ART AND TOTALITARIANISM IN FILM:

ANALYSING THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF ART IN
TOTALITARIAN SOCIETIES

A Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis was inspired by a film. While watching James McTeigue's *V for Vendetta* (2005), I came to notice the similarities between the film's dystopian society and twentieth century totalitarian regimes—the Third Reich (1933-1945), Fascist Italy (1922-1943), and Soviet Russia (1922-1991)—and their respective treatment of art.

In order to answer the question of how art is represented in films about totalitarianism, and contextualize this relationship historically, six films have been analyzed. These films have been selected for their depiction of fictional totalitarian regimes which bear resemblance to the aforementioned three historic ones. A discussion is created which analyzes how art and material culture in the films are used to indoctrinate the people and reaffirm the government's power. This includes not only propaganda posters and images, but the use of symbols and sigils, as well as the use of art to establish the regime as a new religion. The desire for a "one true art form" to replace the degenerate arts and promote the regime, as seen in the Third Reich and Soviet Russia especially, is not seen in the films, which instead focus more on a holistic ban on art and culture. Finally, the way degenerate art is represented in the film shows it to provide support for the narrative. Most art seen in the films belongs to the characters who embody the rebellion or those with enough power and resources to exist above the illegality of art ownership.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis was inspired by a film. While watching James McTeigue's *V for Vendetta* (2005), I came to notice the similarities between the film's dystopian society and twentieth century totalitarian regimes—mainly, the Third Reich (1933-1945)—and their respective treatment of art. This realization pushed me to explore how the relationship between art and totalitarian regimes is represented in fictional films about such regimes.

The twentieth century was a time of cultural and political upheaval in Europe. The rise of totalitarian regimes in the 1920s and 1930s, notably the Third Reich in Germany, Fascist Italy (1922-1943), and Soviet Russia (1922-1991), affected all aspects of society, including the arts. These regimes strove to create a pure and perfect nation, and they used the arts to mold and indoctrinate the public. Certain art styles that challenged the status quo were censored in favour of others and works which did not comply with the newly implemented values were hidden or destroyed.

The topic of art during those regimes has been explored vastly. There have been academic fields focusing on art lootings and reparations, art collections, as well as the treatment of artists and Jews in the art world at the time—all of which have been studied and written about by art historians for over 50 years. A closer analysis of historical context shows the important role that each leader played in these cultural reforms, and how their ideologies were both influenced by and affected art movements.

Historian and literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov has been widely recognized as influential in the fields of history and sociology. In his essay "Avant-gardes and totalitarianism" (2007), he discusses Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), and Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) and the role each man played as leader of a totalitarian regime. He stresses the argument that the relationship between these leaders and art was not as simple as that of banning or supporting it— by striving to mold the nation, they essentially embody the role of the artist.[1] While it is a short study, Todorov's analysis of the three leaders through this Platonic concept will contribute to my own analysis of the relationship between art and totalitarian regimes in the selected films.

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[1] Tzvetan Todorov, "Avant-gardes and totalitarianism," *Daedalus*, vol. 136, no. 1 (2007): 57-64. This follows Plato's concept of the politician-artist and will be explored further in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Historian Walter L. Adamson (1990) leads a similar argument to Todorov, in which he shows how Mussolini exploited art movements, artistic journals, and their supporters to gain a following, which he could manipulate to support his own ideas and that of the Fascist Party.[2] Ultimately, as Adamson points out, the relationship between Mussolini and the Italian avant-garde was an entangled, complicated relationship, unlike the more straightforward one between Hitler and art in the Third Reich.

Art at the time of these regimes was seen by the totalitarian parties as two categories: propaganda and degenerate art. Propaganda was a prominent tool for the indoctrination of the people and fulfilling the art-based cultural upheaval of each nation. The research of cultural historian Joan Clinefelter (2005) discusses the German art scene prior and during the Second World War.[3] She focuses on the German Art Society (1920-1944)—a *völkisch* art interest group who aimed for the creation of a "racially pure German art"—highlighting the role it played in shaping National Socialist art policies leading into the war.[4] They sought political influence by forming a relationship with the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) and curating the Degenerate Art exhibitions.[5]

Historian Jonathan Petropoulos examines the German art world as well, discussing the importance of art dealers in Nazi art lootings.[6] He argues that art dealers were a key component to the lootings—almost as important, if not more, than the officials themselves. Art dealers had the knowledge and skill set to obtain artworks for Nazi collections, whether legally or not. They were often hired as consultants by NSDAP officials, and contributed to private collections such as that

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[2] Walter L. Adamson, "Modernism and fascism: the politics and culture in Italy, 1903-1922," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 95, no. 5 (1990): 359-390.

[3] Joan L. Clinefelter, *Artists for the Reich: culture and race from Weimar to Nazi Germany* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2005).

[4] *Völkisch* (trans. "folkish", "of the people"), a term used by and for German nationalists, linked with racist ideologies, such as antisemitism. The *völkisch* art movement arose in the late nineteenth century. Inspired by German Romanticism, it was used by the Society to invalidate modernism in an attempt to restore German art to its former glory. Steven Kasher, "The art of Hitler," *October*, vol. 59 (1992): 48-50. See also Clinefelter.

[5] For the remainder of this paper, the National Socialist Party will be referred to by its abbreviation. Degenerate Art shows were exhibitions which displayed modernist and other degenerate art with the intention of publicly shaming the artists who created them and the museums in which they were once displayed. Clinefelter, 64-69; *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel, 2014).

[6] Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian bargain* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2000); Jonathan Petropoulos, "Art dealer networks in the Third Reich and in the Postwar Period," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol 52, no. 3 (2017): 546-565.

of Hermann Göring (1893-1946).[7] In "Art dealer networks" Petropoulos brings up evidence that the networks maintained by such complicit dealers are crucial to unearthing missing information on looted artworks.[8] It is the responsibility of the current generation of art dealers, he proposes, to bring forward this information for museums and the public, and aid in the repatriation of looted artworks.[9]

In Soviet Russia, art was greatly censored, and modernists were blacklisted. John E. Bowlt's interview with Dmitry Sarabyanov (2002), and his subsequent piece on the Russian art historian (2017), provide a window into this Soviet censorship.[10] Soviet art was used to push the Party's political message, and any art which did not comply was taken off display. In Fascist Italy, however, Mussolini kept modernism and the avant-garde close to his Party's politics, only rejecting those artists, whom he could not transform to fit his ideologies.[11] He used the modernists to legitimize his power, forming alliances with various artist groups, such as the Futurists, and drawing inspiration from their beliefs.

The multifaceted role of art in these totalitarian regimes, as analyzed in the literature, is reflected in fictional films focusing on these and similar regimes. The interest of this thesis is to discuss how our understanding of this historic role of art is represented in cinema. Film was chosen as the primary source for this research as it is a narrative presented visually.[12] This concept is discussed by writer Siegfried Kracauer (1960), who is known for his work on film theory.[13] Kracauer dissects every aspect of film, from its ties to reality (via photography) to how it connects with its audience, in order to provide a full theoretical basis of film. He argues that film is not able to show its audience into the inner workings of a character's mind, as a novel might.[14] However, where film

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[7] Kenneth D. Alford, *Hermann Göring and the Nazi art collection* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012); Isabella Zuralski-Yeager, "Updating records of Nazi art looting from an art dealer's archive: a case study from Gustav Cramer's archive at the Getty," *Getty Research Journal*, no. 11 (2019): 197-212.

[8] Petropoulos, "Art dealer networks", 560-564.

[9] Ibid., 565.

[10] John E. Bowlt and Dmitry Sarabyanov, "An exchange on art and western cultural influences in the USSR after World War II," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, (2002): 82; John E. Bowlt, "Remembering Dmitry Sarabyanov," *Experiment*, vol. 23 (2017): 4-10.

[11] Adamson, 361.

[12] Angela Dalle Vacche, "Cinema and art history: film has two eyes," in *The SAGE handbook of film studies*, ed. James Donald and Michael Renov (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2008), 180.

[13] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of film: the redemption of physical reality*, 1st Princeton Paperback ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[14] Kracauer, 235-236. The visual narratives of film are also discussed in Dalle Vacche; John A. Walker, *Art and artists on screen* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1993); David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film art:*

fails, it excels in depicting more easily visual details—as such, it may be a clearer way of representing the relationship of art and totalitarianism. For this research, it was important to choose films which represented totalitarian governments and preferably bore similarities to at least one of the three regimes discussed, but which depicted a fictional society. In this way, it would be possible to focus on how visual arts are treated in these societies without the distraction of whether the regimes depicted are themselves historically accurate.

Based on this requirement, the films chosen for this research are *V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium* (2002), *Demolition Man* (1993), *Fahrenheit 451* (1966 and 2018), and *Brazil* (1985). Each of the films represents aspects of totalitarian governments, such as the Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and Soviet Russia, which is why this thesis will focus on these three nations in particular. The research relied heavily on watching the films multiple times and noting scenes in which art and material culture are present and how they are treated. This was then considered within the context of academic and contemporary literature, creating a comparative discourse between the two media. As the focus is on the visual, scripts or other written source and inspirational material were not consulted.[15]

To form the methodology of this thesis, several works from the film studies field, other than Kracauer's, have been consulted. Film theorists David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (1990) list four steps to understanding when a film is trying to emphasize, misdirect attention, clarify, intensify, or complicate our understanding of the film.[16] These are based on identifying the film's structure and salient techniques, defining patterns, and interpreting functions of said techniques. As film is a manipulative medium with its ability to control the viewer's knowledge, it must be left to interpretation.[17] Thus, an analysis must be conscious of narratives, characters, setting, tropes, and codes.[18] As this thesis presents itself in the field of art history, aesthetic and film theorist

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an introduction, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1990); Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the image: social representation in the cinema and other media* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981); Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Film and history," in *The SAGE handbook of film studies*, ed. James Donald and Michael Renov (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2008).

[15] *V for Vendetta* is adapted from the 1982-1983 comic series of the same name (by Alan Moore and David Lloyd). A close reading of the graphic novel showed art in a lesser role, even when in the background of scenes—as this would have interfered with the film-based analysis, the novel will not be directly referenced in this thesis.

[16] Bordwell and Thompson, 276-278.

[17] Ibid., 311; Walker, 146; Kracauer, 46-59; Nichols, 28.

[18] Codes are defined as abstractions and concepts, which are unconsciously constructed by the analyst who assigns them meaning. Nichols 10-28. Some tropes which are common in films representing the art world include: the art dealer as a criminal and the art critic as uncreative. Walker 147-150. See also Kracauer.

Angela Dalle Vacche's (2008) "Hypertext Device" paradigm of the intersection of film and art history has been considered.[19] However, although Kracauer and other literature discusses technical film aspects such as lighting, music, and colour, these have not been prioritized in the analysis of this thesis, so as to keep the focus on the art historical aspect over the cinematographic.

The various aspects of the role of art in totalitarian regimes—mainly as propaganda and degenerate art—will be outlined, and each chapter will tie these aspects to the way art is treated in the films. In these films, some aspects are more prominent than others, which will be considered and discussed in context of the art historical literature with the aim of creating a discourse between the two media. The main questions asked in this thesis are: why or how art is represented and what this representation says about the governments portrayed in comparison to how the role of art in totalitarian regimes has been interpreted by scholars.

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[19] Dalle Vacche, 183. When painting in film takes form of this paradigm, it provides commentary on the difference between the two media (painting and film). Similarly, Walker argues that art can be used to influence the plot, even if done subliminally and left for the art specialist to consciously identify its meaning. Walker, 145-146.

CHAPTER I

ART IN EUROPE (1920-1945): THIRD REICH, FASCIST ITALY, SOVIET UNION

Artists are not autonomous from politics, economics, or any other aspect of their historical time and place.

—Joan L. Clinefelter[20]

As this quote shows, art is reactionary—it is a direct product of its contemporary society. Political scientist Joseph Joe Kaminsky (2014) explores this idea with the argument that every artwork that has been created throughout history could only have been created because of the conditions at the time which led to its creation.[21] He uses the *Mona Lisa* (1503) as an example, arguing that it would have been impossible for the painting to be created three centuries earlier or later than the sixteenth century, as its creation was a direct result to both the societal and economic conditions in which Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) lived. As such, Kaminski states, "each work of art truly is a unique and original creation."[22] Therefore, it is not possible to study the motivations, symbolism, and impacts of art without understanding the social and historical context in which it was created. Furthermore, there are historical periods, such as the first half of the twentieth century, when art clearly plays an important role in the cultural and political landscape of a nation. This chapter provides a historical context of art in the 1920-1945 period of European history, by exploring the role it played in the Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union. It analyzes the relationships of the political leaders of these three nations with art, as well as how some art styles, such as modernism, were seen as dangerous or iconoclastic: and why measures were taken to censor them. Through this chapter, a basis for the analysis of the six films will be created, which will occur in the next two chapters of the thesis.

I.   POLITICAL LEADERS AND ART

Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler were involved in the art world long before their rises to power, both having written for journals and corresponded with other artists. Mussolini was an avid reader of *Leonardo* and was a freelance writer, penning poetry reviews and essays, such as *L'uomo e la*

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[20] Clinefelter, 3.
[21] Joseph Joe Kaminski, "World War I and propaganda poster art: comparing the United States and German cases," *Epiphany Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2014): 66.
[22] Ibid.

divinità (1904), inspired by his interest in Nietzsche at the time, and focused on the "social implications of the 'death of God'."[23] As historian Walter L. Adamson (1990) points out, up to the beginning of the Second World War, Mussolini's work highlighted the important role that spiritual elevation, culture, and ideals play in the political landscape.[24] Through his writing, he expressed his ideas for the cultural rebirth of Italy. In 1913, he founded his own journal, *Utopia*, which was an ideological offshoot of *La Voce*, and which focused on the topic of cultural renewal.[25] Despite his strong ideologies, Mussolini was lenient towards artists and art movements. He formed an advantageous relationship with the Futurists and Expressionists, joining their political rallies, despite lacking interest in the movement prior to the war.[26] Mussolini, the members of *La Voce*, and other Futurist groups shared many ideologies, including the necessity of a cultural upheaval of the nation. This could be achieved by eliminating capitalism and materialism, and reverting to more traditional values by incorporating "traditional religious language, symbols, and myths into mass-based secular institutions."[27] As such, these liaisons were an opportunity for Mussolini to increase his following.

