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In *The Matrix of Visual Culture* Patricia Pisters pragmatically applies Gilles Deleuze's film-philosophy to the sustained critique of various canonical, commercial and contemporary films. Translating Deleuze's philosophical methodologies into digestible terms of engagement is a laudable achievement in itself, as I recall trying to work with the dual volumes—*cinema 1: movement-image* and *cinema 2: the time-image*—as being challenging, to say the least.

Pisters's final outcome is admirable. Explanations of the new Deleuzian terminology are grounded with excellent textual analysis of a variety of moving-image events. Importantly, Pisters is not, it seems, a Deleuze apologist—a trait that characterizes many defenders of his film-theory-philosophy. Avoiding the relativism of attempting to champion all facets of Deleuze's critical strategy, Pisters makes clear that, for the time being, certain principles are more fruitful in their application to known films, while other arguments are less developed. Concepts such as the interconnection of the *virtual* and the *actual*, and the notion of "becoming," "a process and an attempt to think differently, to see or feel something new in experience by entering into a zone of proximity with somebody or something else" (p. 106), are particularly engaging. By referring to popular films, the accessibility of this new approach to Deleuze's film scholarship is reiterated. Further, and more interesting from a disciplinary perspective, is the positioning of Deleuzian film theory in subtle opposition to contemporary psychoanalytic theory—which Pisters exemplifies most notably through the film criticism of Slavoj Žižek.

Consequently (and arguably rightly so) Pisters's Deleuzian methodology does seem to make considerable moves toward a viable alternative to psychoanalysis, specifically in the critique of subjectivity and the cinema. The knowing opposition of post-structuralist deconstructive approaches with Deleuze's *rhizomatic* generative methodology (in crude summary, the study of networks rather than isolated points) does provide a welcome respite from the deliberations of certain strands of film scholarship that lack a developmental perspective.

In that sense, *The Matrix of Visual Culture* enters into the spectrum of contemporary film scholarship with the same agenda as Vivian Sobchack's landmark publication *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of the Film Experience* (1992), as both a critique of the discipline of film studies, and its simultaneous reinvigoration. Most importantly, in my view, Pisters reconstitutes the apparent ruin of 20th-century film studies in such a way that it accommodates a variety of practices that largely have been excluded. Thus, animation—which Pisters suggests, in her final chapter, is predictive of the future of cinema—stands alongside live-action film, games and other aspects of our contemporary visual culture.

Though the limits of space warrant their absence, I felt an urge to set Pisters's use of Deleuze against other aspects of film studies, such as the cognitive agenda—perhaps as an antidote to the trappings of constructing a position in opposition to the praxis of psychoanalytic theory.

Ironically, it is in the reworking of Deleuze's film theory by other writers that its potential is unlocked, for instance, in the way that Pisters shifts away from the *auteur* stance of his publications toward a contemporary attitude. Such an emphasis on the historical moment within which Deleuze worked is timely, with the application of his philosophy present at the cutting edge of art, science and technology. For this reason, Deleuze is not the film studies panacea that some may feel him to be. However, there is little more Deleuzian per se than the reworking of his philosophy for our contemporary cultural climate, so eloquently demonstrated by Pisters. I had suspected prior to reading *The Matrix of Visual Culture* that its subtitle—"Working with Deleuze in Film Theory"—might have been something of a misnomer, conscious of Robert Stam's doubt about actually "working" with Deleuze, and holding similar reservations myself. Happily, I have been proven wrong, by a rigorous, progressive and thought-provoking study.

ORYX AND CRAKE

by Margaret Atwood. Doubleday, New York, NY, U.S.A., 2003. 386 pp. Trade. ISBN: 0-385-50385-7.

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The end of the world keeps getting more final. In the past the gods guaranteed a sequel, which is why medieval paintings of Judgment Day are jammed with people, as crowded as subway cars at rush hour. The message is clear: Nobody really dies. Today most of us suspect otherwise: The end of the world may be absolute and irrevocable, with nothing resembling an afterlife, not even in works, ideas or community.

This vision is less than 200 years old. In 1816 Lord Byron expressed it in his poem "Darkness," in which the sun is extinguished. Humanity, at war with itself to the bitter end, dwindles and disappears. Darwin was not particularly concerned about the end of the world, but lent scientific credibility to the idea of human extinction, which for many people is the same thing. H.G. Wells confronted our extinction in *The Time Machine* (1895), and Olaf Stapledon explored it obsessively in *Last and First Men* (1930), in which humans go extinct in 18 different ways. Robinson Jeffers accepted our impermanence as a species, and used it to inform many of his poems. Despite these exceptions, however, few writers had much to say on the subject throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th century. Save for those rare individuals who were gifted or burdened with a sense of geological time, human extinction was largely ignored until 1945. Hiroshima changed everything, including the future. Since World War II, artists, writers and moviemakers have energetically explored our end.

When a story successfully engages mind-numbing but intractable possibilities, we seek its recounting and variations on its themes. Movies like *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Dr. Strangelove* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* touch some of our deepest fears, but in entirely unthreatening ways, as schlock, farce or science fiction. Whether dealing with mad scientists, political cowboys, or complacency in the face of hungry extraterrestrials, end-of-the-world stories are sermons that invite astonishment and laughter even as they chastise us for betraying life. Maybe we deserve to go extinct. Maybe we want to. We are our own worst enemies, which is why so many end-of-the-world stories invite us to imagine the wounds of civilization healed. With cities in ruins and the human population approaching zero, we can start over.

