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History 461

Professor Call

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## The Free Arena of Literature: Science Fiction Films' Critiques of Capitalism in the United States

Capitalism is an inherently flawed system. The ideologies of Karl Marx have remained relevant for their critiques of the system, yet socially, his ideas are not accepted in the capitalist United States. Capitalism, as the dominant economic system of western civilization, has become synonymous with patriotism in the U.S. This has proved incredibly harmful to criticisms of capitalism, as they are met with questions of allegiance and patriotism rather than a careful reconsideration of ideals. Through science fiction films, these ideas that are usually difficult to express become much more palatable to a capitalist society. But to fully appreciate the critiques of capitalism through fictional depictions in sci-fi films, it is imperative to first understand the real world limitations of the economic system.

Capitalism, in the eyes of Karl Marx, has long been a thorn in the side of the common worker. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx asserts that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,”<sup>1</sup> and that lense through which to view history continues to be applicable. The *Communist Manifesto* provides clarification to this class struggle. It places the oppressor and oppressed at the heart of capitalism: their relationship has constantly evolved, seen as “freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed,”<sup>2</sup> throughout pre-capitalist history. It is only when

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (London: Socialist Labor Party of America, 2006), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

capitalism becomes the dominant economic system that we see the introduction of the proletariat and bourgeoisie, the latest evolution of oppressor and oppressed. In *Wage Labour and Capital*, Marx continues to contend this exploitative nature of capitalism. Marx applies his broader statements of patterns in human history to capitalism. He examines how the oppressor and oppressed relationship is not only allowed to exist, but fostered under capitalism. Marx argues that “wages, therefore, are not a share of the worker in the commodities produced by himself. Wages are that part of already existing commodities with which the capitalist buys a certain amount of productive labour-power.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, Marx claims that the proletariat is doomed to remain economically oppressed under the cycle of working to live. Marx’s critiques of capitalism and ideologies have remained significant through history, and are especially relevant in today’s ever growing inequalities<sup>4</sup>.

Wealth inequality has only grown and grown under capitalism - the predominant economic system of western countries. Specifically in the United States, this issue persists to create horrific living conditions for the poor, while the richest only continue to hoard property, wealth, and other resources. In “Income and Wealth Inequality in America, 1949-2016”, Moritz Kuhn, Moritz Schularick, and Ulrike Steins describe the present living conditions of the U.S. as “unequal times”<sup>5</sup>. They even describe the “causes and consequences of widening disparities in income and wealth” as the “defining debate of our age.”<sup>6</sup> But before discussing the present, it is imperative to understand how these conditions came to be. Following the end of World War 2,

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, “Wage-Labour and Capital”, *Neu Rheinische Zeitung* (1847): 9.

<sup>4</sup> Fabian T. Pfeffer, and Robert F. Schoeni. "How Wealth Inequality Shapes Our Future." *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 2, no. 6 (2016): 2-22.

<sup>5</sup> Moritz Kuhn, Moritz Schularick, and Ulrike I. Steins, “Income and Wealth Inequality in America, 1949–2016.” *Journal of Political Economy* 128, no. 9 (2020).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the United States experienced a period of substantial economic growth. Post-war America's economy sets the stage for understanding the economic landscape from the 50s and onwards. While the initial economic growth of post-war America benefited the lower, middle, and upper classes somewhat equally, the 1970s showcase the beginnings of unequal growth. For the middle class or "households between the 50th and 90th percentiles of the wealth distribution"<sup>7</sup> as Kuhn, Shularick, and Steins specify, "incomes rose modestly by about one-third over nearly 40 years, implying annual growth rates of much less than 1% per year."<sup>8</sup> Contrastingly, income growth for the upper class was indisputably gluttonous. "The incomes of households within the top 10% of the wealth distribution have doubled between 1971 and 2007."<sup>9</sup> All while the lower class, or those within the 0th to 50th percentiles of wealth distribution, experienced a total stagnation of income growth<sup>10</sup>.

The economy, of course, is not always in a state of growth. Recessions are inevitable and Marx outlines this in his Crisis Theory. Simon Clarke introduces this concept in his book titled *Introduction: Marxism and the Theory of Crisis*. Based on Marx's Crisis Theory, Clarke outlines that "with every boom the apologists for capitalism claim that the tendency to crisis that has plagued the capitalist system since its very beginnings has finally been overcome."<sup>11</sup> In turn, "when the boom breaks, economists fall over one another to provide particularistic explanations

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<sup>7</sup> Kuhn, "Income and Wealth Inequality in America, 1949–2016."

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Clarke, *Introduction: Marxism and the Theory of Crisis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 1.

of the crash.”<sup>12</sup> Marx analyzed that the capitalist economy is perpetually in a cyclical state of boom and bust.

However, the impact of a bust or recession, both in the long term and short term, is never equal between economic classes. 2008’s economic crisis, officially known as the Great Recession, began in “December 2007 and ended in June 2009.”<sup>13</sup> *The Great Recession* by David Grusky, Bruce Western, and Christopher Wimer emphasizes the unequal impact of recessions. They detail that while the wealthy did lose money during the recession, “their wealth has been partly recouped as the stock market has covered.”<sup>14</sup> The upper class, who comparatively had the most wealth they could afford to lose, had the easiest time recovering. Comparatively, those the most affected by the crash held less wealth that they could afford to lose. “The middle class, whose wealth tends to consist mostly of housing and retirement accounts, have suffered as well and may not rebound as quickly. Some of the biggest relative losses occurred among the disadvantaged.”<sup>15</sup> While the wealthiest have already rebounded from the financial crisis, the middle class and poor still are struggling to recover. “Wealth Disparities Before and After the Great Recession” by Fabian T. Pfeffer, Sheldon Danziger, and Robert Schoeni details how the Great Recession led to “a substantial rise in wealth inequality in just a few years.”<sup>16</sup> This article details that from 2003 to 2011, the wealth lost by the richest 95th percentile was insignificant when compared to what was lost by the bottom 25th percentile. The 95th percentile experienced

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<sup>12</sup> Clarke, *Marxism and the Theory of Crisis*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> David Grusky, Bruce Western, and Christopher Wimer, *The Great Recession*, (The Russell Sage Foundation, 2011), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Gusky, *The Great Recession*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>16</sup> Fabian Pfeffer, Sheldon Danziger, and Robert Schoeni, “Wealth Disparities Before and After the Great Recession” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 650, no. 1 (November 2013): 98–123.

a total change of -0.4% in their net worth while the 25th percentile totaled -84.7%.<sup>17</sup> These numbers reveal that the richest were able to easily hold their wealth, while the poorest struggled to do so. Despite such blatant discrepancies and failures under capitalism, “crises have recurred periodically for the past two hundred years,”<sup>18</sup> Clarke reveals. As long as capitalism still exists as the dominant economic system, recessions will continue to breed inequality.

