for this thesis. Second, any attempt to argue that popularity and box office statistics (even those which include the long tail) are correlative is increasingly flawed in light of the significant impact screen piracy had on data capture throughout the decade.
investigate: *Code 46*, 2046 and *Inception* are part of this filmic wave, though the boundaries of this are both contestable and permeable.45

The inability to effectively sequester the texts within an historical timeframe is a conundrum which applies equally to the theoretical paradigms upon which this analysis will draw. In chapter six I work with a definition of ‘uncertainty’ developed by sociologist Ulrich Beck within his research on World Risk Society. This narrowly defined concept is quite distinct (though related to) the more expansive notion of dis-ease that I have employed, in line with contemporary film criticism, to describe the social backdrop to the era of the films’ theatrical releases. Beck’s work with this concept was first published in *Weltrisikogesellschaft* in 2007 and translated into English in 2009.46 His ideas expand and refine his writing on the subject of ‘risk’ promulgated since the mid-1980s,47 and have evolved alongside, and in response to, the work of many other theorists in the field throughout this time.48 Although, following Beck, I contend that this ‘uncertainty’ is a new variant arising from the specific sociological context of the postmillennial period and is therefore valuable in understanding these films, it cannot be seen as quarantined, nor can it be mapped universally (as Beck, himself points out).49

45 I substantiate the decision to classify these films as part of a subcycle and evaluate possible alternatives in the section: Defining the subcycle, in chapter two.
49 Ulrich Beck, “Risk Society’s ‘Cosmopolitan Moment’,” *Printed Project: Farewell to post-colonialism* 11(2009). Beck’s work does open itself to criticism at times, however, through his attempts to ‘universalise’ concepts. While he takes pains to note that his concept of Second Modernity goes ‘all the way through the ‘plurality’ of modernization paths, of Western and non-Western experiences and projects, their dependencies, interdependencies and interactions’, he nevertheless asserts that it is a global phenomenon, see: Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, “Varieties of Second Modernity: The Cosmopolitan Turn in Social and Political Theory and Research,” *The British Journal Of Sociology* 61, no. 3 (2010).
In addition, it is the research undertaken by theorists such as Beck, both prior to and during the postmillennial decade which are the forebears of the resurgence of interest in the concept of liminality in both sociological and film scholarship. Publication on this subject flourished particularly throughout the second half of the 2000s and shows no obvious signs of abatement. The work of sociologist Arpad Szakolczai on ‘permanent liminality’, introduced in the conclusion of his book, *Reflexive Historical Sociology* (2000), and interrogated throughout the decade is particularly influential in my understanding of this collection of films. The prefix postmillennial is therefore appropriately attributed to the subcycle in recognition of the temporal *coincidence* of these three elements, where each is vital to understanding this constellation as a coherent selection of texts.

Although I maintain throughout this thesis that sociological context is critical to the readings that I advance, I certainly do not claim that my experience of these films (either in reaction or on reflection) should be considered universal. It is not the intention of this thesis to expose, nor even suggest, that there was a normative postmillennial experience which these films invoke. Such a determination would be unsustainable. Nor do I claim that these films were produced individually *as a result* of the contemporary social climes, which would be to neglect the industrial imperatives of film production, in addition to

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50 Google Scholar returns well in excess of 10,000 hits on articles published which include the search term ‘liminality’ in either their title or abstract since the year 2011 alone. When this search is refined to ‘liminality and screen, the results continue to exceed 2,500. (10 March 2015.)


glossing the complexities which arise from analysing a selection of texts from disparate, multinational backgrounds. Rather this thesis invokes sociological theories as part of an interdisciplinary reading of these texts.

Social science fiction criticism: A methodology

In order to analyse these texts in the context of their contemporaneous release, the methodology employed in this thesis is therefore one which acknowledges the importance of science fiction genre studies on the subcycle but is equally capable of embracing the sociological theories which I argue are key to understanding the subcycle’s primary narrative theme. More precisely, *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* will be analysed as social science fictions. This methodology works from the premise that the films’ generic coherence is demonstrated in the plots’ future settings through their ‘dystopian sensibilities’. This assignation affords recourse to theoretical perspectives articulated by dystopian narrative scholars, both cinematic and literary. Equally vital to assimilating these films under the mantle of Iterative Dystopia is the narrative theme which articulates with ideas found in the research of contemporary sociologists. It is from this position that the work of Arpad Szakolczai is influential in particular. As such, I undertake a close text analysis via the social science fiction criticism methodology outlined by Neil Gerlach and Sheryl Hamilton in a special edition of *Science Fiction Studies* dedicated to the subject.

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54 Advancing a sustainable reading of the relationship between the cinema and ‘postmillennial sociological uncertainty’ would, in the first instance, require a far narrower selection films such as is common to analyses of the relationship between Cold War anxiety and film production in 1950s America. See for example Booker’s correlation between ‘anti-Soviet hysteria’ and the ‘coming of age’ of the science fiction genre in 1950s America: Booker, *Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture*, 4-12. See also Huebner’s recent article: Andrew J. Huebner, “Lost in Space: Technology and Turbulence in Futuristic Cinema of the 1950s,” *Film & History*, no. 2 (2010). Jones specifically makes this point in his work on the reception of American science fiction films in 1950s Britain: Matthew Jones, “1950s Science Fiction Cinema’s Depersonalisation Narratives in Britain,” *Science Fiction Film and Television*, no. 1 (2014).

In making the claim that this subcycle is an example of social science fiction, I embed this study in the rich ‘tradition of exploring the interactions between [science fiction] and the social.’ As Neil Gerlach and Sheryl Hamilton note, work in this interdisciplinary field is not without its detractors. They argue, however, that the pace of social and technological change in the late 20th and early 21st century has eroded the barrier between the present and the future, giving rise to ‘the pervasiveness of the [science fiction] imagination in our current understanding of ourselves, our social world and our history.’ Pre-eminent science fiction scholar, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay echoed this idea more recently, when he wrote that, in the postmillennial period

a strikingly high proportion of films, commercial art, popular music, video and computer games, and nongenre fiction are overtly [science fiction] or contain elements of it. This widespread normalization of what is essentially a style of estrangement and dislocation has stimulated the development of science-fictional habits of mind...a kind of awareness we might call science-fictionality...

In accordance with this, Gerlach and Hamilton contend that there is no better method ‘for grasping the defining features of late modernity than an interdisciplinary conversation that brings together the strengths of social science inquiry and [science fiction] literature and criticism’. In their survey of the field of research (released in 2003, contemporaneously with the earliest film I analyse in this subcycle, *Code 46*), they identify four categories of engagement: the employment of science fiction in the social sciences, science fiction’s address of the social sciences, the use of social theory in science fiction criticism and the emergence of science fiction as a social science methodology. It is within their third category—which sees sociological theories employed within science fiction criticism—that I situate this work.

56 Ibid.: 164.
Within the branch of interdisciplinary interaction which they label *social science fiction criticism*, Gerlach and Hamilton further refine their typology. They identify two distinct strands. They catalogue works which seek to draw from outside the direct field of study (in this instance screen studies) with the specific purpose of ‘offer[ing] a more nuanced analysis of the [science fiction] text in its specificity as a [film text]’. It is a theoretical approach which ‘offers the potential for a meshing of disciplinary outlooks’ acknowledging the ‘representational project shared by [science fiction] and social science to construct and explore social worlds.’ Additionally, they distinguish a companion position which reframes the disciplinary interaction, ‘offering commentary on social-theoretical as well as science-fictional texts’. This approach analyses social science fiction texts within their social framework, via (among other techniques) cultural studies models. Gerlach and Hamilton suggest that it is only via the second approach that theorists are able to ‘[avoid] passively accepting the interpretations of social theorists, [and instead use science fiction] to engage and transform the theory, making the intellectual exchange reciprocal.’ They cite Csicsery-Ronay’s work as exemplifying active engagement between the disciplines. I would suggest Andrew Milner’s analysis of dystopian cinema using Raymond Williams’ theory of cultural materialism as another example. There are obvious merits to explicit dialogical engagement with social realities which are the purview of these authors. The intention of this thesis, however, is to engage with sociological theory in order to contribute new, and ‘nuanced’ readings of the films analysed. As previously noted, this thesis investigates the narrative continuities between this disparate constellation of films, but does not attempt to substantiate any notion that they are representative of the socio-historical period in which they were released and does not offer any parallel social commentary. The methodology employed in this thesis is therefore identified as Gerlach and Hamilton’s primary strand of social science fiction criticism, that being, a consideration ‘of the *text in its specificity* as a [film text].’

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.: 162.
62 Ibid.: 165.
63 Ibid.: 167.
I argue that there is merit, in the first instance, in identifying these films as a distinct subcycle and undertaking a detailed survey of the manners in which they reflect and refigure the dystopian form. Moreover, a detailed examination of film texts—as texts—in itself provides the ground in which ‘social science fiction has the potential to become cultural epistemology,’ and it is this which Gerlach and Hamilton identify as the overarching intention of social science fiction criticism. This view is supported by theorists such as Mette Hjort who argues that ‘[c]inematic fictions offer viewers an opportunity to engage in make-believe that may well bring epistemic gains.’ Douglas Williams takes this idea further when he contends that the ‘symbolic universe of communication and expression we call art both creates and reflects the nature of human experience and of the political reality with which we must contend’. As a result, he suggests that, in developing (political) theory ‘at least part of our time should be spent “at the movies, deep in thought and imagination.”’ For as Gerlach and Hamilton themselves attest, ‘[b]oth approaches situate [science fiction] texts in larger sociocultural contexts, with the work of criticism itself becoming a form of social analysis.’ By employing a social science fiction criticism methodology, this thesis seeks to investigate this complex entanglement of relationships between the sociological present and these fictional futures through the films as texts. Relying on a small cohort of primary materials as the basis for its textual analysis, this thesis will facilitate critical reflection on these films, exploring the unique formal qualities of the subcycle and the sociohistorical dialogue in which it engages.

I argue throughout this thesis that Iterative Dystopias manipulate the dystopian narrative form in a manner which is best analysed via an interdisciplinary, social science fiction methodology. I undertake a close textual analysis of Code 46, 2046 and Inception which makes recourse to contemporary sociological theory in order to identify the defining

66 Ibid.: 164.
features of this unruly collective. It is my contention that, in pursuit of a glimmer of hope, the perpetually liminal protagonists within these texts can be read as iteratively performing their everyday lives. In contrast to the linear path followed by the ‘typical’ dystopian protagonist, they oscillate throughout the plot in their paradoxical environments and it is in this that I find the subcycle’s coherent narrative theme. Each of the subcycle’s protagonists is searching for a source of stability which will facilitate transition, they desire a transformation in circumstances akin to those allied with them within the dystopian narrative form. It is, however, a utopia that lies within. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are looking for a place to call home.

The search for a place to belong

Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are searching for a solid foundation. My first chapters mirror their objective, exploring the basis upon which I establish this cohort as a distinctive cinematic collection. In acknowledgement of the bifurcated methodological approach taken within this work of social science fiction criticism, the literature review conducted within this thesis is divided across two chapters. In chapter two, I offer a working definition of dystopia and examine some of the conventions of the form. I focus specifically on the trajectory of the dystopian protagonist’s journey, and argue that it is Iterative Dystopia’s defiance of this well-trodden path that supports my contention that these films are not dystopian, but rather display dystopian sensibilities. In the latter part of the chapter, I consider my classification of Code 46, 2046 and Inception as members of a cinematic subcycle. I contextualise this designation within the field of genre studies, and argue that the term offers two benefits. First, it embraces the texts analysed as a subset of the popular contemporary futuristic cycle. In addition, through the incorporation of cycle, the term evokes the fluidity of the connections made between the films analysed and the broader science genre, their sociological contexts and each other.

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This thesis relies primarily on the work of Tom Moylan and Darko Suvin to characterise the dystopian protagonist’s conventional narrative arc. A discussion of its form and the contrasting arc traversed by Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists is contained in the section entitled: A Dystopian Sensibility.
In chapter three I explore the primary sociological ideas which drive my exploration of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. I begin with a commentary on Arpad Szakolczai’s thesis on permanent liminality, examining it in relation to recent scholarship in the field. I use this as the basis upon which to develop my concept of perpetual liminality and explore the connections that can be made between it and the iterative structure of the subcycle’s protagonists’ diegetic experiences. In the final pages of this chapter, I establish the argument that perpetual liminality can be recognised on screen in Iterative Dystopias through their representations of characters who exist in paradoxical environments. I unpack the term paradox before offering an overview of how I work with the conflicts and contradictions presented in, and by, these diegetic places, within my textual analysis.

This thesis argues that Iterative Dystopia’s perpetually liminal protagonists spiral across their narratives as they search for a utopia which lies within. I echo this idea in the structure of my analysis. Each chapter peels back another layer of the characters’ experience of their diegetic environments. In chapter four, I begin my textual analysis with a consideration of representations of the home across the subcycle. I argue that, in direct contrast to the conventional dystopian protagonist, these characters seek a sense of belonging in the familiar. Their desired transition is one that will return them home. Each film represents its protagonist’s home as a paradoxical place, however, and the chapter offers illustrations of how these desired places of comfort, refuge and solidity are rendered incongruous and unstable by the texts. As a starting point for this chapter, I make recourse to Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, specifically extending it beyond the ‘counter-spaces’ he identified.71 I suggest that in the Iterative Dystopia subcycle, it is the protagonists’ quotidian spaces that are represented as challenging or deviating from binary understanding. I argue that these characters must travel, indeed be travelling, in order to be at home. In this, I raise issues around risk and ritual, refuge and escape, exploration and exile. Importantly in the context of dystopian narrative, I demonstrate that while these characters have a marked capacity for movement, they also

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display a decreased desire to travel and indeed ultimately have nowhere to go. The second section of this chapter considers the locations of these homes and the manner in which the urbanscape (a key dystopian cinematic icon) is represented as geographically interchangeable within each text. I canvass the idea that both Iterative Dystopia’s cities, and the homes located within them, are ‘nonplaces’, as theorised by Marc Augé. In the final sections of this chapter I examine the interior architectures in which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists reside. I explore the idea that these locations dissolve the public/private binary, arguing that these characters attempt to make their homes in unlikely spaces. Furthermore, the subcycle’s conflicted representations of physical milieu compels its perpetually liminal protagonists to look beyond the spatial and ask the question ‘who is your home?’

It is the question, ‘who is home?’ which precipitates the analysis that I undertake in chapter five. This chapter explores a second environment in which Iterative Dystopia’s characters seek a place to call home. William Geld, Chow Mo-wan and Dom Cobb share the desire for a point of stability from which to pursue a path out of their perpetual liminality, and each attempts to create this in, and through, his relationships. Focusing primarily on the interactions between the male protagonists and their lovers, I conceptualise the mediations between these characters (both linguistic and haptic) as ‘dislocutions’ following Fritz Senn’s work on James Joyce. I argue that both words and touch deliberately and inadvertently obscure and evade meaning, resulting in conflicts within the texts between images of belonging and its communication. I argue specifically that it is ‘miscommunication’ that underpins the characters’ relationships, that they are represented as unable to relate without it. In my analysis of the characters’ verbal exchanges, I consider the repetition of phrases within 2046 and Inception and the riddles these create. Additionally, I explore the use of multiple languages within individual conversations in both Code 46 and 2046 and argue that this positions the characters as foreign-at-home. In the final section of the chapter I investigate representations of the

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73 Fritz Senn, Joyce’s Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation, ed. John Paul Riquelme (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).
protagonists’ sexual interactions and argue that images of touch also frustrate binary understanding in these films, and therefore require complementary readings.

In chapter six, I explore the idea that, for Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists, utopia may literally lie within. I contend that in order to find a path out of their perpetually liminal existence, the protagonists in these films also look within themselves. These characters seek comfort and refuge in the act of remembering. They are, however, positioned as uncertain by the films and this compromises the sanctuary they find. Following Ulrich Beck’s definition of ‘uncertainty’, I explore the idea that this sociological phenomenon is doubly represented in this subcycle. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are depicted as simultaneously safe and insecure, both within their diegetic life-worlds and within their own minds. This chapter demonstrates that these texts represent uncertainty on screen through the motif of contagion, and investigates how this uncertainty is underscored by the films’ depictions of surveillance. I argue that Iterative Dystopias fundamentally re-envision this conventional dystopian theme, repositioning it as intimate, both suspicious and seductive. The subcycle’s illustrations of surveillance are a further example of its articulations with its socio-historical context. Moreover, they fundamentally impact the characters’ search for an end to their perpetual liminality.

Despite the divergence of their story arcs, aesthetics and production backgrounds, Code 46, 2046 and Inception can and should be considered as early examples of a subcycle of futuristic films. These texts work alongside dystopian narrative tradition, manipulating and refiguring its diegetic conventions in a manner which is best analysed with recourse to contemporary sociological theory. Using a social science fiction criticism methodology, this thesis identifies and explores the primary formal characteristics of a collection of films it titles Iterative Dystopias.

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74 The definition of uncertainty that I work with in chapter six is formulated primarily in Beck’s recent publication, World at Risk. Beck, World at Risk.
The films considered in this thesis: *Code 46, 2046* and *Inception*, collect in the shadows of a cinematic cycle viewed by a mass audience. Alongside their blockbuster companions these films gaze to the future. Their diegeses conspicuously engage with the ‘anticipation of catastrophe’ that Ulrich Beck argues preoccupied the assumed viewer in the first post-millennial decade, but they do this in a manner which is marked by its incremental difference from the viewer’s present-day. The films’ protagonists exist in contexts which extrapolate from real-world political, environmental and social uncertainties. These ‘mediations’ with the material present are held to the background of the narrative, however. These stories locate dystopia on a personal level, focusing on the protagonists’ quotidian experience. William Geld, Chow Mo-Wan and Dom Cobb all wend iterative paths across their life-worlds. These protagonists revise, rewrite and re-live their experiences in pursuit of a stable environment upon which to found a path out of their perpetually liminal everyday. In the introduction to this thesis I argued that, despite their disparate representations, *Code 46, 2046* and *Inception* can be aligned within a subcycle of films through this common narrative trait.

With my hypotheses regarding this unruly collection of films formulated, like the protagonists of the films considered herein, I too find myself searching for a solid

75 Beck argues that the ‘anticipation of catastrophe’ is an imagining which has become both effective (resulting in action) and affective (resulting in emotion). It is not the ‘deliberate falsification of reality by exaggerating [the] ‘unreal”, rather it is the anticipation of future catastrophe already real in the present. This ‘manufactured uncertainty’ is the defining characteristic of ‘world risk society’. Ibid., especially 9-19. Beck has recently explicitly acknowledged, however, that engagement with these concerns is a ‘luxury”, largely the provenance of ‘modern societies’ which have ‘succeeded in bringing under control contingencies and uncertainties, for example with respect to accidents, violence. ———, “Risk Society’s ‘Cosmopolitan Moment’,” 68-69. I revisit these points in chapter six within my investigation of Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists as uncertain.

foundation. These works, viewed together, beg questions: in what ways do Iterative Dystopias work with and against dystopian narrative conventions and, in light of this, how can the group be effectively described within a genre-based taxonomy? Further, on what basis can my proposition that these films resonate thematically be substantiated? What exactly is perpetual liminality and how can it be identified within the texts? It is these two investigative pillars with which I construct this literature review. In this chapter I support my assertion that Iterative Dystopias can be categorised as a subcycle of films which exhibit dystopian sensibilities. I begin with a consideration of the dystopian form and argue that *Code 46, 2046* and *Inception* defy its conventions in ways which occasion an examination that ventures beyond genre analysis. This validates the social science fiction criticism approach that I advocate for in the introduction to this thesis. Moreover, working from this basis I make the case that these films should be classified within a subcycle, and it is here that I interrogate this terminology. In chapter three, I focus on the thematic connection shared by these films. I survey the evolution of the concept liminality with a particular focus on recent scholarship in the field. Building on the work of sociologist Arpad Szakolczai in particular, I develop the concept of perpetual liminality and offer an overview of the specific methodology through which this thesis applies the concept in its close textual analysis. It is in these final pages that I establish the argument that each film in this subcycle represents its protagonist’s quotidian experience through paradoxes. It is this idea that drives the analysis which I present within each of the main chapters of this work.
A dystopian sensibility

To begin to define dystopia, one must first take a step back and offer a definition of the science fiction genre, with which it is commonly associated in screen scholarship, and the broader utopian narrative form. In 1972 Darko Suvin influentially defined science fiction as ‘a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment’. Far more recently, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay defined contemporary science fiction as a ‘future-oriented’ discourse which influences ‘our conceptions of what is imaginable or plausible’. What both these definitions offer is the acknowledgement that science fictions imagine environments which differ from the intended reader’s/viewer’s sociological present with the intention of provoking reflections on their real-world realities. Necessarily, each author refines these high-level definitions through an analysis of the formal strategies applied across the genre. Paramount however is that, while science fictions operate with a coherent internal ‘cause and effect logic, commonsense motivation and familiar perceptions of the object world’, in other words, a generic verisimilitude, they also ‘involve playful deviations’ from material reality. The science fiction genre is predicated on ‘fictive novums’. These scientific novelties fall on a spectrum from the radically,

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77 Siān Helen Adiseshiah and Rupert Hildyard use the term ‘dystopian sensibilities’ to describe the distinctive traits they identify within early twenty-first century novels. Their investigation finds that literary works from this period adopt and adapt generic conventions to present a ‘destabilized’ or ‘mutated’ ‘realism’, matched with a ‘utopian yearning for the “not yet” of a better future’. Similar to the films I examine, the literary works examined by Adiseshiah and Hildyard revive modernist techniques (including stream of consciousness and interior monologues) which, on being reprised, are devoid of the power to shock despite the fact that they are innovative in the specific context. Hildyard and Adiseshiah, Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now.


79 Csicsery-Ronay, Seven Beauties of Science Fiction, 5-6.


82 Csicsery-Ronay, Seven Beauties of Science Fiction, 6.

83 Suvin follows Bloch’s work on Utopia in his definition of this key science fiction concept. Suvin, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre.
‘unexpectedly new’ to the ‘naturalistic’, but nevertheless form a gap between the diegetic world and the viewer’s own.

Utopian narratives may be defined separately, but in relation to, these critical science fiction concepts. While Csicsery-Ronay identifies utopian narrative as a story form ‘favoured by science fiction’ for its capacity to articulate and critique the ‘dramatic relationship between technology and social life’, Suvin argues that utopian narratives bear a more complex, partially overlapping, relationship to science fiction, noting in particular utopia’s dominance of the genre in the 19th century. He argues for a definition of utopian narrative as ‘the socio-political subgenre of science fiction’, or as Andrew Milner paraphrases it, ‘social-science-fiction’. Across the science fiction genre, the science which distinguishes its imaginary futures from the viewer’s present ranges from the fabulous and/or irrational, to the credibly realistic. Within utopian narratives, this range is diminished as the emphasis in these social science fictions is placed on a social critique which is strengthened via naturalistic, empirical representations. Political commentator, Chris Berg captures this idea succinctly when he writes that utopian narratives are ‘most emotionally powerful when they are seen as possible’. This point is interesting within the context of this thesis as each film text notably restricts images of

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84 ________, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre.”
85 I seek to define utopian narrative here in its relationship to recent science fiction scholarship. For an overview of the myriad usage of the term utopia, both academic and colloquial, see: Ruth Levitas, The Concept of Utopia (London: Philip Allan, 1990). Levitas’ work inclusively defining utopia contrasts with projects such as that undertaken by Gregory Claeys who seeks to define utopia based upon content, working from its negative properties, ie. what utopia is not. Gregory Claeys, “News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia,” History 98, no. 330 (2013).
86 Csicsery-Ronay, Seven Beauties of Science Fiction, 218.
87 Ibid., 8.
futuristic technologies familiar within their contemporaries. Accordingly, rather than an exaggeration of the present-day social situation that some authors associate with the form, it is more precisely that utopian narratives offer a plausible extrapolation from the assumed viewer's present. It is this correlation between plausibility and social commentary that is pivotal within my analysis of these films. The dystopian form with which this thesis works is a category within utopian narrative defined in this manner. It maintains the convergence between social critique and plausible extrapolation with a more focused expression. Specifically, dystopian narrative is a qualified negative articulation of an imagined future.

Like science fiction and utopia, ‘dystopia’ itself is, as Fredric Jameson points out, a word which ‘is laden with dangerous and misleading ambiguities’. Since the term became current in the 1950s, and more particularly since the academic embrace of Utopian Studies in the 1970s, dystopia’s definition has been continually challenged, as utopian taxonomies have been revised and its domain subcategorised. For the purposes of this thesis, I follow Jameson’s tetralogical division of the utopian narrative form. Jameson defines anti-utopia in direct opposition to utopia, then distinguishes dystopia as utopia’s ‘negative cousin’ (following Tom Moylan) and further isolates apocalyptic narratives. It is his characterization of dystopia through Heinlein’s classic novella title *If This Goes On—*, referenced in the introduction to this thesis, that captures the three primary characteristics fundamental to my understanding of this postmillennial subcycle of films. Iterative

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92 I revisit this point on the absence of technologies within this subcycle in my discussion of images of communication in chapter five.
93 The definition of dystopia as an *exaggeration* of the contemporary social is usually found in the work of authors who conflate dystopia with the category of anti-utopia. See for example: G. Wesley Burnett and Lucy Rollin, "Anti-Leisure in Dystopian Fiction: The Literature of Leisure in the Worst of All Possible Worlds," *Leisure Studies* 19, no. 2 (2000): 77.
95 The Cold War origins of the term dystopia are agreed upon by key theorists in the area, see for example: Ibid; Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (Boulder, USA: Westview Press, 2000).
96 Continued attempts to refine utopia’s antithetical counterpart(s) has seen one theorist recently distinguish five sub-categories within both anti-utopia and dystopia, in an attempt to describe the nature and function of the literary and cultural forms. Antonis Balasopoulos, “Anti-Utopia and Dystopia: Rethinking the Generic Field,” in *Utopia Project Archive* (Athens School of Fine Arts Publication, 2011).
Dystopias represent futures which are worse than the assumed viewer’s material reality (both in their depictions of the ‘catastrophic’ diegetic worlds that their characters inhabit, but more importantly through their representations of their protagonists’ quotidian experience). Second, these films, read together, function in the classical dystopian mode, presenting a warning which expresses a social desire ‘for a better way of being’; yet they offer glimpses of ‘hopeful horizons’ within the texts. Jameson’s interpretation of dystopia directly supports these assumptions. He writes that it ‘it is in light of some positive conception of human social possibilities that [dystopia’s] effects are generated and from Utopian ideas [the] politically enabling stance [of these ‘new maps of hell’] derives.’ Dystopia is thereby characterised within this thesis as a negotiation between the utopian and the anti-utopian, as Tom Moylan conceives it. Furthermore, it is

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98 Levitas argues that this is the social function of all utopian narratives. Levitas, The Concept of Utopia, 9. Whether the presence of a ‘warning’ is a defining feature of dystopian narrative is debated. Scholars who argue in favour of this proposition suggest that social change must be, and by extension can be, affected through or as a result of a dystopian text. The relationship between dystopian narrative and socio-political praxis is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, for a detailed overview of this relationship, see: Moylan, Scraps of the Untainted Sky, in particular, Part Two: Dystopia. Notably, Jameson refers to a warning as a ‘classic’ dystopian trait. Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions, 198. Also influential on in the field, Lyman Tower Sargent argues that ‘most dystopias do this’ (my emphasis), against Robert O. Evans who concurs with Levitas. Lyman Tower Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” Utopian Studies 5, no. 1 (1994): 6; Robert O. Evans, The ‘Nouveau Roman’, Russian Dystopias, and Anthony Burgess (Gale Research, 1991), 33, quoted in Sargent, Ibid. Taking a broader definition of dystopian fiction (as directly oppositional to utopian texts), Greg Claeyss characterises the ‘warning’ which defines dystopian narrative as either a ‘satire or attack upon dystopian ideologies or movements.’ Claeyss, “News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia,” 171.


100 Baccolini argues that expressions of both fear and hope within the narrative (as opposed to the dystopian narrative opportunating a hopeful reading) are a feature of a contemporary ‘ambiguous dystopias’. Baccolini cites ‘recent’ works by Margaret Atwood, Kim Stanley Robinson, Octavia Butler and Ursula Le Guin released primarily in the 1980s and 90s to support this assertion. Raffaella Baccolini, “The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction,” PMLA 119, no. 3 (2004): 520.


102 Moylan, Scraps of the Untainted Sky; 147. Dystopia’s location on a spectrum between utopia and anti-utopia is a key characteristic of models of this narrative form developed after 1980 including:
through this understanding of the dystopian form as inhabiting a space *between* these oppositions that it is also conceptually linked with the subcycle’s narrative theme of perpetual liminality, an idea to which I will return.

The assertion that Jameson’s definition of dystopia is fundamental to my classification of *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* as Iterative Dystopias provokes the question as to why I seek to align these films through a ‘dystopian sensibility’, rather than pursuing an analysis of this postmillennial subcycle based solely in genre criticism. The answer lies in the contention that although the films analysed are identifiable as ‘dystopian’ from a theoretical perspective, their executions of the narrative form defy key conventions. My intention in attributing ‘dystopian sensibilities’ to these Iterative Dystopias is, therefore, two-fold. First, I position the films within the context of science fiction genre studies, but limit the focus of the lens through which the texts are viewed to an analysis informed by dystopian narratological frameworks, as we have seen. Second, as we are about to see, the term ‘dystopian sensibilities’ acknowledges the fact that it is precisely the manner in which these films defy narrative conventions that unifies them and thus makes them of interest here.

Narratologists, Tom Moylan and Rafaella Baccolini, identify two formal strategies that typify dystopian narrative. First, the narrative usually begins *in media res*, locating its protagonist in a ‘nightmarish’ everyday which is both ‘immediate’ and ‘normal’ for the character. As we have seen, this is typically an ‘authentic’, ‘realistic’ diegetic world which adheres to both generic and cultural verisimilitude. Second, across the narrative arc, the protagonist moves from a position of apparent contentment to one of questioning disapproval, experiencing an heuristic awakening within a world which ‘is revealed as resistible and changeable’ provided that s/he is willing to conquer (often great)

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103 Moylan and Baccolini, *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, 5-6.
adversity. Importantly, it is the protagonist’s realisation that there is a flaw in the ‘operation of the entire [diegetic social] system’,\textsuperscript{107} which precipitates the character’s transition from being ‘unreflectively immersed’ in their diegetic situation to ‘an experience of alienation and resistance’.\textsuperscript{108} Examples which range from the critically acclaimed \textit{Children of Men} (2006) to Mike Judge’s farcical satire, \textit{Idiocracy} (2006), are evidence of the continuation of the dystopian form (in all its narrative variations) in the first postmillennial decade. Each of these markedly different films presents a protagonist who journeys from acceptance to resistance. These characters actively challenge the system as they strive, altruistically, to effect social change and each text concludes with an explicit representation of a hopeful future.\textsuperscript{109} The narratives analysed within this thesis operate in contrast to this tradition in two fundamental ways.

The first point of difference between the traditional dystopian protagonist’s journey and the struggles toward potential hope experienced by the protagonists of Iterative Dystopias is that this subcycle of texts complicates its articulations of cultural verisimilitude. The plots of \textit{Code 46}, \textit{2046} and \textit{Inception} do not only take place within a plausible, recognisable future extrapolated from the assumed viewer’s present. They additionally augment these diegetic realities through a further layer of social dreaming, creating a doubled hypothetical structure. In \textit{2046} the future is depicted as narrative (within the protagonist’s fictional work), in \textit{Inception} the future is a dream (chemically-enhanced and able to be shared), and in \textit{Code 46} the future is erasable (through technology-enabled memory manipulation). Each of the films’ protagonists must consequently strive to effect change across multiple textual-temporalities.\textsuperscript{110} This complicates the protagonists’ journeys as they struggle towards the glimmer of hope offered in the ambiguous final scenes of each film. Furthermore, the layered plot

\textsuperscript{107} Moylan, \textit{Scraps of the Untainted Sky}, xiii-xiv.
\textsuperscript{108} Moylan and Baccolini, \textit{Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination}, 5.
\textsuperscript{109} The final scenes of \textit{Children of Men} see the first baby born for a generation rescued by a ship named ‘Tomorrow’, while \textit{Idiocracy} concludes with its protagonist (Luke Wilson) making his inaugural speech as US President declaring that the time would come again ‘when reading wasn’t just for fags and neither was writing. People wrote books and movies, movies that had stories, so you cared whose arse it was and why it was farting…’
\textsuperscript{110} It is important to note that, of the films cited earlier to support my claim for the ongoing existence of this subcycle post-2010, only \textit{Source Code} shares this trait.
structures of each of these films is fundamental to my assertion that Iterative Dystopias share a coherent narrative theme and it also plays a key role within my analysis of the subcycle’s articulations of the protagonist as uncertain.\textsuperscript{111}

The second, and most critical, point of difference between the typical dystopian narrative form and this subcycle is found in the trajectory of the hero’s journey. In Iterative Dystopias the protagonists begin their narrative cognisant of the failings of their environment, unlike their traditional counterparts. The dystopias in which they exist are articulated on an intimate level, framing both their social interactions and their comprehension of their quotidian experience. Their journeys proceed as iterations of everyday life, which they perform\textsuperscript{112} in the inexact replications of routine across the texts’ diegetic layers. While they are depicted as resistant, the transformation they seek is for individual gain. Furthermore, their horizon of hope is one that lies within. These texts do not offer their hero as a guide, either for the diegetic collective or the viewer. It is specifically their personal experience that is problematised in the narrative. It is the desire for change in their individual circumstances that generates the plot. That hope remains within this subcycle is essential, however, and an investigation of this formal requirement will reverberate throughout each chapter and become the focus of my conclusion.

Based on these two fundamental contraventions of dystopian narrative convention, I conclude that \textit{Code 46}, \textit{2046} and \textit{Inception} cannot be mustered under the rubric ‘dystopian narratives’. Thus, it is these points which provide the springboard for the analysis which will consume this thesis as I respond to the question: if the typical dystopian (anti)hero’s narrative arc fits so uncomfortably with these protagonists, how can their experiences of their worlds be characterized? In order to answer this question, this thesis offers a reading of these films which draws upon the sociological concept of liminality. The remainder of this chapter, however, is dedicated to an interrogation of the terminology I use to describe this unruly collection of texts.

\textsuperscript{111} This point will be revisited in chapter six, in particular.
\textsuperscript{112} I use the term perform mindfully here as it is key within Szakolczai’s definition of permanent liminality which I investigate in chapter three.
Defining the subcycle

This thesis unifies *Code 46, 2046* and *Inception* as Iterative Dystopias, a collective defined by its narrative explorations of perpetual liminality. As I noted from the outset of this thesis, however, the primary formal commonality shared by these films is that each narrative is set (at least in part) in the future. It is clear from the cinematic context outlined that, despite their divergent executions of this formal trait, these individual texts must be understood within the scope of the future-oriented films which dominated screens throughout the postmillennial period and, in addition, as in dialogue with the science fiction genre. On this basis, the analysis undertaken within this thesis draws upon genre theory. I argue, however, that reading Iterative Dystopias as a collective limited to only a genre analysis would not be sustainable, nor would it be constructive. Rather, through the interdisciplinary close textual analysis undertaken in this thesis I establish that these films can be understood as part of a subcycle. It is a mantle which I adopt in acknowledgement of its tangential relationship to genre theory. It is a term which also captures the texts’ relationship to the broader cycle of futuristic films and additionally invokes the impression of movement critical to reading these texts.

Even if a ‘processual and contingent’\(^{113}\) approach to genre was advanced, one that was founded in Steven Neale’s assertion that a genre’s elements ‘are always in play rather than simply replayed’,\(^{114}\) it would be untenable to suggest that these films could be read as a collection solely through their relationship to the science fiction genre. Neale’s focus on the importance of differences alongside repetition in constituting a genre informs the work undertaken in this thesis. As does his argument for an approach to genres which account for history, aesthetics and cultural context.\(^{115}\) It could not be argued, however, that the films I analyse as Iterative Dystopias articulate *the same* ‘specific systems of expectation and hypothesis that spectators bring with them to the cinema...[systems which] provide spectators with a means of recognition and understanding’.\(^{116}\) For while


\(^{114}\) Neale, “Questions of Genre,” 165.

\(^{115}\) Ibid.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 158.
Neale suggests that much of his theory is applicable to collections of films produced within other national cinemas, his work is limited to films from a single origin, specifically Hollywood cinema.¹¹⁷ In contrast, *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* were produced, distributed and viewed in vastly different circumstances from each other within the global screen market. Accordingly, the ‘systems of expectation’ influential in the viewing of these films are complicated not only by the aesthetic and narrative diversity of the texts in question, but also their production and reception contexts.¹¹⁸

John Rieder’s rhetorical definition of the science fiction genre (following Paul Kincaid) as “whatever [in all its historical mutability and rhizomatic irregularity] we are looking for when we are looking for science fiction”,¹¹⁹ offers another approach to genre with the potential to encompass these films. It is likely, however, that this thesis would stand alone at this point in the ‘community of practice’ charged with the ‘ongoing construction, maintenance and revision’¹²⁰ of this version of the science fiction genre that is requisite in Rieder’s approach. Moreover, while arguments could be mounted that these texts do not contravene the first four of Rieder’s ‘propositions’ regarding the science fiction genre, namely that:

1) sf is historical and mutable;
2) sf has no essence, no single unifying characteristic, and no point of origin;
3) sf is not a set of texts, but rather a way of using texts and of drawing relationships among them;
4) sf’s identity is a differentially articulated position in an historical and mutable field of genres¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 157.
¹¹⁸ Although it is arguable (though beyond the scope of this study to consider) that these films could be associated industrially through the assertion that each was made by a ‘commercial auteur’, this is a tenuous relationship through which to interrelate films. Corrigan, “The Commerce of Auteurism: A Voice without Authority.”
¹²¹ Ibid.: 193.
it would be unsustainable to argue that they work within Rieder’s fifth criterion. This
principle states that ‘attribution of the identity of [science fiction] to a text constitutes an
active intervention in its distribution and reception’, echoing Neale’s point regarding
systems of expectation. As Christine Cornea points out, this is not reason to reject genre
analysis outright, however, particularly for films associated with the science fiction genre
which has boundaries that are ‘less than easy to distinguish’ and ‘does not readily submit
to the methods of analysis that have flourished in approaching other film genres’.
Nonetheless, while there are syntactic commonalities that are identified in this thesis
between the Iterative Dystopias analysed (in terms of themes, characters and form), their
semantic divergences render their complex narratives better understood via the more
focused work of narratologists, as I have discussed. Furthermore, the diversity of their
industrial origins necessitate acknowledgement that these films were produced and
viewed in vastly different ways, and thus sit uncomfortably with approaches that have
historically been applied within the bounds of national cinemas. In practical terms
therefore, this thesis works with science fiction genre analysis as ‘a way of using texts and
of drawing relationships among them’, in accordance with Rieder’s third criterion, but
advocates for an alternative means of classifying them as a collective.

Neale’s more recent work on genre-based taxonomies offers the beginnings of a solution
to the problem of describing this unruly selection of texts. Neale defines a film ‘cycle’ as ‘a
group of films made within a specific and limited time-span and founded for the most
part, on the characteristics of individual commercial successes’. This definition resonates

122 Ibid.: in particular, 193.
123 Christine Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh
    University Press, 2007), 5.
124 This distinction between syntactic and semantic approach to genre analysis follows Altman’s
    pioneering work in the field. Rick Altman, “A Semantic/ Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” in *Film
    Genre Reader 3*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2003 (adapted from
    original publication 1984)).
    the Age of Transnationalism,” in *Film Genre Reader 3*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin, Texas:
    University of Texas Press, 2003), 520. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into why the
cycle of futuristic films was successful within the postmillennial period beyond the summation of
critical perspectives on the issue presented in the introduction. I would suggest that defining the
futuristic cycle with reference to commercial success necessarily acknowledges that this collective
performs a similar negotiation between its requirement to satisfy the ritualistic desires of audiences
with the deluge of futuristic films identified in the introduction to this thesis, which are allied within the fantastic genre. Each of the films cited there was released—and popularly received—in the postmillennial decade. My sole reservation with this label lies in Neale’s insistence on the defined time-span of a cycle. For, as I noted in the discussion of the characterisation of *Code 46, 2046* and *Inception* as postmillennial texts, their relationship to the socio-historical period of their release is contingent. Neale’s definition of cycle is valuable to this thesis in that it implicitly entwines industrial and critical analysis with issues of reception context, a point which Christine Gledhill and Hamid Naficy have both argued is a critical (and oft-neglected) aspect of genre analysis. The term film cycle imputes an understanding of film texts informed by Cultural Studies which locates them in a ‘web’ comprised of filmmakers, texts, spectators and industry, as described by Naficy, or by Gledhill as constituted by texts and aesthetics, industry and institution, history and society, culture and audiences. Against Neale’s explicit temporal specificity, however, it is my aim to highlight the presupposition of dynamism ascribed within the term cycle. This mobile nature extends beyond simply describing the filmic cycle’s permeable temporal boundaries. Through its relationship to genre analysis the term cycle remains embedded with the theoretical debates on the inclusive/exclusive constitution of genres particularly prominent throughout the 1980s, the questions around genre’s functional utility across

and its function as ideological repository, that Altman suggests is the ‘logical contradiction’ inherent in the definition of all genres. Altman, “A Semantic/ Syntactic Approach to Film Genre.”


129 Filmic precedence for the conception of the term cycle as fluid, variable or unstable is established in its attribution to the contested selection of films labelled *film noir*. Alain Silver influentially deployed the term cycle to describe noir’s cross-genre aesthetic connection based on mood and motif, thus bearing some similarity to my application of the term here. Alain Silver, Carl Macek, and Bernard Schleifer, *Film Noir: The Encyclopedia* (New York; London: Overlook Duckworth, 2010). Additionally, Geraghty and Jancovich contend that Barbara Klinger’s work on Douglas Sirk’s postwar films uncovers a cross-genre ‘Adult Film’ cycle. Lincoln Geraghty and Mark Jancovich, eds., *The Shifting Definitions of Genre: Essays on Labeling Films, Television Shows and Media* (Jefferson, USA: McFarland,2008).

130 See Robert Altman’s seminal article for a detailed overview of this issue, in particular his concerns regarding the ideological nature of the ‘cycle’ which he conceives as the motivated combination of genres for cross-marketing purposes: Altman, “A Semantic/ Syntactic Approach to Film Genre.” Telotte assesses this idea in the conclusion of his work on the SF genre: J. P. Telotte,
national boundaries, and the ongoing revisions of the conception of genre prompted (and required) by the 1990s debates over whether the industrial or critical perspective does, or should, dominate generic classification. In addition, historically the term ‘cycle’ has been used both to refine categories within genres and also to facilitate discussion of the changes across genres through time. Cycle has thus been used variously to reduce the scope of genre criticism and it has also been used to create inter-, or multi-genre groupings to both industrial and critical ends. This fluid nature of the term ‘cycle’, its mutable and multiple usage therefore renders it an effective meta-category for the films I seek to analyse. This thesis works with Code 46, 2046 and Inception as part of a ‘subset’ of the futuristic film cycle popular in the postmillennial period. These films considered together are core, early examples of a subcycle of films this thesis entitles Iterative Dystopias. This subcycle is marked by many of the same qualities as the broader cycle. It bears a conditional relationship to the fantastic and science fiction genres. It is conceived through the dynamic relationships it forms within a web of understanding. All boundaries of the subcycle are permeable.

In order to establish the primary characteristics of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle, this thesis analyses a modest sample of intentionally diverse films. While I have argued that Code 46, 2046 and Inception should not be viewed as the sole examples of works

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132 For a thorough background to the work in this area, see: Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre."


identifiable under this mantle (instead offering this thesis as a foundation for further investigation), their limited number leads to the question as to the validity of labelling this collection as a subcycle rather than employing more restricted, or restricting, terminology. Film studies offers a plethora of alternatives with which this thesis might describe these films. In the following section I provide a brief survey of potential nomenclature, considering ‘tendency’, ‘inflection’ and ‘mode’ in turn. It is my intention here to interrogate terminological options, rather than to examine in depth the analysis undertaken by the authors to which I refer. These terms each share traits common with the term ‘subcycle’, but are limited in important ways.

