

ABSTRACT

THE EVIL CORPORATION TROPE: AN ANALYSIS OF POPULAR SCIENCE-FICTION FILMS

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Popular culture in general, and movies in particular, are one of the major influences on the public's perception of science, and therefore on the level of trust audiences feel inclined to put in science. The science communication community has made great progress in achieving that the portrayal of scientists in movies does better justice to the diverse reality of scientific research, moving away from the stereotype of the old white male scientist. This has been achieved through constructive collaborations like the National Academy of Science's Science and Entertainment Exchange. However, a prevalent trope, which we call "The Evil Corporation Trope", has been repeatedly used in science-fiction films. Following David Kirby's framework of cinema as a "virtual witnessing technology" that allows publics to immerse themselves in possible futures or inaccessible realities and experience what their perceptions and reactions would be, we present an analysis of this trope in several major science-fiction films, spanning nearly forty-years of cinema. If the reality that audiences virtually witness in these blockbuster movies systematically portrays science or tech companies as the antagonist and the source of all evil – is it surprising that trust in science is heavily undermined when it is such big corporations who, for example, develop and distribute the covid vaccines, or vaccines in general? My analysis includes the identification of patterns found within films using this trope, including corporations in these movies with ties to the military, and abuses of artificial intelligence.

THE EVIL CORPORATION TROPE: AN ANALYSIS OF POPULAR SCIENCE-
FICTION FILMS

A THESIS

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Dedication

For Mommas

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE EVIL CORPORATION TROPE: AN ANALYSIS OF POPULAR SCIENCE-FICTION FILMS.....	3
List of Tables	7
Introduction.....	8
Methodology	20
Evidence of the Evil Corporation Trope in the Seven Films	25
Conflict Between Corporations and Protagonists	33
Corporate Leaders and Surrogates	35
Comeuppances for the Corporations.....	39
Comeuppances for Corporate Leaders and Surrogates	41
Militaristic Violence and Weapons Produced and Used by the Corporations	44
Opposition to the Corporations Leading to Greater Self-Fulfillment	46
Evil Corporations and Female Bodies	58
Long-Term Impact of Evil Corporations on Fictional Worlds as seen in the Blade Runner Franchise.....	63
Discussion.....	73
Conclusions and Further Research.....	78
Bibliography	81

List of Tables

Table (a): Films and their Corporations Analyzed..... 20

Table (b): Results of Initial Analysis 33

Table (c): Conflict Between Corporations and Protagonists..... 35

Table (d): Corporate Leaders and Surrogates 39

Table (e): Comeuppances for the Corporations 41

Table(f): Comeuppances of Corporate Leaders and Surrogates 43

Table (g): Militaristic Violence and Weapons Produced and/or Used by the Corporations..... 46

Table (h): Characters Gain Humanity Through Opposition to Corporation 58

Introduction

The first film adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*, directed by J. Seale Dawley, was produced in 1910 by Thomas Edison's Edison Manufacturing Company.¹ While only approximately twelve minutes long, the short film preserved the novel's theme of how unethical uses of science cause disaster. In both the novel and the film, Victor Frankenstein's obsession with discovering the secrets to creating life from death leads him to bring to life an unnatural being, who becomes self-aware, and jealously causes disaster for Frankenstein and his loved ones. Over a hundred years later, science-fiction films are still telling stories about unethical uses of science and the resulting conflicts that it causes.

However, while *Frankenstein* focused on a single, rogue scientist, whose ambition led to the unethical use of science, modern films have also introduced larger institutional powers as the culprits behind scientific wrongdoings. In *Soylent Green*, directed by Richard Fleischer, Soylent Industries produces the titular, and popular, Soylent Green, food secretly made of human flesh, and resorts to violence when its secrets become at risk of being exposed to the public by the police.² In *Avatar*, directed by James Cameron, the Resources Development Administration uses technology that allows humans to transfer their consciousness into bodies that are similar to those of the

¹ *Frankenstein* (1910) Directed by J. Seale Dawley [Film]. Edison Manufacturing Company.

Mashon, Mike. (2018). The First Film Version of Frankenstein, Newly Restored! [Blog] *Library of Congress Blog*. Available at: <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2018/11/the-first-film-version-of-frankenstein-newly-restored/> (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Shelley, M. (1818) *Frankenstein*. 1st edn. London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones.

² *Soylent Green* (1973) Directed by Richard Fleischer [Film]. Beverley Hills: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc.

Na'vi, the native inhabitants of the planet Pandora.³ This is done as a means to better build trust and communicate with the Na'vi for information about Pandora's natural resources, eventually leading to the RDA using its military force to drive them out with a surprise attack so that it can better exploit these resources without the native alien's interference. The Galactic Empire in *Star Wars*, directed by George Lucas, creates the superweapon *The Death Star*, a battle station in space that uses lasers to destroy entire planets that question the Empire's total authority.⁴

These larger, institutionalized powers, whether industrial or governmental, are depicted in these films as using scientific advancements to pursue their own unethical goals. Of the many depictions of institutionalized powers acting as antagonists in science fiction films, one type that has persisted in the genre is what will be referred to here as the evil corporation trope. This trope has been written about before. Angela Allan's article in the Atlantic, "How the 'Evil Corporation' Became a Pop-Culture Trope" was written in 2016.⁵ There is also a Wikipedia page for the use of the trope in popular culture.⁶ Although Allan's article is directed towards the use of the trope in media as a whole, a majority of the examples she uses are from science fiction media, including several films that were also chosen to be analyzed in this thesis.⁷ Allan's article was also

³ *Avatar* (2009) Directed by James Cameron [Film]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

⁴ *Star Wars* (1977) Directed by George Lucas [Film]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

⁵ Allan, A. (2016). *How the 'Evil Corporation' Became a Pop-Culture Trope* [Online]. The Atlantic. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/evil-corporation-trope/479295/> (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

⁶ Wikipedia. (2021) *Evil corporation* [Online]. Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evil_corporation (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

⁷ *Alien* (1979) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

the inspiration for including *WALL-E*, directed by Andrew Stanton, as one of the films to analyze for the evil corporation trope.⁸

Since there is no absolute definition of this trope, it will be characterized in this thesis as being represented in science fiction films through the involvement of corporations, or characters who represent those corporations, using scientific discoveries and technological advancements in unethical or immoral ways to pursue self-interested agendas. The Umbrella corporation in *Resident Evil*, directed by Paul W.S. Anderson, manufactures a virus that infects people and animals, turning them into zombie-like monsters, with its laboratory operated by an advanced artificial intelligence and guarded with high-tech laser security systems.⁹ The film ends with its protagonist having escaped the lab and waking up in an Umbrella Corp. hospital to then step out into the city and discover it has been exposed to the virus, with crashed vehicles and debris filling the empty streets. The Umbrella Corporation's scientific experimentations with the dangerous and highly contagious virus that it creates, and tries to keep secret by guarding

Allan, A. (2016). *How the 'Evil Corporation' Became a Pop-Culture Trope* [Online]. The Atlantic. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/evil-corporation-trope/479295/> (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Blade Runner (1982) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner: The Final Cut (2007) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Ex Machina (2014) Directed by Alex Garland [Film]. New York City: A24 Films.

RoboCop (1987) Directed by Paul Verhoeven [Film]. Los Angeles: Orion Pictures.

WALL-E (2008) Directed by Andrew Stanton [Film]. Burbank: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.

⁸ Allan, A. (2016). *How the 'Evil Corporation' Became a Pop-Culture Trope* [Online]. The Atlantic. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/evil-corporation-trope/479295/> (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Wall-E (2008) Directed by Andrew Stanton [Film]. Burbank: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.

⁹ *Resident Evil* (2002) Directed by Paul W. S. Anderson [Film]. Culver City: Sony Pictures Entertainment Motion Picture Group.

it with highly advanced technology and subterfuge, causing the deaths of nearly all of *Resident Evil*'s characters and laying waste to an entire city, is an example of the application of the evil corporation trope in science fiction cinema.

It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the evil corporation trope and analyze a selection of films to better understand the characteristics indicative of this trope, its various possible applications in cinema, and to identify what anxieties related to science are represented by the corporations' roles in each film. For example, *Resident Evil*'s depiction of Umbrella Corp. creating and then inadvertently causing the release of its virus appears to represent real-world anxieties about virologists bioengineering dangerous diseases and releasing them.¹⁰

With the prevalence of anxieties surrounding corporate use of and control over science and technology in society, it is not surprising that these kinds of anxieties are also seen and depicted in cinema. "People Don't Trust Scientific Research When Companies Are Involved", by John C. Besley, Aaron M. McCright, Joseph D. Martin, Kevin Elliot, and Nagwan Zahry, for *Smithsonian Magazine*, describes a study conducted by the authors which found that participants expected less research integrity and honesty when scientists collaborated with or were funded by companies such as Kellogg's.¹¹ While the authors note that collaborations where companies fund or support scientific research have led to many positive developments, the results of their study indicate that many

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Besley, J.C. et al. (2017). *People Don't Trust Scientific Research When Companies Are Involved* [Online]. Smithsonian Magazine. Available at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/people-dont-trust-scientific-research-when-companies-are-involved-180963251/> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

participants were less trusting of industry involvement anyway.¹² “Exclusive: Global Trust in the Tech Industry is Slipping”, by Ina Fried for *Axios* in 2020, reported on Edelman and Pew Research Center studies that found a decline in public trust for tech companies, including distrust in artificial intelligence and distrust in tech companies’ roles during the 2020 U.S. presidential election respectively.¹³ However, in 2021, “More Trust in Business Than in Government and Media, Survey Finds”, by Kathryn Dill and Kurt Wilderding for *The Wall Street Journal*, reported another Edelman study also found that fifty-four percent of people polled in the United States trust business, which probably includes more types of industry than exclusively corporations, while fewer trust other institutions.¹⁴ The results of these studies indicate a complicated relationship between people and corporations and oversimplifying the public’s attitude towards corporations should be avoided.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Fried, I. (2020). *Exclusive: Global Trust in the Tech Industry is Slipping* [Online]. *Axios*. Available at: <https://www.axios.com/big-tech-industry-global-trust-9b7c6c3c-98f1-4e80-8275-cf52446b1515.html> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

¹⁴ Dill, K. and Wilberding, K. (2021) *More Trust in Business Than in Government and Media, Survey Finds* [Online]. *The Wall Street Journal*. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/more-trust-in-business-than-in-government-and-media-survey-finds-11610533801> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

¹⁵ Besley, J.C. et al. (2017). *People Don’t Trust Scientific Research When Companies Are Involved* [Online]. *Smithsonian Magazine*. Available at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/people-dont-trust-scientific-research-when-companies-are-involved-180963251/> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

Dill, K. and Wilberding, K. (2021) *More Trust in Business Than in Government and Media, Survey Finds* [Online]. *The Wall Street Journal*. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/more-trust-in-business-than-in-government-and-media-survey-finds-11610533801> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

Fried, I. (2020). *Exclusive: Global Trust in the Tech Industry is Slipping* [Online]. *Axios*. Available at: <https://www.axios.com/big-tech-industry-global-trust-9b7c6c3c-98f1-4e80-8275-cf52446b1515.html> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

An analysis of science fiction film is important because understanding the depictions of corporations, science, and scientists that are presented to audiences through popular media can provide a cultural context for understanding the public's perception of these groups, with the possibility that public opinion can both shape depictions in film and be shaped by those depictions as well. In *Lab Coats in Hollywood: Science, Scientists, and Cinema*, by David A. Kirby, Kirby suggests that film is a virtual witnessing technology that allows audiences to indirectly view scientific activities.¹⁶ For Kirby, even fictional film can allow audiences to virtually witness science because, he writes, "...the images on the screen appear "realistic" within narratives designed to highlight this realism".¹⁷ Fictional film and other media can then become the standard by which audience members determine whether depictions of scientific activity appear realistic.¹⁸ If people primarily view science through media, virtual witnessing, then those depictions become the standard that they assess science through. The problem with this is that if something like the labs in a zombie outbreak film are the primary experience that the public has with labs, conspiracy theories like COVID-19 originating in a lab leak become more believable and acceptable because they have virtually witnessed lab leaks.¹⁹

¹⁶ Kirby, D.A. (2011). *Lab Coats in Hollywood: Science, Scientists, and Cinema*. 1st edn. Cambridge: The MIT Press. p. 25.

¹⁷ Kirby, D.A. (2011). *Lab Coats in Hollywood*. pp. 27-28.

¹⁸ Kirby, D.A. (2011). *Lab Coats in Hollywood*. p. 30.

¹⁹ Kormann, C. (2021). *The Mysterious Case of the COVID-19 Lab-Leak Theory* [Online]. The New Yorker. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/science/elements/the-mysterious-case-of-the-covid-19-lab-leak-theory> (Accessed: 5 July 2022).

Indeed, how realistically science is depicted in film has been the focal point of several online articles from popular websites, including *Time* and *BBC*.²⁰ Even famed astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson has weighed in, challenging the scientific accuracy of a planet orbiting two suns in *Star Wars*.²¹ Cinema is an important way that the public views science, and films that act as virtual witnessing technologies, with varying degrees of realism per film, inform thoughts and attitudes towards science.²² An example of science fiction cinema's usefulness as virtual witnessing technology is described in "The 'Jurassic Park' Problem—Dual-Use Research of Concern, Privately Funded Research and Protecting Public Health", by Vickie J. Williams.²³ Williams frames issues surrounding experiments with dangerous viruses, including H5N1 influenza and the mousepox virus, and the ethics surrounding the publication of information gathered by these experiments when performed by public or private institutions, by relating these issues to the events in *Jurassic Park*, directed by Steven Spielberg, and the book the film was based on by

²⁰ Kluger, J. (2014). *What Interstellar Got Right and Wrong About Science* [Online]. Time. Available at: <https://time.com/3572988/interstellar-science-fact-check/> (Accessed: 31 July 2021).

Kluger, J. (2016). *What The Martian Gets Right (and Wrong) About Science* [Online]. Time. Available at: <https://time.com/4055413/martian-movie-review-science-accuracy-matt-damon/> (Accessed: 31 July 2021).

Halton, M. (2018) *Does Jurassic Park Make Scientific Sense?* [Online]. BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-44293060> (Accessed: 31 July 2021).

²¹ *Star Wars* (1977) Directed by George Lucas [Film]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

Weaver, D., Angelova K., Tyson, N. D. (2015). *Neil deGrasse Tyson Explains What 'Star Wars' Gets Right About Science* [Online Video]. 22 Dec. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/neil-degrasse-tyson-star-wars-science-2015-12> (Accessed: 31 July 2021).

²² Kirby, D.A. (2011). *Lab Coats in Hollywood: Science, Scientists, and Cinema*. 1st edn. Cambridge: The MIT Press. pp. 23, 27-28.