One of the integral beliefs that Americans possess is that if anyone works hard enough, they can achieve social mobility, otherwise known as the American Dream. This romanticized idea that anyone can become financially successful under capitalism may have been true previously in United States history, but it certainly is far from reality in the present day. Sara Goldrick-Rab examines this concept in *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream*. Most would agree that obtaining a college education is an essential step towards achieving economic success in the United States. In order to properly assess the present day validity of the American Dream, Goldrick-Rab examines a study that covers the college experience of 3,000 different disadvantaged young adults in Wisconsin. If truly hard work is the only thing that separates the poor from the rich, as the American Dream would have us believe, then those with less financial resources should have no trouble achieving a degree in higher education. However, this is not what Goldrick-Rab found. It is no secret that college is expensive, and Goldrick-Rab emphasizes that students are largely on their own with finding the funds, as the federal financial aid system is “virtually silent on the role of colleges and universities in keeping the price of higher education reasonable.”<sup>19</sup> As a result, Goldrick-Rab

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<sup>17</sup> Pfeffer, “Wealth Disparities Before and After the Great Recession”.

<sup>18</sup> Clarke, *Introduction: Marxism and the Theory of Crisis*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Sara Goldrick-Rab. *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream*. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2017), 16.

found that half of the students in the study left college without a degree in hand not due to a lack of effort, but rather lack of money. Complications affording tuition, living expenses, books, and other costs forced these students out of higher education completely. Less than twenty five percent of the students in the study were able to acquire a degree within five years. All too often, students left college without a degree and with crippling debt. Current prices on higher education make social mobility difficult without generational wealth. The validity of the American Dream is a complicated topic, beyond the scope of this paper. However, with college degrees extremely difficult for the poor to afford, the American Dream has certainly shifted far from what it is supposed to represent under the capitalist system we live under.

While the limitations of capitalism have been established, solutions have been difficult to discuss. This is due largely to the overwhelming acceptance of capitalism as the chief economic system. In an article for *The National Interest*, Francis Fukuyama argues that the end of the Cold War was not simply a “passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such.”<sup>20</sup> To state the obvious, the Cold War was a war of clashing economic ideologies. With the Soviet Union defeated, Fukuyama asserts that this marked “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of government.”<sup>21</sup> In Fukuyama’s perception of the “final form of government,”<sup>22</sup> capitalism is a cornerstone. Fukuyama defends capitalism through the claims that “the root causes of economic inequality do not have to do with the underlying legal and social structure of our society.”<sup>23</sup> This is evidence of his stance in support of capitalism and against alternative economic forms. Other

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<sup>20</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* no. 16 (1989): 3-18, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992), 181.

scholars have captured the social pressure that exists within the acceptance of capitalism. Matthew Desmond, professor of sociology at Princeton University, expresses this societal pressure in his article “In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation.”<sup>24</sup> Desmond traces the exploitative nature of capitalism in the United States back to its historic system of slavery. Furthermore, Desmond states that a certain phrase is utilized by capitalists to defend the inequality that plagues our society: “this is a capitalist society.”<sup>25</sup> He details this phrase by further describing it as “a fatalistic mantra that seems to get repeated to anyone who questions why America can’t be more fair or equal.”<sup>26</sup> Critiques of the capitalist system are often met with questions of patriotism in the United States. Conflicting economic ideologies were at the heart of the Cold War; capitalism being associated with the U.S. and patriotism. Therefore, by critiquing the capitalist ideology, society can interpret that as a criticism of the United States, regardless of if the critique was of the U.S. or not.

On the topic of the United States, George W. Bush has provided evidence of the ties between patriotism and capitalism in a press conference held shortly after 9/11. While attempting to rally the nation’s support under the pretense of patriotism, Bush states that the crippling of the economy was a primary goal of the terrorist attack. Bush claims “[the terrorists’] intention was not only to kill and maim and destroy. Their intention was to frighten to the point where our Nation would not act.”<sup>27</sup> He emphasizes that “we cannot let the terrorists achieve the objective of frightening our Nation to the point where we don’t conduct business, where people don’t shop.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew Desmond, “In Order To Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, You Have To Start on the Plantation,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Desmond, “Plantation,”.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> “Bush Shopping Quote,” C-Span. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4552776/user-clip-bush-shopping-quote>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

In other words, Bush is equating shopping, or capitalism, as integral to American life - as patriotic. By addressing the American public in this way, Bush is presenting a duty to the American people: consumerism. Bush understands that if the terrorist attack prevents shopping and business from taking place, there is a piece of the American lifestyle that is damaged. Through encouraging the consumer capitalist culture, Bush is linking capitalism with American values and, therefore, patriotism.