Comparable with the investigation undertaken in this thesis, Robert Ray’s analysis of fifty years’ classical Hollywood cinema focuses on an equally limited number of ‘special cases’ in support of his arguments. Ray’s work seeks to identify the primary thematic and formal paradigms which have consistently underpinned commercial success and he uses five key films as his case studies. In his attempts to make connections across time and genre, Ray reveals what he terms a ‘certain tendency’ in American cinema. Ray’s project resonates with this thesis in the sense that it establishes commonalities between a generically and temporally disparate collection of films and utilises a small dataset as a basis from which to extrapolate and detail his findings. I read the term ‘tendency’, however, as a descriptor indelibly linked with cinematic qualities which transcend time. Unless history proves otherwise, Iterative Dystopia’s association with the postmillennial period invalidates the term ‘tendency’ as a descriptive possibility. Elizabeth Cowie’s term ‘inflection’ does not suffer from this impediment. Recalling Neale’s argument for conceiving genre as a ‘process’, Cowie argues that Hollywood cinema is marked by ‘hybridization’, ‘the transformation of generic expectations as much as...the fulfilment of generic norms’. Film noir, she writes is a cinematic ‘inflection’, ‘which emerges in certain genres in the early 1940s’.

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136 Ray adopts and ‘adapts’ this term from François Truffaut’s 1954 article on French Cinema. Ibid.
138 Ibid., 129.
socio-historical period, parallels are able to be drawn with this thesis’ investigation of Iterative Dystopias as postmillennial texts. Cowie’s notion diverges from this thesis, however, in that the cinematic inflection is identifiable through both common narrative traits and similarities in visual style, despite the generically-diverse formulations of individual texts. In opposition to this, the Iterative Dystopias examined in this thesis present markedly different visual styles and are directly associated with (though not definable within) the science fiction genre.

Christine Gledhill presents perhaps the most viable alternative to subcycle for describing Iterative Dystopias in her concept of the cinematic ‘mode’. Gledhill writes that,

> The notion of modality, like register in socio-linguistics, defines a specific mode of aesthetic articulation adaptable across a range of genres, across decades and across national cultures. It provides the genre system with a mechanism of ‘double articulation’, capable of generating specific and distinctively different generic formulae in particular historical conjunctures, while also providing a medium of interchange and overlap between genres.

The boundary-crossing nature which Gledhill attributes to modality, and her characterisation of it as able to describe commonalities which arise in spite of the variations between texts, clearly share an affinity with this project. Her intention for the term to capture the distinct operations of genre convention at particular socio-cultural moments aligns the concept directly with this work. My hesitation with describing Iterative Dystopias as a filmic mode lies in the term’s specific association with Gledhill’s work on melodrama. Although Gledhill’s analysis draws out melodrama’s engagement with the ‘everyday’ (through a re-evaluation of its relationship to ‘realism’), and in this way shares a similar interest to this thesis, Gledhill’s work takes a panoramic view of cinema. She interrogates melodrama’s expression as an organising principle across genres, throughout

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139 Ibid.
140 Gledhill, “Rethinking Genre,” 229.
film history, ideas which she extends beyond the cinematic form. Gledhill specifically advocates for a more expansive, or progressive, perspective on melodrama, one which reads it beyond its manifestations in ‘women’s films’. Her work provides the basis for scholars such as Linda Williams to argue that melodrama ‘is the foundation of the classical Hollywood movie.’ Thus, while her theorisation of the filmic mode renders it a viable alternative to subcycle, her application of it is quite distinct from the intentions of, and analysis undertaken, in this thesis. Comparisons can thus be drawn with the concerns I registered with Ray’s term tendency. Gledhill uses mode to describe a meta-category which transcends time and genre. Conversely, this work focuses in on a small selection of texts. It identifies a niche within a wider cycle of films and examines the characteristics of this clutch, specifically considering how they work alongside, and against, a broader cohort: a cycle of futuristic films. It reads them as related, however contingently, to the specific socio-historical moment of their release. Given the prominence of Gledhill’s work in redefining melodrama as a mode which exceeds genre classification and temporal fixity, there is clear potential for misinterpretation should this thesis utilise the term.

Iterative Dystopias are an unruly collection of films. Adopting the term subcycle to characterise the group effectively captures the aberrant intra-textual, inter-textual and extra-textual connections that they form. It unites the texts, yet retains the space to acknowledge their industrial and aesthetic dissimilarities. It captures the contingent accord that Iterative Dystopias have with the socio-historical era into which they were released. Code 46, 2046 and Inception occupy a cinematic niche—early examples of a subset located within the postmillennial period’s popular futuristic cycle. The term subcycle evokes the mobile, yet distinct, relationship these texts bare to the science fiction genre. These films are social science fictions, representing plausible extrapolations from the assumed viewer’s real-world experience. They are negative insights into possible futures.

142 Gledhill, “Rethinking Genre.”; ———, “The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation.”
This subcycle possesses ‘dystopian sensibilities’. Critically therefore, the explicit invocation of movement in the term sub\textit{cycle} also draws attention to the mutable exchange between these texts and the dystopian narrative form. Iterative Dystopias adapt and amend dystopian convention. It is in their defiance of the form that these films are united. This subcycle articulates dystopia as quotidian. The protagonists wend an iterative path across their narratives in search of their personal utopia. Their journeys are layered across multiple realities, yet are framed within the banalities of the everyday and are shaped by the characters’ intimate interactions. Their horizon of utopian hope lies within. These parallels establish a coherent narrative thread between the films analysed in this thesis, and it is to the subcycle’s thematic connection that I now turn.
CHAPTER THREE: Postmillennial cinematic liminality

A steam engine careens down the middle of a Los Angeles street, despite an absence of train tracks. A woman rides the deserted London Underground in her dreams, looking for a man she has never met, in a place she has never been. A neon-lit monorail snakes the solitary character aboard it between skyscrapers in the darkness. The rush of wind as it traverses the screen obscures an undirected warning, yelled inexplicably in English, for someone (an unseen bystander? the viewer?) to ‘get out of the way’. These three scenes, from Inception, Code 46 and 2046 respectively, feature images of trains. This icon, both of the Industrial Age and of early cinema, is a dissonant motif for futuristic films. Yet it reoccurs within each of the texts that I identify within the Iterative Dystopia subcycle.¹⁴⁶

While none of these films are a film about trains, trains function at varying levels of prominence in their plots and form an aesthetic intersection between these disparate texts. On this basis, the train is an effective vehicle—both literally and figuratively—through which to explore the primary thematic link between these films, their protagonists’ perpetual liminality. Moreover, in the conflicting, complementary meanings it produces within these texts, the icon operates in consonance with the manner in which I argue perpetual liminality can be observed across the subcycle, namely via paradoxical

¹⁴⁶ Notably, this motif also features in the post-2010 examples of the subcycle catalogued in the introduction to this thesis: Source Code and Divergent.
representations. The train is a confounding, and therefore fitting (as we will see), motif through which to orientate the second part of my literature review and elucidate the primary characteristics of this collection of films.

Taking as its starting point the recent flourish of interest in the concept of liminality, this chapter contends that the protagonists of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle are depicted as perpetually liminal. This original concept elaborates on the work of sociologist Arpad Szakolczai. Utilising his ideas as my foundation, I argue for a reading of these films which asserts that the protagonists’ experiences within each narrative are characterised by two qualities: continuous transition and uncertain play. Further, it is as a result of this that their journey towards the utopian horizon is iterative, and this term receives further interrogation here. In the final section of this chapter I attend to the question of how this theme can be recognised formally within Iterative Dystopias. It is in these final pages that I establish the argument that each film in this subcycle represents its protagonist’s everyday environments as paradoxical. This section proposes a definition of paradox and offers an overview of how this thesis applies the concept. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists pursue a path out of their perpetual liminality within paradoxical environments. It is this idea that drives the close textual analysis which I present within each of the main chapters of this work.

Perpetual liminality: The subcycle’s thematic link

The use of the term ‘liminal’ has proliferated in recent scholarship throughout the humanities and social sciences, including screen studies. Reinvigorated in response to

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147 Recent work on liminality in screen studies focuses primarily on cinematic representations of spaces of transition. Bjørn Thomassen argues that there are two distinct types of liminal spaces: spaces that function as liminal, and spaces which are inherently ‘in between’ (the thresholds or border zones of spaces (yet) to be ‘confronted’, in particular the ‘archetypical liminal landscape’ of the seaside or beach). Bjørn Thomassen, “Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” in Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces in-Between, ed. Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts (London: Routledge, 2012), 21-28. It is the latter rather than the former which has occupied screen studies scholars, see in particular Heather Wintle’s article on the use of the shoreline in which she argues that it functions as both a terminus and place of new beginnings in the post-apocalyptic films, The Road (2009) and Waterworld (1995). Brady Hammond’s exploration of James Cameron’s
the one hundredth anniversary of its introduction as a neologism by Arnold van Gennep in *Les Rites de Passages* (1909), liminality has been the subject of conferences, journals’ special editions and edited collections with various focii. While it has resonated particularly within conceptualization of contemporary space, the liminal has seen such diverse application across disciplines that concerns have been raised that it is ‘increasingly used to talk about almost anything’. As Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra attest, at its most broad, liminality is a condition of ‘uncertainty, fluidity and malleability’ which relates to, responds to, or results in transformation. These descriptors could equally be said to pertain to the term itself. A project that undertakes to explore what this slippery concept looks like rendered in contemporary film (narratively and aesthetically) is therefore timely.


Interest in liminality ranges across anthropology, sociology, political science, history, philosophy, geography, as evidenced by the interdisciplinary conference and publication which apparently triggered the recent revitalization of the concept: *Liminality and Cultures of Change* Conference (Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities (CRASSH): University of Cambridge, February, 2009) and subsequently, Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald (eds) Wydra, “Liminality and Cultures of Change (Special Issue),” *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2009).
Anthropologist Victor Turner popularized the term ‘liminal’ (following van Gennep) in his essay ‘Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage.’ The term ‘liminal’ which derives from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold, was used by Turner to express the ‘in between’ stage in social ritual, a location of transition or becoming between pre-liminal and post-liminal states of being. In Turner’s work liminality was a threshold condition, defined as ‘a process, a becoming’, a transition between ‘relatively fixed and stable [personal or social] conditions.’ Importantly, for this thesis, the liminal position of being in neither one place nor another—its location as the bridge across, or the gulf between, ‘states’—was conceived of as *temporary*. In a recent analysis of this work, social anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen proposes a matrix of liminal experience formed in the interactions between Turner’s two parameters: the subject (be it the individual, the social group or ‘whole societies, entire populations, maybe even ‘civilizations’”) and the temporal dimension, which may be (somewhat arbitrarily, he acknowledges) characterized as a moment, a period or an epoch. Following van Gennep’s original conception, Thomassen argues for the (re)addition of a spatial dimension to the definition of the liminal experience. In this category he delineates between ‘specific places’ and ‘thresholds’; areas and zones, including national borders, monasteries, prisons and airports; and countries, larger regions and continents. In creating this taxonomy of the dimensions of liminal experience, his stated intention is dual in purpose, and somewhat contradictory. Thomassen’s ‘attempt to open a debate on how we think and live with liminality today’ lies counter to his desire to limit its conceptual application. Primarily his concern lies in applications which ‘[lose] the key feature of liminality: *transition*.’ He argues that many

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153 Ibid.
154 Ibid., 97.
155 Turner describes liminality as ‘the phenomena and processes of mid-transition’. Ibid., 110.
157 Ibid., 32.
158 Ibid., 28 (original emphasis).
of the recent applications in various disciplines would be more appropriately characterized under Turner’s related concept of the *liminoid*, which he characterizes as an optional ‘break from normality, a playful as-if experience’.

In considering liminality as it manifests thematically within Iterative Dystopias, I diverge in one significant way from Thomassen’s characterisation of the concept. In direct contradiction to his work, this thesis argues that the experience of liminality that is articulated by these films through their protagonist’s journeys is one which is denied the traditional fixity of the pre-liminal and post-liminal states. This liminality is a condition of infinite restlessness, a ‘state’ of permanent alteration. Therefore it defies the *progressively* transitional nature of its original conception which is prioritised in Thomassen’s evaluation. It is instead iteratively transformational, as will be explained. In order to consider this shift, I situate these postmillennial films in relation to the historically contemporary work of sociologist Arpad Szakolczai, in particular his thesis on ‘permanent liminality’. More precisely, following the social science fiction criticism methodology I outlined in the introduction, I investigate the manner in which these texts can be read with recourse to Szakolczai’s concept. I argue, however, that they diverge in two important ways. These films depict worlds characterized by internally-contradictory ideas: *continuous transition* and *uncertain play*. This subcycle is characterised by protagonists who iteratively perform their everyday. It is on this basis that the icon of the train with which I opened this chapter functions as an appropriate motif through which to explore the subcycle’s theme. As Alison Byerly has recently argued, railways create a ‘disorienting feeling of suspension between two places...[a mode of experience involving] a continuous slippage between the subject and the surrounding environment.’

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159 Ibid., 28.

160 I have placed inverted commas around ‘state’ here in recognition of Turner’s original thesis which argues that ‘states’ are static or stable. I have, however, used the term deliberately in order to convey the contradictory nature inherent in the liminality which I seek to describe. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 93. Szakolczai raises this point in introducing his thesis on permanent liminality. Szakolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, 219.


'disorientation' and the ‘in-between’ with the rail journey (the dualistic slippage between spaces and between the individual and these spaces) are equally evocative of the protagonists’ perpetual liminality.

In this subcycle of films, train travel is travel with ambiguous origins and devoid of destination. In 2046, the train is a passage to nowhere. As the scenes aboard the train repeat, overlapping and reconfiguring, it becomes increasingly clear that, while by its very nature a train can only travel in one direction, the direction of this train is unknowable. The motif is used to similar effect in Code 46 in which Maria ritualistically boards her train annually, with the suggestion that she will continue to do so long after the plot’s conclusion. Her train journey is an endless cycle, she continues to get on the train even though she desires only to alight. If, as several theorists have noted, the dangers and desirability of getting lost was a postmodern preoccupation, it is the complementary position of being lost while knowing precisely where you are that is the purview of these postmillennial films. While each of the texts encapsulates this idea, it is perhaps most evident in Inception. Cobb is pictured plugged in to his chemically-induced dream, reclined in a hypnagogic state, neither awake nor asleep, but both at once. He is in multiple spaces simultaneously and alone while in company. These texts are evidence of Byerly’s assertion that

[the discrete experience of a railway journey [seems] to lend itself to a narrative structure whereby the journey defines a specific imaginative episode that might be a dream, a nightmare, or, in a frequent pun, a specific “train of thought”. The journey becomes a world of its own, with its own rules and logic; nothing is certain except the fact that it will eventually end.]

Except in these Iterative Dystopias, the characters are held captive by the ambivalent and ambiguous conclusions to the plots. Whereas travel (real-world or across a narrative arc)

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164 Byerly, Are We There Yet?: Virtual Travel and Victorian Realism, 182.
is usually conceived as a temporary relocation, the journey between two known spaces and therefore a traditionally liminal experience, in this subcycle, trains are places of permanence. While the ambiguous conclusions of these films are, as I argued in the introduction, the source of their utopian hope, it is clear that these travellers are lost, while knowing where they are; or they are stuck, despite knowing the way home. They are always already on the train and unable to get off despite their best efforts. Their liminality is an altered expression of the concept.

I find parallels in this subcycle’s narrative arcs and Arpad Szakolczai’s concept of permanent liminality. His work forms the basis of the concept that I propose offers the opportunity for the ‘nuanced analysis’ of these films that is sought within social science fiction criticism.\(^{165}\) In articulating his concept, Szakolczai is forthright in his acknowledgement of its ‘inherently paradoxical’ nature.\(^{166}\) In contrast to Thomassen, Szakolczai finds in Turner’s work seeds for defining an exceptional, fixed ‘state’ of liminality made possible by the ‘dissolution of order’ caused by historical change.\(^{167}\) He identifies potential for permanent liminality at each of the three phases of Turner’s rite of passage: separation, the liminal period proper and reaggregation. Szakolczai argues that ‘liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame.’\(^{168}\) In the first case, individuals or communities (such as monks) may be stuck for their entire lives continuously performing the ascetic exercises, and suffering the deprivations that characterize the preparations for ritual initiation. The second possibility that Szakolczai identifies is a situation in which the staging of the ritual is suspended in motion, with individuals becoming trapped in their roles and the distinction between the performance of the ritual and the individual’s quotidian experience collapsing. Here, Szakolczai looks to the rituals of court society for an example. Soviet-style Bolshevism provides him with evidence of liminality which becomes permanent at the final phase of transition. In this situation the

\(^{166}\) Szakolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, 219.
\(^{167}\) Szakolczai writes that ‘in the case of real-world liminality, the previously taken-for-granted order of things has actually collapsed. It cannot therefore simply be restored. This means that the central task in a real-world large-scale liminal situation is an actual search for order.’ Ibid., 218.
\(^{168}\) Ibid., 220.
‘players [remain] wandering endlessly in a state of frenzied suspension once the performance is over...’

He writes that, rather than facilitating the traditional reaggregation phase following the liminal period of war (which involves measuring guilt, distributing punishment and actively forgetting the past), communist regimes tread a paradoxical path of promising a utopian future, while ‘play[ing] continuously on the sentiments of suffering, revenge and hatred, prevent[ing] the settling down of the negative emotions...[thus ensuring] the Second World War never ended.’

Thomassen’s objection to Szakolczai’s work is founded on the concern that each example within Szakolczai’s catalogue operates in counterpoint to the clear temporal and spatial definition of his more conventionally-defined liminality. The participant(s) in these rituals are denied the frames of reference provided by the home society of pre- and post-liminal state, and the experienced ceremonial master(s) to lead them through the ritual. The outcome of the transition—the future—becomes inherently unknown. While Szakolczai argues that this is a state of permanent liminality, Thomassen contends that it is better characterized as a ‘failed transition’ in which the ambivalence and ambiguity previously discarded by the individual or community at the conclusion of the liminal period become the foundations of the post-liminal experience. I find Thomassen’s characterization of this as ‘failure’ less compelling than Szakolczai’s conceptualisation, however, in light of the

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169 Ibid., 223.
170 Ibid.
171 Thomassen has recently discussed Szakolczai’s work on permanent liminality as an inappropriate extrapolation of an anthropological concept. His concerns to limit the use of the term liminality go beyond this specific application, however, and have already been noted. Bjørn Thomassen, “Thinking with Liminality: To the Boundaries of an Anthropological Concept,” in Breaking the Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality, ed. Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 51-52.
172 The importance of the changed nature of and/or denial of access to ‘home’ touched on in Szakolczai’s work is the starting point for the analysis conducted in chapter four. Arpad Szakolczai, “Liminality and Experience: Structuring Transitory Situations and Transformative Events,” in Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality, ed. Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), see, in particular, 33-34 on the ‘formative’ nature of liminality.
173 Thomassen, “Thinking with Liminality: To the Boundaries of an Anthropological Concept,” 53.
fluidity associated with the contemporary socio-historical period, a point to which I will return momentarily. In spite of this contest over the application of terminology, both authors agree, that ‘modernity’ is an era characterized by social ‘danger’ in which ambivalence and ambiguity reign. 

The postmillennial decade as coincident with this modernity is therefore a period which follows the ‘dissolution of order’ which initiates the liminal experience. Szakolczai and Thomassen argue that it is in modern society’s failure, or inability, to regenerate structures that these ‘dangers’ lie. They suggest that the ‘solution’ to permanent liminality / failed transition is to be found in the creation of ‘meaningful background structures’, through reconceiving identity, and the home, and reestablishing the ‘concreteness of lived space.’

The first concern that I have in seeking to apply Szakolczai’s concept of permanent liminality to an analysis of Iterative Dystopias emanates from the analogy he draws with the cinematic freeze frame. The conflict between stasis and movement that this correlation highlights is a point of conceptual ambiguity in Szakolczai’s work. On one hand he writes ‘...nothing is more boring than a permanent state of liminality, where even the hope of escaping the routine is lost.’ Yet he follows this statement with the suggestion that ‘[i]ndividuals are forced to invent more and more sophisticated and ultimately perverse forms of entertainment in a mad search after experience, in the wish

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176 Although both authors use the term ‘modernity’ to describe the contemporary socio-historical period in their previously cited works, neither defines its point of commencement and both indicate implicitly that it is ongoing. Thomassen writes that the liminal experience devoid of proper social reintegration (such as in Szakolczai’s permanent liminality) ‘is pure danger’. ———, “Revisting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” 30.

177 Both Thomassen and Szakolczai discuss the ‘dissolution’ or ‘collapse’ of order and its relationship to modernity throughout their writing on the subject of liminality, see most recently: Szakolczai, “Liminality and Experience: Structuring Transitory Situations and Transformative Events,” 34; Thomassen, “Thinking with Liminality: To the Boundaries of an Anthropological Concept,” 50.

178 Szakolczai specifically writes that ‘[h]uman life is not possible and worth living without some degree of stability, meaning and a sense of home.’ Szakolczai, Reflexive Historical Sociology, 226.

179 Thomassen refers to the need to ‘turn to the concreteness of lived space’ in Thomassen, “Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” 31. See also: Arpad Szakolczai, “Citizenship and Home: Political Allegiance and Its Background,” International Political Anthropology 1, no. 1 (2008).

180 Szakolczai, Reflexive Historical Sociology, 226.
to surpass in excitement the boredom of the hectic existence in a permanent state of liminality.\textsuperscript{183} The very possibility of new experience refutes the pessimism of an identically repeated routine without escape, thereby opening the concept to the hope which resides in iterative change. However, while the notion of a liminality that is frozen in time is arguably apt for the historical instances he cites, its application in a postmillennial soci-historical context requires a different approach.

I propose that, rather than refer to the liminality expressed in Iterative Dystopias as ‘permanent’, which implies a fixity or stasis on some level, it should be referred to as perpetual, connoting a state of transition which is infinitely iterative. In the introduction of this thesis I argued for the classification of this subcycle as postmillennial on the basis of the contemporaneous release of the films that I analyse and the sociological concepts that inform my analysis. Critically at this juncture, I also argued that the films articulate with the sociological conditions which concurrently drove the development of contemporary theoretical perspectives on liminality and uncertainty.\textsuperscript{184} In the postmillennial period, whether the discussion concerned spatial borders (local, national, or global); temporal borders; or virtual borders (technological, informational, or economic); sociologists largely agreed that the increased pace and significance of ‘mobility’ was key to understanding the globalised culture.\textsuperscript{185} While the re-characterization of liminality in light of a cultural dynamism is dismissed by Thomassen as ‘attitudinal’,\textsuperscript{186} the

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} I invoke the concept of articulation again here to suggest, following Stuart Hall, that Iterative Dystopias reflect, refract and inform the (multi-perspectival) sociological conditions around their release. Du Gay et al., \textit{Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman}.
\textsuperscript{185} As noted in the introduction, discussions of global culture as ‘mobile’ did not begin at the turn of the millennium. Sociological investigation of these ideas began in earnest in the decade prior but were built upon and extended throughout the years on which I focus. For overviews of the relationship between ‘motion/mobility’ (its objects, role and pace) and ‘global culture’, see for example, Okwui Enwezor, “The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition,” in \textit{Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity}, ed. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2008); David Morley and Kevin Robins, \textit{Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries} (London; New York: Routledge, 1995); Majid Tehranian, \textit{Global Communication and World Politics: Domination, Development, and Discourse} (Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999); Mónica Amor et al., eds., \textit{Liminalities: Discussions on the Global and the Local}, vol. 57, Art Journal (1998).
\textsuperscript{186} Thomassen argues that contemporary society is marked by the continuous desire for innovation and that liminality is being inappropriately invoked to characterise this attitude towards change. He writes that, ‘[t]his boundary-breaking attitude is in essence the very hallmark of modernity, or what
(im)possibility of demarcating boundaries in order to appropriately and effectively generate meaning, facilitate understanding, and communicate experience drew significant scholarly and popular focus. It was precisely this perception that defined the ‘global experience’. As Arjun Appadurai noted, by the turn of the millennium, ‘it [had] become something of a truism that we [were] functioning in a world fundamentally characterized by objects in motion. Although the roots of a ‘mobile culture’ might be traced to Heraclitus’ concept of flux, the ‘relations of disjuncture’ in this era of cultural flow, and attempts to define structures through, against, and within which these relations might be understood, captured the contemporary imagination. As the discourse of globalisation (theoretically) eroded boundaries, it prompted the suggestion that an environment of ‘permanent revolution’ had resulted which denied stability and promoted uncertainty. Distinct from the relatively stable states Turner identified in tribal society against which the traditionally liminal experience could be contrasted therefore, liminality in this new globalised condition (whether actual or perceived) requires a conceptual framework capable of embracing the conflicts and contradictions created within, and through, continuous mobility.

Bauman (2000) called ‘liquid modernity’, but it is imploding and “stabilizing” at the core of our social existence in ways that we still need to understand.’ Thomassen, Liminality and the Modern: Living through the in-Between, 8.

187 I use inverted commas around ‘global experience’ here to highlight similar concerns to those raised around characterising this subcycle as ‘postmillennial’ (discussed in the introduction to this thesis). It is important once again to draw attention to the variety of contexts in which the examples from the Iterative Dystopia subcycle are viewed given the diversity of the films’ production backgrounds.


191 For all the rhetoric surrounding the destruction of borders within global culture, Appadurai’s rhizomic model of culture which exhibits five interacting ‘landscapes’ of global flows—ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes—is perhaps the only pragmatic pursuit of a sociological schema based in borderlessness. Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” in The Phantom Public Sphere, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).


193 Turner’s argument that the transitory property of liminality is directly associated with the comparatively simplistic nature of tribal society is highlighted by Szakolczai to further his argument on the possibility of permanent liminality in modern societies. Szakolczai, Reflexive Historical Sociology, 218-19.
Liminality conceived from this socio-historical standpoint therefore frustrates definition in terms of permanance. Though ongoing, it is not stable. Its perpetual nature is captured in Sandor Klapcsik’s description of a ‘constant oscillation’, a ‘continuous transference, an infinite process formed by transgressions across evanescent, porous, evasive borderlines’. It is this conceptual prism in which the aggregated paradoxes of the protagonists’ everyday experience and their iterative journey in search of their utopia can be understood. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists’ experience has little in common with a film frame frozen in time, the perpetual liminality represented in these films additionally exceeds Szakolczai’s alternate, somewhat inconsistent, metaphor of a ‘spinning wheel of permanent liminality’. It moves beyond even Iver Neumann’s assertion (in the context of his introduction to an international relations forum on liminality) that

there are no stable societies from which to be taken away and be returned to.

With everything in flux, van Gennep’s scheme of a pre-liminal, luminal [sic], and post-liminal phase collapses, and the possibility of perpetual liminality opens up before us.

In Neumann’s words I read the suggestion of the possibility of stasis within an ongoing liminality. The perpetual liminality which is represented in the experience of Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists is an ongoing transition in which the movements and transgressions across fluid boundaries are amplified by the accompanying eddy of oscillations within the liminal state. It is more effectively illustrated by looped, interactive digital media. Here, the variety of possible experiences afforded within the mediated environment approaches the infinite. Furthermore, without significant disruption (which to follow this analogy could be affect through, for example, recoding), unless the ‘danger’ invoked by Szakolczai and Thomassen is acted upon, the liminal experience continues endlessly. Iterative Dystopia’s perpetually liminal protagonists are arrested in the

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194 Klapcsik, *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction: A Poststructuralist Approach*, 3 (original emphasis).
continuous transition of their personal dystopias. They spiral through their everyday, iteratively searching for the glimmer of utopian hope which will enable them to recode their existence.

The parallel that I have drawn between interactive media and the contemporary liminal experience segues to the second modification which Szakolczai’s concept of permanent liminality requires in order support analysis of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle: the concept of play. According to Szakolczai’s thesis, the everyday of permanent liminality is a ritualised performance arrested at a particular point in (what should be) a period of transition. The result is individuals and collectives who are forced to endlessly ‘play’ their roles in this performance. He takes pains to argue that this ‘play’ is not playful, writing that

[t]he word ‘play’ implies fun, but nothing is more boring than to be forced to play continuously. At the same time, playing will not just become a bore, but also deadly serious. Individuals are required to identify with the roles they are supposed to play all the time...and their role will become permanent.\(^{197}\)

Thus play, within the context of permanent liminality becomes both serious and boring. For Thomassen, this invocation of the concept of play raises two concerns. First, and more prosaically, it suggests the potential conflation of the liminal with its companion concept the ‘liminoid’, a melding of the essential, challenging trial,\(^{198}\) with the ‘optional’, ‘playful as-if experience’.\(^{199}\) In addition, for Thomassen it suggests links between liminality and desire, and the broader discussions regarding the endless pursuit of pleasure within a

\(^{197}\) Szakolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, 222.

\(^{198}\) Thomassen argues that the characteristic which distinguishes the liminal from the ‘marginal’ or ‘peripheral’ is the *requirement* to *confront* the challenge or danger of the liminal threshold. Thomassen, “Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” 21.

\(^{199}\) Ibid., 28.
carnivalesque\textsuperscript{200} or ‘disneyfied’\textsuperscript{201} global society. He argues that ‘[l]iminality cannot and should not be considered an endpoint or a desirable state of being...’\textsuperscript{202} I would argue, however, that it is precisely within, and through, its contested nature that the concept of ‘play’ becomes relevant to the perpetually liminal experience manifested in this subcycle of texts. As will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, the concept of play that is engaged by Iterative Dystopias is not one that has been transformed from being synonymous with ‘creativity and freedom’ to an oppositional interpretation which aligns it with ‘boredom and a sense of imprisonment’, as in Szakolczai’s theorization.\textsuperscript{203} Nor, however, is perpetually liminal play a positive, desirable endpoint, thus assuaging Thomassen’s concerns.\textsuperscript{204} It is more influenced by the notion of anti-leisure associated with anti-utopian narratives in which play is not inverted (becoming its opposite, work) but rather ‘perverted’, becoming at once distracting and tyrannical, serving to perpetuate the dystopian condition.\textsuperscript{205} Instead, in my formulation of perpetual liminality, play is uncertain and exploratory. This conceptualisation of play is fundamental not as a distraction from the everyday,\textsuperscript{206} but as underlying the experience of the everyday itself.

\textsuperscript{200} Here Thomassen is directly aligning his argument with Turner’s original thesis. Turner uses the carnival as an example of the popular entertainment he describes as ‘liminoid’. V. Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology,” \textit{Rice University Studies} 60, no. 3 (1974): 70. For a discussion on Bahktin’s carnival as a (revolutionary) liminal period and its relationship to dystopia which is tangential to my core argument, see Jameson, \textit{Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions}, 197-8.

\textsuperscript{201} For an examination of ‘disneyfication’ as the endless and impossible pursuit of the authentic through reproduction, see: Jameson, \textit{Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions}, 214-16. For insight into how it relates to dystopia, see: Suvin, “Theses on Dystopia 2001,” 194-5.

\textsuperscript{202} Thomassen, “Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” 31. Thomassen surveys the potential causes of this ‘misreading’ of liminality as positive, a state to be ‘celebrated’, in the recently published \textit{Liminality and the Modern}. ———, \textit{Liminality and the Modern: Living through the in-Between}, 7-11.

\textsuperscript{203} I rely here on Thomassen’s reading of Szakolczai’s permanent liminality for this terminology. Thomassen, “Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” 31.

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{205} Burnett and Rollin, “Anti-Leisure in Dystopian Fiction: The Literature of Leisure in the Worst of All Possible Worlds,” 77. Although adjunct to the discussion here due to my focus on the texts’ male protagonists, it is interesting to note that Daniels and Bowen argue that the perversion of leisure in dystopia has greater impact on women. Margaret J. Daniels and Heather E. Bowen, “Feminist Implications of Anti-Leisure in Dystopian Fiction,” \textit{Journal of Leisure Research} 35, no. 4 (2003).

\textsuperscript{206} This coalesces with Burnett’s and Rollin’s statement that ‘[i]n utopian fiction, leisure often appears inferior to practical industry, whereas in the dystopia, leisure is fundamental to culture.’ It diverges, however, with the idea that leisure is imposed by a ruling elite on the masses in order to
This play oscillates between the positions of passionate revelry and tedious apathy. Rather than quotidian play being located at, or transitioning towards, either end of this spectrum, within Iterative Dystopia’s narratives, these characters experiment with their quotidian existence. The protagonists explore options, both within their everyday realities and through the alternate existence afforded them in these double-hypothetical narratives. They play with possibilities in their quests for narrative resolution. For Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists, play is both creative and serious. It is through play that they perform their daily experience on their iterative journeys towards utopian hope.

Katherine Gibson and Sophie Watson understand the modernist period as the era of the flâneur strolling through life, ‘observing the lingering detail’, and contrast the postmodern as an age of the tour bus travelling at speed along highways bound for brief stops at ‘destinations’. Perhaps this metaphor could be extended here, both to understand the postmillennial decade and to return this discussion to its point of origin. As it is articulated through this subcycle of films, the postmillennial period is the era of the train journey. These trains travel on the same tracks laid through the rich tradition of films featuring trains from the beginnings of cinematic history. Equally, they continually push forward through landscape, while presenting the traveller with a static interior space around which either physical, or metaphoric, curtains can be drawn. Trains are liminal spaces, transiting between origin and destination. Unlike during the fin de siècle when the fascination was with the beginnings and endings, Iterative Dystopias focus on the uncertainties of the in-between, the banalities of the everyday. Importantly, in each of these texts the protagonists have embarked on a journey. The viewer joins them in media res, and just as is intoned throughout Inception.

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regulate or control, suggesting rather that all individuals ‘play’ or ‘perform’ their everyday in perpetual liminality. Burnett and Rollin, “Anti-Leisure in Dystopian Fiction: The Literature of Leisure in the Worst of All Possible Worlds,” 78.

207 Watson and Gibson, “Postmodern Spaces, Cities and Politics: An Introduction,” 2.

You know where you hope this train will take you, but you can’t know for sure...

But it doesn’t matter...

Because you’ll be together...

Yet despite its characters’ protests to the contrary, it does matter where they are going. Especially given that they are going nowhere, stuck on the train, or more specifically with the train inside them. Iterative Dystopia’s trains are symbols of their protagonists’ perpetual liminality. Within each narrative, these characters are fated to iteratively perform their everyday. Arrested in continual motion, they creatively but seriously play, experimenting in their personal dystopias. These protagonists are looking for a source of stability which will allow them to find a path out of their present circumstances. They are searching for a utopia within.

Recognising perpetual liminality: The paradoxical environment

This thesis analyses three core examples of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. Despite the obvious and noteworthy variations between Code 46, 2046 and Inception, common to each of these films is the depiction of dystopia as personal. The texts focus on the protagonists’ quotidian existence which they encounter as a perpetually liminal experience. These characters desire to transcend this condition, journeying across their narratives in an iterative search for a ‘place’ sufficiently stable to provide the foundation...

[209] In his recent analysis of the film’s opening scenes, Brian Baker suggests that Code 46 represents ‘mobility’ ‘as the state of being a passenger rather than being a pilot’ (original emphasis). He argues that introducing William with shots taken through the window of an aircraft, intercut with ‘God’s eye’ shots of the desert connotes the idea of the protagonist’s lack of agency. Conversely, implicit in my argument that the train is situated ‘within’ these protagonists, is the idea that William is both the ‘passenger’ aboard and the ‘pilot’/’driver’ of his iterative journey. The utopian hope which lies within these texts is predicated on the fact that he has some capacity to direct his travel. Brian Baker, “‘Here on the Outside’: Mobility and Bio-Politics in Michael Winterbottom’s Code 46,” Science Fiction Studies 42, no. 1 (2015): 115.
upon which this utopia might be realised.\textsuperscript{210} They are hoping—to use Thomassen’s and Szakolczai’s terminology—to make their worlds ‘concrete’. Throughout the analytical chapters of this thesis, I investigate three different environments in which these characters seek this utopian solution. I argue that their homes, their personal relationships and their minds share a single unifying characteristic, each can be read as paradoxical. In the final section of this chapter I interrogate the term paradox, defining it as a ‘true contradiction’ and outline how it will be applied in the remainder of the thesis.\textsuperscript{211} In order to begin this discussion, I return again to the subcycle’s train motif.

At first glance, it seems incongruous that a selection of films set in a postmillennial future should prominently feature a motif so evocative of the Industrial Age, one which is indispensable to films emblematic of modernity.\textsuperscript{212} Yet, \textit{Code 46}, \textit{2046} and \textit{Inception} do precisely that. Each of these texts is positioned as ‘sometime in the future’, relative to the assumed viewer’s present. In \textit{2046} this is specifically stated. The film’s title refers to both a primary diegetic space (the Oriental Hotel’s room 2046) and the year in which the protagonist’s novel is set, a year which denotes political uncertainty for the film’s local audiences.\textsuperscript{213} It is inferred in \textit{Code 46}. This text indicates its relationship to the socio-historical present by foregrounding its totalitarian, corporatized political structure in its opening scenes and through its references to environmental destruction. \textit{Inception} positions itself more obliquely with respect to the socio-historical present day. This film hints at its status as a possible-tomorrow through the suggestion that its shared-dream technology was developed as a military training tool which has been misappropriated and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item I define ‘place’ as ‘biographical space’ and discuss this characterisation in detail in the introduction to chapter four.
\item Barbara Mennel argues that the ‘founding myth’ of the cinema—that the Lumière brothers’ film caused panic among the audience—is vital to understanding the relationship between cinema and modernity. Barbara Caroline Mennel, \textit{Cities and Cinema}, Routledge Critical Introductions to Urbanism and the City (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2008), 8–9. Murray Pomerance draws a parallel between the cinema and modernity by invoking the image of Godzilla eating a car plucked from a Tokyo train wreck in Honda’s 1954 classic \textit{Godzilla}. Murray Pomerance, ed. \textit{Cinema and Modernity} (New Brunswick, USA: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 13.
\item As noted earlier, the year 2046 is culturally significant for Wong’s local audiences as it marks the final year of the period for which China agreed to allow Hong Kong to maintain its political and economic status quo.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
is now able to be exploited for the purpose of corporate espionage. This future-orientation is key to understanding these films as having dystopian sensibilities, as I have suggested. Despite this, there is a marked absence of future technologies across the subcycle. Each film defiantly avoids the gadget-and-gimmick-laden art direction conspicuous within the postmillennial future cycle, the ‘definitely-not-now, maybe tomorrow’ aesthetic of other contemporary titles.214 Indeed while they lack of any of the iconography that J.P. Telotte argues ‘the average filmgoer’ associates with science fiction films: ‘rockets, robots, futuristic cities, alien encounters, fantastic technology, scientists (mad or otherwise),’215 they are also largely devoid of even the communications technologies ubiquitous in the lives of contemporary audience members. These films feature trains. This is a future in which the past is the present.

While in early cinema the train was used as a sign of progress and modernisation,216 here it both retains this meaning, while equally connoting the opposite. The train is a machine which functions, literally at times, to propel these characters forwards within the narrative but it cannot be separated from its ‘archaic’, regressive associations. This conflict is captured aesthetically in 2046. There, the industrial motif is presented as future-fantastic through its hyper-stylized representation. In this text, Tak circles on an endless loop of elevated monorail. His train is simultaneously grounded and flying. Inception highlights the contrary temporal signification embodied in this icon through its various illustrations. The film’s first act turning point takes place on a Shinkansen (bullet train). This technology continues to evoke a ‘state of the art’ impression through its sleek appearance, despite being more than half a century old.217 Another key plot point occurs when a freight train

214 As noted in the introduction, Steven Spielberg’s Minority Report stands out as an example in the context of this thesis on the basis that it was the film in which Samantha Morton starred immediately prior to working on Code 46. Within the postmillennial future cycle other ‘aesthetically’ futuristic films in which this progress is attributed to humans (as opposed to the result of alien invasion or acquisition) include: The Time Machine (2002); The Matrix Reloaded and The Matrix Revolutions; I, Robot; Æon Flux (2005); and Avatar.
215 Telotte, Science Fiction Film, 4.
217 In reality, the special effects team created the scene by rigging a train interior on a gimbal in an old aircraft hangar in Cardington, UK and subsequently edited in footage of the Japanese countryside. Joe Fordham, “In Dreams,” Cinefex, no. 123 (2010): 45.
ploughs through the streets of Arthur’s mind. This time it is a classic engine which barrels through the midst of this imagined near-future. Interestingly in this context, this ‘industrial artefact’ was specifically manufactured for the stunt using plywood, fibreglass and steel and mounted on the specially-extended drivetrain from a truck.\(^{218}\) *Code 46* adds an additional layer to the temporal conflation embedded in the subcycle’s manipulations of this motif. Maria’s journey through the empty train carriages of her dream evokes the London Underground on which the scenes were filmed. In these scenes, she searches the tube for a mysterious man (William), an activity which she undertakes every year on her birthday. It is a ritualistic affair in which the iconic symbol of the train is a replication of memories from her past and a projection of images from her future, each inflected with the multiple realities of her present. For me personally (and no doubt many other viewers), these scenes are eerily prescient of travel on the usually-crowded service following the London terrorist attacks of 2005. As the viewer watching this film in its year of release, I was therefore placed uncomfortably in the midst of a future (real and imagined) whilst ‘aboard’ an icon of the past. Across the subcycle the train is an icon which produces multiple meanings. It connotes the past and the future simultaneously, whilst remaining grounded in the present. Moreover, these texts require that it be read through the conflict produced by these contrary meanings.

Images of trains echo across the futures represented in the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. In the conflation of temporalities that I read in this icon, connections may be drawn with Jameson’s work on the ‘historicity’ of the science fiction genre.\(^{219}\) Jameson argues that (classic) science fictions do not represent the future, so much as create environments through which the present may be perceived as history.\(^{220}\) Writing in the late 1980s, he contended that

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\text{[i]f catastrophic "near future" visions of, say, overpopulation, famine, or anarchic violence are no longer as effective as they were a few years ago, the weakening of}
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\(^{220}\) Ibid.: 523.
those effects and of the narrative forms that were designed to produce them is not necessarily due only to overfamiliarity and overexposure: it is perhaps also to be seen as a modification in our relationship to those imaginary near futures, which no longer strike us with the horror of otherness and of radical difference... Defamiliarization, the shock of otherness, is a mere aesthetic effect and a lie.\textsuperscript{221}

Jameson concluded that by the mid-1980s, history had become ‘ahistorical’ and the visions of the ‘present as (past) history’ created in classic science fiction were no longer possible.\textsuperscript{222} He wrote that, ‘[p]erhaps, however, what is implied is simply an ultimate historicist breakdown in which we can no longer imagine the future at all.’\textsuperscript{223} Despite a generation passing between Jameson penning these thoughts and the Iterative Dystopia subcycle, these ideas retain relevance. While Jameson’s suggestion that ‘we can no longer imagine the future’ now reads as hyperbole, I find Iterative Dystopias to be more profoundly affecting than the spectacular films of the popular postmillennial future-cycle precisely because they present futures which are not ‘radically different’ from the socio-historical moments of their release. In them, and through them, the future is imagined as an extension of the present. They have dystopian sensibilities. Although Iterative Dystopias articulate visions of ‘catastrophe’, they do so subtly.\textsuperscript{224} Their catastrophes are extrapolated from contemporary realities and positioned as background in the narratives. The effects of climate change, corporate domination of the political sphere and the misuse of military technologies all referred to in these texts are subordinated and the individual’s journey prioritised. Iterative Dystopias present pessimistic, plausible futures. These texts invite contemplation of the real-world present, as the past of the future represented on screen, which need does not rely on the ‘shock of otherness’ that Jameson argues is no longer possible for the science fiction genre.

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.: 525.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{224} Recall that Ulrich Beck identified the ‘anticipation of catastrophe’ as the primary preoccupation of the postmillennial era. Beck, \textit{World at Risk}, 9.
More critical at this juncture however, is Jameson’s concern that history has become ‘ahistorical’. He writes of images of contemporary society imbued with nostalgia. The result of this is that even present-day narratives appear to be ‘set in some indefinable nostalgic past...beyond history’. For Jameson the past and the present are fused in this ahistorical history, such that neither they, nor the future, can be effectively represented. Commensurate with this idea, Iterative Dystopia’s motif of the train is a contemporary image which is, as I have suggested, infused with history. The train is both an object of the Industrial Age and an icon of early cinema. Yet its association with the present-day is not obscured by these nostalgic references, as Jameson’s analysis suggests. In fact, this quality specifically connects the films to the viewer’s real-world present. Moreover, as an image from a film set in the future, the meanings associated with the image are further complicated. This is not an example in which the past is used as ‘temporal central casting’ for the future, in which images and objects from any time or place are able to be substituted for one another. The train is not decoupled from, or disassociated with, its specific (albeit various) temporal references. Rather, the image of the train conflates temporalities (and, in 2046 and Inception additionally confounds space) producing multiple, conflicting meanings simultaneously which are critical to understanding these films. The contradictions expressed through this image of ahistoricity function precisely to connect the films with the real-world present of the subcycle’s assumed viewers, in opposition to Jameson’s concerns.

Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists exist in a state of perpetual liminality. Their diegetic presents are defined by futures which are iterations of their pasts. This fusion of

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225 Jameson uses the example of Lawrence Kasdan’s film Body Heat (1981) to argue that contemporary objects are infused with nostalgia and films working in this mode ‘conspires to blur’ temporal references to the point that ‘we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach.’ Jameson, “The Nostalgia Mode and Nostalgia for the Present,” 24-5.

226 Anthropologist, Arjun Appadurai uses Jameson’s work on nostalgia as a foundation from which to argue that ‘the apparent increasing substitutability of whole periods and postures for one another, in the cultural styles of advanced capitalism, is tied to larger global forces...’ Although Appadurai explores this idea as it relates to the social sphere, his suggestion that Jameson’s argument should be read as resulting the ‘unmooring’ of temporal references and the ‘substitutability’ of images is in conflict with my reading here. Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” 30.
temporalities is captured in the icon of the train. Across this subcycle, the train journey is symbolic of the protagonists’ search for their utopia. Further, the train reflects the qualities of the environments in which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists conduct this search. The image of the train produces multiple, contradictory meanings and in order to comprehensively understand the icon as it functions in the Iterative Dystopia subcycle, the train requires a paradoxical reading. It is a symbol of both the past and the future, and must be read as both at once. These trains are an embodiment of a ‘true contradiction’. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are metaphorically stuck aboard this symbol of mutually exclusive meanings, searching for an alternative. In Iterative Dystopias, the ahistoricity reflected in the image of the train, is itself another element of the ‘undesirable’ nature of the near-future presented in these texts.

To suggest that Iterative Dystopias engage with paradox is an idea which is not unfamiliar in an analysis of this type. Indeed the science fiction genre, with which I have associated this subcycle, has long used paradoxes as causal motivation in its narratives. Time loops (created by characters travelling through time in order to exert influence on events, either preventing them: the ‘grandfather paradox’, or provoking them: the ‘bootstrap paradox’), have been explored prolifically in science fiction narratives since the publication of HG Wells’ *The Time Machine* in 1895. The film genre’s manipulations of these time travel paradoxes are exemplified in classic science fiction films such as the *The Terminator* (1984). Contemporaries of this subcycle include *Minority Report* (2002), *The Time Machine* (2002). More recently, *Looper* (2012), *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014) and *Predestination* (2014) are key examples. In contrast to the subcycle this thesis analyses, each of these films engages with paradox for the purpose of propelling the narrative. The paradoxes are causal. They compel the extraordinary activity through which the characters pursue their goals. While there is some overlap between the impacts these paradoxes

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228 This paradox was named following its description in Nathaniel Schachner’s short story *Ancestral Voices*. Nat Schachner, “Ancestral Voices,” *Astounding Stories* 12, no. 4 (1933).
229 The ‘bootstrap paradox’ is so called in reference to the title of Robert Heinlein’s short story *By His Bootstraps* which was first published under his pen name Anson MacDonald in 1941. Anson MacDonald, “By His Bootstraps,” *Astounding Science Fiction* 28, no. 2 (1941).
have on science fiction’s characters and Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists, in more conventional genre films these paradoxes are extrinsic to the characters’ everyday lives. Paradoxes are not embedded within the characters’ conception of home, the nature of their relationships or their understanding of themselves, as they are here. This is a vital distinction between the films analysed herein and the more common application of paradox within science fiction narratives. In this subcycle of films, the paradoxes represented in the texts are realised in the protagonists’ quotidian experience. Without transcending their perpetually liminal existence, without achieving their utopia, these protagonists cannot escape or evade paradoxes in their everyday lives. These paradoxes are a by-product of their perpetual liminality, not its cause. In each chapter of this thesis, I investigate a different environment in which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists search for stability. It is my contention that the subcycle is unified in its representation of the places in which these searches are conducted as ‘paradoxical’. This conceptualisation of paradox is therefore quite distinct from the ‘causal paradoxes’ conventionally associated with science fiction films. In the remainder of this chapter I offer an overview of paradox defined as a ‘true contradiction’, and foreshadow the specific manner in which I will work with the concept in the coming chapters.

Phillip Wegner’s analysis of Fredric Jameson’s various ‘adventures’ with the concept of utopia offers an appropriate starting point through which to unpack the idea of paradox as true contradiction. Wegner argues that, despite the multiple ways that Jameson works with utopia across his oeuvre, it is fundamentally conceived as a ‘deeply dialectical’ problematic. He writes that, ‘on the one hand, [the problematic of utopia takes] the form of an early well-nigh “negative dialectic,” that maintains utopia is as impossible as it is indispensable; and, on the other hand, [re-emerges] as a pedagogical and transformative

231 The effect of the causal paradox on characters is usually portrayed in science fictions through some impact on their mental health. Consider for example Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1991) which opens with a psychotic Sarah Connor incarcerated in a mental institution, and Tom Cruise’s psychologically strained characters in Vanilla Sky (2001), Minority Report and Edge of Tomorrow. In chapter six I argue that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are unstable (in the sense that they are searching for stability), like many of their counterparts in dystopian narratives, and science fictions more broadly. However, this instability is a result of ‘uncertainty’ and they should therefore be distinguished from the ‘alienated’ protagonist typical within the dystopian form.

This understanding of utopia (which intertwines textual representations with their social impacts) is conceived through oppositions. Utopia is both futile and necessary. It is both optimistic and pessimistic. Wegner goes on to write that,

the force of [Jameson’s] project lies in the way that it takes already existent concepts and theoretical discourses, those of others and himself, and works and re-works them until they begin to emit messages that might appear radically different than those produced in their original contexts. Thus, if we understand the purpose of dialectical thought to be the production of these kinds of transformations, or what Jameson later calls “transcodings,” and recognize that in this process the holding of one idea in mind does not preclude the simultaneous maintenance of its converse, then we can begin to see how what appear as irresolvable dilemmas and apparent dead-ends at one point in the discussion, actually appears [sic] as solutions when we arrive somewhere else.234

Although Jameson’s work on transcoding has far broader application than Wegner suggests here,235 the underlying principle that Wegner identifies in the process: that ‘the holding of one idea in mind does not preclude the simultaneous maintenance of its converse’, provides a foundation for understanding the paradoxes which I read in Iterative Dystopias. Returning to the train motif to illustrate this point, we can follow the logic expressed by Wegner to substantiate the proposition that this icon can appropriately be read as symbolic of the past and the future simultaneously. These oppositional readings are in conflict, but this does not negate either interpretation. On the contrary, they are both necessary. Independently within each film, and across the subcycle as a whole, the

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233 Ibid.
234 Ibid.: 62-3 (my emphasis).
235 Jameson sets out his thoughts on the production of theoretical discourse via the process of transcoding in the conclusion to Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Although it is critical that Jameson’s work is not mis-characterised as simply enabling contradictory meanings to coexist, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the process here. However, his characterisation of transcoding through the analogy “[w]e think we’re walking firmly on solid ground, but the planet is spinning in outer space” is, I would argue, actually a more effective analogy for the complementary meanings considered here than it is for the rhizomic contextual web he is seeking to describe. Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 391-99.
train motif transmits multiple, antithetical meanings, and each is equally important to understanding these texts. In order to effectively read this image, it requires a paradoxical interpretation.

This thesis argues that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are arrested in a state of perpetual liminality. As a result, these characters inhabit environments which I read as paradoxical. I use this term in contrast to ‘ambivalent’, ‘conflicting’, or ‘inconsistent’, as I contend that each of these places requires an interpretation in which mutually exclusive ideas must simultaneously be held to be true. The personal, everyday places in which the subcycle’s protagonists search for utopia are represented as ‘true contradictions’, expressions of paraconsistent logic. Moreover, reading these environments through their antagonistic, internally opposing qualities is both a logical and rational. In order to effectively understand these texts, or more specifically to understand the manner in which the subcycle expresses the effects of perpetual liminality on the protagonists’ life-worlds, I adopt the position that paradoxical interpretations are not merely ‘not precluded’, as Wegner suggests, but are in fact required.

Each of the following chapters of this thesis works independently with the proposition that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists conduct their iterative search for utopia in environments best understood as paradoxical. As such, I investigate the theoretical concepts which structure each chapter individually, preceding my analysis. Common to each chapter, however, is that the study undertaken challenges binary understandings, advocating instead for complementary readings. In chapter four, for example, I consider representations of the characters’ homes as ‘heterotopias’. I reappropriate Michel Foucault’s concept of the ‘counter-space’, which he defined as a location which challenges

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236 Australian philosopher Graham Priest explores the concepts of ‘true contradiction’ and ‘paraconsistent logic’ in his thesis on dialethism. My interest in dialethism here extends only to the representation of logical contradictions within these texts, however, and not further into the specifics of this paradigm which I acknowledge is both contested and contestable. Priest and Berto, “Dialethism.”

237 Priest argues that true contradictions are both ‘logical’ and ‘rational’. In his encyclopaedia entry on the topic, he also surveys some of the arguments which oppose dialethism based on these qualities. Ibid.

238 As detailed in the two translations of Foucault’s original lecture of the subject: Foucault and Miskowiec (trans), “Of Other Spaces.”; Foucault and Hurley (trans), “Different Spaces.”
or deviates from everyday spaces, mapping it specifically onto the quotidian realm. In doing so, my argument that representations of the home within this subcycle are paradoxical reflects and adapts the qualities of conflict and contradiction that Foucault explores through heterotopia. In chapter five I investigate the protagonists’ emotional environments. This chapter explores the characters’ interpersonal relationships through an analysis of their communications. My arguments are based in Fritz Senn’s concept of ‘dislocution’ which I use to characterise the excess of meaning produced in each of the characters’ interactions. These exchanges require a reading able to acknowledge the ongoing negotiation between the oppositional meanings produced within both the spoken word and physical touch in these films. In chapter six I consider the impacts of perpetual liminality on the characters’ minds and argue that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists show marked points of difference from the anxious, alienated protagonists who conventionally reside within the dystopian form. I use Ulrich Beck’s sociological inquiries into what he terms ‘world risk culture’, and more specifically his ideas regarding the nature of ‘uncertainty’, as a springboard for this investigation. Beck contends that in the context of contemporary society the ‘boundary between rationality and hysteria are blurred, as the discordant impulse to mitigate and protect against, indefinable, ‘unknown’ risks takes hold. I read the presence of this idea in the subcycle through the texts’ representations of the protagonists’ minds as contrarily both safe and unsafe, a point which I explore as it manifests within two conventional dystopian sites, memory and surveillance.

Cognisant of the recent proliferation of scholarship which has invoked the concept of liminality, this chapter has used as its foundation Arpad Szakolczai’s concept of permanent liminality to develop an innovative approach to reading the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. Specifically I have argued that paradoxical representations of place in each of the texts analysed are the observable effects of the protagonists’ perpetual liminality. Each of this subcycle’s protagonists is searching for a way out of his iterative cycle of quotidian experience. As Szakolczai’s analysis leads me to conclude, the utopia that these characters

239 Senn, *Joyce’s Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation.*
240 Beck, *World at Risk.*
desire is one in which their world is once again ‘concrete’. Against conventional representations in the science fiction genre, this life of continuous transition and uncertain play is not precipitated by a causal paradox, but rather results in the proliferation of them. Across the remaining chapters of this thesis, I interrogate the nature of three sources of potential stability, each place more intimate than the last: the protagonists’ homes, their relationships and their minds. Working with the concepts of heterotopia, dislocution and uncertainty, this thesis will demonstrate that these everyday environments share a common characteristic. These places require a reading that acknowledges an overproduction of meaning and is able to embrace the conflicts that result. These places are representations of true contradictions and it through an analysis which focuses on these paradoxes that the primary characteristics of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle can be discerned.

\[242\] Thomassen, “Revisting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” 31; Szakolczai, “Citizenship and Home: Political Allegiance and Its Background.”
CHAPTER FOUR: There’s no place like home

[The] house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them...

_The Poetics of Space,_ Gaston Bachelard

_Inception’s_ Dom Cobb wants to go home. His narrative journey is an odyssey, a classical quest to return to his nuclear family ideal. He desires nothing more than to see his children’s faces again. In _Code 46_, the protagonist, William, is depicted as constantly seeking to construct, and connect to, his home(s). He wants to share space with a wife, a mother, a lover. Like Cobb, he is willing to cross borders and commit crimes to achieve this goal. In contrast, _2046_ sustains a concept of home defined through its protagonist’s insistence on ‘homelessness’._ Desperate to create a sense of stability, Chow withdraws to a hotel room, alone. There he dreams of the security which lies in a train journey from which he cannot alight. Despite their differing representations of the home and their varying narrative concerns, each of these characters is looking for a place of comfort and refuge. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are searching for a place to call home, the foundation from which they might build a path out of their perpetual liminality. Across this postmillennial subcycle these characters conduct an iterative search for this utopia. Fittingly, however, the homes that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists desire are inflected with the double meaning enshrined etymologically by Thomas More in the concept of utopia. They are ‘good places’, which are also ‘no place’._ The places of solidity that they

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244 Bjørn Thomassen relates homelessness to the concept of liminality through ‘tricksters’ who he characterises as ‘non-beings who appear out of blue [sic], inserting an element of novelty and uncertainty into a well-established social situation.’ He argues that, ‘since they are at home in liminality—in homelessness—their real interest often lies in perpetuating, rather than resolving, conditions of confusion and ambivalence.’ In this, Thomassen’s conceptualisation of this state is, once again, quite distinct from my own. Thomassen, “Thinking with Liminality: To the Boundaries of an Anthropological Concept,” 53.

245 My reading of the home as a paradoxical place aligns directly with the origins of the concept of utopia. In 1516, Thomas More coined the term ‘utopia’ intentionally seeking to craft a word with double meaning. Playing with its ancient Greek etymology, More created an English homophone combining ‘ou’ (no) and ‘topos’ (place) to create ‘outopia’, a word meaning ‘nowhere’ or ‘not
are searching for are depicted as fluid, contradictory places of uncertainty. Iterative Dystopia’s homes are rendered as mobile spaces. While for the protagonists in these texts ‘there is no place like home’, unlike Dorothy, they do not get to wake up surrounded by the people and the things that they love, realising that their experiences in Oz were all a dream. Instead, these characters are resigned to making their homes in paradoxical spaces.

Using Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, this chapter explores Iterative Dystopia’s representations of the home as places which undermine binaries. It argues that the everyday spaces in which these characters reside must be understood through their conflicts and contradictions. It is an unconventional application of Foucault’s ideas and I use it to focus my consideration of four questions: how can the subcycle’s homes be characterised, where can they be located geographically, what do they look like architecturally and, finally, in response to this analysis, who does this subcycle designate as home? Taking as my starting point once again the motif of the train, I consider how these characters must travel (and be travelling) in order to locate their homes. I argue that the subcycle’s protagonists exhibit a markedly increased capacity for movement while ultimately having nowhere to go. It is only in transition that these perpetually liminal characters feel at home. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists’ heterotopic homes are represented on screen as ‘non-places’, a reading which introduces conflicting ideas of risk and ritual, refuge and escape, exploration and exile. The geographies in which these texts locate their homes directly respond to this idea. Extrapolating the characteristics of place’, which was equally and simultaneously a ‘good place’ (‘eutopia’, ‘eu’ meaning ‘good’ or ‘well’). In doing so, he captured the contradictions embedded in attempts to create these ‘good’ places: the desirability and the undesirability; the possibility and the impossibility; which have fascinated scholars ever since. Iterative Dystopias are the distant, mutated, offspring of More’s work, and through their depictions of the home, More’s original spatial paradox is highlighted as essential to understanding these films. Thomas More, *Utopia*, Penguin Classics (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

246 For a further articulation of the relationship between the home and solidity, or the ‘concreteness’ of place, see my discussion of the subject in chapter three and Szakolczai, “Citizenship and Home: Political Allegiance and Its Background.”; Thomassen, “Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” 31. I consider the characters’ uncertain response to their environment in chapter six.

247 *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)

248 *Augé, Non-Places.*
Marc Augé’s non-places onto the films’ landscapes, I investigate the subcycle’s representations of the physical environments in which its characters’ homes are located. Developing the concept of the polycity, I argue that, in these texts, real-world geographic spaces are depicted as interchangeable for these characters, and explore how each illustration works with, and against, conventional filmic representations of the dystopian urbanscape to further this idea. In the final section, I argue that the architectures in which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists construct their homes are also heterotopic. These places conflate the public and the private realms. Unable to close the door and be at home, these characters perform their everyday exposed to the world, living their lives in ‘dolls houses’. Across the Iterative Dystopia subcycle, the home— as place, geography and architecture—is a focal point for the texts’ narrative explorations of their protagonists’ quotidian existence. These perpetually liminal characters strive throughout each film to establish and restore their homes. Each space called home is, however, a heterotopic place, a location that at once anchors and denies Iterative Dystopia’s characters’ access to a glimmer of utopian hope.

Locating the postmillennial home

In the preface to his 1966 book, *The Order of Things*, Foucault first articulated his concept of the heterotopia as a disturbing, or undermining space which ‘make[s] it impossible to name this and that’. Heterotopias, he wrote, ‘shatter or tangle common names’ and ‘destroy “syntax” in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to “hold together”.’

The result, Foucault held, is an anxiety which is predicated on the instability of the ground upon which classifications must be situated. Thus, linguistic heterotopias threaten not only the relationship between words and meaning, but also the frameworks in which communications are understood. Over the course of the next two years, Foucault revisited the concept of heterotopia twice and

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250 Foucault defines ‘classification’ as the development of a system of elements. Ibid., xviii.
extended it beyond the linguistic realm, mapping it onto ‘lived’ spaces.\footnote{The first of these instances was in a broadcast on France Culture radio in December 1966, a transcript of which was recently published as: ———, Les Corps Utopique - Les Hétérotopies, Introduction by Daniel Defert (Fécamp: Nouvelles Editions Lignes, 2009). No English translation has been published to date. Foucault furthered his exploration of the idea in a guest lecture to the Cercle d’études architecturales. A transcript of this lecture has been published in two different English translations: Foucault and Miskowiec (trans), “Of Other Spaces.”; Foucault and Hurley (trans), “Different Spaces,” 175-85.} In this conceptual evolution, Foucault formulated heterotopias as places which challenged or deviated from everyday spaces. These ‘counter-spaces’\footnote{In his translation of Foucault’s original texts, Miskowiec refers to heterotopias as ‘counter-sites’ which are real sites ‘in which all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.’ Foucault and Miskowiec (trans), “Of Other Spaces,” 24. Hurley’s translation avoids the use of the term ‘counter-site’ in an awkward passage which refers to ‘real emplacements’ which are ‘outside all places, although they are actually localizable.’ Foucault and Hurley (trans), “Different Spaces,” 178. Here, I follow Peter Johnson’s analysis of the two translations in my use of the term ‘counter-space’, in order to capture Foucault’s insistence on the real, physically locatable, aspect of heterotopia (as opposed to the ‘placeless’ or fantastic nature of utopia against which he ambiguously contrasts this idea, as will be discussed). Peter Johnson, “Unravelling Foucault’s ‘Different Spaces’,” History of the Human Sciences, no. 4 (2006).} undermined the binary oppositions through which space was traditionally conceived, while additionally disrupting an individual’s relationship to these places. His examples were diverse. Foucault explored boarding schools and honeymoon hotels, gardens and cemeteries, psychiatric homes and retirement villages.\footnote{Foucault and Miskowiec (trans), “Of Other Spaces.”} It is heterotopia’s characteristic of ‘double disruption’, common to both these expressions of the concept, which is essential to my reading of the diegetic places analysed in this chapter. Captured in Foucault’s concept is an erosion of the oppositions through which ‘space’ as a physical entity is conceived, alongside subversions and frustrations of ‘place’ (by which I mean the relationship between the individual and space). It is this two-fold challenge which heterotopias present that is fundamental in my contention that Iterative Dystopia’s homes are paradoxical places.

Heterotopia’s quality of double disruption is significant to understanding Iterative Dystopia’s homes, as I define ‘home’ in this thesis as more than a physical structure, in accordance with sociological convention. These diegetic places are ‘a category of phenomena that are at once both concrete and abstract’.\footnote{David N. Benjamin, David Stea, and Eje Arén, eds., The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings and Environments (Aldershot, England; Brookfield, USA: Avebury, 1995), 2.} The places in which these
protagonists reside are not simply physical habitats ‘but include[s] concepts of dwelling and affection’. These characters make their homes in ‘places’ (in the Foucauldian sense), biographical spaces which must be understood with reference to a sense of ‘intimacy’ and ‘subjectivity’. For this subcycle’s protagonists

[Home is an individualized dwelling...not merely an object or a building, but a diffuse and complex condition, which integrates memories and images, desires and fears, the past and the present. [Their homes are]...a set of rituals, personal rhythms and routines of everyday life.]

As this subcycle’s protagonists undertake their iterative journeys in search of a place to belong, they reside in environments which are defined by both physical and emotional connections. Moreover, for these protagonists, home is at once actual and ideal. They are attempting to return home, seeking utopia in a place which they continually create anew.

In addition, in concert with real-world functionality, Iterative Dystopia’s homes operate as the structures through which these characters comprehend their everyday experience. As social anthropologist Marianne Gullestad identifies, home ‘brings together in one notion both the idea of a place and the idea of a social togetherness associated with this


256 Peter Johnson argues that ‘Foucault uses ‘place’ when there is a sense of intimacy of subjectivity...’ Johnson, “Unravelling Foucault’s ‘Different Spaces’,” 77. This thesis acknowledges that the definition of the word ‘place’ is hotly contested within the field of geography. It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider these debates in detail, however. For an overview of issues surrounding the definition of place Tim Cresswell’s work offers a comprehensive starting point. Cresswell argues that the study of ‘place’ is human geography, the consideration of ‘subjective’ spaces imbued with a sense of personal or cultural identity. For a contrasting perspective see, for example, Edward Soja who argues that the distinction between space and place is at best arbitrary and possibly misleading. He argues that Lefebvre’s use of the term ‘lived space’ in combination with ‘everyday life’ more effectively conveys the concept of subjective space. Tim Cresswell, Place: A Short Introduction (Malden, USA: Blackwell, 2005); Edward W. Soja, Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places (Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1996), 40.

place...[it is also] a physical and abstract framework within which we conceive of and interpret both domestic life, and activities outside the home.\textsuperscript{258} For each of the subcycle’s protagonists, home represents a sense of domestic (and domesticated) security, the physical manifestation of a sense of belonging. Equally, it is the location through which they attempt to understand their perpetually liminal experience. An anchor in absence, ‘home’ is the utopia against which they evaluate their everyday. This conjugate understanding, informed by sociology, is key to reading Iterative Dystopia’s representations of the home as heterotopic. These places are a location of belonging, a physical and emotional dwelling, both actual and ideal. Equally, the home is the foundation through which this subcycle’s protagonists seek to interpret and transform their everyday. It is at each of these levels, both concrete and abstract, that Iterative Dystopias depict the home as a place of conflict and contradiction.

Reading Iterative Dystopia’s representations of home as Foucauldian heterotopic places is a notably unorthodox application of the concept.\textsuperscript{259} The home is, after all, not a ‘counter-space’. It is the quintessential space of the everyday. Indeed, this thesis specifically argues that the theme of perpetually liminality which coheres this subcycle of films is articulated in its protagonists’ \textit{quotidien} experience in, and of, their environments. Furthermore, it is not my intention to suggest that the representations of home in these films are in themselves aberrant rather, that under the conditions of perpetual liminality, these

\textsuperscript{258} Benjamin, Stea, and Arén, eds., \textit{The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings and Environments}, 297-8.

\textsuperscript{259} Mis/Re-appropriations of Foucault’s concept of heterotopia and its disorderly application in this vein are not uncommon. As political geographer Edward Soja points out, the value of Foucault’s concept lies precisely in the challenge it presents to conventional modes of spatial thinking. He writes that ‘[Foucault’s heterotopias] are not just “other spaces” to be added on to the geographical imagination, they are also “other than” the established ways of thinking spatially. They are meant to detonate, to deconstruct, not to be comfortably poured back into old containers.’ Soja, \textit{Thirdspace}, 163. Indeed, it is likely due to its malleable ambiguities that the concept has shown such resilience over the half-century since the release of this work. Provoking criticism and praise, the concept of heterotopia retains its appeal to those investigating space from a range of critical perspectives, with recent works invoking the concept including: Michiel Dehaene and Lieven de Cauter, \textit{Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society}, Ebl (Oxon: Routledge, 2008); Arun Saldanha, ‘Heterotopia and Structuralism,’ \textit{Environment and Planning A} 40, no. 9 (2008). Joan Gordon uses the heterotopia specifically in the context of science fiction analysis in her article: Joan Gordon, “Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville’s “Perdido Street Station”,” \textit{Science Fiction Studies} 30, no. 3 (2003).
everyday places take on the characteristics of the divergent spaces Foucault called heterotopia. Iterative Dystopia’s homes are paradoxical places. These homes ‘suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect,’ representing, suspending, contesting and contradicting those sites. They are places which are both open and closed, isolated but penetrable, and it is these qualities that are emphasised in my reading of the physical constructs—the non-places—in which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists reside. They are equally integral to my analysis of the interior architectures in which these characters make their homes. Additionally, the polycity in which I locate the characters' homes geographically is a juxtaposition of several incompatible spaces in a single real space, aligning it too with Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. It is, as I have argued, precisely through the paradoxical representations of space within these texts that we are able to identify and investigate the places of perpetual liminality. Despite the uncustomary nature of this application of Foucault’s ideas, this chapter will demonstrate that the diegetic places in which these characters enact their everyday lives are best understood as heterotopic.

In light of the fact that Foucault articulates heterotopia as ‘counter-space’, assigning it the status of ‘outside’ or ‘absolutely different’, it is interesting to note that he chooses to punctuate his thesis with illustrations of which many are decidedly prosaic. My claim that the quotidian places in which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists reside are heterotopic may therefore not be quite as capricious as it initially appears. One of the examples of

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261 Johnson points out that despite the brevity of his elucidations of the concept, Foucault uses a dizzying array of verbs to describe the structure of heterotopic space, as is evident in this quote. Johnson, "Unravelling Foucault’s ‘Different Spaces’", 78.
262 Foucault’s fifth principle of heterotopia, see Foucault and Miskowiec (trans), "Of Other Spaces," 26.
263 Although I argue that this characteristic is key to understanding the geographies of perpetually liminal experience, it should be noted that a number of the examples that Foucault offers in support of this assertion, such as the theatre and the cinema, align with Victor Turner’s thesis on the ‘liminoid’ as opposed to the liminal. Ibid.: 25. As noted in chapter three, Bjørn Thomassen describes the liminoid as a ‘break from normality, a playful as-if experience’, thus distinguishing it utterly from the unavoidable, ‘undesirable’ liminal experience. Thomassen, "Revisting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces," 28.
264 Foucault and Miskowiec (trans), "Of Other Spaces," 24.
heterotopia Foucault offers is the space of children’s play, drawing heavily on this idea in one of his radio broadcasts to demonstrate his concept. He stated at length,

These counter-spaces, these locally realised utopias, are well recognised by children. Certainly, it’s the bottom of the garden; it’s the Indian tent erected in the middle of the attic; or still, it’s Thursday afternoons on their parent’s bed. It is on that bed where they discover the ocean, as they can swim between the covers, and the bed is also the sky, or they can bounce on the springs; it’s the forest as they can hide there; or still, it’s night as they can become ghosts between the sheets and, finally, it’s the delight, as their parents come home, as they will be scalded.265

In accordance with Foucault’s original ideas, therefore, places of children’s play—the spaces in which they perform their everyday lives—are heterotopic. These places are at once real and imagined, sources of delight and uncertainty. Importantly too, these heterotopias are the spaces in which children routinely play on their ‘Thursday afternoons’. On this basis I conclude that it is less outlandish that it might initially appear to suggest that Iterative Dystopia’s homes may be conceived as heterotopic. As I have argued, this subcycle’s perpetually liminal protagonists perform their everyday. Like the children in Foucault’s example, for whom a bed can be both the sea and the sky, Iterative Dystopia’s characters construct and re-construct their homes as they iteratively seek their utopia.

Moreover, Foucault’s description of heterotopia through children’s play identifies a relationship to utopia which is significant to my work here. As his thesis on heterotopia developed, Foucault was decidedly equivocal on this point, however. Heterotopias are at once antagonistic to, and in allegiance with, utopia. The spaces mirror each other in that, while each is a site which ‘contradict[s] all other sites’ within its ‘cluster’ or ‘network’ of relations; ‘[u]topias are sites with no real place...They present society itself in a perfected

265 This passage was sourced in English from http://www.heterotopiastudies.com/heterotopias-childrens-locally-realised-utopias/ translated by Peter Johnson (2012). It is published in isolation and, as has been noted, no complete translation of Foucault’s 1966 radio broadcasts has yet been published in English. Complete transcripts of the original broadcasts were published in French in 2009. Foucault, Les Corps Utopique - Les Hétérotopies, Introduction by Daniel Defert.
form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case...utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces,' whereas, he argued, heterotopias are ‘real sites...outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality...a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live’.\textsuperscript{266} For the protagonists in this postmillennial subcycle of films, the heterotopic home functions precisely as a site of ‘contestation’ which bares a disrupted (and disruptive) relationship to utopia. The homes illustrated in these texts exist in the conflict between two clichés: the home is both where these protagonists lay their heads and where their hearts are. Furthermore, home is at once the places of their iterative quotidian experience and the utopian spaces they covert. As a physical structure, an emotional dwelling, the anchor for a sense of belonging or the structure through which to interpret experience, Iterative Dystopia’s homes are heterotopic: places of conflict and contradiction.

The perpetually liminal protagonists of this filmic subcycle live in a paradoxical environment. This chapter analyses the texts’ diegetic representations of the home as places which require complementary readings. Foucault’s concept of heterotopia offers a starting point through which to conduct this investigation. Mapping heterotopia’s qualities onto the quotidian realm is an unconventional application of these ideas but, as I have argued, the places in which Iterative Dystopia’s characters conduct their everyday lives erode oppositions, thereby sharing the characteristics of Foucault’s counter-spaces. These homes undermine binaries ‘invert[ing] the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect’.\textsuperscript{267} Furthermore, the concept of heterotopia facilitates access to the ‘double-disruption’ of space that I read in these diegetic places. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists make their homes in places that are at once concrete and abstract, both space itself and the protagonists’ experience in, and of, it are disturbed. These protagonists spiral through their narratives searching for a place to belong, seeking utopia in heterotopic places.

\textsuperscript{266} Foucault and Miskowiec (trans), “Of Other Spaces,” 24.
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid.
‘We’re off to see the Wizard’: travel is home

There’s no room for tourists on these jobs Mr Saito Cobb, *Inception*

Where heterotopias, for Foucault, were othered, separated or differentiated spaces, in this subcycle of films the characteristics of the heterotopic space—the inappropriate, incompatible juxtapositions of, for example, the real and the imagined, the isolated but permeable—are evident in the spaces of the everyday. The ‘in between’ nature of the traditionally liminal experience is rendered as ongoing as the characters perpetually oscillate within, or between, liminal places. The heterotopic space is not just ‘close to home’, or proximate to the protagonists’ quotidian experience, it *is* home. The characteristics of contradiction and conflict are ingrained in the foundations of home itself. Across their narrative arc, Iterative Dystopia’s characters search for the opportunity to (re)establish ‘meaningful background structures’ upon which to found a life beyond perpetual liminality. Each character desires stability, the sense of belonging associated with ‘home’. In pursuit of a glimmer of this utopian hope which lies within their everyday life-worlds, they attempt to ‘re-concrete’ their environments. The places which the subcycle’s protagonists inhabit are, however, represented as paradoxical. As a result, the characters are denied the comfort and refuge they seek and they spiral toward their film’s ambiguous conclusions. Arguably the most obvious manner in which this subcycle of texts represents the protagonists’ experience of perpetual liminality spatially is via their relationship to their homes as disturbed and displaced through travel. In each location, Iterative Dystopia’s characters are simultaneously at home and away, foreign and familiar. Home is everywhere and nowhere.

The subcycle’s motif of the train once again provides a convenient point from which to begin investigating the idea of home as a paradoxical place within the texts. As I noted in

268 Thomassen, “Revisting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” 31, as discussed in chapter three.
269 Ibid., 31.
chapter three, these protagonists are lost, while knowing where they are. They are arrested while in perpetual motion, simultaneously desiring an exit, the chance to find a way home, while acknowledging that the train is in fact their comfortable refuge. The ritualistic reoccurrence of each character’s time on the train is critical to this understanding. The train is a symbol that is at once hopeful and hopeless. In Inception, while Cobb gets off the Japanese bullet train at will, he carries a freight train inside him and can therefore never part from it. It careens through his Paris dream-streets without the need for tracks and barrels toward his wife Mal, as she lies prostrate on railway tracks at multiple moments throughout the film. This image is reminiscent of the damsel in distress from the early days of silent cinema.\textsuperscript{270} In contrast to the historical scenes it references, however, in this context it is unclear whether these characters can ever be rescued from the impact(s) of the train, and moreover, Inception is equivocal as to who is expected to save whom from the impending catastrophe. For William and Maria in Code 46, it is inconsequential how many times Maria alights from her ‘birthday train’, she must continually get back on it—William is always already there waiting for her. This dream-train is an uncertain refuge, concrete only in its capacity to continue both characters’ seemingly endless search for home. Tak, by comparison, speaks of returning from 2046 and is pictured presumably purchasing a return-trip ticket. The sound and image of this interaction contradict each other, however. While Tak’s ticket is sold to him by a character embodied by the owner of the hotel in which his alter-ego/creator Chow resides and thus offers an obvious link to ‘home’, the voiceover acknowledges that no one has ever come back. For these characters, each episode in their iterative travels more effectively establishes them as ‘at home’ on their trains, ritualistically returning to their existence in these spaces of transition.

That Iterative Dystopias paradoxically compel their protagonists to travel, or be travelling, in order to feel a sense of belonging can be read as an engagement with the socio-cultural debates around the nature of home which preceded the films’ release. These ideas did not originate on screen. The changing, challenged and challenging relationship between the individual and place has been an ongoing focus of scholarship around

\textsuperscript{270} See for example The Adventures of Kathlyn (1913 and 1916) and Hazards of Helen (1914–17).
liminality since ‘globalisation’, and these ideas have reverberated in popular culture. As early as the mid-1990s, art historian Okwui Enwezor identified a sense of ‘alienated placelessness’ in contemporary African artistic communities. He argued that the globalised market required artists to ‘travel both at home and abroad...physically and psychically [in order to] migrate in between the pixelated and information-saturated sites of the cyberworld, and inhabit the complex matrices of popular culture...’271 Observing these changes to art practice Enwezor specifically questioned whether liminality could be conceived as temporary in a globalised world. Similarly, Hamid Naficy wrote that through the burgeoning electronic developments which metaphorically enabled people to travel while at home, globalisation had rendered ‘people the world over...always already transnational’.272 He argued however, that transnational filmmakers—those working outside their native homelands—were more representative of the characteristics he associated with liminality. These artists could be exiled without leaving home, existing in a state in which deprivation was balanced against wanderlust. Transnational filmmakers experienced a liminality in which the yearning to escape complemented the desire to return home.273 It is the internally-contradictory characterisation of home defined in, and through, travel that these authors correlate with real-world liminal experiences which is evinced in these texts. Aboard the trains which journey across this subcycle, the characters in each film travel physically and psychically. They are at home while away, and away while at home.

In addition, the liminality which Enwezor and Naficy identify in the contradictory conceptualisation of place has more recently been divorced from any ‘exclusive’ affiliations with particular communities, thereby augmenting the connection between their ideas and Iterative Dystopia’s filmic representations. In Ulrich Beck’s ‘individualisation’ thesis, I find evidence that the paradoxical experience of home has become the purview

271 Okwui Enwezor, ‘Between Localism and Worldliness’ in Amor et al., eds., *Liminalities*.
273 Ibid., 124-25.
of quotidian life for the assumed viewer of these films. Beck suggests that contemporary life is

a travelling life, both literally and metaphorically, a nomadic life, a life spent in cars, aeroplanes and trains, on the telephone or the internet, supported by the mass media, a transnational life stretching across frontiers...Globalization of biography means place polygamy; people are wedded to several places at once. Placepolygamous ways of living are translated biographies: they have to be constantly translated both for oneself and for others, so that they can continue as in-between lives.

Together these scholars from disparate backgrounds elucidate a real-world liminality which can be recognised in, and observed through, the home. Each author argues that the experience of being ‘in transition’ has become dominant within a globalised world, whether this is temporary or ongoing, chosen or imposed. As a result the concept of ‘home’ has become intertwined with the experience of travel, resulting in a sense of belonging which must integrate absence. The subcycle of films this thesis investigates extrapolates from these ideas, manipulating the sociological hypotheses in the imaginative realm. Each text offers a dystopian representation of this contemporary experience of living ‘in between’, presenting liminality as both unavoidable and perpetual.

274 It should be noted that Beck’s ‘individualization’ thesis specifically attempts to characterise sociological experience in the ‘West’. There is thus difficulty in comfortably associating his findings with the ‘assumed viewer’ of a subcycle which includes films directed by Asian filmmakers. I argue that it is appropriate in this instance, for two reasons. First, in an address delivered at the Guangzhou Triennial in 2008 Beck defined the ‘West’ as any location which is occupied ‘managing risks that it itself has produced’, excluding only ‘less safe’ regions such as ‘the war torn regions of Africa, Afghanistan or the Middle East’. Second, while Beck also counterpointed Communist China as ‘non-Western’ in this speech, he did so in the context of a global art fair held in China which I argue fundamentally undermines the classification of experience based on an individual’s native geographic location. While it is well beyond the scope of this thesis to interrogate these ideas in detail, I would suggest that, with these concerns acknowledged, Beck’s characterisation of ‘contemporary life’ is able to be extrapolated to the urbanised, assumed viewer of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. Beck, “Risk Society’s ‘Cosmopolitan Moment’.”

275 The idea of ‘translation’ raised here is a valuable one and will be explored further in chapter five as it pertains to perpetually liminal communication. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences, Theory, Culture & Society (London; Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage, 2002), 25.
The Iterative Dystopia subcycle visually renders its protagonists as homeless at home and at home in their homelessness. In their state of perpetual liminality they are travelling to find home, but must travel to be home.

On screen, the idea that Iterative Dystopia’s characters are at home in travel is illustrated by the films continuously locating them in spaces that Marc Augé has termed ‘non-places’. Following Certeau, Augé defines these (real-world) spaces as those which are unconcerned with continuity, existing outside any historical relationship between individual(s) and space. Non-places are ‘functional not lyrical’,276 ‘spaces [which are] formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure)’.277 It is these locations which exemplify the spatial dimension of ‘supermodernity’, the moniker Augé attributes to a ‘globalised’ experience in which ‘somewhat paradoxically [an] excess of space is correlative with the shrinking of the planet’.278 Non-places therefore are icons which represent both the ‘spectacular acceleration of means of transport’ and the changes in perception of global scale that epitomise this age.279 Architect, Edwin Heathcote has recently digested these rather dense ideas, writing that non-places are places which ‘we have learned to dimly despise...airports and offices,...malls and motorways, places that are everywhere and nowhere, places that are globally familiar and unnervingly similar’.280 This description resonates particularly with Wong Kar-Wai’s depiction of the future in 2046. The only place is the train carriage. The only spaces are the endlessly looping tracks on which the train might travel. The interior of the train is lit either with the stark, fluorescent white light of the shopping centre, or multi-story office tower; or it is filtered through primary colours reminiscent of emergency lights on a dark night. In each case the effect is alienating, both for the character and the viewer. Tak is at once exposed and isolated. He is claustrophobic in the open. He is compelled to perpetually enact his everyday—eating, sleeping, loving, playing—in the non-place of the train carriage. In the brief glimpses which suggest a world outside the train’s carriages may actually exist in 2046 (if only in Tak’s imagination), Tak is occasionally displaced into

276 Augé, Non-Places, esp. 77-82.
277 Ibid., 94.
278 Ibid., 31.
279 Ibid., 34.
locations which conflate this future space with his creator Chow’s present-rendered-future and/or an intertextual past. We are afforded a brief glimpse of the door of room 2046 in the Oriental Hotel being closed by Tak’s robot lover. Later Tak’s robot is seen ascending in a hotel lift, an image which is evocative of a classic science fiction space of transition, the Bradbury Building’s wrought iron elevator, used most prominently in Blade Runner. Rather than diminishing the representation of perpetual liminality, the suggestion that Tak is potentially able to venture outside his train carriage (without logically transitioning him to these spaces) redoubles the impact. Should he be able to leave, should he choose to alight from the train, his only other option is to inhabit other non-spaces. Moreover these locations are not even temporally fixed, but floating between the past, the present and the future. In this text, the journey is clearly articulated as the destination, an endless transition, a passage to nowhere.

Both Inception and Code 46 share 2046’s fascination with non-places, though their representations are somewhat less stylized than Wong’s. Similar to 2046, these Iterative Dystopias manipulate the train as a device to further the narrative. They are equally open to readings of the locomotive in which it is characterised as a ‘residence’ defined through and by its interstitial nature. The train is, as I have discussed, a motif which effectively expresses the characters’ perpetual liminality. These films differ, however, in that they situate their protagonists in a dazzling array of non-places in addition to the train. They thereby emphasize the crucial role travel plays in understanding these protagonists’ daily lives. In making use of a wider selection of locations which fall within Augé’s definition, following Beck, I argue that these narratives more directly correlate with the assumed viewer’s present (thereby ratifying their position as a dystopian extrapolation). These films visually articulate Augé’s idea that

non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified—with the aid of a few conversions between area, volume and distance—by totalling all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called ‘means of transport’ (aircraft, trains and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains,
leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space... 281

Augé concludes that these non-places ‘are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten.’ 282 Within this subcycle of films, the association between the protagonist and the non-place is vital to understanding to understanding the role of space in the dystopian extrapolation. Moreover, in the palimpsestic nature of these spaces that Augé identifies—their overwhelming similarity which obscures differences and the variations which prove their interchangeability—these spaces are the logical locations for the subcycle’s protagonists to conduct their iterative search for utopia. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists move between the non-places of global travel without changing location. They find themselves at home in these heterotopias.

Michael Winterbottom makes particularly effective use of the non-places specifically identified by Augé in *Code 46*. For almost half of this film, 283 characters are depicted checking into or out of airports and seated on airplanes, waiting in subway stations or travelling on trains, driving on multi-lane highways, riding escalators or in elevators and roaming bustling commercial streetscapes. The prominence given to these usually transitory spaces is heightened by the beauty with which these scenes are captured. Of particular note is the scene in which William is depicted, centred in the frame, travelling on one of twelve escalators which together form a cross-hatched backdrop for William’s attempt to contact his mistress (Maria) after their initial meeting. Using this combined technique of undue prominence and unexpected beauty, the viewer’s attention is drawn to the unconsidered places of the everyday. It is in spaces such as these that William, alongside his compatriots across the cycle, is compelled (and compels himself) to make his home. Equally, the diegetic present of *Inception* inhabited by the protagonist Dom Cobb, is located almost entirely in non-places. His narrative unfolds across a myriad of non-places, most prominently on a transcontinental flight between Sydney and LA, on a

282 Ibid.
283 Approximately 36 minutes in 85 minute screen time.
bullet train travelling between Kyoto and Tokyo, and in a disused Los Angeles warehouse masquerading as an empty factory somewhere in Paris. It is in these spaces that he experiences the banal realities of his everyday. These are the places in which he lives. It is in spaces of transition that Cobb is at his most vulnerable, in the most public of places that he is most alone and isolated, for it is in these non-places Cobb chooses to sleep.

