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Exploring Dystopian Worlds in the Novels and Films in

English: A Future Imagined

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0. Abstract

This Master's thesis aims to explore eight dystopian texts produced over the last century from the approach of cognitive estrangement and defamiliarization, that is, from a creative interpretation of alternative or imaginary worlds to reflect on existing social and political conditions and foresight the future of humanity on Earth. Dystopian literature and Science Fiction offer the best ways to address imaginatively issues such as control and surveillance of population, stratification of citizens, destruction of nature, suppression of women's rights and the use of Techno-science by governments as a tool for enforcing oppression and for perpetuating their power.

To cover a wide range of examples, I have included five novels and three films that have a significant impact on the ways in which we envisage a "near future" classified in Totalitarian, Biologically Based, Post-Apocalyptic, Feminist and Cyberpunk dystopias. They depict nightmarish communities with a distancing perspective to provide us compelling warnings about forthcoming dangers as these stories seem to be part of our own experience.

This work concludes that their authors have included a socio-political commentary on the dominant preoccupations and anxieties of their age which we can extrapolate to our socio-political environment. I argue for the need to create more stories conveying cautionary messages about potential threats to humankind and to increase research into such topics to confront future challenges.

Key words: cognitive estrangement, defamiliarization, dystopian texts, Science Fiction, Techno-science.

CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the genre of Science Fiction, dystopian narratives are a kind of speculative fiction which has had an increase of popularity in recent years owing to films such as Suzanne Collins' trilogy *Hunger Games*, TV series like Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* or more recently Netflix series *Black Mirror*. However, this form of popular literary genre had its beginnings in modern times more than a century ago, especially with Forster's futurist account "The Machine Stops", written in 1909, which is for Beauchamp "probably the first modern dystopia" ("Technology in the Dystopian Novel" 57). In this text, the author foresees the dangers of a society enhanced by science and technology "in which humanity has retreated to vast subterranean cities run by the Machine" (G. J. Murphy 473). Forster depicts an imaginary world of people living trapped in cells, isolated from nature and external world and surrounded by hyper technological devices leading to artificial experiences that provided a fake sense of security and comfort.

In this project I have undertaken a review and a comparative analysis of the most influential dystopian texts throughout twentieth century and well into the twenty first century, from Zamyatin's novel *We* written in 1921 to Blomkamp's film *Elysium* released in 2013. It is my aim to identify the main aspects which characterize them as dystopian. In general, these texts share many traits that define them as members of this genre. They depict how ruling powers enforce surveillance and control over bodies and minds of their citizens to achieve their unconditional obedience, where people's freedom and individuality are crushed, the past is systematically rewritten, and men and women are isolated from natural world. In nearly all these texts science and technology are instruments in the hands of "evil masters" used for ill (Beauchamp "Technology in the

Dystopian Novel”⁵⁴) that is, employed not to enhance human life’s conditions but to maintain power and hegemony over the citizens.

This dissertation highlights the power of dystopian movement as a vehicle of “diagnosis and warning”, as Madow contends in her review of Hillegas’ book *The Future as a Nightmare*. She quotes Hillegas’ argument that “[d]ystopian science fiction ... could conceivably produce sufficient mass of self-awareness of the dangers to human life in the space age as to help avert the realization of at least some of its own predictions” (qtd. in Madow 198). Through the dystopian protagonist’s perspective, writers help the audience recognise the negative aspects and social preoccupations in their own time and place. By transposing their own historical and social contexts to an unspecified moment in humanity’s future, these authors depict how oppression, inequality and a large range of ethical issues are related to innovative uses and misuses of science and technology owing to their “potentially dehumanizing and destructive effects” (Beauchamp, “Technology in the Dystopian Novel” 54). I will show that these eight texts fulfil the primary objective of the dystopian novel which is to increase our awareness of the political and social concerns existing in our own world. The main goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the social constructs that they explore have escaped their imaginary environments and form part of today’s experience.

1.1 Research Statement and Objectives

This Master’s thesis explores a set of novels and films produced over the last hundred years focusing on the potential of dystopian literature and science fiction to convey the main preoccupations and social concerns produced in this period of time. This research is premised on the idea that although Science Fiction¹ and dystopian literature

¹ For the sake of brevity, hereafter Sci-Fi.

depart from realistic fiction persuading us that there exist other spaces different from our own world, they describe characters and events that are not so remote or unfamiliar to us but significantly related to it. I will show that dystopian literature has a significant research value as these texts have comparable elements to modern societies. I aim to highlight how dystopian works deal with moral, social and political issues linked to human's developments and social progress in each specific setting.

Based on close readings focused on cultural representations of humans and posthumans, it is my purpose to achieve a better understanding of the fears and anxieties produced by social and economic powers which control and manipulate the diverse communities that populate these fictional worlds. I will explore the socially troubling aspects of new technologies and their use by totalitarian governments that rule through control and monitoring of all citizens. Darko Suvin holds that Sci-Fi is a literature of "cognitive estrangement" whose spectrum is ranging "from the ideal extreme of exact recreation of the author's empirical environment to the exclusive interest in a strange newness, a novum" ("On the Poetics of Science Fiction Genre" 373) The cognition of a "novum" or novelty implies a reflection on reality and a creative and critical (often satirical) approach tending toward "a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment" (377).

The function of estranged genres is to create an *alternative formal framework* or "a radically different location" functioning as "a yardstick for comparison" and providing a "shocking and distancing mirror above the all too familiar reality" (Suvin, "Defining the Literary Genre" 137 emphasis in original). A similar argument is proposed by Keith Booker for he sees that the main strategy of dystopian literature is defamiliarization. For Booker, the purpose of this genre is to focus its critique on imaginatively distant settings

“[to] provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted and considered natural and inevitable” (3-4).

Throughout this project, I have reviewed eight dystopias placed in unfamiliar and distant environments. They depict non-existent societies where living conditions are considerably worse than those in which writers live and write. Set in a hypothetical future, these stories invite us to observe and reflect on real social and political tendencies of the society in which these works were produced. By means of cognitive estrangement and following an extrapolative model, these texts approach topics such as the struggle of the individual against oppressive regimes usually overtaken by technology and scientific advancements, environmental catastrophes, totalitarianism, and diverse dictatorships. My focus is mainly humanistic and I have centred upon the suffering of human beings and the injustices and abuses that result from the implementation of a supposedly utopian ideal.

1.2 Hypothesis

I contend that these dystopian fictions are products of real traumas and preoccupations of twentieth and twenty first centuries. Owing to the effect of “cognitive estrangement”, Sci-Fi confronts realistically unreal worlds since we are connected to characters and settings that do not actually exist but are clearly recognisable to contemporary audiences. On the basis of this idea, I maintain and prove that dystopian characters are visible human and their experiences do not differ from our own experiences. Although they inhabit an imaginary and estranged world located in a distant place and set in different time, we identify with them because they mirror our own preoccupations and fears about the future.

In the introduction of the book *Dark Horizons*, Moylan and Baccolini state that most of dystopian narratives start *in media res* within a nightmarish environment and “their “cognitive estrangement” is at first forestalled due to the immediacy and the

normality of the location” (Moylan and Baccolini 5 emphasis in original), which is recognised by the reader as familiar. All dystopias have in common their depiction of human suffering due to the oppressive societal control whose goal is to maintain the illusion of a perfect, utopian society. Their texts are built around “a narrative of hegemonic order that is maintained, as Gramsci put it, both on coercion and consent” (qtd. in Moylan and Baccolini 5). However, a counter-narrative develops as a consequence of the dystopian citizens’ movement “from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance” (5).

The plots look on the most significant aspects of their writers’ societies and the focus is placed on a main character’s point of view who questions the dystopian society and manifests his or her dissent in the form of written or oral narration. This fact permits the dystopian characters to foster a sense of empowerment and self-confidence to cope with the crushing power of the state. The arguments embody authors’ socio-political criticism about cultural current trends, societal norms or political systems that are projected into imaginary settings. The protagonist of the dystopian novel transmits his or her message and invites the reader to interpret and judge “those aspects of society that constitute the narrator’s oppression” (Varsam 206). By interpreting social, environmental or political systems, readers can grasp the subversive elements in the text “and elicit the exact parameters of the warning conveyed in any given dystopian text” (Varsam 206).

