

FUTURE CITIES OF LONELINESS: DYSFUNCTIONAL URBANITIES ON FILMIC MARS

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Abstract

This article discusses cinematic Mars fictions with a hermeneutic approach in their relation to the real-world urban challenges encrypted in these art works. Science fiction movies have long created a collective consciousness of specific imaginations of how city life might look and sound like in the future, condensing our real life beyond the cinematic world, our wishes, hopes and fears into works of art. However, almost all ‘earthly’ sceneries are burdened with connotations. That is why so many filmic future narratives are located in the blank vastness of foreign worlds and their temporarily inexhaustible freedom for speculation – in particular on Mars. Against the historic background of the development of Mars fiction as a movie genre, this paper distinguishes three phases of Mars cinema movies and examines the forms and ideas of urbanity those films create, the societal and urban issues that are preferred by those cinematic scenarios, and how these filmic future ‘cities’ can be understood as critical comments on current and forthcoming questions of urbanity. Starting from Nietzsche’s thought of post-moral mankind as a ‘lonely’ species, it demonstrates, on the basis of selected examples, such as the film *Total Recall* (1990), how Mars science fiction movies deal with dysfunctional communities and the resulting loneliness of the urban human of the future. That makes filmic Mars cities aesthetic projections of ‘earthly’ sociopolitical challenges of urbanization that have been dynamically changing in the course of history since the beginning of 20th century.

Keywords: Science Fiction, Film, Mars, Loneliness.

Individuals and communities are facing an existential crisis in megacities of our days, not least because of evolving urbanization, medialization and individualization of urban every day live. For a long time, thinkers of the future, city planners and economists are trying to develop reliable and accurate scenarios of urban trends, like increasing pollution, gentrification, and migration, and how to deal with them – to date, not always very successfully. At the same time, science fiction movies have long created a collective consciousness of specific imaginations how city life might look and sound like in the future: Nobody who thinks of the city of tomorrow takes into consideration academic or architectural white papers anymore. Instead, he or she imagines filmic dream images of flying cars, omnipresent robots and steel-concrete sky scrapers just like dark rainy streets, cold surfaces, and claustrophobic surroundings – exactly how we know them for instance from Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982), from *I, Robot* (2004), or *Elysium* (2013). The cinematic town of the future is more often than not a grim dystopia, an overcrowded 'non-place' of loneliness.

Since the beginning of film history, the aesthetic play with the future is a fixed inventory of cinema. Those futuristic movies therefore always refer to our present day, condensing our real life beyond the cinematic world: our desires, hopes and fears collected in works of art. The science fiction genre and its specific appeal is defined by the chance "to disrupt our entanglement in normality, to breach our acknowledgement of actuality through our thoughts." (Schlemm, 2004, 130) That makes future films aesthetic projections of contemporary trends that could become major challenges in the future, made visible through means of cinema.

However, almost all 'earthly' stages, characters, and requisites are burdened with associations, meanings, and attributions. That is why so many filmic future narratives are located in the blank vastness of foreign worlds and their temporarily inexhaustible freedom for speculation – ahead of it all: the red empty sand of Mars. The emptiness of this world, initially free of any connotations, gives the futuristic literature and especially the science fiction film special aesthetic freedom to deal with complex socio-political discourses, such as questions of postmodern-western identities and socialisation. As I will attempt to show in the following, the increasing sense of isolation in the industrialized regions, especially in the context of progressing urbanization, seems to be the focus of contemporary Mars films – today more than ever.

It is the anticipation of the 'nihilistic' loneliness which Nietzsche predicted for man of occidental postmodernity – that are freed from the pressures of christian morality, but at the same time abandoned from the moral community with god: "What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming [...]: the advent of nihilism." (Nietzsche, NF-1887,11[119]) – It is the nihilism of impassable loneliness with which people are confronted in an industrialized-

mechanized, individualized, and, above all, urbanized world. They are only getting increasingly isolated in view of current developments like artificial intelligence, geopolitical tensions, and increasing automation.