Unlike Augé, however, I would not argue that the measure of the importance of these spaces of transition is quantifiable through their prevalence, though they are clearly the dominant spaces in these protagonists' lives. Nor would I argue that merely existing in non-places is sufficient to commute them with the value of 'home'. There is real risk in narratives of this type that the concept of home could be eliminated entirely, the characters cast adrift on an anti-utopian perpetual liminality devoid of all hope. What is telling, however, is that the protagonists across this subcycle with dystopian sensibilities seek travel as a means of defining their relationship to home. It is in the travel that they find themselves at home. For Tak this is due to the absence of alternative. He is born (in his author’s imagination) to forever be at home on the train travelling to and from 2046. Comparatively, Cobb travels to create anew the (impossible) home he desires with his family, he travels to return to the home he once had. It is only in and through this continuous transition that he can be at home. It is only Code 46's William, it could be argued, who has a home which ‘exists’ though he repudiates it. He shares a space with a wife and child in Seattle. It would then follow that William chooses (or is compelled) to exist in a heterotopic counter-space. Yet the existence of this counterpoint serves to highlight, rather than nullify, the relevance of my argument that in this subcycle, perpetual liminality is expressed through travel that is home. As William enters the space of his character-less, high-rise, familial apartment, he is depicted as less in command of his situation, less ‘at home’, than at any time throughout his travel. It is a home which is constructed and furnished with ambivalence. His family orbits with little reference to him (no doubt due to his ongoing, protracted business travel). Even the icons of stability, refuge and comfort—his family—are preoccupied with transition. This idea is tellingly illustrated through William's son who is beguiled by all forms of transport. He is pictured in the kitchen with his mother upon William's arrival home from his business trip playing with a toy aerofoil. On the occasions his father has time to spend with him, William offers
to read his son’s mind (an undertaking which conflates business performance with personal game play). His son, focused no doubt on both the mechanics of travel and his father’s ostensibly frequent and prolonged absences responds that he is thinking of ‘bicycles’ and ‘boats’.

Iterative Dystopias depict an understanding of home which is inseparable from that of travel. This relationship is not merely conflicting or incongruous, but paradoxical. Without travel—without the distance constituted through either exile, escape, or both—these protagonists are unable to achieve any sense of stability. Their narratives position them as constantly in transition, tracing an iterative path towards the distant utopian horizon within. Their only refuge is found in continuous motion. This subcycle’s homes can therefore be read as heterotopic spaces. These places exhibit the conflicted, contradictory natures that Foucault found in ‘othered’ sites. Here, however, these characteristics are mapped onto the characters’ everyday experience. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists live in a paradox in which home is constituted in, and through, travel. This idea is expressed on screen by texts which compel their protagonists to reside in locations that Marc Augé has identified as non-places. It is on trains, in the air and whilst traversing through anonymous corporate monoliths such as factories and high-rise buildings, that these characters sleep, love and go about their daily routines. They journey to find home and to be at home. It is through an antithetical conception of space that Iterative Dystopias represent its characters’ perpetual liminality.

In light of the previous analysis, it is unsurprising that the relationship between the home and physical space in Iterative Dystopias is complex. As I have argued, the spatial forms adapted and adopted as ‘home’ by the protagonists in this subcycle are complicated by a conception of place defined through its paradoxical relationship to movement. In the forthcoming analysis I will demonstrate that mapping Foucault’s ideas into the quotidian realm, and recognising the home as a heterotopic space, has implications both for where the Iterative Dystopia subcycle locates its homes geographically and how it constructs them architecturally. Further, it raises the question as to whether there is merit in contemplating a concept of home defined entirely through relationships rather than space, and I will consider each of these issues in turn. It is clear that, when considering
‘where’ the homes of Iterative Dystopia’s perpetually liminal protagonists might be located, the discussion must begin with a location in which non-places proliferate. It must also take into account the overarching dystopian sensibilities of these texts. The logical place to commence this analysis, therefore, is the city.

Constructing the dystopian polycity

The postmillennial cycle of futuristic films is notably fascinated with the city. Indeed, many of the films in this cycle treat the city as an additional character, encapsulating the film’s mood and furthering its narrative. This positions them as direct descendents of the ‘cannonical’ ‘dystopian’ texts from Metropolis through Blade Runner and beyond. Tracing the history of the relationship between the city and dystopia, Barbara Mennel has observed that from ‘the inception of science fiction film...the city represented the future and was thus a prime site for the negotiation of utopian and dystopian visions.’ As her recent analysis demonstrates, while the presentation of, and role played by, the city has changed markedly over the past century, dystopian films remain uniquely tied to the urban landscape. Iterative Dystopias are no exception. The city is the primary space in which this subcycle aesthetically articulates its dystopian sensibilities, working with and against visual representations made familiar throughout the history of the filmic form.

284 I think here of films such as Minority Report, Equilibrium and others which would be readily analysed as neo-noir films, alongside films set in cities of the very near future such as Cloverfield. Citing the example of Neill Blomkamp’s 2009 film District 9, Nel notes the increased levels of scholarly attention given to the relationship between the city and science fiction in the late 1990s-2000s. Adèle Nel, "The Repugnant Appeal of the Abject: Cityscape and Cinematic Corporality in District 9," Critical Arts: A South-North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies 26, no. 4 (2012): 551. Kuhn acknowledges the importance of the city to science fiction as not only a location, but also subject matter, in her introduction to a section dedicated to the city space in her influential anthology Alien Zone II. Annette Kuhn, ed. Alien Zone 2: The Spaces of Science-Fiction Cinema (London; New York: Verso 1999), 77. Gold argues specifically that the city in science fiction often takes on the role of an additional character. John Gold, "Under Darkened Skies: The City in Science-Fiction Film,” Geography 86, no. 4 (2001): 342.

285 I use the term canonical here in inverted commas to acknowledge the multiply-problematic nature of a designating canon in this cycle of texts. I have also placed inverted commas around dystopian in order to designate that some of the texts under discussion do not necessarily fall within my narrow, Jamesonian definition of the term.

286 Mennel, Cities and Cinema, 130.
Furthermore, it is in the city that these texts confirm the foundations of their dystopian nature, articulating these spaces as ‘plausible extrapolations’ from the assumed viewer’s real-world present. These films conflate geographies. In their inappropriate reduction of differences across urban landscapes, they produce environments of disarming commutability, a disturbing expansion of the provenance of the non-places Marc Augé identifies with supermodernity. Iterative Dystopias foresee futures in which non-places are no longer the spaces ‘in between’, the traditionally-conceived liminal sites of passage to elsewhere. The city itself is a non-place. In these representations, this subcycle of films denies its protagonists the possibility of a spatial utopia. Instead, it offers its protagonists a perpetually liminal existence: a life lived within the interchangeable ‘polycity’.

Dystopian films have conventionally worked with the city space to various ends. In her influential essay on the 1980s dystopian cycle, ‘future noir’, Janet Staiger identifies the imposing skyline of high-rise buildings, the labyrinthine structure and disorder of urban sprawl, alongside a disorientating darkness as the distinguishing features of contemporary classic dystopian films such as Blade Runner and Brazil (1985). She argues that ‘[dystopian] vision can be elaborated and interpreted not only through narrative propositions about the society but also via mise-en-scene - as impaired physical constructions, antivisions of the makers’ hopes.’

Thus, the city plays a vital role in conveying generic connections aesthetically, alongside functioning to augment and reinforce the story. Andrew Milner concurs with this when he writes that ‘the city is the dystopian novum, the shape of the prior catastrophe encoded within its social and architectural forms’, extending his analysis of the idea beyond the paradigmatic Blade Runner, to include Metropolis and Alex Proyas’ Dark City (1998). In addition, representations of the city play an integral role in connecting the dystopian narrative with the films’ assumed audience. Keith Brooker, for example, contends that Jean-Luc Godard’s 1965 film

Janet Staiger, “Future Noir: Contemporary Representations of Visionary Cities,” in Alien Zone 2: The Spaces of Science-Fiction Cinema, ed. Annette Kuhn (London; New York: Verso, 1999), 102. It should be noted Staiger’s argument about the importance of mise-en-scene in future noir is couched more broadly, working in support of ‘a denunciation of the utopian vision’.

Alphaville is also greatly enriched by the look of the city itself, which resembles Paris closely enough to make the point that Godard’s depiction of the distant, outer-space city of Alphaville is really a commentary on the cold, inhuman conditions of life in modern cities of our own world...[his filmic techniques give the city an] eerily inhuman look, producing a subtle defamiliarization.289

Accordingly, the dystopian city is a future space inflected with the real-world present. It is there that form’s ‘plausible extrapolations’ from sociological conditions are rendered spatially. Considered together, these scholars present a unified position on the crucial role that the city has played historically in aesthetically engaging with the concerns of the dystopian form. In concert with this, the city continues to shape the viewer’s understanding in the wider postmillennial cycle of futuristic films. Whether it is the place to escape from: the home which is left behind, as in The Road (2009) and Solaris (2002); or the space in which the drama is located: the home with which the protagonist learns to find fault, as is the case in Minority Report, Equilibrium (2002) and Repo Men (2010); the city maintains its central role across these dystopian, anti-utopian and apocalyptic narratives. More precisely, representations of the city contribute to both an understanding of the nature of the imagined future and further intertwine the diegetic worlds with the assumed viewer’s present.

The city is unquestionably important in each of the films considered in this thesis. Of greatest interest is the manner in which these films work with and against the iconography associated with the form to achieve the goals of both supporting and furthering their dystopian warnings. In this subcycle of films, the city becomes an ‘every space’, a coalescing of individual sites into a single, nebulous polycity. In a sense, this renders as literal Staiger’s assertion that

[t]he advantage dystopias have is that they do not have to provide alternate visions of tomorrow; they can merely exaggerate or invert utopias, suggesting that aspects of the fantasy ideal future will eventually produce distortions or

contradiction. Considered as negations of specific fantasies of the future and as unorganized protests about social tendencies dystopian fictions criticize specific utopias and function as warning messages about the present day: this is tomorrow — if we don’t watch out. 290

These films do not provide ‘alternative visions’ of the future, but rather render the cities of the present as interchangeable, firmly grounding their dystopias in the real-world. 291 This spatial manipulation is similar to that identified by David Desser in his analysis of a transnational, ‘global noir’. 292 These cities are an inversion of the Borgesian Aleph—irrespective of where the protagonist stands the vision remains the same. 293 These characters are required to make their home everywhere and nowhere. Importantly, however, only 2046 is contained to, or by, the metropolis. Both Code 46 and Inception witness their protagonists’ adventures beyond the city, yet unlike in previous incarnations of the dystopian cinematic vision, the places beyond are no less dystopian than the traditional urbanscape. They are merely another iteration of the places inhabited by the perpetually liminal protagonist.

The interchangeability of ‘the city’ in Code 46 is asserted through homogenous establishing shots. As William enters and re-enters cities he is greeted by an expanse of dense urbanization. Skyscrapers are positioned side-by-side forming a high-rise patchwork interrupted only by transport infrastructure. Buildings abut freeways, rivers, train lines. They fill every space not dedicated to the rapid movement of people or things, and cease abruptly at the extremities of the city, the checkpoints. Cities are cement islands in an otherwise barren future-space. Despite the overwhelmingly ‘concrete’ construction of the every space, however, it is an architecture of transition. The viewer’s experience of it

291 Architectural Engineering scholar Elsheshtawy makes this point specifically with reference to Code 46, arguing that ‘what is striking about the movie is that its dystopian vision relies not on stage sets, but on real spaces. By blending images of existing places, it evokes a future that is thoroughly grounded in the present.’ As I have argued, this point is critical to my reading of the subcycle as a whole. Yasser Elsheshtawy, “The Prophecy of ‘Code 46’: ‘Afuera’ in Dubai, or Our Urban Future,” Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review, no. 2 (2011): 20.  
292 Desser, “Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism,” especially 533.  
mirrors the characters’, as s/he is afforded only glimpses of this world in passing. From the majestic aerial perspectives gained through the windows of William’s flights between ‘Seattle’ and ‘Shanghai’, to the speeding glances gleaned through the windows of cars, the feeling is not one of disorientation (as in traditional dystopian films) because everything is clearly depicted and familiar. Instead it is one of un-orientation. These are disassociated spaces, cities that are ‘dis-placed’, ungrounded by culture or nationhood and unanchored by the mediating space of the suburbs. Paradoxically, it is through naming difference that Winterbottom erases the difference between the cities. There is no diegetic reason why this story needs to take place across multiple urban locations. William could work and live in the same city as Maria. That he is required to travel to the location enables the difference to be maintained through the naming of the places, while the singularity is depicted. William essentially travels to the place that he left. While this representation is clearly a politically-motivated comment on globalization, it functions too as a particularly eloquent illustration of the protagonist’s perpetual liminality. William can travel halfway around the world, but his destination—stripped as it is of defining or distinguishing characteristics—remains the place he left. His new experiences are merely iterations of his past. Whether he is with his wife or with Maria, he is at home in an heterotopic every-place.

While the labyrinthine, high-rise, un-orienting nature the urbanscapes align directly with the traditional characterisation of the dystopian city, Code 46’s use of light diverges completely from expectation. Far from the spaces of ‘dripping darkness’ that architect Edwin Heathcote identifies with Blade Runner and other dystopian future films, the light in Code 46 is blindingly white. In a move which conveys the environmental degradation of this imagined near future (and thereby one of the primary sociological warnings of this

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296 Brian Baker argues that Winterbottom’s use of light in Code 46 ‘places it on a continuum with contemporary sf disaster scenarios such as in Contagion (2011) and 28 Days Later (2002)’, though he acknowledges that these comparisons are limited in that Code 46’s ‘nocturnal world is as busy as our own’ (real-world experience). Baker, “‘Here on the Outside’: Mobility and Bio-Politics in Michael Winterbottom’s Code 46,” 121.
dystopian text), the residents of the polycity have resorted to inverting night and day in order to escape the scorching sun. The warning is focused by representations of those who live *afuera* (the appellation used to indicate the spaces outside the city, a location known only as ‘everywhere else’) for whom this is not an option. They are excluded from access to the technology to support such a shift. It is through these contrasting representations that it becomes clear to the viewer that, in the polycity of this on-screen near future, night has literally become day, and day, night. The melding of this physical and cultural binary is emphasized in the scene in which William and Maria leave a nightclub in the depths of the ‘night’, huddling under William’s jacket to protect themselves from the sunlight. While Michael Goss argues that this is merely a ‘clever reworking of the standard romantic imagery of love-struck boy shielding the object of his desires from the rainy night’, I read the scene’s temporal conflation, combined with the inversion of generic aesthetics, as further evidence of the polycity’s heterotopic nature. It is not only a space of conflated geographies and moreover, a place which must be transited through quickly—a writing of Augé’s non-places over the city as a whole—it is also a space in which dystopian convention is ‘othered’ through these aesthetics. Whether it the ‘natural’ light of the ‘night’, or the dazzling electronic lights that illuminate the newly defined ‘day’, light saturates every space, sanitizing the palette of perpetually liminal experience to cool blues and greys, cleansing difference through merging. The protagonist conducts his iterative journey in these interchangeable city spaces. Far from hiding in the shadows, these characters squint and shrink from this highlighted dystopia.

The physical space of *Code 46* is overtly binary. This dystopian narrative is furthered through the juxtaposition of the polycity and the accessible, but equally ambivalent, space called *afuera*. By affording the protagonist the chance to escape the urban, but refusing to grant the possibility of alternative space, *Code 46* enhances its depiction of the perpetually liminal experience. Not only is *afuera* not the unequivocally utopian designation sought by the traditional dystopian hero, ultimately it is no different from the

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297 As I have noted in this thesis, while *Code 46* provokes analysis of its politics through its representations of environmental destruction, in this scene, as elsewhere in the film, this contextual information is limited to narrative exposition. The characters do not acknowledge these circumstances.

298 Goss, "Taking Cover from Progress," 74.
cityscape of William’s quotidian experience. It is simply another interchangeable space in which he lives an iteration of his journey in search of utopia. The viewer is introduced to this location in the opening sequence, via a mobile aerial shot of a desert expanse. The horizon is obscured, the barrenness is panoramic. In these shots Code 46’s desert is endless. Where the film’s urbanscapes conform to Bauman’s depiction of contemporary real-world cities in their ‘overwhelming tendency to standardization and...resulting dreary uniformity’, so too does this space beyond the urban concur with his ideas. Both the polycity and its apparent opposite, the desert, can be read in themselves as spaces of interchangeable familiarity, functioning, as Bauman argues, to soothe inhabitants through the ‘rare comfort of predictability and orderliness’. While Bauman contrasts the ‘desert’ as a metaphoric space between the ‘oases’ of ordered and predictable real-world cities, in Code 46 the desert is realised literally. It is ambiguous space which is depicted as both in opposition to, and unified with, the urban. Disorientatingly, it embraces the characteristics Bauman ascribes to his spaces of non-urbanity. This desert is a space of ‘both romantic musings, but also fully prosaic fears’, a space which mixes ‘exciting adventures and unspeakable dangers’. William travels beyond the bounds of the polycity hopeful that he is tracing a path toward utopia, equally elated and afraid. Despite this, the desert functions within the narrative as no more than another space in which this perpetually liminal protagonist can experience an iteration of his quest for his utopia. Afuera is a space of literal return for Maria who was raised ‘outside’ in the desert. She leaves to start life ‘anew’ with William in the space of her past, and is ultimately cast out the city by its authorities and forced to relive the experience again. For William, this palimpsestic aspect is further compounded. He ostensibly leaves the city in order to venture into the unknown. Yet he is pursuing a space in which to found a relationship with a woman who is a clone of his mother. His actions do not affect a new beginning in a different space, therefore. William is merely rewriting his childhood and redrafting his marriage. Following Robert Brown, William can be read as being drawn to the calming landscape of the savannah seeking a space of psychic return. This notion of William’s

299 Bauman, City of Fears, City of Hopes, 24.
300 Ibid., 25-6.
301 Ibid., 26.
302 Though Brown notes that the theory of biophilia is contested, the notion that the savannah is the ‘originary’ human landscape and is therefore appealing to the human psyche, is useful in
journey *afuera* as a return to a place that he has never been offers an obvious link to the perpetually liminal nature of this experience. Rather than a space of transition, *afuera* becomes the place of origin, transition and ‘complete’ existence. Despite *afuera* appearing to offer a contrast, it is simply another space in which William enacts iterations of his quotidian experience.

*Code 46* represents the interchangeability between *afuera* and the polycity not just narratively, but also aesthetically. This ‘outside’ is sketched as quintessentially primitive. It is disordered, dirty, unmanaged. Populated by those who society has refused the insurance cover required to live in the polycity by reason of disease, genetic aberrance or unsanctioned behaviour, they find shelter in the huts or the decaying buildings of over-populated shanty towns. They are a desperate and unruly thronging mob. Their depiction works in sharp relief to an immaculately-attired William in his spacious, chauffeured personal vehicle as he transitions swiftly through a checkpoint in the film’s opening scenes. Yet, while the polycity is technologically-progressive, hygienic, ordered, its people are bodies functioning within a system. Every individual is subject to constant surveillance. Workplaces become prisons and hospitals are interrogation centres. Conversely, in the sequence following William’s and Maria’s flight in pursuit of a life together, *afuera* is rendered an altogether more ‘civilised’ space. Approaching a hotel operator seeking a room to stay, William declares that the couple has the required documentation to legitimate their travel. This declaration is at once false—their cover is fraudulent—and unwarranted, for it is met by a smile and shake of the head. Verification within the system is irrelevant in this establishment. The genial hotelier desires only that his guests are comfortable, offering them a room, food and a hot shower, suggesting that they engage in a game of chess, a potent symbol of civilized living. The undermining of the binary between the civilised and the primitive is further evidence that William is living his perpetually liminal experience in heterotopic spaces. Whether he is located inside or outside physically, in the interchangeable every-city or the romantically-terrifying desert, William traces the iterative path of his perpetually liminal existence. In these heterotopic spaces of conflict and contradiction he is spot lit in a dystopian world without shadows.

 Brown, "You Can’t Go Home Again: The Place of Tradition in *Firefly’s* Dystopian Utopia and Utopian Dystopia," 11.
In contrast to *Code 46*, *2046* works with space in manner far more recognisable in terms of conventional dystopian aesthetics. Its protagonist Chow is confined to the city, living in places which evocatively express Heathcote’s aforementioned description of ‘dripping darkness’. Despite this, I find similarities between the films through *2046’s* representation of Chow’s city as a place of discordant incongruities. The question of where one might locate this protagonist’s home geographically highlights the contrast between *2046’s* imprecise visual representations of place and its unequivocally specific narrative location. Chow wanders a city without clear spatial orientation. There are no establishing shots through which to locate his journeys, journeys which he undertakes in the dark and often in the rain. Aesthetically, Chow resides in the urbanscape of a dystopian any-city. This is magnified in the narrative strand set in the future. Tak’s monorail ride takes him through transfigured spaces, a hyperstylized recasting of reality. Though this future-place is derived from Hong Kong’s geographies, it is an anywhere urban space of advertising billboards and high rise buildings, only grounded through the story played out under its neon lights. The film is unequivocal in its use of Hong Kong as the primary diegetic location in the narrative, however. Its references to Hong Kong’s history and future are overt. Far from hindering a reading of the film which confirms Iterative Dystopia’s representation of diegetic urbanspaces as poly-cities, however, Wong’s *2046* simply inverts Winterbottom’s manipulations of space. Where *Code 46* uses multiple spaces interchangeably to invoking a single city, in *2046*, the every-city is illustrated through one city that stands for a multiplicity.

The incapacity of a singular, nationalistic paradigm to describe the real-world experience of the people of Hong Kong was much discussed in the lead up to the transfer of sovereignty from Britain to China in 1997. As artist and curator Oscar Ho asserts, there

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303 See my discussion in the introduction to this thesis regarding this text’s relationship to Hong Kong and Stephen Teo’s assertion that the diegetic space in which Tak resides is one which ‘transforms the mundane into the extraordinary...[but] without losing its sense of reality’. Teo, *Wong Kar-Wai: Auteur of Time*, 151.

304 For discussions on the inadequacies of nationalism as a paradigm through which to understand Hong Kong, due to the competing cultures of Britain and China, see Sheldon Lu Hsiao-peng, “Filming Diaspora and Identity: Hong Kong and 1997,” in *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*, ed. Poshek Fu and David Desser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Gina
are necessarily ‘many layers and dimensions’ within Hong Kong’s cultural identity. Moreover, he argues that ‘Hong Kong’s success is based on its ability to accommodate and use whatever cultures are available.’\textsuperscript{305} Within film studies, Esther Yau concurs with this position, arguing that the success of Hong Kong cinema is in fact grounded in its national non-specificity, that its global accessibility is generated through its cosmopolitan, borderless nature.\textsuperscript{306} While it is important to note that this assertion is made with reference to the Hong Kong genre films that generate mass audiences worldwide, and not to \textit{2046} which was unsuccessful at its local box office (as is typical for Wong’s films) and achieved only limited international success,\textsuperscript{307} it speaks to the cultural context in which the film was produced. Chow’s diegetic environment is one which is informed by, and engaged with, these antagonistic, but productive real-world cultural contrasts. I would argue, however, that it is unsustainable to suggest that \textit{2046}’s protagonist experiences his city as a multiple-yet-singular space, via some indeterminate ‘global sensibility’ which is imbued within the text solely by dint of its director’s heritage, or the socio-historical setting of the film. The similarities that I read between the representations of the geographies in which the protagonists make their homes across the Iterative Dystopia subcycle would suggest that to do so would inappropriately limit analysis. There is more to this film’s use of space than a simple reflection of the complexities of contemporary Hong Kong. In making this argument, I follow in the scholarly footsteps of others who contend that cinematic texts cannot be read as national allegory.\textsuperscript{308} The film’s socio-

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Marchetti offers a competing perspective, arguing that on the basis of its position in the global trade market as processor of raw materials into goods for on-sale, Hong Kong has always been a place located ‘in between’ cultures. Marchetti, “Buying American, Consuming Hong Kong: Cultural Commerce, Fantasies of Identity, and the Cinema,” 297.
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\textsuperscript{305} Oscar Ho, ‘Hong Kong: A Curatorial Journey for an Identity’, in Amor et al., eds., \textit{Liminalities}, 42.
\textsuperscript{308} Noting in particular the work of Ackbar Abbas on Hong Kong’s ‘postcolonial nationalism’; of Yau Ka-fai on its ‘modern nationalism’; and of Stephen Teo on the country’s ‘postmodern nationalism’ as evidence, Luke Robinson argues strongly that the trend towards reading the cinema as national allegory instituted by Fredric Jameson in his article “Third-World Literature in the Era of
historical background is one element which must be considered in combination with factors such as multicultural production investment sourced from France, Italy and China; shooting locations which include China (Macau and Shanghai) and Thailand, but not Hong Kong; and a diegesis featuring characters who each speak in the actors’ native language (Cantonese, Mandarin or Japanese) without any suggestion of misunderstanding. Chow’s on screen experience reflects and refracts all these fractured, irreconcilable geo-cultural references. As Allan Cameron convincingly argues, across his oeuvre

[t]he closest Wong Kar-wai gets to articulating a stable Hong Kong identity is, finally, to suggest the universality of instability. This model of unity through disjuncture is deeply ambivalent, suggesting commonality through the very impossibility of commonality. It is an articulation of identity that produces a certain optimism even as it crushes the possibility for unified identification.309

‘Universal instability’ and the ‘impossibility of commonality’ are the starting point for this text’s representation of the city in which Chow resides. These characteristics are further compounded by both textual and extra-textual factors, in addition to the film’s dystopian aesthetic of disorientating darkness. Thus where Code 46 makes use of multiple locations to convey the commutability of experience in the policity, in 2046 Hong Kong stands as single location encapsulating multiplicity. Chow’s heterotopic home is located within this unsettled diegetic geography.

While Code 46 augments its representation of spatial dystopia through characters which perform their quotidian iterations across two diametrically opposed (yet coalesced) spaces, Chow’s experience of his disorienting polycity is compounded by the temporal

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309 Cameron, “Trajectories of Identification: Travel and Global Culture in the Films of Wong Kar-Wai,” page 14/18 (original emphasis).
instabilities within 2046’s narrative. Despite Mazierska and Rascaroli’s argument that Chow’s desire for constant change (which they read primarily in his roguish refusal to commit to women) results in ‘not only neglect and instantaneous abolition of the past but also lack of respect for the future,’ I read him as a dystopian protagonist searching for a utopian escape from his experience of perpetual liminality. His respect for the future is utmost, as he pursues the possibility of change both in his present and through his futuristic novel. This character is doomed to iteratively re-perform his everyday as he searches for a way to reach a utopian horizon. In this instance, his horizon is the iteration in which Chow can return from the future, and regenerate from the past, a love to sustain him in the present. Consequently, Chow’s ‘Hong Kong’ becomes a space of nostalgia. Chow is a protagonist who is seeking utopia, whilst—as is often the case in dystopian fictions—‘imagining the future as retrospective act’. The path he is seeking out of his perpetually liminal present involves recreating the past anew. In this sense, the text fulfils the goal Fredric Jameson once pessimistically attributed to its parent genre, science fiction, ‘to demonstrate and to dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future...’ Nonetheless 2046 attempts this Sisyphean task, and Chow continues to circulate Tak on his monorail despite the fact that ‘nothing ever changes in 2046’. Both optimism and pessimism reside in these scenes. The glimmer of utopian hope that lies within the dystopia is found in the cultural reference made by the year in which this narrative strand is set. Chow’s mise-en-abyme envisages a time of potential social and political change beyond the fifty years of autonomy granted to Hong Kong by China following the 1997 political handover. Although Wong has been quoted that, ‘[t]he idea for the film...comes from the promise the Chinese government gave to the Hong Kong people: 50 years of no change,’ this diegetic future is one constructed by a character who, writing against the

310 Mazierska and Rascaroli, “Trapped in the Present: Time in the Films of Wong Kar-Wai,” 7, my emphasis.
312 Fredric Jameson, “Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?,” Science Fiction Studies 9, no. 2 (1982): 153.
backdrop of the 1966 anti-British riots, cannot know of this potential. Chow is a character who moves fluidly between times, making a home in the 1960s and the 2040s, exploiting an optimism and infused with a pessimism born in the 1990s. As critic Richard Corliss notes in his review, Wong shuffles the present-day of the film’s production, its recent past and the distant future, mixing reality, memory and fantasy, ‘with the dexterity of a cardsharp’. The counterpoint presence of icons of time, including watches, clocks and calendars, alongside the references to time peppered throughout the dialogue, in inter-titles and within the soundtrack are temporal markers which function in a similar way to the checkpoints demarcating the borders between the cities and afuera in Code 46. Just as in Code 46 these markers of transition indicate only that Chow is moving to another iteration of his perpetually liminal experience. Unlike Code 46 which uses multiple cities to represent spatial singularity, 2046 uses a single city to convey the city as a non-space. The ‘Hong Kong’ in which Chow must make his home is a polycity in which both cultural and temporal references are conflated. It is a diegetic space which is at once everywhere and nowhere. Moreover, by highlighting the differences that cannot be either effectively delineated or maintained by these perpetually liminal protagonists, this subcycle of films renders visible the spatial antagonisms which are characteristic of the geographies in which the characters endeavour to locate their heterotopic homes.

Inception works with urbanscapes in a manner which is more aligned with Code 46 than 2046. Nolan conflates geographic spaces through the counterintuitive method of highlighting difference, recalling Winterbottom’s contrast between the polycity and the desert which draws attention to the interchangeability of these spaces. As is the case with Winterbottom’s protagonist, William, Dom Cobb is in constant transition between the

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314 Ibid.  
316 Gina Marchetti argues that Wong’s ‘obsessive interest in time and dates’ is directly related to anxiety regarding the 1997 hand over, designed to remind the viewer both of the passing of time and its ‘absolute demarcation’. Referencing Wong’s 1994 film Chungking Express, she cites specific dates which function as narrative turning points, alongside temporally marked dialogue (‘In 24 hours I will fall in love with this woman’) and a soundtrack of songs such as What a Difference a Day Makes. Written by Stanley Adams. Performed by Dinah Washington. (Mercury Records, originally released 1959). Marchetti, "Buying American, Consuming Hong Kong: Cultural Commerce, Fantasies of Identity, and the Cinema," 290.
'great cities' of the world. His experience of each city is the same however. In each city Cobb conducts another iteration of his search for a path out of his perpetually liminal existence. He is equally (not) at home in the multiple geographies of this polycity, unaffected by any difference. In lieu of the expansive establishing shots and the disorientation of the towering skyscrapers which pervade *Code 46*'s scenes of arrival, Dom Cobb is presented *in situ*, with his various locations identified through iconic motifs. The viewer is cued to Cobb's arrival in Paris, for example, through both the expository dialogue in a previous scene and an establishing shot of Montmatre. This is followed by a cut which takes the viewer to a 'Parisian' university within the diegesis (though the scenes were shot on location at University College, London). This displacement is compounded as Cobb, seated at a bistro table (an iconic Parisian motif), reveals to his companion, Ariadne, that they have dreamed this Paris from his warehouse sleep-lab (a film location actually situated in Los Angeles). Additionally, the bullet train upon which the characters are revealed to have dreamed their first dream iconographically indicates a Japanese location, though it is not Kyoto as identified in the diegesis, but rather Tokyo in which the scenic panoramas glimpsed through the windows were filmed. More radically displaced, the crowded bazaars of Tangiers, Morocco stand in for a space identified in the plot as the streets of Mombassa, Kenya. Though discrepancies between diegetic spaces and shooting locations are commonplace and their identification is in itself a banal undertaking, what is interesting in terms of this thesis is the ease of the protagonist's transition between these spaces. As Cobb moves from place to place, each location representing merely another oscillation of his perpetually liminal experience, this character is equally at home and not at home in them all. Furthermore, his experience of each place as a dystopian any-city is portrayed as identical, irrespective of his location. Dom Cobb is a man desperately pursuing his utopian escape from the conglomerate of geographies in which he makes his heterotopic home.

Where the bisected landscape in *Code 46* and bifurcated time in *2046* accentuate the iterative quality of their protagonists' journeys, it is *Inception*'s representations of space as layered that are compelling in this context. While Cobb’s ‘odyssey’ sees him roam internationally in search of his utopia, effectively rendering the world's cities a singular, personal place—the 'not-home' which is 'home'—it is through his dreamscape that the
spatial paradoxes in which this perpetually liminal experience can be recognised are writ bold. In these places, diegetic realities amalgamate with unrealities and the protagonist is literally able to reside simultaneously in multiple locations. Home can be geographically located everywhere and nowhere, a pure example of the heterotopic space. Cobb leaves himself behind in each location, whilst moving wholly as he descends to each new level. Through his dreamscapes Cobb journeys to the origin of his dystopian darkness which is simultaneously the source of his utopian hope. Inception explores this concept most expansively following the plot point in which Cobb boards a long-haul flight from Sydney to Los Angeles. He is seeking to cross the threshold into the realm of the mythological journey, to complete the task assigned and earn his reward—to be able to return to his wife. Cobb’s quest is to dream his way home. In doing so, he enters a peculiar space, a narrative virtual reality constructed in the format of a ‘lived’ videogame. This journey originates in one of Augé’s quintessential non-spaces, aboard an aircraft, which as I have argued, the perpetually liminal protagonists of this subcycle are most at home. It is in these scenes that Cobb is most obviously travelling to locate his home and at home in his travels.

In each of the dream-levels Inception’s protagonist performs an iteration of his perpetually liminal experience. Of primary importance to my reading of the geo-spatial interchangeability in Inception is the labyrinthine structure explicitly attributed to each layer of these dreamscape, and implicitly applied to Cobb’s life-world. Irrespective of where he is located, as I have argued previously, this protagonist creates circumstances in which he can only get lost, despite knowing precisely where he is. The film takes pains to underscore the importance of this in naming its ‘dream-architect’, Ariadne. Taking significant licence with the Greek mythology that her name evokes, Inception positions Ariadne as mistress of the labyrinth and charges her with supporting Cobb to overcome his ‘hidden beast’ (his wife). In this re-presentation, Ariadne is the labyrinth-creator, taught to design spaces in accordance with the principles of the Penrose Steps most famously illustrated by MC Escher. This strategy of spatial design is reminiscent of Peter Weir’s satirical dystopia The Truman Show (1998) in which the protagonist, on becoming

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317 This directly follows the argument that I made in chapter three that a feature of Iterative Dystopias is the protagonists’ desire to get lost, while knowing where they are.
suspicious of his reality, discovers the edges of his constructed universe. In *Inception*, however, the protagonist, seeks solace in his artificial world(s). Whereas in *The Truman Show* the ‘end of the world’ is rendered spatially, in *Inception* Cobb hides from the certainty that he may already be at its/his end, preferring to continue his iterative journey toward the glimmer of utopian hope that lies within.

In addition to the labyrinthine structure which imputes a sense of disorientation, (even, or perhaps particularly, when the characters believe themselves to be orientated), the first two layers of the dreamscape directly recall the aesthetic motifs of high-rise buildings and disordered urban sprawl Staiger associates with contemporary dystopian film. Though the first sequence is a frantic car-chase though the streets of an unnamed city and the second a subdued business meeting in an elegant hotel, both use teeming rain to underscore the dystopian aspect of the spaces, in a manner similar to *2046*. Conversely, the third and fourth layers of the dream conform to Bauman’s concept of spatial ambiguity, referenced though the desert in *Code 46*. Like the desert, these dream-levels—located on a snow-covered mountain and on a beach encroached upon by both the ferocious ocean and decaying building—are, again, both romantic and fear-provoking.318 These too are spaces which ‘tempt with the promise of a gamble: there are exciting adventures and unspeakable dangers that the hapless [characters] cannot calculate and coming in a succession that [they] cannot anticipate.’319 Despite these distinctions, the spaces are constructed as polycity through the inclement weather which draws universally across these places. Irrespective of these urban/non-urban divisions, as the film progresses separately in each dream-layer toward its ultimate multi-level climax, the dramatic weather gives the impression that dystopian darkness has, or may be about to, descend permanently. Interestingly, *Inception* repudiates dystopian convention and the light remains naturalistic throughout these scenes. It is through this filmic device that Nolan reconnects the dreamscapes with reality, both in terms of Cobb’s life-world, and the assumed viewer’s own understanding of geographic space. Using these conflicting techniques, the spaces of Cobb’s dreams are able to be read as both real and unreal. They

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319 Ibid.
are places in which Cobb is at home and not at home, places through which he must travel to find his home and travel in to be at home.

The places in which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists make their homes are heterotopic spaces. The characters must travel to find home and travel to be at home in their narratives. They live their lives in non-places. In the real world, it is in urbanspaces that Augé’s non-places proliferate. Accordingly, these protagonists begin their quest to locate their utopia in the city, also the quintessential dystopian site. Each film works with and against generic aesthetic conventions in its representation of the life-worlds in which these characters reside. Whether the protagonist is confined to the urbanspace or able to venture beyond, whether he is living in darkness or blinded by light, changes in space offer only minor alterations within his cyclical experience. These characters make their heterotopic home(s) in what this thesis has termed the ‘polycity’. In Iterative Dystopias, real-world geographies take on the characteristics of interchangeability and transition that Augé attributes to the non-places of supermodernity. Furthermore, in the different techniques used to erase differences across spaces, binaries are undermined. The polycity thereby reaffirms and highlights the heterotopic nature of this subcycle’s homes. It is in this dystopian polycity, which is itself a non-place, in which the perpetually liminal protagonists of these texts trace their iterative paths in search of a place of refuge, a sense of belonging, their utopia which lies within.
If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.

The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard\textsuperscript{320}

Having considered the unfixed, and unfixable, nature of the heterotopic spaces that Iterative Dystopia’s perpetually liminal protagonists call home and examined the geographic uncertainties of the near-future landscapes in which they are located, the final section of this chapter will address two inter-related questions. First, how does this subcycle of films represent its protagonists’ heterotopic homes architecturally? In response to this, I argue that the dolls house, a prominent icon in \textit{Inception}, offers an appropriate model through which to read the characteristics of Iterative Dystopia’s homes. Through this structure, I undertake to explore the ways in which the protagonists’ interior places take on the transitory quality of non-places, fusing the public and the private realms into a single disorientating space. Second, following Augé’s contention that, in the supermodern era which ‘finds its full expression’ in non-places, ‘people are always, and never, at home’,\textsuperscript{321} I consider the merits of defining Iterative Dystopia’s homes without recourse to space at all. Augé ventures Vincent Desombes’ proposal that ‘[t]he character is at home when he is at ease in the rhetoric of the people with whom he shares life’,\textsuperscript{322} as an alternative means of conceiving the contemporary home. The final section of this chapter will therefore pose the question ‘“who” is home?’ for the protagonists of this postmillennial subcycle. For renowned social anthropologist, Mary Douglas, these questions: ‘how’ are the interiors of these homes conceived? and ‘who’ might they be conceived through? would register as inappropriate. As I have concluded in the foregoing analysis, however, each example of an Iterative Dystopia that I analyse emphatically invalidates her assertion that: ‘Home is “here,” or it is “not here.” The question is not

\textsuperscript{320} Bachelard and Jolas, \textit{The Poetics of Space}, 6.


\textsuperscript{322} Ibid., 108.
“How?” nor “Who?” nor “When?” but “Where is your home?” It is always a localizable idea. These characters reside in heterotopic spaces which are translated across the diegetic polycity. Their homes are paradoxical places, unable to be defined without reference to travel. It is telling, though unsurprising therefore, that despite a considerable proportion of each of these stories taking place in architectures which I conceive as Iterative Dystopia’s heterotopic ‘homes’, there are virtually no shots of their exteriors. Through this technique, the films divert the viewer from effectively ‘locating’ these places. Together, the questions ‘how’ and through ‘whom’ are these homes conceived are therefore pivotal in the context of these films. They suggest an inwardly-focused solution to the definition of home, reaffirming my contention that these characters are searching for a utopian solution to their perpetual liminality which lies within.

Christopher Nolan assigns the dolls house emblematic status within Inception’s narrative. It is within a dolls house which belonged to Cobb’s wife that he conceals the ‘answer’ to the riddle which unpins the film. Mal’s childhood plaything is located in ‘limbo’—Inception’s deepest dream level—and is hidden within the dream-architecture created by the couple. Locked within this dolls house is the totem which could definitively indicate the veracity of Cobb’s reality and end his iterative search for a place to belong. Beyond the crucial role that it plays in this film, however, the dolls house is also an effective icon through which to explore Iterative Dystopia’s heterotopic homes further. The dolls house evokes, of course, one of Foucault’s original examples of heterotopia: the spaces of children’s play. Importantly for my reading of Inception Foucault argued that within, and through, the games played by children places merge reality and the imaginary. It is the conflation of opposites such as these that, I have argued throughout this chapter, are fundamental to understanding the subcycle’s representations of home. Across the subcycle, the primary binary undermined within its ‘dolls houses’ is found in the melding of the public and the private realm. It is the failure of this division that is critical to understanding the interior architecture of Iterative Dystopia’s heterotopic homes.

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The dolls house is a symbol of traditional domesticity. It provides concrete refuge for its inhabitants. It is a place of comfort and shelter for all those (real and imagined) associated with the game being played. At the same time, for a dolls house to function, the characters residing within must be exposed to the (real) world in some way. The roof must be able to be lifted or the fourth wall must be absent. The ‘private’ lives of the dolls must be lived in the public eye. Like the dolls house, the illustrations of home presented in these texts are spaces in which the public and the private realms merge. This conceptual movement fundamentally shapes the places in which these perpetually liminal characters lay their heads. Even within their homes, the quotidian experience is a performance for these perpetually liminal protagonists. In line with this, Iterative Dystopia’s characters experience their homes as uncomfortable and ‘disorientating’ places. It is fitting therefore that the interior architectures of Iterative Dysopia’s homes conceived in this way are confounding in that they invert the gendered associations connoted by the dolls house. These spaces are resolutely ‘masculine’. They are cobbled together with whatever is available, and function takes precedence over form. They are places in which meals consist of tuna consumed from tins, singlets suffice as outerwear, and sleeping is oft undertaken in chairs, feet propped on desks.

For these perpetually liminal protagonists there are no gingham curtains, nor neatly made beds, which are characteristic of the feminised toy. These are far from the visions of domesticity which are interwoven with the icon, spaces in which to live ordered, controlled and controllable lives. The dolls house is thus an appropriately inappropriate symbol through which to explore the interiors of Iterative Dystopia’s heterotopic homes.

For Inception’s Dom Cobb, the interior architecture in which he seeks refuge and comfort of ‘home’ is an apartment building accessed through (chemically-induced) sleep. It is here

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325 This, of course, directly recalls the importance of ‘play’ which is not ‘playful’ in Szakolczai’s concept of permanent liminality and my characterisation of the perpetually liminal experience as one which involves the exploratory, uncertain performance of the everyday. Szakolczai, Reflexive Historical Sociology, 221-2.

326 Homi Bhabha writes of the ‘disorientating’ experience of ‘unhomeliness’ which results when ‘the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other...’ While the contexts in which we observe the dissolution of the boundaries between the public and the private are markedly different, Bhabha relates this spatial conflation directly to the experience of liminality. His work is therefore tangentially relevant here. Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (Oxford; New York: Routledge, 1994), 13.
that *Inception*'s protagonist is able to dream his future, remember his past and perform his everyday. This multi-layered dreamscape is a deft combination of the concept of the dolls house and the separate, but interrelated, videogame-style levels mirrored in the main narrative. This home can be read in opposition to the Los Angeles house (the home of his children) to which Cobb is ostensibly seeking to return throughout the text. While his LA abode is (diegetically) ‘real’, he is limited to fantasizing about residing there. Contrarily, his dreamspace apartment is a fantasy reality, constructed using his memories. In the interplay between the real and the imagined Cobb finds shelter, at home in a heterotopic space *par excellence*. Furthermore, this is a heterotopic space which adopts the transitory qualities of non-spaces. The apartment building of Cobb’s dreams is at once an empty building and a receptacle in which disparate locations are experienced together. It is a home which realizes Cicero’s concept of the memory palace. Each floor, each level of descent into the layers of Cobb’s mind, is populated with a different memory located in various places across time. It is a home which is filled with a multiplicity of possible homes, with pasts lived in either reality or unreality, each able to be inhabited as though it is contemporary. It is a home in which Cobb can return to his Los Angeles house to be near his children, or choose to reside with his wife Mal in an oft-visited hotel room on their final anniversary together. He can be with his wife and children together, watching over them as they play on the beach (a traditionally liminal location),\(^{327}\) this seaside spot may be the site of family holidays past or a creation from within a previous dream. Equally he can choose to dwell in a fantasy within a fantasy, and return to the dream-world that he and his wife, both architects, designed and built together. This is a place which heralds infinite potential for a character attuned to defying (and denying) the boundaries of landscapes. Here, physics is able to be manipulated, cities can literally be turned on their heads and the paradoxical desire to live in a detached house that is part of an apartment building is a wish that is easily fulfilled. Cobb’s interior architectures directly recall Bachelard’s idea that a home must shelter the dreamer. Cobb’s memory palace is his fantasy reality. This home is one in which the film’s perpetually liminal protagonist is able to reside in a paradoxical knot of mutually exclusive, yet simultaneously inhabited, homes.