Todorov argues that Hitler's short artistic career, as well as his affinity for Richard Wagner's (1813-1883) work, would have exposed him to influential ideas, such as Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and his belief that art could influence the world.[28] Hitler openly expressed his admiration towards Wagner, stating that the composer's work had inspired his vision of being the unifier of the German Reich.[29] Throughout his political career, Hitler continued to monitor the arts. According to historian and art dealer Steven Kasher (1992): "No other modern person has experienced the same degree of personal control over the visual culture of his nation as did

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[23] Adamson, 385. *Leonardo* was a literary magazine published from 1903 to 1907.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 387. *La Voce* (trans. "the voice") was a literary magazine founded by one of the co-creators of *Leonardo*, Giuseppe Prezzolini (1882-1982). Based in Florence, the magazine was published between 1908 and 1916. Adamson argues that *La Voce* was one of the most influential Italian journals at the time, and as such inspired Mussolini's ideologies.

[26] Ibid., 387-388.

[27] Adamson, 362.

[28] Todorov, 59-61. See also Ibid., 51-53. *Gesamtkunstwerk* (trans. "total work of art") represented the unification of all the arts, which Wagner believed could be done through theatre. See also Éric Michaud, "The total work of art and totalitarianism," *Thesis Eleven* vol. 152, no. 1 (2019): 3-18.

[29] Todorov, 59. The Futurists were a group of intellectuals in the early twentieth century, who valued modernism, youth, industrialism, speed, and violence. Their aimed to bring life back into the culture of a stagnating nation. See also Emily Braun, "Expressionism as fascist aesthetic," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 31 (1996): 273-292.

Hitler."[30] Hitler's artistic interests were evident in his contributions to Nazi design. He appropriated the swastika into the Nazi flag, which he designed in 1920. In the years prior to his design, the swastika had already been appropriated by *völkisch*, antisemitic groups, but after 1920 it became solely associated with the NSDAP.[31] In *Mein Kampf* (1925), Hitler justifies the meaning of the symbol in context of the Party as representing:

> the mission of struggle for the victory of the Aryan man, and, by the same token, the victory of the idea of creative work, which as such always has been and always will be anti-Semitic.[32]

Hitler used his own antisemitism to justify the use of a symbol with a preconceived meaning. For him, the swastika was an accurate representation of the image and values of the NSDAP.

Apart from his personal involvement in the aesthetics of the NSDAP, Hitler was a key figure in the Degenerate Art shows, which were held between 1933 and 1937. Hitler, as well as two of his closest associates, Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945) and Hermann Göring attended one of the shows, which was organised in Dresden in 1935. The show impressed Hitler enough that he wanted it shown all across the country.[33] He also planned a "Führer"-museum in Linz, Austria, and hired art dealers such as Erhard Göpel (1906-1966) to select and buy artworks.[34] In fact, historian Jonathan Petropoulos argues that art dealers played a vital role in the Nazi art lootings—the use of their networks and experience made them complicit in the lootings even during anonymous sales.[35] Between 1933 and 1945, art dealers acquired artworks from Jewish patrons by means of forced sales; some dealers, such as Göpel and Walter Andreas Hofer (1893-c. 1971), were commissioned as consultants and private buyers—the inflated Reichsmark allowed for advantageous purchases overseas in occupied nations.[36] Petropoulos brands the Third Reich as a "kleptocracy," and argues that art dealers committed countless ethical compromises in order to gain the favour of the Nazi

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[30] Kasher, 51.
[31] Kasher, 48-50.
[32] Quoted in Kasher, 50.
[33] Clinefelter, 68-70.
[34] Zuralski-Yeager, 198. Göpel was an art historian who acted on behalf of the Reich Commissioner for the Occupied Dutch Territories in The Hague, Netherlands. He was tasked with canvassing the Dutch art market and purchasing artworks for the museum from 1939 until his death in 1942. Other high-ranking Nazi officials also had personal collections, such as Hermann Göring, whose Carinhall collection was curated by Walter Andreas Hofer.
[35] Petropoulos, "Art dealer networks". See also Zuralski-Yeager.
[36] Petropoulos, "Art dealer networks".

officials.[37] Art dealers enabled the Nazi lootings, aiding Hitler, Goebbels, and other officials in their mission of the cultural upheaval of Germany.

Todorov refers to the Platonic comparison of the statesman and painter, whereby the statesman is an artist whose material is his whole nation.[38] As artists, political leaders shape their nations' image, behaviour, and thoughts. Their creation is not paint on canvas or charcoal on paper—instead, it is society, humanity, and everything in between. These leaders dictate how the public should act, look, work, consume, and create—ultimately shaping the entire nation: "Once political religions supplanted traditional beliefs, the transformation of the individual and that of the state could be promoted in parallel."[39] This is evident in each of Mussolini's, Hitler's, and Stalin's ideologies and their subsequent relationships with the avant-garde.

In 1917, Mussolini wrote about the necessity of a government leader who would combine "the delicate touch of an artist with the iron fist of a warrior," and referred to the Italian people as a "deposit of precious mineral."[40] Throughout his political career, he greatly upheld the idea of the leader as an artist, claiming that the politician-artist had to create using the most difficult material—man—who would become the equivalent of what marble is to an artist.[41] He referred to himself as the "sculptor of the Italian nation," whose goal was to "create new Italians, to transform the Italian soul, to reshape the masses, to mold an entire people."[42] Todorov argues that Mussolini took on the roles of both the artist and the work of art.[43] In order to create a convincing narrative for his followers, Mussolini had to first convince them that he was worth following. He had to transform his own image into what he wished the new Italian man to be—he was a Renaissance man, the perfect example—unafraid of manual labour, an athlete, and a praiseworthy writer on topics such as philosophy and literature.[44] This aestheticization of the nation was clear: under Mussolini's Fascist movement great emphasis was placed on any date or achievement, which could be transformed into a public celebration, such as holidays and parades, and architecture was considered to be the "supreme art" as it was most public and accessible. However, Todorov writes:

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[37] Petropoulos, *The Faustian bargain.*
[38] Todorov, 57-64. See also Michaud, 14-16.
[39] Todorov, 57.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 58.
[44] Ibid.

> …the aestheticization of the political never became an end in itself; it always remained
> subordinate to the political objective. What became sacred under Fascism was not the
> beautiful but the state.[45]

Thus, despite the front of an aesthetically-oriented leader, Mussolini's ultimate goal was the success of the Fascist Party and the public's loyalty towards it.

The politician-artist metaphor can be applied towards Hitler's and Joseph Stalin's governments as well, argues Todorov, but with slight alterations.[46] Unlike Mussolini, Hitler presented himself solely as the artist, without attempting to become a work of art as well. Hitler's total work of art was the German people.[47] Art was a basis in the formation of the NSDAP and Hitler directly took part in the design of the Nazi aesthetic.[48] This hands-on approach is a literal manifestation of the politician-artist described by Plato (and as interpreted by Todorov). In an April 1936 article, the *Völkischer Beobachter* argued a connection between Hitler's experience as an artist and his political career, claiming that having been an artist made him a great leader.[49] Goebbels echoed this vision in 1937:

> All of Hitler's work is proof of his artistic spirit: his state is truly an edifice of classical
> composition. The artistic creation of his political work establishes his pre-eminence
> among German artists, a position he has earned by his character and nature.[50]

The Nazis used the imagery of Hitler as an artist in their effort to solidify control over German culture and normalize the outlooks and goals of the Nazi regime. Hitler's taste influenced art in the Third Reich, as cultural policies and actions were initiated in the hope that they will reflect his opinions and satisfy him.[51] Both he and Mussolini viewed the public as raw material, from which

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[45] Todorov, 58.

[46] Todorov, 59-64.

[47] In reference to Wagner's concept. See Stephen Miller, "Totalitarianism, dead and alive," *Commentary*, vol. 88, no. 2 (1989): 28-32.

[48] Creating the Nazi flag, for example.

[49] Todorov, 60. The newspaper was loyal to the NSDAP. This article shows an attempt to further cement art's role in the Party's politics. What is interesting, as Todorov points out, approximately half of Hitler's first government was composed of people who had experience with the art world, including Goebbels, who considered himself a writer, and was therefore also an artist. In his novel, *Michael* (1929), Goebbels borrows Mussolini's imagery of the people as artistic material, much as stone to a sculptor.

[50] Quoted in Todorov, 60.

[51] Clinefelter, 71-72. It was not only Hitler who was involved in defining and promoting "German" culture—all NSDAP officials, such as Göring contributed to the cause.

they could mold the perfect nations and restore their former glory. For Hitler, this involved adhering to the Aryan template and eliminating that which did not, ultimately diverging from a cultural reformation to a physical one as well, unlike Mussolini, who strove to reshape the Italian people primarily on the basis of culture as opposed to appearance. Joseph Stalin would follow in Mussolini's footsteps, using culture to control the Soviet public and strengthen his nation through a cultural rejuvenation.

Similar to Hitler and Mussolini, Stalin had ties to the arts—as a young man, he began to write poetry, as well as excelled academically, especially in the arts and drama.[52] When he came to power, he moved towards a tighter control of Soviet art by combining all organizations into one union per profession.[53] This unification not only resolved the dispute on which art style would be the official art of the regime, it also allowed the Party to control the arts more easily—socialist realism became the only Party-accepted art style, and all art which did not fall under the category was deemed anti-Soviet. Stalin became the puppet master of the arts. He used artists, mainly writers, to shape Soviet values through their work, referring to them as "engineers of the human soul," while prior they had simply been considered teachers of the nation.[54] Despite their new title and role, it was in fact Stalin who was the true creator. The role of authors was "not to interpret the world but to change it," yet the Soviet Party was in control, and thus they simply had to follow orders and execute Soviet propaganda under the guise of socialist realism.[55] Like Mussolini and Hitler, Stalin took on the role of the artist, whose work was the entire nation.

II.   THE DANGER OF MODERNITY

In the case of the Third Reich and Soviet Russia, it was not enough to eliminate the "dangerous" modernist arts—they had to be replaced with an acceptable style which would spread propaganda and alter the cultural landscape of the nations. Both German and Soviet artists were forced to conform to the regimes' artistic expectations or risk the consequences: dismissal from their positions, persecution, imprisonment, exile, or murder; degenerate artworks were ridiculed, sold

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[52] See Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd., 2007).
[53] Many art schools wished to be seen as representing the Communist Revolution, which caused great rifts in the field. When Stalin divided them, there was no more than one union per profession, such as the Writer's Union and the Painter's Union. See Todorov, 61.
[54] Quoted in Todorov, 62.
[55] Quote from Ibid.

under duress, or destroyed.[56] The root of this movement for German art started in 1920, with the founding of the German Art Society. The *völkisch* group advocated against the popular modernist art styles which were prevalent in Germany in the twenties, and wanted to return to a style rooted in nineteenth century salon painting.[57] The Society used "racial purity" to legitimize artworks, reject modernism, and adhere to traditional values, themes, and modes of representations.[58] They were looking for a "racially pure German art," which would restore German culture back to its former glory.[59] This pure German art would represent national values and ideals. It was a form of propaganda, promoting not only one art style over all others, but a whole culture, all the way down to regulating people's appearance.[60] Clinefelter describes the modernists as "outsiders who sought to poison the nation's art and break the cultural ties that bound Germans together"—in a sense, art was politicized as an outlet for the racist policies of the government.[61] Alternatively, the diseased and tortured image of degenerate art was contrasted against German art, which was presented as heroic, monumental, strong, healthy, and powerful.[62] Good art was not only that which was rooted in Realism and was in no way ambiguous, but the kind of art which glorified Hitler and presented him in a godlike manner.[63]

In the years prior to Hitler's election win, the ties between the Society and the NSDAP strengthened, elevating the hope that if the Party won, it would help the Society's envisioned cultural renaissance come to fruition.[64] The relationship between the art group and the Party was symbiotic: while the Society needed the NSDAP's power to spread and legitimize their cultural message, the NSDAP needed the Society for its member count, so that its own ideologies could spread to beyond the topic of culture. Interestingly, not all NSDAP officials agreed with the *völkisch* movement. Goebbels opposed this antimodernist stance at the beginning, as he admired

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[56] Helga Coulter, "Pictures on my analyst's walls: reflections on the art of Käthe Kollwitz, the Nazis and the art of psychoanalysis," *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2016): 485.

[57] Clinefelter, 62.

[58] The Society's ideologies were rooted in racism, more specifically, antisemitism.

[59] Clinefelter, 1.

[60] See Olaf Peters, "Fear and propaganda: national socialism and the concept of 'degenerate art,'" *Social Research*, vol. 83, no. 1 (2016): 52-53. Also see Clinefelter, 14-35. *Völkisch* art acted both as a template for what the German people should be and a means of inspiration to return to their German roots and eliminate foreign influence.

[61] Clinefelter, 10.

[62] Clinefelter, 19.

[63] Coulter, 484. See also Barbara McCloskey, "'Marking Time': women and Nazi propaganda art during World War II," *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2012): 5.

[64] Clinefelter, 45. The Society's ultimate goal was to be placed in charge of all German culture.

expressionism and wanted it to be adopted as the official German style.[65] In 1933, he made a speech in which he emphasized the need for organizing the nation politically, as opposed to searching for control through its culture.[66] However, over time Goebbels became more radicalized, eventually renouncing expressionism.

In Russia, socialist realism replaced all art forms, allowing the Party full control of the arts and Soviet culture. As with the proposed *völkisch* art style, socialist realism glorified the type of person the Soviet citizen should be. The style revered peasantry and tradition, as can be seen in Vera Mukhina's (1889-1953) *Peasant Woman* (1927) (Fig. 1.1). The sculpture was praised for its exemplary depiction of the seemingly perfect Soviet woman—strong, confident, and proud, she stood tall and unashamed of her peasant look, willing to "give her heart and soul for her land," as a true Soviet should.[67] Socialist realism provided a template for the Soviet character. Artists who did not conform to this new art style were blacklisted and censored. Socialist realism was the only acceptable art style, and serious campaigning was done to eradicate such artistic deviation. Writers and literature played a large role in the movement. For Stalin, they were a tool for the re-education of the nation—the engineers of the human soul. Prior to this flattering term, writers were considered teachers of the nation. However, under the guise of socialist realism, they were not in charge of their creations—the Party was. The job of a writer-engineer was to change the world, not interpret it, as artists would be expected to, infusing Soviet propaganda into the narratives of their works, with a focus on individual and collective education[68] Through their work, writers and artists would become paragons for the average Soviet citizen, showing that loyalty to the Party will be awarded and should be the aim.