1.3 Phases

In Chapter II, I provide an overview of the definitions of Utopia, Dystopia and Sci-Fi. It can be argued that in the last decades, dystopian literature combines elements of Sci-Fi to make a critique of contemporary socio-cultural tendencies and consequently these genres overlap. Sci-Fi has developed a dystopian tendency to the extent that “today we have difficulty imagining our own future other than in terms of some kind of catastrophe”

(Ruppert 8). Peter Fitting also claims that “it is impossible to study the utopias or dystopias of the last fifty years without acknowledging the central role of science fiction” (135). To address the emergence of dystopian novel, I first examine some concepts related to utopian thinking to outline the main reasons for dystopian or anti-utopian move. I quote Lyman Tower Sargent as one of the most influential utopian scholars drawing some fine and interesting distinctions between utopia, dystopia and anti-utopia.

Utopia is the exploration of a better place in the form of “social dreaming”, a definition that emphasises its unreal and inaccessible character. Sargent defines utopianism as “the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than one in which dreamers live” (Sargent, “The Three Faces” 3). That is why “the most complete success of the anti-utopians is to make the label “utopian” take on the meaning of fanciful, unrealistic unpractical” (Sargent, The Three Faces” 22).

Darko Suvin , a noted science fiction and Marxist critic, recognises the power of Sci-Fi to arise our curiosity about the existence of “ estranged” communities of people apparently different from our own but sharing their same fears and hopes with us. I define the key terms for the central strategies we use to interpret dystopian fiction: cognitive estrangement and defamiliarization, which serve “to draw parallels between similar events placed in disparate contexts” and to “see the world in radically different ways” (Varsam 207).

Next, I draw a brief overview of the role played by technology and scientific advancements in the building of dystopian societies. In this paper I want to approach my topic from the technophobic side, that is, to address Techno-science as an instrument at the service of hegemonic powers to enforce a particular ideology conforming to their interests.

Chapter III is a discussion of the eight works that I have selected from the perspective of foresight and warning. I explore how their authors have framed each topic according to a list of major topics to “interpret the future of humanity on Earth” (Bina et al. 171).

Firstly, I provide a brief outline of each work as a way of introduction aimed to identify the most important ideas conveyed by each dystopia, focusing on the four patterns described in point 1.6 below. When available, I quote writer’s direct impressions on his/her text which allow a better understanding of the historical or social contexts in which the plot is developed. The eight texts I chose to study contain several of the following features:

- Totalitarian control and restriction of freedom of citizens who are subject to constant surveillance from ruling powers.
- For the most part, the societies portrayed are technophilic because men rely on “a massive technological apparatus” (Beauchamp, “Technology in the Dystopian Novel” 54) that determines their values and social relationships reducing their lives to impersonal forms of reification and objectification.
- Depiction of characters often trapped in a dehumanised world and struggling to escape intolerable conditions of living. These conditions are based on institutionalized fear “in order to establish a new “reality” defined by hierarchy and stasis, censorship, and lack of freedom” (Varsam 208).
- The natural world is generally destroyed by human’s hand, banned or distrusted. Totalitarian states see Nature as a source of pernicious influence on men because of its benign impact on their quest for independence, self-identity and free choice.

- As Mumford explains in his essay “Utopia, the City and the Machine”, to attain citizen’s “perfect obedience” no “dangerous thoughts” or disturbing emotions must be permitted” (273), and “to ensure docility, the guardians do not hesitate to feed the community with lies” (274). Utopia is only made possible at the cost of “great assemblages of men” (284): as individuality and dissent are not allowed, they have to conform to uniformity and regimentation (277).
- As independent thought is suppressed, dystopian citizens have to transmit the negative aspects of their lives by oral records or written memories. Audiences learn what is wrong in their communities and we are asked to identify and empathize with the main characters’ resistance to oppression through the statement of dystopian experiences from their point of view (Varsam 205).

In my analysis of post-apocalyptic dystopias, I have inserted two figures corresponding to The World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report 2020. They provide an enlightening perspective on the signs of alarm about the irreversible impacts on future societies based in the information we have now. The result ranks “climate action failure” and its related environmental issues at the top of five potential threats in terms of likelihood.

The final section of this Master’s thesis contains my conclusions about the entire project. It is my contention that although the texts are set in the future and they present imaginary worlds, they bear striking similarities with our own societies. They reflect authors’ dominant preoccupations of their time which are projected in the settings, characters and plots, warning audiences about the dangers of ruling elites who wield their

power to enslave citizens, as well as the misuse of science and technology appointed to control bodies and souls of people to perpetuate the power that they possess.

1.4 Theoretical Background

My dissertation examines how the illusion of a perfect society is maintained through disciplinary control over the minds and bodies of their subjects. To explain how domination is created and how it is intrinsically tied to systems of control and surveillance of population, I have drawn on Foucault and Bordieu as two notable theorists of the nature of human power. Works such as *Discipline and Punish* and *Masculine Domination* will be useful to disclose how power articulates the social and cultural life in dystopias. Claeys affirms that “the desire to create a much improved society in which human behaviour was dramatically superior to the norm implies an intrinsic drift towards punitive methods of controlling behaviour which inexorably results in some form of police state” (108). For Foucault, the absolutist and monarchical form of power of old times has been superseded by disciplinary power in the form of technologies of the body and surveillance tactics embodied by Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. Used primarily in prison designs and extended to other institutions of civil society, “[it] epitomizes corporal discipline , the “other dark side” of explicit law codes, egalitarian judicial framework, representative government and the like” (Clowes 211).

To discuss the forms of governance to create a flawless society in *Gattaca*, I have relied on Foucault’s study of bio-power and bio politics of the population as stated by him in his lecture “Security, Territory and Population” and in his influential book *The History of Sexuality*. In the first work, Foucault argues that “starting from the eighteenth century, modern western states took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species” (“Security, Territory, Population” 16). Accepting that power “is not a substance, fluid or something deriving from a particular source”(16), bio-politics is put to

work as a “set of mechanisms and procedures that have the role or function and theme, even they are unsuccessful , of securing power” (Foucault, “Security, Territory, Population” 16-17). In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault analyses how the power over life is “centered on the body as a machine” in the form of its disciplining, of optimization of capabilities, docility, and the increase of its usefulness and “its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls” (139). *Gattaca* tends toward anti-utopianism because genetic perfection is the main target of government policies and its misuse of Technoscience produces reification of people. Genetic code determines that a person could be classified as “underclass” and relegated to an inferior position within society.

The Handmaid’s Tale is a feminist dystopia. The most important element in the plot is the topic of violence toward women which I have approached through Bordieu’s theories about symbolic violence and masculine domination for they supply a solid theoretical background to understand the sociology of gender relations.

In *Masculine Domination*, Bordieu addresses the “objective structures and cognitive forms” (*Masculine Domination* 5) of a primitive society called Kabyle in the early 1960s in northern Argelia “organized through and through according to the androcentric principle” (*Masculine Domination* 3). His ethnographic representation of Kabyle society bears many similarities with the Republic of Gilead. Bordieu’s analysis of symbolic violence draws attention to the importance of biological and anatomical differences between sexes as a justification for a “social constructed difference between the genders” (*Masculine Domination* 11 emphasis in original). Symbolic violence is “the essential part of masculine domination” (Bordieu qtd. in Kraus 214) “which is not perceived as such because it is nothing other than the application of an arbitrary social order and a vision of the world rooted in the habitus or bodily dispositions of dominant and dominated” (Kraus 214).

Similarly, I have used Bourdieu's theories of symbolic violence to analyse *Elysium*, a critical dystopia exposing an exploitative economic system based on an unjust class and race division between the Elysian citizens and Earthly inhabitants. This disenfranchised population accept the inequalities that maintain them oppressed as acceptable and natural because they "apply categories constructed by them from the point of view of the dominant classes" (*Masculine Domination* 35). Symbolic violence works through the naturalization of certain stereotypes and roles since the organizational structures that exert this violence do not make this order of things appear legitimate by consent and coercion but by means of "free, deliberate and even calculated submission"(37). Passivity and submission is a side effect of the same domination; it implies the acceptance of the social order even by people disadvantaged by it.