\(^{327}\) See again the importance of the beach in contemporary cinematic explorations of liminality, note 137.
It is on this fence formed between reality and imagination that Cobb desires, not just to sit, but to live.

Architecturally, Cobb’s dreamscape home conveys not just the paradoxical relationship between the reality and unreality of a Foucauldian heterotopic space, it can be read too as a dolls house with dystopian sensibilities. This is a building accessed only from inside, entered via an old-fashioned cage elevator. Similar to the elevator in 2046’s future, this too is distantly reminiscent of the Bradbury building signalling the dystopian presence in this utopian vision (and vice versa). The vertical structure suggests Cobb’s journey to his psychic core, and the increasing intimacy of the scenes depicted as the elevator falls imply a ‘descent’ into madness. Furthermore, through its numerous levels Cobb’s multi-story memory palace speaks to the hubris associated with tower-building since the story of Babel and, more importantly in the context of this subcycle, to the motif of the tower as it has been used throughout dystopian cinematic history. Phillip Wegner notes, for example, that the tower is a device of separation for the privileged. It is an icon to be ‘brought down’ within dystopian narrative, an idea rendered particularly effectively by David Fincher in Fight Club (1999). There is no doubt that Cobb uses his tower as a tool of separation, an escape from (and to) the realities of his life-world, nor that it may come crashing down at any moment. More recently, Edwin Heathcote has drawn attention to the contemporary correlation between towers and anxiety. He notes that this ‘symbol of human pride [to be] smashed by aliens or by the elements, was once a clichéd disaster movie trope but post-9/11 bears a terrible potency. Cobb’s tower of memories is a private place which he guards jealously. He fears its destruction. He fears its persistence.

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328 While any comments pertaining to the psychology of these characters are peripheral to the core ambition of this thesis which investigates perpetual liminality as a sociological phenomenon, it should be noted that considerable attention has been paid to Inception from a psychoanalytic perspective. See for example chapters in the recent titles: Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, Inception and Philosophy: Ideas to Die For, Popular Culture and Philosophy: V. 62 (Chicago: Open Court, 2011); David Johnson, Inception and Philosophy: Because It’s Never Just a Dream, The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series (Hoboken, USA: Wiley, 2012).

329 Wegner, “Where the Prospective Horizon Is Omitted: Naturalism and Dystopia in Fight Club and Ghost Dog.” As Elsheshtawy points out, the use of the high-rise building as a tool of separation in dystopian cinema has its roots in Metropolis. In Lang’s film the privileged resided in towers while the underclass was forced underground. Elsheshtawy, “The Prophecy of ‘Code 46’: ‘Afuera’ in Dubai, or Our Urban Future,” 22.

Despite this, however, it is easily penetrable, as Ariadne demonstrates. Without any sign of hindrance, she follows him into his dreams and thereby the depths of his mind. Just as though envisaging a dolls house with the fourth wall removed, Inception signals Ariadne’s entry to Cobb’s mind cutting between shots which establish her in his elevator, and point of view shots into the various levels of his home. Tellingly, the first image she sees is of a majestic dolls house (Cobb’s wife’s), given pride of place on the window seat, placed in the centre of the frame. Cobb’s ultimate place of shelter, his refuge and source of comfort—his palace of memories—is glaringly exposed. Easily penetrated by an unwelcome guest, this heterotopic place (and the dreams contained within it) bleeds across fantasy and reality, merging the private with the public, leaving Cobb exposed in his dystopian dolls house.

The melding of the public and the private that is critical to understanding the interior architectures of Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists’ perpetually liminal experience is most obviously rendered in 2046. Where future fantasies commonly depict communal living, the protagonists of this futuristic subcycle are ultimately solitary characters, fated to trace their iterative paths alone while counterintuitively making their homes in public environments. This is overt in the case of Wong’s protagonist, Chow, who resides in a hotel. As with all these characters, he is unable to find refuge or grounding in the quotidian domestic realm, while paradoxically finding permanence in non-places, sites of transience. 2046’s dolls house is the Oriental Hotel. As Gina Marchetti notes, hotels function as anonymous, transnational spaces, in which the domestic blurs with the communal across Wong’s oeuvre. While this is critical, I would argue, to understanding this text, the rationale Mazierska and Rascaroli separately provide for this dwelling, namely that Wong’s characters seek residence in transient spaces such as hotels in order to disavow material possessions or mementos of the personal, stands in contrast to my earlier analysis of Chow’s search across time for a lover. Moreover, their hypothesis is glaringly opposed by the actions of the other protagonists in the subcycle, as we have already seen in my analysis of Inception. Irrespective of Chow’s motivation, however, what

331 Marchetti, “Buying American, Consuming Hong Kong: Cultural Commerce, Fantasies of Identity, and the Cinema,” 301.
is significant is the permanent impermanence of a perpetually liminal life lived in hotels, the simultaneously exposed and concealed performance of the everyday.

One of the most obvious illustrations of the destruction of the boundary between the public and the private in 2046 is the manner in which the viewer is introduced to Chow’s soon-to-be lover, Bai Ling. As film viewers, we are customarily provided voyeuristic access to hotel rooms whilst the characters are alone. In 2046, however, this privilege is extended to other guests, as the hotel’s flimsy construction allows neighbours to ‘participate’ in each others’ lives. We are introduced to the new tenant renting Room 2046 as she is awoken by Chow having intercourse in the next room. The scene cuts from a wavering wall, to a hand groping the bed head and attempting to catch books falling from the mantle, to a close up of shapely calves and feet, punctuated by toenails painted red, being rubbed together. It is only when ultimately these legs leap out of bed and are revealed to be attached to Bai Ling, (who proceeds to pound on the banging adjoining wall and complain that it is too early to be awoken in this way) that the audience is cued that these are two different rooms. The shot returns to the bed head, hand and mantle, the activity briefly paused. It recommences and we cut back to Ling throwing something at the thumping wall before the scene ends. Chow’s sex act is literally attempting to penetrate the boundaries of both the physical space and the personal life of the tenant next door.

2046’s characters perform their perpetually liminal everyday lives within the permeable walls of a dolls house. The film illustrates a complete disregard for any boundary between public and private space and highlights this through banal illustrations. Resident in the hotel, Bai Ling stands in the hallway, clad only in a bathrobe and filing her nails. She discusses the details of her sex life with friends, while in the background of the scene, a cleaner mops the floor and another guest ascends the stairs to his room. For protagonist Chow, these unimpeded revelations of the private take the form of exposing his financial circumstances. Chow shares this information with both the viewer and his fellow guests as he unapologetically informs one of the hotel staff that he is late with the rent. As with Bai Ling’s conversations, people continue to pass by in the background and Chow is in no way circumspect. Any boundary between the public and private goes unheeded.
Furthermore, *2046* compounds the impact of its illustrations of equivocal interior space, by positioning pivotal emotional moments in (traditionally conceived) liminal spaces. Not only do private moments take place in public, they also take place in spaces that are ‘in between’. This is unmistakable in the scene in which the text’s key characters determine the boundaries of their (short-lived) sexual relationship. They resolve the terms of this socially transgressive, pseudo-prostitution arrangement while standing in the open doorway of Bai Ling’s hotel room. They are neither inside nor out, they are literally liminal. The doorway is neither a public space, nor a private one, but both at once. This critical diegetic moment occurs therefore in a space exemplary of an Iterative Dystopia dolls house. With the characters predominantly framed in close ups, no other characters are witnessed passing by in the background as this scene unfolds. The potential for outsiders to witness or intrude upon these intimate moments is, however, absolutely available. It is a disorientating and uncomfortable experience for both the characters. These emotions are echoed aesthetically, not just within this scene but throughout the film. The camera angles and frame composition chosen by long-time Wong collaborator, cinematographer Christopher Doyle, support a reading which prioritises the dislocated, ‘in between’ nature of Chow’s experience in his dolls house. The film is framed to incompletely reveal action. Within scenes different angles expose and conceal differing fragments. The effect is a film composed as a collage. The ‘pieces’ can be assembled to form complementary pictures, dependent of the position and perspective of the observer. In places and at times these pieces may leave spaces between much like a mosaic, or combine and overlap. The whole remains, however, inaccessible. In *2046*, fundamental moments, alongside the banalities of daily life, take place in spaces which merge the public and the private, only parts of which can be seen.

As with the other films analysed, *Code 46* clearly calls into question the conception of the home as private sanctuary. *Code 46* depicts its urban populace residing in high-rise apartments, echoing aspects of both Dom Cobb’s dystopian tower of memories in *Inception* and the melding of the public and the private in *2046*’s hotel. Its representations of life in the dolls house are, however, quite distinct from the other texts. Here, the conflation of the public and the private occurs in the conflict and contrast between William’s two familial spaces and the defiance of (Western, middle-class, urban)
behavioural norms I read in each. In addition to the non-places which are William’s primary places of residence, the architectures which Code 46 articulates as his familial home are multiple. The merging of the public and the private is most clearly evidenced in the residence that he shares with his wife and son in Seattle through the ‘depersonalization’ of this personal place. This space is decorated with the affected design dictates of ‘contemporary cool’. With the exception of the minor touches found in his child’s room, William’s apartment features unadorned walls and clean surfaces, stainless steel appliances and large-scale screens displaying easily digestible digital art. This family lives its daily existence as though constantly exposed to others, inhabiting a grey space (both literally and metaphorically) rendered indistinguishable from William’s workspaces and the hotels in which he makes his home during his frequent business trips abroad.

In contrast, Maria’s apartment—the home of William’s mistress, his mother’s clone—and (as I will suggest in the concluding section of this chapter) the place more readily able to be called William’s home, encapsulates the conflation of the public and the private within its physical structure. A smaller, older space than William’s Seattle property, glass partitions ineffectively divide the open plan space into rooms. This aspect of the living conditions is highlighted by Maria’s pre-coital visit to the toilet throughout which, seated only metres apart, she and William sing a duet of No Woman No Cry. The excretion of waste, particularly by a female, generally considered to be a thoroughly private act is made public in this near-future existence. While this action clearly connotes the intimacy felt by this couple despite the short duration since their meeting, and could alternately be read as a ‘motherly’ behaviour, it suggests that the very nature of privacy has altered. These characters are at home in a dolls house, living their private lives in spaces uncontained by solid walls. The conception of the home as a private space is challenged further by the ease with which William is able (at a later point in the film) to invade Maria’s apartment using corporate-sanctioned techniques to gain access to her password. The technologies ostensibly designed to protect privacy are able to be manipulated and used as weapons by the corporation. This is not to suggest, however, that Code 46 represents privacy as having been subsumed entirely by the public. Maria’s determination to grow

plants within her apartment is a private action, a refusal to conform to the requirements of public existence. It is an act which literally conveys the character’s desire to ‘earth’ her space, to root it physically and protect herself against the perils of living in a dystopian tower. As has been argued throughout, it is the paradoxical melding of these binaries which exemplifies the interior architecture of the heterotopic spaces. It is in the conflict and contradictions encapsulated by the icon of the dolls house in which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists experience their perpetually liminal lives.

In this postmillennial subcycle of films the places, the geographies and the interior architectures of home have each in turn been demonstrated to be heterotopic. The perpetually liminal experience of these protagonists refuses them the ability to close any physical (or metaphorical) door and simply be at home. They are not ‘sitting on the fence’ of liminal existence but rather residing there, at home in transition as they iteratively seek the utopian horizon within the multiple places they attempt to call home. As a result, these characters retreat into dolls houses: Foucauldian spaces of children’s play which conflate the real and the imaginary, places in which the public and the private meld. It is in just such an interior that Inception’s Dom Cobb crafts his palace of memories. Although he is attempting to create a sanctuary, this tower denies dystopian convention and is penetrated by intruders, leaving him exposed. Chow too must perform his everyday existence in public, making his home in 2046’s Oriental hotel. This film affirms the fusing of the private and public realms both through its considered manipulations of interior spaces and its disorientating, fragmented aesthetic. Code 46 works differently with this blended binary, depicting it primarily through its characters’ challenges to behavioural expectations in their responses to their space. Across the subcycle, these characters are uncomfortably exposed as they conduct their quotidian existence. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists trace paths which they hope may eventually lead them towards comfort and stability. In doing so, they seek refuge in dolls houses, requiring them to perform their everyday lives and their relationships with those they live alongside. Perhaps then, in spite of Mary Douglas’ assertion that one never asks ‘who is your home?’, it is a line of inquiry that becomes as relevant as any spatially-focused question previously posed here.
Limitations of the spatial paradigm and the question: ‘who’ is home?

The idea that home may indeed, to follow the cliché, be ‘where the heart is’, is in this instance far from a preposterous suggestion. While Mary Douglas’ influential argument that the home is always localizable was made a generation ago (predicated on the idea that the home was the provenance of a nuclear family), Linda McDowell has more recently acknowledged the dilemma that,

[i]f place, the locality, is defined not as a bordered container but a locus of exchange and interactions across different spatial scales, how should we define the home as it is both the site and the locus of multiple forms of interchange, both ‘real’ and virtual, between people who are both physically present and absent at different times?\textsuperscript{334}

The concept of home which could, or should (however contingently), be defined as a place of exchange or interchange is one that resonates with these postmillennial films. While it is a fruitful path to pursue, endeavouring to define ‘home’ through the relationships these places seek to contain is, as I will briefly consider, no less problematic than attempting to do so through any of the spatial dimensions that have occupied this chapter.

For \textit{Inception}’s Dom Cobb, the proposition of home defined as relationship hub is immediately complicated through the multiplicity of stabilizing unions which Cobb is depicted as simultaneously and contradictorily seeking. There is, foremost within the narrative, the relationship that he has (or had) with his children and the home in Los Angeles where they reside. Cobb spends the duration of the plot seeking to return physically to this abode. Paradoxically, however, it is his desire to call this place home that forces Cobb into international exile. He chooses to leave this desired place after his wife frames him for her murder. By escaping the origin of this crime, and placing himself in

exile, Cobb seeks to prove that her death was not murder. Instead this unreliable character contends that his wife’s death was a suicide aimed at compelling him to leave this home (which she believes exists in dream) to join her in a home which he believes is the product of her dream-state fantasy. The Los Angeles house is his home because it is there that he can be a father to his children. He has chosen to leave without saying goodbye to them specifically with the intention of affording him the opportunity to return. This house is however, simultaneously not his home, because the woman he loves is not there. She is either alive elsewhere (in which case, he is either mad or exiled), or she is dead. The answer to this riddle is concealed in a totem—his wife’s spinning top which indicates where fiction meets reality—which she has hidden from both Cobb and herself. It is buried within a dolls house, in a safe that is both physical and mental, within her dreamspace reconstruction of her childhood home. In concealing it thus she limits the possibility of exchange between the couple, hiding from them both the fact that in a perpetually liminal existence the spinning top represents the ultimate paradox—a popular culture appropriation of Schrodinger’s cat, a top that both continually spins and must always topple. For Cobb, there is little possibility of a home defined with reference to his relationship with this alive and dead, doubled woman.

This doubling (or dividing) of the character which could potentially lead these protagonists home is also evident in both 2046 and Code 46. Indeed, 2046 presents a multilayered illustration of the fraught potential of defining home through relationship, compounding its complexities. The conflation of the character Mimi (the original inhabitant of room 2046) with Lulu creates an intertextual reference across Wong’s oeuvre, definitively indicating that Chow will be unable to find a place of comfort through

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335 Audrey Yue has argued that in Wong’s 1960s ‘trilogy’ of films, love functions as a ‘site of intersection’ which exposes ‘the traffic of comings and goings’, ‘the similarities of convergence and the differences of divergence’, critical to reading the transitory lives of characters whose homes are ‘uprooted’ in places ‘destabilised through heterotopia’. Yue makes her arguments in the context of work which focuses on 2046 as a political allegory and is therefore tangential to the arguments made in this thesis. I read her conclusion that love functions as a site in which to ‘construct community’, however, as analogous to my argument that the intimate relationships offer the potential for a sense of belonging and it is therefore interesting in the context of this chapter. Audrey Yue, “Migration-as-Transition: Hong Kong Cinema and the Ethics of Love in Wong Kar-Wai’s 2046,” in Asian Migrations : Sojourning, Displacement, Homecoming and Other Travels, ed. Beatriz P. Lorente, et al. (Singapore Asia Research Institute, 2005).
reference to these inaccessible women. Equally, Chow’s dalliance with Bai Ling (partly, or perhaps, purely) because she is the new tenant in room 2046 calls attention to the inappropriate nature of this exchange. It serves only to highlight his desire to find a home in an inaccessible relationship of old. In an equally complex and complicated rendering the unlikely possibility of defining home through interaction in this postmillennial subcycle, Maria’s role in *Code 46* is literally one in which she performs the role of both William’s mistress and mother. It is upon finding out that Maria has been genetically cloned from his mother, that William seeks to, at first terminate, then recommence, his relationship with her in his desperate search for a utopian horizon. The suggestion therefore that (in the absence of a home able to be readily defined through spatial paradigms) a proposition which sees home defined as a locus of interchange or exchange seems, from this perfunctory analysis, to be destined to failure as a strategy to resolve the paradoxes inherent in the places of perpetual liminality. The doubled and divided women who populate this subcycle are further evidence that, for these perpetually liminal protagonists, the horizon of utopian hope in which the home is returned to its status of stable refuge remains merely a glimmer. What has been raised through this limited attempt to apply McDowell’s concept to these films, however, is the importance of communication and intimacy as a means through which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists negotiate their experience of space and, more broadly, attempt to understand their perpetually liminal existence. The subcycle’s representations of interpersonal exchange therefore form the primary concern of the next chapter.

Iterative Dystopia’s homes are heterotopic places. For the protagonists in these texts, while there might be ‘no place like home’, as this chapter has demonstrated, there is also no ‘home’ in space. Where Foucault’s original thesis on heterotopias associated the characteristics of conflict and disruption with locations he identified as ‘counter-sites’, in this subcycle of films, I read these traits in the spaces of the diegetic everyday. Starting from the counterintuitive proposition of mapping Foucault’s ideas onto the quotidian, I have argued that it is, in fact, the places in which these characters seek the comfort and refuge of home that undermine accepted binary distinctions. The places inhabited by Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists have contradiction ingrained within their foundations. In
In order to understand Iterative Dystopia’s paradoxical representations of space, I have therefore offered complementary readings.

This subcycle of films represents its protagonists at home in movement. In order to feel any sense of belonging, they are required to travel. On screen, this contradictory notion is expressed through characters who are continually located in spaces defined by Marc Augé as non-places. Furthermore, it is not merely that these characters are cast adrift on these spaces of transition by their narratives, but rather that they actively seek them. It is within interstitial spaces such as trains and aircraft that Chow (through his alter-ego Tak), Dom Cobb and William Geld quest for their utopian horizon, iteratively searching for a path out of their perpetual liminality. Fundamental to this analysis, however, is that it is also in these spaces that they eat, sleep and love. Non-places are the space of their everyday. *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* each amplify the significance of Augé’s concept of non-places by extrapolating its characteristics onto the subcycle’s cities. I read the geographies in which the films’ protagonists reside as interchangeable. These are commutable spaces in which real-world differences are inappropriately reduced or fused, forming a singular diegetic polycity. It is through their manipulations of familiar landscapes that these narratives ground their dystopian visions in the assumed viewer’s present. Moreover, it is through their representations of urbanscapes (in particular) that the texts engage aesthetically with the dystopian form. Whether the characters are confined within spaces of ‘dripping darkness’ as might be anticipated, or forced to shelter from saturated light, these texts further shape their representations of space with reference to their dystopian cinematic lineage.

Correspondingly, the interior spaces called ‘home’ by these protagonists are also heterotopic places. Arguing that these characters make their homes in ‘dolls houses’, I explored these spaces with direct reference to the melding of the real and the imaginary that Foucault identified in his example of children’s play. It is the blurring of the public and the private realms that are key to understanding the architectures inhabited by Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists, however. Whether it is in a tower constructed of memories, in the doorway of a hotel room or within an ineffectively partitioned familial space, the interiors to which these characters retreat leave them uncomfortably exposed, performing their
quotidian existence in full view. Finally therefore, I conclude that as the places called home offer little comfort for the protagonists of this subcycle (save for the hope that persists in their iterative paths), it is to the interpersonal relationships conducted within these spaces that I must turn to follow the protagonists in their iterative journey towards their utopian horizon.
CHAPTER FIVE: Effective (Mis)communication

In their quest to create, reformulate or return ‘home’, the protagonists in *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* are seeking a place of belonging. The home they desire exists on the horizon of hope. It is a place of comfort, a sanctuary apart from the iterative performance of their quotidian existence. It is a shelter (both physical and psychic) from within which they can begin to make sense of their experience, the foundation upon which they may build their path out of perpetual liminality. As we saw in chapter four, however, their homes are heterotopic places. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists reside in architectures in which everyday life must be conducted on the permeable boundary between the public and the private realm. They find refuge in polycities, diegetic sites which conflate real-world geographic references, melding them into locations of contradiction. Furthermore, in order for these characters to be ‘at home’ Iterative Dystopia’s narratives require their protagonists to be travelling. These characters inhabit non-places. It is in these spaces that they conduct their daily existence, arrested in continuous motion. Denied a traditionally-conceived home, in the last chapter I concluded that each protagonist in this subcycle of texts must attempt to answer to the question ‘who is home?’ in pursuit of their utopia.

In this chapter I build on the assertion that Iterative Dystopia’s characters attempt to find a place of belonging through their intimate relationships. I analyse the subcycle’s representations of communication focusing primarily, once again, on the experience of the films’ male protagonists. I argue that the ‘emotional environments’ of Chow Mo-Wan, William Geld and Dom Cobb offer a second narrative layer in which the subcycle’s theme of perpetual liminality can be read. Specifically, this chapter explores the characters’ attempts at communication with their loved ones—both linguistic and haptic. I draw on Fritz Senn’s concept of ‘dislocution’ in order to define and describe the characters’ intimate interactions, asserting that Iterative Dystopia’s communications require readings which acknowledge the oscillating, complementary meanings Senn imbricates in his concept. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists’ exchanges produce both an excess, and a lack, of meaning which, like the heterotopic spaces in which they live, undermines binary conception. Despite their divergent production backgrounds, differing narrative arcs and
their disparate aesthetics *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* are unified in their representations of their characters’ communications as paradoxical.

This chapter investigates Iterative Dystopia’s representations of two different modes of interpersonal communication through the concept of dislocution. The first part of the analysis examines a series of spoken word exchanges between the subcycle’s characters. I argue that, although the representations vary considerably between the films, in each example considered, the words uttered are not merely signs open to multiple interpretations, rather they can only be understood in, and through, the contradictory information that they convey. I consider first the relationship between *Inception*’s Dom Cobb and his wife Mal as one which is conducted in riddles. While this has the obvious effect of withholding information from the viewer and creating narrative tension, I argue that these riddles are expressions of the dislocation which is fundamental to the film’s representations of this couple’s interactions.

I find corresponding evidence that the subcycle’s intimate exchanges can be characterised through the concept of dislocation in both *Code 46* and *2046*. Both these texts represent dialogues in which multiple languages are used in individual exchanges between characters. The examples that I investigate function quite differently from precedents of ‘cultural pluralism’ in the science fiction genre, however. In Iterative Dystopias it is personal interactions, the private conduct of these characters, which are predicated on miscommunication. While in each film, the characters’ verbal interactions are open to readings which focus on the shifting or multiple meanings which may be produced in the disjunctions between languages and the inherent ambiguities created in acts of translation, I read these dislocations as demonstrations of the unsettled (and unsettling)

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336 While I consider ‘translation’ as a dynamic process of exchange through Sarat Maharaj’s sociological deployment of Senn’s concept, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider the socio-political implications of Wong’s and Winterbottom’s use of language in these texts. For additional insight into issues around translation in *Code 46* see: Goss, “Taking Cover from Progress.” Elsheshawy, “The Prophecy of ‘Code 46’: ‘Afuera’ in Dubai, or Our Urban Future.” Martha Nochimson outlines Wong’s personal experience of Hong Kong’s poly-lingual society and its relationship to his oeuvre in Martha Nochimson, *World on Film: An Introduction* (Malden, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 338-40. Judith Kerman’s seminal analysis of *Blade Runner*’s representations and manipulations of language and the film’s ‘undigested multicultural world’ has much to contribute to understanding both texts from a socio-political perspective. Judith B. Kerman, “Post-
nature of the characters’ relationships common across the subcycle. I contend that the interactions between William and his nuclear family depict a ‘foreignness at home’ which directly extends my analysis of this film undertaken in chapter four. I argue that *Code 46*’s use of multiple, intermingled languages in conversations between loved ones, creates an intimacy through distance, and distance in intimacy. The notion of ‘foreignness at home’ is also unmistakable in *2046*. In this text, it resides in the contrasts created by Wong’s use of different languages to articulate Chow’s iterative experience. This film matches its slippage between languages with divided imagery, as the protagonist Chow attempts to negotiate his perpetually liminal experience through his imagined alter-ego Tak.

In the final section of the chapter, I analyse a selection of significant haptic exchanges between the subcycle’s protagonists and their lovers. I argue that these physical communications can also be read as paradoxical, and thus, further evidence of the characters’ perpetually liminal quotidian experience. I begin by analysing a single sex-act between William and his mistress, Maria, which takes place towards the conclusion of *Code 46*, arguing that this scene exposes the contradictions in the relationships this protagonist forms with others. Through its depiction of this intimacy as both sanctioned and unsanctioned, this film highlights the requirement of complementary readings to understand William’s iterative experience. *Code 46* offers the most potent representation of the conflicting and conflicted messages which underpin physical intimacy across the subcycle, however I also read evidence of this idea in *2046*’s and *Inception*’s inversions of expected hierarchies of touch. Dislocutions are produced in the contradictions between images of physical contact and the meanings attributed to them within these texts. Iterative Dystopias offer representations of speech and touch which express their protagonists’ perpetually liminal experience. Each text questions binary understanding in, and through, its protagonists’ interactions. As they undertake their iterative journeys across their narrative arcs in pursuit of their glimmer of utopian hope, these characters

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perform their relationships with others producing meanings which are conflicting and contradictory.

Who is home?: Characterising the subcycle’s interpersonal exchanges

In order to characterise and analyse the communications between the subcycle’s protagonists and their loved ones, I invoke Joycean scholar, Fritz Senn’s dynamic, precisely imprecise neologism, dislocution. Senn originally conceived dislocution as a critical concept which could help us observe some of the energetic, restive, and defiant animus of *Ulysses* in all its diversified manifestations...a term that should be reasonably precise, so as to retain some denotative edge, and yet implicatively loose enough to accommodate multifarious features.

He coined the term intending to capture narrative turbulence, disruptions, transformations and acts of substitution which don’t quite work, arguing that dislocution suggests a spatial metaphor for all manner of metamorphoses, switches, transfers, displacements, but also acknowledges the overall significance of speech and writing, and insinuates that the use of language can be less orthodox. The prefix should alert us to a persistent principle of *Ulysses*, evinced in a certain waywardness, in deviations, in heretical turns, but also in multiple errors and miscommunications...

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337 Senn, *Joyce’s Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation.*
338 Ibid., 202.
339 Ibid., xxi.
Some methodological typology of dislocation would be a natural next step, but even if it were feasible, the gains of systematic neatness would not make up for the intrinsic falsification. \(^{340}\)

In this chapter, I follow Senn in employing dislocation as a way of describing the simultaneous excesses and deficiencies of meaning critical to my reading of Iterative Dystopia’s intimate, individual (spoken word and haptic) exchanges. It is a concept through which to observe the conflicts and contradictions which typify the communications between this subcycle’s characters. Originally conceived as optic with which to view both the ambiguities within ‘unruly’ Modernist literature, and the ‘disruptive’ ‘approximations’ produced in its reading, \(^{341}\) within this chapter I use dislocation cognisant of this dual application. In addition, in accordance with cultural historian Sarat Maharaj’s implementation of the concept, I work with dislocation to highlight the idea that the oscillating and complementary meanings produced in, and by, this subcycle ‘hide in plain sight’ within the diegeses. This subcycle’s protagonists are seeking a place of belonging which might offer the solution to their perpetually liminal experience. As they undertake their journeys, they attempt to create the stability in their relationships that is denied them in their heterotopic homes. Iterative Dystopias inhibit this possibility, however, through its representations of its characters’ interpersonal exchanges as dislocations.

This thesis argues that Iterative Dystopia’s diegetic communications are typified by contradiction. At a textual level, it reads these interactions as either deliberate or ambiguous (mis)communications with the viewer. Yet the disjunctures created between the subcycle’s modes of diegetic communication and the multiple, contrary meanings produced go unnoticed or unremarked upon by the characters involved. In Inception, for example, characters utter identical words to produce opposite meanings, and notably accept both ideas without question. While in Code 46, an act of touch is able to provoke incompatible responses. In the second iteration of her illicit affair with William, Maria is depicted as both willing and unwilling, able and unable to override irreconcilable

\(^{340}\) Ibid., 202.  
\(^{341}\) Ibid., 206-10.
emotions and, moreover, accepts this dual reaction as unremarkable. Iterative Dystopia’s characters do not hesitate when faced with these conflicts and, in this, they implicitly accept the incongruities of their daily experience. Following this, I define dislocution within this thesis as the intimate engagements between characters which produce meanings that are opposed or opposing, which nonetheless the characters fail either to recognise, to react to, or to reflect on this opposition. These incongruities are quotidian. These films articulate dialogues of dislocution in which this ‘strangeness’ in the characters’ interpersonal communication is found hiding in the plain sight of their perpetually liminal everyday.

In a sense, diegetic communication in Iterative Dystopias has much in common with the ‘scene of translations’ that cultural historian Sarat Maharaj observes in (the terminologically-laden) multicultural, globalised, international, postcolonial, cosmopolitan society of the late 1990s. In these films, however, it is intimate communication which is an act of ‘perfidious fidelity’. It is their quotidian interactions, not acts of (active) translation, in which meanings are produced in an ‘unceasing tussle between something hard-won out of opacity and the impossibility of transparency’. Within Maharaj’s analysis, dislocution is the production of meaning in, and through, communications which embrace the inevitable ‘excess’ of the untranslatable. For the characters in the Iterative Dystopia subcycle of films, each act of communication that I analyse is a dislocution. In both their touch and speech I read a production of both an excess and lack of meaning. As Maharaj observes, these are engagements in which ‘words...as much mimic as stand off from and pull faces at one another.’ Furthermore, there is ongoing negotiation between the contradictions I read, oscillations of meaning. It is not simply that these texts produce multiple meanings, akin to those Maharaj identifies in acts of translation. Further, my reading extends beyond the idea that ‘the holding of one idea in mind does not preclude

344 Ibid.
345 Ibid.
the simultaneous maintenance of its converse’,\textsuperscript{346} as I argued in chapter three. In the performance of their everyday lives, the characters of this subcycle engage in a manner which requires the meanings produced in their interactions to be understood as complementary. These dislocations result in antithetical meanings which they simultaneously embrace. They either fail or refuse to acknowledge the strangeness.

The characterisation of Iterative Dystopia’s representations of intimate exchanges as ‘dislocations’ which ‘hide in plain sight’ allows me to observe two points of deviation from generic expectation. The first is a divergence from contemporary dystopian narrative form. The second is a variation from their futuristic counterparts on the postmillennial screen. I have argued that the contradictions expressed within these diegese, through both spoken word and touch, are fundamental to understanding the depictions of the characters’ relationships with their loved ones, in part because of the fact that these incongruities go largely unregistered, or unremarked upon, by the characters themselves. This is a significant departure from a more conventional use of language in dystopian narratives. Keith Booker argues that the dystopian form represents language as a powerful tool which may be wielded by characters either as a means of suppression or liberation.\textsuperscript{347} Dystopia’s characters are cognisant of the capacity of language to manipulate and be manipulated. In concert with Booker, Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini identify the potential that resides in characters’ use of language in dystopias. They note that ‘the dystopian protagonist’s resistance often begins with a verbal confrontation and the reappropriation of language’.\textsuperscript{348} By actively exploiting it, the heroes of conventional dystopian narratives use language as a foundation for change. Language


\textsuperscript{347} Booker uses Bakhtin’s concept of ‘authoritative language’ to make his argument, writing that ‘[t]he governments described in dystopian literature tend to focus their energies on language not only because it is a potentially powerful tool with which to control and manipulate their subjects but also because language may harbor powerfully subversive energies that such governments would like to suppress.’ Booker, Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide, 19.

\textsuperscript{348} It should be noted that, in addition to the operation of language within the dystopian text, Moylan and Baccolini make the argument that the subversive potential of language in the dystopian form works equally as a mechanism for social critique. Booker concurs with this point in his analysis. My interest here, however, is in the diegetic operations of the spoken word. Moylan and Baccolini, Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination, 6; Booker, Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide, 199-20.
therefore functions as a source of utopian hope. In contrast, in the subcycle of films investigated in this thesis, characters communicate with their loved ones in a manner which literally expresses their perpetual liminality. They are ensnared in, and by, miscommunications and for the most part they are represented as acquiescing to this conflicts enunciated by these dislocations, either tacitly or directly. In addition, on the occasions in which the protagonists actively attempt to command communication, such as through the act of ‘inception’ in Inception, they do by specifically working with the contradictions integral to my reading of the subcycle. They actively deploy dislocation. Moreover, in these instances, the characters are depicted as beholden to their perpetually liminal circumstances. Their attempts to manipulate language do not result in the ‘change’ sought by the heroes in conventional dystopian narratives, but merely precipitate another iteration of their spiralling journey. Unable to exploit language in a conventionally dystopian way, Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are frustrated in their efforts to answer the question ‘who is home?’

Alongside the contrast between the power of language in the conventional dystopian form and its relative impotence in this subcycle, Code 46, 2046 and Inception also deviate from the postmillennial cycle of future-films in their representations of communication. With limited exception, Iterative Dystopias fail, or refuse, to visually represent communication in a manner which marks them as conspicuously different from their contemporary counterparts. Moreover, the absence of communications technology imagery differentiates these films from the sociological context into which they were released. This additional layer of disjuncture serves, I argue, to emphasize the importance of communication to reading these films.

It is incontrovertible that the assumed viewer of these films engaged with them against the background of accelerating real-world technological innovation and its impact both onscreen and off. S/he viewed the films in an era characterized by Sarat Maharaj as a ‘retinal regime’ of info-data overload.\footnote{Sarat Maharaj and Gilane Tawadros, “We Were Nobody. We Were Nothing’: Art, Communications & ‘Memories of Underdevelopment’,” in Media and Glocal Change: Rethinking} By the turn of the millennium, Maharaj argues,
transmission of data and flows of information had become intensely visual. Equally importantly, these films were viewed in a sociological context which Anthony Elliott and John Urry argue was premised on the idea of ‘intimacy at a distance’. Technological mediation was integral to the conduct of real-world social relations. While I do not seek to engage with the vast body of literature examining the rapid growth of mass communications technologies in the postmillennial decade in referencing these ideas, argue that the lack of images of the technologies increasingly vital in the viewer’s real-world communications, and the contrast this produces in reference to genre convention, serves to highlight the importance of the characters’ intimate interactions in reading these texts. By expunging visual imagery of communications technologies from these futuristic texts, communication is left hiding in plain sight. Although Winterbottom makes use of a Skype-style teleconference capability, video phones and voice-activation, in Code 46, it is a present-as-future representation with the effect that the technology appears dated, if not archaic. This is further compounded through the extra-textual comparisons that can be drawn between the images of technologies in Code 46 and, for example, Spielberg’s big budget science-fiction film Minority Report, given their consecutive release, their broadly similar narrative concerns and Samantha Morton’s starring role in both films. Moreover, it is not only spectacular representations of these types of technologies (the conventional purview of science fictions) which are eliminated across this subcycle. Even the mobile phone is largely absent. This is particularly obvious in Inception (which, even

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Shaun Moores traces the use of this phrase to the work of Donald Horton and Richard Wohl who published on the ‘para-social interaction’ of mass communication in the 1950s. While Moores’ (now somewhat dated) investigation uses the concept as a basis for investigating the impact of mass media on relationships, authors such as Elliot and Urry argue (following Beck, Giddens and Irigaray), that ‘intimacy at-a-distance’ is a foundation in modern relationships. Shaun Moores, Media/ Theory: Thinking About Media and Communications, ed. David Morley, Comedia (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), especially 74-8. Anthony Elliott and John Urry, Mobile Lives, ed. John Urry (New York: Routledge, 2010).

For a detailed discussion on this issue, see: Nicholas Mirzoeff, Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture (New York & London: Routledge, 2005); Morley and Robins, Spaces of Identity; Tehranian, Global Communication and World Politics: Domination, Development, and Discourse.
taking into account its decade-long script development, was produced post the facebook and twitter-led social media explosion of the mid-noughties). Despite being the most recently released film analysed, it largely eschews representing this now-ubiquitous communication mode, indeed using cumbersome walkie-talkies in the arctic dreamscape scenes. Although this dearth of technology is not unique within contemporary dystopian narratives, when viewed as a collective, these films can be read as taking a deliberate stand against the real-world paradox of exploding telecommunications possibilities which have resulted in an excess of ‘words, images and noise’ which, in effect, limit the possibilities for meaningful discourse. Together these films create a false quiet. Through the absurdity of this technological absence (which defies both formal convention and creates a rupture with the viewer’s real-world experience) the texts implicitly acknowledge the importance of communication to understanding the protagonists’ narrative experiences.

*Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* depict characters who, unable to re-‘concrete’ their existence within their heterotopic homes, seek a sense of belonging in, and through, their relationships with others. Yet they participate in dialogues with their loved ones, consisting of both spoken word and haptic interactions, which defiantly flout expectations. The meanings produced are paradoxical. In contrast to the more conventional deployment of language in dystopian narrative, these texts problematise communication (and by extension the relationships founded upon it) as a solid foundation from which their protagonists may construct an avenue out of perpetual liminality. The words spoken in these texts are not shown to have the capacity to subvert or transform, instead the texts emphasize situations in which the meanings conveyed are at once misleading and accurate. In this conflict and contradiction words the possibility of utopian hope found

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352 Toby Widdicombe points out the absence of technology in Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novels, reading this as the suggestion that technology may be useful in the creation of dystopias (in which neither Atwood, nor this subcycle of texts is greatly interested), but is not critical to their survival. Widdicombe, “Margaret Atwood, Doughnut Holes, and the Paradox of Imagining,” 298.

353 On this point see Majid Tehranian, who uses the metaphor of noise to expose the contemporary paradox of increased communications potential. He writes that ‘that international communication is becoming a dialogue of the deaf’, arguing that exploding telecommunications possibilities often leads to a flood of words, images and noise thus limiting the possibilities for meaningful international discourse. Tehranian, *Global Communication and World Politics: Domination, Development, and Discourse*, 55 and 132 (my emphasis).
within intimate relationships is frustrated. These characters ask ‘who is home?’ but must negotiate exchanges in which the dialogue either deliberately or inadvertently, but certainly inevitably, miscommunicates.

Motivated (mis)communication in *Inception*

*Inception* represents spoken word dislocation in what I term ‘motivated (mis)communications’. These dislocutions produce the multiple, contradictory meanings which are vital to understanding the protagonist’s iterative experience. In both the examples that I analyse from this film, however, it is Cobb who precipitates the paradoxes articulated. Yet he is neither able to control them, nor does he respond to the ‘strangeness’ produced in a manner which suggests that he views these incongruities as anything other than routine. Dislocation is a fundamental characteristic of this protagonist’s spiralling journey across his narrative. I argue that this film manipulates the spoken word in a manner which moves beyond an exploitation of language in order to withhold information from the viewer, or to drive its plot. Cobb is not an unreliable narrator, for example, who is propagating misinformation, or allowing half-truths to masquerade temporarily as the complete picture. Rather *Inception* depicts circumstances in which Cobb, and the characters around him, must simultaneously hold contradictions to be true. These dislocutions are key to understanding this second layer of the protagonist’s perpetual liminality. Its clearest examples are found in *Inception’s* two central story pillars, obsessing Cobb as he performs his iterative journey. This film produces the incongruities that I call dislocation by underscoring ambiguous utterances with conflicting or liminal imagery. Of the three films analysed in this thesis, *Inception* is the most resolute in undermining language as a potential source of utopian hope.

More than any of the other protagonists, Dom Cobb seeks to define his home through his intimate relationships. This character is motivated by an obsessive desire to return to his family and his unwavering belief that his wife, Mal, is the foundation that will enable him to transition from his perpetually liminal existence. *Inception* is ironically clear in rendering language opaque, however, thereby diminishing its potential as a source of utopian hope.
As the characters speak, their dialogue is overlayed with visual representations of the conflicts and contradictions in meaning it produces. A primary example of this occurs at the film’s climax, in the scene which purports to remove the final obstacle to Cobb’s return ‘home’. Cobb himself is absent from this crucial interaction which is a dialogue between Cobb’s sidekick, Eames, and the film’s antagonist, Robert Fischer. Throughout *Inception*, Cobb’s team prey on the multiplicity of potential understandings latent within the half heard, or misheard, deathbed utterance of Fischer’s father, in their effort to achieve the plot’s goal. It is through his father’s final (non)statement that Fischer defines himself and Cobb’s team manipulate both the language and its underlying sentiment(s) to create a situation, divided across dream levels, in which two contradictory statements are equally true. On dream level one, Fischer is encouraged to remember his father’s final communication with his son

Fischer And I could only make out one word: disappointed.

On dream level three, the team induce a scenario in which Fischer alternately experiences the scene with his father

Maurice Disapp...disapp...

Fischer I know Dad. I know you were disappointed I couldn’t be you.

Maurice No. I was disappointed that you tried.

Through his motivated miscommunication, Cobb (with the support of his team) triggers a direct conflict between Fischer’s recollections. More relevant here, however, is the fact that Cobb is not in control of the outcome, and each of Fischer’s contradictory memories is itself ambiguous. Was Maurice ‘disappointed’ that his son sought to be like him because he altruistically believed that Robert should never have been trying to emulate him? Or was he ‘disappointed’ that his son had wasted his time trying to follow in his footsteps because his son was incapable of achieving this goal? It is on dream level two, in *Inception*’s penultimate scene, that Fischer seeks to interpret these words. Seated on rocks in the pouring rain beside the river into which their van has just plunged, Robert Fischer turns to his father’s confidante, Browning, and gasps
Fischer: You know the will means that Dad wanted me to be my own man, not just to live for him. That’s what I’m going to do Uncle Peter.

This is a statement pregnant with dislocation. It decisively articulates Robert’s newfound understanding of his relationship with his father. It is also meaningless, in that it is unclear as to the emotional or practical implications for any of the film’s characters. Fischer’s statement only raises a plethora of questions. Fundamentally for Cobb, it does not determine whether or not the obstacle (purportedly) preventing his return to his family has been overcome. This redoubles the ambiguity expressed in the film’s final scenes. The viewer must read *Inception’s* climax as one which presents the unknown as the only known.