This paper is based on my first thoughts presented in an article for *Cinemabuch* No. 63 (Newiak, 2018), which I want to enhance from the specific urban context of this issue. In the following, I want to analyse Mars literature and especially the Mars cinema with a hermeneutic approach in relation to the real-world urban challenges and possible solutions encrypted in these art works. Against the historic background of the development of Mars fiction as a movie genre, I want to examine which forms and ideas of urbanity those films create, how these filmic future ‘cities’ can be understood as critical comments on current and forthcoming questions of urbanity, and which societal and urban issues are preferred by those cinematic scenarios. I would like to show that the development of urbanity on Mars in science fiction films can be seen from the beginning of the 20th century until today as a narrative of an increasing isolation in our highly complex postmodern world: As I want to demonstrate on the basis of selected examples, such as the film *Total Recall* (1990), dystopic science fictions are inseparably associated with their absent or dysfunctional communities and the resulting loneliness of the urban human of the future. This is what makes these Mars cities projections of ‘earthly’ socio-political present-day problems that have been dynamically changing in the course of history.

Three phases of cinematic Mars fictions can be distinguished: firstly, the tendency of early Mars books and films to evolve utopian-optimistic imaginations of life on Mars that makes this strange world to a place of longing with positively connoted urban concepts, and that lets Earth and its cities appear as a dysfunctional antitype; secondly, Mars fictions against the background of the cold war and its ideological antagonism, narrating Mars and its inhabitants as a source of evil and permanent threat, largely ignoring the Martians (urban) living conditions; and thirdly, lasting until today, a phase of contemporary Mars science fiction, now less interested in the Martians and their relation to the Earthlings but instead focusing on the human efforts to reach Mars and establish their own settlement on its surface, provoking an accumulation of diverse allegoric narratives and pictures of the first Mars ‘cities’ and their characteristics as critical aesthetic comments on recent societal developments.

In this context, for an accurate conceptual distinction, it has to be said that the urbanities presented by the Mars films do not always meet an intuitive ‘terrestrial’ idea of cities as a typical ‘metropolis’. Rather the imaginative freedom of art has produced its very own concepts of urbanity that are partly incompatible to a conservative definition of cities. Only this ‘thinking outside the box’ makes the specific appeal of these unorthodox fictions and their potential to rethink

traditional urban structures. In how far the Martian communities can be understood as ‘cities’ in an archetypal way differs from phase to phase, from classical urban infrastructures in the early Mars fiction literature, through more idealized utopic versions of the city in the first Mars motion pictures, to mainly settlement-like structures in the contemporary Mars cinema in consequence of changed genre expectations and more ‘realistic’ narrations. Even if the term ‘city’ somehow evades precise and universal definition (Wolf, 2005, 1048), we want to define cities as all permanent agglomerations of buildings, constructed as a shell for the cultural ‘organism’ inside, providing space for living, habitation, work, supplies and sociality, and thereby a place subject to continuous change and interaction with its environment (Maikämper/Krämer, 2015, 10). Interestingly, especially the latest Mars films tend to overemphasize the dysfunctional character of their cities, making them places which still need to become full cities.

The First Extra-terrestrial Urban Utopias

Since ancient times, speculating about the conditions of and on the celestial bodies that surround us is an integral part of mankind’s intellectual history (Zinsmeister, 2008, 10). Written almost two thousands years ago, Lucian of Samosata’s *A True Story* (*Verae Historiae*), for example, narrates an adventurous journey to the moon, whose inhabitants are fighting with the ‘warriors of the sun’ for the colonization of the planet Venus. (Lucian, 1913, 1:247–358)

The blank emptiness of such undiscovered worlds has always been predestined to serve as a stage for social and political fictions. Each of the multiple utopias located on the moon, like Cyrano de Bergerac’s *Voyage to the Moon* from 1657, invites our phantasy to foster the image of a different society and a way of life: While most people on Earth live in simple dwellings under miserable conditions, the author speaks about wealthy and well-nourished cities with ‘houses on wheels’, drivable and retractable according to “weather” conditions and “seasons” on the Moon (Bergerac, 1899, 172–73).

From the beginning, such ‘fudged’ utopian visions on the moon as ‘neutral ground’ functioned as an ‘unsuspicious’ scenery for satirical drawings of reprehensible social and political conditions on Earth: Protected as unreal folly, those seemingly ‘apolitical’ utopian narratives provided some freedom to create a counter-world, criticizing the social reality of monarchist tyranny and economic exploitation (Mehlem, 1996, 19).

At the same time, the appeal of those utopias is created by the fascination of the exotic: Traveling to an unknown place satisfies the romantic idea of turning one’s back on the narrow-minded everyday life and seeking one’s metaphysical happiness and a new god (Mehlem, 1996, 22). On strange planets – so the reader hopes – our encrusted ways of thinking and believing would

have no meaning anymore, all class and role models would be suspended. However, on the way to those new paradises, like in Jules Verne's tales, new deadly dangers are lurking, and at the destination, some sinister monstrosities may be waiting. Yet despite all risks, those adventures are still engaging, as they provide a different way of life compared to encrusted structures on Earth.

