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The Politics of Insects:
Discipline and Resistance in the
Cinema of David Cronenberg

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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Abstract.

This dissertation examines the films of David Cronenberg which all conduct a consistently thorough examination of the relationship between the ideologically constituted Cartesian subject and the disciplinary structures that surround, control and limit this subject. Cinema, because of the presence of both film form and narrative content, functions as a double articulation of this disciplinary activity. Each film's narrative disciplines, on screen, the bodies contained within the plot, even as each film's form disciplines both the way in which these cinematic bodies are delivered to an audience, and the way the audience's own viewing practices are controlled and composed. Thus it becomes vital to explore the mechanisms implicated in these processes, and to gain an understanding of how Cronenberg's cinema works to highlight and critique them.

The primary assertion of this thesis is that Cronenberg's work functions as a particular style of resistance to hegemony that Slavoj Žižek labels 'heresy'. For Žižek, heresy occurs not when one disobeys one's ideological requirements, but when one over-fulfills them, thereby extending these ideological demands and disciplinary discursive structures out to a site of logical absurdity. In assessing and charting this territory, the thesis is constructed in the following manner. The first chapter, which outlines my methodology, applies itself to a brief examination of Cronenberg's least-discussed commercial feature (Fast Company). Chapter Two is concerned with charting the disciplines applied to the body in Shivers, Rabid and The Fly, while Chapter Three continues a focus on Cronenberg's movement and play with framing devices as a means of subverting a stable spectatorial position, utilising eXistenZ, Spider and The Dead Zone as examples. Chapter Four explores the manner with which heretical adherence to a single ideological construction pushes the protagonists towards large-scale disciplinary violations, as detailed in Crash, M. Butterfly and Dead Ringers while the fifth chapter examines notions of discipline and recuperation is focused on Naked Lunch, Scanners and The Brood. A final sixth chapter compares Cronenberg's most recent film, A History of Violence, with Videodrome in order to explore the changing face of his disciplinary ambivalence and its relationship to a broader cinematic industry.

This Thesis is dedicated to Teresa,
Queen of the Bears.

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