Visually, the film confirms the contradictions in Fischer’s final statement in a number of ways, further reinforcing the ambiguous outcome for Cobb enunciated in Fischer’s words. The non-diegetic music which accompanies this scene signals the characters’ return to (diegetic) reality. As the scene progresses, however, the viewer becomes aware that Fischer remains in the ‘first level’ of his multilayered dream. He is in a space of hypnagogic liminality, an ‘in between’ level of dreaming that the character believes he has woken up to. Further, as the character defines his course of indeterminable action, the camera makes a sweeping pan around him revealing the Janus-face of the body seated beside him. His companion is first Browning, then Eames, at once both and neither. In this critical plot scene, *Inception* refuses the viewer clarity as to the meaning of Fischer’s words. This ambiguity alone is insufficient to support a reading of the communication as dislocation. As I have demonstrated, however, across the text this character uses words in a manner which produces incompatible meanings across scenes and the contrary nature of these speech acts are reinforced in the film’s imagery. Moreover, as is common across the subcycle, Fischer fails to recognise, respond to, or reflect on the conflicts in his words. For *Inception’s* protagonist, this example of dislocation is, however, ultimately immaterial to his achievement of narrative resolution. The film has already hindered Cobb’s ability to define ‘home’ through his relationship with his wife in its depictions of their intimate interactions.
Cobb’s wife, Mal, is a character at once halved and doubled. She is divided across reality and unreality, both whole and fragmented in each world. Pivotal to understanding her character and the film’s central conceit is the idea that her suicide by defenestration is at once death and birth. Mal’s suicide is not a transition (a traditionally-conceived liminal act), but rather an action with opposite but equal ramifications across both her indeterminable un/reality/ies. This character both believes and refutes the ‘simple little idea’ that her husband planted in her mind, ‘that her world isn’t real’. This dislocution, produced through Cobb’s motivated miscommunication, articulates a mobius strip of logic that cycles throughout the story. It informs the characters’ interactions with each other and establishes that Mal is unavailable as a location of stability from which Cobb might relinquish perpetual liminality. The conflicting duality captured in the characters’ spoken word exchanges is best exposed in the scene in which Mal farewells her husband. The scene is staged with Mal seated under the window lintel of a multi-story hotel. Neither inside nor outside, Mal is arrested ‘in between’. Like Bai Ling and Chow in 2046, Inception positions Cobb and Mal in a heterotopic space to experience this defining moment in their relationship. The character begins the scene determined and assertive. She states ‘I am going to jump and you are coming with me’. She kicks off a single, elegant high-heel shoe and commands ‘come out onto the ledge or I’ll jump right now’. This falling shoe adds another layer of visual metaphor to the scene. Mal is now one shoe on and one shoe off, which I read as an allusion to her inability to control or recognise the multiple meanings generated in the words she speaks. She both retains and divests herself of this symbol of gendered power. These images underscore the equivocal depiction of language of Mal’s suicide note(s). Mal informs Cobb that she has filed a letter with their lawyer stating that she fears for her safety. The letter also attests to her sanity. This communication implies that Cobb will murder her in one life and has murdered her in another. It is a suicide note which confirms murder. It provides evidence of sanity to support insanity, at once creating and erasing Cobb’s guilt and his innocence.

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354 See my discussion of this in Chapter four: Playing in the dolls house.
It is, however, in Mal’s ‘final’ words—her verbal suicide note—that *Inception*’s speech acts can most clearly be understood through the concept of dislocation.

Mal

*You’re* waiting for a train, a train that will take you far away. You know where you hope this train will take you, but you can’t know for sure. But it doesn’t matter. Because *you’ll* be together. (My emphasis.)

The viewer is first introduced to these words in the plot as a riddle which reveals the scorn of a jealous wife. Positioned as a Sphinx guarding love and truth (though having access to neither), Mal’s words are a puzzle in which ‘reality’ is at stake. In this iteration of Cobb’s journey, the refrain teasingly raises questions without answers. These same words are later revealed to have been first spoken in this intimate relationship by Cobb. In that instance they intone the paradoxical relationship the characters have to home and exile and reveal a marriage conducted in layers. On the basis of the film’s flashback structure, compounded by its temporal manipulations within the dream sequences, across three incantations Mal and Cobb must be understood to have always either spoken or heard these words before and be destined to speak or hear them again. Furthermore, irrespective of who utters the refrain, it is always invoked in the second person. These words are Mal’s words which are also Cobb’s. They are words spoken by Mal to Cobb and to herself. They are spoken about her, by her, but from without. The statement ‘you’ll be together’ is not just a riddle incanted on multiple occasions to tempt the viewer into believing that the narrative will offer an explanation as to who this ‘you’ might be, or resolve itself by granting its protagonist the chance to ‘be together’ with his wife (either alive or dead, dreaming or awake). It is an unsolvable puzzle which illustrates the complementary meanings produced in this perpetually liminal protagonist’s intimate communications. Just as Cobb is unable to escape his iterative experience by ‘re-concreting’ his environment, nor is he able to do so by defining a sense of belonging through his spoken word interactions with his loved ones. These characters relate through dislocations. Each variation of this verbal engagement between Dom Cobb and his wife contains ambiguities, but read together they present layers of contradiction which exemplify the protagonist’s perpetually liminal experience. As we will see, unlike the other
films in the subcycle, Cobb is responsible for this experience inasmuch as he precipitates it through ‘motivated miscommunications’, yet he remains unable to control the oppositional meanings which result. Moreover, in his relationship with Mal—experienced, remembered and imagined—Cobb is forced to continually revisit this interaction. It is an unremarkable aspect of his perpetually liminal everyday. *Inception* presents an emotional environment in which dislocutions diminish the spoken word’s capacity to function as a source of utopian hope.

*Code 46*’s (anti)esperanto

*Code 46* offers two distinct examples of dislocation within its dialogue. Language is undermined as a potential source of utopian hope for William Geld in each occasion in the text that individual words are exposed as producing contradictory meanings. These moments of semantic antinomy highlight the quotidian nature of dislocation across the subcycle. The characters engaged in these scenes do not react to, or appear to reflect upon, the oppositional meanings created in the words that they speak. More critically for the film’s protagonist, however, through its contrived representation of a universal language in which these everyday ‘miscommunications’ are made possible, William’s relationships are unsettled. William is forced to conduct his intimate interactions in a manner which further emphasises that he is a foreigner in his (heterotopic) home. The words he speaks construct intimacy through ‘distance’, thereby creating a distance in intimacy, withholding the sense of belonging for which he is searching.

The language spoken in *Code 46* is an amalgamation of words from Spanish, French, Arabic, Italian, Persian and Mandarin, ‘lexically airdropped’ into the dominant English. Everyone in the film converses using the same multilingual tongue, irrespective of ethnic origin or geographic location. It is an (anti)Esperanto, reminiscent of *Blade Runner*’s (1982) ‘cityspeak’, that viscerally renders on the screen Maharaj’s sociological concern that

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355 Goss, “Taking Cover from Progress,” 73.
privileging ‘hybridity’ has the potential to lead to a ‘flattening sameness’. Though it offers a polyphony of opportunities for analysis which are beyond the scope of this thesis, my interest here is the manner in which the characters’ construct and experience their everyday realities in, and through, this language. As in Inception, the meanings conveyed in the characters’ exchanges are disrupted, often antithetical. In contrast, however, Code 46’s dislocations are not expressed in the repetitions of ambiguous phrases across the text. They are revealed in isolated exchanges. I consider two key examples in support of this idea. First, I analyse Code 46’s concept of the palabra, or password, and the specific words associated with it, arguing that it captures the prosaic contradictions rife within spoken word communication in this film. Further, I offer this example as the quotidian background against which I read the dialogue William shares with members of his nuclear family. These scenes in Code 46 further my contention that Iterative Dystopias renounce the possibility that its protagonists might build a path out of perpetual liminality on the foundation of their intimate relationships.

In the near-future of Code 46, individuals speak to gain entry to their private places. The film uses the word palabra to describe this language-based access system, applying it functionally as ‘password’. A reading which focused on Code 46’s representation of words as literally ‘keys’ to entry might therefore suggest that language in this text retains (at least some of) the power conventionally attributed to it within the dystopian form. Words here are units of currency which can be exchanged for access, or used to limit, movement and there is the possibility, following this logic, that they could be wielded in order to subvert authority. Yet any power in language (and the associated utopian hope) is undermined in this text through its specific representations. The palabra spoken within the text—panoply and carrefour—are words which function as keys that are unable to

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356 Maharaj, “Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other.” On this point, see also: Spivak, Outside in the Teaching Machine.

357 Translation Studies scholar Mona Baker argues that ‘cultural realities’ are constructed through the activity of translation. In Code 46, the individual’s experience that is constructed in the disjunctures between languages, the excesses and the lack of meaning produced in their singular multi-lingual tongue. The idea that these characters ‘construct’ their experience recalls my argument that Iterative Dystopias are not nihilistic texts, and is thus important here. Baker, “Translation as an Alternative Space for Political Action,” 24.

358 A more direct Spanish translation of palabra into English appears to simply be ‘word’. A plethora of online translators offer contraseña as the direct translation for ‘password’.
lock doors. They are thus another cue to the permeable nature of the boundary between the private and the public that I explored in my discussion of Iterative Dystopia’s homes as heterotopic spaces. These passwords declare the contradiction of insecure and unsecured ‘security’. Their use highlights the conflicts inherent in the film’s banal exchanges and forms the relief against which the dislocutions in William’s intimate relationships become emphasized.

Maria’s palabra is an elegant example of the film’s engagement with the concept of dislocation. To enter the personal space of her apartment and also to unlock her diary—the receptacle of her private thoughts—Maria uses the word ‘panoply’ which derives from the ancient Greek meaning ‘armour’ or ‘protection’. The ease with which William appropriates Maria’s password in the film, in order to enter her private places, lucidly demonstrates the oppositional meanings produced in her use of this word. Maria’s palabra is literally armour which offers no protection. This is noteworthy because Maria is a character who undertakes illegal activities. She has intimate knowledge of the regime in which she exists, how best to circumvent it, and the measures necessary to attempt to protect herself (though her execution of these tasks is fairly rudimentary within the film). On this basis, however, Maria’s password does not simply become a ‘stolen key’ through William’s (mis)appropriation, but rather a manifestation of the contradiction that it was already imbued with. This character defends herself via a safeguard she understands is both protection and pretence. She employs the word panoply ironically. It captures her acknowledgement that her armour is no protection against the system. Furthermore, it affirms that there is nothing out of the ordinary about this language-based incongruity.

My reading of Maria’s password as dislocation is strengthened by having been foreshadowed in a scene in which William dupes a receptionist into giving him unauthorised access to the business that he is charged with investigating. The protagonist desires to begin his detective work undetected and convinces the receptionist to allow him to ‘guess’ her password. She agrees, on the basis that he ‘couldn’t do it’. Using powers of increased ‘empathy’ bestowed upon him by the regime, William succeeds immediately. Interestingly, this is one of the few moments throughout the film in which a non-English word is translated into English. Its dual articulation emphasises this
password's conflicting meanings. In this performance of personal violation, William speaks, then repeats, the receptionist's password

William

Your *palabra* is *carrefour*. Crossroad. *Carrefour*.

This word denotes a decision point. It connotes the idea that passwords offer assurance that intruders can (and will) be diverted from private places. Like all passwords it is intended to arrest access, a point which is signalled through the physical metaphor. This is further augmented through the use of a French term, in opposition to the text's dominant use of English, a language which also bears no relation to the scene's geographic location or the cultural heritage of the actress employing it. The receptionist seeks to protect her privacy creating a barrier through the spatial metaphor of diversion and fortifies this diversion by the use of a language only peppered throughout the 'international' tongue. Yet the receptionist's response to William's con is not one of horror, but rather the awed mystification of one who has witnessed magic trick. In this I read her acknowledgement of the inherent conflict which resides in the concept of the *palabra*. Both Maria's and the receptionist's passwords form permeable barriers, both literally and metaphorically. They are penetrable amour and a crossroad which functions equally as an access conduit. Both are easily (mis)appropriated by an 'empathetic' friend/foe (an idea to which I will return in the next chapter). In *Code 46*, characters' *palabra* clearly express the disjuncture between words and the contradictory meanings they produce in Iterative Dystopias. Furthermore, the characters' responses to the failure of these passwords highlights dislocation's quotidian nature within the film. These are protective words without the power to protect.

It is not just access to private space that must be negotiated (or circumvented) through dislocations in *Code 46*. It is the intimate communications that occur within these places that I characterise as dislocations. For William, like Iterative Dystopia's other protagonists, words spoken in private highlight the contradictions ingrained within his relationships,
refusing him the sense of belonging he seeks. In William’s life-world, irrespective of whether they are in public or at home, every character speaks the single language. Notably, this ethnically-unbalanced hybrid language is uncomfortably articulated by the characters throughout the text, emphasizing the disruptions in, and to, the characters’ communication. This is particularly evident in the quotidian interactions between members of William’s nuclear family. In Tim Robbins’ hesitations over, and mispronunciation of, the non-English words which proliferate throughout his dialogue, moments of ‘foreignness’ are deeply embedded within William’s intimate relationships. It is interesting that, in comparison with other dialogue throughout the film, William’s conversations with his wife and son are more liberally populated with non-English words than is common throughout the text. As is the case throughout the subcycle, the effect of this is paradoxical. Without an available comparison with other familial interactions, these motley multilingual communications might be read as an adaptation of the imposed singularity, a ‘secret language’ with which only the initiated can communicate. Its creation attributes a closeness to the characters sharing the language, while its uniqueness and exclusive application offer it as a potential example of language reinvested with the utopian hope of existence for William beyond perpetual liminality. The overall impression generated by these scenes is, however, not conspiratorial privacy, but rather clumsy and awkward miscommunication. Without conclusively denying the positive potential of this language, William’s familial conversations are better read as examples of the distance created in even the closest relationships in, and through language, in Iterative Dystopias.

*Code 46*’s characters perform intimacy. Prominent in this regard is the conversation William has with his wife and child having just discovered that the subject of his days-old infidelity, Maria, is also (genetically) a member of his family. William frantically phones ‘home’ to inform them of his intention and desire to return. His wife answers the video call with the salutation, *agur* (Basque) after which she briefly chastises him in clipped English for calling from the car. Their exchange concludes thereafter with declarations of love using the phrase *ti amo* (Italian) and the phone is momentarily passed to William’s son, who, dressed for bed, greets him with the multilingual phrase ‘Daddy? *Salut. Ça va?’* (French) to which William responds (in a clumsy half-French/half-English), ‘*Sa-llo. Love you.*’ His son appears to respond with the curiously grammatically incorrect, ‘*Me you,*
(which is likely supposed to be the Italian phrase *anche io* translated directly into English) and they conclude their conversation exchanging the French phrase: ‘*A bientôt.*’ The erratic combination of languages used within this dialogue and their dubious articulation mirrors the instability of this family unit, compromised as it is at this point in the plot through William’s affair. Additionally, I read the noticeable increase in the occurrence of non-English words in the protagonist’s speech as a desire to impute intimacy through the use of the ‘romance’ languages in particular (for in these conversations there are no Asian words, in contrast to the rest of the film). As distinct from the ‘futuristic newspeak’ he utters without acknowledgement outside his familial environment, here William appears to be gratefully importing cultural context, manipulating the language he speaks in order to strengthen the feelings communicated through his words. The resulting dialogue emphasizes his failure to connect. These conversations call attention to William’s foreignness at home (if a culturally-specific version of foreignness in these instances). Equally, however, William’s increased use of European words within his familial conversations, alongside the casting of French actress Jeanne Balibar in the role of this quintessentially American actor’s wife, suggests that ‘foreignness’ can and must belong in William’s life. For William, intimacy is impossible without this distance, he is unable to relate without it.

Whether Iterative Dystopia’s characters are communicating with strangers or those with whom they are intimately familiar, the dialogues of their everyday experience produce the contradictory meanings that this thesis characterises as dislocation. For *Code 46*’s protagonist, William, this fundamentally challenges his ability to find a sense of belonging in his intimate relationships. Unlike in *Inception*, in which the contradictions spoken in the dialogue seemingly go unnoticed by the characters, both Maria and William appear cognisant of conflicts expressed, yet they are glossed in the text, accepted as ordinary by the characters. The quotidian nature of dislocation is highlighted in *Code 46* in the scenes in which William steals characters’ passwords in order to enter private places. Words which are doubly inscribed as ‘protective’, through both their denotative meaning and their application in the text, fail to protect. Their use and misuse consolidate the assertion I made

in chapter four that Iterative Dystopias represent the perpetually liminal experience as one in which the boundary between the public and the private is undermined. More importantly for this film’s protagonist, however, Code 46’s representations of the spoken word depict William as unsettled within his familial environment. He is foreign at home. William awkwardly performs routine communications with his loved ones in a manner which highlights the distance in these intimacies. Just as in Inception, the dislocations in Code 46 accentuate the subcycle’s representation of relationships as an unviable foundation from which to build a path out of perpetual liminality.

Making conversation with a foreign self in 2046

In contrast to the other two Iterative Dystopias analysed in this thesis, I find little evidence that 2046 inhibits its protagonist’s quest for an answer to the question ‘who is home?’ through its representations of spoken word interactions between loved ones. It is Chow’s haptic exchanges that I argue impede this character’s ability to define home through his romantic engagements. That is not to suggest there is no evidence of dislocation in the words spoken within the text within this text, however. Indeed, as my analysis will demonstrate, Chow’s words speak contradictions which he fails to acknowledge, creating both the excesses and lack of meaning which define dislocation. This dislocation is fundamental to the manner in which Chow negotiates his quotidian experience.

Moreover, obvious parallels can be drawn between 2046’s manipulations of the spoken word and my analysis of the dislocations which plague Iterative Dystopia’s other protagonists. In Chow’s voiceover monologue, 2046 brings together Code 46’s thread of ‘foreignness at home’ with Inception’s repetitious riddle in a manner which reinforces the iterative structure of the protagonist’s perpetually liminal experience through his spoken words.

Wong Kar-Wai’s protagonist speaks contradictions in a riddle which echoes across the film.361 In 2046’s use of the voiceover Chow is represented as at once the author and the

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361 Wong Kar-Wai is known for using riddles, working with enigmas to create tension both within his films and across his oeuvre. As Wendy Gan remarks, ‘Wong is acutely aware of the processes of
subject of his quotidian experiences. As is the case in *Inception*, in the variations in the words spoken and the voices they are spoken with, *2046* confirms the iterative path of its protagonist’s journey. Chow’s words are a memoir of the future. Near identical incantations describe on-screen action which explores his lived past(s), present(s) and potential future(s), alongside those of his alter-ego, Tak. It is with Takuya Kimura’s voice that the protagonist initially incants the premise central to this film.

Every passenger going to 2046 has the same intention...Nobody really knows if that is true, because nobody’s ever come back. Except me...Some people get away fairly easily. Others find that it takes them much longer.

Unlike in *Inception*, which presents an ambiguous statement that only becomes conflicting through its repetitions, these words are internally contradictory. As Chow reiterates the incongruous idea that he is the only exception to the rule that nobody ever returns from 2046 (despite the many people who escape) through both Tak’s voice and his own, and accompanies it with conflicting imagery from both his present and his future, Chow’s words operate as a dialogue with himself. Moreover once the film makes it clear that Tak and Chow are synonymous (and must therefore be simultaneously conceived as both one person *and* two people who have ‘returned’) the statement is rendered irreconcilable. It is in the slippage between these complementary ideas, which are uttered in conflicting voices, in contrasting languages, with small but influential amendments across the text, that Chow negotiates his quotidian experience. Although, unlike the other protagonists in this subcycle, Chow is not seeking the answer to the question ‘who is home?’ in these statements, his words are clearly able to be characterised through the concept of dislocution.

In accordance with Iterative Dystopia’s other protagonists, Chow also does not react to, or remark upon, the incongruities spoken within his voiceover. This is emphasized for the constant substitutions and deferral that affect all signs...In *Chungking Express* [1994], for example, there is a playful proliferation of signifieds for certain signifiers, increasing the slipperiness of their meanings.’ Wendy Gan, “Surviving Desire: Rewriting the Romance in the Films of Wong Kar Wai,” *SPAN* 50/51 (2000): 94.
viewer through the film’s initial unwillingness to directly associate the conjoined characters of Chow and Tak. As Gary Bettinson points out,

the narration suppresses cues that might alert us to Chow and Tak’s synonymity. In the film’s opening sequence, Tak’s voiceover dialogue (spoken in Japanese) overlays images of a futuristic cityscape. Later the same stretch of dialogue is repeated and is once again accompanied by science-fiction imagery, but now Chow intones the dialogue (in Cantonese). 362

The failure of this character / these characters to react or respond to the differences in the repetition of the words spoken can at first, therefore, be read simply as a narrative device employed in order to sustain the enigmatic relationship between Chow and Tak. Chow uses the same words (spoken variously by he and Tak to describe his future) to articulate his experience of the present at the conclusion of the plot, however. In this scene, Chow is pictured walking slowly away from his lover, Bai Ling. Bai Ling’s voice overlays these images which exclude her from the frame, questioning, ‘why can’t it be like it was before?’ In response, Chow (in voiceover) re-presents his refrain with modifications, suggesting both that ‘it’ (his experience and his understanding of it) is precisely as it was before, is incrementally but fundamentally changed, and can never be the same.

Everyone goes to 2046 with the same intention. They want to recapture lost memories. Because in 2046 nothing ever changes. But nobody really knows if that’s true, because nobody has ever come back.

2046 opens with Chow’s articulation of utopian hope uttered by a doppelganger residing in his dystopian future. As the plot begins, there is the suggestion that this character may ‘return’ from the future to begin anew. The plot concludes with the suggestion that ‘he can never come back from the future’, yet this assertion is made in the story’s past, suggesting the possibility of change. In these contrary ideas I find the excesses and lack of

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meaning that I characterise through the concept of dislocution. They capture the internal conflict of a perpetually liminal character venturing into a future which progresses beyond the present, yet declaring his intention to do so by becoming arrested in the past. Chow uses multiple voices to speak these complementary meanings. This narrator is embodied by two actors, Tony Leung and Takuya Kimura. He is represented multi-temporally. He is represented bi-linguistically. Chow is divided and doubled, identical to Tak, yet distinct. He is seeking intimacy with an other who, at once, is and is not himself, in order to understand his experience. Chow negotiates his everyday in the dislocution he speaks in conversation with himself.

Iterative Dystopia’s other protagonists are prevented from answering the question ‘who is home?’ as a result of the dislocution that proliferates through the dialogues they have with their loved ones. In 2046, dislocution manifests in the ‘conversation’ Chow has with himself. This protagonist is forced to negotiate his everyday experience through the excesses and lack of meaning that are highlighted through his voiceover. Despite this difference, there are parallels too between the manifestations of dislocution in Wong’s film and its representations in Code 46. Code 46’s perpetually liminal protagonist expresses the contradictions of his quotidian experience in, and through, his manipulative, hesitating enunciation of multiple languages spoken in combination. Within his intimate relationships, the obvious disjuncture between the English and the non-English words spoken within this hybridized language produces the effect that William appears foreign at home. 2046 generates a similar effect through Chow’s speech. In this film, the protagonist’s voiceover monologue is spoken by two bodies, in two different languages. There is no acknowledgement in the text of any differences between either the words spoken, or the languages that they are spoken in, despite the slippages in both. I read this disconnection as evidence of Chow’s ‘foreignness’ within. In contrast to Code 46, which constructs language, purposely manipulating it as a dystopian element of William’s world, there is no doubt that the division between Chow and Tak could be read simply as a mimetic reflection of Hong Kong’s polyglot society. This reading would position Chow as seeking multiple perspectives through the different languages available to him. This is unconvincing however, when contrasted against the scenes of frustration between Mandarin-speaking Miss Wang and her Japanese lover, also played by Takuya Kimura, as
they attempt to communicate across their language barrier. Read in this context, the unremarked upon linguistic disparities within the protagonist’s voiceover evoke the impression of estrangement or division. In his native Cantonese, Chow speaks to, and through, and his alter-ego, who (re)articulates these experiences in Japanese. 2046 doubles and divides its protagonist. Chow is seeking to characterise or understand his experience through the ‘dialogue’ he creates with a fictionalised, foreign self.

The words spoken by Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists undermine binary conception. This subcycle of films requires complementary readings in order to appreciate the excesses and lack of meaning produced in these dislocations, as each of the interactions that I have analysed confirms. In each text, the contradictions and conflicts evident in their dialogues pass unnoticed, or unacknowledged, by the characters. These dislocations are a quotidian aspect of their perpetually liminal experience, and furthermore, in both Inception and Code 46, they are fundamental to the conduct of their romantic relationships.

Unlike Iterative Dystopia’s other protagonists, Inception’s Dom Cobb precipitates the spoken word incongruities which are fundamental to his experience. He is, however, represented as unable to control the outcomes of his manipulations. Despite the multiple meanings produced, he responds to the strangeness which proliferates as an unremarkable aspect of his daily life. Further, in the repeated ambiguities spoken by Cobb and his wife Mal, both characters are positioned (verbally and visually) as ‘in between’, never together, nor apart, but both at once. This couple are denied the possibility of relating without dislocation. Cast as a foreigner in his heterotopic home, Code 46’s William also performs his intimate relationships through dislocation. Despite his efforts to affect warmth through an increased use of the romance languages, William stumbles awkwardly over his hybrid tongue. Words this protagonist speaks with his wife and child

Wong’s decision to have each actor speak in his/her native tongue in 2046 functions quite differently from the science fiction trope which positions characters from different realms attempting to communicate using their individual languages. These interactions, perhaps most famously illustrated in the Mos Eisley Cantina scene in Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope (1977), produce either comedic effect or instigate narrative conflict. While the scene in which Jing-Wen attempts to give Tak directions are comedic, the overriding impact of their failure to communicate is one of frustration and despair. Furthermore, with the exception of the dialogue between these characters, the use of different languages by 2046’s characters goes unnoticed in the narrative.
create distance even as they make connections. For both Dom Cobb and William Geld, the glimmer of hope that lies in the answer to the question ‘who is home?’ remains elusive.

2046’s Chow Mo-Wan does not articulate his desire for stability through the words he speaks in his romantic encounters. Dislocution instead plagues the dialogue that he has with himself. Chow’s words, spoken by multiple bodies, in multiple languages, echo William Geld’s ‘foreignness at home’, creating similar excesses and lack of meanings as he attempts to negotiate his quotidian experience. Furthermore, while these intimacies are markedly different from the domestic conversations depicted in Code 46, there are parallels able to be drawn between Chow’s engagement with Tak and the interactions between Cobb and his remembered and imagined wife. Tak’s words impact Chow, just as Mal’s words effect Cobb. Iterative Dystopia’s perpetually liminal protagonists perform speech acts which convey multiple, contradictory meanings. These spoken word dislocutions pervade their everyday experience. Moreover, in Inception and Code 46, dislocution limits any possibility that these protagonists might find a sense of belonging in their intimacies. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists must look beyond language, a traditional source of utopian hope, to determine a path out of their perpetually liminal experience.

Ambiguous intimacy: Iterative Dystopia’s uneasy intercourse

The strangeness which hides in plain sight of Iterative Dystopia’s spoken word communications also penetrates its protagonists’ physical interactions. Fritz Senn’s concept of dislocution therefore offers a further point of access to the characters’ haptic engagements. In the final section of this chapter I consider examples of the films’ ambiguous presentations of sexual contact and argue that, in addition to problematising the spoken word, the subcycle inhibits the possibility of ‘unspoken’ communication as the foundation upon which Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists might build a path out of their perpetual liminality. With each touch, these characters express multiple, conflicted and conflicting meanings.
At what is, both literally and symbolically, the climax of *Code 46*, the text entwines its characters’ bodies in intercourse. It is an ambivalent scene in which the spoken and the unspoken are juxtaposed. The run-away couple, William and Maria, discuss William’s family as they embrace on the unmade hotel bed in which they will again consummate their affair. They kiss and Maria draws away from William, confused by her body’s response. As she learns of the measures taken by the society’s ruling body to ensure no further illicit relations between the pair, she declares:

Maria  I’m not scared of you.
William  No, but your body is.

and it is made clear visually and audibly within the diegesis that she is both physically *and* emotionally terrified *and* excited. This sex act is, as Bruce Bennett writes, ‘consensual rape’.\(^{364}\) This haptic dislocution functions to express emotional and biological pasts which have been lived and not lived—Maria is genetically identical to William’s mother, though she is not his mother. The couple has consummated their relationship previously, though Maria remembers William only as a character from within a dream. They have conceived a child together which Maria terminated, though her memory of this has been forcibly removed. It also expresses the conflict between the possibility of their potential futures and its impossibility, of them creating a life together as a family, although biologically they already are and legally can never be. For this scene to be understood, these contradictions must concurrently be understood as true. These oppositions are emphasized visually through Winterbottom’s use of a hand held camera, involving and implicating the viewer in the exchange. It is an almost-Oedipal scene, in which softly-lit shots conflictingly allude at once to romance and pornography, while simultaneously undercutting any potential for pleasure. Although William is positioned as the patriarchal male, strapping his much younger conquest to a hotel bed, he is also largely removed from the scene. In contrast to the majority of the film, Maria dominates the frames, often in extreme close up. Thus although the scene is voyeuristically charged, it also affords

Maria the space to reclaim the choice to reject social norms. It is, however, a paradoxical defiance, for the orders come from within her body.

The dichotomy of the sanctioned/unsanctioned and its links with the possibility/impossibility of fulfilment are key to the physical relationship between William and Maria. *Code 46* couples the danger of the illicit with its desirability in a complex manner which positions risk-taking as requisite for personal fulfilment. In this sense it engages with the type of risk taking Hamid Naficy argues is inevitable for those working and living under surveillance. While it is undoubtedly problematic to invoke the very real dangers faced by interstitial filmmakers (which form the basis of Naficy’s argument) within this discussion, it is sustainable to suggest that William’s role as a rogue hegemonic operative seeking an alternative existence through putting himself (and others) at risk has the potential for comparison within the contemporary socio-political realm. Moreover the level of risk William is willing to accept compounds throughout the narrative. The morally unsanctioned act of instigating an affair outside familial monogamy escalates to a legally unsanctioned act following William’s and Maria’s discovery of their genetic relationship. The affair intensifies adding a level of social non-sanction when William naively defies his orders to return home, (briefly) leaving the safety of his hegemonic position to pursue his relationship with Maria *afuera*. In its conclusion, the film seemingly restores a semblance of social order, returning William to his nuclear family and condemning Maria to exile. This underscores the dystopian warning articulated by the film. William is reinstated with his family, relieved of any memories associated with his affair. There is no suggestion that he is not happy with his situation, able to embrace the socially-sanctioned narrative which fills the gaps in his edited memories. Beyond the plot, the viewer must acknowledge, however, that William has been required to accept a punishment which is both with and without cause, for the crime from which it precipitated has been expunged. In its conclusion, William is denied the empathy virus upon which he relied to perform his job, thus extinguishing his capacity to work in his current employment and his wife is furnished with more details of his story than he is privy to which may have ongoing ramifications.

*Code 46*’s representations of haptic dislocation articulate and embrace the conflicts

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365 Hjort, "Introduction: The Film Phenomenon and How Risk Pervades It," 158.
between passion and terror, hope and resignation. William, like we saw of Dom Cobb previously, is ultimately positioned as uncertain, for this character the only known is the unknown.

*2046*'s representation of physical intimacy is similarly paradoxical to that portrayed in *Code 46*. This is particularly evident in Chow’s relationship with Bai Ling. For this couple the conventional hierarchy of physical intimacy is inverted. The most emotionally engaged moments transpire with the merest brush of the hand, while sexual intercourse is romantically reduced to the status of transaction. Furthermore, these haptic exchanges are unidirectional, for although they communicate, the message is either unreceived, unacknowledged or unclear, and neither character is positioned to respond.

Chow’s sexual relationship with Bai Ling is depicted as ambivalent from the outset. Their first communication occurs through the walls of their newly adjacent rooms as he has noisy intercourse on his side and she complains loudly that she is trying to sleep on hers, a complaint he chooses to ignore. This scene functions as a visual metaphor for the relationship based on simultaneous connection and division which they will develop and sets the tone for their sex-based exchanges in which they oscillate between desire and repulsion. In an early interaction Chow offers Bai Ling a sexualised gift (stockings) as an ‘apology’ for attempting to pimp her out to his friend. In this scene, the characters perform flirtation, she is coquettish and he openly suggestive. They touch. Chow grasps at Bai Ling’s hands on multiple occasions forcing upon her a gift she purports not to want. Bai Ling touches Chow, slapping his face in response. It is touch which communicates the charged sexual tension between the couple, suggesting both the possibilities and impossibilities of the relationship that will ensue. The couple’s relations are marked with a desire for belonging through their determination to name their interactions, first as ‘drinking buddies’ and subsequently as prostitute and john. In this they seek definition, understanding, security, though their designations of these dislocutions are immediately undermined. As friends the couple play-fight: touching, kissing and biting, physical exchanges charged with sexual intent. As lovers they exchange money, attempting to exclude emotional engagement and erotic intention in an agreement that is rapidly
rescinded, then inverted. Sex thereby becomes a currency with which Bai Ling and Chow obliquely communicate the conflicted value of a relationship.

2046 conveys the characters’ understanding of the ‘true’ value of their relationship and their desire for each other only in the scene which concludes their first Christmas together. In a dream-like scene reminiscent of classic 1950s Hollywood, Bai Ling and Chow are pictured seated together in a taxi. She stares thoughtfully out the window, while he sleeps, head resting on her shoulder. In a subtle move that is depicted as both with and without intent, Chow places his hand on Bai Ling’s thigh. Initially she rebuffs him, removing his hand with her gloved and bejewelled one. As he replaces his hand, this time grasping her hand in his, she assents to the move. Shot in extreme close up, this joining of the characters’ hands conveys a quiet intimacy that is at once at the heart of, and in contradiction to, their relationship. In opposition to Code 46, 2046 presents physical intimacy as common currency. The characters do not fight others or themselves to touch in 2046, rather they fight to imbue touch with accurate and understandable meaning. Intercourse retains some level of capacity to communicate, even functioning as a channel through which to speak to characters who are not participants in the act, making ambivalent statements such as ‘I am over you’. When it does speak, intercourse speaks with a forked tongue of loneliness, of desire for another and of the absence in presence captured by this ambiguous intimacy.

Inception engages with this concept of haptic dislocation by articulating sex through its absence. Just as in Code 46 and 2046, Inception depicts intimacy from the perspective of the male protagonist, yet in contradistinction to the other films, Cobb’s imagined engagement with the opposite sex is notably asexual. Every (other) aspect of Cobb’s character is heteronormative. He is the patriarch of a young, attractive family. He is a commanding leader, determined, practical and pragmatic. He is primed for the ongoing performance required by his perpetually liminal everyday. He is a classical Hollywood hero. Yet, despite his complete control over their interactions—for Mal only exists in his mind—at no point in Inception does Cobb conceive of himself in bed with his wife. It is as though having penetrated her mind with such dire (and uncertain) consequences in the act of ‘inception’ he is unwilling, or unable, to risk penetrating her body.
The suggestion of sex is omnipresent in *Inception*, however. There is palpable attraction in Cobb’s subconscious recollection/reincarnation of his wife. The viewer is introduced to her wearing a jewel encrusted, evening gown which reveals a flawless décolletage. Next she is the picture of classic French elegance in an eggshell trench. Our third view of Cobb’s wife depicts her multiply within his memory palace, scantily-clad in a camisole in their living room, bathers by the ocean and finally, in the deepest recesses of his mind, Mal is clothed in another beautifully crafted, sexually evocative gown on the night of their final wedding anniversary. She is berating Ariadne. Mal spits

Mal I know who you are. What are you doing here?
Ariadne I don’t know. Trying to understand.
Mal How could you understand? Do you know what it means to be a lover, to be half of a whole?

This scene is, for both Cobb and for Mal, a reconstruction of a past that never existed. It is an expression of the impossibility of the creating a whole from fragments that both do and do not, have and have not, existed. It is a statement of ambiguous intimacy which attests to the fact that Mal and Cobb can neither be lovers, but nor can they be separated. Indeed, the only time that this married couple are ever pictured lying down together they are primly dressed, waking up from a dream together. They are side by side and on waking, Cobb’s kiss is refused. As in *2046* it is the holding of hands in *Inception*, the lightest of touches, that paradoxically conveys the greatest amount of emotion. Cobb instills these moments with the totality of his emotions, be it the barest brush of the hand between young lovers and the convivial grasp of the elderly couple. As he gently glides the hand of his suicidal wife away from the blade of a knife or grips her hands within his as they wait for the train to wake them from their dream, he asks these haptic exchanges to convey to his past, present and future self, to his living and dead wife, emotions that are and were present and absent. These are physical dislocations. With each touch this couple produces and conveys multiple, conflicting (and multiply conflicted) meanings.
Code 46 depicts its protagonist’s extramarital affair as an adventure, an explorative iteration of his quotidian experience. 2046’s protagonist attempts to characterise his intimacy as acts of prostitution while Inception’s Dom Cobb remains faithful in his monogamy. Despite the diversity of sexual relationships depicted across these three texts, each depicts physical intimacy as contradictory. Touch, like the spoken word, is best understood in this subcycle as dislocation. Irrespective of whether it is the brush of hands or intercourse, Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists’ touch produces multiple conflicting meanings. Moreover, the characters accept this as a requisite aspect of their perpetually liminal existence. These interactions capture the simultaneous desire and repulsion felt as these characters relate, resulting in the inversion of conventional understandings of touch in both 2046 and Inception, while conflating meanings in Code 46. It is through these representations that both the possibility and impossibility of these characters making a stable future together is expressed. The oscillating meanings produced in these haptic dislocations substantiate this thesis’ claim that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are unable to found a path out of their perpetual liminality in their intimate relationships.

Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are searching for a sense of belonging. Denied stability in their heterotopic homes this chapter has explored their emotional environments—their relationships with their loved ones—as a second narrative layer in which these characters look for the foundation upon which to build a path out of their perpetual liminality. As they spiral through their stories, these characters pursue the glimmer of utopian hope that lies in answering the question ‘who is home?’

Despite the proximate relationship that these films bear to the cycle of future films popular within the postmillennial decade, Iterative Dystopias are clearly distinguished through their shared resistance to visual representations of communications technology. This works in combination with their specific depictions of verbal and haptic communication to highlight the importance of interpersonal exchange for the assumed viewer of these texts. Yet on screen, Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists’ engagements produce both an excess, and a lack, of meaning which ‘hide in plain sight’ of the characters’ everyday. They pass unnoticed, unacknowledged, or unreflected upon as the protagonists iterate across their narratives, the contradictions are accepted as quotidian.
Furthermore, the conflicts imbued in their intimate interactions undermine binary conception, like the heterotopic spaces in which they live. Whether it is deliberate distraction or merely results in ambiguous connotations, miscommunication is unavoidable; it underpins the characters’ relationships. Indeed, they are depicted as unable to relate without it.

Within the subcycle, there are clear intersections between the depictions of the protagonists’ interactions with their loved ones that I analysed in this chapter. Despite their diverse production backgrounds and differing narrative arcs, Code 46, 2046 and Inception share allegiances in their specific articulations of spoken word and haptic dislocutions. In both Inception and 2046 a riddle uttered repeatedly across the narrative serves not only to produce oppositional meanings within the scenes, but functions to reaffirm the iterative trajectory of their protagonists’ journeys. Equally, though it manifests quite distinctly in each film, both Code 46 and 2046 illustrate their protagonists’ inability to find stability through the spoken word in the theme of foreignness at home. For the protagonists of Inception and Code 46 spoken word dislocation fundamentally undermines their capacity to answer the question ‘who is home?’

So too touch is frustrated as a source of intimate communication in Iterative Dystopias. As the subcycle’s protagonists seek to connect with their loved ones within their sexual interactions, the meanings produced are antithetical and hierarchies of understanding are inverted. In spite of the notable differences between the relationships depicted, these films are unified in the requirement for complementary readings of these scenes. Ultimately, the unacknowledged incongruities in the characters’ spoken word and haptic interactions, which this chapter has described through Fritz Senn’s concept of dislocution, deny language its conventional utopian capacity in Code 46, 2046 and Inception. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are frustrated in their pursuit of a glimmer of utopian hope within their emotional environments.
Iterative Dystopia's protagonists are hindered in their pursuit of comfort and refuge at home. They reside in heterotopic spaces. These places, which elude binary understanding, offer them little hope of a stable foundation upon which to build a path out of their perpetual liminality. As they trace their spiralling journey across their narratives, this subcycle's characters are also frustrated in their attempts to find security in their relationships with their loved ones. With each word that they speak and each touch that they share, these protagonists produce multiple, conflicting meanings. Dislocution pervades their intimate interactions, undermining the utopian hope conventionally ascribed to language in the dystopian form. Accordingly, these characters embrace the possibility that they might locate their utopia within themselves. They search for a sense of belonging that they can create in their own minds. The characters in this subcycle desire to recapture the 'never-past' in order to assert, regain, and beguile themselves with an imagined stability. They are seeking to build a home within their memories.

This chapter explores the mind as a third environment in which the protagonists of these Iterative Dystopias conduct their search for an alternative to their perpetually liminal experience. It argues that this subcycle of films narrates its characters' psyches in a manner which notably diverges from the conventional characterisation of a dystopian hero. Moreover, its representations distinguish the characters from their counterparts in the postmillennial future-cycle of films. The protagonists of *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* are reframed as ‘uncertain’. Drawing upon the work of sociologist Ulrich Beck to define this idea, I contend that, unlike both their predecessors and their contemporaries in the dystopian form, these characters are neither anxious, nor alienated, nor mad. They respond appropriately to their perpetually liminal experience.

The uncertainty that afflicts Iterative Dystopia's protagonists is illustrated on screen through representations of the characters' minds as paradoxically safe and unsafe. While they retain their capacity for creativity, their cognitive spaces are also sites of control. These characters retreat into the sanctuary of their own thoughts only to be challenged
by assaults upon these protected and protective places. I begin the chapter’s textual analysis with a consideration of the subcycle’s engagement with memory. I argue that these characters actively construct their memories in order to establish a reliable understanding of their present. Further, in each iterative attempt to reshape the past I read the characters’ desire to develop a future beyond their perpetually liminal existence. By positioning memory as a forward-looking activity, a glimmer of hope remains within these texts. Just as their homes and their relationships are represented as places which undermine binaries, however, so too are the protagonists’ minds. These characters seek shelter in spaces which are infected with indecipherable contradictions. In these films uncertainty is ‘pathological’, expressed and explored in the motif of contagion. In the final section of the chapter, I argue that this subcycle underscores its representations of the mind as a conflicted place through its engagement with surveillance. These films recode it as ‘intimate’, rendering the characters both suspicious of it and seduced by it. Iterative Dystopias refigure the dystopian narrative convention of looking for a utopia outside the system. These characters explore the places of their everyday in their search for a sense of belonging. In this chapter I consider the idea that they are looking for a horizon of hope which exists within their own heads.
Uncertain protagonists

Can we know the future we face? The answer of course is, no, we cannot; but yes, we must act “as if” we do...The future is in many ways unknowable, and uncertainty is a basic condition of human knowledge and existence. This creates a paradox: How to provide certainty and security through knowledge of the future in the face of uncertainty as a basic condition of human knowledge?

Ulrich Beck

Like the subjects of Ulrich Beck’s sociological research, William Geld, Chow Mo-wan and Dom Cobb want to know their future. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists desire existence beyond their perpetual liminality. With each iteration of their narrative journeys they explore possibilities. They rewrite their pasts and their futures as they venture incrementally further into the unknown, searching for a solid foundation. As a result, this thesis contends that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are ‘uncertain’ in their performance of their everyday. The characters’ experience of their perpetual liminality mirrors two primary traits with Beck’s analysis of real-world uncertainty. First, their uncertainty is a response to blurred boundaries. Second, it is their uncertainty that creates opportunities for transformation.

From the backseat of his chauffeured vehicle, William Geld is whisked through an environment ravaged by the impacts of climate change. Code 46’s protagonist lives in a world which has been turned upside down, in which night has literally become day. Against the stark relief of his disintegrating surrounds, Geld is firmly focused on his own future, unaffected in his climate-controlled comfort. This is equally true of Dom Cobb. While Inception’s plot is propelled by the global energy crisis, Cobb leverages an opportunity to impact global security for his own personal gain. Moreover, he does so as he sleeps comfortably aboard a flight from Sydney to Los Angeles, in a first class seat. Similarly, with file footage of the 1960s Hong Kong riots playing in the background of his daily life, 2046’s protagonist writes short stories dressed in his underwear. His comfort is

primary. He is seemingly oblivious to the world outside. Like his well-healed compatriots, Tak is depicted living luxuriously, donning a tuxedo and heading out to the casino despite his surroundings. Against the backdrop of realised catastrophes, and cognisant of the flaws in their socio-political environment, Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists focus on themselves. Unlike conventional dystopian protagonists, they do not offer resistance or denounce the system for social gain. They just want to go ‘home’. They desire an end to the perpetual liminality that is their collective experience. They are occupied by the uncertainties of their own personal futures.