I have resorted to Hannah Arendt's seminal book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to outline some of the most important features which characterised totalitarian regimes and their organized means to attain and maintain the despotic state power.

Some of the events narrated highlight the hierarchical structures of knowledge and power represented by science and technology. In technological dystopias (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *Blade Runner*), I have drawn on Haraway's theories of cyborg developed in "A Cyborg Manifesto" and Hayles's notion of posthuman that she stated in *How We Became Posthuman* , which are needed to discuss human's representation transcending the concept of liberal subject and blurring the limits between mind and body or human and machine.

1.5 Delimitation of the Corpus

This study involves the selection of eight dystopian texts, five novels and three films produced over the last 100 years engaging with the notion of imagined or alternative societies. I have grouped the dystopias in five blocks to cover different instances of them. According to my interests, I have categorized the narratives in Totalitarian, Biologically

Based, Post-Apocalyptic, Feminist and Cyberpunk dystopias. In all cases, the liberal paradigm of a stable society and democratic aspirations are susceptible to fail and the darker side of utopia is reflected in the form of dystopias or anti-utopias portraying societies where “evil or negative social developments have the upper hand” (Claeys 107).

Within the limits of this thesis, as it was my wish to cover a broad range of dystopian works to provide different styles and strategies, I have included films as well. High number of novels have been successfully transformed into cinematic adaptations as is the case with *Blade Runner*, based on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. Since Hollywood has become a powerful industry leader in terms of worldwide impact and potential to reach large audiences, *Blade Runner* has achieved a status of cult film and it is acknowledged as one of the most influential pop-culture icons since its release. This film renders cultural representations of social experience in terms of consumer capitalism and ontological preoccupations about the status of artificially generated humans who are endowed with human consciousness but are denied their condition as “truly” humans.

Other dystopian topics have inspired popular films based on original screenplays which met with greater or lesser success, as *Gattaca* and *Elysium*. Through an effective mechanism of identification, both films use conventional images, situations and terminology easily recognisable by audiences and readers in discussions about race and class discrimination. According to Kirby,

Gattaca is an example of an extrapolative fiction film; it projects, from today’s limited use of gene therapy, a world where new eugenics is a reality. Essentially filmmakers act as bioethicists attempting to forecast the consequences of unrestricted human-gene therapy in a society that accepts all the implications of the genetic determinist ideology. (8)

The main objective in the universe of *Gattaca* is to build up a utopia based on genetic purity by eradicating “undesirable traits and human imperfections” (Kirby 9),

which leads to a dystopian world of social division and exclusion of individuals who do not fulfil these standards.

Elysium plays upon the negative representation of a polluted and overcrowded Earth in contrast to the utopic and unattainable habitat of a space station exclusively destined for the wealthiest and the powerful. These films are a form of popular culture to convey didactic warnings about our future departing from naturalistic and realistic literature and drawing on the realm of Sci-Fi.

Dystopian accounts are usually developed in the form of satire. In these texts, the author projects his or her social critique from the perspective of a discontent character whose main anxieties and terrors are expressed by dialogue, following the conventions of the diary, or through the technique of stream of consciousness. *We, Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale* undertake a sharp criticism of real world, but they adopt new social economic and political reconfigurations building a satire of utopian aspirations gone awry. While Zamyatin and Orwell worried about totalitarian regimes, Atwood engages with the theme of fertility in a theocratic dictatorship which selects passages of the Old Testament to justify its repressive and brutal rule. All these novels have in common the lust for power, one of main human motivations according to Suvin ("On the Poetics of Science Fiction" 376).

Although it was not originally written in English, I have included Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* because it offers a depiction of a totalitarian state under the scope of a dissident Russian author. Arguably, *We* is the source of inspiration for *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. These dystopias have in common the depiction of the powers of the state embodied in the figure of a godlike figure "who demands absolute adoration and obedience" and "constitutes the most fundamental source of authority": The Well-Doer,

Big Brother and Huxley's World Controller (Beauchamp "Of Man's Last Disobedience" 287).

Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer-winning novel *The Road* tells the story of two anonymous characters, a father and his son, and their struggle for survival in the middle of a deteriorated ecosystem caused by a nuclear cataclysm. While the Earth is devoid of any sign of civilization, father and son embody human contact and solidarity for "they are good guys" and "bearers of the fire" in a world where most people are reduced to the condition of savages. McCarthy's dark vision was filmed in 2009, directed by John Hillcoat and starred by Viggo Mortensen in the role of Father. This adaptation offers a powerful portrayal of the strong emotional bonds between father and son during their journey of survival across a dying world.

1.6 Methodology

To elaborate this project, I have taken into account the different historical and social contexts in which the works were inserted. First, I have provided a brief summary of the author's most significant aspects about the society he or she is projected. Gutting states that for Foucault, "such philosophical concepts as *resemblance*, *representation*, and *man* pervade all the disciplines of a given period, a view that leads [Foucault] to the notion of an episteme as the system of concepts that defines knowledge for a given intellectual era" (9 emphasis in original).

Content analysis methods were used to investigate systematically both the implicit and explicit meanings of each text. To expand this content, I have drawn on the essay "The future imagined: Exploring fiction as a means of reflecting on today's Grand Societal Challenges and Tomorrow's Options". This research work has been my source of inspiration since it offers a ground-breaking perspective on the objectives concerned on my

Master's thesis. For its authors, speculative and creative fictions are the best literary options to embody, tell, imagine and symbolise "futures" capable of identifying warning signals that ought to be heard (Bina et al. 166). Following the four major patterns identified in this essay and organised under the label of "Core Challenges" (172), I have focused on:

1. Individual dignity, values, wellbeing, and "strong homogenisation of identities" (Bina et al 172). I will focus on disrespect of human rights, dehumanisation and social control of subjects to rule out "dangerous thoughts" or deviations from the official dogma. Some works warn us about the dangers which entailed the suppression, censorship or curtailment of literature and reading books (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *The Handmaid's Tale* or *We*).

2. Natural environment vs. Technology, concerning destruction of nature and decline in biodiversity produced by environmental pollution, extreme urbanization and overpopulation (Bina et al. 172). Some texts consider animal extinction and food and water scarcity (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *The Road*, *Elysium*).

3. Dehumanising potential of Techno-science and the employment of systems of surveillance of population as a social-political instrument of control and manipulation of people in the service of coercive powers (use of telescreen or secret police to enforce perfect obedience and avoid dissent, etc). In *Elysium*, the access to technology and the benefits derived from advanced medical technologies are restricted to elitist groups. The use of genetic manipulation in *Gattaca* is damaging because it creates a discriminatory division among humans and it denies them equal opportunities for professional and social success. Some texts are clearly technophilic, such is the case with *Do Androids* in which high-tech amusements and homely machines provide an altered perception of reality to suppress grief, suffering or aggressive conducts but at the cost of supplanting real human relationships.

In other cases, advanced technology is not essential to build up a dystopian setting. For instance, Atwood depicts the Republic of Gilead as a place where the system that oppresses women is extremely archaic, supported by a perverse interpretation of the Scriptures and maintained through isolation, regimentation and strict surveillance of female population. Similarly in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, technology is applied only in areas related to warfare and repression to make people more miserable, only “for sheer sadism” (Beauchamp “Technology in the Dystopian Novel” 56). Oceania is a technologically primitive society designed and kept so by its rulers “to keep citizens in a state of depressed deprivation” (“Technology in the Dystopian Novel” 55).

4. Society and social structure, concerning socioeconomic conditions, discrimination and the ways societies are constructed and depicted as “hierarchical” (Bina et al. 173) and oppressive. These unequal societies are based on property, education, social class, or gender discrimination. This includes women’s inequality and male violence toward them (*The Handmaid’s Tale*), or stratification of workers and employment and capitalist society’s division between owners and workers (*Elysium*).