III.   DEGENERATE ART SHOWS

The first German Art Society-curated exhibition was held on May 24, 1929 in Lübeck, with the goal of "[defining] by example what constituted German art."[69] This exhibition paved the way for future Degenerate Art shows—it was a turning point in the fight against modernism, displaying what kind of art should be created by German artists, and reinstating what the Society believed

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[65] Peters, 45. Expressionism was seen as natural and Nordic and as such, the true German style. See Clinefelter, 59.
[66] Ibid., 54.
[67] Bettina Jungen, "Vera Mukhina: art between modernism and socialist realism," *Third Text*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2009): 40.
[68] See Todorov.
[69] Clinefelter, 35. See also *Degenerate Art.*

was German "native culture."[70] Through the exhibition, the Society was directly targeting the German people, showing them the kind of art and values they should be supporting. From 1933 onwards, such exhibitions played a key role in NSDAP propaganda, with their anti-modernist, anti-Communist, and antisemitic message.[71] The Society felt that German identity was threatened by "alien" and modern art, therefore, there was a sense of urgency to eliminate degenerate art and artists from German culture.[72]

On 30 April 1933, the first Pure German Art (*Reine Deutsche Kunst*) travelling exhibition opened in Brunswick. Curated by the Society, its content lacked originality. On display were nineteenth century-style paintings, peasantry scenes, idyllic landscapes, and historical themes. No modernist styles, such as impressionism or expressionism were included, although they had been prominent styles in German art for over forty years.[73] There were also no artworks with a distinct Nazi theme. However, what the Society introduced in this exhibition were the "chambers of horror" where degenerate art was displayed.[74] All modernist art was removed from regular exhibition rooms and displayed in these "chambers of horror," with the intention to "defame" all art which was associated with the Weimar Republic.[75]

The Society's role in these exhibitions can be credited to Bettina Feistel-Rohmeder (1873-1953), whose March 1933 piece "What the German artists expect from the new government" provided a guideline for the organization of future degenerate shows.[76] This guideline was followed in the "Government Art 1919-1933" exhibition, held in Karlsruhe in April 8-30, 1933. The exhibition's goal was to show how much money had been wasted on "bad" art, using the pieces as examples of the atrocities committed by the Weimar Republic and the negative effects modernist art had on art students.[77] Each "offensive" artwork was tagged with its price, paid by the museum authorities and thus, indirectly, by the taxpayers, along with the name of the museum

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[70] Clinefelter, 35-36. This first exhibition hosted a total of 200 works by 40 artists, all of whom were Society members.
[71] Clinefelter, 54.
[72] Ibid., 27.
[73] Ibid., 59-60.
[74] Ibid., 64. These "chambers of horror" would later become separate Degenerate Art shows.
[75] Ibid. Popular artists, such as Emil Nolde, George Grosz, Wilhelm Lembruck, and Max Liebermann were displayed. As the Weimar Republic had developed a negative likeness in the eyes of the NSDAP, who saw it as overly decadent and thus, degenerate. As such, the modernist art associated with it was also considered degenerate. See also McCloskey and *Degenerate Art.*
[76] Feistel-Rohmeder was the founder of the German Art Society.
[77] Clinefelter, 68. See also *Degenerate Art.*

official who authorized the purchase. Altogether, 22 local degenerate art exhibitions took place from 1933 to 1937, with shows in Baden, Stuttgart, Munich, and Dresden. These shows featured many artworks, and countless of them were subsequently destroyed after each show, again following the suggestions of Feistel-Rohmeder. In August 1944, Goebbels ordered the shutting down of German cultural life, in order to mobilize for the war effort. All visual art competitions and exhibitions were prohibited, and instructional facilities were closed; shows, such as musicals, theatres, and cabaret performances were shut down; only film and radio were allowed to continue.[78]

IV.   THE FATE OF DEGENERATE ARTISTS

The Society members who worked as professors despised any colleagues who associated with modernism.[79] One specific target was Otto Dix (1891-1969), who the Society blamed for corrupting his students into believing that "perversion was art" and who struggled due to the NSDAP's degenerate art action.[80] Despite being German and having fought in both wars, he was on the Nazi watchlist, and lost his professorship in early 1933.[81] Dix painted *The Trench* (1920-1923) (Fig. 1.2), whose brutal imagery was inspired by his experience in the First World War. However, the painting was put in museum storage after Hitler's rise to power, as the NSDAP believed that it promoted the brutality of war, and feared it would make war off-putting for people.[82] The piece was exhibited in the Degenerate Art shows, and was miraculously spared from the autos-da-fé; however, it was purchased in January 1940, and it has since disappeared from public record.[83] This piece and its history show the kind of relationship that existed between artists and the NSDAP. Thus, the NSDAP held art and its potential to impact the German people of such high importance that they would take action against citizens loyal to their country. Such censorship as the one experienced by Dix was not uncommon, and many other artists suffered the same fate. Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) is considered by psychologist Helga Coulter to be the "suffering witness" of her time.[84] Like Dix, Kollwitz used art to depict the horrors of war; however, the

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[78] Clinefelter, 117.

[79] Ibid., 41.

[80] Ibid., 41.

[81] Jennifer Mundy, *Lost art: missing artworks of the twentieth century* (London: Tate Publishing, 2013): 130-136.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid. Some Dix pieces were kept safely in storage to avoid the art lootings and burnings.

[84] Coulter, 480.

regime wanted a glorification of war, instead of its condemnation. Thus, Kollwitz faced the consequences of being a degenerate artist—it was forbidden to display her work, and any pieces already on display were taken down.[85]

Not all artworks survived the Degenerate Art shows. Otto Freundlich's *Large Head* (*The New Man*) (1912) (Fig. 1.3) was acquired by the Hamburg Museum of Arts and Crafts in 1930.[86] However, following museum director Max Sauerlandt's dismissal in 1933, the museum was banned from displaying modernists, and 270 artworks, including *Large Head*, were confiscated by the NSDAP.[87] The sculpture was displayed at a Degenerate Art Exhibition, and was possibly destroyed after the show's end in 1941. The fate of many artworks displayed at the Degenerate Art Exhibitions are unknown; many were sold, while some were kept in private collections, such as in Göring's Carinhall. In March 1939, the Berlin Fire Brigade burned an unknown number of "unsaleable" works; many others simply disappeared amidst the confusion of war.[88] Nazi censorship and ostracization has led to significant loss of art and social commentary; these reverberations are still felt today as many of the artworks, such as *Large Head*, have still not been recovered.[89]

In the Soviet, artists faced similar consequences. One such artist was Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935). With the Communist Revolution in 1917, avant-garde experimentation was acceptable, allowing Malevich and many other artists to work freely. He was appointed Director of the State Institute of Artistic Culture in Petrograd in 1923.[90] However, after Stalin assumed leadership in 1924 and unified the arts, the Institute was closed in 1926, losing Malevich his position. He continued to work as an artist, but was eventually forced to stop creating abstractions.[91] In 1927, he was interrogated after a return from Germany, and his reputation with the Party weakened—he was not allowed to travel (and was thus unable to retrieve works he had left in Germany), could

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[85] Ibid., 485. Although Kollwitz' work was not destroyed by the Nazis, some pieces were lost in an air raid over her Berlin home in the 1940s.

[86] Mundy, 125-129.

[87] Ibid.

[88] See Mundy. The exact number of burned artworks is unknown, but speculated to be in the hundreds to thousands of pieces.

[89] In 2010 German customs officials discovered over 1,500 artworks missing since the war. See Brendan Manley, "German officials reveal trove of Nazi-confiscated 'degenerate' art," *Military History* (2014): 8.

[90] Mundy, 56-62.

[91] Ibid.

not exhibit, and was forced to create only sanctioned art.[92] By his death, his abstractions were labeled "anti-Soviet" and removed from public view. While many of the works left in Germany survived as people were able to hide them, some were destroyed by the NSDAP and others disappeared from the records.[93]

In the Soviet, Russian avant-garde was a taboo topic—exhibitions that were too modernist were seen as problematic and provocative, eventually becoming banned. Malevich was not the only artist blacklisted by the Party; others included: Lyubov Popova (1889-1924), Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891-1956), Pavel Filonov (1883-1941), and Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953). Such artists were no longer written and published about, and their artworks were taken off display and put in storage rooms indefinitely.[94] Others, like Mukhina, were blacklisted despite creating Party-approved works. Although *Peasant Woman* was popular with the Party and had won an award, Mukhina's career was not easy. She was outspoken against socialist realism and never officially became a Party member. As such, the State did not support her—many of her sketches were not approved, so she created significantly fewer pieces than she designed, often was not compensated for her work, and was not provided with requested studios.[95]

As this chapter has shown, the relationship between art and totalitarian regimes is closely knit. All three leaders were highly involved in the arts in their youths and acted as artists as they molded the people through their censorship and allowance of certain artworks. Artists were blacklisted and faced dire consequences if they did not uphold to the governments' ideological values. The following chapters will examine further the double role of art as propaganda or degenerate art, and explore how these roles are represented in the chosen films.

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Bowlt and Sarabyanov, 82.
[95] Jungen, 43.

CHAPTER II

ART AND PROPAGANDA

The finest propaganda does not reveal itself: the best propaganda is that which works invisibly, penetrating into every cell of life in such a way that the public has no idea of the aims of the propaganda.

—Joseph Goebbels[96]

Think what you like in private, as long as you agree in public…and the doors will be wide open to you.

—Vaclav Havel[97]

For a political regime to be successful in changing the cultural landscape of a nation, it requires the use of propaganda. In some cases, this might include graphics, such as posters, which are used to influence the general public's opinion of the government or its predecessors. For example, Richard Chambers (1983) outlines three function-based styles commonly used in war propaganda posters: (1) appeal to patriotism, (2) war effort, and (3) negative statements about the enemy.[98] Each of these influenced public opinion differently, but with the common goal of appeasing government policies. Apart from propaganda in the form of posters, a more common way for a regime to affect culture is by directly targeting the visual arts as a whole. As described in the previous chapter, modernist art styles were targeted by totalitarian regimes and replaced by Party-approved styles which adhered to Party values.[99] This chapter will focus on the way art is used as propaganda by such governments, and how this relationship is represented in six films: *V for Vendetta* (2005), *Equilibrium* (2002), *Demolition Man* (1993), *Fahrenheit 451* (1966, 2018), and *Brazil* (1985). Each film represents a totalitarian or dystopian society in which propaganda is present more or less intensely, yet with a similar effect of indoctrinating the population.

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[96] Quoted in Coulter, 484.
[97] Quoted in Miller, 30.
[98] Richard Chambers, "Art and propaganda in an age of war: the role of posters," *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1983): 54. While the examples he uses are from both the First and Second World War, these categories are nevertheless applicable to propaganda posters in general.
[99] Such as Third Reich's *völkisch* art and Russia's socialist realism.

I.   PROPAGANDA IN THE FILMS

James McTeigue's *V for Vendetta* is based on the 1982 graphic novel of the same name written by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd. It depicts an alternate reality in which a post-war dystopian England is governed by the Norsefire—a tyrannical party with a Big Brother-esque control over its people. Daily activity is monitored by militant police, media is censored, buildings are covered with blatantly propagandistic posters, and the nation's ubiquitous Chancellor Adam Sutler's speeches are broadcast on large public screens. The film revolves around a young woman named Evey, who is swept into the world of the mysterious V and his Fawkesian plan to blow up Parliament and bring an end to the government.[100]

Propaganda in this dystopian world is rampant. Posters with the Norsefire slogan, "Unity is strength," as well as the Norsefire's cross-like sigil, populate public space (Fig. 3.1). They promote the unification and blind loyalty of the public towards their government. Chancellor Sutler's speeches are broadcast widely in public with the same sigil marking the screens. Propaganda seeps into people's households as well, as a portrait of the Chancellor hangs in each home. In this world, art is mostly banned—the artworks seen in the film are in V's Shadow Gallery, or part of Gordon Dietrich's (Evey's boss) secret collection (Fig. 3.2 and Fig. 3.3).[101] While there are some pieces visible in Evey's apartment, art is generally sparse, therefore most propaganda exists in the form of posters and televised rallies. These posters are straightforward—they blatantly call for loyalty to Chancellor Sutler, the Norsefire, and, ultimately, England herself. These posters can be seen throughout the city, and although they are not diverse in text or design, they are widespread, ensuring that their message is clear.

Equilibrium, directed by Kurt Wimmer, tells the story of Libria—a futuristic city in which emotions are forbidden. As such, all forms of culture are banned and daily injections of "Prozium II" are mandatory, as the medicine suppresses emotions. The governing power, the Tetragrammaton Council, is led by Father—an unnamed politician whose powerful speeches are broadcast to the masses. The protagonist, John Preston, is a member of the Grammaton Cleric—

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[100] Guy Fawkes (1570-1606) was a British soldier who took part in the Gunpowder Plot—a plan to blow up Westminster Palace in an attempt to kill King James I (1566-1625) and his ministers, who were inside for a Parliament meeting at the time. See Britannica, "Guy Fawkes," Biography, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Guy-Fawkes (Accessed 5 May 2020.)

[101] The Shadow Gallery refers to V's home.

Libria's law enforcers, who seek out signs of rebellion and material culture and destroy them. After accidentally stopping his intake of the government-enforced medication, Preston is able to see the injustice of the Council, joining the rebellion.

As with the Norsefire in *V for Vendetta*, the Tetragrammaton Council's sigil can be seen everywhere in the city, enforcing the idea of an omnipresent government. Upon closer inspection, many similarities exist between *V for Vendetta* and *Equilibrium*, as both films draw inspiration from the same three dystopian societies.[102] As in *V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium* shows the use of media as propaganda to indoctrinate the public: Father's constantly broadcast speeches, like Chancellor Sutler's, further the idea of an omnipresent leader. In the film's climax, it is also revealed that the Council twists media to help solidify its message. The only posters visible remind citizens to take their Prozium II doses (Fig. 3.4). Unlike *V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium*'s use of propaganda is mostly verbal or through media, as opposed to a more design-based artistic propaganda. However, the art-based propaganda which does exist focuses on censorship: all objects of cultural value, including art, are deemed dangerous and consequently incinerated. The act of vilifying art for causing taboo emotions, and snowballing the human condition into war, is itself propaganda. [103] Thus, art becomes propaganda against its own existence. As such, art is represented as something dangerous—this is seemingly a more heightened version of the treatment of (modern) art during the 1920s to 1940s by the NSDAP, the Fascists, and the Communists.