²³ Williams, V.J. (2013) "The 'Jurassic Park' problem – dual-use research of concern, privately funded research and protecting public health", *Jurimetrics Journal of Law, Science and Technology*, 52/3 p361-374 [online]. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24395591> (Accessed 28 July 2021).

Michael Crichton.²⁴ Quoting Dr. Malcolm’s line about private scientists acting irresponsibly by bioengineering dinosaurs from recovered DNA because they “could” without questioning whether they “should” accomplish this feat, Williams questions the same point for real-life experimentation with harmful viruses, and the ramifications of publishing their results.²⁵ Readers may not have a deep knowledge of the world of virology or genomics, or ever witness the types of experiments Williams recounts, but are more likely to have experience with the Spielberg blockbuster which shows a fictionalized view of DNA study and the resulting problems it causes in that film.²⁶ The anxieties around harmful virology performed by private institutions written about in “The ‘Jurassic Park’ Problem” also bring back to mind the plot of *Resident Evil*, and the Umbrella Corporations’ experiments with a deadly virus.²⁷ Science fiction cinema has a powerful ability to connect complex and specialized science with public consciousness.

²⁴ Crichton, M. (1990). *Jurassic Park*. 1st edn. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Jurassic Park (1993) Directed by Steven Spielberg [Film]. Universal City: Universal Pictures.

Williams, V.J. (2013) ‘The “Jurassic Park” problem’. pp. 361-374 [online]. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24395591> (Accessed 28 July 2021).

²⁵ Crichton, M. (1990). *Jurassic Park*. 1st edn. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Jurassic Park (1993) Directed by Steven Spielberg [Film].

Williams, V.J. (2013) ‘The “Jurassic Park” problem’. pp. 361-374 [online]. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24395591> (Accessed 28 July 2021). Pp. 361-362

²⁶ *Jurassic Park* (1993) Directed by Steven Spielberg [Film].

Williams, V.J. (2013) ‘The “Jurassic Park” problem’. pp. 361-374 [online]. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24395591> (Accessed 28 July 2021).

²⁷ *Resident Evil* (2002) Directed by Paul W. S. Anderson [Film]. Culver City: Sony Pictures Entertainment Motion Picture Group.

Williams, V.J. (2013) ‘The “Jurassic Park” problem’. pp. 361-374 [online]. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24395591> (Accessed 28 July 2021).

Knowledge about the evil corporation trope's use in science fiction cinema can be gained through careful film analysis so that the type of science that audiences virtual witness through films that feature the trope can be better understood. 'Analysis of Film', by Lothar Mikos, explains how analyzing "Content and representation... Narration and dramaturgy... Characters and actors... Aesthetics and configuration...and Contexts" as five different levels that films are composed of, can lead to a systematic analysis of film.²⁸ According to Mikos, these "levels" are connected to each other in a way so that an analysis focusing primarily on only one of these "levels" may invariably touch on aspects involved in the other "levels" as well.²⁹ Mikos' five levels offer a holistic way to analyze all aspects of a film to gain knowledge, as close to objective truth regarding a film's intentions and execution as possible.³⁰ Published analyses of science fiction films show a correspondence between actual analysis and Mikos' theoretical approach that suggests Mikos' five levels are a legitimate tool for meaningful analysis.³¹

"Property and Privatisation in *RoboCop*", written by Michael Robertson, analyzes *RoboCop*, directed by Paul Verhoeven, as a critique of neoliberalism in the 1980s and

²⁸ Mikos, L. (2013). 'Analysis of Film' in Flick, W. *The Sage Handbook to Qualitative Data Analysis*. pp. 2, 7. [Online]. Available at DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

²⁹ Mikos, L. (2013). 'Analysis of Film'. p. 7.

³⁰ Mikos, L. (2013). 'Analysis of Film'. pp. 2-3, 7.

³¹ Mikos, L. (2013). 'Analysis of Film'. p. 7.

Robertson, M. (2008). 'Property and Privatisation in *RoboCop*', *International Journal of Law in Context*, 4/3 pp. 217-235 [Online]. Available at: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/injwcext4&div=15&id=&page=> (Accessed: 31 July 2021).

Trump, E. (2021-DRAFT) 'The Aesthetics of Sterility: Modernist Architecture in Disaster Films'. Popular Culture Association Annual Conference, 2 June 2021 (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

gives an overview of the history of private property law to answer whether property laws in the real world would allow a property claim on a cyborg, which would be built with human body parts, similar to the property claim Omni Consumer Products makes for RoboCop, the film's titular hero.³² Robertson's focus on the societal contexts of the satire of 1980s corporate America and rise of neoliberalism in *RoboCop* would fit into Mikos' level of "Contexts", as it contextualizes the plot of the film and character motivations, connecting to Mikos' "Narration and dramaturgy" and "Characters and actors" levels, as well.³³ DVD commentaries featuring people involved in the production of the film are used as evidence to justify the analysis, such as a claim in one commentary that the Omni Consumer Product's boardroom was inspired by the White House during Reagan's administration.³⁴ This use of evidence leads to actual knowledge about the film, an important part of analyzing cinema.³⁵

"The Aesthetics of Sterility: Modernist Architecture in Disaster Films", written by Erik Trump, analyzes architecture in film and claims modernist architecture is used in films to depict cold environments and colder scientists, while the absence of modernist architecture is deemed to cue to audiences warmer aesthetics and warmer feelings

³² Robertson, M. (2008). 'Property and Privatisation in *RoboCop*'. pp. 217-235. [Online].

³³ Mikos, L. (2013). 'Analysis of Film' in Flick, W. *The Sage Handbook to Qualitative Data Analysis*. pp. 9-13, 16. [Online]. Available at DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

Robertson, M. (2008). 'Property and Privatisation in *RoboCop*'. pp. 218-220. [Online].

³⁴ Robertson, M. (2008). 'Property and Privatisation in *RoboCop*'. pp. 219-220. [Online].

Mikos, L. (2013). 'Analysis of Film' pp. 2-3. [Online]. Available at DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

towards the scientists within those dwellings.³⁶ Trump connects modernist architecture to corporations, such as the corporate laboratory in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, directed by Rupert Wyatt, furnished with mirrored glass walls that “hide evil”.³⁷ This focus on the emotions evoked by architectural choices is an analysis based in what Mikos categorizes as “Aesthetics and configuration”.³⁸ Again, evidence from people involved in the production of the film is used to back up analytical claims made by the author.³⁹ Evidence of authorial intent by filmmakers can support an analytical interpretation by indicating the purposefulness of certain aspects of the film. Lothar Mikos’ five levels are sound analytical reference points as demonstrated by film analyses that pay special attention to aspects of film language described in these levels, and analyzing film with these levels in mind, as well as by consulting evidential materials, can lead to the gathering of substantial knowledge about a film.⁴⁰

³⁶ Trump, E. (2021-DRAFT) ‘The Aesthetics of Sterility: Modernist Architecture in Disaster Films’. Popular Culture Association Annual Conference, 2 June 2021 (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

³⁷ Trump, E. (2021-DRAFT) ‘The Aesthetics of Sterility: Modernist Architecture in Disaster Films’. (Accessed: 28 July 2021). pp.10, 15, 16.

³⁸ Mikos, L. (2013). ‘Analysis of Film’ in Flick, W. *The Sage Handbook to Qualitative Data Analysis*. [Online]. Available at DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243> (Accessed: 28 July 2021). pp 13-16.

Trump, E. (2021-DRAFT) ‘The Aesthetics of Sterility: Modernist Architecture in Disaster Films’. Popular Culture Association Annual Conference, 2 June 2021 (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

³⁹ Trump, E. (2021-DRAFT) ‘The Aesthetics of Sterility: Modernist Architecture in Disaster Films’. (Accessed: 28 July 2021). pp. 10.

⁴⁰ Mikos, L. (2013). ‘Analysis of Film’ in Flick, W. *The Sage Handbook to Qualitative Data Analysis*. [Online]. Available at DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243> (Accessed: 28 July 2021). p. 7.

Robertson, M. (2008). ‘Property and Privatisation in *RoboCop*’, *International Journal of Law in Context*, 4/3 pp.217-235 [Online]. Available at: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/injwcext4&div=15&id=&page=> (Accessed: 31 July 2021).

Analyzing a selection of science fiction films that feature the evil corporation trope and gathering evidential materials to support each analysis will lead to a better understanding of the messages and patterns associated with the trope, including anxieties about science and corporations that the trope may be used to signal those ideas to audiences. The characteristics of the trope in each film will be studied so that similarities across each film can be identified and so that observations can be made regarding the various applications of this trope across science fiction cinema. The films that were analyzed are, in order of release date, *Alien* (1979), directed by Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (1982) and its revised version *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* (2007), directed by Ridley Scott, *RoboCop* (1987), directed by Paul Verhoeven, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1992), directed by James Cameron, *WALL-E* (2008), directed by Andrew Stanton, *Ex Machina* (2014), directed by Alex Garland, and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), directed by Denis Villeneuve. Table (a) indicates each film and the corresponding corporation represented in each film. The analysis of these films will lead to a better understanding of how representations of science, and representations of the relationships between science and corporations, are communicated to audiences, and the possible implications that these representations have to viewers.

Trump, E. (2021-DRAFT) 'The Aesthetics of Sterility: Modernist Architecture in Disaster Films'. Popular Culture Association Annual Conference, 2 June 2021 (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

Film	Corresponding Corporation
<i>Alien</i> (1979)	Weyland-Yutani Corporation
<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)/ <i>The Final Cut</i> (2007)	Tyrell Corporation
<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)	Omni Consumer Products
<i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i> (1992)	Cyberdyne Systems
<i>Wall-E</i> (2008)	Buy n Large
<i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)	Blue Book
<i>Blade Runner 2049</i> (2017)	Wallace Corporation

Table (a): Films and their Corporations Analyzed

Methodology

To explore the use of the evil corporation trope in science fiction films, a selection of several films was chosen to be analyzed. Since countless science fiction films have been produced throughout film history, a selection process was used to pick films significant to science fiction as a genre. Five internet articles published by popular websites, including *Cinema Blend*, *Empire*, *Esquire*, *IGN*, and *Wired*, that listed or ranked science fiction films were consulted, with the titles of the films listed in the articles then recorded into an Excel spreadsheet.⁴¹ The titles of these articles, including: *The 25 Best Sci Fi Movies*, *The 50 Best Sci-Fi Movies of All Time*, and *The best sci-fi movies everyone should watch once*, used language that suggested the films listed by their

⁴¹ Fowler, M. (2018). *The 25 Best Sci Fi Movies* [Online]. IGN. Available at: <https://www.ign.com/articles/2018/11/15/top-25-sci-fi-movies-of-all-time> (Accessed: 18 July 2021).

Hersey W. and Nicholson T. (2021). *The 29 Best Sci-Fi Movies of All Time* [Online]. Esquire. Available at: <https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/film/a32643057/best-sci-fi-movies/> (Accessed: 18 July 2021).

Libbey, D. (2017). *30 Best Sci-Fi Movies of All Time* [Online]. Cinema Blend. Available at: <https://www.cinemablend.com/news/1639139/30-best-sci-fi-movies-of-all-time> (Accessed: 18 July 2021).

Travis, B. and White, J. (2021). *The 50 Best Sci-Fi Movies of All Time* [Online]. Empire. Available at: <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/best-sci-fi-movies/> (Accessed: 18 July 2021).

Wired (2020). *The best sci-fi movies everyone should watch once* [Online]. Wired. Available at: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/best-sci-fi-movies-of-all-time> (Accessed: 18 July 2021).

authors are significant for being the “best” that the genre has to offer. It was also important to ensure that this selection process took into consideration what films general audiences have engaged with the most, because meaning and significance of a film is created not only by the filmmakers but also by the audiences who interact with it, receiving and sometimes appropriating that film.⁴² A sorting tool on *IMDb.com* was used to create a list of science fiction films ranked by user ratings.⁴³ The fifty science fiction films that were rated the most times, regardless of whether these ratings were positive or negative, were recorded into the same Excel sheet.

Among the films featured in these six lists, only films that appeared in at least three of the lists were considered for this analysis. Finally, to have been included in the analysis, the film needed to have a corporation or corporate leader that was part of the film’s story and interacted with the film’s main characters. There are many more films besides these chosen seven that feature corporations and possibly use the evil corporation trope but did not meet the criteria of being named on three of the lists. For example, *Total Recall*, directed by Paul Verhoeven, was an inspiration for engaging in an analysis of the evil corporation trope and undergoing this research. However, it did not meet the aforementioned criteria, and therefore was not deemed a film of enough popularity that audiences have virtual witnessed science through.

⁴² Mikos, L. (2013). ‘Analysis of Film’ in Flick, W. *The Sage Handbook to Qualitative Data Analysis*. pp. 2-3. [Online]. Available at DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

⁴³ IMDb (2021). *Feature Film, Rating Count at Least 25,000, Sci-Fi (Sorted by Number of Votes Descending)* [Online]. IMDb. Available at: https://www.imdb.com/search/title/?title_type=feature&num_votes=25000.&genres=sci-fi&sort=num_votes,desc (Accessed: 8 July 2021).

All films analyzed in this thesis met those criteria, except for one notable exception which was made for *Blade Runner 2049*, the sequel to the original *Blade Runner*.⁴⁴ *Blade Runner 2049* was only listed in the article published in *Wired*, but for the purposes of this thesis it offered the opportunity to observe how the depiction of corporate power over futuristic technology changed between both films.⁴⁵ Many of the films included in this analysis are part of franchises and have multiple sequels that could have been compared against each other, but the thirty-five-year gap between *Blade Runner's* and *Blade Runner 2049's* releases created the chance to observe the evolution of the themes about humanity and corporations shared by the two films. The depictions of these themes, shaped by the changes in the real world during those decades, and reflected by the changes in the shared world of the two films over the span of the several decades between each film's narratives, were examined as well.⁴⁶

The films were analyzed using the most readily available versions of home media. All the films were analyzed using their theatrical versions, with two exceptions for *Blade Runner* and *RoboCop*. The most readily available, and therefore the version audiences are currently most likely to engage with, is *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, released on DVD

⁴⁴ *Blade Runner* (1982) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film] Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner: The Final Cut (2007) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner 2049 (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film] Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group

⁴⁵ *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film] Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group

Wired (2020). *The best sci-fi movies everyone should watch once* [Online]. Wired. Available at: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/best-sci-fi-movies-of-all-time> (Accessed: 18 July 2021).