CHAPTER II

2. 1 Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction

2.1.1 Utopia

Before discussing the key component of literary dystopias, it is necessary to examine the definitions of utopia according to contemporary critics who have reviewed and clarified the concepts of utopianism and social and literary utopias and their negative manifestations: dystopias and anti-utopias.

Thomas More coined the term ‘utopia’ in 1516 punning on the word eutopia to depict “[a]n imaginary island as enjoying a perfect social, legal and political system”, and

“[a] place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs and conditions” (Oxford English Dictionary, qtd. in Suvin “Defining the Literary Genre” 124). The word utopia is based on the Greek word “topos” meaning place adding the prefix “u” or “ou” meaning “no or not”. Sargent claims that the primary characteristic of the utopian place is its non-existence combined with a location in time and space to give verisimilitude and to be recognized by the reader as a good or bad place (“The Three Faces” 5). Similarly, for Vieira, the most salient characteristics of the utopian place is its non-existence combined to “the desire for a better life, caused by a feeling of discontentment toward the society one lives in” (6).

Therefore, the term “utopia” can be interpreted as “no place” and also as “good place”, suggesting an ironic double meaning and reinforcing the idealistic and unrealizable character of this society (Sargent, “The Three Faces” 6). Sargent also notes that “[e]ven if utopia is realizable, the costs are too high and people are simply incapable of utopia” (“The Three Faces” 22). In the same way, Suvin is also aware that the utopian attempt to achieve a perfect state is far from being realizable. In his terms, utopia is:

[t]he verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis. (“Defining the Literary Genre” 132)

The word “utopia” has been used as a root for the formation of more derivative neologisms such as dystopia, eutopia and anti-utopia, among others. In “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited”, Sargent gives the following definitions of these concepts:

- Utopianism: “social dreaming”. The phenomenon of utopianism concerns “social dreaming” of people who imagine a “radically different society in which the dreamers live” (3).

- Utopia: “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived” (9).
- Dystopia or negative utopia: “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (9).
- Anti-utopia: “a non-existent society ... that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular utopia” (9). This term “is in common use as a substitute for dystopia” (8).

In his taxonomy, Sargent has included the negative manifestations of utopia. He believes that although utopianism “is essential for the improvement of human condition ... if used wrongly, as it has been, utopianism is itself dangerous, and in this sense, supporters of utopianism are both wrong and potentially dangerous” (*Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* 9). In “Open Society”, Popper argues that the utopian enterprise of creating an ideal state according to the author’s perfect society cannot go forward without “a strong, centralized government of a few... which therefore is likely to lead to a dictatorship” (140).

In *Biopunk Dystopias*, Lars Schemenk distinguishes between common usage, sociological concept and literary theory of “utopia”. Common usage regards “utopia” as the dream of a perfect life and the unreachable better world. In terms of sociology utopia “refers to the process of betterment ... providing a blueprint for a better future” (12).

Finally, literary theory sees “utopia” as a neutral term that incorporates any form of “social dreaming”, allowing for “dystopia”, “the negative side of the dream, the nightmare to be warned about, as equally utopian (12).

In his delineation of Utopia, Lewis Mumford reminds the foundation stones of Plato's *Republic*. Mumford links utopia to the military: "people must strictly mind their business taking order from those above and not answering back" (273). The price of utopia is total submission to a central authority, forced labor, lifetime specialization, inflexible regimentation, one-way communication and readiness for war" (285). Mumford goes on to say:

"Isolation, stratification, standardization and militarization", one or more of these attributes enter into the concept of utopian city as argued by the Greeks ... In the end, utopia merges into the dystopia of the twentieth century, and one suddenly realises that the distance between the positive ideal and the negative was never so great as the advocates or admirers of utopia had professed". (277)

2.1.2 Dystopia

The term dystopia appeared in a speech before the British Parliament by John Stuart Mill in 1868, reflecting on the impossibility of establishing a utopia on the grounds that "economy and social development was subjected to human laws that cannot be influenced by human will" meaning that all utopian ideas "were too flawed to be practical" (Ashley, "Freedom or oppression? The fear of dystopia"). Utopia does not exist, even in More's island, a hierarchical and patriarchal society where authority is established by wise elderly men based on very strict laws with harsh punishments (Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* 2). On one hand, utopian writers believe in the positive outcomes of the structured life of utopia "*in which human relations are organized according to a radically more perfect principle than in the author's community*" (Suvin, "Defining the Literary Genre" 128). On the other, dystopian writers warn us about what happens when something breaks its flawless order or when citizens do not want to comply with a government apparatus too greedy for power.

In “The Origins of Dystopia”, Claeys points out that “the vision of heaven on earth became anticipations of hell” after “the grotesque slaughter of the First World War” (107). Thus, in the twentieth century, “dystopia becomes the predominant expression of the utopian ideal” as “the liberal paradigm of universal opulence and stable democracy” of the utopias of the past “is itself also an utopian ideal and itself susceptible to dystopian failure” (108).

Within the continuum of utopian imagination, images of positive utopia dominated before the twentieth century whereas dystopia prevailed during most part of the twentieth century and continued onwards. Anti-utopian genre gained new impetus in the first quarter of the last century, particularly after the Russian Revolution and the rise of Bolshevism (Evans 29; Fitting 139). This social context contributed to the production of dystopian novels such as Zamyatin’s *We*, one of the early dystopias of the twentieth century and source of inspiration for *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The rise of Communism and Fascism demanding an extreme adherence from their citizens crushed the ideals of welfare humanism and freedom, and the feelings that upheld utopian spirit turned into fear. Sargent affirms that failing to build a utopia, force is used to construct what totalitarian powers believe to be a perfect society. So, the main tendency in the twentieth century “has been to equate utopia with force, violence and totalitarianism” (Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism”²⁴). This author affirms that the current development of dystopia has appeared owing to the rejection of hope and the loss of confidence justified by World Wars I and II, Vietnam, the apparent failure of the welfare state, ecological disasters, corruption, and the upsurge of ethnic and tribal slaughter in Eastern Europe and Africa, among others. (Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism” 26). It has led to pessimism about the ability of human race to construct a better society, and self-conscious warnings that things could be worse superseded utopian accounts.

Tom Moylan defines dystopian narrative as “the product of the terrors of the twentieth century” emerging from “the anti-utopian novels of the nineteenth century” (xi). For Moylan, “[a] hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady weakening of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination” (xi). According to Robert O. Evans, a defining characteristic that nearly all dystopian novels share is that “they are calculated to give their readers a warning... of what may happen if we do not pay attention to the way in which our social and political institutions develop” (33). Evans argues that Zamyatin’s book examines what happens to a mythical place when “it becomes entirely closed... with no contact whatever with the outer world” (33). Although Zamyatin is “an idealist with some faith in human nature” (33), he is warning us “that if we persist we will destroy something in our society and in ourselves” (35).

I contend that these “new maps of hell” (Suvin, “Utopianism from Orientation” 171), contain compelling warnings that must be heard to identify real or potential threats. Each one of these envisages arguments enough to support dystopian fear: the rise of despotic governments, environmental degradation, biological risks, the building of boundaries to repel migratory movements or the decontrolled use of technology.

2.1.3 Dystopia and Techno-science

Modern science fiction has taken a dystopian turn owing to the pervasive presence of technology intruding into our lives. As argued by Beauchamp, the dystopian novel by projecting an admonitory image of the future, formulates its warning by fusing “two modern fears: the fear of utopia and the fear of technology” (“Zamyatin’s *We*” 56-57), bearing in mind that for Beauchamp, utopia means “imaginary models of static, regimented and totally ordered, in short, “perfect” societies” (“Technology in the Dystopian Novel 53).

The connection between Sci-Fi and the utopian begins when the former is able “to reflect or express our hopes and fears about the future and more specifically to link those fears and hopes to science and technology” (Fitting 138). Orwell provided the argument that supports this point through Goldstein’s manifesto “The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism”. Goldstein claims that:

The invention of print, however, made it easier to manipulate public opinion, and the film and the radio carried the process further. With the development of television and the technical advance which made possible to receive and transmit simultaneously ... private life came to an end. Every citizen, or at least every citizen important enough to be worth watching, could be kept for twenty-hours a day under the eyes of the police and in the sound of official propaganda. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 214)

It is amazing how Orwell anticipated 70 years before our age the role of the technology as a threat to our privacy monitoring people and places by the use of electronic devices. Likewise, the employment of media manipulation was a tactic aimed at influencing audience’s beliefs. In our days, the pervasive presence of “Big Brothers watching us” via telescreens for security purposes, or the use of networking technologies to gather “big data” about where we go, what we read or what we buy, etc, is no longer fictional and very far from being a simple speculation.