In Marco Brambilla's *Demolition Man*, after an unsuccessful hostage rescue attempt, Los Angeles police officer John Spartan is sentenced alongside the criminal Simon Phoenix to be cryogenically frozen. Over thirty years later, Phoenix escapes during a routine check-up and begins to terrorize the city, now called San Angeles. As the police force no longer possesses the skills to apprehend Phoenix, Spartan is thawed out to assist. The propaganda in *Demolition Man* is treated similarly to the previous two films. The San Angeles government promotes two messages throughout the film: "Be well" and "Safety above all." The former is used as a greeting between

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[102] Namely, George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). All three novels depict restrictive totalitarian societies, where censorship is strong, and the public is monitored.

[103] It is important to note the importance of the anti-emotion propaganda in Libria and its use to indoctrinate the population into subservience. People are encouraged to report suspicious persons to the force (as in the Soviet—see Miller, Bowlt and Sarabyanov, and Todorov). They are brainwashed into trusting that Prozium II and the Council exist for their own well-being and protection from the hardships of human nature. Through propaganda campaigns, feelings have been portrayed as a purely negative trait, without any redeeming factors.

people and is featured on propaganda images.[104] As in *V for Vendetta*, the propaganda in *Demolition Man* has penetrated the average household. Images inscribed with "Be well" can be seen even as a screensaver image on Spartan's home TV screen (Fig. 3.5). This propaganda is everywhere—from people's homes to their speech. There is no "safe" space in which one can think as they wish, not even in private, without being reminded of the government.[105]

A key propaganda piece is the San Angeles History Museum, which represents the decayed state in which Los Angeles used to exist and contrasts it against the San Angeles decades later. Art portraying the destruction and violence of the twentieth century and all artefacts displayed are used to cement the idea that the current state of the city is the ultimate improvement (Fig. 3.6 and Fig. 3.7). The museum also works to further enforce the idea that San Angeles' leader, Dr. Raymond Cocteau, is the city's hero: as he took advantage of violence and destruction, allowing San Angeles to rise like a phoenix from its ashes.

Both *Fahrenheit 451* films are based on Ray Bradbury's 1953 novel. *Fahrenheit 451* presents a world where all written word is banned. Books are burned and only images can be used to tell stories. The Firemen, who have long forgotten their true purpose of extinguishing fires, instead burn books in a manner evocative of the book burnings in the Third Reich. They act as a form of law enforcement, punishing anyone who breaks the reading ban. Similar to *Equilibrium*, the main character, Guy Montag, becomes tempted by this banned culture. When he discovers the government's true nature after witnessing a woman's dying message be censored for television, thus hiding the truth from the public, he rebels and joins the forces trying to keep knowledge and culture alive for future generations.

In François Truffaut's 1966 version, there is little visual, and even verbal, propaganda. The Firemen's motto, "We burn them to ashes and then burn the ashes," is one of two indoctrinating messages used, and shows the level of indoctrination which exists amongst the Firemen. They are taught to hate books for their uselessness and propensity for trouble.[106] In a scene which depicts a class for Firemen trainees, no propaganda is shown or covered. Although it is clear that effort has

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[104] There is minimal decorative or artistic design throughout San Angeles to match the minimalist aesthetic common in futuristic films. While propagandistic posters do not exist, propaganda is displayed digitally.

[105] It is unclear if "Safety above all" is a government message or one specific to the police force, but it is just as widespread as "Be well."

[106] Similar to *Equilibrium*, book content is determined to cause upset which could escalate to violent retaliation, therefore in order to keep the nation happy, all books are banned)

been put into indoctrinating the Firemen during their training, so that they do not question their role in censoring the world, all the scene portrays is learning how to find hidden books. The other propagandistic message is a campaign called "Report those who threaten you," which promotes civil vigilance and loyalty to the overall cause of the government. What media exists is not used to spread propaganda as in *V for Vendetta* and *Equilibrium*. Instead, it is dull in content—engaging just enough to keep people occupied and compliant.

In Ramin Bahrani's 2018 adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*, the general sense of the novel has been kept, as with Truffaut's counterpart, however, there are some differences. While in this adaptation, books and written word are still banned, it is more obvious how the public is indoctrinated into vilifying written word. A school assembly scene shows schoolchildren screaming and booing at the sight of prop books which Montag uses for a demonstration. They cheer when he burns the books. The propagandistic message of the Firemen as creators of fire rather than its extinguishers is stronger in this film, yet it is not supported by any artistic form other than the televised book burnings. Symbols are more commonly used as visual propaganda in this film than in Truffaut's version. In a world where writing is no longer used for anything other than social media, symbols are everywhere, facilitating the creation of propaganda messages. Slogans such as, "Stay vivid," "Freedom is choice," and "See something, say something," (Fig. 3.8) are reminiscent of slogans previously discussed in this chapter. These messages are everywhere, although they appear in digital and holographic forms, instead of the more commonly seen medium of paper. The reasoning for this seems to stem from an overall ban on paper and writing utensils, as all communication is digital with an emphasis on social media and live stream projections. As in Truffaut's film, as well as in *Equilibrium*, all books are deemed equally "bad", primarily because they cause rifts between groups of people, which could have serious consequences. They are deemed useless and are heavily shortened and censored via the use of symbols. In this way, a novel such as *Moby Dick* can be shortened into a single paragraph (Fig. 3.9).

Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* is a satirical adaptation of dystopian films, such as *1984*, as well as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). The film follows Sam Lowry, an unassuming bureaucrat at the Ministry of Information whose haunting dreams start to interfere with his daily life as people he dreams about begin to appear in reality. Together, they escape the nightmarish reality of a capitalist society and towards the freedom which Sam literally dreamt of. Visual culture

in *Brazil* exists primarily as government propaganda. While there are some visuals present—black and white photographs of famous Golden Age actresses, notably Marlene Dietrich, in Sam's apartment (Fig. 3.10)—the majority of visual content present is propaganda. These posters reflect the group mentality encouraged by the government and enforced by the people—with examples such as: "Suspicion breeds confidence," "Information: the key to prosperity," "Central Services: we do the work, you do the pleasure," and "Be safe, be suspicious" (Fig. 3.11). It is fitting that these messages are spread throughout the Ministry of Information, whose main purpose is, essentially, the gathering, organizing, and processing of information. No action can be taken without filling out the proper forms ("Information…") and the buildings are heavily monitored ("Suspicion…").

In *Equilibrium*, both *Fahrenheit 451* films, and even *V for Vendetta*, the most prominent use of art as propaganda is in the propaganda *against* art. In *Equilibrium*, all culture is banned because emotions are banned for being dangerous. As it can be seen in Preston's transformation when he stops taking Prozium II, cultural objects cause emotional outbursts, which are deemed unsafe by the government. In *Fahrenheit 451*, books are burned because they used to cause discords between people, so all written word has been banned to prevent that and keep people complicit. While there are some differences as to how each film tackles the book bans and the visual representation of culture, the overarching idea is that, as in *Equilibrium*, culture (and art in particular) incites feelings, which can be dangerous if they lead to disagreements. Thus, art and culture are vilified and unless they can be censored, are banned.

II. SYMBOLOGY

It is not necessary to provide context for the swastika, the *fasces*, and the hammer and sickle in order to recognize the regimes and ideologies they represent.[107] This is due to the intensive propaganda action taken by each of the three regimes—the symbols were everywhere, penetrating the nations through every aspect of their culture, from architecture to home decoration.[108] Similar

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[107] *Fasces* (trans. "the axe"): an ancient Roman symbol of power and authority, chosen by Mussolini to represent his political regime. Mussolini used the symbol to reinforce his promise to return Italy to its former greatness by modelling it after Rome. See Britannica, "Fasces," Visual Arts—Decorative Art, 2015. https://www.britannica.com/topic/fasces (Accessed 25 April 2020.)

[108] The *fasces* were incorporated into all aspects of material culture, appearing on jewelry, desk accessories, letterheads, lamps, and architecture. See Dennis P. Doordan, "In the shadow of the fasces: political design in Fascist Italy," *Design Issues*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1997): 42-43.

symbols appear in each of the films, however with varying degrees of propagandistic intent. These symbols can be organized into two categories: (1) appropriated quasi-religious symbols of the Party (*V for Vendetta* and *Equilibrium*), and (2) symbols of the public servants (*Brazil*, *Demolition Man*, *Fahrenheit 451*). The appropriation of symbols can be seen in the Third Reich and in Fascist Italy. The swastika, traditionally a Hindu symbol (Fig. 2.1), gained traction as a symbol for antisemitic, *völkisch*, and reactionary groups in the early years of the twentieth century.[109] However, the symbol became synonymous with the NSDAP during the course of its leadership, its constant presence—a sign of the party's ubiquitous existence in all aspects of German life. Similarly, the *fasces* (Fig. 2.2) was appropriated from ancient Rome and not only became the symbol of the Fascist Party but also provided it with its name.[110] The symbol was another example of Mussolini's attempts to rekindle Italy with its Roman past.[111]

In *V for Vendetta* and *Equilibrium*, both regimes' sigils are variations of a cross (Fig. 3.12 and Fig. 3.13), similarly appropriated into representing the regimes and transforming it into a staple of political propaganda. The Norsefire sigil appears as a stylized version of the Orthodox cross (Fig. 2.3), whereas the sigil of the Tetragrammaton Council bears similarity to a stylized Greek cross (Fig. 2.4) (while also bearing similarities to the swastika due to its square dimensions). As with the swastika, these appear to be religious symbols appropriated by the ruling party, and with slight stylistic alterations have become the symbol associated with the totalitarian regime.[112] In *V for Vendetta*, apart from its use on flags during political rallies, police badges, and arm bands worn by the armed forces, the sigil is used to mark each official government document or propaganda poster, (Fig. 3.1). Its omnipresence in every aspect of public and private life draws attention to the similarities between the continuous surveillance of a nation ruled in tyranny by the Norsefire and its NSDAP counterpart. The Tetragrammaton Council's cross is just as prominent, with the Council having gone as far as integrating it into architecture (Fig. 3.13)—highlighting the importance architecture plays in reconstructing a nation to match the regime's ideologies. The Council's cross appears on flags and is even painted on the floor of Father's office (Fig. 3.14). This, along with the Norsefire's cross, and the aforementioned constant integration of the swastika, *fasces*, and the hammer and sickle, appears to be an example of the finest propaganda described

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[109] Kasher, 48-50.
[110] Britannica, "Fasces".
[111] See Adamson.
[112] The swastika was rotated 45 degrees from its original appearance in Hinduism.

by Goebbels, as quoted in the beginning of this chapter. It is the kind of propaganda which penetrates every aspect of daily life, spreading its message stealthily, under the radar of the general public.

The second category of symbols—the sigils of public servants—can be related to the Soviet hammer and sickle (Fig. 2.5). While the hammer and sickle were also thoroughly spread out into Soviet material culture, they differ from the swastika and *fasces* by having a contemporary representational meaning: the hammer represented Soviet workers, whereas the sickle represented Soviet farmers and peasantry.[113] This sigil was commonly seen on flags and currencies, and is now easily recognizable as a symbol of Communism and the Soviet lifestyle. In the case of *Demolition Man*, the only sigil seen is that of the police force, worn as uniform badges, and used as decorative accents on walls and doors inside the police station. The sigil appears as a futuristic and stylized shield badge (Fig. 3.15), a more intricate design than the crosses used by the Norsefire and the Tetragrammaton Council. In *Fahrenheit 451*, this is similar—the only symbol seen represents the Firefighters, who are not the leading government but the executors of its laws. In both adaptations, the sigil is a stylized salamander (Fig. 3.16 and Fig. 3.17), and the number 451 is present throughout. In Truffaut's adaptation, the Firemen wear the number as an armband (Fig. 3.18) similarly to the forces in *V for Vendetta* wearing the Norsefire cross, reminiscent of the SS-armbands in the Third Reich. In both the 1966 and 2018 versions, the salamander sigil is used on Firefighter buildings and trucks, highlighting Firefighter property. However, unlike in *V for Vendetta* and *Equilibrium*, these sigils are not used to signify the power and reach that the regime has; instead, they are simply used to identify a group subservient to the government. *Brazil* presents a similar case, in that the only sigil seen represents a subdivision of the government as opposed to the party itself. To adhere to the anti-capitalist nature of the film, the initials "M.O.I." (Ministry of Information) are stamped on all objects within the Ministry (Fig. 3.19).[114] A different sigil representing the Ministry is stamped on every propaganda poster which appears in the film (Fig. 3.20). The ubiquitous nature of both sigils is similar to that of the Norsefire's and Tetragrammaton

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[113] Nikša Sviličić and Pero Maldini, "Visual persuasion and politics: ideology and symbols of the totalitarian regimes—case study: hammer and sickle," *Collegium Antropologicum*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2013): 579.

[114] The film is a satirical interpretation of dystopian narratives. It also presents Sam's world as very narcissistic and capitalist, with scenes such as a young child asking a mall Santa for her own credit card. Bureaucracy plays a key role in the film, as regularly actions are postponed until the appropriate forms are filled out, and characters consistently shift responsibilities to others, as it is "not in their department."

Council's crosses, and as such is reminiscent of the use of Party sigils in the Third Reich, Italy, and the Soviet Union.

III. THE PARTY AS RELIGION

One of the main roles of art as used by totalitarian regimes was to reinforce the regime's status as the new religion which should be worshipped by the nation. This can be seen in different forms in the Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and Soviet Russia. As discussed in the previous chapter, Todorov describes the leaders of these nations as examples of Plato's concept of the politician-artist. By taking on the role of the creators of their nations, they subsequently embody the role of the ultimate creator—God. Todorov continues:

> [The people] were asked to worship and be a part of a new religion, but that religion was not art. In Italy, it was the nation/state, in Germany, it was the people, in Russia, it was Communism. Everything was shaped based on these new "gods."[115]

Each regime had a goal for its nation, and propaganda was necessary to achieve said goal and indoctrinate the people into worship similar to that found in religion. An example of how the state was presented as a new religion, as Todorov describes it, is the *Apotheosis of Fascism* (1942) (Fig. 1.4) painted by Luigi Montanarini, a Florentine artist. The mural is an example of Fascist monumental art, and is located at the headquarters of the Italian National Olympic Committee at the *Foro Italico* in Rome.[116] The composition depicts Mussolini as a godlike figure, surrounded by his followers and party members looking on at him in admiration. The mural includes symbolism alluding to Fascism's Roman origins. Communism is depicted as well—a grotesque warrior laying in defeat at the feet of Fascism.[117] This propaganda piece depicts Mussolini's power and the Italian greatness he strove to restore through a rebirth of the nation. The religious symbolism adds to Todorov's comparison of the Party and State as the new religion people were

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[115] Todorov, 64.