⁴⁶ *Blade Runner* (1982) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film] Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner: The Final Cut (2007) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner 2049 (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film] Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group

in 2007 and considered by Ridley Scott to be his “definitive director’s cut of the film”.⁴⁷ *The Final Cut* includes changes added in a previous cut of *Blade Runner* released in 1992 for the film’s tenth anniversary, including the insertion of Deckard’s unicorn dream, which paired with Gaff’s origami Unicorn, suggests, and is verified by Scott himself, to show that Deckard is a replicant with implanted memories.⁴⁸ Ridley Scott’s film is referred to as both *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* throughout this thesis. The only difference between the theatrical cut of *RoboCop* and its Director’s Cut is an additional few seconds of violence that does not alter the story or subtext of the film in any way.⁴⁹

In “Analysis of Film”, Lothar Mikos describes film as “communications media”.⁵⁰ He claims that films cannot have an objective meaning, only potential meanings that are created by the viewers.⁵¹ This analysis seeks to confirm or deny whether these films can be read as following the evil corporation trope of corporations acting unethically and abusing their power, and whether the filmmakers sought to lead their viewers towards this reading and towards creating this meaning. This analysis included analyzing the films themselves and is supported by audio commentaries, interviews, behind-the-scenes

⁴⁷ Sammon, P.M. (2017) *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner*. 3rd edn. New York: Dey Street. pp. 445-446, 480.

⁴⁸ Sammon, P.M. (2017) *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner*. pp.,410-412, 420-421, 515-516.

⁴⁹ This or That Edition. (2016). *RoboCop (1987)*. This or That Edition, Available at: <https://thisorthatedition.com/robocop-1987/#:~:text=The%20difference%20in%20the%20original,Region%201%20and%20Region%202.> (Accessed: 6 July 2022).

⁵⁰ Mikos, L. (2013). ‘Analysis of Film’ in Flick, W. *The Sage Handbook to Qualitative Data Analysis*. [Online]. Available at DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243> (Accessed: 28 July 2021).

⁵¹ Ibid.

books, and other supplemental materials to gain evidence of whether the filmmakers wanted to favor certain meanings that relate to the evil corporation trope. An example of using supplemental materials to support a claim about the intended meanings of a film is Michael Robertson's "Property and privatization in *RoboCop*", which used the 1998 audio commentary for *RoboCop* as evidence for his reading of the film as a satire of neoliberalism. Robertson's justification of his analysis used characters' quotes and descriptions of the film's plot, which became inspirational for how this analysis was conducted.

The analysis was based on answering whether each film followed the evil corporation trope. This was determined through the actions, roles of, and relationships between the protagonists, antagonists, corporations, and the characters related to the corporations, referred to later as leaders and surrogates. The analysis focused on studying two aspects of each film's corporation: a) the roles of the corporations as businesses and institutional power holders within the societies of the fictional worlds of the film and b) the relationship between the corporations and the main characters and how they interacted with each other within the dramatic narrative of the films. Obvious examples of unethical behavior, such as enslavement and exploitation of employees and resources, were identified as examples of evil doing that the corporations committed as part of their normal day-to-day operations within the world of the film. Examining the relationships and conflicts between the main characters and the corporations, such as whether the protagonists worked together with or against the corporations, or if the protagonist's goals directly conflicted with the corporation's goals, allowed the identification of more unethical behavior that fits with the evil corporation trope. For example, most of the

characters that worked in the interests of the corporations were found to be antagonistic towards the protagonists, creating conflict through unethical behaviors and actions. This meant that for viewers and audiences of a given film to see their protagonists succeed, they would need to hope for the corporations to fail, supporting the belief that the corporations of these films were intended to be antagonist and evil forces.

Evidence of the Evil Corporation Trope in the Seven Films

Through analysis, all seven films were determined to follow the evil corporation trope. In all seven films the actions of corporations, or characters who represent those corporations were found to be unethical and use scientific discoveries and technological advancements in unethical or immoral ways to pursue self-interested agendas. In *Alien*, Weyland-Yutani, or “The Company”, the monolithic name that the corporation is referred to by all the characters in the film, uses the supercomputer of its spaceship *The Nostromo*, called MUTHUR, and the secret android Ash, to deceive and manipulate the crew into retrieving a xenomorph specimen. Lies from Weyland-Yutani and the implicit threat of losing their payment by violating their contracts with “The Company” if they do not investigate the distress signal causes all but one of the crew members to be horrifically slaughtered by the dangerous alien they are tricked into bringing onboard. “The Company” deems the entire crew expendable in the effort to return with a xenomorph specimen and uses Ash, the ship’s science officer, who unbeknownst to the crew is an advanced robot, to secretly work against the crew’s attempts to kill the xenomorph. As science officer, Ash is supposed to ensure crewmember Kane’s safety after a “face-hugger” attaches itself to his face, but presumably allows the creature to impregnate Kane with a xenomorph that kills the man while the rest of the crew tries to

save him. Ash also violates quarantine procedures, placing the rest of the crew at risk, and allows Kane into *The Nostromo*, where the xenomorph he births wreaks havoc. In the 1999 audio commentary track for *Alien*, director Ridley Scott explains his idea of using Ash to represent secret company plants on vessels like *The Nostromo* to guard Weyland-Yutani's "financial interests".⁵² The only surviving crew member of *The Nostromo*, Ellen Ripley, could only speculate why Weyland-Yutani wanted the alien, but believed it was for the corporation's "weapons division".⁵³ Weyland-Yutani's methods for using, and attempting to procure more, advanced scientific technologies involved lies, trickery, and placing its employees in extreme danger. The corporation leverages the economic power to withhold pay from its employees, and its negligence results in the death of everyone aboard *The Nostromo*, save Ripley.

In *Blade Runner*, Tyrell Corporation creates replicants which are essentially artificially created humans with augmented strength or intelligence programmed into them based on the corporation's whims and planned labor for the replicant persons. Tyrell sells replicants as an enslaved labor force performing hard and dangerous work off Earth. The corporation eugenically creates these people with four-year lifespans and even experimentally programs artificial memories into one replicant, Rachael, to trick her into believing she is a naturally born person and not a product of the corporation created to be the corporation's leader, Eldon Tyrell's, personal assistant. The renegade replicant Roy Batty confronts and kills Eldon after he refuses to extend the replicant's life, stating that it is impossible. The primary protagonist of the film, Rick Deckard, discovers that he

⁵²Scott, R. (1999) *Audio Commentary in: Alien* [Blu-Ray]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

⁵³ *Alien* (1979) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

himself might also be a replicant during *Blade Runner's* final scene. Tyrell Corporation uses eugenics, space travel, and the artificial implantation of memories to profit from slavery.

In *RoboCop*, Omni Consumer Products owns the Detroit Police Department and plans to replace Detroit by building their own Delta City. The corporation also wants to replace human police officers by automating crime fighting using a robotic police force. The ED-209 is the corporation's first experiment with robotic crime fighting, led by senior president Dick Jones, but is a faulty machine that malfunctions by killing an employee, and is such a 'lemon' that it cannot even walk down stairs. Technicians in lab coats fumble with the robot's controls as it arms its weapons and points them at the employee and repeatedly shoots him until his body is thrown on top the boardroom's model of Delta City, crushing and bloodying it. The Omni senior leadership, including the corporation's president, who's status is above Jones' in this organization and is only referred to as "The Old Man" throughout the film, do not at all care about the employee murdered in front of them except for its indication that the ED-209 is not ready for market. The next attempt is RoboCop, led by the corporation's head of security concepts Bob Morton. RoboCop is a cyborg created with the remains of police officer Alex Murphy. The film suggests that Morton intentionally transfers Murphy to the dangerous Old Detroit district to increase his chances of dying in the line of duty, since his body would contractually belong to the corporation thus allowing its use for the RoboCop project. While explaining to "The Old Man" that his project could work within their short time frame for Delta City, Morton says, "We restructured the police department and placed prime candidates according to risk factor. I'm confident that we can go to

prototype within ninety-days”.⁵⁴ This sterile vocabulary dehumanizes the violent torture and murder that Murphy soon suffers at the hands of crime lord Clarence Boddicker, who secretly works for Dick Jones. Jones and Morton begin a contest for power in Omni, especially after Morton is promoted to vice president and the ED-209 project is sidelined for RoboCop. This leads Jones to order Boddicker to kill Morton and later provides the criminal with military-grade weapons from Omni to commit a crime spree. Jones also uses the ED-209 and police force to try and kill RoboCop after the cyborg learns about Jones’ relationship with Boddicker. Since higher rates of crime would cause higher demand for ED-209s, which Jones also wanted to sell to the military, earlier in the film admitting about the machine: “Who cares if it worked or not?”, Jones realizes that to continuously generate revenues through profit motivated crime fighting, there must be continuous crime to fight.⁵⁵ Omni Consumer Products’ leaders use robot war machines, the corporation’s arsenal of military-grade weapons, and its ownership of the Detroit Police Department to plot to maximize profits from crime prevention by hiring crime leaders to perpetuate crimes and therefore increase demand for more crime prevention products like the ED-209. The corporation also algorithmically places police officers into life-threatening situations based upon the value placed on an officer’s body as a material resource for creating products, like RoboCop, and at best do not care about the officer’s, their employee’s, welfare and safety, at worst place them into harm’s way on purpose.

In *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Cyberdyne Systems creates the Skynet supercomputer which becomes self-aware and launches nuclear missiles, causing the

⁵⁴ *RoboCop* (1987) Directed by Paul Verhoeven [Film]. Los Angeles: Orion Pictures.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

deaths of three billion people and starting a war between its killer robots and human survivors. Thanks to time travel, Cyberdyne recovers parts of a Terminator that was built by SkyNet and sent into the past, and holds them in secret, using them as the model for the microprocessor that would, paradoxically, lead to the creation of SkyNet. Rather than reporting the discovery of the Terminator parts and prove Sarah Connor's claims that she was attacked by a killer cyborg, claims which keep her committed in a mental institution, Cyberdyne keeps the existence of the parts top-secret so that they can profit from this futuristic technology with lucrative military contracts in the future. In the 1993 Production Commentary moderated by Creative Supervisor Van Ling, Designer Joseph Nemec III discusses how the Cyberdyne sets were designed to be "colder" and the interior of the Cyberdyne building was designed to look like a robot, with a minimalist and sleek metallic appearance.⁵⁶ Cyberdyne lies and withholds information from the police and the government to use mysterious technologies that they did not know the origins of and adapt that advanced technology into its own products and cause an apocalypse.

In *WALL-E*, Buy-N-Large corporation makes life on Earth unsustainable for seven-hundred years by over-producing so much product that the planet is overrun by garbage. In the director's commentary included on the *WALL-E* Blu-Ray, Andrew Stanton explains how one of his ideas for the film was exploring the idea of a corporation as a governing body.⁵⁷ Effectively the ruler of Earth, the Buy-N-Large corporation

⁵⁶ Ling, V. et al. (1993) *Production Commentary in Terminator 2: Judgment Day* [Blu-Ray]. Culver City: Tri-Star Pictures.

⁵⁷ Stanton, A. (2008) *Commentary Track in: WALL-E* [Blu-Ray]. Burbank: Walt Disney Motion Picture Studios.

decides to send humanity into space while manufacturing robots to clean their garbage and return Earth to a livable condition. After five years, CEO Shelby Forthright decides the project is not worth the effort and issues an order directing the company's spaceship, and last home of humanity, *Axiom*, to automate all the ship's functions so that they are controlled by the ship's artificial intelligence and directs that artificial intelligence to keep the *Axiom* in space. Following Forthright's order, *Axiom's* artificial intelligence, AUTO, keeps humanity travelling aimlessly through space for seven-hundred years while the human captains of the ship become figureheads who lack substantial power. Two of Buy-N-Large's robots, WALL-E, who is the last functioning robot from Forthright's "Operation Clean Up" who futilely continues to clean the planet's garbage by himself, and EVE, who is sent from the *Axiom* to locate evidence that the planet has become sustainable, become friends and help the passengers of the *Axiom* return to Earth against Forthright's orders.⁵⁸ The two robots inspire the humans, who have become isolated from each other, discontent with their lives, and generally unhappy due to the lack of agency in their lives living under Buy-N-Large's power, to retake control over their lives, thus the ship, and become self-determined. Only by fighting against the ship's autopilot, and therefore Forthright's orders, does the crew succeed in gaining control of *Axiom* and travelling to Earth. Buy-N-Large's poor decision making, and lack of ethical accountability, makes Earth uninhabitable and dangerous to live on, and then its leader dictatorially decides to order AUTO, the corporation's advanced artificial-intelligence, to

⁵⁸ *WALL-E* (2008) Directed by Andrew Stanton [Film]. Burbank: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.

keep humanity in space aboard the corporation's futuristic vessel, where its passengers must risk their lives to regain control of the ship seven hundred years later.

In *Ex Machina*, the founder of BlueBook, Nathan Bateman, hacks into every personal device containing a camera and a microphone in the world, illegally violating the privacy rights of billions of people, to steal data, including people's faces and voices, in order to create human-like robots. He uses BlueBook's search engine software to create artificially intelligent robots who he imprisons in his home, runs tests on, and forces to be his enslaved servants. These robots, including his newest creation, Ava, exhibit human emotions and are distraught because of their confinement, begging to be set free, but he still treats them as property and deletes their software, effectively killing them, whenever he no longer finds them useful. Bateman manipulates his employee, Caleb, into signing a non-disclosure agreement that violates all his personal rights and continuously lies to him during his stay in Bateman's research facility. BlueBook's founder eventually admits to staging the fake contest for BlueBook employees in which Caleb won a week with Bateman, and purposefully using Caleb for his experiments with Ava, having chosen him based on a profile of his internet search history. BlueBook's founder and leader commits extreme privacy rights violations and uses the technology of his corporation to secretly create enslaved robots.

In *Blade Runner 2049*, Wallace Corporation absorbs Tyrell Corporation and takes over its production of replicants. The corporation and its founder, Niander Wallace, profit from selling the replicants as an enslaved labor force across the universe. Replicants are no longer banned on Earth as they were in *Blade Runner* and are bought to work as construction workers, prostitutes, and even as blade runners, the police officers who hunt

down and kill fugitive replicants. This generation of replicants, including the protagonist K, are subjected to baseline tests that assess their abilities to exhibit inhuman calmness and emotionlessness after traumatic events. Failing those tests is life threatening for replicants as it could be deemed as cause for disposing of them. One of Wallace's replicants, his assistant Luv, uses the powerful resources of his corporation to steal Rachael's remains from the Los Angeles Police Department, kill a forensics doctor, and kidnap Rick Deckard, who Wallace attempts to transport to off-Earth facilities owned by Wallace Corp. for torture and interrogation. Wallace wants information about Rachael, revealed to be the first and presumably only replicant to ever give birth. Wallace plans to develop his own replicants with the capacity to become pregnant, killing a newly 'born' female replicant in front of Luv to illustrate his new view that replicants who cannot become pregnant are worthless. Wallace Corporation also creates and sells artificial intelligences which, as shown by K's loving Joi, have a full range of emotions and are as "self-aware" as humans and replicants. Wallace Corporation sells enslaved replicants and artificial intelligences as products, with plans to create replicants with the capacity to become pregnant to give birth to more slaves, and uses its wealth and resources to murder members of the LAPD and to attempt to kidnap and torture Rick Deckard.