In their study of 64 dystopian novels and movies, Bina et al. conclude that texts in which techno-science occupies a prevalent position are particularly frequent from 1990 onwards (174). Sci-Fi has expanded the limits of future technologies showing their transformative power for social progress but they have inspired dystopian visions about “the evil side” of techno-scientific developments. Many of the dystopian societies under this study rely heavily on advancements in the fields of biotechnology, cyber-technology and robotics (*Do Androids, Blade Runner*) and human-gene altering technologies (*Gattaca*). Other dystopias are clearly technophobic and adopt the rudimentary mode of

“technologies of power” or “technologies of the body” based on purely punitive and disciplinary methods (*The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*).

In *We*, science and technology assumes an “almost mystical role” (Bina et al.174) in its quest for perfection according to a strict mathematical rule which estrange humans from nature bringing about destructive and dehumanizing effects. In utopian projects, technological development contributes to increase individuals’ quality of life in terms of improvement of health, to correct genetic abnormalities or un-wanted elements such as disease, unhappiness, isolation etc., “echoing specific ideals of progress” (Bina et al. 174).

In this study I have considered the impact of technological changes expressed from their negative side rather than from the perspective of fulfilment of positive ideals. As an instrument in the hands of totalitarian rulers, the harmful effects of techno-science are associated to unwanted outcomes such as social domination by governments and corporations to create social hierarchies (*Elysium*), to build genetic perfection (*Gattaca*), or serving as a tool for social domination, manipulation and rationalization (Bina et al. 174) leading to disrespect of human rights, loss of privacy and freedom (*We*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *The Handmaid’s Tale*).

Last but not least, *The Road* reflects the collapse of a society by assuming that the apocalyptic cataclysm was caused by a decontrolled use of nuclear weapons. The novel imagines an inhospitable environment where technological apparatus is absent and technocratic achievements of the past appear now useless and trivial in contrast to human’s weakness and extreme adversity.

2.1.4 Science Fiction, Cognitive Estrangement and Defamiliarization

The phenomenon of utopianism concerns “social dreaming” of people who imagine an ideal world in which to live. In its desire for creating a perfect society, Sci-Fi represents alternative possibilities developing in futuristic but yet utterly familiar settings. The main

role of Sci-Fi is to depict unrealistic worlds as a metaphor of our reality or as an extrapolation of it “in order to warn the reader of future, potentially catastrophic developments” (Varsam 209).

For Suvin, Sci-Fi departs from a fictional or “literary” hypotheses to offer an interpretation of human values in cultures different from our own “with totalizing (“scientific”) rigor in which there is no difference “between imaginary and factual possibilities... implying a new set of norms ... [T]his is known as the attitude of *estrangement*” (“On the Poetics” 374 emphasis in original).

This concept of “making strange” was developed to literary theory by Russian Formalist Victor Shlovsky in 1917 (known by “ostranenie” but rendered as “defamiliarization”). Later, this notion was successfully applied by Bertold Brecht in his anthropological and historical works (Suvin, “On the Poetics” 374). Suvin borrowed Brecht’s term “*verfremdung*” (translated as “alienation”) but he reversed the concept of defamiliarization to affirm that Sci-Fi describes “unfamiliar things as if they were familiar” (Nodelman 24). For Suvin, Nodelman affirms, the final effect is the same: “by Brechtian distancing or by the unfamiliarity of science fictional worlds, we are estranged from our assumptions about reality and forced to question them” (Nodelman 24). By emphasizing estrangement, Suvin shows that “things could be different”, moving away from reality (Nodelman 24). On the other side, we are invited to judge and compare the common facts of the dystopian world with a new and dynamic perspective because “[a] representation which estranges ... allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (Suvin, “On the Poetics” 274).

Defamiliarization is the artistic technique that presents dissimilar communities as similar to human ones; the stories do not have to be realistic, and their characters “do not have to be human or even outwardly anthropomorphic” (Suvin, “Defining the Literary

Genre” 143). However, the most important thing in Sci-Fi is that these communities are “treated as an alternative history” (144) while they mirror our own world.

Patrick D. Murphy believes that although utopian and dystopian narratives benefit from the utilisation of “spatial and temporal displacement” in order to make more strange “the dystopian features of the present and the possible horrors of the future”, the authors face the problem of “having that same distance sever the didactic signals of their chosen genre” (25). He puts it that “if a work seems too far removed from the everyday”, the defamiliarizing distance would result in sublimation, a “cathartic elimination of anxiety” rather than “cognition”, which is “the kind of understanding that makes the readers want to act to change the world” (40).

In order to reduce the distinctions between the fictional universe and the empirical universe, the authors have used literary conventions such as “pseudo-documentary framing” in form of discovered manuscript... hugging close to the shore of present time... or by making their dystopian world easily recognisable but foregrounding through exaggeration of a few of its elements (P. D. Murphy 27). Besides, the topics introduced by the texts are rather recognisable to audiences: ecological devastation, the aftermath of a nuclear disaster or the patriarchal repression of women, among others. The purpose of these stories is to alter “the consciousness of their readers who will act in the world differently” (27), and the result of this new understanding could prompt in us social action “by elaborating on its evils in terms of other worlds” (40).

In her survey of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Maria Varsam claims that we are asked to identify and emphasize with Offred from the perspective of her dystopian experience. Interestingly, Varsam holds that for the purpose of ensuring that identification is successfully developed, we need to “make objects *unfamiliar*...to increase the difficulty and length of *perception*” in order not merely to sympathize but also to judge and to

condemn “ those aspects that constitute the narrator’s oppression” (206 emphasis in original) . Through the devices that “make strange our perception of the world” (206) , we create the necessary distance to see the world in radically different ways to reflect on reality with a “renewed perception ... [to] see the world anew, not as it is but as it *could* be” (206 emphasis in original).

Today we accept that Sci-Fi and dystopias are narratives that involve a prediction about the future that take the form of “self-conscious warnings” against the risks to which we are exposed and help “make the correct choices” to achieve a better society (Sargent, “Three Faces” 26). In his discussion of dystopian genre, Fredric Jameson insists that “dystopia is always and essentially what in the language of science-fiction criticism is called “near-future novel” telling the story of an imminent disaster, -ecology, overpopulation, plague, plague the stray comet or nuclear accident- waiting to come to pass in our own future” (*The Seeds of Time* 56).

Many films dealing with the future depict any form of frightening dystopia, emphasizing our vulnerability and revealing the fragility of human life. Novels and films of this genre are capable to foresight how human beings would change due to technological advances. The works under my study contend that nuclear, climatic or technological catastrophes are very likely to occur. They serve as a way of early warning signal and a form of forward-looking technique into the potential dangers of over- technologized societies and all kinds of dystopian control.

2.2 Conclusion

It can be argued that utopia and dystopia are “two sides of the same coin”. Sargent and Popper alike are convinced that the political nature of utopianism leads to the growth of totalitarianism and violence. Utopia constitutes “a blueprint of what the author sees as a perfect society which is to be constructed with no significant departure from the blueprint

... [because] any alteration would lower its quality” (Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism” 24). This assertion implies that utopias are impossible to achieve for they are built by human beings and there are no perfect people. When rational methods for realizing an ideal state fail, utopian planners and engineers are entitled to “use power instead of reason” (Popper 142), i.e. to use violence.