Aesthetically, disease is the most appealing instrument of destruction. Unlike nuclear war, extraterrestrials or

gray goo (a nanotech apocalypse in which everything on earth is reduced to identical copies of infinitesimally small self-replicating machines), a final epidemic can leave the biosphere intact, along with plenty of loot for survivors. The epidemic is invariably swift, which spares readers too much distressing imagery. Two of the finest novels of human extinction, Gore Vidal's *Kalki* (1978) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Galapagos* (1985), feature terminal epidemics. Now Margaret Atwood updates the story of disease-induced human extinction for the first decade of the 21st century.

Oryx and Crake is set in a near-future that is like today, only more so. Gigantic corporations with names like OrganInc, HelthWyzer and RejoovenEsence rule the earth. Society is divided into haves and have-nots. The haves, who work for or run the corporations, live in gated compounds with good shopping. The have-nots live in the plebelands, vast crime-ridden slums. Jimmy and Crake meet in high school in the HelthWyzer compound, where their parents work. Both boys are loners. Jimmy cultivates a jaundiced view of the world and thinks about sex. Crake, whose father died a few years before, an apparent suicide, is remote and academically gifted. The boys play computer games together, favoring ones that involve extinction lore, historical battles or world conquest. They surf the net and discover sites dedicated to open heart surgeries, executions, animal torture and pornography. On a site called HottTotts, which features child sex in impoverished countries, they first see Oryx, an exquisitely beautiful child prostitute from somewhere in Southeast Asia. Both boys immediately fall for her, but each keeps his secret from the other.

After high school Jimmy goes on to art school in New York. Except for genetic art, which does not interest him, the arts are irrelevant, but there is still a need for advertising, so Jimmy unenthusiastically prepares himself for a career in what he calls "2-D window-dressing," public relations. Crake, on the other hand, is courted by the best schools in the country and chooses Watson-Crick, a prestigious institute of science. There he focuses on transgenics. Eventually he becomes a leading biotechnologist and climbs high on the corporate ladder. Along the way he learns that HelthWyzer has programs not only to cure disease but also to create it. This assures profits into the indefinite future. In the world of At-

wood's novel, all rebellion ends in futility or death, so rebellion is not an option for either Jimmy or Crake. Absence of choice fuels fantasies of world-destruction and post-human worlds.

World-destruction fantasies are common, but few people act on them. Fewer still are in positions to perpetrate anything beyond symbolic acts of sabotage or terrorism. Crake has expertise and access to vast resources. With his ruinous family history and blighted sex life, he experiences little in humanity worth preserving. By the time he achieves his dream of being with Oryx, the fate of humanity is sealed.

Atwood's characters brood in passing about transgression, but for her, the central problem with biotechnology is not that it goes too far. The central problem is that it can realize human dreams. If biotechnology were only a matter of improving health and looks, feeding the hungry, making a few people rich and tooling new pets, most people would welcome what they found useful and resign themselves to the rest. However, biotechnology can serve dreams that rise out of the infantile and mineral depths, dreams to radically improve the race, or avenge stolen lives, dreams of an emptied world, and of the ecstasy of destruction. Atwood reminds us that the greatest danger from biotechnology today is not from cloning, germline engineering or corporate domination of the world's food supply, dangerous as these things may be, but from engineered disease. And from what we already are.

The novel has a few shortcomings. For two so tormented characters, Jimmy and Crake are surprisingly unadventurous in conversation with each other. True, their situations in life are extraordinary, and all genuinely extraordinary experience tends to maroon people within the confines of ordinary language. Yet we would expect Jimmy especially to explore the possibilities of language, since he is fascinated by words. Instead, Jimmy and Crake sound like two guys with a few family problems and the kinds of routine grudges against the system that prepare them to be functionaries. Still, Jimmy and Crake's conversations are compelling. Atwood captures the adolescent cynicism so popular today (and not limited to adolescents), a style of disbelief that mimics the cynicism of worldly power without fathoming its implications.

The world that Atwood sketches, mostly through Jimmy, is demonic, yet

not without beauty or tenderness. The boys' naive cynicism puts them on a collision course with the world and affords Crake no defense against his own fury and power. Crake is an exceptionally drawn character, driven by unrelenting betrayals from the people most important to him. As a boy, he responds by immersing himself in study and computers. Later he explores socially sanctioned crime. Finally he rises to all-encompassing revenge. Even as he pursues highly structured madness he never ceases to be human. Jimmy and Oryx, both of whom display grievous shortcomings as human beings, especially in their treatment of Crake, are never altogether unlovable characters. Should we go extinct? Become posthuman? No contemporary novel reminds us with such absence of sentimentality of what is at stake.

FRANCIS BACON: THE LOGIC OF SENSATION

by Gilles Deleuze. Daniel W. Smith, trans. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, U.S.A., 2003. 264 pp. Trade. ISBN: 0-8166-4341-5.

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Often, a philosopher's body of work can become tied down to a set of shorthand references. Plato's cave, Descartes's cogito, Kant's sublime, Hegel's dialectic and so on. Familiarity asks for clarity, and clarity delivers what in some cases is a philosophical soundbite. Arguably, this sort of shorthand has been happening to more modern philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze. For many, Deleuze's name has been tied to a set of concepts that emerged out of *A Thousand Plateaus* (co-authored with Félix Guattari): the rhizome, deterritorialization, multiplicity, the body without organs and a host of other concepts.

With this in mind, it is a welcome event to see many of Deleuze's neglected other writings being translated for the first time. Deleuze's work on the painter Francis Bacon is one such book. First published in 1981, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* is a book that marks a move towards the later Deleuze, in which the philosopher explored aesthetics and culture in a more focused vein. Deleuze's cinema