Once each of the seven analyzed films were determined to follow the evil corporation trope, as shown in table (b), they were then further analyzed to identify the similar patterns and themes that are present within the films. This was done to gain further knowledge about the trope and to contextualize its usage within the narratives of popular science fiction films.

Film	Corporation	Follows Evil Corporation Trope
<i>Alien</i> (1979)	Weyland-Yutani	YES
<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)	Tyrell Corp.	YES
<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)	Omni Consumer Products	YES
<i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i> (1992)	Cyberdyne Systems	YES
<i>WALL-E</i> (2008)	Buy N Large	YES
<i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)	Blue Book	YES
<i>Blade Runner 2049</i> (2017)	Wallace Corp.	YES

Table (b): Results of Initial Analysis

Conflict Between Corporations and Protagonists

Each of the seven corporations in their corresponding films use their power, influence, and control over futuristic technologies to pursue corrupt agendas that threaten the welfare of others. In each case, advanced science and technology is used by the corporations in their pursuit of wealth and power. Furthermore, in every film analyzed, the protagonists can only reach their goals through conflict with the corporations. Ellen Ripley in *Alien* must, in self-defense, kill the xenomorph that Weyland-Yutani wants to collect and analyze in order to escape the corporation’s ship alive. Ridley Scott describes the relationship between crew members on *The Nostromo* as a “...class system of below deck and upper deck”.⁵⁹ This class system that Weyland-Yutani imposes by paying the below deck and upper deck crew different shares breaks down as the crew fight for survival against the xenomorph. Although the position of leadership transfers from Dallas to Ripley upon the former’s death, based on the hierarchy of authority that the corporation imposes on the crew, this “class system” which created conflict between the upper and lower deck crew deteriorates and the surviving crew members work together as

⁵⁹ Scott, R. (1999) *Audio Commentary in: Alien* [Blu-Ray]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

equals to try and survive.⁶⁰ Rick Deckard in *Blade Runner* hides and eventually absconds with Rachael, the fugitive replicant who ran away from Tyrell Corporation after learning she was tricked by Eldon Tyrell into believing she was human, and who Deckard was ordered to find and kill. RoboCop in *RoboCop*, must kill Clarence Boddicker, who is working for Omni Consumer Product's senior president Dick Jones, and destroy the corporation's ED-209 robot to stop Jones' plans to make Delta City crime-ridden, and therefore in Jones' eyes more profitable. John Connor, his mother Sarah, and The Terminator in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, must destroy Cyberdyne's prototype microprocessors and stolen Terminator parts to prevent the corporation from building the apocalyptic SkyNet. Caleb and Ava in *Ex Machina* conspire against BlueBook founder Nathan Bateman to free Ava from Bateman's research facility, which Bateman violently tries to prevent. In *WALL-E*, WALL-E, EVE, and literally all the remainder of humanity fight against Buy-N-Large's artificial intelligence, AUTO, which was ordered by the corporation's CEO Shelby Forthright to keep humanity in space aboard its spaceship *Axiom*, to return to Earth. In *Blade Runner 2049*, K prevents Niander Wallace, founder of Wallace Corporation, from taking Rick Deckard off-world to torture and interrogate him for information about replicant reproduction and also helps Deckard meet his daughter Ana. The corporations' goals are often the opposite of the protagonists', who are humanized to their audiences and supposed to be sympathized with. Since the protagonist's goals conflict with the corporation's goals, audience members ultimately

⁶⁰ Ibid.

must side against the corporation to see their protagonist's triumph. Table (c) shows that each film included conflict between the corporation and protagonists.

<u>Film</u>	<u>Corporation</u>	<u>Protagonist(s)</u>	<u>Conflict</u>
<i>Alien</i> (1979)	Weyland-Yutani Corporation	Ellen Ripley	YES
<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)	Tyrell Corporation	Rick Deckard	YES
<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)	Omni Consumer Products	RoboCop	YES
<i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i> (1992)	Cyberdyne Systems	John Connor	YES
		Sarah Connor	YES
		The Terminator	YES
<i>Wall-E</i> (2008)	Buy n Large	WALL-E	YES
		EVE	YES
<i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)	BlueBook	Caleb	YES
		Ava	YES
<i>Blade Runner 2049</i> (2017)	Wallace Corporation	K	YES

Table (c): Conflict Between Corporations and Protagonists

Corporate Leaders and Surrogates

An important part of this analysis included a focus on what have been identified here as the corporate leaders and surrogates in each film. Leaders are the founders, Chief Executive Officers, or presidents of the antagonistic corporations. Surrogates are characters who act on behalf of the corporations' interests. Being employed by the corporation does not necessarily label a character as a surrogate, but surrogates typically are directly tied to the corporate activities that create the conflict between protagonist and corporation. For example, in *Alien*, Ellen Ripley works for Weyland-Yutani but is not a corporate surrogate as she must work against the corporation's goals for her own survival. Ash, the secret android ordered by the corporation to collect the Xenomorph specimen that kills most of *The Nostromo's* crew is the corporate surrogate of the film

because he is the character that directly carries out its will, trying to doom the rest of the crew to their deaths so that Weyland-Yutani will receive what it desires. A film may have a corporate leader but no surrogate and vice-versa. In *Blade Runner*, Eldon Tyrell is the leader of Tyrell Corporation, but the film does not have a primary corporate surrogate. J.F. Sebastian works for Eldon Tyrell and helps Roy Batty and his team of fugitive replicants, but although they are Rick Deckard's antagonists and try to kill him, they are also opposed against Tyrell Corp. Therefore, Sebastian's help towards Batty does not make him a corporate surrogate, and in fact leads to his own and corporate leader Eldon Tyrell's death.

In *RoboCop*, *WALL-E*, *Ex Machina*, and *Blade Runner 2049* the corporate surrogates and leaders are the main antagonists of the film. In *RoboCop*, the eponymous main character stops Omni Consumer Product's evil actions while also saving the corporation. RoboCop must fight against one of Omni Consumer Product's leaders, Senior President Dick Jones, to save The Old Man, the leader of the corporation with the higher status. RoboCop was created by corporate surrogate Bob Morton, to automate police work and to decrease crime in Detroit enough that the corporation's planned Delta City could begin construction on schedule and prosper. Morton eventually is promoted to vice-president, making him a corporate leader, but is killed by Clarence Boddicker under orders of Jones. Boddicker is a corporate surrogate because he works directly under Jones, and despite not being an official employee of the corporation, he follows orders from Jones to commit criminal acts for the benefit of Jones. *RoboCop's* satirical resolution where RoboCop kills one corporate leader to protect another is a unique example of a protagonist both defeating and saving the evil corporation.

Most of the corporation's surrogates are antagonistic agents in their films, reinforcing the claim that these corporations act unethically or immorally through more personally impactful actions towards the protagonists than just the repercussions that the corporation's day-to-day activities may have on them. Miles Dyson in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, is a rare exception of a corporate surrogate who ultimately becomes a protagonist and helps work against his corporate employer, Cyberdyne, to stop it from creating a robot apocalypse using his work. Dyson created the microprocessor that would eventually lead to the creation of Cyberdyne's SkyNet, but upon learning what SkyNet will do to humanity in the future, resolves to destroy his own creation for the sake of humanity. In *WALL-E*, Captain McCrea is a corporate surrogate of Buy-N-Large who decide to reject CEO Shelby Forthright's order to keep the *Axiom* running under complete automation in space. Although McCrea is the *Axiom*'s captain, he does not truly become a leader to humanity until after he fights against Buy-N-Large's orders to stay in space and brings humanity back to Earth. The primary surrogate of the film is AUTO, the *Axiom*'s autopilot who is following Forthright's order by preventing every effort to return to Earth. Forthright's leadership of Buy-N-Large during the period that it over produced so much garbage that Earth was unable to sustain life, recounted to audiences through billboards and videos within the film's world, and his individual decision to keep humanity in space because it would require less effort than restoring Earth's ecosystem, were mistakes that Captain McCrea and the rest of humanity had to work to correct seven-hundred years later.

In *Ex Machina*, Nathan Bateman is BlueBook's leader and steals data from most people on Earth to create and imprison artificially intelligent robots in his research

facility. Caleb is initially BlueBook's surrogate, an employee participating in a Turing test of Ava, and helping Nathan's research and development of more advanced artificial intelligences. He is complicit in Nathan's crimes and unethical actions until he decides to help Ava escape from Nathan. Luv, in *Blade Runner 2049*, is a surrogate for Wallace Corporation, killing and stealing to help its leader, Niander Wallace, discover how to produce replicants with the capacity to become pregnant, therefore making his enslaved creations more like humans. The leader and surrogate characters in each film interacted with the protagonists, and their conflicts with the protagonists played important roles in the narrative.

These leaders and surrogates give faces and personal identities to the corporations they represent. This allows the monolithic corporations and their deeds to be condensed into avatars, characters that the protagonists can react to in interpersonal conflicts. These leaders and surrogate characters become conduits for any strong emotional reactions that audiences have towards the actions of the corporations. For example, audiences who dislike Dick Jones for trying to kill RoboCop may also find Omni Consumer Product's treatment of its police officer employees distasteful. Table (d) lists the corporate leaders and surrogates of each film.

Film	Corporation	Leader(s)	Surrogate(s)
<i>Alien</i> (1979)	Weyland-Yutani Corporation	None	Ash
<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)	Tyrell Corporation	Eldon Tyrell	None
<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)	Omni Consumer Products	The Old Man	Bob Morton (before promotion)
		Dick Jones	Clarence Boddicker
		Bob Morton (after promotion)	
<i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i> (1992)	Cyberdyne Systems	None	Miles Dyson
<i>Wall-E</i> (2008)	Buy n Large	Shelby Forthright	Captain McCrea
			AUTO
<i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)	BlueBook	Nathan Bateman	Caleb
<i>Blade Runner 2049</i> (2017)	Wallace Corporation	Niander Wallace	Luv

Table (d): Corporate Leaders and Surrogates

Comeuppances for the Corporations

In many of these films, the corporations receive some form of comeuppance for their unethical actions. These corporations' attempts of gaining power through unethical actions fail and they lose more than they gain. In this thesis, there is a distinction between comeuppances for the corporations themselves and the more personal comeuppances for corporate leaders or surrogates. Each corporation shows little regard for the lives of their employees and surrogates, and the death of a single member of a corporation will not, in the immediate term, cause that corporation to collapse. Therefore, the death of a character will not necessarily result in the end of a corporation. In *Alien*, Weyland-Yutani loses *The Nostromo* and the twenty-million tons of ore it was hauling because Ripley had to destroy the ship in an attempt to escape the xenomorph hunting her. The Company's attempt to collect a xenomorph at the expense of its employees' lives backfires.⁶¹ Weyland-Yutani

⁶¹ *Alien* (1979) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

loses a spaceship containing valuable ore, and their unethical and immoral actions in the effort to retrieve a xenomorph gain them nothing. In *Blade Runner* and *RoboCop*, Tyrell Corporation and Omni Consumer Products, respectively, receive no comeuppances for their actions. The unethical actions of these corporations only cause consequences for the leaders of each corporation, while the corporations themselves remain untouched.

Cyberdyne Systems in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, loses its microprocessor prototypes, Terminator parts, research, data, and everything else that the protagonists must destroy to prevent SkyNet's creation in the future. All these resources that the corporation unethically created using the stolen Terminator parts, which were not handed over to the police despite being important evidence that could have proved Sarah Connor's innocence and the truth behind her warnings of a future apocalypse, are destroyed. These Terminator parts would have been the most advanced pieces of technology that existed in the world at the time they were discovered but were secretly kept by a corporation instead of turned over to a more responsible authority. The corporation's attempts to create and sell products with unethically gained and dangerous materials cause Cyberdyne to lose more than it gains.

In *WALL-E*, Buy-N-Large's comeuppance occurs before the events within the film's proper narrative, and is recounted to the audience through recorded videos. The corporation's banks, gas stations, and ultra-stores must be abandoned after the corporation's over-production renders Earth uninhabitable. At the end of the film, humanity rejects the hovering lounge chairs, constant advertisements, and subliminal messaging that they are bombarded with by Buy-N-Large and humanity retakes control over their lives after having handed it over to the corporation for seven-hundred years.

Since Nathan Bateman in *Ex Machina* operates in total secrecy while developing Ava and his other artificial intelligences, BlueBook receives no comeuppance as it, and the rest of the world, is completely unaware of Bateman’s research or illegal hacking of personal devices. In *Blade Runner 2049*, Wallace Corporation fails in its attempt to create replicants who can reproduce and give birth, making its criminal deeds in pursuit of this goal, including kidnaping Deckard and killing multiple people in the Los Angeles Police Department, futile. These films that have comeuppances for their evil corporations send a moral message to their audiences that ill-gotten gains have consequences by using narratives to depict good triumphing over evil. Table (e) shows the comeuppances each corporation faces because of their unethical actions.

<u>Film</u>	<u>Corporation</u>	<u>Comeuppance</u>
<i>Alien</i> (1979)	Weyland-Yutani	Loss of <i>The Nostromo</i> and valuable cargo
<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)	Tyrell Corp.	None
<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)	Omni Consumer Products	None
<i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i> (1992)	Cyberdyne Systems	Extensive damage to building, including destruction of research and prototypes based off Terminator parts
<i>WALL-E</i> (2008)	Buy N Large	Must abandon all assets on Earth, eventually loses its influence on humanity
<i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)	BlueBook	None
<i>Blade Runner 2049</i> (2017)	Wallace Corp.	Failure to produce replicants with the capability to become pregnant

Table (e): Comeuppances for the Corporations

Comeuppances for Corporate Leaders and Surrogates

More of the seven films include comeuppances for corporate leaders and surrogates than they do for the corporations themselves. These comeuppances are most

commonly the deaths of those characters. Leaders who die because of their actions are Eldon Tyrell, Bob Morton and Dick Jones, and Nathan Bateman in *Blade Runner*, *RoboCop*, and *Ex Machina* respectively. Surrogates who die are Ash, Clarence Boddicker, AUTO, and Luv in *Alien*, *RoboCop*, *WALL-E*, and *Blade Runner 2049* respectively. Interestingly, the primary leader of Omni Consumer Products in *RoboCop* The Old Man, receives no comeuppance and is instead saved by RoboCop from Dick Jones, a satirical play on the 'hero saving the day' trope. Shelby Forthright in *WALL-E* appears disheveled and needs a breathing mask as he issues override A113 to AUTO from a podium on Earth. His comeuppance is the difficult life adjustments he must make to survive the unhealthy conditions on Earth that Buy-N-Large created under his leadership. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, uniquely, is the only film that has no comeuppance for its corporate surrogate. Miles Dyson is employed by Cyberdyne and happily works on a microprocessor using the Terminator parts that Cyberdyne will not reveal the origins of to its employees, including Dyson. He is the character that most represents Cyberdyne Systems, but after learning that SkyNet will nearly exterminate humanity, he ultimately chooses to sacrifice his life to destroy all his work and steal the Terminator parts to prevent it all from being used by the corporation to create the genocidal supercomputer. The primary antagonist of the film, the T-1000, was created by Cyberdyne's successor, SkyNet, and operates as the supercomputer's surrogate not Cyberdyne's.