Ulrich Beck describes ‘uncertainty’ as an individualised response, but one which is felt across populations who are exposed to ‘luxury risks’. These risks are omnipresent dangers, issues of concern for people residing in “objectively” safer environments. Additionally, the effects of the risks are incalculable, their mitigation or resolution requires ‘unknown answers to questions that nobody can clearly formulate.’ I read parallels between the perpetual liminality experienced by Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists and the luxury risks Beck identifies. Neither Geld, Chow or Cobb face imminent dangers in their narratives. They are depicted as relatively comfortable as they go about their daily lives, despite the risks which exist in their diegetic life-worlds. Yet, as they spiral through their narratives towards their films’ ambiguous endings, they are searching for an answer that can only be defined negatively, one which can only be formulated using unknowns. They want a life beyond their perpetual liminality. Neither its causes, nor its ongoing effects can be effectively or reliably determined, however. They face futures that render

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367 Moylan, Scraps of the Untainted Sky, xiii-xiv.
368 Moylan and Baccolini, Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination, 5.
369 Beck, World at Risk, 54-55.
370 ———, “Risk Society’s ‘Cosmopolitan Moment’,” 68.
371 ———, World at Risk, 52.
372 Beck specifies ecological, terrorist, military, financial, biomedical and informational risks as the ‘manufactured uncertainties’ (ie. risks which humans are responsible for causing and responsible for managing) which pervade contemporary society. He contrasts the ‘uncertain’ response to the ‘anticipation of catastrophe’ associated with these risks, with the fears felt by ‘unsafe’ populations, such as those living in war-torn regions. ———, “World Risk Society and Manufactured Uncertainties,” 291. ———, “Risk Society’s ‘Cosmopolitan Moment’,” 68-69.
373 ———, World at Risk, 52.
374 Ibid., 115.
375 Ibid., 52-53.
them uncertain. It is the coalescing of the boundary between safety and insecurity that Beck exposes in his work which is of primary importance to my characterisation of Iterative Dystopia’s characters as uncertain. In accordance with the social science fiction criticism methodology employed throughout this thesis, I invoke Beck’s ideas in order to facilitate a nuanced reading of these texts, rather than to suggest that the films are mimetic. The protagonists in this subcycle of films are secure in their risky environments. They are middle class, urban males who, exposed to the ravages of global warming and faced with social uprising on their doorsteps, continue to go about their everyday lives. They are secure in their insecure geo-political environments, but face their future with uncertainty.

This chapter takes the conflict between safety and insecurity identifiable in the protagonists’ experience of their diegetic environment and argues that, in addition to this straightforward reading, the Iterative Dystopia subcycle artfully explores this blurred boundary within its characters. In harmony with their homes and their relationships, their minds are also sites of contradiction. These characters are depicted as vulnerable in their inviolable environments. Importantly, however, their uncertainty is not pessimistic. In this assertion, I take my cues again from Ulrich Beck. Beck argues that faced with the uncertainty caused by the ‘overwhelming presence’ of risk in, and to, their daily lives, individuals respond in three ways: denial, apathy and transformation. Within the dystopian narrative form, denial and apathy are mirrored in characters who express a fear which inhibits their activity, or who exhibit a ‘cynical detachment’ which expresses their perceived (or actual) powerlessness. These are considerably different emotions from those displayed by this subcycle’s protagonists as they iteratively pursue change to their quotidian circumstances. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists reflect the idea that uncertainty


\[\text{377}\] Claey, “News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia,” 156.

\[\text{378}\] More precisely, Boggs suggests this relationship is key to understanding ‘postmodern film’ which he argues lies at the intersection of the dystopian and neo-noir genres. Carl Boggs, “Postmodernism the Movie,” New Political Science 23, no. 3 (2001).
'can be a source of creativity, the reason for permitting the unexpected and experimenting with the new.' Across their narratives they pursue the glimmer of hope that may lead to permanent change.

Iterative Dystopia's protagonists' uncertainty marks them as notably different, both from their counterparts in the dystopian tradition, and within the broader future cycle. They are neither anxious, nor alienated. As Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla argues, fuelled by the events of 9/11 and subsequent terror attacks, many of the action, science fiction and fantasy films in the postmillennial decade sought to tap into what he terms the popular 'psychosis of insecurity'. He contends that films such as Spielberg's Minority Report and War of the Worlds (2005) generated dramatic impact through their representations of latent social fears. These films engaged with 'fears' that were the 'response to a specific threat [with] a definite object'. In light of this, it is hardly surprising that the typically-dystopian 'anxious' protagonist—directly descendent from the late 1990s 'paranoid strain' of science fiction—continued to populate the postmillennial screen. These dystopian protagonists expressed their insecure, unstable, or fragmented subjectivity in texts ranging from Cameron Crowe's commercially successful 2001 film, Vanilla Sky, to

381 Ibid.
382 I distinguish the 'uncertainty' reflected in Iterative Dystopia's protagonists from the 'fear' engaged by popular Hollywood films via Anthony Giddens' definition. Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, 43.
383 Vivian Sobchack includes the following films in the 'paranoid strain' of science fiction: The Truman Show; David Cronenberg's Existenzi (1999); The Matrix; Fight Club; Solaris; and Minority Report. Vivian Sobchack, "American Science Fiction Film: An Overview," in A Companion to Science Fiction, ed. David Seed (Malden, USA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005), 172.
2009’s critically acclaimed, independent film *Moon*, and Jaco van Dormael’s underrated *Mr Nobody* (2009). However reasonable the origins of the anxieties felt by these characters, or focused the source of their fears, the line between sanity and madness was blurred in these films and the protagonists were isolated from, or by, their society. In contrast, Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are depicted as rational in their conduct of their everyday. Unlike their generic counterparts, they are not singled-out by the texts as unusually disturbed, nor ostracized within their social realm. They do not draw the attention of the mental health profession. These characters are depicted as exhibiting behaviours which fall within a range of normal, acceptable actions given that their quotidian existence is riven with paradoxes.

The characterisation of Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists as lucid in their uncertainty does not imply that the subcycle’s protagonists are wholly sound psychologically. When an uninvited Ariadne (Ellen Page) decides to follow *Inception*’s Dom Cobb into his dreams she becomes deeply concerned for his emotional stability. This does not prevent her from re-entering his subconscious labyrinth, however. Further, she decides not to alert the other members of his inner-circle to the potential dangers lurking in Cobb’s mind. Instead, she conspires to support him in his quest. An already intimate scene becomes conspiratorial as Ariadne leans in, whispering: ‘the team needs someone who understands what you are struggling with’. Moreover, *Inception* is equivocal regarding Cobb’s mental (in)capacity. In one scenario Cobb is a wanted criminal, on the run from the law having murdered his wife, but it is an idea which is only alluded to obliquely within the plot. It is

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385 Here, protagonist Sam Bell (Sam Rockwell), is literally and figuratively isolated, communicating with his own hallucinations during an three-year stint maintaining a mine in outer space.
386 *Mr Nobody* focuses on a hospitalised Nemo Nobody (Jared Leto) as he confides his life-story/ies via a multi-linear narrative to a journalist and a psychiatrist while the world watches. It premiered at the Venice International Film Festival in 2009 and received limited release across Europe in 2010. This was followed by a US premiere at the Los Angeles Film Festival in 2011 and subsequent release in 2013. *Mr Nobody* did not garner theatrical release in Australia.
387 Many authors have fruitfully pursued psychoanalysis as a means through which to investigate, for example, the Freudian aspects of *Inception*’s dreamscape, the oedipal motif in *Code 46* and the depictions of melancholia in Wong Kar-Wai’s oeuvre. See for example: Mark Fisher, “The Lost Unconscious: Delusions and Dreams in Inception,” *Film Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2011); Bennett, *The Cinema of Michael Winterbottom: Borders, Intimacy, Terror*, 70-72; Michael Ward, “Mapping the Mind between Movies: Intertextuality in the Work of Wong Kar-Wai,” *Bright Lights*, no. 72 (2011).
not pursued in detail. Like his protagonist-counterparts across this subcycle, Cobb’s behaviour is depicted as reasonable and logical in light of his circumstances.

In contrast to *Inception*’s ambiguity regarding Cobb’s mental health, *Code 46*’s William is venerated as a pillar of the community, an investigator in the field of corporate crime. This character is well-respected specifically because of his mental acuity. It is due to William’s psychological stability that he is able to support an ‘empathy virus’, and manipulate it, ensuring that he is successful—indeed, sought after—within his profession. While the plot focuses on William’s deviation from behavioural norms (for which he is ultimately sanctioned), his aberrance is categorised as an isolated incident. It is a ‘momentary madness’ caused, or at least justified, by a fault in the system and not a flaw inherent within his character. As a result, William is rehabilitated, not isolated, and returned to his (nuclear) familial fold. On the car ride home from the hospital at the conclusion of the film, William is depicted as hesitant and perplexed. This uncertain character is positioned as ready to take the next step of his iterative journey.

Of the three protagonists, the character who arguably exhibits the most blatantly non-normative social behaviours is *2046*’s Chow. This character goes to lengths to avoid meaningful interpersonal relationships and prefers imaginative places to reality. Yet, it is he who is portrayed as the most ‘psychologically stable’ character in the film. It is the other characters who are psychologically transgressive. Lulu/Mimi (Carina Lau) commits suicide and Wang Jing-Wen (Faye Wong) is institutionalised. In comparison, Chow’s behaviour is depicted as reasonable and rational. While each text insinuates that its protagonist may have either temporary or ongoing psychological concerns, they are resolutely depicted as responding *appropriately* to their everyday experiences. Existing in an environment of perpetual liminality results in uncertainty, it does not give rise to madness.

Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are uncertain. Faced with environments in which the boundary between security and danger is blurred, they remain firmly focused on their pursuit of an alternative to their perpetual liminality. These characters are depicted as responding appropriately to their everyday experience. This distinguishes them from the
conventional dystopian protagonist, who is both anxious and alienated in his/her pursuit of social change. Equally, they share little in common with the paranoid and ostracized characters who populate the contemporary future cycle. This subcycle’s protagonists do not express fears which lead to paralysis, nor to do they display feelings of powerless which might hamper them in achieving their goals. They continue to pursue transformation as they trace their iterative paths. This does not suggest that they are psychologically unblemished, but they are not deviant, nor mad. They are uncertain. Far from limiting them, it is this which propels them. These characters pursue the glimmer of hope which lies within. With their homes and relationships compromised by conflict and contradictions, they look to their memories as a foundation for transformation.

Seeking refuge within: making a home through memory

Hamid Naficy writes that ’[m]emories are fallible, playful, and evasive, and the narratives and iconographies that they produce...are palimpsestical, inscribing ruptures, fantasies, and embellishments as well as ellipses, elisions, and repressions.’388 He is describing the role of a filmmaker’s memory in the creation of a film. He could equally be describing the role of the protagonists’ memories in the Iterative Dystopia subcycle, however. These characters are seeking to make themselves a home—and at home—in their own heads. For these characters the act of remembering is a deliberate refashioning. They embellish and elide aspects of their lives. Remembering is a creative act in which they attempt to defy their experiences within their heterotopic homes and their conflicted relationships. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists manipulate their pasts in their search for a sense of stability within themselves. As these characters trace their iterative paths, they knowingly construct memories of the never-past, narrating their lives in an effort to extinguish their uncertainty. Just as the boundary between safety and insecurity is blurred for the protagonists in their diegetic environments, however, it is also blurred within the characters themselves.

388 Naficy, “Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics,” 121.
*Inception* reworks the dystopian convention of representing characters who ‘seek refuge in dreams whenever their subjectivities are threatened’. Its characters use their dreams to perform the act of remembering. In *Inception*, dreaming creates alternative layers of reality. As Ariadne wakes from her first chemically-induced dream, distressed and in pain, Cobb promotes this idea.

Cobb

Because it’s never *just* a dream.

And a face full of glass hurts like hell, doesn’t it? While we’re in it, it’s real.

Within his own dreams and those he shares with others, Dom Cobb creates and explores a labyrinth of memories in an attempt to vanquish his uncertainty. He iteratively recalls, repurposes and repositions his past, editing and embellishing as he searches for a future beyond his perpetually liminal existence. He uses his dream space as a location to compose himself. It is in dreams that Cobb literally collects his thoughts, by constructing a memory palace. It is the place in which he searches for safety and stability. Remembering is a creative act. There is a glimmer of hope in the minor changes to his past that Cobb makes in his dreams. Within his memory palace, he directly engages with Mal in the hotel room which is the scene of her suicide/murder. In this ambiguous time and place, he is able to converse with his wife, to promise her that he’ll ‘come back for her’. In this statement he articulates a scenario—that he half believes—in which her death is / was not final. He is creating a never-past to which he makes iterative changes with each visitation. Cobb is constructing a home through his memories.

Cobb’s desire to build a secure place with his memories is compromised, however. His dreams are a location of contradiction. His quest to alter his past, and revive his dead wife, is thwarted through his inability to remember her ‘in all [her] complexity, with all [her] perfection and all [her] imperfection’, as he mournfully informs her in the text. In addition, he is ambivalent about his desire to achieve this goal, for it is his very ability to

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389 In his analysis of *Brazil* and *Metropolis*, he argues that dreams serve to ‘foretell the fears and struggles of the characters.’ Nezar AlSayyad, *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 90.
resurrect his wife that creates the opportunities for her to cause him harm. Despite his control over Mal as his ‘creation’, she is able both to injure him physically and to disrupt his capacity to act. In the film’s opening scenes, it is Mal who frustrates Cobb’s attempt to steal Saito’s secrets, causing Cobb to fail to complete his job. At the film’s conclusion, Cobb’s wife stabs him in the climatic scenes. As a result, Cobb is conflicted in his desire to revive his wife and to banish her. This home built of memories is as ambivalent as the heterotopic physical spaces that Cobb seeks to call home.

2046 works with the idea that remembering is a creative act through which the future may be transformed on two levels. Chow rewrites his memories, both those he makes within 2046’s diegesis, while also recasting his past beyond the text in the references made to the other films in Wong’s 1960s trilogy. Speaking at the press conference held following 2046’s premiere at Cannes Film Festival, the film’s leading actor, Tony Leung, characterized the movie in the following way: ‘This film is about a man who is trying to get rid of his past. Wong told me that this was the same character as before [in In the Mood for Love], but that I should treat him as a completely new character.’\(^{390}\) I disagree with Leung’s interpretation of Wong’s intention. I read Chow not as a character who is ‘trying to get rid of his past’, but rather one who is attempting to refigure it, use it as a ground for transformation. The text supports this reading through the mise-en-abyme that Chow creates. In his story of the future, he transforms himself into Tak (Wang Jin Wen’s boyfriend in diegetic ‘reality’) and re-remembers women from his past and present, seeking to alter the relationships he has had and those he might have in the future. His remembering is a forward-looking activity. Wang Jing Wen’s character is recast as an android within his narrative, allowing Chow to tease out the possibility of building a life with her in his imagination. In addition, Chow’s lover in Wong’s 1990 film, Days of Being Wild, Mimi/Lulu, is also doubled as an android in this mise-en-abyme. Further, it is her brief appearance as ‘a woman from Chow’s past’ in 2046 that inspires him to create the story ‘2046’ initially. In this narrative, Chow is literally attempting to write his future by manipulating his memories. Like Inception’s Dom Cobb, there are ambiguities in this act, however, elegantly captured in 2046’s paradoxical refrain:

\(^{390}\) Peter Brunette, Wong Kar-Wai, Contemporary Film Directors (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 102-3.
Everyone who goes to 2046 has the same intention: they want to recapture lost memories. Because in 2046 nothing ever changes. But nobody really knows if that’s true or not because nobody has ever come back.

These words could equally be spoken of Maria’s experience in *Code 46*. This text does not allow the viewer access to its male protagonist’s memories. However, I find evidence of the idea that memory is a creative space in the flashback plot that is structured through Maria’s voiceover. Maria is *afuera* as she reveals, proposes and concedes aspects of her pasts, of those around her, and of people she’s never known. Maria’s speech reframes and reconsiders not only her memories, but also William’s. Through her voiceover, she engages in a dialogue with her former lover. It is a dialogue which he will in all likelihood never know that he will never hear. A glimmer of hope lies in Maria’s ability to narrate aspects of the past that she cannot possibly have access to. She seeks refuge in the questions that she asks. Her memories allow for the possibility of change. Like Dom Cobb, Maria is attempting to build a home in her memories. This character is pursuing a future through the past. Unlike the conventional dystopian protagonist who, as Tom Moylan suggests, ‘often reclaims a suppressed and subterranean memory that is forward-looking in its enabling force’, iterative dystopia’s protagonists *create* the memories on which they hope to build their future. Remembering itself is a forward-looking activity. These characters seek refuge in their memories of the never-past as they attempt to build a home in their own heads.

The pathology of uncertainty: medical motifs, or, do your thoughts make me sick?

Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists pursue a glimmer of hope through the act of remembering. They revise and rewrite their pasts, seeking to construct the solid foundation upon which to build a path out of their perpetually liminal existence. These characters are uncertain, however. Their uncertainty is not merely a response to their

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diegetic environment, but a response to the conflict which exists within their own heads. These characters are depicted as retreating into their own minds to find refuge, yet the texts simultaneously allow them to be penetrated from within. Their minds are represented as locations of conflict and contradiction. Iterative Dystopia’s perpetually liminal protagonists are unsafe in their own heads, compromising the possibility that they might make a home within themselves.

In his original formulation of the concept of permanent liminality, Arpad Szakolczai draws upon the analogy of a virus to describe the transmission and proliferation of the conditions he associates with a society arrested in the middle stage of the traditional ritual of liminality. He writes

In the end...it seems that life itself is nothing but performance on a stage... the archetypal carrier of the ‘virus’ of this type of permanent liminality, transmitting it to modern society where it thrives and spreads beyond all bounds under these particularly fertile conditions...was the court.\(^\text{392}\)

Following Szakolczai’s assertion, a dystopian expression of permanent liminality may therefore work directly from this premise, aligning the court with ‘the system’ in which the protagonist is ‘unreflectively immersed’ prior to his or her heuristic awakening.\(^\text{393}\) In such a portrayal, the protagonist would resist this ‘diseased’ environment in search of a utopian alternative. In this subcycle of films, however, it is not the system that carries the virus, but rather the individual characters that are infected. As they spiral across their narratives, iteratively searching for their own personal utopia, these perpetually liminal characters retreat into their own heads seeking to fashion a place of belonging within their memories. Just as in the heterotopic spaces they call home and in the relationships that are compromised by dislocution, here too these characters are faced with contradictions. Across the subcycle the motif of contagion functions to highlight the mind as a contradictory space. Code 46 and Inception engage with this motif directly, illustrating their protagonists’ minds as compromised and conflicted places through their

\(^{392}\) Szakolczai, Reflexive Historical Sociology, 222.
\(^{393}\) Moylan, Scraps of the Untainted Sky.
representations of viruses, while *2046* explores consonant ideas through its depictions of whispering. In each example, the boundary between security and danger is blurred. Iterative Dystopia's protagonists' minds are infected with uncertainty.

Viruses have a traditionally-conceived liminal status. Viruses require host bodies—life—in order to replicate and transmit, and an infected host is in a state of corporeal in-between. Infection is impermanent. It is a transitional state which leads either to recovery and health or degeneration and death. This temporary nature restricts the metaphoric resonance between the virus and perpetual liminality. Conceived in this way, the virus is limited to conveying (however evocatively) that the uncertainty experienced by Iterative Dystopia's protagonists is pernicious, pervasive and communicable. While this understanding is important in an analysis of the wilful, targeted transmission of viruses depicted in *Code 46* and *Inception* (as illustrations of the 'imaginary science' which plays on the fears of the assumed viewer in the science fiction genre), a more circumscribed application of this pathological analogy is required to approach Iterative Dystopia's representations of uncertainty.

Both *Code 46* and *Inception* include representations of viruses that are persistent or endless. Although infection in these texts has a defined point of origin, either invited or imposed, neither film suggests the possibility of a cure. In each text, the viruses infect characters' minds, afflicting their thoughts and penetrating their psyches. It is through viruses that the 'safe' spaces of the characters' minds are penetrated, compromising the possibility of finding security within. They are rendered uncertain. Characters that are affected by uncertainty may not necessarily be aware that they have been infected, nor that they may be contagious. Once infected therefore, the characters in these films are trapped in viral limbo. A fruitful pathological analogy for understanding the nature of their uncertainty is therefore limited to the small number of epidemic viruses that have been

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394 Csicsery-Ronay, *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, 111. The wilful manipulations of viruses in both *Code 46* and *Inception* were rendered particularly frightening for the postmillennial audience member who viewed these films in the context of viral epidemics such as Britain's foot-and-mouth disease and the global outbreaks of SARS, H5N1 (bird flu) and H1N1 (swine flu). The impact is redoubled in *Inception* through the suggestion that 'inception' was developed as a military-training tool and has been (mis)appropriated as a weapon against civilians.
identified in which the host may remain asymptomatic. In such cases, from the moment of infection to the moment of the (potentially unrelated) death of the host, these viruses position the individual in a state of corporeal perpetual liminality. He or she is infected and able to infect, but unaffected. Without serology which confirms the patient’s status, the individual is at once both healthy and unwell, a pathological equivalent of Schrödinger’s cat. Read in this way, the asymptomatic virus provides mechanism through which to consider the minds of afflicted characters as paradoxical places. Infection with an asymptomatic virus compromises the security that these protagonists hope resides in their own minds, rendering the space of their memories at once secure and unsecured, thereby leading to decidedly insecure characters. Cobb, Geld and Chow are uncertain.

The virus is a central, recurring motif in *Inception*. In essence, *Inception* follows a classical Hollywood plot trajectory: the protagonist, Dom Cobb, is tasked with overcoming an obstacle in order to achieve his goal of returning home to his family. Cobb’s obstacle is the successful implantation of an idea in the antagonist’s mind, the achievement of ‘inception’. This plot mechanism works from the premise that a human mind can be invaded by another within a shared dream. An individual (or group of individuals) is able to infect the host with an idea which, although non-indigenous, can replicate within the host’s consciousness, despite the mind’s defences, and translate into action. It is a premise which Cobb describes explicitly.

Cobb An idea is like a virus: resilient, highly contagious, and the smallest seed of an idea can grow. It can grow to define or destroy you.

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395 The most prevalent asymptomatic viruses include strains of the herpes virus. Particular strains of herpes, including Epstein-Barr virus and cytomegalovirus, are commonly carried in a host without ever progressing to disease state. For a discussion on asymptomatic viruses, see: Ingela Krantz et al., “Ethics of Screening for Asymptomatic Herpes Virus Type 2 Infection,” *BMJ (British Medical Journal)* 329, no. 7466 (2004).

396 Although the parallels between idea and virus are the primary analogy used in *Inception* it is worthwhile noting that in its opening scenes the text does initially conflate its biological references. Cobb asks: ‘What is the most resilient parasite? A bacteria? A virus? An intestinal worm?...An idea.’ Later in the text Cobb refers to inception as like implanting cancer.
This pathological conception of the idea enables it to be surgically ablated (that is, isolated and removed), but also transmitted, or implanted, resulting in the infection of a host’s mind. Following this, the mind (as the system targeted by this virus) is rendered an ambivalent space. It is able to be fortified against, but remains vulnerable to, invasion. It is able to be vaccinated against incursion, but may be unwittingly exposed and thus susceptible to either the reception of, or removal of, ideas. Through its depiction of the idea-as-virus, *Inception* compromises Dom Cobb dreams, undermining his place of refuge.

*Inception*’s opening scenes introduce this theme. Positioned as a gun-for-hire seeking to steal an idea for profit, Cobb is pictured rifling through the inner sanctum of his target’s mind, which manifests literally as a combination-locked safe. Having broken into the safe, Cobb finds a simple, uninscribed manilla envelope, which he attempts to exchange for an identical envelope taken from his jacket pocket. During this transplantation, Cobb is interrupted by his target, Saito (Ken Watanabe), who is suspicious of? aware of? waiting in anticipation of? the crime in progress. It is unclear whether his mark is consciously or subconsciously aware of the incursion and whether Cobb has successfully infiltrated and stolen the idea. Shortly thereafter, the documents contained within these envelopes are revealed to the viewer. One envelope contains blank sheets of paper, while the other contains a document marked ‘confidential’ with substantial amounts of information blanked out. Saito’s innermost thoughts (like his mind as receptacle) are represented as a paradox. They are at once written and erased. His mind is a blank slate and a thoroughly documented palimpsest of partially remembered / partially erased communications. His thoughts are secrets that are remembered *and* forgotten, protected from himself in order to protect them against others. They are thoughts contained within a mental safe that is at once secure and only exists in order to be penetrated.

While Saito’s mind contains (or is made of) an antithetical safe, constructed to secure ideas specifically so that they may be stolen, I read both Cobb’s and Mal’s minds as cells. This term illustrates the contradiction contained within these spaces, for cell connotes both a secure site, designed to prevent transition between inside and outside in either direction; while also suggesting its pathological sense, a growth culture in which the idea-
virus may multiply, enabling infection to take hold. Once infected in this film, the
recipients of these ideas react ambivalently to the presence of new pathogens. The virus-
ideas move fluidly between levels of consciousness, transition between the real and the
imagined and ultimately even transcend death. While Dom performs an act of inception
on his wife, forcibly contaminating her with the idea that ‘her world is not real’, the idea
permeates both their minds, infecting both characters with uncertainty. Both Mal and
Cobb (and consequently the viewer) vacillate between understanding their experiences as
reality and unreality, ultimately requiring a conception of them as paradoxically both at
once. Cobb wrestles with the uncertainty provoked by this contradiction, as Mal states,

Mal (to Ariadne) You’re so certain of your world, of what’s real. Do you
think he is? Or do you think he’s as lost as I was?

Cobb I know what’s real, Mal.

Mal No creeping doubts? Not feeling persecuted, Dom? Chased
around the globe by anonymous corporations and police forces,
the way the projections persecute the dreamer. Admit it, you don’t
believe in one reality any more. So choose. Choose to be here.
Choose me.

Cobb is, however, plagued by doubts. His journey across *Inception*’s narrative is
predicated on the fact that he is exiled from home. Cobb believes that he is being
pursued by the police, wanted for the murder of his wife. As a result, he seeks refuge in
his dreams, attempting to make a home in his memories. In doing so he is forced to
wander through the infected minds of the characters that surround him. Moreover,
Cobb’s own mind is also a space of conflict. The virus which carries the idea that ‘this
world is not real’ has also breached the safe space that lies within him. He is rendered
uncertain. Unable to equivocally locate reality, *Inception*’s protagonist is required to
continue his iterative search for an alternative to his perpetually liminal experience beyond
the film’s ambiguous conclusion.

In concert with *Inception, Code 46* realizes its characters’ uncertainty through the motif of
contagion. While *Code 46* is, on the whole, less consumed with exploring ambiguities of
the mind than *Inception*, the virus functions similarly in the text, focusing attention on the compromised nature of the place to which these characters retreat in order to remember. The majority of the viruses depicted in *Code 46* are temporary, transitory infections. The viruses differ in the level of impact infection has on the host, but they are omnipresent. In the regulated and regimented future depicted in *Code 46*, however, infection is never random. Viruses are either chosen or imposed. As is the case in *Inception*, it is when the characters are forcibly manipulated through, or by, viruses that the motif functions to highlight the irreconcilable nature of the mind.

*Code 46* depicts viruses as tools which are able to be manipulated. Individuals bear responsibility for contagion. While this speaks to a viewer’s potential fears regarding biological warfare and bioterrorism, in this near-future viruses are pervasive but not necessarily pernicious. Elective infection is not understood to be permanent, and viruses are able to be used recreationally and professionally. Maria attests to this when she tells William that,

Maria: I tried a virus once, for Mandarin Chinese, ok? So like Chinese people knew what I was saying, but I didn’t. It was weird.

William demonstrates this too through the mindreading games he plays with his son. It is against this background of viral infection as both routine and desirable that *Code 46* uses the motif of contagion to expose its characters as uncertain.

*Code 46*'s characters are positioned as uncertain through two distinct uses of viruses in the film. In order to enhance his performance as an insurance investigator, William infects himself with, or is infected with (it is not made clear which), an ‘empathy’ virus. This virus enables him to invade people’s thoughts, reading their minds, either with or without their direct consent. With the gift or forfeit of a morsel of personal information, a virus-enabled William is able to penetrate strangers’ minds, exposing their inner sanctum as insecure. Characters’ responses to William’s abilities vary, but all express uncertainty in the admixture of mystification, violation and awe represented. It is, however, Maria’s forcible infection with a virus to prevent her from having intercourse with William that offers the
clearest illustration of it as the motif through which uncertainty is exposed. Despite the removal of her conscious memories of their affair, Maria’s body remembers their relationship. Her mind is temporarily able to override the emotional and physical anguish caused by the virus allowing the couple to (re)consummate their love. Maria’s mind is an unsafe space, able to be forcibly penetrated and infected by a virus with influence over her will; yet her mind is not completely insecure. Her mind is a space of conflict, not complete colonisation. She is uncertain. Further, William must also be read as uncertain, for the neural ‘surgery’ performed on the protagonist at the conclusion of the film mirrors Maria’s procedure earlier in the plot. Speaking to William, though he cannot hear, Maria’s voiceover informs the viewer

Maria: You went before a tribunal. They decided the empathy virus had affected your judgement. So they took away your memory of me, just like they had wiped my memory of you.

William’s mind, as the receptacle for memories that are at once remembered and forgotten is, like Maria’s, a conflicted and compromised space. He is uncertain. Just as for Dom Cobb, the ambiguity that this leaves propels the character into the next iteration of his perpetually liminal journey, beyond the conclusion of the text.

Of all the Iterative Dystopias analysed in this thesis, 2046 offers the most oblique engagement with the motif of contagion. While Wong’s film does not use viruses to expose and explore the nature of its perpetually liminal protagonist’s mind, there are clear links which can be made to the other films through 2046’s representations of whispering. In this text it is the whisper which betrays the security of the mind, at once concealing and revealing Chow’s innermost thoughts. As a consequence, I read representations of the whispered secret, both within 2046’s narrative and as a trope which moves across Wong’s 1960s trilogy, as an externalised representation of the mind as a compromised space.

2046 opens with a whisper. The first sequence includes images from the film’s futuristic mise-en-abyme in which both Tak and his android lover are pictured whispering into a vast, suspended organic sculpture juxtaposed against its unnatural, high key, hard-lit
environment. Their intention, intones the voiceover, is to conceal a secret ‘that no one else would ever know’. Yet, even before the viewer is presented with these images, the film (literally) reveals the writing on the wall: the whispered secrets are transcribed in neon lights surrounding this receptacle. Chow’s desire—his need—to divulge this secret through Tak can only result in its spread. Whispers behave like viruses. Moreover, just as in the children’s game of ‘Chinese whispers’ in which distortions and mutations in transference are characteristic, here it is merely suggested that there is a correlation between the characters’ mute-speech and these illegible written translations. Chow’s innermost thoughts are doubly concealed, first in a secret told to (and through) Tak and then interred within the whispering hole. They are obfuscated within the writing on the wall. Yet in the act of whispering they are simultaneously revealed. Chow’s thoughts are compromised, secured and unsecured, in this act.

The analogy drawn between the whisper and the virus is furthered through an intertextual reading of Wong’s 1960s trilogy. Not only does the image of the whispered secret reoccur within 2046, it echoes across the films. It majestically closes In The Mood For Love as Chow whispers into a hole formed in the ruins of Angkor Wat, before reawakening to open 2046. Considered within the context of Wong’s oeuvre, the whispered secret connotes inescapability. Chow travels across time (from 1962 to 1966, and into the future) and place (from Cambodia to Hong Kong), from lived experience into his narrative alter-ego, Tak, but cannot evade his secrets. Nor can the viewer avoid infection with the contents of his mind, as Kristi Matsuda points out, in a recent review, when she writes,

The movie begins as it ends, with identical shots of that silvery “tree” hole into which you whisper your secrets in 2046...You realize maybe you’ve been the vessel, that this unraveling has been Chow whispering his secrets, and now you’re left harboring them forever.

397 Clearly fascinated with the concept of the whispered secret, Wong first used the motif in Chungking Express.
There is an optimistic futility, akin to the search for utopian hope within a dystopia, inherent in his act of whispering a secret into a hole. For Chow, the desire expressed in the act of whispering is doubled, there is hope that divulging a secret while no one is listening will preserve the past and bring about change. It is a hope that is not just contained within the text, but beyond it. In light of Mitsuda’s comments above, this perspective becomes even more apparent in the scene in which Tak whispers into the makeshift hole formed by his android lover, as she proclaims: ‘I’ll be your tree. Tell me and nobody else will ever know.’ There are thus clear parallels that can be drawn with the palimpsest documents procured from Saito’s mind in *Inception*. The secret unburdened through the act of burying a whisper paradoxically renders the contents of the mind both safe and unsafe. The characters in this subcycle can only be secure in insecurity, they are uncertain.

Each text consolidates its representation of its protagonist’s mind as a space of both security and danger aesthetically. These Iterative Dystopias adopt chiaroscuro techniques oft-used in modernist dystopian films to visually illustrate the idea. At the conclusion of *Code 46*, in the series of frames in which William’s memory is erased, the protagonist is pictured in extreme close up. It is not clear whether is he aware of what is about to occur, nor whether he has consented. As he lays on a hospital gurney his face is in blissful repose throughout the operation. The shots oscillate between near-darkness and harsh white light as a result of the hospital’s laser. William’s mind is affirmed as conflicted. Exposure to light in this way renders William’s recent escapades with his mistress, Maria, dark. They are excised from his conscious mind, buried in his body. Meanwhile, it is through this procedure that the details of his actions are literally ‘brought to light’ for those around him. Equally though, it is only through this exposure (which is also erasure) that William is able to regain access to his nuclear family and begin his iterative journey again.

Similar manipulations of light are identifiable in *Inception* and *2046*. In the scene in which Dom Cobb attempts to steal Saito’s secrets, the protagonist is led directly to his target’s mental safe. Despite being securely concealed in murky surrounds, the path to the innermost sanctum of Saito’s mind is walled with gold-lit tatami screens. Moreover, Cobb
is dazzled by sunlight on each occasion he steps out of the darkness of his mind’s elevator into memories of his children playing, or recollections of the moment that he and his wife chose to return to ‘reality’ by tying themselves to railroad tracks. Correspondingly, against the backdrop of a future-‘Hong Kong’ nightscape, the interior of Chow/Tak’s mental train-carriage is exposed in saturated white light. Under this shining light, Chow’s mind is naked, unable to be cloaked, yet equally it is camouflaged within the character’s fiction. The Iterative Dystopia subcycle visually represents its characters minds as the flood-lit Orwellian Ministry of Truth and the backstreets of Blade Runner’s Los Angeles, simultaneously.

Iterative Dystopia’s perpetually liminal protagonists seek to build a home in their memories. These characters retreat into the safe space of their own minds in order to find refuge from lives lived in heterotopic homes and relationships plagued by dislocation. The respite they find in the memories that they create is limited, however, as these men are uncertain. Their uncertainty is not only a response to their external environment, but a result of the conflict and contradictions that lie within their own heads. These films expose and explore the compromised nature of their protagonists’ minds through the motif of contagion. In both Code 46 and Inception, the protagonists’ minds are literally infected. Exposed to the idea that his world is not real, Dom Cobb’s place of memories becomes plagued by uncertainty. William Geld also responds with uncertainty as a result of the virus which consolidates the imperfect excision of his past. In contrast, 2046 takes up these ideas in its illustrations of whispering, externalising Chow’s thoughts and depicting their permeable nature in secrets which are at once concealed and revealed. Furthermore, each film supports this characterisation visually through its use of chiaroscuro lighting. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists chase the glimmer of hope that they might build a path out of their perpetually liminal existence into the recesses of their mind. Their minds are compromised, however, their uncertainty pathological, and they are forced to continue their iterative journey beyond the conclusion of the plot.
Intimate surveillance

Through the motif of contagion, Iterative Dystopias represent their characters’ minds as paradoxically safe and unsafe places. This characteristic is reaffirmed in the films’ depictions of surveillance. While the texts engage with surveillance as an instrument of corporate control (aligning them with their science fiction contemporaries), the subcycle offers a distinct model of surveillance which I term ‘intimate surveillance’. In Iterative Dystopias this new weapon enables characters to be observed from within. Moreover, although they are suspicious of this unmediated violation, they willingly submit to invasion. It is through acts of intimate surveillance that the subcycle’s protagonists’ memories are further compromised, hindering their capacity to make a home in their own minds. By re-envisioning this conventional dystopian theme, the subcycle underscores its protagonists’ uncertainty.

Citing classic dystopian films from *Metropolis* to *Brazil*, Nezar AlSayyad argues that

[a] key aspect...of twentieth-century dystopian visions in general, is a comprehensive system of surveillance...“This gaze was organized under the premise that no citizen should have anything to hide.” Indeed, those who hid were assumed to be guilty, and those who surveilled were also to be under surveillance.399

This organised, systemic surveillance, comprehensively explored in Foucault’s work on the panopticon,400 is a concept that continues to hold the attention of dystopian narratives into the twenty-first century. Indeed, each of the films in this subcycle engages directly with surveillance as an instrument of control. In Iterative Dystopias this power is wielded by corporations, conforming with representations of surveillance across contemporary

science fictions more broadly. In 2046, for example, Chow’s landlord, hotel owner Mr Wang (Wang Sum) operates as the ticket master and the train driver within his fictional narrative ‘2046’. Wang thereby controls access to, and monitors the direction of, Chow/Tak’s journey. While in Inception, the catalyst which propels Cobb’s narrative arc is a heist involving internal surveillance from which both the protagonist and his corporate boss seek to profit. In contrast to the targeted and directed operations of corporate power represented in 2046 and Inception, Code 46 integrates a literal representation of the panopticon into its narrative. Alongside films in the broader future cycle such as V for Vendetta (2006), A Scanner Darkly (2006) and the DVD-only ‘surveillance-horror’ Eyeborgs (2009), Code 46 preserves the role of surveillance as socio-political weapon designed to suppress the masses, following the Orwellian (anti-utopian) tradition.

In Maria’s workspace, individuals are reduced to bodies. They are concealed in metallic-hued uniforms and operate as numbered-cogs within a post-industrial machine. These bodies are then exposed in, and through, the continuous footage taken by omnipresent cameras. Images endlessly cycle across plasma screens observed by management. Simultaneously, they are stored within encrypted databases, forming digital histories which capture every worker’s every breath. Whether it is depicted as focused in who it targets or all-pervasive, surveillance as a tool of corporate power is an entrenched theme in this subcycle. While Iterative Dystopias continue to engage with this dystopian convention, they additionally recode it, positioning surveillance as ‘intimate’. This new form of surveillance has three primary characteristics: first, the observations are unmediated; second, they are carried out internally; and third, the characters who are subjected to it willingly submit. It is through its depictions of this model of surveillance that the subcycle reaffirms its protagonists as uncertain.

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402 Lucius Shepard argues that all science fiction films since Metropolis fall into two categories: post-apocalyptic or Orwellian, of which Code 46 is the latter. It is important to recall, however, that following Jameson’s distinction, I have designated Orwell’s work as anti-utopian rather than dystopian throughout this thesis. Lucius Shepard, “Blade Runner Had a Baby,” Fantasy & Science Fiction 108, no. January (2005): 130.
The Iterative Dystopia subcycle depicts futures in which the powerful return to relying on individuals to perform acts of watching.\textsuperscript{403} It portrays the most effective form of surveillance as unmediated. These illustrations stand in contrast to contemporary real-world manifestations of surveillance: surveillance as ‘action-in-absentia’,\textsuperscript{404} the anti-human,\textsuperscript{405} mass-processing of data that was, until Edward Snowden’s revelations, the provenance of conspiracy theorists.\textsuperscript{406} Moreover, these representations are clearly distinguished from illustrations found in the wider future cycle. Postmillennial films, customarily utilise (and propose augmentations to) real-world surveillance technologies in their diegeses, with *Minority Report* and *Equilibrium* offering clear examples of this. They rely upon cameras to perform the function of eyes and databases to aggregate, sort and distil information. Iterative Dystopias share more in common with the Cold War-era surveillance evocatively captured in Donnersmarck’s 2006 film, *The Lives of Others*.\textsuperscript{407} This film depicts characters living in a universe which appears to have been lifted directly from Orwell’s 1984:

There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment...You have to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the

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\textsuperscript{403} These representations can thus be read as a distillation of the ‘double-entry system’ required in the Foucauldian panoptic model of surveillance in which individuals are compelled to watch, and betray, each other for the benefit of the system. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Social Theory (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 214.


\textsuperscript{405} Louise Amoore argues that contemporary security measures work with the ‘residue of daily life left in the patterns of travel, financial and consumer transactions...[the] abstracted items of data [which] become the nodal points that, when joined in association with other items, are assumed to become an indisputable visualization of a person’. This ‘digital alter ego is precisely a projected person: an image of a potential future person yet to come.’ Louise Amoore, “Lines of Sight: On the Visualization of Unknown Futures,” *Citizenship Studies* 13, no. 1 (2009): 18.

\textsuperscript{406} For a discussion of contemporary surveillance as rendered ubiquitous through technological capability and its relationship to cultivated uncertainty, see Michael Betancourt, “The Demands of Agnotology: Surveillance,” *CTheory, Theory Beyond the Codes: tbc058*(17 July 2014).

assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.\footnote{George Orwell, \textit{1984} (Middlesx: Penguin, 1989), 4-5.}

Iterative Dystopias diverge from Orwell’s anti-utopian model of surveillance described in this passage and its filmic re-presentation in one key aspect, however. While this subcycle depicts surveillance as most effective when individuals are complicit in watching both others and themselves, Iterative Dystopias leave no room for darkness. There are no places in which the scrutiny ends.

Iterative Dystopias articulate models of surveillance which are most effective when it is unmediated. Individuals are once again the machines in the process: the characters are watched and watching. Despite largely avoiding images of surveillance technologies, however, these films infer that it is technological advancements that have brought surveillance full circle in this way. In this subcycle, surveillance involves direct, internal penetration. Victims’ minds are compromised \textit{from within}. In \textit{Inception}, the technology that enables a character to infiltrate another’s mind in order to conduct either inception or extraction is specifically presented as a move beyond the screen. It is explained within the diegesis as a military-developed capability and derives its plausibility from the assumed viewer’s recognition of the US military’s role in technology development and its increasing use of videogames in training, recruitment and rehabilitation.\footnote{For a history of the US military’s engagement with videogame / interactive digital technologies, see: Corey Mead, \textit{War Play: Video Games and the Future of Armed Conflict} (Boston: Eamon Dolan/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).} This ‘shared-dream technology’ surpasses the haptic limitations of screen-based virtual reality, enabling participants to \textit{experience} not just simulate. Importantly, it affords these characters the advantage of observing and manipulating behaviours from inside another’s mind. This intimate surveillance alters, amends and directs experience such that its effects ripple throughout the observed character’s past, present and future. It is surveillance from within.

\footnote{George Orwell, \textit{1984} (Middlesx: Penguin, 1989), 4-5.}
*Code 46* offers multiple representations of surveillance. Maintaining images of panoptic observation, it portrays William's virally-enhanced mind-reading as the most effective mechanism available for compelling or preventing behaviour in this near future. Where the mediated systems of surveillance are shown to be fallible, *Code 46*’s characters are unable to evade or mitigate against intimate scrutiny. Maria is able to forge travel documentation to circumvent checkpoint screenings, facilitating her affair with William. Yet neither character is ultimately able to escape the internal surveillance which results in the alteration of their memories.

*2046* contrasts two versions of intimate surveillance. Unlike its postmillennial counterparts, mediated surveillance does not take place via screens (logically, given the majority of the narrative is set in the 1960s) rather it is, put simply, spying. Undirected by any system and personally uninhibited, these characters seek knowledge to manipulate behaviour. Chow gazes after Bai Ling through gaps in an ornate metalwork panel gauging her response to the redefinition of their relationship, while Bai Ling uses the same aperture to confirm Chow is indeed going home alone. These characters are both adept at, and fond of, spying on each other, and the film visually incorporates fragments of each individual into scenes while simultaneously maintaining their distance. In this way, *2046* rehabilitates an intimacy within mediated surveillance. Just as in *Code 46*, however, it is against this relief that the film’s version of unmediated, intimate surveillance is presented. On the train in *2046* Chow/Tak is exposed, observed by his android lover, a replica of a long-lost love. He is penetrated by his landlord, Mr Wang, and laid bare to his co-writer, Wang Jing-Wen. Integrally, to both this idea and the narrative, he is also unable to hide from himself. In *Iterative Dystopias*, the most effective form of surveillance is that which is unmediated. These dystopian futures are ones in which the characters are compromised internally.