The societal pressure to accept capitalism is a global phenomenon, unfortunately. Slavoj Žižek, a Slovenian philosopher, comments on this absurd aspect of capitalism in the film ‘*Zizek!*’, which is a documentary about himself. Žižek asks his audience to ponder:

“...the strangeness of today’s situation. Thirty, forty years ago, we were still debating about what the future will be: communist, fascist, capitalist, whatever. Today, nobody even debates these issues. We all silently accept global capitalism is here to stay. On the other hand, we are obsessed with cosmic catastrophes: the whole life on Earth disintegrating, because of some virus, because of an asteroid hitting the Earth, and so on. So the paradox is, that it’s much easier to imagine the end of all life on Earth than a much more modest radical change in capitalism.”<sup>29</sup>

Žižek makes an incredibly compelling argument about the state of global capitalism. Although he is addressing capitalism on a global scale, this silent pressure is absolutely relevant to the existence of capitalism in the United States. Cosmic catastrophe films like *2012* and *The Day After Tomorrow* both have grossed over \$150 million in their domestic releases in the United States. While not critically successful, the success of these films at the box office proves how captivating the idea of the apocalypse is to the U.S. audience. The lack of significant films

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<sup>29</sup> Taylor Astra, dir. *Zizek!* Germany: Zeitgeist Video, 2005.



around alternative economic systems in the United States further cements the idea that “we all silently accept... capitalism is here to stay.”<sup>30</sup>

Science fiction offers a platform for critics of capitalism. Due to the unspoken acceptance of capitalism as the dominant economic system in the United States, critiques of the system are often rejected. Through the depiction of capitalism and corporations in distinct, fictional worlds to our own, objections to the current economic system can be made and heard. In this specific case, science fiction allows directors and filmmakers to express criticisms and other ideas about another world that would not be acceptable to say about this world. More specifically, science fiction permits the criticism of capitalism without the social pressure to accept capitalism as the ideal economic system or questions of patriotism. In *Meet Me at Infinity*, science fiction author James Tiptree Jr. emphasizes this point by describing science fiction as “the only free arena of literature.”<sup>31</sup> He even boldly asserts that “if you can’t say what you want to in science fiction, my personal feeling is that you haven’t much to say.”<sup>32</sup> Science fiction allows for the circumvention of societal censorship that would otherwise make these critiques incredibly challenging to share.

Science fiction films allow for these critiques of capitalism to be shared with an impressively large audience. *WALL-E*, *Soylent Green*, *Blade Runner*, and *Jurassic Park* have combined to gross well over half a billion<sup>33</sup> dollars domestically. Directors and filmmakers often utilize the “free arena”<sup>34</sup> that science fiction provides to showcase the flaws of capitalism. For example, *WALL-E* demonstrates the inseparability between corporations and profit motives, even

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<sup>30</sup> Astra, *Zizek!*.

<sup>31</sup> James Tiptree. *Meet Me at Infinity*. (New York, Orb, 2001), 361.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>33</sup> Box Office Mojo. <https://www.boxofficemojo.com>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

during the worst environmental crisis known to man. *Soylent Green* illustrates the illusion that modern society has a scarcity of resources under capitalism. *Blade Runner* makes a compelling analogy that compares the proletariat to slaves in order to critique the worth of an individual under capitalism. *Jurassic Park* examines the ethical irresponsibility that is inherent in a corporation's purely capitalistic motives. The films discussed are not simply a single criticism of corporate capitalism, as many of the films discussed have overlapping criticisms with one another. The genre of science fiction allows for these criticisms to not only exist, but to be heard and seen by leftists, conservatives, communists, and capitalists alike. These are groups of people that otherwise might not be exposed to these arguments, but through critiquing the society of a hypothetical future, capitalists can fully digest these arguments, instead of meeting them with the tired, thoughtless response of "this is a capitalist society."<sup>35</sup>

Karl Marx's writings are now one hundred and fifty years old, and the landscape of capitalism on planet Earth and the United States has changed greatly in that time. While Marx's arguments and critiques of the system are still relevant today, it is important to examine how capitalism has evolved over such a long period of time. For one, corporate capitalism has become an integral part of the economic system. Sandrine Blanc provides a working definition of corporate capitalism in "Expanding Workers' 'Moral Space': A Liberal Critique of Corporate Capitalism". She states that corporate capitalism first "developed primarily in the U.S. during the late nineteenth century."<sup>36</sup> She clarifies that the corporation is "characterised by a legal personality, the separation of asset owners from managers, shareholders' limited liability, as well as an often large hierarchical and multi-divisional organisational structure."<sup>37</sup> The foundation of

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<sup>35</sup> Desmond, "Plantation."

<sup>36</sup> Sandrine Blanc, "Expanding Workers' 'Moral Space': A Liberal Critique of Corporate Capitalism." *Journal of Business Ethics* 120, no. 4 (2014): 473-88.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

capitalism is limitless growth. As a result, in order to have success under capitalism, an individual or corporation must have an appetite for wealth that can never be satisfied. Because of this, I believe there is no distinction between capitalism and corporate capitalism from the late 19th century onwards. Corporate capitalism is simply a natural development of capitalism.

Other scholars share my opinions on capitalism. They see corporate capitalism and capitalism as one and the same and have criticisms that apply to each interchangeably. Revisiting “Expanding Workers’ ‘Moral Space’”, Sandrine Blanc showcases this idea. Blanc’s criticisms of capitalism are agreeable. She states that “two features of corporate capitalism constrain employees’ moral agency: the relation of authority that forms part of the work contract and organizations’ fragmented decision-making processes.”<sup>38</sup> She believes that these issues are showcased in the corporate world, yet are inherent to the entire capitalist structure. I would agree with her assertion that the concern over “the relation of authority that forms part of the work contract and organizations’ fragmented decision-making processes”<sup>39</sup> is integral to capitalism itself following the late 19th century and into the present day.

Because corporations had not yet been established during his lifetime, Marx was unable to critique them. Though joint stock companies did exist, they did not wield the same economic dominance that modern day corporations hold. Although Blanc’s definition is restricted to late nineteenth century U.S. companies, Marx’s theories are still applicable to the modern day corporation. He does concentrate on modern society, but he illustrates how it is an evolution of prior oppression methods. Marx argues that class struggle still exists, even in modern society. “Oppressor and oppressed”<sup>40</sup> continue to plague capitalist societies, as “modern bourgeois

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<sup>38</sup> Blanc, “Critique of Corporate Capitalism.”

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, 9.

society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.”<sup>41</sup> This modern society that Marx comments on has always held an oppressor and oppressed - in other words, the same “relation of authority that forms part of the work contract”<sup>42</sup> that Blanc is concerned about in the corporate world has existed well before her timeline of corporations sprouting in the late nineteenth century. Oppression in capitalism has existed far before the corporation became a pillar of the economy.