[116] Known as the *Foro Mussolini* during his rule.

[117] This imagery is akin to the scene of St. George slaying the dragon, and depicts Fascism as a powerful regime which will bring the end of the "enemies" to the state it strives to be. See Nick Carter and Simon Martin, "The management and memory of fascist monumental art in postwar and contemporary Italy: the case of Luigi Montanarini's *Apotheosis of Fascism*," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 22, no. 3 (2017): 338-339.

made to worship through propaganda, such as the *Apotheosis*. The Fascist Party used themes and imagery that were familiar to the people to support their ideology and politicize people's beliefs.[118]

A similar concept of propagandizing the regime as something to be worshipped can be seen in most of the films as well. In *V for Vendetta*, Chancellor Sutler's portrait is present in every household, including a retirement home, evoking the imagery of a religious icon (Fig. 3.21 and Fig. 3.22). He is the ubiquitous, all-seeing leader, who looks over each household as if monitoring their loyalty. In the 2018 version of *Fahrenheit 451*, the Firemen are treated as saviours who help people improve as a society by burning books and other material culture which may be upsetting in any way. Their burnings are broadcast live on the largest skyscrapers in the city for everyone to see (Fig. 3.23). Although the Firemen are not the ruling party of that nation, through these larger-than-life broadcasts, they are elevated to the same level of authority and omnipotence as Chancellor Sutler or Father.

In *Equilibrium*, as in *V for Vendetta*, Father's speeches are broadcast to every household and public space. Unlike Chancellor Sutler, however, Father is never seen in public, which further emphasizes his mythical presence in addition to his name, again evoking an image similar to Todorov's and Plato's politician-artist. Father is the creator of Libria, and he watches over it the way God is perceived to do. Father's very existence is propaganda in itself. It is discovered in the climax of the film that he had been dead for years, and the Council had elected a replacement whose image would be altered to resemble Father's using digital effects. Thus, "Father" would be able to continue making speeches and governing Libria.

In *Demolition Man*, the imagery of a leader as a religious figure is subtle, but it exists in the little propaganda seen throughout the film. In a scene set at the police headquarters, there is a series of screens set into the walls, which depict Cocteau in a manner which illustrates the religious importance placed upon each regime's leaders. Fig. 3.24 shows Cocteau dressed in white in front of a sky background, his arms spread out in a Christlike pose, wishing everyone to "Be well". The image portrays Cocteau as a godlike and good person, as if he is blessing the citizens of San Angeles. Cocteau is praised as the hero who helped San Angeles thrive after its destruction in the early years of the 21st century, despite his characterization as the true antagonist in the film.

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[118] Doordan, 40-41.

Propaganda such as the ones used in each film allow for the further indoctrination of each nation and enforce the worship of dictators.

IV. VISUAL PROPAGANDA AND ONE TRUE ART STYLE

Although the films feature art bans, or bans on material culture, there is no government-approved art which replaces what has been eliminated, and to which artists must adhere. The bans are more all-encompassing in the films than in the Third Reich, Italy, or Soviet Russia, and focus on censorship without replacement. In the case of the films, there is no example of a "one true art form", such as *völkisch* art or socialist realism. In *V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium*, and *Fahrenheit 451*, visual art forms, music, film, and other examples of material culture are banned either for their negative effects on the status quo or due to personal preference of the political leaders.[119] However, as artworks are blacklisted, they are not replaced by a different style. Once the art disappears, the nation becomes more barren. Styles such as *völkisch* and socialist realism benefited by being the only government-sanctioned art styles, and became government propaganda, providing physical examples of the cultural upheaval that the regimes strove for. In these films, however, the only propaganda seen is the lack of art and culture, which in turn ensures that people have no inspiration for a life other than the one dictated to them by the government.

Art and propaganda have an intertwined relationship in each of the three totalitarian regimes discussed. Aspects of this relationship are explored in each of the films differently, in ways that would complement the regime that is portrayed. In the case of regimes, such as those in *V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium*, and even *Fahrenheit 451*, which appear to have borrowed more characteristics from the three historical regimes, more aspects are portrayed, allowing for a stronger and more recognizable resemblance. These fictional regimes do not simply use art bans as their most recognizable characteristic of historical regimes. Instead, they borrow stylistic details such as the importance of omnipresent government sigils, as well as propagandistic designs and slogans, which are used to spread the government's ideologies and ensure the indoctrination of the nation by penetrating people's public and private lives. However, it is important to note that where cultural bans exist, they are more total than the ones that existed in the Third Reich, Soviet Russia,

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[119] Chancellor Sutler orders the blacklisting of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* (1880) after V uses it as a background theme to his explosion of the Old Bailey (the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales). There is an understated concern that the melody will be associated with the rebellious act and the government blacklists it to avoid further uprisings.

and Italy—where one aspect of material culture was deemed inappropriate, any other aspect similar to it would also be banned without replacement of a more acceptable style. In the cases of *Brazil* and *Demolition Man*, the similarities are less noticeable, as there are fewer overall bans of culture present; instead, propagandistic messages are dispersed throughout the city, usually in the form of posters, which act as reinforcement of the indoctrination in place.

CHAPTER III

CENSORSHIP: DEGENERATE AND FORBIDDEN ART

Changes of regimes can also lead to a quiet—or in the cases of the toppling of statues of past leaders a very public and newsworthy—culling of art favoured by previous governments…

…Major artworks can serve as 'memory-objects,' forming connections between people, their experiences and values, their past and the future, in ways that many feel go beyond the rights of specific individuals, whatever the law may say.

—Jennifer Mundy[120]

Totalitarian regimes such as the Third Reich, and even Soviet Russia, used the idea of "degenerate art" to dictate what styles of art were and were not acceptable as part of their cultural revolutions. In the Third Reich especially, this anti-modernist action was strong, with modernist artworks displayed in Degenerate Art exhibitions, and the active persecution of modernist artists by the government. Art was looted, sold forcibly, and sometimes destroyed, with the goals of restoring German nationalist pride exemplified in Reich-approved art styles. In Russia, art was heavily monitored to ensure loyalty to the Party. Artists who did not comply were blacklisted and struggled financially as their professional demands were not met with the government's support. This chapter explores how totalitarian regimes use concepts such as degenerate art to censor culture and create a cultural landscape that fits their ideologies. Various degrees of art censorship can be seen in all six films, As *Demolition Man* and *Brazil* focus more on propaganda, this chapter will deal primarily with *V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium*, and both *Fahrenheit 451* films. First, the historical context of degenerate art and cultural degeneration will be explained in greater depth, followed by a discussion on the representation of degenerate, blacklisted, and censored art in the films, showing that aspects of this representation are present in the historical context outlined in the previous two chapters. While art in the chosen films is used to hint at historical context, such as through their portrayals of looting and propaganda, there is an intrinsic, symbolic aspect of its representation as well.

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[120] Mundy, 12-13.

## I.	DEGENERATE ART: BEHIND THE NAME

Art historian Olaf Peters (2016) defines degenerate art in the Third Reich as "the extreme example of a state-run campaign against modern art as the precursor or prerequisite to a parallel attempt to impose the National Socialist conception of art by force."[121] Through the degenerate art campaign, the NSDAP was able to censor art and curate it in a propagandistic manner by vilifying certain styles, such as modernism, in comparison to *völkisch* art, which was praised. The concept of degeneration came to fruition in the Third Reich and was principally a German concept. However, in the Soviet, there were unacceptable and blacklisted art styles as well, which were treated negatively as being anti-Soviet, and leading to consequences for the artists who created them.

The concept of cultural degeneration was popularized by Max Nordau (1849-1923), a trained physician who argued that degeneration was a mental illness.[122] Nordau is known as the father of racial hygiene (*Rassenhygiene*) due to his published work on the topic of Social Darwinism and maintaining the health of the people (*Volksgesundheit*) through selective breeding.[123] He believed that degeneration was due to the constant and rapid changes to modern civilization, to which some people were unable to adapt at the same pace. Thus, modern art and literature, according to Nordau, was "almost without exception…sick, degenerate, and hence in need of therapy."[124] He targeted avant-garde art and literature as the central cause for this diagnosis of degeneration; he considered them character deficits—a stark difference from how they were accepted as works of intellectual genius until then. Nordau called it a "severe mental epidemic," however he believed that, as per Social Darwinism, the weak or degenerate would soon evolve out of existence:

> Degenerates, hysterics, and neurasthenics are not capable of adaptation. Therefore they are fated to disappear. That which inexorably destroys them is that they do not know how to come to terms with reality.[125]

Thus, the concept of cultural degeneration became a scientific way of arguing against artists and certain works of art, especially modernism. Art groups, such as the German Art Society, adopted this idea as evidence in support of *völkisch* art. This was subsequently appropriated by the NSDAP

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[121] Peters, 42.
[122] Ibid., 42-43.
[123] Ibid., 43.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Quoted in Ibid., 44-45.

as it supported the party's own racist ideologies. However, this concept of degenerate art existed only in the Third Reich; in the Soviet, art was censored primarily based on politics, rather than on racial ideologies; artists were censored for creating works that could be construed to show defiance against Communism or the government. Degenerate art essentially became a convincing tactic for the NSDAP to promote the racial bias of the party and accumulate supporters, such as the Society.

The second person that Peters discusses as having provided the building blocks of National Socialist degenerate art action, was architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg (1869-1949). Schultze-Naumburg wrote *Art and Race* (*Kunst und Rasse*) in 1928, the premise of which followed in Nordau's footsteps, with ideas on the mental and physical degradation of the contemporary people. In it, Schultze-Naumurg writes that the "body of the people is physically and mentally different in orientation and healthier; only today's art is one-sidedly focused on manifestations of decline and degeneration."[126] The 1934 reprint of the book included additional praise for Hitler for driving away Jewish people from their positions of power, and praising eugenics. Peters emphasizes that Schultze-Naumburg's work shows that he recognized that governmental influence and pressure would be necessary to successfully convince the nation to accept racial ideas and act upon them.[127] Apart from including examples depicting unhealthy and degenerate beings, Schultze-Naumburg dissected what a good, healthy type would look like—the "Nordic type."[128] He argued that art should depict this good type and ignore the degenerate type presented by modernism and the avant-garde. Schultze-Naumburg also emphasized the ties between the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) and degenerate art, and that effort must be made to move away from this and towards a more idyllic goal. This idea matched the NSDAP's and Society's stance in opposition to the Weimar Republic, which they blamed for having destroyed German culture.[129]

The concepts of degenerate art and cultural degeneration specifically referred to Germany, and were predominantly an argument of race and the racial superiority of an Aryan Germany. In the six films, however, this is not the case, since none of the films outright mention Germany, nor do they present their arguments for banning cultural works as racially charged. This is why, for this thesis the term "degenerate", as it is understood from the historical background above, has been

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[126] Schultze-Naumburg quoted in Peters, 50.
[127] Ibid., pp. 11, quoted in Ibid., 51
[128] Ibid., 52-53.
[129] Clinefelter, 43.

used interchangeably with any "blacklisted" art or art "deemed inappropriate" by the government, so as to be able to forge deeper comparisons. This decision is supported by the concept of Soviet blacklisted art, which was banned for different reasons than degenerate art in the Third Reich— mainly the idea that art in the Soviet was either for or against the State. Soviet art existed to support the State and its ideologies and would manifest said ideologies into works which would be easily consumed by the public. Thus, while the Third Reich and the Soviet governments used different terminology to describe art which disagreed with them, they were essentially referring to the same concept and as such, either term will be used.

This chapter analyzes how degenerate art is represented in each of the films and discusses it in comparison to the literature on degenerate art from the 1920s to the 1940s. As it will be seen, some of the films, such as *V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium*, and *Fahrenheit 451* treat art and culture differently than *Brazil* and *Demolition Man*, however it is important to note once again that the similarities between the first four films could be attributed to the fact that the majority of the material which has inspired them is the same. That being said, the way culture is explained and represented in each film differs and contributes to the narrative of art and totalitarianism. Further into this chapter, the idea of the total cultural ban in the films will be explored in relation to the bans seen in the Third Reich and the Soviet.

II.   HOW DEGENERATE ART IS REPRESENTED IN THE FILMS

As discussed in chapter two, in *Equilibrium* everything that makes a person feel any emotions is banned. As such, all art and other cultural objects, such as music, film, books, and even decorative furniture, are illegal. Prozium II is taken to chemically suppress emotions and keep the population monotone and submissive. Those who choose to not take the medicine take on the role of protectors of culture. They amass art collections and protect them from the Grammaton Cleric, in hopes to preserve them for future generations. The film opens with a scene set in an abandoned building outside of the city walls. A group of rebels have tried to save many artistic, literary, and musical works that were censored (Fig. 3.25). The collection is discovered, the rebels are all executed by the Grammaton Cleric, and all artworks are burned. If a work is thought to be important in finding more information on the rebels, it will be collected, examined, and sorted, only to eventually still be destroyed. There is a list of condemned objects, which is updated occasionally. Included are music, strategy-based or interactive computer programs, and paintings. This method of censorship,

in which the list of censored objects is all-encompassing, yet built over time, is similar to the methods used by the Norsefire in *V for Vendetta*. In both films, censorship covers most aspects of material culture; however, occasionally new objects are blacklisted.

There is a drastic difference in the treatment of art in civilian homes compared to Father's office in *Equilibrium*. Households are plain and minimalist, with few furniture pieces (Fig. 3.26). There is no decoration on the white walls or ornamental design in the furniture. In comparison, Father's office is grand and luxurious, with colourful walls and decorated columns (Fig. 3.27). The windows are large and covered in rich drapes. There are bird cages, marble floors, and a crystal chandelier. Most striking are the large framed paintings which hang on the walls. This contrast is reminiscent of the way that art was censored in the Third Reich, but some NSDAP officials took advantage of the lootings and amassed personal collections. It does not become quite clear how the artworks in Father's office were sourced and whether they had been appropriated from loots. However, the parallels in power dynamic between Libria and the Third Reich are clear.