The final, and most important, characteristic of the intimate surveillance engaged in this subcycle is its captivating nature. Each text depicts characters who are at once repulsed

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410 As Peter Marks points out, it is ‘the film’s overlaying of different surveillance systems [that] signals it as a potentially rich source for analysis’. The film’s exploration of genetic surveillance is particularly interesting as a complement to the mind-surveillance that I explore here. Peter Marks, “Imagining Surveillance: Utopian Visions and Surveillance Studies,” *Surveillance & Society* 3, no. 2/3 (2005): 232.
and beguiled by the notion of sharing their mind with another. Iterative Dystopia’s characters are persuaded to submit to surveillance, however, specifically by the attractiveness of the intimacy which it facilitates. Moreover, in the cases of *Inception* and *Code 46*, it is the characters’ decisions (and desire) to engage with internal surveillance which enables it to be used against them. It is on this basis that I read the representations of unmediated, internal surveillance in these texts as engaged with sociological discourse on ‘post-panoptic’ surveillance. David Lyon argues that, while there is clear evidence that contemporary society has grudgingly or willingly traded constraints to freedom (both locally and globally) in pursuit of ‘a prized “security”’, there are new levels of individual complicity in contemporary surveillance. He suggests that despite apprehensions individuals may have over the opportunities for data-mining made possible through digitalized consumerism, it holds significant attraction through reducing physical and economic limitations to accessing goods. In addition, Lyon concurrently notes the marked increase in individuals who seek pleasure via the introverted exhibitionism (or camouflaged exposure) of social media. As Slavoj Zizek writes, ‘...today, anxiety seems to arise from the prospect of NOT being exposed to the Other’s gaze all the time...’ As is befitting their postmillennial social context, Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are also complicit in their surveillance. Their concessions to ubiquitous observation go beyond the pursuit of safety. For these characters, intimate surveillance is ‘suspicious-and-seductive’.

*Code 46* works with the idea that intimate surveillance is seductive most obviously through its representations of surveillance as ‘play’. In these illustrations, the mysteries of its operations are proposed as enticing. Further, William demonstrably enjoys the position

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412 This element of Lyon’s characterization of surveillance works directly from Bauman’s thesis on liquid modernity. Ibid.
413 Lyon argues that the desirability of introverted exhibitionism evidenced in the online space is the result of a ‘long-term process in Western cultures, where scopophilia...[has merged] with the growing ubiquity of surveillance practices’. Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance: A Conversation*, Polity Conversations Series (Cambridge, UK; Malden, USA: Polity Press, 2013), 127.
of power that his virally-induced ability to read minds brings. In the opening scenes, he teases the pretty receptionist with his ‘talent’ in order to circumvent her firm’s security protocols and get his own way. More interesting, however, is that the receptionist delights in this flirtation. She enjoys the invasion. As was discussed in chapter five, surveillance here is a magic trick and the receptionist is bemused by the spectacle. The seductive aspect to being watched is echoed in scenes with William’s son as he begs his father to guess what he’s thinking. In this mode, surveillance is a bedtime ritual, a bonding moment between oft-absent father and his young son. It is a nurturing scene, softly-lit and closely framed. At its most benign, William’s ‘empathy virus’ therefore functions to create intimate moments. For the viewer, this scene between father and son is too brief, however. It is too easy for the recently-returned business man to invade his child’s mind. Particularly as he quickly departs again as though there was no incursion into this private place. *Code 46* thus imparts an undertone of unease, an indication of the tension between suspicion and seduction in its representations of surveillance.

Throughout the subcycle each representation of intimate surveillance invokes a sense of disquiet. The conflict between seduction and suspicion is particularly dominant in the scenes between Dom Cobb and his wife Mal in *Inception*. Mal is positioned as a willing participant in her own mental surveillance. She is a ‘partner’ lured into participating in shared-dream technology by the promise of personal and professional gains. Mal is, however, also represented as the duped consumer, addicted to an unhealthy experience. Never is this more conspicuous than in the scenes which take place in Dom’s memory palace, his furtive, solo chemically-enhanced dreams. (In Dom’s mind) Mal is desperate for her husband to remain in the dreamspace, yet he is clearly positioned as a voyeur peering into his own life. He is intimately involved, active in each memory yet equally, calculatingly distanced. He participates in his memories whilst simultaneously only able to watch his visions unfold without change. Furthermore at the climax of the film, as Mal begs Dom to stay both literally and figuratively in limbo with her eternally, Dom turns to Ariadne and articulates the conflict between his desire for, and suspicion of, this place of intimate surveillance. He states
In each scene with Mal, Cobb wavers between wanting to believe the veracity of his situation and being suspicious of its reality. Mal and Cobb are both enticed by the relationship they are afforded through intimate surveillance.

In concert with these familial illustrations, Iterative Dystopias also employ intimate surveillance as artillery to further corporate gain. Code 46 ‘weaponises’ ‘empathy’ in order to conduct surveillance which its characters are unable to circumvent. While empathy as an emotion is underpinned by interpersonal commonality, a desirable connectivity based on mutual understanding, in Code 46, the requirement for the empathetic character to become vulnerable within the exchange, to share in the experience, is removed. Here, William’s virally-enhanced empathy facilitates unidirectional communication. He is able to hear and subsequently speak the unspoken thoughts of the characters he observes. He harnesses the potential to use stolen thoughts against those he investigates and importantly, is not required to give anything in return. Despite his victims demonstrating concern (at varying levels) over his incursion into their minds throughout the text, the conviviality and intrigue created in the deployment of this weapon are precisely the traits which make it so successful.

Intrigue also plays a role in the success of intimate surveillance as a weapon in Inception. Despite the obvious risks inherent in using surveillance technologies to avoid surveillance, Robert Fischer undergoes training to mitigate against the chance that his mind may be penetrated. He is at once enticed by the possibilities of intimate surveillance to protect him and terrified of its potential to harm him. Once alerted to the possibility that his dream space has been invaded, Fischer’s ‘militarized subconscious’ is depicted as literally mobilizing an army of guards that have been trained to combat the threat of extraction. Recalling the high level protective security detail of government officials, Fischer’s mind is invaded by men dressed in grey suits and adorned with communication ear-pieces and concealed weapons. Their task is to survey for surveillance. They are an externally-trained, internal force deployed to protect against an opponent who is identical, but with
opposing motivation. Fischer invites invasion in order to protect himself from invasion and it is only due to his having imbricated himself with intimate surveillance measures that Cobb and his colleagues are able to successfully infiltrate his mind.

Iterative Dystopia’s characters’ minds are sites of conflict. Its protagonists are represented as infected with uncertainty through the motif of contagion. Further, the subcycle reaffirms the mind as place which undermines the boundary between security and danger through its depictions of surveillance. The Iterative Dystopia subcycle adopts and adapts dystopian conventions to recode surveillance as intimate. Whether it is playful or weaponised, employed as a mechanism for personal gain or an exercise of corporate control, each film offers illustrations of surveillance in which characters’ minds are internally invaded by others. The success of this model of unmediated surveillance in these films hinges on the tension between suspicion and seduction felt by the films’ characters. These uncertain characters willingly allow themselves to be subjected to subconscious penetration. Furthermore, this ambivalent characterisation of surveillance directly impacts the control that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists have over their memories. Intimate surveillance hinders the characters’ abilities to make a home in their minds.

Manipulated minds: memory as a site of control

Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists seek refuge in their memories. Frustrated in their attempts to build a solid foundation in the heterotopic spaces that these characters call home, and hindered by the dislocation which pervades their relationships, they look within themselves for a place of comfort. While memory—or more specifically, the act of remembering—is available to characters as a process of resistance against the uncertainty of their perpetually liminal existence, their memories are able to be penetrated. Within these films, memories are implanted, erased or quarantined, unbeknownst to the characters. Their minds are therefore impeded from becoming ‘the place where [they can] hide [their] secrets and express [their] private selves.’ They are not a desired ‘place of
resting and dreaming in safety." For this subcycle’s characters, memories are open to intimate surveillance. The creativity that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists exercise in shaping their memories of the never-past is compromised through the subcycle’s representations of the mind as a site of internally-executed external control. In these films there is no way for the characters to distinguish between memories which are created by, or those which are insinuated into, their minds. Memories are able to be manipulated and certain-futures imposed. The protagonists remain uncertain.

In 2046, Chow’s ‘certain-future’ is his continued existence within a fortified, perpetually liminal environment. Unlike its counterparts in the Iterative Dystopia subcycle, it is the structure of this film’s plot that ensures that its characters are fated to iteratively perform and re-perform their pasts, presents and futures. For 2046’s protagonist Chow, the most insidious form of surveillance is that which is conducted by the film’s omniscient filmmaker, alongside the assumed viewer, who bears intertextual knowledge of his past. Observed and instructed across this non-linear experience, events and characters from Chow’s past are repeated, cycling through with iterative amendments. His past is a ritual performance, he is arrested in it and it inescapably impacts both his present and his future. Chow’s memory provides a glimmer of utopian hope. The act of remembering enables him to create the futures evidenced in his mise-en-abyme, his fictional narrative ‘2046’. In it he is able to refashion memories, re-live experiences with women from his past and present, teasingly forging a future. At its culmination, however, the narrative’s non-linear structure constrains the character, stifling him in the endlessly cycling (un)certainties of his perpetually liminal existence.

In contrast with 2046, Code 46 and Inception engage with memory-surveillance directly within their diegeses. It is a mechanism through which characters are able to impose certain-futures upon others. Interestingly, while it is a primary narrative thread in each film, they execute this idea in a diametrically opposed way. Dom Cobb and his team place Robert Fischer under surveillance in order to seed a memory. It is their intention to alter his past and thereby create a certain-future for both Fischer and Cobb. The intimate

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416 It is these characteristics that Pallasmaa argues are critical in any definition of home. Pallasmaa, “Identity, Intimacy and Domicile - Notes on the Phenomenology of Home,” 138.
surveillance which results in Fischer’s implantation with the memory of a loving father is successful. It precipitates his decision to ‘be his own man’. By breaching the security of the safe space of Fischer’s mind, Cobb is able to ensure that this character has a memory of being loved, but the text is not forthcoming as to the ramifications of this dream-state revelation. It is opaque as to how this will affect Dom Cobb’s bifurcated understanding of reality. *Inception* is unequivocal in its representations of the idea that the capacity to implant a memory sparks certain action. In this film, however, undermining the security of the mind through acts of intimate surveillance leads only to an uncertain response. Cobb and his wife cohabit in the recesses of his/her/their mind, watching each other. Cobb’s success in implanting the memory of a reality that exists beyond their present circumstances and engendering Mal’s acceptance of the idea that ‘her world is not real’ leads directly to a certain-future. Mal agrees to kill herself to wake from her dream. This has ramifications for both Mal’s and Cobb’s perception of, and response to, their perpetually liminal environment. Having presented, created or facilitated Mal’s memory of an alternate present, both Dom and Mal become further entangled in a web of pasts and presents, dreams and realities. In the ambiguous final moments of *Inception*’s plot, Dom Cobb is positioned to recommence his iterative journey, mirroring the plight of *2046*’s Chow. Cobb’s spinning-top totem of reality bobbles in the film’s concluding frame. It is, at once, both certain to fall, yet equally able to continue turning.

In *Code 46*, William and Maria suffer the theft of their memories. The film’s main characters each have elements of their pasts erased in order to ensure they conform with desired behaviours. They have new pasts created for them as a by-product of mental suturing performed across the ellipsis. At the conclusion of the film, William is released into the arms of his nuclear family. He has been internally arrested from pursuing forbidden love with his mistress Maria. Yet, as the narrative reminds the viewer through Maria’s story, his body cannot (and will not) divest itself of memory edited from his mind. On some level, both William and those around him are aware that the safe space of his memories is permeable, that his mind is a conflicted place. Moreover, *Code 46* clearly indicates that William’s certain-future will involve constant surveillance. He will be subjected to traditional and intimate forms, controlled by those in possession of the memory of which he has been stripped. Retaining possession of the bodily memory which
cannot be excised, William will, like his counterparts Chow and Cobb, iteratively cycle in his perpetually liminal environment repeating, restaging and refiguring his past.

Iterative Dystopia’s perpetually liminal characters embrace the possibility that they may locate a utopia within themselves. They seek a refuge that they can create through their memories. The subcycle’s protagonists are, however, uncertain. This is not simply a response to their diegetic environment, although the characters do reflect Ulrich Beck’s real-world conception of uncertainty on screen. In the Iterative Dystopia subcycle, the protagonists’ uncertainty is a reaction to the blurring of the boundary between safety and insecurity within their own minds. While they retain their capacity for creativity, and are represented as imaginatively revising and reinscribing their pasts, their cognitive spaces are also sites of control. Inception’s Dom Cobb constructs a memory palace in which to visit his loved ones, but his recollections are fraught, at once desired and dangerous. His own creations have the capacity to frustrate his search for utopia. 2046’s Chow rewrites his past in his present, and his future, transforming both himself and the women that he loves/d in his attempts to find a space of belonging. His imagination is a ground for experimentation, though the outcomes remain unknown. While in Code 46, Maria voices an unspoken dialogue with William, engaging him in her memories of the never-past. She is creating memories for both of them, seeking answers to questions that they did not think to ask. In accordance with Beck’s theorisation, Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists’ uncertainty has the potential to inspire transformation, the capacity to bring an end to their iterative journey. The protagonists’ endeavours to make a home in their memories are undermined, however, by texts which maintain that the security of their mental space has been breached.

For Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists, uncertainty is an expression of the conflicted and contradictory nature of their minds. These protected, and protective, places are compromised and the subcycle propagates this idea through the motif of contagion. Working from Szakolczai’s original analogy, this chapter has argued that in Iterative Dystopias it is not the environment that is diseased, but rather the protagonists who are infected with the asymptomatic virus of uncertainty. 2046 offers representations of whispering, which at once reveal and conceal secrets, as a metaphor for this contagion;
while in *Inception*, it is ideas that poison characters, plaguing them with doubts. In contrast, in *Code 46*, contagion is literally an injected pathogen which spreads contradictions. Both William and Maria suffer under the conflict between desire and repulsion which results. Unlike the alienated, anxious protagonists of conventional dystopian films, Iterative Dystopia's protagonists are infected with uncertainty, their condition is pathological.

Iterative Dystopia's protagonists are searching for an end to their uncertainty. In undertaking to fabricate their futures through their memories, they must wield, and protect their minds against, a new arsenal of weaponry. These texts portray a unique model of surveillance. Intimate surveillance enables characters' memories to be enhanced or expunged. These unmediated violations are internally imposed and result in alterations and amendments to the characters’ pasts, presents and futures, which they cannot evade. In its ambivalent depiction as both suspicious and seductive, the surveillance model depicted in these films mirrors the qualities that David Lyon ascribes to contemporary, real-world examples, grounding these futuristic films in the socio-historical present day. Despite the insidious nature of this form of surveillance, and the pathological uncertainty which infects the subcycle’s protagonists, remembering may still be a defiant act. In Iterative Dystopia's ambiguous conclusions, there is a glimmer of hope that these protagonists may one day build a path out of their perpetual liminality. As they begin the next iteration of their journey, the chance remains that these uncertain characters may one day be at home.
CONCLUSION: Future Horizons

*Code 46* opens with two aerial shots. The screen is filled with vast, uninviting desert landscapes. An expanse of sand stretches toward a hazy horizon. These are ‘God’s eye’ point of view shots, but the viewer is immediately aligned with the protagonist through an eyeline match. This is confirmed retrospectively in the film’s third shot, a mid-shot of William gazing out an aircraft window. *Inception* starts similarly. The viewer of this film is drowned in an equally inhospitable landscape. Waves of a ferocious ocean break against rocks, before the film reveals its protagonist in extreme close up. Cobb lies face down in the shallows. He looks up, searching for the horizon. In contrast, *2046* commences with a tracking shot which moves out from blackness to reveal a shell-like object flanked by shimmering tanks of blue light. This environment is at once organic and artificial, and importantly in this context, seemingly horizon-less. Yet in the very next scene the film reveals the horizon which its protagonist seeks. This scene is claustrophobic, like the opening frames of *Inception*. It comprises shots of rapidly moving, fluorescent monorails traversing the screen and a teasing pan upwards which continues to obscure any physical horizon. It is in the voiceover which accompanies these images that the viewer is introduced to the film’s protagonist and it becomes clear that we have unknowingly been looking at Tak/Chow’s horizon all along: the future. The foregrounding of the horizon (either spatially or temporally) in the opening scenes of each of these films highlights its importance as a motif within the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. The image of the horizon provides an uncommon formal connection across this unruly constellation of films. Within each text, the horizon functions both iconically, interlacing them with the dystopian narrative tradition; and allegorically, as a symbol of the perpetual liminality which thematically coheres the films. The horizon thereby serves as an effective rhetorical lens through which to focus my concluding remarks to this analysis of these Iterative Dystopias.

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417 Baker, “‘Here on the Outside’: Mobility and Bio-Politics in Michael Winterbottom’s Code 46,” 115.
This thesis began with the intention of determining what it was that allied two mid-noughties films. *Code 46* and *2046* were both set in the future and while they differed vastly in terms of plot, aesthetics and production, they had beguiled me through their improbable similarities. Considering the texts in combination with Christopher Nolan’s *Inception*, I established the hypothesis that I had identified a subcycle of texts. However unlikely the combination appeared, this collection had much in common. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists trace iterative paths across their narrative arcs. They restlessly spiral towards their texts’ ambiguous conclusions. Their goals are personal. These characters desire nothing more than a sense of belonging, a solid foundation from which to transition beyond their current state. They search within the environments of their everyday experience for their utopia. Through the social science fiction criticism methodology employed, this thesis has advanced an interdisciplinary reading which clearly establishes coherence within this disparate collection of texts. Films belonging to the Iterative Dystopia subcycle are connected via their representations of their protagonists as perpetually liminal.

Although elements drawn from science fiction genre analysis prove critical to understanding *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* as individual texts, it is unsustainable to argue that the films I explored as examples of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle can be related within the science fiction genre. In light of their vastly differing industrial backgrounds and reception contexts, these texts do not approach the same ‘horizon of expectation’ for their assumed viewers.\(^418\) This thesis established a relationship between these texts which is ‘critical’ rather than ‘industrial’.\(^419\) The subcycle is unmistakably in dialogue with the science fiction genre, however. Moreover, the films belong to a subset

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\(^{419}\) Citing Todorov, Stephen Neale argues that, within the Hollywood system, genres are located in the ‘inter-textual relay’ within the industry. They ‘are public and industrial——not personal or critical—in nature.’ Neale notes, however, that this characterisation stands at odds with Todorov’s work on ‘theoretical genres’ within his explorations of the marvellous, uncanny and fantastic. As I established in chapter two, this thesis follows John Rieder’s definition of the science fiction genre which requires a ‘community of practice’ to negotiate its form. On this basis, I suggest Todorov’s ‘theoretical genres’ would be better classified as critical forms. Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, Sightlines (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2005), 38; Rieder, “On Defining Sf, or Not: Genre Theory, Sf, and History.”
of the broader futuristic film cycle that dominated the box office throughout the postmillennial decade. Iterative Dystopias work with, alongside and against this cohort. They form contingent and dynamic relationships both with the future-cycle films as cinematic texts, and the socio-historical environment which critics argued resulted in the success of those popular films. While I have not sought to argue that these Iterative Dystopias (either individually, or as a collective) offer an insight into any sort of universal postmillennial social experience, I read their engagement with concepts such as liminality and uncertainty from beyond the screen. Considered together, these films reflect, refract, translate and transpose ideas which feature prominently in both scholarly and popular discussion of the postmillennial decade, taking them onto the screen, into fiction and into the future.

The primary formal commonality identifiable in the Iterative Dystopia subcycle lies in the films’ relationship to the dystopian narrative tradition. Following Fredric Jameson, this thesis defined dystopia narrowly, as the ‘negative cousin’ of utopia, distinguishable from the hopeless state of anti-utopia and from post-apocalyptic narratives. Iterative Dystopias elide and elude dystopian conventions, however, leading me to qualify their categorization as films displaying dystopian sensibilities. In accordance with expectation, each film depicts a future which is worse than the assumed viewer’s own present. They represent catastrophic diegetic worlds wracked by global warming and corporate domination, though these predictions are confined to the background of each narrative. More importantly, they represent their protagonists’ quotidian experience as perpetually liminal. This is an undesirable situation and the protagonists are impelled to find a different, better way of living. These films are distinguished within the dystopian form through the nonconformities that I identified, both in the trajectories of the protagonists’ journeys, in addition to the personal nature of their quests. Above all, Iterative Dystopias depict perpetually liminal protagonists who are searching within their everyday experience for a glimmer of hope.

420 Here I invoke ‘uncertainty’ both as it was referred to broadly in the summations of postmillennial cinema that I discussed in the introduction, and as defined by Ulrich Beck. 421 Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions, 198-99.
The image of the horizon which opens the films analysed in this thesis, and with which I commenced this concluding chapter, functions quite distinctly within Iterative Dystopias. This is notable, as the horizon is the dystopian icon *par excellence*. From a narratological perspective, a focus beyond the horizon is the figurative starting point for dystopian narrative. The horizon symbolises the boundary between the protagonist’s diegetic present and the alternative future s/he is striving towards. Further, it represents the divide between the assumed viewer’s real-world experience and the fictional universe on screen. Through the dystopian form, the viewer is afforded glimpses over the horizon at a universe which bears plausible relationship to his or her own. This horizon is a threshold. It is a marker of transition, a traditional, Turneresque liminal zone, conceived as a space in which one cannot linger.\(^4\) In contrast to this characterization, Iterative Dystopias situate their characters *at* the horizon. They exist in a ‘neutral’ space ‘whose specificity consists in being neither one nor the other’.\(^5\) The protagonists in these films conduct their everyday lives in spaces of negotiation, ‘in the process of becoming’.\(^6\) They do not recognise the horizon that they look for in the opening scenes, because they are already there. Through an exploration of their physical milieu, considered in chapter four, the emotional spaces of their relationships, investigated in chapter five, and the interior spaces of their minds probed in chapter six, I conclude that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists perform their quotidian existence in the paradoxical places symbolised by the horizon. It is there that they construct and reconstruct their lives in the search for a place of belonging.

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\(^4\) Darko Suvin interrogates the nature of the horizon and its relationship to the place in which the ‘utopian agent’ dwells, arguing that the horizon is an ‘imaginary space toward which the [utopian agent] is moving’. I read this to mean that the horizon is a boundary which, if reached, would result in utopia. Darko Suvin, “Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies,” *Utopian Studies* 1990, 77. Poststructuralist Louis Marin, approaches the nature of the horizon from a semiotic perspective and, with a far more limited scope, sociologist Kevin Hetherington considers the space of the horizon as a heterotopia, as Foucault originally conceived it, heavily referencing Marin’s ideas. Louis Marin, “Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present,” *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1993); Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*, International Library of Sociology (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 139-43.


\(^6\) Ibid.
Despite this modified understanding of the horizon as symbolic space, Iterative Dystopias retain the horizon’s principle trait in dystopian analysis, namely, that it is at the horizon that ‘traces, scraps’ of ‘utopian possibility’ may be found.\(^{425}\) As Lucie Armitt puts it, the horizon symbolises ‘a vista onto unknowable promise’.\(^{426}\) As they journey across their narratives, William Geld, Chow Mo-wan and Dom Cobb pursue a glimmer of hope that there is life beyond their perpetual liminality. Their liminality is not a desirable state.\(^{427}\) The hopeful dimension of the dystopian horizon is therefore critical to my characterisation of the subcycle’s protagonists as *perpetually* liminal. Their experience of the horizon is not nihilistic, as Arpad Szakolczai implores in his work on permanent liminality, the basis of my concept. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists’ liminality is at once ‘a source of excitement and variety and a shakeup from the dull routines of everyday life’ that may be experienced in traditionally liminal circumstances, but it is tinged with the acknowledgement that ‘nothing is more boring than a permanent state of liminality, where even the hope of escaping the routine is lost.’\(^{428}\) The journey undertaken by these characters is not one of closed-loop repetition, but rather a series of revisions involving incremental change. It is iterative. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are arrested in continuous motion, perpetually liminal.

Kevin Hetherington provides a starting point for reconciling the irreconcilable dichotomy of (diegetic) life at Iterative Dystopia’s horizons. He writes that, at the dystopian horizon ‘hope will always be disappointed but that such a disappointment will be the basis of a new hope.’\(^{429}\) Furthermore, it is in a space beyond the horizon, Hetherington argues, that ‘uncertainty will be resolved’.\(^{430}\) Iterative Dystopias offer only hints at the possibility that this impossible place ‘beyond the horizon’ might exist for its protagonists. They offer

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\(^{425}\) Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, 276. For Moylan, the horizon is the location of both textual and extra-textual hope. Moylan and Baccolini, *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, 6.


\(^{427}\) Thomassen, “Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces.”

\(^{428}\) Szakolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, 226.


\(^{430}\) While Hetherington names this ‘space beyond’ Utopia, this is the point at which his use of Marin’s work diverges from my own. Ibid.
scant evidence in *2046*’s subtle changes to the repetitive experience of Chow’s everyday and his conflicting and inconclusive articulations of these experiences through his voiceover narration. There are only tenuous indications that an existence outside uncertainty is possible for these characters. They reside in a body’s refusal to comply with the erasure of the mind in *Code 46* and in the spinning top that bobbles, yet refuses to fall for Dom Cobb in *Inception*. Nonetheless, utopian hope glimmers in these stories structured as doubled hypotheticals. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are afforded the possibility of alternatives within diegetic lives lived and imagined. The iterative journey that these characters trace is ‘progressive but gradual...A revolution [that] can only be accomplished at the end of a controlled, measured and (if necessary) amended and reformed evolution’.

The horizon-line shot which features variously in *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* is iconic in the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. This is not simply because it is a rare semantic commonality between the films. More importantly, the horizon is a readily identifiable spatial paradox, at once clearly visible, yet physically unreachable. It is not an emblem of ‘far-off abstraction...an easy target for the limitless projection of individual hopes, fears and dreams, continually and comfortably receding into an ever-extendable ideological distance’, as Sally Bayley characterizes it in her study of dystopian domesticity. As it recurs across this subcycle, the horizon image is as tangible as any other aspect of the protagonists’ diegetic places. The horizon is a Foucauldian heterotopic space, and is symbolic of all the places in which the films’ protagonists live, communicate and remember. These characters live at the horizon. In opening with images of the horizon, these films foreground this paradox.

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431 In his most recent work, Marc Augé argues that society needs to be working towards a ‘[p]ractical, pragmatic utopia’ based on iteration rather than innovation. While he is discussing education as key to sociological change, I draw parallels between the *process* of change he describes and that which is articulated in these films. Marc Augé, *The Future* (Kindle Edition: Verso, 2015), Kindle Location 1188-90.

As the theme of perpetual liminality played out across this divergent constellation of texts, other formal consistencies emerged within the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. The horizon-as-space is an elegant rhetorical nexus of the ideas considered throughout this analysis, for not only is it a Foucauldian heterotopia, it also connotes numerous ideas within screen history. If the invocation of the horizon in the opening scenes of *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* signals each protagonist’s desire to orient himself, as I have asserted, this point of reference is found in (and through the journey towards) a biographical space. Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists are looking for a place to call home. Across the subcycle, however, while the protagonists are searching for a place of refuge, a location of belonging, the homes in which they reside are unstable and contradictory places. Unlike Foucault’s counterspaces which challenge or deviate from the quotidian, these protagonists live in everyday heteropias. The subcycle represents characters who eat, love and sleep in interstitial spaces as they transition between, and within, interchangeable geographies. Additionally, the architectures of these places are challenged by the collapse of any divide between the public and private spheres. Exposed in the performance of their everyday lives, physical spaces offer Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists little comfort.

Hampered in their attempts to define their homes in space, the horizon, as cinematic icon, provides a cue to the alternate ways to define home that Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists explore. The horizon is typically a romantic space. It links love and location in classic films from *Gone with the Wind* (1939) to *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973). It is this connection that is also regularly reworked in popular contemporary films such as *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003). In that film Captain Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp) concludes the narrative by urging his shipmates to ‘...bring me that horizon. And really bad eggs. Drink up me hearties, yo ho’, before they sail into the sunset together. The horizon works across screen genres as a symbol of belonging (or its antithesis), and reminds us that across this subcycle, as these characters are forced to acknowledge the contingency of a spatialized conception of home, they seek stability in their relationships. This idea carried my analysis from chapter four into chapter five, yet asking ‘who is home?’ was also found to be problematic for these perpetually liminal protagonists. Iterative Dystopias represent their characters emotional environments as equally unstable, and my analysis of the films’ representations of communication concluded that these too
are paradoxical. The interactions between the protagonists of this subcycle and their loved ones are frustrated by dislocation. Both the words they speak and the touches they exchange produce multiple, contradictory meanings, hindering the possibility for these characters to ride contentedly over the horizon together.

In counterpoint to the romantic gesture of riding off into the cinematic sunset, the filmic horizon also symbolises the existence of, and potential threat located in, a space beyond it. In the context of an anxious era, such as the Cold War, it is the development of over-the-horizon surveillance capabilities which are associated with this space. Throughout the noir cycle, for example, the constant threat is rendered as (narrative and aesthetic) claustrophobia, as characters seek to insulate themselves from the threat that exists on the other side. By contrast, for the uncertain protagonist of these postmillennial future-films, the threat is no longer isolated beyond even a bodily horizon. Following Ulrich Beck, I argued that it is the blurring of the boundary between safety and insecurity that is evident in the characters' negotiations of their everyday experiences within their diegetic worlds, which defines their uncertainty. Furthermore, for the protagonists of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle, the dissolution of this frontier is mirrored in their minds. These characters attempt to create a home in their memories, but their minds are compromised, infected with pathological uncertainty and the films demonstrate that there is no guard against surveillance within. For this subcycle, the symbolic horizon captures more than the dimensions of heterotopia that Hetherington characterizes as an ‘ambivalence...that allows us to focus on the idea of process rather than structure’, ‘an ordering that never comes to rest but which vacillates between ideas of freedom and control’, however critical these ideas may be to understanding its nature. The horizon is more than Louis Marin’s ‘poetic and rhetorical’ place ‘beyond space’, in which ‘a bridge seems to be established between the visible and the invisible’, for these texts move beyond a conventional understanding of ritualistic, temporary liminality. Iterative Dystopias posit the plight of their protagonists as a perpetually liminal experience and locate them at the horizon as they undertake their everyday existence.

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The presence (and relevance) of perpetual liminality as a cinematic theme has, as might be anticipated, continued beyond 2010. As was acknowledged from the outset of this study, my analysis of Iterative Dystopias as postmillennial cinema is a contrivance. The designation is not intended to suggest that these films provide insight into a universal, sociological experience of the period, but rather to acknowledge the decade as the historical nexus linking the release dates of the films analysed with the theoretical paradigms necessary to conceiving the subcycle as a coherent group. Code 46, 2046 and Inception are early examples within a subcycle of which the textual inclusions are yet to be conclusively defined. Indeed, it may be that these films are examples in a grouping which remains as contested and contestable as the noir cycle does three generations on. Importantly though, the Iterative Dystopia subcycle is likely to remain a small cohort, despite Garin Dowd’s contention (as he rests on luminaries in the field) that it is ‘well documented...that genre designations are imposed retrospectively;’ and that ‘the genre critic, “intoxicated” by the “effervescence” of her/his new grouping, will assuredly create a whole in which that part can be lodged and given sustenance’. The structure of the protagonists’ journeys and the paradoxical nature of their environments are unlikely to be extensively replicated across the screen. Further analysis will uncover new exchanges between this group and other texts released within the decade and beyond, however, relating them in a fractal-like web of overlapping social and narrative concerns.

Post-2010, two films demonstrate clear allegiances with the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. Both texts position their protagonist as perpetually liminal and, moreover, reprise the train motif through which I interrogated the nature of this characterisation. Neil Burger’s box office success Divergent offers a dystopian scenario in which the motif of the train is ever-present. In this plot the train is a mode of transportation which does not stop for passengers. Rather it performs endless cycles of a track which approaches, but does not cross, the boundary fence encircling the inhabitants of Chicago. The train functions as a motif of perpetual liminality in this film. Unlike in preceding ‘edge of the universe’ narratives such as Brazil and The Truman Show, the characters who board this train are not liminal, they are not temporarily transitory in line with Turner’s thesis. Nor are

they to be conceived of as permanently liminal, arrested in a state of endless repetition, as in Szakolczai’s theory, for their journeys contain the potential for change. There is the glimmer of dystopian hope, directly articulated in the concluding voice over, when Beatrice ‘Tris’ Prior (Shailene Woodley) announces ‘but for now we’ll ride the train to the end of the line. And then...we’ll jump.’

There is also a clear corollary between Duncan Jones’ 2011 film, *Source Code*, and the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. The continuities with *Code 46* and *Inception* are particularly noteworthy. *Source Code* explores the possibility of conducting a military-led, forensic investigation utilising the artificially stimulated mind of a dead soldier to prevent future crimes. For a substantial proportion of *Source Code’s* plot, Sean Fentress / Capt. Colter Stevens (Jake Gyllenhaal) appears to be trapped in a time loop quest. His journey is structured in a manner which has more in common with Harold Ramis’ *Groundhog Day* (1993) than the films with which it comes to parallel. With each failed attempt to defuse the bomb the protagonist dies, only to find himself revived and required to begin again. It is when Fentress/Stevens is revealed to be effectively dreaming—both alive and dead—a displaced brain attached to neural sensors which are controlled by senior military officers, that this film begins to clearly resonate with the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. His journey is iterative. This character is arrested between life and death, residing in heterotopic spaces. He is aboard a train which loops endlessly, though it travels only toward a single station. Simultaneously, he is floating in digital space, detached from his body, the inner-workings of his mind exposed to others. Furthermore, his acts of remembering are forward-looking, and compromised by intimate surveillance. However, it is *Source Code’s* ambiguous conclusion and the romantic relationship which dominates the story, which are the strongest evidence that this film is a potential candidate for inclusion within the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. *Source Code’s* protagonist gazes at his companion on his train to nowhere, searching for a place comfort. Colter Stevens wants to go home.

The analysis of perpetual liminality as a cinematic theme presented in this thesis also offers opportunities for new readings of films working within other modes of storytelling. As was noted at the outset of this study, the ‘puzzle films’ of the 2000s play a critical role in the context of the subcycle’s reception, particularly as they relate to works within both
Nolan’s and Wong’s oeuvres. While this mode of storytelling appears to have lessened in popularity post-2010, it is still evident in films such as *Looper*. Rian Johnson’s 2012 film is a time travel narrative. Using the grandfather paradox familiar within the science fiction genre, the film initiates a point of divergence that results in its protagonist, Joe (Joseph Godon-Levitt / Bruce Willis) experiencing alternate realities. While this diverges from Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists’ sequential pursuit of possibilities, the concept of uncertainty as I have conceptualised it in this thesis has definite application. This character’s mind is a conflicted space, riven with the contradictions of competing memories of his past and future. Furthermore, as he moves between diners and hotel rooms, *Looper*’s protagonist conducts a significant proportion of his everyday in heterotopic spaces. The interconnections between puzzle narratives and Iterative Dystopia’s theme of perpetual liminality are fertile ground for further research.

In addition, *Code 46*, *2046* and *Inception* share many allegiances with contemporary post-apocalyptic film narratives such as *Time of the Wolf* (2003), *The Road* and more recently released examples, including *World War Z* (2013), *Oblivion* (2013), *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014) and the billion dollar *The Hunger Games* franchise (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Within this story form, Korean director, Bong Joon-ho’s first English-language film, *Snowpiercer* (2013), is located entirely on a train. Sequestered within a snow-covered mountainscape, there are no horizons visible from its carriages. Like in *2046*, the horizon for which *Snowpiercer*’s protagonist is searching is the future. Meanwhile, its protagonist is charged with finding refuge aboard this interstitial environment, with his experience in each carriage forming an additional layer of his search. While the film’s mise-en-scene is suggestive of a post-apocalyptic narrative, there is no conclusive evidence presented in the film to confirm that it is not instead the scene of a utopian experiment gone awry. Further, the film’s inconclusive ending, in conjunction with the tension between preordination and open possibility throughout the story, suggest that much of the analysis conducted in this thesis could be productively extrapolated to a consideration of this film.

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Distinct parallels are also able to be drawn between the characteristics of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle and the most recent addition to the *Maze Runner* franchise, *Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials* (2015). In this film the characters’ journey is structured ‘episodically’,\(^4\) the characters’ experiences are repeated and revised. They are ‘in one post-apocalyptic bunker, then they’re in another. They’re under the protection of one untrustworthy adult, then another. They’re skulking about an abandoned mall by flashlight, then slinking through a sewer system by flashlight’.\(^5\) More interestingly, however, these iterations are pronounced across the franchise. The narrative arc explored in the sequel is essentially a repetition of the original *Maze Runner* (2014), with a small though significant change in location. Whether they are residing within the Glade (in the first film) or at the headquarters of WCKD (in its sequel), these characters spend the plots literally searching for an exit, whether by running through a maze or crawling through airconditioning tunnels. Across these different titles, Thomas (Dylan O’Brien) is searching for a place to call home. Despite the shift to a post-apocalyptic narrative form, just like Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists, he longs for an existence beyond the search which spirals across these two narratives.\(^6\) The theme of perpetual liminality is not an aberration isolated to a small constellation of films from the postmillennial decade. It is one which could productively be pursued on the screen currently and has application across a number of different narrative forms.

Finally, this thesis has identified perpetual liminality as the coherent theme across the Iterative Dystopia subcycle. It has established that this variant of liminality is expressed on screen through its representation of the protagonists’ quotidian environments as

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\(^5\) Ibid.

paradoxical, and it has explored the operation of these paradoxes within each text considered for analysis. The social science fiction criticism methodology that I employed specifically supported my goal to contribute to the field of screen studies through the conduct of a ‘nuanced’ analysis of these films as texts. Delimiting the scope of the thesis in this way facilitated an in-depth, detailed consideration of a subcycle which I isolated within the popular postmillennial future-cycle. To the field of screen studies, this thesis contributed new readings of these films based in concepts drawn from diverse disciplinary perspectives. In conducting this research, I have also laid the foundations for further analysis which approaches these texts from an opposing standpoint, a companion project which prioritises sociological uncertainty.

Ulrich Beck writes that ‘cultural optimism and cultural pessimism turn out to be two aspects of a single dynamic...Hope and concern condition one another.’ Iterative Dystopias such as Code 46, 2046 and Inception represent this oscillation on screen. This subcycle motivates its protagonists to continually question their environments and their experience of them. They are compelled by their narratives to seek paths out of their perpetually liminal existence. Further, they are urged to view the paradoxes they face with scepticism. Despite the possibilities inherent within their iterative journey, their liminality is not a desirable predicament, but nor is it a situation of anti-utopian futility. In these near-futures, the protagonists are both literally and figuratively situated at the horizon. As they gaze from this dystopian standpoint into the equal potential of the utopian and anti-utopian extremes, they retain hope. This perpetually liminal position is critical to understanding these films in the context of their time. As Ulrich Beck highlights,

[a]rguing for the centrality of [uncertainty] to understand the dynamics of our time, I am aware of the dark sides of individualization and globalization as well.

441 Beck, World at Risk, 16.
442 This aspect of the Iterative Dystopia’s representations of perpetual liminality is agreement with Thomassen’s conceptualisation of liminality, though it diverges significantly elsewhere, as has been discussed. Thomassen, “Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces.”
443 Here we recall again Moylan’s characterisation of dystopia as a negotiation between utopia and anti-utopia. Moylan, Scraps of the Untainted Sky, xiii.
But I can’t help feeling bored by the habit of concentrating on the catastrophes ahead. It doesn’t challenge us to think. How do we know that everything is getting worse? Neither the pessimist nor the optimist can foresee the future. It is very difficult and therefore intellectually challenging to open up a mode of thinking and acting for realistic utopian opportunities.444

These films echo this challenge. By offering dystopian representations of the near-future, they stimulate their assumed viewer to conceive their real-world present differently. In doing so, Iterative Dystopias suggest the possibility of a hopeful future beyond the screen. Although I would not go as far as Phillip Wegner, who argues that utopian narrative is a ‘representational practice’ with ‘pedagogical force’ in that it ‘re-educates the desires of its audience, enabling them to grow the “new organs” necessary also to “live” and “perceive” a newly emerging social and cultural reality’,445 there is no doubt that the identification of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle is an invitation, if not a provocation, to reconsider the prominence and impact of social uncertainty in the years following the turn of the millennium.

Beyond the scope of the social science fiction criticism methodology applied in this thesis, Arakady Plotnitsky’s interdisciplinary work on paradox and unknowability also offers fruitful opportunities for further research into this subcycle of films. Although it is tangential to the final argumentation in this thesis, his assertion that objects under analysis require complementary readings which ‘at times [conflict] with or [inhibit] each other, [are] at times mutually exclusive; but never [allow] for a full synthesis’,446 was highly

444 In the original quote, Beck uses the term ‘risk’ where I have substituted ‘uncertainty’. Beck’s concept of risk is a broader category which encompasses the uncertainty that I have pursued throughout my thesis. My intention in making this alteration is not to narrow his claim but rather to avoid any confusion in terminology. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences, 213.
influential in my initial approaches to these works. The identification of the Iterative Dystopia subcycle of films, the development of the concept of perpetual liminality and the exploration of the formal traits which shape it provide a valuable foundation for further research from a variety of different interdisciplinary approaches.

The image of the horizon which echoes across the opening frames of each Iterative Dystopia analysed in this thesis is an uncommon visual link between this disparate collection of films. Above all, however, this image exposes the subcycle’s critical formal traits. These texts locate their characters in paradoxical environments. Arrested in a state of continuous transition, the protagonists seek a foundation upon which to build a path out of their perpetual liminality. They are searching the horizon for a place of comfort and belonging, a place to call home. Even Code 46, the most pessimistic of the texts analysed, retains glimmers of hope, despite isolating its star-crossed lovers from each other in its final scenes. In William’s gaze that rests a little too long on his son’s face as it dawns on him that he is unable to read the boy’s mind, there is hope that he may one day remember Maria. In the melodic affirmation that ‘life is but a dream’ that accompanies this scene, there is hope that William need not be sacrificed on the pyre of socio-normative expectations. He may awake from the stupor of life with his nuclear family and his corporate nine-to-five and imagine other options as he has before. Hope exists too in Maria’s eyes, still bright despite her exile, narrowing briefly as her lips faintly curl upwards in memory. Perhaps her thoughts travel to William, perhaps instead she recalls that she has returned from afuera previously. Either way, as she gazes towards the image of the horizon, in each vision of the past lies hope for the future.

Hope smoulders too in 2046. As the viewer escapes from the futuristic black hole with the first camera pan, the voiceover asserts that there are always exceptions to rules. Whilst the concluding scene reaffirms that ‘nothing ever changes in 2046’ and states again that it is a time and a place from which there is no return, the ultimate paradox of the film is that its circularity both closes and opens it to possibilities. For even as the viewer is plunged back into the futuristic abyss, our memory of the future (that is now also the past) is that there is an exit from that black hole.
As the turn of the millennium faded, and a decade of ‘social uncertainty’ came to its end,\textsuperscript{447} the Iterative Dystopia subcycle showed greater signs of (potential) optimism. Of the ternion of films analysed in this thesis, Christopher Nolan’s 2010 film \textit{Inception} is the most definite in its equivocality. At the conclusion of this film, Dom Cobb’s spinning top continues to turn, endlessly rotating on the horizon of dystopian possibility. \textit{Inception}’s conclusion resolutely confirms the hope which resides in the subcycle’s protagonists’ journeys, however. It presents the future as a children’s toy with which the director encourages both Cobb and the viewer to play. As the credits roll on each of these texts, ambiguities remain. In their plot-endings, Iterative Dystopia’s protagonists embark on another revision of their story. Once again they board the metaphoric train that carries these perpetually liminal characters through their everyday experience, as they search for a place to call home. ‘They know where they hope this train will take them, but they don’t know for sure’.\textsuperscript{448} Maybe in this next iteration of their journey they will find utopia at the horizon.

\textsuperscript{447} I refer once again to the ‘uncertainty’ observed by cinema critics in their end-of-the-decade reflective pieces, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis. Delaney, \textit{“Ah, the Noughties, the Decade When We Cast Off Reality.”}; \textit{“Empire’s Review of the Decade: 10 Film Trends of the Noughties.”}; Savage, \textit{“Entertainment Review of the Decade: Cinema.”}; Harris, \textit{“The Nervous, Noncommittal Noughties Can’t End Soon Enough.”}; Davey, \textit{“Best Films of the Noughties.”}  

\textsuperscript{448} Here I reprise the riddle-refrain from \textit{Inception}, first voiced by Mal in the film. In its original incantation, Mal says ‘You know where you hope this train will take you, but you don’t know for sure’.


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