Whereas utopian perspectives of future express the hope and desire that a better world can be achieved, opponents of utopianism say that utopia leads inevitably to force, violence and totalitarianism, the darker side of utopia. For instance, when O’Brien tried to convince Winston that the totalitarian regime of Oceania was the best of all possible worlds, he argues that it is founded not upon love and justice but upon “hatred” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 279). For O’Brien, as long as “the heretic, the enemy of society will always be there ... [t]he espionage, the betrayals, the arrests, the tortures the executions and the disappearances will never cease (280-281). Winston objects this argument by replying that there is something in the universe, some spirit or some principle which cannot be overcome (282), but O’Brien says that he is “the last man”, “outside history” and “non-existent” (283), because in the universe of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston’s longings for an utopian world freedom, justice and love are simply unattainable.

2.3 Why study Dystopias?

To support my point of view on the benefits of studying dystopias, I will start by giving a summary of Donald Lawler’s point of view about the utilities of speculative fiction which provides a solid argument in favour of the potential good effects of Sci-Fi and fantastic literature. In broad terms, this author holds that the most important values produced by this genre may be classified as “CAUTIONARY, NORMATIVE, ESTHETIC AND EPISTEMIC” (3 emphasis in original). As cautionary tale, Sci-Fi has an important and necessary role in our culture because by exploring imagined futures, “speculative

science fiction sensitizes its readers to the likely consequences of the often fast-moving developments of the present” and it serves ... as a sort of early warning system ”(3). Most importantly, Sci-Fi has offered us guidelines for assessing our “moral values in imagined future cultures different from our own” (3).

As regards the aesthetic power of Sci-Fi, it has “the power to evoke, stimulate, exercise and resolve primal emotions... but there is also a power that distinguishes science fiction and fantasy from all other literature: the power of producing awe and wonder” (Lawler 8). Owing to the “epistemic” benefits of science-fiction, we change “our ways of imagining” and also the representations of collective imagination leading to possible “new realities” (9). Its stories give us inspiration to imagine alternative scenarios from which the future may be shaped. Finally, Lawler argues that “fantasy offers human imagination the possibility of alternate worlds and experiences ... [and] helps prepare us to live in worlds which the life of imagination is nourished rather than strangled” (10).

I will outline some utilities of studying dystopian worlds:

- Dystopias explore the dangerous effects of political systems and structures which maintain the illusion of a utopian society while they are based on technological, bureaucratic, moral or totalitarian control (“Dystopias: Definitions and Characteristics”).
- There is a great potential of dystopian texts to interest audiences. Sci-Fi literature and mass media are the major source of information about Technoscience for non-expert people. Novels and films are capable to foresight how human beings would change due to technological advances.
- Writers and film makers imagine plausible futures often resulting from the extrapolation of tendencies and trends in their scientific, social and cultural environments. In Jameson words, Sci-Fi is “the attempt to imagine

unimaginable futures [b]ut its deepest subject may in fact be our own historical present” (*Archaeologies* 345). Compared to high literature, texts of popular culture convey future visions reaching to a much broader public. Although Sci-Fi and fantasy have been dismissed as forms of cultural sub-genre or “light entertainment”, Jameson argues that “a mass cultural genre as like Science Fiction has different (and stricter) laws than high culture and can sometimes express realities and dimensions that escape high literature”(*Archaeologies* 345).

I consider that the topic of my work is academically relevant because due to its attention to social and political critique, dystopian literature is the perfect vehicle to increase our involvement in social criticism of current cultural codes, values and ideologies. This genre has been the object of extensive research and the issues explored are of interest across different disciplines and discourses combining Marxist, feminist, post-colonial and post-structuralist criticism, political theory and sociology, among others. In recent years, the genre of Sci-Fi has developed a dystopian tendency that “has served as a prophetic vehicle ... for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible socio-political tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world ... in the realm of utopias’s underside” (Baccolini and Moylan 2).

Sci-Fi literature and films “reach wide audiences and thus amplify participation in the debate about the future that we want” (Bina et al. 170). Booker contends that “imaginative literature is one of the most important means by which any culture can investigate new ways of defining itself and of exploring alternatives to the social and political status quo” (3). The demand for dystopian literature and Sci-Fi has increased significantly from the turn of the twentieth century with the rise of Techno-science

developments. It encompasses personal data collection by public or private agencies or censorship in the media has increased our interest in fictitious societies worse than ours.

The growth of global ecological threats is giving Sci-Fi new materials to avert potential dangers to the environment and nature. Braun affirms that “one of the most notable developments in recent years has been the growing importance of literature, film and art for how individuals and groups figure, imagine or anticipate what is to come” (241). For this critic,

as future scenarios have taken greater significance in public life, the line separating limits of science and fiction has become increasingly blurred ... reflected in the emerging proliferation of apocalyptic novels and film [*sic*], and the re-emergence and deployment of utopian and dystopian fiction. (Braun 241)

2.4 Personal involvement in the topic of my research.

I would like to devote the last words of this introduction to make few remarks about my personal involvement in the topic of my Master’s thesis. Since I first watched *Blade Runner*, one of my favourite films of all time, I realised the power of Sci-Fi films to tell fascinating and moving stories arising our curiosity about different worlds or new realities unfolding in the future. Ridley Scott reproduces the Gothic myth of Frankenstein through the replicants’ search for their creator in order to ask him for more life. It is impossible not to feel empathy for these mechanical beings exploited by a network of power which uses them as enslaved labour force. The film shows that these sentient artificial minds are “more human than humans”. On the one hand, they are self-consciously preoccupied about their short lives; they show feelings and concerns similar to humans. On the other, they display a more human behaviour than real humans and possess an intelligence superior to them. The final scene where Roy Batty pronounces the soliloquy known as “the Tears in the rain monologue” has been acknowledged as one the most poetic and brilliant speeches in the story of Sci-Fi cinema.

It has not been an easy task to select the texts for this study. Many other works approach other topics and depict diverse societies revealing the perspective of a bleak future. Thus, I could have explored the manipulation of embryos to control human's actions in *Brave New World*, the cloning of human beings for organ harvesting in *Never Let me Go*, or the topics of censorship and enforced illiteracy to deprive individuals of free thinking and creative imagination in *Fahrenheit 451*. Regarding films, while *Metropolis* is dealing with exploitation and dehumanization of working classes, *The Matrix* explores the fear of technology in the age of virtual universes. Finally, Cuarón's film *Children of Men* is an example of dystopia of human infertility intermingled with political aspects of race and immigration.

CHAPTER III

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. Totalitarian Dystopias: *We* (1929) by Eugeny Zamyatin and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell.

3.1.1 Introduction

“Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive” (C.S. Lewis 151).

I have chosen the totalitarian dystopias *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to exemplify the impact of totalitarian regimes on the respect of human rights and liberties.

The entry for “totalitarianism” in Encyclopædia Britannica reads as follows:

[It] is a form of government that attempts to assert total control over the lives of its citizens. It is characterized by strong central rule that attempts to control and direct all aspects of individual life through coercion and repression. It does not permit individual freedom ... making people more willing to be merged into a single unified movement.

Totalitarian states typically pursue a special goal to the exclusion of all others, with all resources directed toward its attainment, regardless of the cost. (“What is Totalitarianism?”)

Zamyatin was a member of the Bolshevik party who participated in the rebellion against the Tsarist power in 1905. After having passed several years exiled, he came back to support the October Revolution of 1917, but he was soon disappointed with socialism and collectivism as the government started to spread their authoritative control and totalitarian power over the population known as “the dictatorship of the proletariat” (Claeys 119). Although he wrote *We* before the rise of the Stalinist regime, he foresaw the horrors hidden in the promise of future happiness for all. For Mirra Ginsburg, Zamyatin’s doctrine is summarised in two statements expressed by I-330: “there is no final revolution ... revolutions are infinite”, and “I do not want anyone to want for me, I want to want for myself” (v). Ginsburg states that “[t]hese two principles (belief in eternal change and freedom of the individual to choose) dominated all his life and are reflected in the text” (v).

Orwell, a convinced socialist, began working on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* after he witnessed the incredible violence of a society in which the political power was in the hands of a dictator or leader and a corrupted ruling elite. In his essay “Big Brother in America”, Beauchamp affirms that the novel reflects the real atmosphere of the Soviet Union of the 30s, that is to say:

a world of secret police and the purge trials ... of torture- extorted confessions of preposterous crimes and summary executions in the cellars of the Lubyanka² prison ... a world where the Memory Hole worked overtime to destroy the past ... where major figures became unpersons overnight, where eternal truth shifted on a daily basis. (248)

Oceania represents the image of Stalinist Russia that Orwell transposed to a futurist England where totalitarian rule is utterly triumphant.