V for Vendetta presents degenerate art in two distinct cases: V's Shadow Gallery, and Gordon Dietrich's collection. The Shadow Gallery houses all types of cultural objects, from paintings to sculptures, film, books, and even a functioning jukebox (Fig. 3.28). There are also film posters, framed butterflies, a piano, a chess set, and comic books. The collection was primarily obtained, according to V, by raiding the Ministry's storage of looted art. V's collection is one way in which he rebels against the Norsefire—by embodying everything that they oppose and preserving the works of artists who had been censored. His direct defiance of the Party's censorship is his way of reclaiming culture and power for the people. The collection is also a testament to him as a character, showing that he is an intelligent and cultured person, despite his tragic backstory. Dietrich's collection was amassed differently from V's. He explains to Evey that it was expensive to source, and even if some pieces are of no personal significance, such as a copy of the Koran, they carry enough cultural significance to be worth protecting.[130] There is also anti-government propaganda, directly targeting Chancellor Sutler (Fig. 3.29), which was a rare acquisition for Dietrich as it was believed that the Norsefire had destroyed all copies. Apart from the Koran, there other various religious objects, such as a Buddha figurine. There is also homosexual erotica—

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[130] Dietrich owns the Koran despite not being Muslim due to said cultural significance. This is important because owning the book poses great risk, as Islam is one of the leading reasons for persecution, yet he accepts the risk for a greater cause, a decision which eventually costs him his life.

another illegal piece. In summary, V's and Dietrich's collections represent a microcosm of all that is considered dangerous by the Norsefire: religion, homosexuality, anti-government propaganda—that is to say, cultural deviance and freedom of thought. As such, these collections, while dangerous, are important to the cultural landscape of the film.

In contrast to V's and Dietrich's homes, Evey's apartment is plain. It is not completely devoid of art, unlike Preston's home in *Equilibrium*; there are paintings visible (Fig. 3.30). This further solidifies the idea that cultural works are not banned at once but gradually, whenever Chancellor Sutler decides that a piece is no longer appropriate for the public. Society is not as minimalist as in *Equilibrium*. The censorship enforced by the Norsefire is much more realistic: with some aspects of culture are deemed more inappropriate and consequently banned, whereas others, which are not seen as threatening for the public, are not. This gradual censorship is likelier to garner only passive interest from the public, and likely will not cause any outrage. What is notable, however, is that any artworks that are recognizable to the viewer are found solely in V's and Dietrich's degenerate collections. This includes real artworks and sculptures, references to major religions, classic films, and well-known literary works.[131] In all other households, while not completely devoid of decoration as in *Equilibrium*, what art is visible is usually simple and unrecognizable—this signifies that it is the censored art that has emotional and cultural meaning.

Equilibrium and *V for Vendetta* make it clear that all forms of culture representing creative thought and freedom of expression could be dangerous, and must therefore be censored and banned. *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), on the other hand, focuses primarily on the written word. Books are rubbish, according to Montag, as they make people unhappy, disturb them, and make them antisocial, therefore all books must be eliminated to ensure a content nation. As such, houses are raided and culprits who are found hiding books are arrested or killed. Even the smallest books are confiscated by the Firemen. As with *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta*, rebels hide their secret collections in their homes, which are subsequently raided by the Firemen. A successful loot is burned on the spot, without taking any evidence back to the precinct for examination. The stigma surrounding reading is strong enough to break trust within families—when Montag's wife discovers his hidden collection, she threatens him and states that she wants the books out of her

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[131] Some examples include the *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) by Jan van Eyck (1390-1441), *Puberty* (1894-95) by Edvard Munch (1863-1944), and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1934) directed by Rowland V. Lee.

home. Eventually, she calls the Firemen, who raid their home, despite Montag's good reputation as a Fireman. The level of indoctrination present in the population is strong, successfully vilifying books to the extent that their presence causes significant distress to the everyday citizen.

Despite the clear ban on literature, there are distinct differences in the use of visual art between everyday citizens and the "Book People."[132] These differences are not explicitly addressed, but add to the understanding of how art is treated in this society. Montag's house is plain and minimalist in design, devoid of decoration apart from some decorative vases (Fig. 3.31). In the Firemen's precinct, the only art or decoration present is propaganda art featuring the Firemen (Fig. 3.18), or other Firemen-related objects, such as a toy firetruck. Similarly, in a café scene, which does not appear to be part of the precinct, the only artworks also depict Firemen (Fig. 3.32). In contrast, the house of one of the Book People is heavily decorated with colourful wallpaper and many artworks on the walls. This contrast hints at the possibility that all art is censored except the art that glorifies those who censor; as in *V for Vendetta*, when artworks are deemed to go against political ideologies, they become censored. In *Fahrenheit 451*, while images do exist, they have two functions: glorifying the Firemen and replacing written text (Fig. 3.33). Thus, art functions as documentation, as in *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta*. People read books because it is forbidden to do so. The Book People memorize what they read and then burn the books. This allows them to pass on the stories to the next generations of Book People, but ensure that no evidence is left, to avoid suspicion. This concept is also seen in the 2018 adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*.

In *Fahrenheit 451* (2018), the world is more technology- and social media-based than its 1966 counterpart. People use their phones constantly; daily life is streamed online at all times—be it on a bathroom mirror-screen or on the city's skyscrapers for all to see. Like the 1966 version, written word no longer exists—instead, books are "translated" into heavily censored emoji-based synopses. Unlike the earlier film, however, there is still some writing-based communication, mainly texting. People comment and react on each other's posts; however, paper and writing are illegal.[133] As books are banned, a group of rebels (the Book People in this film are referred to as "Eels") is seen uploading digitized books to a safe drive during a Firemen raid. The drives are

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[132] The Book People are the rebel groups who illegally possess and read books.

[133] The only writing that is seen happens in secret. Captain Beatty, Montag's boss, keeps a box of paper and a pen hidden in his office, which he occasionally uses to write down thoughts and memories. This is kept secret and eventually he burns all the evidence, signifying that he chooses the government over his clear fascination with books.

burned publicly in a similar manner to the earlier film; however, instead of imprisonment or death, the culprits' identities are erased. While they are left alive, their personal data is gone, making it impossible to survive in the city as regular citizens, thus suffering a digital death. When Montag's hidden collection is discovered, he is forced to burn it himself in a live-streamed public shaming. As with the 1966 version, the Eels have a plan to protect books through memorization, however, this plan is furthered through science. In both films, the Book People or Eels each memorize a book, which they subsequently embody and are able to pass down to the next generation. However, in the 2018 film, there is another project—OMNIS.[134] Through OMNIS, each book is encoded as genetic information and integrated into the DNA of a bird, with the goal of replicating the process on more animals and allowing for natural procreation to spread the information.

There is a difference in the treatment of visual art and decoration between Eels and regular citizens (such as Montag) in comparison to the 1966 version of the film. In the 2018 version, there appears to be one artwork that the Firemen discover in the house of "*Grapes of Wrath*".[135] However, this world appears to be predominantly devoid of art. Unlike the art seen in the café and precinct in the 1966 film, there does not exist any propaganda art depicting the firemen.[136] Art in general is not used; even eel houses, such as that of "*Grapes of Wrath*", although much more heavily decorated than Montag's house, for example, are mostly devoid of artworks. Captain Beatty's office, as in the 1966 film, is decorated with Firemen memorabilia, but no visual artworks are present (Fig. 3.34). Overall, there is a larger emphasis on literature and writing than any other form of material culture in this film.

All four films use art to represent rebellion. Although it is illegal to own artworks or other pieces of material culture, with severe consequences for people who are caught in possession, people continue to store art as an act of defiance towards the governing powers. In a way, through its preservation, art is also used as documentation—as rebels take control over historical documentation, they take away from the government's ability to fabricate the past. Art becomes a way of documenting a world that no longer exists, representing a future for the resistance to strive for—a life post-revolution.

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[134] From the Latin, *omnis*, meaning "all".

[135] When Eels memorize a book, they begin referring to themselves as its title or author. Apart from "*Grapes of Wrath*", others are known as "Toni Morrison", "Chairman Mao", "Van Gogh", and "James Baldwin".

[136] As discussed in the previous chapter, all propaganda has been digitized and projected on buildings or as holograms.

III.   THE ROLE OF DEGENERATE ART

The role of art in reality has so far been defined into several aspects: the supposed inspiration for totalitarian leaders; as a way of censorship and supporting a political agenda; and as a way for the expression and suppression of the public's voice. The concept of degenerate art agrees with two of these three aspects. Through the creation of the "other" (degenerate art), a contrast is created which works to highlight the desired outcome (art supporting the regime). When an authority creates such contrast for the public and does not allow for divergence from these preestablished opinions without the threat of consequence, then said authority is totalitarian in nature. The use of art to shape societal and political culture allows for the regime to slink into the nation's everyday lives. Thus, a parallel is formed between the role played by degenerate art historically and how it is represented in the films. In the films, art is not simply used in the background—it helps drive a narrative and allows the viewer to draw conclusions and make comparisons to the historical regimes from which these films daw inspiration.

In films featuring a totalitarian regime, art and culture will be heavily controlled. However, art will be used to send a message to the film's audience in order to ground the story, making it more identifiable and relatable.[137] When watching the six films, it is easy to note the surface-level usage of art: propaganda messages, looting, and hidden collections. However, looking at art symbolically creates a paradigm which changes the way the artistic narrative is viewed because it represents art in a different light. In all six films, art is a symbol of rebellion, giving the protagonists and other rebel forces the sense of a future beyond the regime—it brings hope. The most important question to ask when illustrating this is, *Who owns the art?* The answer, as provided by the films, is split into three categories: (1) the "degenerates", (2) the rebellion, and (3) the power. These categories are present at varying degrees in all six films.

Art implies that the character who interacts with it (1) will rebel against the regime in the near future, or (2) has already rebelled. *V for Vendetta* represents this most clearly. In the film, we see a man (V) imprisoned and experimented on, which changes him to become both physically and intrinsically different from the rest of the population. He is a menace to the government—a

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[137] For more on the concept of "identification through impersonation", see *Mirroring evil: Nazi imagery/recent art*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt (The Jewish Museum: New York, Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, New Jersey, London, 2002): 17-38.

"degenerate" who fights against the regime, but who also owns the largest collection of art outside of government storage. We see another man (Dietrich) who has to keep his true self hidden because homosexuality is illegal, so his collection becomes his way of rebelling—owning the last copy of an anti-government propaganda campaign so strong, the Norsefire had to destroy every poster in order to feel safe in its power. Dietrich's secret cache becomes the only place where he could truly be himself, a "degenerate". We also see art, albeit unrecognizable and unimposing, in the apartment of the person who most significantly changes their stance on the government during the run of the film—Evey. For Evey, art acts as a signifier that she is unlike the rest of the public—a premonition of her rise to rebellion, ultimately completing V's plan of blowing up Parliament and bringing the Norsefire to an end. She is ostracized from society through her association with V and her subsequent rebellion, and as such she is also a "degenerate".

V for Vendetta shows that degeneracy and rebellion often go hand-in-hand, despite being separate categories. This is also clearly seen in *Fahrenheit 451*. Montag, the Book People, the Eels, and anyone associated with them, are those who collect books, despite the bans and threat of consequences. They foresee a future, in which literary knowledge and culture will be spread again, so they use their abilities to source books illegally and ensure said future can happen. In *Brazil*, there is no art apart from propaganda—not even Sam's mom has art in her otherwise luxuriously decorated home. Art does not exist, except in Sam's and Jill's homes. In Sam's apartment we see non-government-sanctioned art in the form of photographs of Golden Age Hollywood starlets. In Jill's apartment we see various photographs as well. As such, art signifies to the film's audience which characters are special and have the circumstances or personality that will cause them to rebel, before said characters get the chance to find out. This is not always clear—in *Brazil*, it is never made explicitly clear whether art is banned or why it would be, or even how much of art is censored. However, with only Sam and Jill in possession of any art, it eventually becomes clear that these two characters disagree with the society created by the totalitarian regime, and will find a way to escape from it.

Demolition Man touches upon the ideas of rebellion and degeneration as well. In a world where minimalism is the status quo, Huxley's office and her apartment are heavily decorated with twentieth-century memorabilia, and she is mocked for it. Her collection represents the "degenerate century", in which violence was prevalent and people were engaging in unhealthy activities. This

idea is indoctrinated into the San Angeles population, and they learn to look at anything which displays characteristics from the twentieth century as barbaric. Thus, Huxley's interest and active collection of memorabilia and art from that time period is seen as unusual and against the norm. Apart from Huxley's office and apartment, art is also present in Spartan's apartment—various paintings hang on the walls. Since Spartan himself is a degenerate, having lived in the twentieth century and missing the cultural rejuvenation due to his time in cryoprison; the art in his apartment simply signifies that he is different. No other place, be it the San Angeles police headquarters or Cocteau's office, displays art—except for the museum, where art is not only represented as the degenerate, but it portrays how the power uses it as well. Most of the art in the museum is in the form of photographs, and there are artefacts from the time before the cultural rejuvenation. Thus, museum art literally represents the degenerate through its portrayal of violence and the overall negative traits of the twentieth century. As museums tend to be government-sanctioned, it can be said that the art here is used by the government (power) in order to promote the benefits of San Angles after the rejuvenation by contrasting it with the state of the area before Cocteau's rule.

In *Equilibrium* there is the same case of rebellious attempts to protect art, thus representing art as a beacon of hope for a future after the regime's end. However, as with *Demolition Man*, another side of art is also present—art, as it is used by the power. There is a paradox created in the scene where Preston confronts Father in his office. Despite the ban on art and material culture, Father's office is luxurious, unlike the minimalist décor in the rest of Libria. Thus, the authoritative figure who is enforcing the ban is also enjoying art in private. This paradox is striking: while Libria's laws exist to ensure the suppression of freedom of thought, Father recognizes humanity's need for art, so he uses his position of power to obtain it for himself. Father and the rebellion are two sides of the same coin—they both understand the power that art and culture hold, and that being in possession of it will enrich one's life. As such, all six films represent the role of degenerate art in a way that fits each film's narrative, but still presents concepts seen in historical context and show significant parallels to the three tyrannical regimes discussed in this thesis.

CONCLUSION

This thesis focused on the relationship between art and totalitarian regimes, in particular the way in which it is represented in film. Each of the six films analyzed—*V for Vendetta*, *Equilibrium*, *Demolition Man*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Brazil*—demonstrates the role of art in totalitarianism, primarily as propaganda and "degenerate" art. Direct comparisons were made in the use of propaganda posters and symbols by the depicted regimes, as well as the portrayed bans on art and material culture, and their subsequent being looted and incinerated by the forces. While art in the films is used to draw historical parallels, such as these lootings and propaganda, there is an intrinsic, symbolic aspect to its representation as well, which connects the six films. In each, art is a symbol of the rebellion and is used to identify the rebels from the rest of the population, signifying that to them, the loss of culture is unacceptable. In a way, through emphasizing its survival, art is also used as documentation—protecting it allows for the knowledge it carries to be passed on to future generations. Thus preserving art preserves the history it carries—a history which spans far greater periods of time than the governments which attempt to eradicate it—and allows the people to reclaim some of the power from the tyrannical governments.