As Marx’s writings are so old, it begs the question: why has there not been a communistic revolution? The proletariat remains chained and divided, despite Marx and Engel’s passionate rallying cry for “working men of all countries [to] unite!”<sup>43</sup> Thomas Piketty attempts to answer this question in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. He states that “modern economic growth and the diffusion of knowledge have made it possible to avoid the Marxist apocalypse but have not modified the deep structures of capital and inequality - or in any case not as much as one might have imagined in the optimistic decades following World War II.”<sup>44</sup> It is important to note that the “Marxist apocalypse”<sup>45</sup> has been avoided for now, yet the rooted wealth discrepancy that capitalism is known for has not changed. While capitalism is an inherently unequal economic system, it has undoubtedly led to great economic growth for some. Usually, this growth is for those who are already advantaged in societal, political, or economic power. Thus, those in power

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<sup>41</sup> Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Piketty and Arthur Goldhammer. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

see no reason to exercise any kind of change. Selfishly, they only perceive how capitalism impacts themselves and thus see no reason for a “communistic revolution”<sup>46</sup> when capitalism has made them so rich and powerful. Combine this with the societal pressure in the United States to accept capitalism, and a revolution becomes nearly impossible.

Following World War II, the United States economy was in a booming state. However, there were signs present that the economy would not last. In Marx’s terminology, a bust was soon to follow. Recalling Piketty, he describes this impending recession in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. He states bluntly that “after World War II, real estate and stock prices stood at historic lows.”<sup>47</sup> Additionally, charts that Piketty cites in his work reveal troubling trends for the economy in the 1950s following the post-war boom. Public debt was beginning to climb - it experienced a height that had not been previously seen before in U.S. economics.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, housing, agricultural land, and other domestic capital experienced a crash in their value.<sup>49</sup> As a result of the impending slump in the economy, anxieties surrounding the economic future of the United States were abundant and manifested themselves in *Soylent Green*.

*Soylent Green* is a science fiction thriller about an overpopulated and apocalyptic planet Earth released in 1973. While the film was shown in theaters fourteen years after the post-war economic slump that the United States felt, the film is based on the novel *Make Room! Make Room!* by Harry Harrison that was released in 1966. While I will be focusing my analysis on *Soylent Green*, it is important to note that both works of fiction display prominently fears of overpopulation as a result of the impending economic slump of the post-war U.S.

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<sup>46</sup>Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, 40.

<sup>47</sup> Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*, 153.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

In director Richard Fleischer's *Soylent Green*, overpopulation and environmental damage are shown to be the primary concerns in this version of Earth depicted in the year 2022. But the film is more than an ecological disaster film. In her journal, "Crisis in the era of the end of cheap food: capitalism, cannibalism, and racial anxieties in *Soylent Green*", Michelle Yates recognizes that *Soylent Green* is "not just a reductionist representation of overpopulation."<sup>50</sup> Rather, the film "offers a nuanced critique of capitalism."<sup>51</sup> In addition, pollution and an unidentified climate catastrophe have contributed to the apocalyptic landscape. As an apparent result of these factors, food, water, and housing have become nearly nonexistent. However, it is made clear that these issues only impact the poor. The dreary, dirty, and dusty streets of New York City are contrasted by the white and lavish penthouse suite that William Simonson lives in. As this apocalyptic New York is a product of capitalism, naturally its worst aspects only affect those without money.

Another example of the inequalities bred under capitalism in *Soylent Green* is in the food. Sol Roth, an analytical assistant to the protagonist detective Frank Thorn, describes soylent as "tasteless, odorless crud."<sup>52</sup> He reminisces on previous years and states "when [he] was a kid, food was food."<sup>53</sup> Soylent is the cracker-like substance that is rationed to the hungry population of New York City. In the opening shots of the film, a commercial for soylent can be seen on television. This advertisement implies that profits are still a driving force for the Soylent Corporation, despite people struggling for basic amenities. The Soylent Corporation takes a pseudo-governmental role in distributing food during a crisis. Although this is a task that would

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<sup>50</sup> Michelle Yates. "Crisis in the era of the end of cheap food: capitalism, cannibalism, and racial anxieties in *Soylent Green*." *Food, Culture & Society* 22, no. 5 (2019): 608-621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2019.1638125>

<sup>51</sup> Yates, "Crisis in the era of the end of cheap food."

<sup>52</sup> Richard Fleischer, dir. *Soylent Green*. Screenplay by Stanley Greenberg. Los Angeles: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1973.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

best be served by an actual governmental entity without profit motives, the Soy lent Corporation has taken over this role. The corporation and humanitarian crises is an idea that is also explored later in Pixar's *WALL-E*. Yates comments on the twist of the *Soylent Green*, where it is revealed that Soy lent Green is actually made out of human beings. She states that "while seemingly horrific, the notion of humans cannibalizing themselves in order to survive functions metaphorically for the system of capitalism, where human lives are cannibalized, wasted at ever accelerating rates in order to procure the most profit possible."<sup>54</sup> Yates argues that cannibalism in *Soylent Green* is merely a metaphor for the capitalist system that we live in. Just as people are literally cannibalized in *Soylent Green*, people are metaphorically cannibalized in capitalism in the pursuit of profits, capital, and wealth. I absolutely agree with this interpretation of *Soylent Green*.

To contrast the poor experience, *Soylent Green* shows us William Simonson and rich people like him - who are able to afford meat, vegetables, and have running water: all of which are considered extravagant luxuries. Although it is never explicitly stated, the audience is led to believe that overpopulation, pollution, and a climate disaster have led to the shortage of actual food and other critical resources. However, I would argue that it is actually capitalism that led to the illusion of shortages, rather than actual shortages - just as the United States has experienced this phenomenon.

Because *Soylent Green*'s United States is a representation of the United States, parallels can be drawn between the fictitious depiction and the actual United States. Both have a capitalist system that drives their economies. Both have inequalities, while *Soylent Green*'s U.S. is more visible. Under both of these capitalist systems, I believe that excess is produced. In the real

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<sup>54</sup> Yates, "Crisis in the era of the end of cheap food."