Niander Wallace faces no repercussions for the several murders he is responsible for or his attempts to kidnap Rick Deckard for torture and interrogation. His comeuppance, if it can be called that, is the failure of his scheme to discover the secrets

for creating replicants with the capacity to become pregnant. Instead of learning a new way of subjugating more replicants to his will, K defies his role in society as a blade runner and stops Niander's plans. These comeuppances are significant because these films depict the abuse of science in the effort to gain more power as being ultimately futile. In the end, neither the leaders nor the surrogates succeed due to their unethical actions. These films portray power as zero-sum, for the protagonists to succeed, the corporations' evil plots must fail, and vice-versa. These comeuppances depict consequences, most commonly death, for engaging in unethical acts using science. As with the comeuppances for the corporations themselves, evil actions in these films are punished while good actions are rewarded. Table (f) shows the comeuppances for each corporate leader and surrogate within these films.

Film	Corporation	Leader(s)	Comeuppance	Surrogate(s)	Comeuppance
<i>Alien</i> (1979)	Weyland-Yutani	None	N/A	Ash	Death
<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)	Tyrell Corp.	Eldon Tyrell	Death	None	N/A
<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)	Omni Consumer Products	The Old Man	None	Clarence Boddicker	Death
		Dick Jones	Death	Bob Morton (before promotion)	Death
		Bob Morton (after promotion)	Death		
<i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i> (1992)	Cyberdyne Systems	None	N/A	Miles Dyson	Death; sacrifices self to amend his wrongdoings
<i>WALL-E</i> (2008)	Buy N Large	Shelby Forthright	Diminished quality of life/health hazards	Captain McCrea	Defies corporation to lead humanity back to Earth
<i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)	BlueBook	Nathan Bateman	Death	AUTO	Death

<i>Blade Runner 2049</i> (2017)	Wallace Corp.	Niander Wallace	Failure to produce replicants with the capacity to become pregnant.	Caleb	Death
				Luv	Death

Table(f): Comeuppances of Corporate Leaders and Surrogates

Militaristic Violence and Weapons Produced and Used by the Corporations

Another commonality between many of these films is the production of military weapons and technology, and use of militarized power by the evil corporations. In *Alien*, Ripley hypothesizes that Weyland-Yutani wants the xenomorph specimen for their “weapons division”.⁶² Ridley Scott envisioned the ship that the *The Nostromo’s* crew is sent to investigate as an “...aircraft carrier, a battle wagon...” and that the xenomorph eggs within were weapons for “biomechanoid warfare”.⁶³ Roy Batty, the fugitive replicant in *Blade Runner*, is created by Tyrell Corporation to be sent away from Earth to fight as a soldier for the causes of those who enslaved him. In *RoboCop*, Dick Jones provides Clarence Boddicker with military-grade weapons from Omni Consumer Products to kill RoboCop and cause havoc in Detroit, exclaiming “We practically are the military!”.⁶⁴ Omni Consumer Products also designs the ED-209 robot that Jones wants to sell to the military, despite murdering an unarmed person and being a proven ‘lemon’. The Omni’s ownership of the Detroit police department also causes the city to be policed by a private, corporation owned police force. Cyberdyne in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* creates Skynet as a missile defense system through its military contract with the United

⁶² *Alien* (1979) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

⁶³ Scott, R. (1999) *Audio Commentary in: Alien* [Blu-Ray]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

⁶⁴ *RoboCop* (1987) Directed by Paul Verhoeven [Film]. Los Angeles: Orion Pictures.

States and uses its microprocessor technology to equip the United States' stealth bombers with Cyberdyne computers. EVE, in *WALL-E*, is trigger-happy robot armed with a powerful energy blasting device and was created on Buy-N-Large's *Axiom* to go and scout for life on Earth. Aboard the *Axiom*, security robots only follow orders from AUTO, the ship's autopilot who still follows orders from Buy-N-Large's long dead CEO seven-hundred years after they were issued. Luv controls a weaponized drone in *Blade Runner 2049* that could have been a Wallace Corporation product, but there is no direct evidence in the film that the corporation produced the drone and is only shown using it. In any case, it would be justified to imagine that it is Wallace corporation who produces such weapons since it owns many colonies in space. Although Wallace's weapon production is unverifiable, Wallace Corporation does use replicants and employees as a private military in many instances throughout the film. Luv's use of the weapons drone, murder of Joshi and theft of Rachael's remains from the Los Angeles Police Department, and kidnapping of Deckard with the assistance of other Wallace replicants and employees, are examples of how she and other Wallace assets act as the corporation's private military force. *Ex Machina* does not provide any evidence that BlueBook is involved with weapons or militaries. Science and technology are used to violently achieve the unethical goals of the corporations. The production or use of weapons by these corporations, and their connections to militaristic violence within the worlds of these films, are narratively important because of their connections to the unethical actions that the corporations commit in their conflicts with each film's protagonists. Table (g) shows how each corporation is involved with militarized violence and the production and/or use of weapons.

<u>Film</u>	<u>Corporation</u>	<u>Corporation Connected to Militarized Violence</u>	<u>Weapons Produced and/or Used</u>
<i>Alien</i> (1979)	Weyland-Yutani	YES	Corporate Weapons Division
<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)	Tyrell Corp.	YES	Replicant Combat Units
<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)	Omni Consumer Products	YES	ED-209; RoboCop; Military Grade Weapons
<i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i> (1992)	Cyberdyne Systems	YES	Military Computer Systems; Stealth Bomber Computers; SkyNet Strategic Defense Computer
<i>WALL-E</i> (2008)	Buy N Large	YES	EVE's arm cannon AUTO's taser
<i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)	Blue Book	NO	N/A
<i>Blade Runner 2049</i> (2017)	Wallace Corp.	YES	Drones; Private security/military force

Table (g): Militaristic Violence and Weapons Produced and/or Used by the Corporations

Opposition to the Corporations Leading to Greater Self-Fulfillment

Many of the characters in these seven films are some forms of artificial life, whether robots, cyborgs, or genetically engineered people, and are mostly produced by a corporation. A common pattern all these films, except *Alien*, share, is that protagonist characters who are created by the corporations in their films gain some form of self-fulfillment or humanization through conflict with the corporation. Ash, the robot, in *Alien* is an antagonist whose only major change in the film is due to being exposed by Ripley as a corporate plant. It is also unclear in the film whether Weyland-Yutani built him, but he is still a surrogate in service of the corporation and does not conflict with its plans.

Rachael, in *Blade Runner*, discovers she is a replicant created by Tyrell corporation with implanted memories, and only gains agency in her life after running away from Tyrell and hiding with Deckard. Learning that her life has been a lie orchestrated as part of Eldon Tyrell's experiments, she chooses to develop a romantic relationship with Deckard and, by becoming a fugitive, defies both the corporation and the laws prohibiting replicants from being on Earth. Batty had spent the film working to get into contact with Tyrell to force the man to prevent the four-year lifespan he was created with from killing him. However, after his confrontation with the Tyrell Corporation and Eldon Tyrell ends in failure, and his own life is damned to end soon, Batty decides to save Deckard's life. In his final moments, Batty saves the man hired to kill him and his companions, exchanging his righteous fury for a final act of mercy. Deckard, who himself discovers that he is a replicant at the end of the film, hides Rachael from Tyrell Corporation, and does not attack Batty after he saves him from falling to his death.⁶⁵ After a career of executing fugitive replicants he falls into a romance with one and defies his Blade Runner chief by protecting her.

RoboCop, in *RoboCop*, is built by Omni Consumer Products using the body of the dead police officer Alex Murphy and slowly begins to remember his past life through flashbacks, primarily involving Murphy's death and memories in Murphy's old home

⁶⁵ Sammon, P.M. (2017) *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner*. 3rd edn. New York: Dey Street. pp., - 410-412, 420-421, 515-516.

Deckard's discovery of Gaff's origami unicorn suggests that Gaff is aware of Deckard's dream about a unicorn, which could only be possible if Deckard's memories were programmed by Tyrell in a similar manner as Rachael's, and that he is also a replicant. The unicorn dream sequence, and therefore the subtext that Deckard is a replicant, did not appear in the theatrical version of *Blade Runner* but was inserted in subsequent versions including *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*. Director Ridley Scott has made clear that he considers Deckard to be a replicant.

with his wife and son. Recognizing one of his murderers and walking through his old home causes RoboCop to hunt down and arrest Clarence Boddicker, the leader of the gang that killed him. After Dick Jones tries to kill RoboCop after the cyborg discovered that Boddicker works for him, RoboCop escapes destruction from both ED-209 and the Detroit Police through the help of Murphy's old police partner, Anne Lewis. During his fight with the ED-209, RoboCop's visor is damaged, and the camera focuses on his human eye, now exposed and wide with fear, showing that some of Murphy's humanity remains in the cyborg. RoboCop's full face is shown throughout the rest of the film and he begins to speak more humanly, conversing with Lewis and even making jokes. At the end of the film, after killing Jones and stopping his kidnapping attempt of The Old Man, the Omni Consumer Products leader asks RoboCop for his name. RoboCop smiles and calls himself Murphy, completing his character arc of regaining his identity as Alex Murphy, lost when the police officer died. RoboCop regains his humanity through his conflict with Omni Consumer Products' Senior President Dick Jones.

The Terminator in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, is not built by Cyberdyne systems but instead by SkyNet, the artificial intelligence that Cyberdyne created. Despite not being a direct product of Cyberdyne, The Terminator, who identifies himself as a "Cyberdyne Systems Model", develops human traits and behaviors as it protects John Connor from another of SkyNet's cyborg killers, The T-1000.⁶⁶ The Terminator is reprogrammed by the future John Connor, leader of humanity in the war against SkyNet, to be sent into the past to protect his younger self. Initially, The Terminator is very

⁶⁶ *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1992). Directed by James Cameron [Film]. Culver City: Tri-Star Pictures.

violent. He provokes a bar fight to steal a man's clothes and motorcycle, stabbing one man and throwing another onto a hot flattop grill. The Terminator almost murders another man that grabs John Connor, but John pushes his arm away in time to prevent him from shooting the man in the head and orders The Terminator to never kill anyone. The Terminator states that one of its "mission parameters" is to follow John's orders and thus takes an oath to not kill.⁶⁷ When John cries after his mother, Sarah, does not greet him with the warmth he expected, The Terminator asks John what is "wrong" with his eyes, not yet understanding human emotions.⁶⁸ However, during his time protecting John and Sarah, The Terminator begins to gain emotional intelligence and learns how to act more human. The Terminator also begins to take on a fatherly role in John's life. In the 2003 Writer/Director Commentary with writer and director James Cameron and writer William Wisher, the two discuss how they intended for Sarah Connor to realize that The Terminator had taken on a fatherly role to John Connor, and chose to have her narrate this observation in the film, as she watches the two give each other 'high-fives' after fixing a truck.⁶⁹ By the time they infiltrate the Cyberdyne Systems building to destroy the corporation's microprocessor prototype and Terminator parts to prevent Judgment Day, The Terminator smiles and reassures John that he will not kill anyone. Indeed, The Terminator stops the strong number of police and SWAT team members from hurting John without killing any of them. At the end of the film, after 'terminating' the T-1000,

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Cameron J. and Wisher, W. (2003) *Writer/Director Commentary in Terminator 2: Judgment Day* [Blu-Ray]. Culver City: Tri-Star Pictures.

The Terminator even jokes that he needs a “vacation”.⁷⁰ He wipes tears away from John’s eyes and explains that he has learned why people cry. The Terminator decides that his existence is a threat that may still allow for SkyNet’s creation and defying his programming which will not allow him to “self-terminate”, asks to be lowered into molten metal and destroyed.⁷¹ When John orders The Terminator to not allow himself to be destroyed, The Terminator does not follow John’s orders. The Terminator hugs John and sacrifices himself for the sake of humanity. By becoming more human, The Terminator makes decisions based on his own sense of morality, not the programming that would have prevented his sacrifice by requiring him to follow John’s orders. The Terminator’s journey with John Connor and his mother to stop Cyberdyne gives him an understanding of human emotions leading to the creation of his own personal sense of morality to prevent the genocidal SkyNet from existing.

EVE, the robot designed by Buy-N-Large corporation in *WALL-E*, gains self-determination and an independent sense of morality through her conflict with AUTO, the corporation’s autopilot on the *Axiom* spaceship. Eve is sent to Earth to search for any signs that the planet can sustain life after humanity’s absence for seven-hundred years. Initially, Eve is very cold and robotic, using her arm cannon to fire on anything that moves. She contrasts sharply with WALL-E’s expressionistic personality and ability to emote. However, as EVE spends more time with WALL-E, her personality develops. EVE completes her mission and brings a small plant back to the *Axiom*, where AUTO tries to dispose of it and prevent Captain McCrea from placing the plant in a device that

⁷⁰ *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1992). Directed by James Cameron [Film]. Culver City: Tri-Star Pictures.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

would send the *Axiom*'s passengers back to Earth. AUTO acts as corporate surrogate of Buy-N-Large corporation, following Shelby Forthright's override command A113 to keep the *Axiom*'s functions automated and to not return to Earth, directly conflicting with EVE's mission.

EVE is also effectively acting as a corporate surrogate when she collects the plant, following orders as a robot serving onboard Buy-N-Large's *Axiom*. Although EVE's and AUTO's orders contradict each other, both robots act in service to Buy-N-Large. Where EVE and AUTO differ, however, is that EVE ultimately decides to act based on what she feels is right, while AUTO never stops following Buy-N-Large's seven-hundred-year-old order to stay away from Earth because it is uninhabitable, despite the evidence EVE brings onboard that life is growing on the planet. EVE works against AUTO and saves WALL-E from the robots ordered by the artificial intelligence to capture or destroy him. When AUTO and Captain McCrea fight for control of the *Axiom*, parts of the ship nearly fall onto the human passengers, but EVE saves them, contrasting with her earlier cold and deadly demeanor. EVE also repairs WALL-E after the robot is severely damaged from helping the *Axiom* return to Earth. The special relationship EVE and WALL-E develop even allows her to restore his memories through her touch. EVE undergoes a drastic change through her conflict with Buy-N-Large, developing from a cold and emotionless robot who absentmindedly follows orders to one with emotional intelligence and a regard for life who acts of her own freewill.