The films discussed in this thesis show how art can reinforce totalitarian regimes and promote rebellion as well. In this age, where art is generally perceived passively, these films and the parallels to totalitarian regimes that they invoke, show that art and the responses it can produce are, and will always be, relevant. Although the regimes which provided the basis for this analysis are no longer in power, these films show the impact they have had, including on the art world. As film itself is a subset of art, the inspiration alone is significant. However, by showing the power that art possesses to influence totalitarian regimes, whether they would use it as a weapon, or try to destroy it, these films allow their audience to imagine that such cultural censorship is not simply an event of the past.

The methodology of this thesis focused on six films, the majority of which were inspired by novels about dystopian worlds. Only the films were analyzed, without referencing this source material or even their scripts, because it was decided that the final, visual product would allow for a clearer representation of art, which itself is a visual form. This limitation could provide an opportunity for further research by inquiring whether there is a significant difference between the representation of art between the films and their written material, and how that has been treated by

the artistic choices of the filmmakers. In addition, all six of these films are Western, usually Hollywood, productions, which could limit or bias the interpretation to a Western point of view. By widening the scope of film choice to international cinema, and also including into the analysis of other European and non-European regimes, there is potential for a better understanding of the relationship of art and totalitarian regimes, and how it is represented by filmmakers through different cultures.

This thesis contributes to the interdisciplinary studies of cinema and art history and the idea that cinema, no matter how fictional, is in some way representational of reality. This idea has been discussed by Siegfried Kracauer and many scholars following in his footsteps, including Angela Dalle Vacche, who has argued for the necessary benefit of studying film from an art historical point of view. "...we have a range of representational possibilities which are assumed but not explained and eventually forgotten in the language that we use to write about film."[138] We need art history to provide a second lens through which to view the complex narratives of film including all the subtleties which often go unnoticed when observed from the technical lens of film studies. My research for this thesis found little literature that discussed the selected films, and scarcely any that explore them within an art historical framework. Using this framework, this thesis aimed to form a dialogue which had not previously existed and elevate the messages of the films to a higher level. This thesis demonstrates that any film based upon fiction or nonfiction literature, including graphic novels, can unravel differently when analyzed from an art historical lens. This is the importance of interdisciplinary research.

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[138] Dalle Vacche, 185.

APPENDIX I

ARTWORKS

Fig. 1.1. Mukhina, Vera, *Peasant Woman*, Bronze, 1927, (State Tretyakov Gallery).

Fig. 1.2. Dix, Otto, *The Trench*. Oil on canvas, 1920-23, (Location unknown).

Fig. 1.3. Freundlich, Otto, *Large Head (The New Man)*, Plaster, 1912, (Location unknown).

Fig. 1.4. Montanarini, Luigi, *Apotheosis of Fascism*, Mural, 1942, (*Stadio dei Marmi*, *Foro Italico*, Rome, Italy).

APPENDIX II

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS AND POLITICAL SIGILS

Fig. 2.1   The Hindu swastika.

Fig. 2.2   The *fasces*.
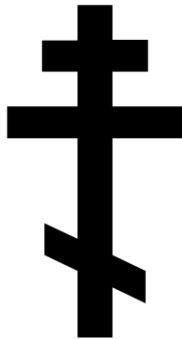
Fig. 2.3   The Orthodox cross.
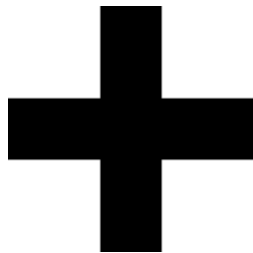
Fig. 2.4   The Greek cross.

Fig. 2.5   The hammer and sickle on the first State Emblem of the Soviet Union (c. 1923-1936).

APPENDIX III

IMAGES FROM THE FILMS
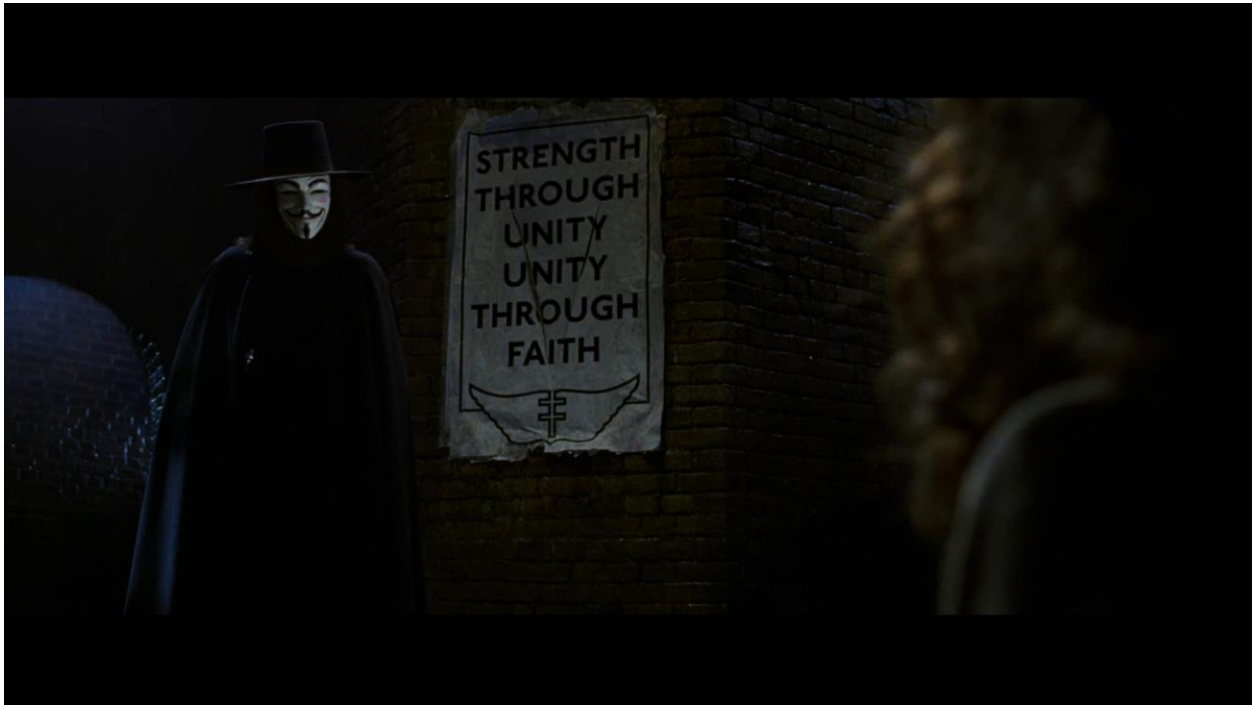
Fig. 3.1. An example of the Norsefire's propaganda posters, featuring the regime's slogan and sigil.

Fig. 3.2. The Shadow Gallery—V's home and secret art collection.

Fig. 3.3. Dietrich (left) showing Evey the collection he keeps in a hidden room in his house.
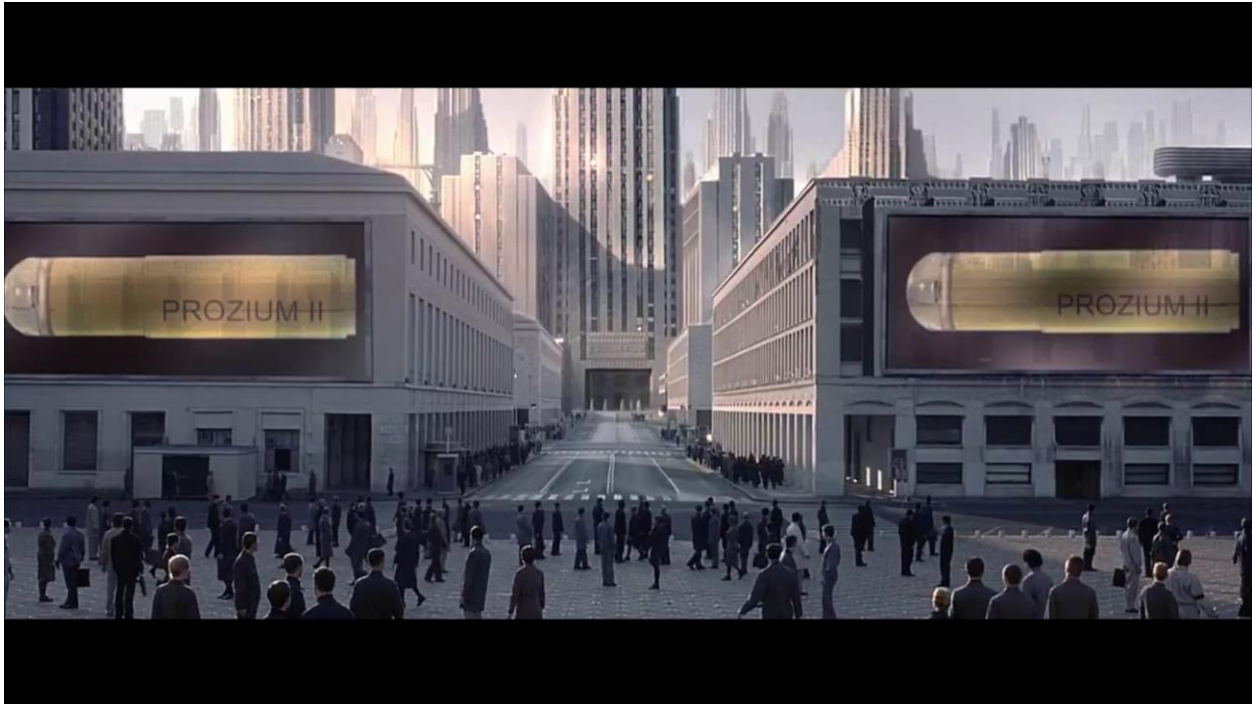
Fig. 3.4. The only propaganda poster in Libria, advertising Prozium II.

Fig. 3.5. The propaganda in *Demolition Man* appears even in people's homes, as seen here in Spartan's living room.

Fig. 3.6. The San Angeles History Museum. The photograph on the left depicts the city's violent past. Images like this one are used in the museum as propaganda to promote the new, more peaceful, regime.

Fig. 3.7. City remains below are dirty and graffiti-filled, further solidifying the idea that San Angeles has greatly improved after the new regime.

Fig. 3.8. Propagandistic messages seen in a bar. These messages are some of the few written works seen anywhere in the city.

Fig. 3.9. As writing is banned and books are illegal, the stories are censored into shortened versions using emoji-like symbols. This image depicts Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851).

Fig. 3.10. Some of the only non-propagandistic images seen in the whole film are in Sam's apartment.

Fig. 3.11. An example of the propaganda in *Brazil*, as seen in the Ministry of Information.

Fig. 3.12. The Norsefire cross depicted on a police badge.
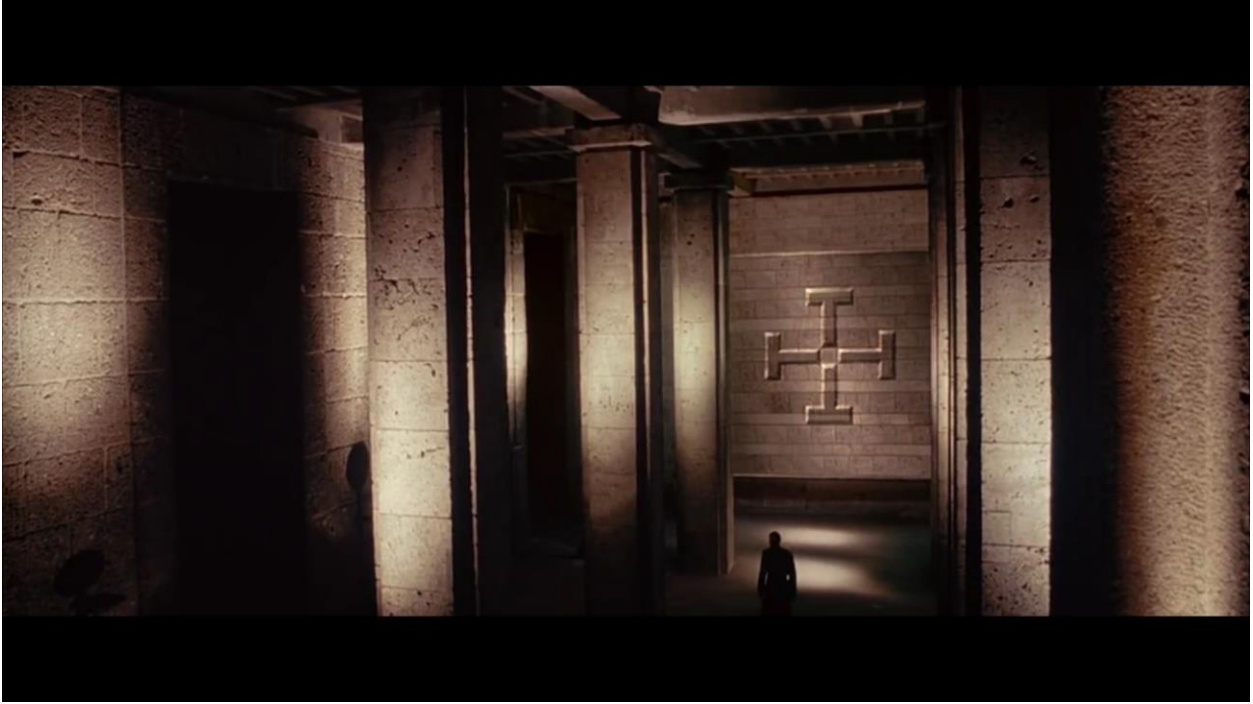
Fig. 3.13. The Tetragrammaton Council's cross carved into a government building.

Fig. 3.14. The Tetragrammaton Council's cross on the floor in Father's office.