United States, this excess is tangible. Alex Barnard's *Freegans: Diving into the Wealth of Food Waste in America* addresses this failure of capitalism. Barnard ponders: "if capitalism is such an efficient system, why does 40 percent of all U.S. food production go to waste while one in six people in the nation face hunger?"<sup>55</sup> Additionally, housing in the United States is not the issue that many believe it to be. Homelessness impacts millions across the United States every year.<sup>56</sup> Despite this, "[homeless] are outnumbered by vacant homes and government-owned buildings."<sup>57</sup> Under capitalism, housing and food both appear to be scarce resources. However, this is merely an illusion. Excess of both of these goods are produced. Yet, still there are individuals who are unable to secure consistent access to either of these resources. This is a result of the greed that is present under capitalism and is a failure of the economic system in the United States. I believe that this failure extends to the capitalism depicted in *Soylent Green* as well. While this is my own interpretation, I believe it is very plausible for these negative aspects of real world capitalism to exist in *Soylent Green's* universe.

As a reaction to the slump of the post-World War II economy of the United States, anxieties began to rise about resources. But because Americans are under the false pretense that capitalism does not produce enough resources, they misdirected their concerns. Instead of pondering how they can change the economic system that they live in, they become irrationally afraid of overpopulation leading to a shortage of resources - despite capitalism producing an excess of resources. This fear is showcased in *Soylent Green*, where people are sleeping on overcrowded streets and eating crackers for meals. The film attempts to attribute this poor

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<sup>55</sup> Alex Barnard's. *Freegans: Diving into the Wealth of Food Waste in America*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 3.

<sup>56</sup> "Empty Homes outnumber the Homeless 6 to 1 So Why Not Give Them Homes?" Mint Press News, July 2nd, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



quality of life to overpopulation, but the true cause of these issues - both in *Soylent Green* and the real world - is capitalism. Additionally, the film serves as a broader metaphor for the cannibalization of people under capitalism. The poorest in capitalism are consistently trampled over in the pursuit of capitalist wealth, and *Soylent Green* serves as a metaphorical critique of this.

*Blade Runner* takes the cop narrative from *Soylent Green* and adds a cyberpunk aesthetic. Released in 1982 and directed by Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* examines capitalism and the consequences of the blind pursuit of profit at the hands of the Tyrell Corporation. The film contains an exaggerated portrayal of capitalism that acts as a critique of our real world economic system.

As the Tyrell Corporation is just that, a corporation, they are seeking profits without considering the full ethical scope of their actions. In this case, the production of replicants poses serious questions regarding a creator's obligation to their creation. *Blade Runner* makes a serious effort to show the audience how replicants are nearly identical to human beings. It takes blade runner Rick Deckard around one hundred interrogative questions to confidently say that Rachel is not a human being. Despite Rachel and the replicants' humanity, Tyrell only sees them as a product. Eldon Tyrell, the founder of the corporation, states that "commerce is [their] goal here at Tyrell. 'More human than human' is [their] motto."<sup>58</sup> Aside from being a creepy company slogan, Eldon Tyrell very clearly identifies the goals of the Tyrell Corporation: money. There are serious ethical concerns surrounding artificial intelligence, which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, this does not stop Tyrell Corporation from monetizing this technology without

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<sup>58</sup> Ridley Scott, dir. *Blade Runner*. Screenplay by Hampton Fancher and David Peoples. Los Angeles: The Ladd Company / Warner Bros. 1982.

second thought. Eldon Tyrell clarifies further that “Rachel is an experiment, nothing more.”<sup>59</sup> Rachel, one of the replicants, only has value because she can produce capital for Tyrell Corporation. Under capitalism in this futuristic-cyberpunk depiction of Los Angeles, there is no room for ethical debate. This ethical critique of capitalism is a common criticism, as it is similarly seen in *Jurassic Park’s* manipulation of evolution and both *WALL-E* and *Soylent Green’s* use of a corporate entity to address humanitarian and environmental crises. Tyrell Corporation demonstrates that they are not concerned with the morality of their pursuit of capital, yet they are very concerned with the monetization and profit to be gained from this world-changing technology.

Zeb Kaylique examines the lack of purpose felt by replicants in his investigation of existentialism in *Blade Runner*.<sup>60</sup> Kaylique indicates that “the replicants that we encounter ... are self-aware and seek age-old answers to the problems of identity and purpose despite the fact that they are born of technology, artificial.”<sup>61</sup> He continues to reveal that the replicants “question themselves and seek truth and reassurance.”<sup>62</sup> The replicants are looking for answers to questions that are normally incredibly difficult to address. However, under capitalism, these answers they seek are all too easy to find: the replicants have no greater purpose in life. Once the replicants abandon their slave labor and contributions to the economy, they are purposeless under capitalism. This concept is a cornerstone in more of the critiques of capitalism in *Blade Runner*.

*Blade Runner* makes an intriguing analogy to real world capitalism. In the film’s universe, replicants are slaves - they hold value to society purely on their ability to contribute to

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<sup>59</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*.

<sup>60</sup> Zeb Kaylique. "Blade Runner." *Existential Analysis* 30, no. 1 (2019): 218.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

the economy. Rachel introduces this concept, as she reveals in a conversation with Deckard. After Rachel was forced to murder a fellow replicant to save Deckard, the Detective consoles her: “Shakes? Me too. I get ‘em bad. It’s part of the business.”<sup>63</sup> Rachel replies that “[she is] not in the business. [She is] the business.”<sup>64</sup> In this way, replicant slaves are not very different from the proletariat that exists in capitalism. The antagonist replicant, Roy, expands on this view in his final confrontation with Detective Deckard. He states that it is “quite an experience to live in fear. That’s what it is like to be a slave.”<sup>65</sup> Roy does not expand on the specific sources of fear he experienced, but it is easy to approximate what sources of fear could exist for a wage slave in our world: losing their job, being unable to work, or having their pay decreased to name a few. This analogy continues when examining the terminology used to describe killing replicants. When a replicant dies, it is known as retirement. Ridley Scott is literally comparing the death of an individual with them no longer contributing to the economy. Through this analogy, Scott is saying that if a person can no longer work, they might as well be dead. This analogy is very powerful in critiquing the social value that we place on individuals based on their income or economic contribution in the United States.