For a long time, the moon has been a magnet for utopian literature, nevertheless, it is not the 'perfect candidate' for poetic stories of a different human society: Astronomy discovered that the moon is nothing more than a boring, extremely cold desert stone, without atmosphere, air, or significant gravitation. It is not surprising that Mars, our immediate neighbour planet, replaced the moon as the main stage for extra-terrestrial utopias. Beginning in 1749, for example, Emanuel Swedenborg described the Martians as peaceful vegetarians in his eight volumes of *Arcana Coelestia*. During this time of early Mars literature, we also learn lots about the cities the Martians supposedly live in: Carl Ignaz Geiger's *Earthling's Journey to Mars* from 1790 describes a highly automated futuristic world, with an early foreshadowing of the connection between people and peoples through the means of individual mobility. Also, Eberhard C. Kindermann talks about the martian cities as places of natural grown palaces, where hierarchical and social distinctions are unknown to these places. (Abret and Boia, 1984, 35–40)

Clearly, these visions of utopia on Mars are always connected to an idea of communality, equality and collectively – values which cannot be taken for granted in Europe by the 18th century, but have their disputed 'home' in the high developed city of the future. Notably, such progressive futuristic societies are only made possible by economic, ecological, and intellectual prosperity, based on a high degree of automatization and mechanization, which lay the foundation for a liberal-egalitarian urban social system.

Until the mid 19th century, in the absence of scientific findings, such appealing stories of Mars utopias have been based on pure speculation. This changed, however, with Herschel's and Secchi's presumption that there could be rivers filled with liquid water on Mars. Using sophisticated observation instruments, astronomer Schiaparelli finally gave the impulse for a 'Golden Age' of Mars literature: His report of the observation of so called 'canali' on Mars in combination with a bad translation of his discovery instantly led to the assumption that humanlike beings, as a necessary result, should be living on Mars, busy with the construction of one artificial waterway after another – causing an inflation of Mars novels, which are too numerous to be mentioned. Even scientists could not resist enriching their academic findings with fictional anecdotes of how they imagine the life of the allegedly existing Martians. In many cases, scientific findings provided just keywords for adventurous 'fairytales' located on Mars, where it is not possible to verify the plausibility of such allegations. (Abret and Boia, 1984, 55–6)

What all these Mars fictions have in common is that the Martians usually cultivate a non-violent, fair and progressive life style, and that their way of life appears as a placeholder for the unexpressed expectations of this generation, suffering from difficult living conditions in the new industrial towns, challenged by church's loss of importance, and an increasing medialization of everyday life. While the political manifesto seems to be too abstract or sophisticated, the Martians show a path to a future worth living for, through new concepts of community, made possible through advanced technology, high productivity, and thus an equitable society. (Abret and Boia, 1984, 207–11)

Terrestrial Problems on Red Sand

For the early cinematography, the Moon and Mars are a 'standard repertoire' from the very beginning. The space hype and the growing popularity of the cinema coincide for a good reason: Both provide substitutes for the past moral communities which got lost with the diminishing importance of Christian faith in an industrialized, intellectualized, and urbanized reality. The vast expanses of the universe and especially of the empty deserts of the Moon and Mars provide an inexhaustible free space for any 'projection', an almost eternal 'canvas' for popular scenarios and attractions.

The early Danish motion picture *Himmelskibet (A Trip to Mars)* from 1918, tells the story of a research expedition to the neighbour planet, and pictures its inhabitants as highly kind and welcoming, living in a so to speak 'communist' society with no class driven relations. There are no dark, overcrowded megacities on this 'red' planet Mars, but spacious temple complexes, flooded with sunlight, and open to all Martians and their guests from Earth. A long time ago, even this highly developed and pacifistic society has been violent. To prevent themselves and their interplanetary friends from any war happening again, the Martians stored their hostile past on video tapes – serving as lively memorial, especially for their guests from 'a thousand years lagging behind' Earth. In the year of the end of World War I, neutral Denmark presents specific measures for a peaceful future: abolition of class relations, a life close to nature, culture of memory as everyday practice, and functional urban structures. While the real Earthlings face the full force of abandonment from God in their destroyed cities, nobody is alone in this filmic Mars metropolis.