Fig. 3.15. The San Angeles police force badge can be seen on Huxley's uniform and on the window behind her.
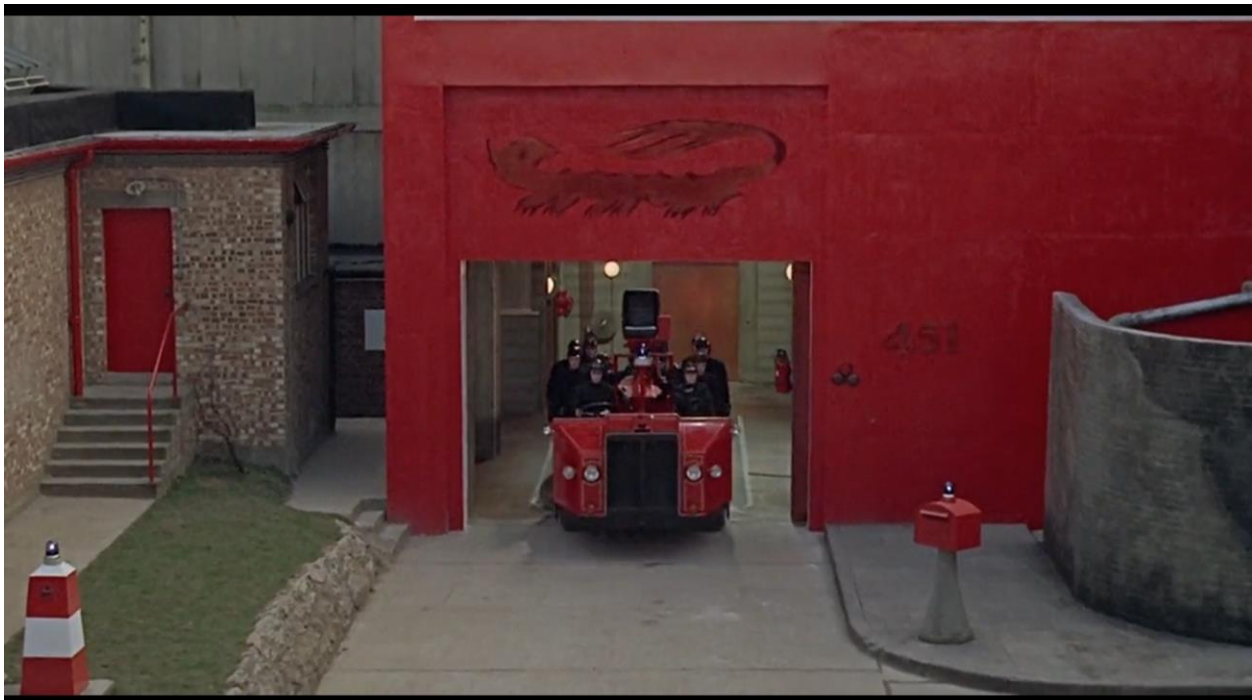
Fig. 3.16. The Firemen's salamander and 451 sigils in the 1966 film.

Fig. 3.17. The Firemen's salamander and 451 sigils in the 2018 film.
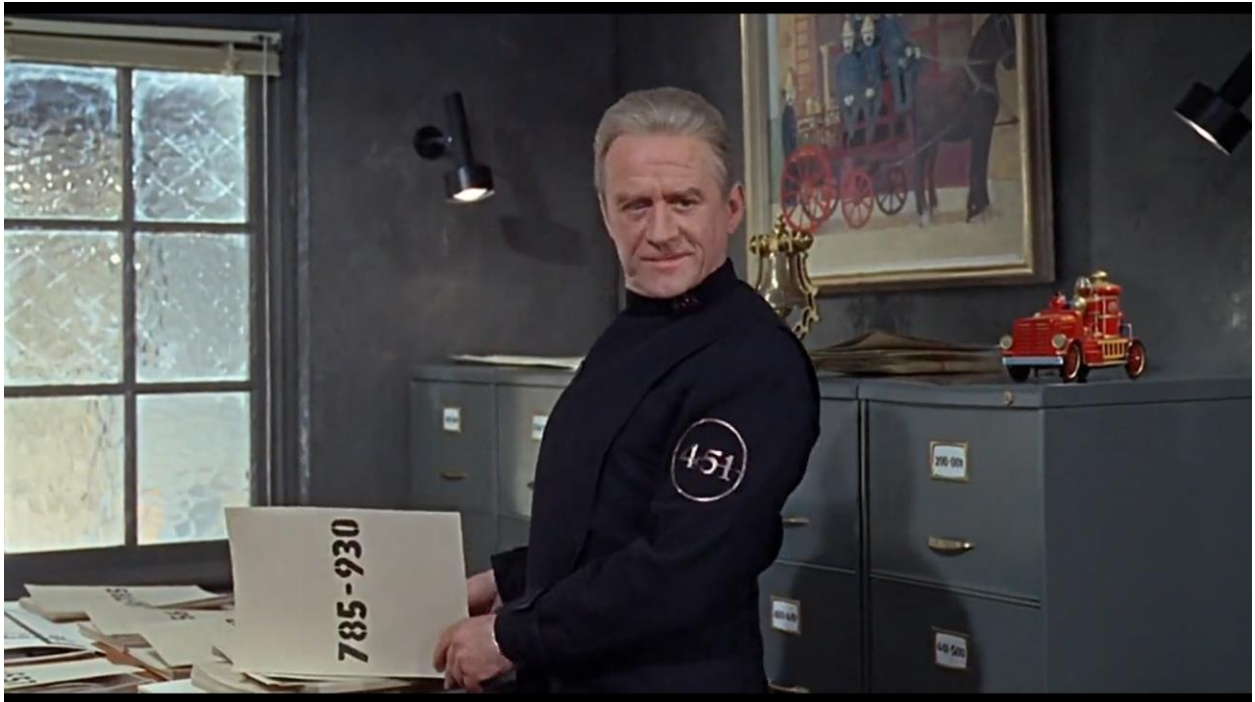
Fig. 3.18. "451", the second part of the Firemen's emblem, as part of the Captain's uniform. This image also shows Firemen propaganda.

Fig. 3.19. "M.O.I." is stamped on every object to signify Ministry property, most visible here on the teacup and fishbowl.

Fig. 3.20. The Ministry's sigil marks every propaganda poster.

Fig. 3.21

Fig. 3.22. Chancellor Sutler's official portrait watching over his citizens in their private homes. In Fig. 3.21, it is above the fireplace.
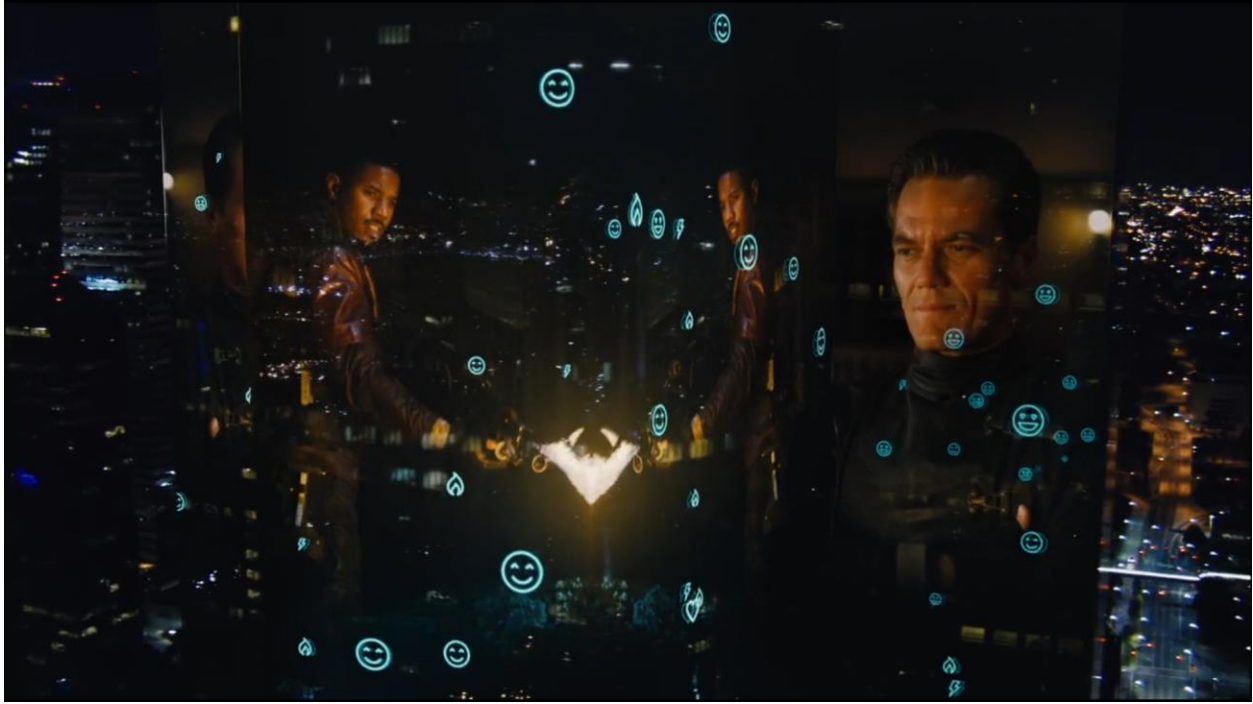
Fig. 3.23. The other type of visual propaganda seen in *Fahrenheit 451* (2018) is the broadcast of all Firemen activity on the city's skyscrapers.

Fig. 3.24. The religious symbolism in the propaganda in *Demolition Man* is evident in this scene, with Dr. Cocteau depicted as a Christlike figure.

Fig. 3.25. A rebel hideout showing a collection of illegal artworks.

Fig. 3.26. The same minimalist style, as seen here in Preston's home, is prevalent throughout Libria.

Fig. 3.27. Father's office is vastly different in design from the rest of Libria.
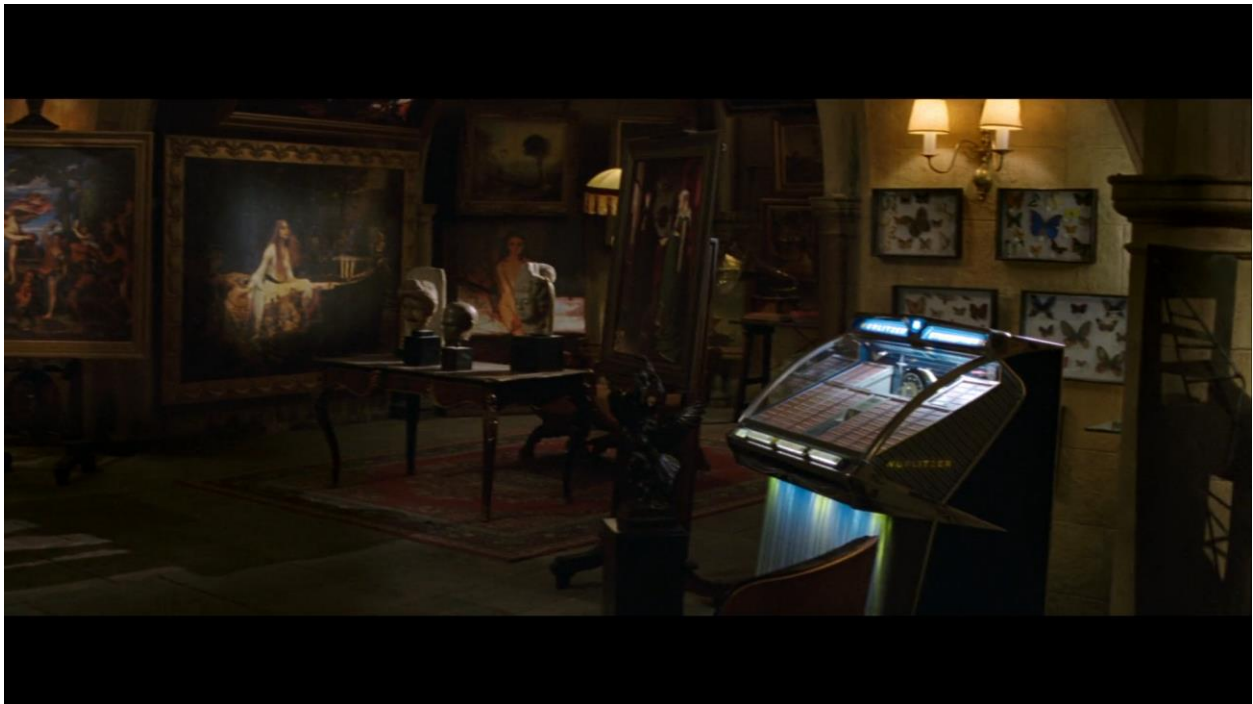
Fig. 3.28. This image shows the great variety of art and other material culture in the Shadow Gallery.

Fig. 3.29. The anti-government propaganda in Dietrich's collection.

Fig. 3.30. Evey's bare apartment is the only place other than the Shadow Gallery and Dietrich's collection where any art is present.

Fig. 3.31. The only decorative art visible, apart from the propaganda art seen throughout the film.

Fig. 3.32. The artwork in this café depicts Firemen propaganda, as also seen in the Firemen headquarters.

Fig. 3.33. As in Fig. 3.9, this image portrays how images and symbols have replaced written word, as seen in the man's newspaper.

Fig. 3.34. Captain Beatty's office is plainly decorated only with Firemen-related plaques.

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Fig. 1.3. Downloaded 1 April 2020. https://artdone.wordpress.com/2017/09/07/otto-freundlich-cologne-basel/otto-freundlich-large-head-1912-lost/.

Fig. 1.4. Downloaded 4 June 2020. https://edition.cnn.com/travel/gallery/italy-secret-weekend/index.html.

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Fig. 2.3. Downloaded 3 June 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Orthodox_cross#/media/File:Cross_of_the_Russian_Orthodox_Church_01.svg

Fig. 2.4. Downloaded 3 June 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_cross_variants#/media/File:Greek_cross.svg

Fig. 2.5. Downloaded 4 June 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammer_and_sickle#/media/File:Coat_of_arms_of_the_Soviet_Union_(1923%E2%80%931936).svg

Fig. 3.1. Captured 7 April 2020. McTeigue, *V for Vendetta*.

Fig. 3.2. Captured 7 April 2020. McTeigue, *V for Vendetta*.

Fig. 3.3. Captured 7 April 2020. McTeigue, *V for Vendetta*.

Fig. 3.4. Captured 8 April 2020. Wimmer, *Equilibrium*.

Fig. 3.5. Captured 7 April 2020. Brambilla, *Demolition Man*.

Fig. 3.6. Captured 7 April 2020. Brambilla, *Demolition Man*.

Fig. 3.7. Captured 7 April 2020. Brambilla, *Demolition Man*.

Fig. 3.8. Captured 9 April 2020. Bahrani, *Fahrenheit 451*.

Fig. 3.9. Captured 9 April 2020. Bahrani, *Fahrenheit 451*.

Fig. 3.10. Captured 9 April 2020. Gilliam, *Brazil*.

Fig. 3.11. Captured 9 April 2020. Gilliam, *Brazil*.

Fig. 3.12. Captured 7 April 2020. McTeigue, *V for Vendetta*.

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