Further evidence of *Blade Runner*’s commentary on capitalism is visible in its cyberpunk environment. *Blade Runner*’s depiction of Los Angeles lacks sunlight entirely. Oftentimes, Los Angeles is covered in rain. As a result, the streets of LA are incredibly shadowy and wet. And the only escape that appears on the streets for the individual exists due to capitalism. There is incredible contrast between the dreary streets of L.A. and the blindingly bright advertisements of Coca Cola and other commercial entities that line the streets. In *Blade Runner*’s depiction of Los

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<sup>63</sup> Scott, *Blade Runner*.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Angeles, brands appear to be offering salvation from the dark streets in their products. In one of the first shots of the film, Detective Rick Deckard is seen caught in the dark rain, searching for a place to dry off. He is only able to find shelter when he takes a seat at a business and orders food. The restaurant that he sits at contradicts the street he walked in from, being dry, bright, and clean. Capitalism is portrayed as a kind of salvation for the inhabitants of *Blade Runner's* Los Angeles. The contrast between the dark and dilapidated streets of Los Angeles and the luminous businesses illustrate that, for the individuals, consumerism can save them. These commercial entities are overstated representations of the capitalistic qualities of this futuristic society. In this way, *Blade Runner* is critiquing capitalistic culture by showing an exaggerated version of our own society.

On the topic of corporate greed, Stephen Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* proposes a typical scenario in capitalism: a corporation prioritizing the intake of wealth with little regard to the ethics of their methodology. This scenario should be familiar, as it is similar to the premise of *Blade Runner* and its replicants. From this plot, Spielberg poses a question to the audience: what are the consequences of a corporation seeking profit margins? In *Jurassic Park's* case, the consequences of this action come from irreversibly disturbing the natural order of evolution and endangering human life in the process.

*Jurassic Park* showcases the dangers of greed in its own way. Throughout the film, bringing extinct species of dinosaurs back to life is seen primarily as a novel business concept, instead of the complex moral issue that it actually is. It is this business venture that acts as the central motivation for the plot of *Jurassic Park*. In essence, *Jurassic Park's* narrative is driven primarily by the pursuit of or complications from the pursuit of capital, that being a resource that can be gained and create more resources. Donald Denarno, an attorney, exists as a representation

of the interests of the investors of Jurassic Park. He is consistently only concerned with the potential monetary gain of the park, rather than the ethical and safety concerns that stem from cloning dinosaurs. Initially, Denarno is sent to assess the park's safety after a dinosaur handler is killed by a velociraptor. Denarno shows absolutely no concern at the loss of human life, rather only is worried about how the accident will impact investor funding and the opening of the park. Denarno further emphasizes his and the investors' greed by stating that "[they] are going to make a fortune with this place,"<sup>66</sup> after seeing a living dinosaur for the first time.

Not all of the characters are as laser focused on the earnings from Jurassic Park. Dr. Ian Malcom proposes his reasoning for why genetic engineering of dinosaurs back to life is a potentially dangerous concept. In his monologue, Malcolm states that "the kind of control [they are] attempting is not possible. If there's one thing the history of evolution has taught us, it's that life will not be contained. Life breaks free, expands to new territories and it crashes through barriers, painfully, maybe even dangerously, but there it is."<sup>67</sup> However, this does little to deter the monetary focused mindset that has already captivated Denarno and the other investors of the park. Denarno is a morally corrupt character, and John Hammond, the park's owner, leans towards a depiction of a morally grey stance. He is concerned about more than simply greed, yet is still under the delusion that evolution can be packaged into a product. Beyond simple profit margins, Hammond exclaims that "this park is not just for the super rich. Everyone in the world has the right to enjoy these animals."<sup>68</sup> While well intentioned, this claim is simply that: an intention. In response, Denarno snarkily replies that "Sure. [everyone will have the right to enjoy

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<sup>66</sup> Steven Spielberg, dir. *Jurassic Park*. Screenplay by Michael Crichton and David Koepp. Kaua'i: Amblin Entertainment / Universal Pictures 1993.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

these animals.] We'll have a coupon day or something."<sup>69</sup> Hammond is seen laughing alongside Denarno, seemingly in agreement. Hammond's laughter towards Denarno's gluttonous comment reveals that profits are still the principal driving force behind Jurassic Park's creation. Ian Malcolm's response to this exchange is revealing of a rational individual's reaction. Malcolm states that "the lack of humility before nature that's being displayed before here staggers [him]."<sup>70</sup> The selfish desires of Hammond and Denarno are contrasted with Malcolm's sensibility surrounding the park's development.

Predictably, the staff of Jurassic Park eventually lose control of the dinosaurs after a variety of complications. As it begins to dawn on the characters driven by monetary gain that they cannot control evolution for monetary gain, they realize the dangers of playing God. Malcolm emphasizes his earlier points and skepticisms surrounding the genetic cloning of dinosaurs. He states that "before [Dr. Hammond] knew what [he] had, [he] patented it, and packaged it and slapped it on a plastic lunch box, and now [he is] selling it."<sup>71</sup> In an intense line, Malcolm asserts that "what [Dr. Hammond calls] discovery, [Malcolm calls] the rape of the natural world."<sup>72</sup> While the anti-greed message inherent in *Jurassic Park* is clear in the quoted lines of dialogue that I have included here, not all audiences had the same interpretations of the film.

When considering interviews with director Stephen Spielberg and audience members, there is a single commonality: computer-generated imagery<sup>73</sup>. It is no secret that *Jurassic Park's*

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<sup>69</sup> Spielberg, *Jurassic Park*.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> "Jurassic Park (1993) - Audience Reactions." n.d. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIjcDkjDIMQ>.

use of CGI was revolutionary. And a great reminder of this is each question asked of Spielberg about the film being centered around this ground-breaking technology. CGI had appeared in movies before, but *Jurassic Park* was the first of its kind to utilize the technology to such an incredible extent. I would argue that it is difficult to miss the commentary on capitalism that is present in *Jurassic Park*, but viewing the film for the first time without exposure to CGI before, I can see how most other aspects of the movie would be glossed over in the audience's mind.