Soviet silent picture and classic *Aelita*, from 1924, imagines the path to such a classless society from a Bolshevik-ideological perspective. Engineer Loss loses himself while daydreaming when an unidentified radio message is received by several stations on Earth. The main story stays in the young and chaotic Soviet State, authentically showing life in Moscow with its everyday social problems. In Loss' phantasy, he leaves 'war communism' and meets the queen of Mars, Aelita –

not just a beautiful woman interested in practicing the earthly ritual of kissing, but the head of a brutal society of slaveholders. Of course, this place needs a revolutionary liberation, and the guests from Earth bring along some experience. First, Aelita joins the resistance movement, but only to prevent the revolution by deporting the disarmed rebels. Naturally, this conspiracy is incompatible with Loss' Marxist-Leninist worldview, and the trigger for later censorship of the movie. In addition, it is an ironic twist that Loss wakes up after daydreaming of revolution on Mars, and finds himself back in Moscow full of social problems: profane jealousy, living together in the cramped 'kommunalki' apartments, and the struggle for the daily bread.

There are many more relevant Mars movies from the beginning of the 20th century, like the bizarre German propaganda movie *Die Entdeckung Deutschlands* from 1916—some guests from an superior urbanized Mars culture serve as pseudo-neutral observers and verify by their personal visit that the Germans' war production is running on full speed, contrary to their enemies' secret reports (Lange 2014)—, or the Hollywood musical *Just Imagine*, from 1930: whereas mankind on Earth is living in a godless amoral future, the Martians still know what is 'good' and 'bad' (Johnston, 2011, 66). In each of these movies, the Martians provide an “alienated and differentiated look on our earthly conditions” (Innerhofer, 1996, 281) and appear as desirable extrapolations of ourselves into the future. In comparison with our outdated life on Earth, we look at utopian worlds when we are allowed to take a glance at the Martian's futuristic collectively organized cities. That makes Mars a giant 'red canvas' on which almost all unconscious and hidden desires can be projected.

Red Invaders from Mars

After the Second World War, the Mars film genre shows a completely different picture. The red soil does not function anymore as an unlimited free surface for fictional realizations of succeeded societal experiments and developments, but represents the politically pushed fear of a possible invasion of the United States by the Soviet Union. Our previously peaceful and liberal Martians now turn into bloodthirsty beasts, merciless red 'communists', only desiring to enslave US-Americans or to erase the US-American capitalism. Community and collectivism do not serve as a progressive sense of cohabitation anymore, but merely serve to destroy western life style.

Whereas the individual sense of threat to become a victim of a Soviet invasion stays very vague and abstract, the increasing number of UFO sightings appeared to many people unexpectedly real, influencing the science fiction genre. Beginning with the *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* comics, Mars becomes the home for a highly technologically developed and at the same time extremely aggressive extraterrestrial nation.

There are uncountable examples for this period's Mars invasion movies, such as *Flight to Mars* from 1951, the classic *War of the Worlds* and *Invaders from Mars*, both from 1953. In each case, the hostile masses of Martians try to subordinate or exterminate US-American people with some form of complex technology.

Interestingly, during this period of Mars cinema, we do not get any substantial access to the way the Martians live on their planet. We witness their actions only from an earthly perspective through the eyes of western rich earthlings, while these films do not develop any real interest on the Martians, their society and motivations. On the contrary: They are stylized into enemy stereotypes, representing everything that is hated in the conservative white Anglo-Saxon United States of these days. Needless to say that the real enemies of a liberal democracy simultaneously sat in the *House Committee on Un-American Activities*, imposing occupational bans and imprisonments against film-makers, actors and intellectuals.

A Filmic Space Race

In the 1960s, the Cold War reached its peak: While the Soviet Union and the United States fight to be first in space and on the moon, astronomy is developing at a rapid pace. There are first unmanned missions to Mars, and they are sending pictures of a lifeless inhospitable world back to Earth. All hopes to encounter complex forms of life on Mars finally pass away.

But that did not result in an end of the Mars cinema – instead, the genre was booming again: Maybe Mars is a dead world *now*, but it may have been a habitable second Earth a long time ago, and it seemed to be a realistic goal that once humans would reach the red planet and found a settlement, maybe in 20, 50 or a hundred years (Markley, 2005, 270). As long as dead Mars cannot be inhabited, it is the mission of the movie genre to fill this scientific and technological vacuum, to '(re-)animate' Mars through aesthetic speculations.