² Former headquarters of the KGB. See: www.atlasobscura.com/places/lubyanka

In a letter to Francis H. Henson, Orwell insisted that:

My recent book is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party... but as a show up of perversions to which a centralised economy is liable and which have been partly realised in Communism and Fascism ... I believe that something resembling it could arrive. I believe also that totalitarian ideas that have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere ... and that totalitarianism, *if not fought against*, could triumph anywhere. (Collected Essays, 502 emphasis in original)

Arendt claims in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that:

The disturbing factor in the success of totalitarianism is rather the true selflessness of its adherents... a Nazi or a Bolshevik ... may be willing to help in his own prosecution and frame his own death sentence if only his status as a member of the movement is not touched. (307)

We and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* show great many of similarities in agreement with Arendt's concept of Totalitarianism:

- “The totalitarian movements aim at and succeed at organizing masses- not classes ...not citizens with opinions about, and interests in, the handling of public affairs” (Arendt 308). These masses count with the presence of a charismatic ruler, or in Orwell's words, a “semi-divine leader” (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 205) who “could manipulate a propaganda apparatus ... to immortalize [their] name (Arendt 305). Totalitarian leaders “command and rest upon mass support” and maintain their leadership with the confidence of the masses (306).
- “[T]he modern totalitarian leaders do not differ much in psychology and mentality from earlier mob leaders, whose moral standards and political devices so closely resembled those of the bourgeoisie” (Arendt 313). Goldstein explains how the Middle classes, or the new aristocracy made up of “bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, trade-union organisers” etc, (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 213)

deposed the High classes and seized the power enlisting the Low “pretending that they are fighting for liberty and justice” (210).

- “The extraordinarily bloody terror ... serves indeed the exclusive purpose of defeating the opponent and rendering all further opposition impossible”(Arendt 440), and succeeded by using punitive methods for controlling behaviour which result in repressive forms of police state.
- “The masses grew out of the fragments of a highly atomised society” and tended toward an especially violent nationalism, being “the chief characteristic of the mass man ... his isolation and lack of normal relationships” (Arendt 317). Total loyalty is expected from the isolated individual who lacks family, friends, comrades or other social ties and “derives his sense of having a place in the world only from his belonging to a movement, his membership in the party” (323-324).
- “Compared with all other parties and movements their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional and unalterable loyalty of the individual member” (Arendt 323). In Oceania, as well as being “competent, industrious and even intelligent within narrow limits”, it is necessary to be “a credulous and ignorant fanatic whose prevailing moods are fear, hatred, adulation and orgiastic triumph” to qualify as a member of the Party (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 200).
- “Wherever totalitarianism possesses absolute control, it replaces propaganda with indoctrination and uses violence to not so much to frighten people ... as to realize constantly its ideological doctrines and its practical lies” (Arendt 341). It uses violence to frighten people “when political opposition still exists” (341).

Before analysing both texts in more detail, it is necessary to consider their generic relationship and deal with their characteristics which define both of them as dystopias.

There are differences and similarities between these narrations. Claeys contends that the key aspect of the totalitarian ideal “was held to be the desire for complete control over the hearts and bodies, minds and souls, of the citizens of the nation” (119). They both evoke similar societies dominated by totalitarian control of people’s lives, lack of individualism and dehumanization, and existence of thought control supported by an overwhelming array of surveillance practices and ubiquitous guardians and spies.

The ideological architects of both states enforce the cult of a leader (Benefactor and Big Brother) demanding total adherence from their subjects and imposing their expansive visions through domination and repression of dissenters. In the texts, the main male characters keep a furtive record of their experiences and thoughts to be read by future generations. Initially, D-503 believes in the system and expresses in his diary his rational worldview and his unconditional loyalty to the regime but his faith begins to diminish convinced by the theories of the woman he falls in love with.

On the other hand, Winston’s account reflects his rejection of the political system and his hatred of the Party from the beginnings of the novel. His romantic involvement with Julia is a politically subversive act because he knows that the love of one person and the sexual desire were the forces that would destroy the Party: “[t]heir embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory” (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 133). But while *We* is a literary anti-utopia because the ideals of material advancement against natural world and human nature are simply unrealizable, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* represents the archetypal form of dystopian text tinged with more pessimism in which all hopes to escape from this hell are trampled underfoot by an authoritarian state. It controls citizen’s bodies and minds by means of state terrorism.

We devises a satire against utopia and utopian thought. It depicts a technocratic social order dominated exclusively by the logic of mathematical rationality where a

powerful government controls every aspect of its citizens' lives stressing unity over individuality, or "the victory of *all* over *one*, of the *sum* over the *individual*" (Zamyatin 46 emphasis in original). In the One State, individual happiness depends on communal happiness. The ideal of perfection is achieved by a petrified social system in which people act like cogs in a machine according to an ideal of "unfreedom". But Utopian societies can only be maintained by the use of coercive methods, and happiness and state protection is effected through extreme social control. Because there is a disharmony between the perfect conception of an ideal state and the imperfect people inhabiting this state, such perfect societies are built and imposed by the use of power instead of reason. The cost of realizing a utopian societies are too high because they rest on "force, violence and totalitarianism" (Sargent, "Three Faces of Utopianism" 24).

The One State is revealed to have been founded after a catastrophic Great Two Hundred Year's War where only the 0,2% of the populations survived. While their ancestors "subdued the entire globe to the power of the One State" (Zamyatin 1), coercion is to be maintained because the One State is planning to "subjugate the unknown lives on other planets, who may still be living in the condition of freedom" and "if they fail to understand ... it will be our duty to compel them to be happy... [b]ut before resorting to arms, we shall try the power of words" (Zamyatin 1).

We inspired the most important dystopias of the twentieth century: *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The former is a bio-technologic dystopia where human beings are reproduced artificially to modify their physical and intellectual qualities building up a system of caste divisions. According to their status, individuals accept blindly their social position so that this community achieve stability and security and every citizen lives happily.

Published in 1949, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems to confirm Zamyatin's worst prophecies about the future of the Soviet Union under Stalin's brutal regime of terror. In Winston Smith's society, citizens live under secret surveillance and control and suffer harsh living conditions. The authoritarianism of the state is based on constant manipulation of the historical events and on disinformation about never-ending wars because oppressive regimes always need that a state of war to justify their power. Finally, party members have to show a total submission and love for the Party's leader even though they know he is responsible for their misery.

As an instrument of social control and owing to its potentially destructive effects on humans, technology plays an important role in dystopian fiction. For Beauchamp:

[t]he utopian ideations of the past, that once seemed impossible of historical actualization, appear in our century not only possible, but perhaps inevitable given the increasing array of techniques for social control made available by our science. ("Zamyatin's *We*" 56)

According to Beauchamp, technology can be used by totalitarian states to enforce a set of values depending on the ruler's purposes, a force to which Well-Doers or Big Brothers are subservient ("Technology in The Dystopian Novel" 54). *We* devises a technophile society where technocrats and scientists handle technology as an ideological instrument for manipulation and rationalization of people and scientific progress is intended to transform men into mindless robots. A sophisticated futuristic technology designs the Integral to spread the ideology of the One State and "subjugate the unknown beings of other planets who may be still living in the primitive condition of freedom to the beneficent yoke of reason" (Zamyatin 1).

Contrariwise, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* ideology controls technology, which is an instrument to serve the purposes of the Party. Orwell renders a technophobic dystopia where an archaic technology endeavours to keep the citizens in a state of ignorance and backwardness. This technological regression is pursued by the state because if civilization

progresses technologically, inequality would eventually disappear and “hunger, overwork, dirt, illiteracy and disease could be eliminated within a few generations” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 197). Its underdeveloped industry and elementary technology are connected to areas of warfare and police espionage (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 197, 201) and are geared to produce mechanisms of surveillance to monitor subversive elements against the State. Consequently, its technologic sector is limited to the fabrication of war materials, telescreens, microphones and police helicopters to fulfil the need to build up a repressive regime. Emmanuel Goldstein remarks that “[i]n Oceania, at the present day, Science, in the old sense, has almost ceased to exist. In Newspeak, there is no word for “Science”” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 201).