When examining the economic context of *Jurassic Park's* release, the audience's reaction becomes even more understandable. *Jurassic Park* was released in 1993, following a period of incredible economic success for the United States. John Hennessy, an American financier, offers insight into the economic growth that the United States experienced during the 1980s. In "The Global Economy of the 1990s: Implications for the United States", Hennessy reveals that "millions of women entered the labor market, the American workforce expanded 1 ½ to 2 percent per year in the 1980s."<sup>74</sup> Wealth inequality during the 1980s and 1990s was comparatively low, as the bottom ninety percent of Americans held a significant amount of wealth more than the top one percent<sup>75</sup>, demonstrated in Emmanuel Saez's journal article, "Wealth Inequality in the United States Since 1913: Evidence from Capitalized Income Tax Data." With the turn of the century, this wealth inequality would grow significantly, as the top one percent would overtake the bottom ninety percent.<sup>76</sup> However, in the early 1990s when *Jurassic Park* was released, there was little room for concern for the average American about the economic system that governed the United States. Marx would classify this period of time as a

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<sup>74</sup> John Hennessy, "The Global Economy of the 1990s: Implications for the United States." *Vital Speeches of the Day* 56, no. 24 (1990): 759.

<sup>75</sup> Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman, "Wealth Inequality in the United States Since 1913: Evidence from Capitalized Income Tax Data", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131, no. 2, (May 2016).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

boom, rather than a bust. For the time being, the system of capitalism faced little objection as a result of this growth. However, as I have stated previously, capitalism is an inherently unsustainable system built on excess and gluttony. The bust was soon to come. This tranquility in a capitalist system would quickly screech to a halt.

Directed by Andrew Stanton in 2008, *WALL-E* is an animated film from the legendary studio from Pixar that poses an interesting ecological and environmental message with a simple premise: what if humanity was forced to leave the Earth due to an accumulation of garbage and forgot to turn off the last robot? Through the opening scenes of *WALL-E*, Stanton establishes a bleak, desolate, and apocalyptic depiction of the Earth. There are no signs of life, save for a single cockroach and tiny plant. What is left in place of the green grass and singing birds is trash. An accumulation of waste has transformed the landscape of Earth to no longer be habitable by human beings. Despite the vast variety of objects thrown away, many share a common brand: the Buy n Large (abbreviated BnL) corporation. Newspapers, toys, and jewelry are just a few of the consumer products under the BnL umbrella. Other shots of this barren metropolis reveal that BnL had investments in restaurants, banks, gas stations, grocery stores, transportation, and international trade.

Despite the dreary setting, the film is able to appeal to its target audience of children and families without coming across as dark through its characters. WALL-E, the robot, is happy-go-lucky and is seen dancing his way through the mountains of trash. Their sidekick, a cockroach, is also portrayed as friendly and even cute. However, when examining the scenario and setting of *WALL-E* without the positive outlook of its characters, the true dismality of planet Earth is uncovered; there is nothing but trash and desert on a dying planet.



Buy n Large's reach is not limited to purely business endeavors. The head of the corporation, Shelby Forthright, holds the title 'Global CEO' and is even referred to as 'President'. When addressing the general public, Forthright is seen speaking from a podium that eerily resembles the White House's press conference room. BnL flags flank Forthright on either side with a picture of headquarters directly behind him. These images allude to Buy n Large becoming bigger than just a successful corporation, but holding direct control over governments as well, as there are no mentions of any nationalities or borders in *WALL-E*. Buy n Large's control over world governments led to an incredibly corrupt political system, where profit became the central motive of decisions and policies that greatly affected the fate of humanity.

In order to solve the trash issue, Buy n Large proposes that the human race lives in space while BnL robots clean the Earth in what is originally a five year plan. The videos detailing the plan to the public leave a similar impression as a commercial. This was by design, as Stanton was quoted speaking on Fred Willard, the actor for Shelby Forthright, describing him as the "most friendly and insincere car salesman [he] could think of."<sup>77</sup> This poses an interesting question: why would a governmental entity pitch their crisis relief program in the form of a commercial? The answer is that BnL viewed the greatest environmental catastrophe in the history of humanity as an enticing economic opportunity.

Regardless of Buy n Large's initial involvement with creating the wasteland, they profited greatly off of the result and actively prevented the return to Earth in a never ending endeavor of greed. BnL already had a strong foothold on Earth with stakes in countless different industries. However, they knew they could have more. By forcing humanity onto a starship cruiser, they could effectively create an absolute monopoly, where individuals have no choice but

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<sup>77</sup> Steve Weintraub, *WALL-E Q & A with Writer/Director Andrew Stanton*. Other. *Collider*, June 23, 2008.

to consume their media, eat their food, and be under their direct control. Even the temperature and time of day are easily controllable by Buy n Large. BnL's exertion of influence on individuals began as early as childhood, where the education system is designed to brainwash children to have a positive outlook on Buy n Large. The audience is shown a brief scene of children in a classroom learning the ABC's where A stands for "the Axiom, your home sweet home,"<sup>78</sup> and B stands for "Buy n Large, your very best friend."<sup>79</sup> With this unequivocal monopoly that BnL held, there was no monetary incentive to head home. The enticing, endless profits of holding the human race under a single corporate entity ensured that BnL took every measure possible to keep humanity in space, away from planet Earth where their monopoly would be broken.