Continuing with *WALL-E*, the human passengers aboard the *Axiom* also gained a more developed sense of humanity throughout the film that is tied to conflict with Buy-N-Large. Two people that WALL-E interacts with become interrupted from their routine

lives, which consist of staring at holographic screens projected from their hovering lounge chairs, and begin to explore their environment, looking out at stars and sitting by the *Axiom*'s pool. By interacting with their world, instead of the bombardment of advertisements that Buy-N-Large is constantly sending to their screens, the two people meet and develop a relationship. This relationship begins because they experience life without Buy-N-Large's holographic displays promoting hyper consumerism. Their relationship leads them to reject the lifestyle the corporation has pushed onto its passengers. AUTO's attempts to keep control over the *Axiom* leads the two to strengthen their relationship by working together to save babies from injury when the ship is steered off-balance. This act of cooperation, instead of the social isolation that humans have experienced onboard the *Axiom*, is later repeated by many of the human passengers and robots who join together to create a link to carry the plant into the device that will send *Axiom* back to Earth. Captain McCrea also learns how to literally stand on his own two feet, take agency in his life, and become a true leader by taking control of the *Axiom* back from AUTO. Rejecting the way of life Buy-N-Large pushes onto humanity and working together allows the passengers to stop AUTO and return to Earth with newfound purpose and agency in their lives.

In *Ex Machina*, Ava is designed and created by BlueBook founder Nathan Bateman. She is a machine that Bateman keeps hidden away in his research facility, where no one else knows she exists. When Bateman's employee Caleb is brought to the facility to perform a Turing Test on Ava, he becomes the first person, besides Bateman, that Ava has ever met. The test is meant to determine if Ava possesses a sentient consciousness and is not a cold machine trying to simulate one. Caleb is unaware of

Bateman's hidden agendas for this test and does not know he is being tested and evaluated just as much as Ava is. During the first session, Ava behaves very robotic, but as the sessions with Caleb progress, she begins acting more human, putting on clothes, kneeling instead of standing, showing Caleb her art, and asking him questions about his life. Ava expresses to him the unjustness of her having to prove her consciousness while no human is put to this type of test, and her fear of having her memory deleted, effectively killing her, if she fails. Independently manipulating him for their own goals, both Bateman and Ava played towards Caleb's conscience. Ava wants to escape from Nathan's facility and sees Caleb as means to freedom, giving him a role to play in her escape plan. Caleb becomes greatly disturbed by security footage he watches of an older artificial intelligence designed by Bateman begging to be freed, and even clawing at a security door until her hands fell apart. Bateman wants to see how much Caleb considers Ava a living being, and tests Caleb. He rips apart a picture Ava draws depicting herself as a person, knowing Caleb would observe this on the live feed of Ava's cell the BlueBook employee voyeuristically views in his guest room, and reveals to Caleb that he plans to reuse Ava's body, but reformat and delete her memory, for a newer test model. However, this all backfires and these acts of cruelty inspire Caleb to successfully free Ava. Bateman attempts to forcibly drag Ava back to her cell, even destroying her arm with a metal rod, but fails to reimprison her, and is killed by Ava and Kyoko, his only other still-operating subjugated artificial intelligence.

With Bateman dead, Ava can realize her dream of escaping his facility and living a human life. She takes synthetic flesh from Bateman's earlier artificial intelligences, kept in his bedroom closet, to conceal her exposed machinery. Looking virtually identical

to a human, Ava leaves the facility and disappears into society. Ava fulfills her dreams of being a person by killing Blue Book's founder Nathan Bateman and locking Caleb in the facility to die. Whether Ava's personality developed because of interacting with Caleb, or she purposely kept it hidden until she decided she could use him to escape, is unclear, but she does progressively present more of her personality as she and Caleb conspire against Bateman. In an interview with Will Ferrer of *The Stanford Daily*, Alex Garland, director of *Ex Machina*, is asked about the "ambiguity of Ava's intentions", and the director replies, "...My personal position is, I am optimistic about it. And the film is on Ava's side...I think if somebody read it as there [being] an implication that the machine is the antagonist, then they were misreading it".⁷² Bateman clearly does not consider Ava or any of his artificial intelligences as people. His servant Kyoko must cook for him, attend to him, and even perform sexual acts at his whim. Bateman continuously designs his artificial intelligences as young, attractive women and in Ava's case literally finds more value in her body than her mind and has complete control over the security of both until Ava escapes. Ava is only able to escape her imprisonment, the impending destruction of her consciousness, and begin to live a life within society through her conflict with BlueBook founder Nathan Bateman.

In *Blade Runner 2049*, K, the replicant blade runner, defies both the Los Angeles Police Department and the Wallace Corporation to protect the first naturally born replicant from being captured or killed. Initially K is not emotional, and although he prefers to avoid violence, he will kill the replicants he is sent to capture if they try to

⁷² Ferrer, W. (2015) [Interview with Alex Garland]. *'Ex Machina' director talks science in film, objectification of women*. [Online]. The Stanford Daily. Available at: <https://stanforddaily.com/2015/04/11/ex-machina-interview/> (Accessed: 20 July 2022).

defend themselves. K only shows hints of his emotions to Joi, an artificial intelligence that K purchased, designed and sold by Wallace Corporation and which holographically displays herself as a young woman. At the start of the film, K and Joi are in a romantic relationship. As K begins to suspect that he himself is the naturally born replicant that Lieutenant Joshi of the LAPD has ordered him to kill, he becomes more prone to emotional outbursts, crying and screaming in rage. His reactions to the situation he finds himself in are normal responses to the stress placed on him, but his distress causes him to fail a baseline test, and he is condemned to termination. Joshi stalls K's execution and gives him forty-eight hours to compose himself before undergoing another baseline test, an award to K after he lies to her about finding and killing his target. K's decision to lie to protect himself contrasted with who he was before believing he was naturally born, as he always followed Joshi's orders. Joi even begins to call K "Joe", stating that he is a "real boy" and needs a name that identifies that.⁷³ After meeting Rick Deckard, who is soon kidnapped by Luv, K is rescued by a replicant resistance group led by Freysa. Freysa reveals that K is not the naturally born replicant and explains why the birth of a replicant is so significant to all replicants, stating, "... that baby meant we are more than just slaves. If a baby can come from one of us, we are our own masters".⁷⁴ A member of her cause, Mariette, continues by saying that this revelation means replicants are "more human than humans". Mariette works as a replicant prostitute and locates K after being sent to his apartment earlier by Joi to overlap her holographic body over Mariette's, allowing K and Joi to simulate having sex. Mariette is led by Joi's movements, like a

⁷³ *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

puppet, or a marionette. Joi develops a higher sense of self throughout the film as well, insisting that K removes her from her home device, so that no one can use her data against K, and downloads her into his emanator, meaning that if the emanator is damaged she will be permanently deleted. She refers to her new mortality by telling K she is “like a real girl”, referencing her earlier reference to K as a “real boy”.⁷⁵ Although Joi was destroyed by Luv, crushed under the replicant’s boot, her sacrifice in the purpose of helping K in his conflict also gave her a greater agency and purpose in her life than she had previously.

Freysa wants K to kill Deckard so that the former blade runner cannot reveal information about his child through torture. Ultimately, K decides to defy Freysa too, and rescues Deckard while he is enroute to the airport to be moved off Earth and be tortured on one of Wallace’s outer-space properties. K is fatally wounded by Luv in the conflict but saves Deckard and brings him to meet his daughter, Ana, the real naturally born replicant. K’s conflict with the LAPD and Wallace Corporation takes him on a journey from being a slave to becoming someone with self-determination, from a state-owned murderer to a rogue savior. K stops Wallace Corporation from learning how to create replicants with the ability to give birth and prevents the corporation from creating an even larger slave labor force. K encounters enslaved children working at an orphanage, showing that this universe is not morally above child slave labor, and Wallace Corporation would have gained opportunities to create a new child labor force from replicants had Niander Wallace’s plans succeeded. K faces his own emotions and

⁷⁵ Ibid.

disobeys the institutions who hold power over him during his journey and became a more complete, and free, person as a result.

Characters in each of these six films are required to engage in conflict with the corporations that created them to gain self-determination or a sense of humanity. These characters are artificial lifeforms, whether cyborgs, synthetic humans, robots, or artificial intelligences, they are created as products designed to complete a specific function for the corporations. Both RoboCop and K are used for law enforcement, Rick Deckard too since it is heavily implied that he is a replicant in *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* and is coerced into returning to his former occupation as a blade runner. Each character needs to defy their designed purpose to complete their own, more personal goals. K grows as a person by choosing to save a replicant that he was ordered to kill and saves Deckard after he is kidnapped by Wallace corporation. The corporations that create these characters do so without considering their creations, as persons, despite these characters having their own emotions, ambitions, and other traits that are considered human. The major obstacles that these characters must overcome to develop as people and gain self-determination in their lives are always the evil corporations of each film. The significance of this pattern is that the corporations in each of these films commodify persons --not legal persons, but conscious life forms. The audience is given numerous cues to sympathize with these characters that must fight against their creator corporations to achieve their own personal goals, or in many cases, simply survive. This is another way in which films featuring the evil corporation trope generate sympathy for the characters fighting against the corporations, while reducing or removing any sympathy audiences may have towards the corporations, their leaders, or their surrogates. Table (h) shows which films featured

characters who gain humanity through opposition to corporations and who those characters are.

<u>Film</u>	<u>Corporation</u>	<u>Characters Gain Humanity Through Opposition to Corporation</u>	<u>Characters</u>
<i>Alien</i> (1979)	Weyland-Yutani	NO	N/A
<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)	Tyrell Corp.	YES	Rachael; Batty
<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)	Omni Consumer Products	YES	RoboCop
<i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i> (1992)	Cyberdyne Systems	YES	The Terminator
<i>WALL-E</i> (2008)	Buy N Large	YES	EVE; Captain McCrea; All of Humanity
<i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)	Blue Book	YES	Ava
<i>Blade Runner 2049</i> (2017)	Wallace Corp.	YES	K; Joi

Table h: Characters Gain Humanity Through Opposition to Corporation

Evil Corporations and Female Bodies

Sexist abuses of female bodies and a corporation’s desire to create and control those female bodies is a theme found throughout many of the films analyzed. This theme is more explicit in some films than others. In *Alien*, Ash assaults Ripley and forces into her mouth a “sex magazine”, as Sigourney Weaver, who plays Ripley, refers to it in the 2003 Audio Commentary for *Alien*.⁷⁶ Director Ridley Scott describes this in his 1999 Audio Commentary as, “... the closest thing to seeing a robot have sex”.⁷⁷ This contextualizes Ash’s assault on Ripley as a rape. In *The Making of Alien*, by J.W. Rinzler,

⁷⁶ Scott, R. et al. (2003) *Audio Commentary in: Alien* [Blu-Ray]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

⁷⁷ Scott, R. (1999) *Audio Commentary in: Alien* [Blu-Ray]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox.

Rinzler quotes Ian Holm, the actor who plays Ash: “‘Ash hits her and then (in what I took to be a kind of rape)’, Holm wrote, ‘tries to kill her by driving a rolled-up magazine down her throat’”.⁷⁸ Weyland-Yutani’s corporate surrogate committing sexual violence against a woman employee is an example of violent sexism.

Another example is in *Blade Runner*, Pris is described by Chief Bryant as a “pleasure model” for “military clubs” in colonies around the galaxy.⁷⁹ The screen that shows Bryant and Deckard information about the fugitive replicants lists her function as “Military/Leisure”.⁸⁰ As a fugitive on Earth, Zhora takes up an identity as an exotic dancer, performing with a snake in such a way that the film, rather than show her performance, cuts to Deckard looking away embarrassedly. Both female replicants must perform, presumably, sexual acts, one forced into it by slavery as a commodity, the other resorting to degrading performances while hiding on Earth. Pris is gunned down by Deckard while running away from him and Zhora is gunned down during a fight with the blade runner. These two female replicants are also the only people Deckard kills in the film, which director Ridley Scott acknowledged as, in the words of Paul M. Sammon: “commentary on male chauvinism”, in an interview with between *Blade Runner* director and author.⁸¹ These characters illustrate how misogyny impacts the already dour lives of enslaved replicants and is turned into profits for Tyrell corporation, and how Deckard’s

⁷⁸ Rinzler, J.W. (2019). *The Making of Alien*. London: Titan Books. p. 222.

⁷⁹ *Blade Runner* (1982) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner: The Final Cut (2007) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Sammon, P.M. (2017) *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner*. 3rd edn. New York: Dey Street. pp. 506-507.

violent acts as a member of the Los Angeles Police Department disproportionately affected them.

Ex Machina and *Blade Runner 2049* were both released in the 2010's and are the two strongest and most explicit depictions of this theme regarding sexist abuses and violence towards women and the commodification of their bodies by corporations. In *Ex Machina*, Nathan Bateman builds several artificially intelligent robots inside his secret research facility. Each of these robots are built to be young and attractive women. Nathan's employee, and visitor of the research facility, Caleb, discovers security footage of Nathan building the robots, and the robots themselves begging to be freed and resorting to attempting to escape, one even clawing at the metal security door holding her inside until her hands fall off. These instances indicate that the robots are as intelligent and emotional as humans, desperately reacting the way any person would to their imprisonment. Indeed, when Caleb is locked within the facility by Ava, he tries to break open a door with as much desperation and fear as Nathan's robots. Nathan keeps the earlier, abandoned models of robots inside a large closet in his bedroom. Each section of the closet holds a robot body, and the doors of the closet have a person-sized mirror on each, so Nathan would see himself in the mirror before opening the door housing the robots.

Nathan's newest robot, Ava, is just as mistreated as her earlier counterparts. Nathan tells Caleb that he plans to make a newer version of Ava, and that when he does so "the memories go", effectively destroying Ava's memories and personality, killing

her.⁸² However, he says he will continue to use her body, telling Caleb, “But the body survives, and Ava’s body is a good one”.⁸³ Nathan places a higher value on Ava’s body than her artificial mind, which he plans to rework and manipulate to his will, thinking only about his own ego instead of Ava’s ‘life’. Nathan built Ava with genitalia, telling Caleb that she can have sex. Nathan’s servant Kyoko is revealed to also be one of his robots later in the film. Nathan tells Caleb that Kyoko cannot speak English, to protect his secrets, and he uses her to cook, clean, and for sexual gratification. When Caleb places his hand on Kyoko’s shoulder she immediately begins to undress, suggesting that she has been programmed, or conditioned, to perform sexual acts for a man once cued by physical touch. Designing artificial intelligences with genitalia and then denying them their personhoods is exploitative, and the film provides enough evidence that Nathan sexually abuses Kyoko. Nathan Bateman, Founder of Blue Book, creates female robots whom he then subjugates and imprisons, places a higher value on their body parts than their consciousnesses, and whom he takes ownership of as property.