But the Mars movie genre did not only adapt to the new academic standard of knowledge, but also changed to socio-political discourses: “in constructing images of Mars and Martians, human beings inevitably constructed images of themselves and their own world” (Crossley, 2011, 82). At the end of the 20th century, it is not the ideological ‘system conflict’ anymore that is dominating the narratives around Mars. Instead, the early fundamental questions of societal concepts and especially of the liveable city of the future return to the genre – this time, producing images of loneliness instead of communities.

The US-American science fiction action film *Total Recall* (1990) is a good example on this development, forming the starting point for the third boom phase of Mars films. Main actor Arnold Schwarzenegger embodies construction worker Quaid, comfortably living in a futuristic

city together with his wife, played by Sharon Stone. But Quaid is unable to enjoy the security and wealth of his life – and dreams of Mars, every day and every night. In this future world, the red planet is colonized by the dictator Coahaagen who exploits inhabitants and soil on behalf of Earth's military. While there is a rebellion sprouting on Mars, Quaid decides to make a virtual but adventurous 'trip' to Mars which is implanted as a 'real' memory into his mind. We become witnesses of Quaid fighting as a secret agent against villains and conspirators on Mars in front of a hopeless scenery of red-light districts and mining catacombs. During his mission, Quaid not only doubts the difference between imagination and reality, but is confronted with almost all relevant public discourses of the early 1990s: the privatization of public services (in his case of air supply), exploitative working conditions, the power of the industrial-military complex, the spreading of screen media in daily and public life, the induced fear of terrorism, the future of cityscape.

There have been many critical comments characterizing the movie as extremely violent, but a clear majority of film reviews acclaimed the movie's unusual political ambition, its reference to minorities, third-world-colonialism and totalitarian tyranny. The world we get to know in *Total Recall* consisting of faceless housing complexes, dubious amusement districts, and aggressive advertisement, is characterized by automated daily routines, ubiquitous media machines, and complex security facilities, a place of terror of consumerism and social inequality. There cannot be "any trust, any love, any empathy." in this place. "[...] Fear and loneliness are plentiful in this world, technological intelligence and emotional coldness inevitable." (Thal, 1990, 290)

Science-fiction legend Philip Kindred Dick is the author of the novel *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* from which the movie is adapted. Like in other stories written by Philip K. Dick – such as *Blade Runner*, *Minority Report* and the latest Amazon-series *The Man in the High Castle* – the dystopia of *Total Recall* lies in the growing individual isolation in an increasingly complex, mechanized, and economized societal reality. Dystopia for Philip K. Dick means the loss of meaningful communities in a world of loosely connected subjects, who are no longer forming functional *societies* but just abstract *networks*, leading rather parallel than interconnected lives in small anonymous apartments and faceless jobs.

That makes *Total Recall* primarily a film about the swelling feeling of loneliness in the anonymous city of the future, and according to that, it is an allegory of a growing phenomenon in a highly urbanized and developed society like the one we live in.

I want to argue that the preference for plots of loneliness in contemporary Mars films is not only a distinctive characteristic between the early Mars fictions and their tendency towards utopian collectivism in contrast to latest films, but that the thematics of loneliness as a central postmodern phenomenon is the main characteristic of the contemporary Mars science fiction. I

would even suggest that the mediation between communitarisation and loneliness is the key issue of all popular filmic formats – nowadays such as in the past.

While *Total Recall* still models a typical complex city on Mars, a ‘metropolis’ in the narrow sense with a straightforward problematization of urban challenges in the postmodern world, today’s Mars movies are more concentrating on a possible first exploration and habitation of Mars, adjusting to technological and academic progress, promising a soon-to-be real mission to the red planet. The nature of the imagined life on Mars has thus changed significantly. They now most of all present research facilities and habitats as the first small settlements or man-made ‘cities’ on Mars. At the same time, the films are clearly dominated by a privileged thematization of loneliness under postmodern urbanized conditions.

Let me demonstrate this trend based on some more examples from the third and most recent boom of Mars motion pictures since the beginning of the 21st century. One of the most popular examples is *Mission to Mars* (2000), a story of the second manned mission to the red planet – fuel fire, disabled maneuverability, and psychological borderline experience included, in accordance to genre convention, and with no any other surprises. Interestingly, the narration gains steam when the team arrives on Mars and there is only one survivor of the first mission, living in loneliness for several years and on the border between insanity and hopelessness in its autarkic Mars habitat. Only when he meets the second team, the lone survivor is gaining new hope.

The development becomes clearer if one looks at the last years of film production. For the last three years, there has been a minimum of one big cinema film with Mars as the main setting.