One of *WALL-E*'s biggest strengths is its target audience. Or rather, the lack of a target audience that is apparent. In an interview with IGN, Andrew Stanton claims that "one of the keys to [the filmmakers] is we've never thought about our audience, or never thought about who our audience might be."<sup>80</sup> This lack of specificity within the intended audience for *WALL-E* allows for the film to reach farther than it would have normally. *WALL-E*'s environmentalist and anti-corporate message was able to reach audiences of all ages partially because Stanton and his team did not target any single age, but also because of the science fiction genre that allowed for the exploration of these ideas naturally. This proved to be incredibly effective in terms of reception and monetary success of the film. Critics were incredibly receptive to *WALL-E*, as the film made the American Film Institute's Movies of the Year list for 2008. Ironically, the critiques

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<sup>78</sup> Andrew Stanton, dir. *WALL-E*. Screenplay by Andrew Stanton and Jim Reardon. Emeryville: Walt Disney Pictures / Pixar Animation Studios, 2008.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Sciretta, "What is the Intended Audience for Pixar's WALL-E?" *Slash Film*, August 4th 2007.

of capitalism inherent in the film also proved to generate significant wealth for Pixar and Walt Disney, as *WALL-E* grossed over \$200 million at the domestic box office.<sup>81</sup> *WALL-E* was an achievement - both commercially and critically. It was incredibly successful at spreading an anti-capitalist and environmentalist message on a science fiction platform; a message that its audience most likely would have not heard if it were not for the animated, apocalyptic film with the cute robots.

Although *WALL-E* focuses more on corporate greed, the themes of the film are very applicable to the wealth inequalities seen in 2008. In both instances, capitalism has failed. In *WALL-E*, an unregulated and free market has led to the creation of a super corporation with the power of a world government and the motives of a corporation. In the Great Recession, capitalism emphasized ever-growing wealth inequalities between the richest and poorest. “Wealth Inequality: Data and Models” by Marco Cagetti and Mariacristina De Nardi reveals that “the richest 1% [holds] one third of the total wealth in the economy.”<sup>82</sup> The United States under capitalism has resulted in a greatly uneven distribution of resources. Karl Marx proposes a solution to these inequalities in *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx’s detailing of communism emphasizes that “communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society: all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriations.”<sup>83</sup> Exploitation of the working class under capitalism is what leads to wealth inequality and, in *WALL-E*’s case, the existence of a super corporation with unseen limits to its power. Marx argues that communism would eliminate this exploitation and create a more

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<sup>81</sup> “The Numbers: WALL-E.” Nash Information Services.  
<https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/WALL-E#tab=summary>

<sup>82</sup> Marco Cagetti, and Mariacristina De Nardi. "Wealth Inequality: Data And Models." *Macroeconomic Dynamics* 12, (2008): 285-313.

<sup>83</sup> Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, 23.

equal society. *WALL-E*'s depiction of capitalism, and its glaring pitfalls, is support for Marx's assertions in *The Communist Manifesto*.

Capitalism is a very flawed economic system. The inequalities inherent in it create wealth discrepancies and a poor quality of life for all but the rich. It encourages corporate entities to disregard ethical concerns of their creations or their pursuits in order to generate as much wealth as possible. It convinces the population that there are not enough resources for everyone in order to sell to those who want and deprive those who cannot afford. It creates pseudo-governmental corporations that wield too much power with solely profits as their interest. Capitalism, as an economic system, is inherently flawed, yet far too accepted.

As much as I love these films, there is one aspect that I wish was changed: none of these pictures offer alternatives to capitalism. In my interpretation, I believe this is because of the pressure to accept capitalism. The fact that these films are offering critiques of the long-standing economic system of the United States is already radical enough for the average American. If these movies were to showcase communism or even socialism in a positive light, I do not think they would have had as much success, commercially or critically. Socialism refers to a social theory that champions the collective cooperation of citizens, while communism is a branch of socialism that emphasizes cooperation through a totalitarian government. Previously, the science fiction films released in the U.S. that have tackled communism have only painted it in a negative light.

An example of this comes from 1956's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, a UFO film that depicts the sentiments that the people of the United States held about communism. Barry Grant's book *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* acts as a great analysis of the film. He contextualizes it by stating "at the time *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was being made, the Cold War was at its

height and fears about Communism and nuclear war were rampant.”<sup>84</sup> It would be easy to misinterpret *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*’ representation’s meaning while recalling arguments that I made previously in the paper. With science fiction acting as a method for authors and directors to make critiques about a fictional world they could not make about our world, one might argue that this means communism, distinct from a totalitarian government, was generally accepted during this time. This would be inaccurate. Science fiction can be used as a tool to relay criticisms that are not popularly accepted in society, but that does not mean it always fills this role, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is evidence of this. It would be accurate to interpret *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* as a representation of the paranoia and unease that Americans held surrounding a different economic system. The aliens, known as “pod people” in the film, are an obvious metaphor for communists in our world. Grant reveals that “consistent with such pop-culture representations of Communists during the era, the pod people in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* lack emotion, which is here inextricably linked to capitalism.”<sup>85</sup> Grant emphasizes that this depiction of communists in a negative light is not exclusive to science fiction, it existed across all pop-culture at the time. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is an example of how American films previously have depicted alternative economic systems - they are seen as flawed, if not dangerous to the U.S.

In the United States, capitalism has become akin to patriotism. For this reason, critiques of the economic system are far too uncommon. U.S. society has accepted capitalism and is far too unquestioning of the flaws that come with it. This is where science fiction comes in. As “the only free arena of literature,”<sup>86</sup> science fiction allows for writers and authors to say things about

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<sup>84</sup> Barry Keith Grant. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. London: BFI Publishing, 2010, 64.

<sup>85</sup> Grant, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 66.

<sup>86</sup> Tiptree, *Meet Me at Infinity*, 361.

another world that would not be socially acceptable to say about this world. In this instance, it allows directors and filmmakers to criticize the capitalist society that we exist in as citizens of the United States. Science fiction allows for these critiques to be heard to such a wide variety of audience members from different political backgrounds. *Soylent Green*, *Blade Runner*, *Jurassic Park*, and *WALL-E* all were incredibly successful, both commercially and critically. Although there is irony in examining a film critiquing capitalism's success in the money grossed, this is a good indicator of the reach that the film has had. *Jurassic Park* grossed \$350 million domestically, *WALL-E* grossed \$220 million domestically, and *Blade Runner* achieved comparatively smaller monetary success at \$30 million grossed domestically<sup>87</sup>. The success of these films has allowed these critiques of capitalism to be seen by individuals who would not normally have seen them. At times, these criticisms are more obvious than others. But they exist to pose the same single question to these audiences: is capitalism the best we can do?

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<sup>87</sup> "The Numbers" Nash Information Services.

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