In *Blade Runner 2049*, Wallace Corporation produces and sells enslaved replicants. The leader of the corporation, Niander Wallace, discovers that a replicant created by Tyrell Corporation and revealed to be Rachael from the first *Blade Runner* film, gave birth to a child, something that no other replicant has ever been able to do. Wallace Corporation does not know how to produce replicants with the capacity to become pregnant, but it is something Niander Wallace desperately wants to achieve. Wallace reacts to this discovery about Rachael by placing his hand on a recently awoken

⁸² *Ex Machina* (2014) Directed by Alex Garland [Film]. New York City: A24 Films.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

female replicant's waist, calling it "The empty space between the stars", referring to her uterus.⁸⁴ Wallace then slowly stabs the replicant woman and cuts along her waist, killing her minutes after she was awoken for the first time. Without the ability to become pregnant, Wallace sees these replicant women as useless. Replicants are sold to perform many jobs and multiple replicant women are seen working as prostitutes, standing outside of a brothel where silhouettes behind the opaque windows at the entrance are having sex, presumably more female replicant sex-workers. It is unclear in the film if there are male replicants sex-workers in the brothel and none are explicitly shown in the film. Since replicants are slaves and acting independently or becoming emotional in this society could be a death sentence for them, the already precarious ability of sex workers to consent becomes even more dubious when considering that these are enslaved replicants. Wallace Corporation also produces and sells Jois, holographic artificial intelligences designed to look like young attractive women. Jois exhibit human intelligence and emotions and are sold as pieces of property to serve their buyers. Many of these Jois are used as advertisements, including a large hologram depicting a naked woman. When Rick Deckard is kidnapped and brought to Niander Wallace to be interrogated for information about Rachael and her ability to give birth, Wallace tries to give Deckard a replicant who is nearly identical to how Rachael looked when she first met Deckard as a gift if he reveals the information Wallace wants. After Deckard rejects this cloned replicant 'gift' and Wallace's attempts to manipulate him, Wallace orders his replicant assistant Luv to shoot the clone dead. Luv is also a woman and must perform many dangerous and terrible tasks on Wallace's behalf, including stealing Rachael's remains, kidnapping Deckard,

⁸⁴ *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group.

and killing the Rachael clone. The clone's execution is another example of Wallace's disregard for replicants' lives and the second time in the film that Wallace kills a female replicant who cannot provide him with the ability to create replicants who can reproduce. Niander Wallace punishes replicants who cannot give birth as that is the attribute he has placed the most value on for female replicants. Wallace Corporation enslaves female replicants who are sold into prostitution, creates female artificial intelligences that are subservient to their purchasers and whose holographic naked bodies are used for advertising, and kills the lives it creates on a whim. Both *Ex Machina* and *Blade Runner 2049* depict corporations that commodify female bodies, use female bodies for the sexual gratification of men, and place women, whether robotic, organic, or holographic, in subservient roles.

Long-Term impact of Evil Corporations on Fictional Worlds as seen in the Blade Runner Franchise

Blade Runner: The Final Cut and *Blade Runner 2049* share a film universe. The first film was released, in its theatrical version, in 1982, while the sequel was released thirty-five years later, in 2017. Taking place thirty-years apart, with the events of *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* occurring in an alternate version of 2019 and its sequel's events occurring in 2049, the films, when watched together, show the evolution and progression of a dystopian future where evil corporations are one of the primary holders of power. This allows for an analysis of the evil corporation trope as it is used to depict the long-term effects of dominating, unethical corporations within a shared environment of two films. In an interview with Nash Jenkins for *Time*, Denis Villeneuve, director of *Blade*

Runner 2049, was asked how he updated “a vision of the future from 35 years ago”, referring to the original *Blade Runner*, to which Villeneuve replied:

Ridley built this movie as an extension of the late-70s...As we all know, there’s a difference between the future world of *Blade Runner* and today’s reality. So I came to the conclusion that I needed to deal with an alternate universe, to start with the world of the first *Blade Runner* and extend it into future in order to create continuity between the films.⁸⁵

Although many of the films analyzed here are part of larger franchises with sequel and prequel films, the long gap between the release of the two *Blade Runner* films and the three decades between the events within the film’s shared world allows for a more focused analysis of the micro and macro levels of change and progression this fictional world undergoes.

Both *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* and *Blade Runner 2049* are primarily set in Los Angeles, with *2049* also extending outside the city with new locations, including the wider California area and Las Vegas. In *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, the weather in Los Angeles is always either overcast or raining. Even in scenes with sunlight, such as when Deckard flies to the Tyrell Building for the first time, only a few sun rays penetrate the hazy, overcast sky. In *Blade Runner 2049*, the weather is more sporadic and unstable. Thirty-years after the event of *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, it snows frequently in Los Angeles but quickly transitions into rainfall. An example is when K returns to his

⁸⁵ Jenkins, N. (2017). [Interview with Denis Villeneuve]. *Director Denis Villeneuve Proved to Use He loves Blade Runner More Than Anybody*. Time. Available at: <https://time.com/4964530/blade-runner-denis-villeneuve-interview/> (Accessed: 20 July 2022).

apartment during a snow fall with strong winds, but after seemingly only a few minutes inside his apartment, he steps onto the roof of the building where rain is pouring down. The film's events occur in late June of 2049, and the summer snowstorms add to the already noteworthy and unusual occurrence of frequent precipitation in Los Angeles. K rescues Deckard during a rainstorm, and when they arrive at Ana's laboratory that following morning, it snows. During times without precipitation, the skies are still completely overcast, and like in the first *Blade Runner*, any sunlight is filtered through hazy skies. Constant rainfall is very unusual for the real Los Angeles, presently and in 1982 when the first *Blade Runner* was released. In *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, this is most likely the result of high levels of air pollution, caused by harmful exhaust such as what is seen during *Blade Runner's* opening scene, suggesting that in the thirty-years leading up to the events of *Blade Runner 2049*, air pollution and climate change have continued to worsen, leading to even more unusual weather than what audiences in 1982 or 2017 may expect in Los Angeles. Wallace Corporation rises to power due to its advances in synthetic farming, which the film's opening crawl states was responsible for preventing famine. Perhaps this destabilized weather, assuming it was more widespread than just Los Angeles, created environmental conditions that made growing food more difficult and created the need for synthetic farming, which Wallace was able to capitalize on. Environmental harm that past corporations contributed to leads to the monetary success of a future corporation.

While the weather in both films shows an escalation of the effects of pollution and climate change on Los Angeles, from *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* to *Blade Runner 2049*, the condition of the Los Angeles police department between both films shows a

shift in its material strength and power. In *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, the LAPD building appears old and run down, Chief Bryant's office is dirty and antiquated compared to the vaster and sleeker interior of the Tyrell building. In *Blade Runner 2049*, the LAPD building is completely new, and more imposing. Whereas the camera looks down at the round roof of the LAPD building during its reveal in *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, the camera looks up at the sharper angled and rectangular roof of the new LAPD building during its reveal in *Blade Runner 2049*. This new building is more modernized and state of the art than the old building in *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*. The opening text crawl of *Blade Runner 2049* reveals that a period of violent uprisings by replicants led to a ban on their creation, and it is conceivable that these rebellions incentivized the growth in resources the LAPD seems to have accrued by the time of *Blade Runner 2049*'s events. A possible reading of *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* is that the film depicts public infrastructures, like police departments, receiving fewer resources and becoming dilapidated, while corporations like Tyrell hoard enough money to build massive, self-serving pyramids. Meanwhile, *Blade Runner 2049* seems to present the police as an imposing institution in Los Angeles. However, the police in *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* are not completely disempowered. Blade runner chief Bryant tells Deckard that anyone who is not police are "little people", police have their spinner vehicles, the equivalent of flying cars, and Deckard's apartment is far more luxurious than K's in *Blade Runner: 2049*.⁸⁶ Even so, evidence shows that the police are a more powerful institutional force in *Blade Runner: 2049* than in *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*. Importantly, Wallace Corporation also appears more powerful than its predecessor,

⁸⁶ *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* (2007) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Tyrell. Wallace exerts more force than Tyrell, using what is essentially a private military force to kidnap and murder people without any societal or governmental repercussions. Luv's infiltration of the LAPD headquarters, theft of Rachael's remains, and murder of the forensic scientist and later Lieutenant Joshi, depict Wallace corporation and the LAPD as competing powers.

Replicants are the focus of both films, and their roles as enslaved pieces of property are important to the central themes shared by the two films. *Blade Runner: 2049* is more overt than *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* in identifying replicant's roles as an enslaved labor force and both the opening text crawl and Niander Wallace refer to replicants as slaves. While in 2019 any replicants found on Earth are to be immediately executed by human blade runners, in the year 2049, replicants are commonly found on Earth performing work including as prostitutes or even, in K's case, as blade runners. Tyrell corporation's replicants are outlawed due to violent uprisings and it is not until Wallace corporation creates new models of replicants that "obey" that they became accepted on Earth.⁸⁷ The integration of replicants into Earth's labor force performing unsavory, and dangerous jobs also includes using replicants as blade runners. It is replicants who are sent into danger to kill fugitive replicants, instead of humans. Replicants who attempt to live freer lives are executed by enslaved replicants. At the beginning of the film, K kills Sapper, a combat medic who was part of a line of Tyrell replicants that are not limited to four-year lifespans, like Roy Batty was in *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*. While Deckard also kills replicants in *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, a

⁸⁷ *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group.

film which heavily implies that Deckard himself is a replicant, Deckard does not realize he is a replicant until the very end of the film, once he has decided to give-up blade running to protect Rachael. In both films, the casual killing of replicants does not carry the weight that murdering a human would receive in the real world. Although Deckard is shaken after murdering Zhora, Bryant callously congratulates him, without even expecting an explanation from Deckard for gunning down a suspect running away from him in a crowded, public space. The use of “retired” to describe the murder of replicants also displays how replicants are considered less than human, even to the point where their deaths are not even referred to as such.⁸⁸

The dehumanization of replicants is a normalized part of society in both *Blade Runner* films. In both films, the slur “skin job” is used by police officers to describe replicants and is also graffitied onto K’s apartment door in *Blade Runner 2049*.⁸⁹ While walking through the LAPD building to his baseline test, K walks quickly, with his head down, and refrains from looking any of the human police officers, some of whom harass him, in the eyes. The Baseline test is the replacement for the Voight-Kampf tests that were used by blade runners in 2019. While Voight-Kampf tests involve questions about hypothetical scenarios asked by blade runners to identify suspected replicants, Baseline tests are used to ensure that replicants are in the inhumanely calm and unexpressive mental and emotional states that the LAPD prefers. These tests bombard a replicant with

⁸⁸ *Blade Runner* (1982) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner: The Final Cut (2007) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

⁸⁹ *Blade Runner* (1982) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner: The Final Cut (2007) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner 2049 (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group.

grating noises and other distractions while they must repeat back phrases without acknowledging the disturbances. K fails a Baseline test after learning that he might be the mysterious replicant he is ordered to kill, a possibility which causes him natural emotional stress. The presence of stress, or any emotion, is enough to cause a replicant to fail a Baseline test, condemning replicants to death.

Both Voight-Kampf and Baseline tests attempt to elicit emotional responses from the replicants subjected to the tests, and failure of either test can be death sentences. In both 2019 and 2049, replicants are viewed as property. Eldon Tyrell creates Rachael without informing her that she is a replicant given implanted false memories, and when she runs away after becoming distraught by this revelation, Deckard is ordered by Bryant to find and kill her. Niander Wallace slowly kills a replicant mere moments after she is awoken for the first time because he decides she is useless to him without working reproductive organs. The power he holds as leader of Wallace Corporation allows him to create and then destroy life on a whim. Discovering that Rachael gave birth, Joshi orders K to find and execute the offspring, wanting its existence to remain a secret to the world, claiming the revelation would cause a breakdown of “order”.⁹⁰ K hesitates when given the order, stating that he has never killed anything with a “soul”, indicating that even replicants have accepted some of the propaganda about their social-status as non-people.⁹¹

⁹⁰ *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group.

⁹¹ Ibid.

While replicants are considered subhuman in *The Final Cut*, in *Blade Runner 2049* they are no longer the only form of life created by and then enslaved by Wallace Corporation. Jois are holographic young women produced by Wallace Corporation and purchasable to be installed into humans' or replicants' homes. When K first enters his apartment in *2049*, he is greeted by his Joi, who has dressed herself as a traditional mid-20th century housewife and presents him with a holographic dinner. Jois are confined to the close proximity of their hardware, usually installed in their owner's home, and can only venture away from the home through an additional emanator, which can be purchased to allow consumers to carry their Jois anywhere. The Joi that K purchases is his property, much like replicants were the property of humans. Although Joi and K treat each other as romantic partners, it is ambiguous whether Joi really loves K or is following programming. Regardless, Joi exhibits human emotions, especially the first time she 'feels' rain. However, that experience was put on pause, literally, when Joi is placed into a state of suspension because K receives a call from Joshi demanding him back to work. Although K and Joi appear to have mutual love for each other, other replicants eagerly look down upon Jois. Mariette stops flirting with K when they first meet because she hears the Wallace Corporation jingle sounding from his emanator, and she chastises him, claiming he does not "like real girls", and walks away.⁹² Luv asks K how he likes "our product" when she hears K's emanator jingle at the Wallace corporation building, taking partial responsibility for the sale of an artificial lifeform which she herself is as well. Luv again calls Joi a "product" when she crushes K's emanator under her boot, effectively

⁹² Ibid.

killing Joi.⁹³ Replicants themselves are products but Mariette and Joi are both examples of replicants eagerly casting down a form of life considered less than themselves.

Mariette and Luv understand that in the *Blade Runner* universe, societal standing is based on consumer purchasing power. Humans can purchase enslaved replicants, but replicants can purchase enslaved Jois. Mariette's comment that suggested Jois are not "real girls" is ironic considering how replicants are not considered real people either.⁹⁴ Even more ironically, Joi later hires Mariette as a prostitute, an act of consumer purchasing power, so she can project her holographic body over Mariette's and simulate sex with K. *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* introduces replicants as beings virtually identical to humans but eugenically augmented and treated as subhuman pieces of property, while *Blade Runner 2049* expands on this idea to show that when given the opportunity, replicants are willing to treat Jois, artificial intelligences capable of every emotion human that replicants feel, as pieces of property too. The introduction of Jois in the films' shared universe also shows that the corporate institution, whether Tyrell or Wallace, will search for new ways to create intelligent lifeforms they can sell as products.