Mark Watney is *The Martian* in a very popular novel and motion picture from 2015 who stranded on Mars and is waiting for his rescue, a modern Robinson Crusoe story against the backdrop of Mars’ red desert. Till his salvation, the astronaut lives completely isolated. Only the hope of a reunification with a human community keeps his survival instinct alive. Watney is not really dependent on other humans for pragmatic reasons (despite many hurdles, he manages to keep food production, water recycling and air supplies running), but rather due to his need for communication, interaction, and thus communitization.

In *Approaching the Unknown* (2016), the astronaut William Stanaforth is alone for his complete (ego-)trip from Earth to Mars. On his journey, the water supply system malfunctions, but he does not return to the safe human community on Earth, and decides to accomplish his mission – if required, even after his death. Remembering his life on Earth, he talks about the feeling of being alone amidst thousands of people in a city. Stanaforth’s story is one of hope to find a new meaningful community within himself through a meaningful task, although it throws him back to a stolid experience of abandonment, which ultimately makes his mission impossible.

In *The Space Between Us* (2017), we get to know the teenager Gardner who is born on Mars amidst adult astronauts as the first 'native' Martian. He needs to stay on the planet as his organism has adapted to the lower gravitation. His research facility, a small independent city, provides security and comfort, but this academic 'utopia' is a prison for the young man. His short trip to Earth gives him a sense of how a romantic community with another person feels like, but the boundaries between the two planets and its two lone individuals temporarily remain insurmountable. But the film gives a positive outlook that even these 'natural' borders can be overcome through sacrificial strength of will and scientific progress.

While our film heroes are flying to Mars, for countless people on Earth the red planet is an unattainable place of longing – maybe precisely because of the chance to become part of a new form of collectiveness which got lost in the overcrowded impersonal cities of our times. Nonetheless Mars is moving closer: NASA's plans for the first mission to Mars in the 30's of our century becomes more and more concrete attainable, and the private sector discovers Mars as a lucrative business. A foundation from the Netherlands even plans to send a handful of volunteers to Mars for a permanent settlement, without any chance to return, and multibillionaire Elon Musk is making enormous efforts to construct a reusable Mars rocket to settle a whole Mars city with thousands of people.

One more century of nihilistic loneliness?

Until today, the surface of Mars has always been an oversized screen for our collective hopes, aspirations, and dreams. They have been projected into the red desert with the help of the cinema projector. Nowadays, science fiction is reaching for our life in the social reality beyond the cinema. In the near future, we will begin to imitate those filmic fictions through our real life.

But if we can read the history of Mars in the cinema as a development of an increasing loneliness, what does this mean for the utopia of a new sense of communality in our future cities on Earth and beyond? Do technological and scientific progress of our days lead us into a future of different kinds of sociality and a new experience of closeness, or do we rather have to live for one more century in a 'nihilistic loneliness' as Nietzsche postulated 130 years ago?

Encoded in the symbols of film, the Mars cinema has always implicitly suggested recommendations on how to deal with urban challenges of postmodernity, above all with the increasing sense of isolation in the city, and adapting to the surrounding socio-political conditions. In the early Mars literature and the first Mars film phase, the genre was initially dominated by imaginations of utopian ideal cities as substitutes for the lost moral bond with god at the end of 19th century – characterised by a classless, close-to-nature and peaceful urban community, made

possible through material abundance and technological progress. The later Mars movies focused on Mars as a place of dysfunctional urbanity, characterized by chronic loneliness. In particular, *Total Recall*, allegorically calls for overcoming the exploitation of people and nature by the state and the industry, for the recession of privatization of public commodities, and a critical handling and regulation of new types of media technology – Only that makes it possible to establish a postmodern kind of urban communality. Finally, in the latest Mars cinema, we can observe an overemphasis of the return to idealized forms of interpersonal closeness, a reestablishment of a sense of communality through friendship and romance, common (scientific) goals, and the overcoming of spatial and temporal borders between postmodern individuals. Even if it often remains abstract and allegorical, the preference of narratives of loneliness and recommunity in the Mars movies becomes an expression of the increasing feeling of isolation in the highly urbanized societal reality of our days. Naturally, this feeling cannot be resolved by the aesthetic means of art, but cinema can provide a speculative dispositive of how our world could look and sound like after Nietzsche's 'two centuries of nihilism'.

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Total Recall [feature film] Dir. Paul Verhoeven. Carolco Pictures, US, 1990. 113 mins.
War of the Worlds [feature film] Dir. Byron Haskin. Paramount Pictures, US, 1953. 85 mins.

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