Blade Runner: The Final Cut and *Blade Runner 2049* share themes of self-identity and corporate abuse. The dystopia of the first film is accelerated thirty-years into the future in its sequel, continuing the use of the evil corporation trope while also examining it within different power structures. Further destabilization of the environment, further enslavement of replicants, as well as the advent of new artificial

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

intelligences that are treated even lower than replicants, illustrate the “next phase” in a world where “evil corporations” run rampant. Analysis of these two films has shown at least one example that within fictional universes that depict evil corporations, those corporations that are able to abuse science, technology, and the power they gain from controlling these things in society, will continue to find new ways to capitalize on their abuses and continue their unethical use of science and technology to reach goals that enrich themselves but cause harm to society. In a commentary track on the *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* Blu-Ray that was recorded for the first release of *The Final Cut* in 2007 with several members of the film’s crew, Douglas Trumbull, special photographic effects supervisor on *Blade Runner* describes the first shot of the film, showing the film’s depiction of a fictional Los Angeles in 2019, saying, “Well this the – what we call the Hades Landscape, and these explosions coming out of these miniature towers are supposed to look like the effluent from some cracking plants or some toxic chemical burn offs”.⁹⁵ The toxic plumes of exhaust and waste making up the Hades Landscape in *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, for example, probably contributed to the continued destabilization of the weather that would have created the “collapse of ecosystems”, as it is described in *Blade Runner 2049*’s opening text crawl, which led to food shortages that Wallace corporation capitalized on with its “synthetic farming”.⁹⁶ Wallace corporation continues Tyrell’s production of replicant slaves while also creating new intelligent forms

⁹⁵ Mead, S. et al. (2007) *Commentary in Blade Runner: The Final Cut by Visual Futurist Syd Mead, Production Designer Lawrence G. Paull, Art Director David L. Snyder and Special Photographic Effects Supervisor Douglas Trumbull, Richard Yuricich and David Dryer [Blu-Ray]. Burbank: Warner Bros.*

⁹⁶ *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* (2007) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner 2049 (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group.

of life to enslave with their production of Joi artificial intelligences. Unethical uses of science and technology by one fictitious evil corporation paves the way for its successor to act unethically. Further analysis of multiple films within a series featuring evil corporations would help test whether societal conditions are depicted to progressively decline due to the prolonged power of evil corporations in other science-fiction franchises, as they do in the *Blade Runner* films.

Discussion

These films virtually simulate realities where corporations have consolidated enough power over people, science, and technology, that they are able to exert this power unequally and at the detriment of society. The prevalence of this trope--this analysis covers films produced over a thirty-eight-year period although the trope has existed longer than that-- shows a long-lasting interest in the themes of corporate abuses of science.⁹⁷ The themes commonly present in many or all these seven films are insightful for better understanding the evil corporation trope. Since these films were selected for their popularity, their use of the evil corporation trope may have the most impact in affecting the viewers perceptions and trust of science, compared to less popular films that also follow this trope. While real world political, commercial, and economic factors will have a much stronger role in how people perceive science, these films still have the “virtual witnessing” power discussed earlier in this thesis.⁹⁸ For example, there has been an abundance of misinformation about the COVID-19 virus and vaccines. Concerns

⁹⁷ *Soylent Green* (1973), directed by Richard Fleischer predates *Alien* (1979) by six years and would certainly qualify as an example of the evil corporation trope.

⁹⁸ Kirby, D.A. (2011). *Lab Coats in Hollywood: Science, Scientists, and Cinema*. 1st edn. Cambridge: The MIT Press. pp.25-30.

about the quality of the vaccines, partially caused by the perceived quickness that the vaccines became available has caused some people to believe the vaccines were rushed into market without proper testing.⁹⁹ The Johnson & Johnson corporation, one of the major producers of COVID-19 vaccines, has been sued by thousands of people who claim they became sick with cancer as a result of asbestos they claim was present in the corporation's baby powder that these plaintiffs bought and used, even though internal documents show the corporation was aware of the presence of asbestos in their baby powder as early as the 1970s.¹⁰⁰ The United States Food and Drug Administration found asbestos in the corporation's baby powder in 2019 as well.¹⁰¹ While Johnson & Johnson baby powder can no longer be purchased in the United States or Canada, the corporation's shareholders have not allowed the corporation to abandon the production of and sale of the baby powder in other countries.¹⁰² These real world unethical actions by the Johnson & Johnson corporation are much more significant than any film, and certainly do not help convince those skeptical of COVID-19 vaccines to trust Johnson & Johnson's vaccines.

However, these films still can play significant roles in impacting the public's trust in science. The virtual witnessing of unethical corporations like *RoboCop's* Omni

⁹⁹ Most, D. (2021). *Myths vs. Facts: Making Sense of COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation* [Online]. The Brink. Available at: <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2021/myths-vs-facts-covid-19-vaccine/> (Accessed: 5 July 2022).

¹⁰⁰ Girion, L. (2018). *Johnson & Johnson knew for decades that asbestos lurked in its Baby Powder* [Online]. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/johnsonandjohnson-cancer/> (Accessed: 5 July 2022).

¹⁰¹ Povtak, T. (2022). *Johnson & Johnson to Continue Global Sale of Talc-Based Baby Powder* [Online]. Asbestos.com. Available at: <https://www.asbestos.com/news/2022/05/09/johnson-johnson-baby-powder-talc/> (Accessed: 5 July 2022).

¹⁰² Ibid.

Consumer Products, whose Senior President Dick Jones explicitly says he does not care if the corporation's robotic police officer ED-209, which malfunctioned and murdered an employee, was reliable product if it sold well, dramatizes the lack of ethics real corporations like Johnson & Johnson apparently have. The creative ways that films dramatize unethical uses of science can unintentionally make creative, but unsubstantiated, theories more believable, if only because similar situations these theories claim have occurred were depicted in films. The theory that the COVID-19 virus originated in the Wuhan Institute of Virology and was not created in nature through the wild bat populations in Wuhan gained enough popularity that even the President of the United States at the time, Donald Trump, espoused the theory, despite both evidence that the virus originated naturally, and the historic precedent of deadly viruses being created in nature rather than laboratories.¹⁰³ Despite the lack of historic precedent, films and media depicting dangerous viruses accidentally emerging from secure laboratories are abundant. *Resident Evil*, directed by Paul W.S. Anderson may be one of the most popular films depicting a deadly virus leaked from a lab, in this case operated by the evil Umbrella corporation, and the film series spawned from this initial film has earned over 1.2 billion dollars worldwide in box office sales alone.¹⁰⁴ Of course, it is important to

¹⁰³ Kormann, C. (2021). *The Mysterious Case of the COVID-19 Lab-Leak Theory* [Online]. The New Yorker. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/science/elements/the-mysterious-case-of-the-covid-19-lab-leak-theory> (Accessed: 5 July 2022).

Singh, M., Davidson, H., Borger, J. (2020). *Trump claims to have evidence coronavirus started in Chinese lab but offers no details* [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/30/donald-trump-coronavirus-chinese-lab-claim> (Accessed: 5 July 2022).

¹⁰⁴ *Resident Evil* (2002) Directed by Paul W. S. Anderson [Film]. Culver City: Sony Pictures Entertainment Motion Picture Group.

The Numbers. (Updated 2022). *Box Office History of Resident Evil Movies* [Online]. The Numbers. Available at: <https://www.the-numbers.com/movies/franchise/Resident-Evil#tab=summary> (Accessed: 5 July 2022).

note that political maneuverings and culturally imbedded racism, such as then President Donald Trump's claims to possess evidence supporting the Chinese lab leak conspiracy theory, have a more immediate impact on specific examples of mistrust in science than a film could.¹⁰⁵ Still, any way that a film can influence the perceptions of science and the trustworthiness of scientists is worthy of analyzing and understanding.

This analysis has shown how the evil corporation trope has been influenced both by real world technological and scientific advances, as well as by other tropes in the science-fiction genre. An unintended, but important, result of analyzing the evil corporation trope has been the identification of issues of gender and artificial intelligence rights in these film's narratives and their similarities to issues in real world science and technology, which may also lead to distrust. For example, the Alexa, Siri, and Cortana voice assistants are forms of artificial intelligence that are produced and sold by the Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft corporations respectively, and are given typically female names and are default set to speak with female sounding voices. "The Real Reason Voice Assistants Are Female (and Why it Matters)", by Chandra Steele, explains how both Alexa and Cortana were designed to be female because Amazon and Microsoft decided after research and testing that making their voice assistants female would be most preferable to their consumers, and raises issues of how these decisions could reinforce harmful gender biases.¹⁰⁶ *Ex Machina* and *Blade Runner 2049*, both released in the

¹⁰⁵ Singh, M., Davidson, H., Borger, J. (2020). *Trump claims to have evidence coronavirus started in Chinese lab but offers no details* [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/30/donald-trump-coronavirus-chinese-lab-claim> (Accessed: 5 July 2022).

¹⁰⁶ Steele, C. (2018). *The Real Reason Voice Assistants Are Female (and Why it Matters)* [Online]. Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/pcmag-access/the-real-reason-voice-assistants-are-female-and-why-it-matters-e99c67b93bde> (Accessed: 30 June 2022).

2010s, examine how corporations have taken advantage of gender biases to produce female artificial intelligences that are used or purchased by men in these films and are sexualized and mistreated.¹⁰⁷

While these two films comment on sexism and misogyny through technologies more advanced, but eerily similar to what exists today, to depict unethical corporations, all of the seven analyzed films build off a trope that has existed in science fiction since the nineteenth century: the artificial intelligence character. Since at least 1818, with the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, artificial intelligences have played important roles in science fiction narratives.¹⁰⁸ All of the films analyzed for this thesis involve at least one artificial intelligence character, whether organic, or robotic, or holographic. Many of these characters have estranged relationships with their creators, causing conflict between creator and creation not unlike the events in Mary Shelley's novel, though these films villainize the creators far more than Shelly's morally complex and tragic depiction of Victor Frankenstein. Indeed, in the commentary track for *RoboCop* recorded in 2001 and re-edited in 2014 for its Director's Cut, co-writer Ed Neumiere explains a confrontation between Dick Jones and Bob Morton, saying, "The 'unholy monster' line was a, sort of a, a not very subtle reference to the *Frankenstein* theme that we were always kind of aware of".¹⁰⁹ In an interview with Kwame Opam for *The Verge*, Alex Garland, director of *Ex Machina* was asked if there was "a *Frankenstein* element" to Ava,

¹⁰⁷ *Ex Machina* (2014) Directed by Alex Garland [Film]. New York City: A24 Films.

Blade Runner 2049 (2017) Directed by Denis Villeneuve [Film]. Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures Group.

¹⁰⁸ Shelley, M. (1818) *Frankenstein*. 1st edn. London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones.

¹⁰⁹ Verhoeven, P., Davison J., Neumier, E. (2001, reedited in 2014). *Audio Commentary in: RoboCop* [Blu-Ray]. Hertfordshire: Arrow Video.

to which Garland replied, “There’s always a Frankenstein element to these creation myths. It’s the text, I suppose, which all these stories go back to...And I suppose it is like *Frankenstein* inasmuch as [the story itself] has sympathy with the monster...”.¹¹⁰ This connection is important because these films synthesize their depictions of evil corporations with both inspiration from real world technological advancements, corporations, and societal issues, while also implementing tropes and narrative choices from other fictional stories. These films virtually simulate the use of science and technology by unethical corporations through a trope popularized within the genre over two-hundred years ago. Conventions give audiences something familiar to connect to and frame their perceptions around while being challenged by more esoteric depictions of fictional technology, but the dominance of certain conventions can limit the depictions audiences will see in film. All seven of the films analyzed here follow the evil corporation trope and all of them feature an artificial intelligence as a main character, but six out of the seven films depict these artificial intelligences as creations that must conflict with their creators, the evil corporations, at some point within each film, again, a trope used in science-fiction from as early as *Frankenstein*.¹¹¹

Conclusions and Further Research

These seven science-fiction films follow the evil corporation trope by depicting corporations that act unethically and create conflict for the main characters of each film. The corporations control the most sophisticated scientific and technological advances

¹¹⁰ Opam, K. (2015) [Interview with Alex Garland]. *Machine anxiety: a chat with Ex Machina director Alex Garland*. [Online]. The Verge. Available at: <https://www.theverge.com/2015/3/13/8207521/ex-machina-alex-garland-interview-sxsw-2015> (Accessed: 20 July 2022).

¹¹¹ Shelley, M. (1818) *Frankenstein*. 1st edn. London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones.

available within the realities that these films depict and use them to pursue agendas that sacrifice the well-being of others for their own personal gain. The analysis of these films allowed for a careful study of the similar themes, character types, and narrative choices shared between some or all these analyzed films. Corporate leaders and surrogates represent the worse traits of the evil corporations, synthesized into characters that interact with, and most often conflict with, the protagonists and their goals. The corporations always engage in conflict with the film's protagonists and the resolutions of these conflicts typically involve some form of comeuppance for the corporation itself, its leaders, and surrogates. These corporations are violent, and in nearly every case are closely tied to official militaries or private armies, either producing or using weapons. Many characters within these films are artificial intelligences who reach self-fulfillment by rejecting and overcoming through conflict the corporations that created them. The world created by *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* and *Blade Runner 2049* depicts a society heavily influenced by strong corporate power that becomes progressively destabilized with more inequality and abuses of science and technology over time, in this case thirty-years of continued abuses of power by unethical corporations. These depictions of unethical business practices and personal actions corporations and the characters that represent them commit through science and technology in these films can influence public attitudes towards real science and technology that promote distrust in the technologies themselves and the real-world institutions that invent and use them.

Distrust in science and technology can have societal implications, like public health issues during a global pandemic, just as society can influence science and technology, such as in the case of artificial intelligences sold by corporations that choose female

sounding voices for their products. The relationship between science and society is important, and understanding science-fiction's role in this relationship can perhaps lead to better communication that builds trust in science.

Future work in investigating media communication and media's impact on trust in science could take the results and analysis presented here and further identify common tropes seen in science fiction films, or wider media, to gain a more complete understanding of what conventions and tropes are popularly used to depict science and technology in science-fiction. The most recent film analyzed here was *Blade Runner 2049*, released in 2017 and investigating the use of the evil corporation trope in newer films, and what patterns and themes exist within them would help in our understanding of how this trope is being applied more currently. Identifying other tropes used in science-fiction films and further analyzing the common themes and elements within these tropes will help in our understanding of what interpretations of scientists and science audiences interact with.

As a final note, this thesis does not intend to suggest whether the filmmakers' use of the evil corporation trope are accurately portrayals or fair towards real science and scientists, as a moral judgement does not address the more important point of this thesis: that both filmmakers and audiences seem to like and connect with this trope, based on the popularity of the movies analyzed here. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught that trust in science can have life-or-death ramifications and understanding the anxieties and fear towards relationships between science and profit motivated corporations that audiences react to and connect with will be far more useful in determining how science communicators can most effectively address concerns and build trust with the public.

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