Great dystopian works such as *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* describe fictional societies where ambitions of utopianism are transformed into nightmarish societies because utopian aspirations have turned into corruption and abuses of power. These communities are “organized in a *significantly less perfect* way than in the author’s community, (Suvin, “Utopianism from Orientation to Agency” 170 emphasis in original). Their writers provide a social critic closely linked to their historical context but defamiliarize them by settling the stories in “imaginatively distant settings” (Booker 3). These dystopias confront alternative worlds “realistically” (or cognitively according to Suvin), and they show us “not another place, but another viewpoint on our usual place” (Nodelman 25).

3.1.2 *We*

You are perfect; you are machinelike; the road to one hundred per cent happiness is free! Hurry, then, everyone-old and young-hurry to submit to the Great Operation! ... Long Live the Great Operation! Long live the One State! Long live the Benefactor!. (Zamyatin 180)

One of the best summaries of *We* is provided by Orwell in his 1946 review of the novel. For Orwell, the book deals with “the rebellion of the primitive human spirit against

a rationalised, mechanised painless world” (Review of “*We*” 72). Orwell’s essay starts by describing life under the repressive society devised by Zamyatin :

In the twenty-sixth century...the inhabitants of Utopia have so completely lost their individuality as to be known only by numbers. They live in glass houses ... which enable the political police, known as the “Guardians”, to supervise them more easily. They all wear identical uniforms, and a human being is commonly referred to either as “a number” or “a unif” (uniform). They live on synthetic food, and their usual recreation is to march in fours while the anthem of the Single State is played through loudspeakers. At stated intervals they are allowed for one hour (known as “the sex hour”) to lower the curtains round their glass apartments ... The Single State is ruled over by a personage known as The Benefactor, who is annually re-elected by the entire population, the vote being always unanimous. The guiding principle of the State is that happiness and freedom are incompatible. In the Garden of Eden man was happy, but in his folly he demanded freedom and was driven out into the wilderness. Now the Single State has restored his happiness by removing his freedom. (Orwell, “Review of *We* by E.I. Zamyatin” 73)

The novel deploys the life of D-530, a scientist who keeps regular records of his experiences in the One-State, a futurist society organized around the model of a perfect machine. These records generate a counter-narrative through which we learn about “his alienation, growing desire and consciousness, and attempted resistance” (Moylan, *Scraps* 160). Citizen’s daily routine is lived according to a strict schedule regulated by The Table of Hours. This totalitarian state imposes regimentation and discipline to create docile bodies by “supervising the processes of activity ... and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space and movement” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 137). These methods “made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body ... and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility might be

called disciplines), which became general formulas of domination” (137). Therefore, in the One State:

Every morning, with six-wheeled precision, at the same hour and at the same moment, we - millions of us- get up as one. At the same hour, in million-headed unison we start work; and in million-headed unison, we end it. And, final into a single million-handed body, at the same second, designated by the Table, we lift our spoons to our mouths. At the same second, we come out for our walk, go to the auditorium, go to the hall for Taylor exercises, fall sleep.... (Zamyatin 12)

This passage makes reference to Frederick Taylor as the father of scientific organization of work and philosopher of industrial efficiency. As Beauchamp contends in his essay “Zamyatin’s *We*”, Taylor was the first to adapt to the factory “the model of the organic, conflict-free society hierarchically structured, with strict division of labor and reduction of individuals to cogs in a rationally regulated machine” (60). Accordingly, he is the great ideologist to inspire the reconversion of the factory model into a social model for human activity. Zamyatin extrapolates the model of the machine to build up One State, a community modelled on the citizens’ estrangement from nature, on the aesthetization of technology, and on the exaltation of the rational and the mechanised.

The population is enclosed within a glass-walled city and it is constantly monitored by the Guardians, a secret police who control and correct any deviation from the orthodoxy. The Green Wall marks the boundaries of this community and the natural world which is populated by “savages” or people not subjected to the repressive control of the One State. These rebels embody such values as “freedom, spontaneity, fancy, the individual’s own foolish will” (Beauchamp, “Zamiatyn’s *We*”62) abolished by the One State. D-530, heavily impregnated with the One State’s ideology, compares the human’s longing for freedom with Adam and Eve’s original sin. He claims:

Those two, in paradise, were given a choice: happiness without freedom or freedom without happiness. There were no third alternative. Those idiots choose freedom and what came of it? The chains you understand? That was world's sorrow was about. For ages! And only we have found the way of restoring happiness.... (Zamyatin 61)

One of the main topics explored in the novel is the surveillance of population in the hands of government. The immense power of the One State rests upon the constant monitoring of citizens helped by the transparent architecture of its buildings so that they were “always visible, always washed in light” (Zamyatin18). But although D-503 admits that they “have nothing to conceal from one another” (18), he recognises that the task of the Guardians is very difficult and necessary to the point of wonder “who knows what might happen otherwise?” (19), implying the existence of subversive activities, social unrest and citizens’ opposition to their constant scrutiny.

The method of surveillance in *We* is related to the concept of Panopticon as theorised by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. The Panopticon guaranteed the invisibility of guardians while they oversaw the activities of inmates in jails, factories, schools, hospitals or any part of population that needed to be supervised. Designed by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighty century, this building consisted of a tower surrounded by a circular structure divided into cells. These cells had no communication among them and each cell had two windows: one facing surveillance tower and other away from the tower to let in light. Foucault argues that:

[e]ach individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor, but the side walls prevent him from coming in contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, but never subject in communication. (*Discipline and Punish* 200)

Edith W. Clowes emphasises the parallels “between the perfect visibility and transparency obtained by the architectural design” of the Panopticon and “Zamyatin’s

dystopian glass city that centres on the Cube in which the Benefactor stands” (211). For Clowes, “the transparent glass is an image of subjugation to total political and physical control” (211).

In this carceral system, the real subjection comes from the fact that every subject is responsible for his or her subjugation. Surveillance is accepted by D-530 as part of normal life and feels comfortable with it as he believes it to be one of his most prized privileges:

How good is to know that a vigilant eye is fixed upon you, lovingly protecting you against the slightest error, the slightest misstep. This may seem somewhat sentimental, but an analogy comes to my mind—the Guardian Angels that the ancients dreamed of (Zamyatin 66).

Foucault argues that “the major effect of Panopticon [was] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (*Discipline and Punish* 201). Clowes asserts that for Foucault, “the Panopticon is fundamentally dystopian”, it is “the “other, dark side” of civil society’s explicit laws and codes ... for the liberal democratic utopia would be exposed as a prison in which physical discipline replaces the civil liberties ” (Clowes 211) .

Foucault puts it in *Discipline and Punishment* that “the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building , it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form” (205). He explains:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously play both roles; he becomes principal of his own subjection. (*Discipline and Punish* 202-203)

The political and social organization in *We* operates as a perfect machinery. Bordieu holds that “the basis of the most ineradicably adherence to the established order” lies in “the correspondence between objective classes and internalised classes, social

structures and mental structures” (*Outline of a Theory of Practice* 164). It means that some schemes and objective principles of organization are internalized and “experienced as a “natural world”” (164) and self-evident and taken for granted even though they are arbitrary and contribute “to the reproduction of the power relations of which they are the product” (164).

D-503, having interiorised the state’s norms is at the mercy of a totalitarian rule. He is outraged when he reads that a subversive organization “aims at liberation from the beneficent yoke of the State” (*Zamyatin* 5) and claims: “[l]iberation?” Amazing, [*sic*] the extent to which criminal instincts persist in human nature I use the word “criminal” deliberately ... The only means of ridding man of crime is ridding him of freedom” (35).

As a consequence, he willingly accepts that his infringement of the norms deserves physical discipline even though this punishing is despotic and unjust. After breaking the law he confesses:

in my last moment I shall piously and gratefully kiss the punishing hand of the Benefactor. Suffering punishment is my right in the relation to the One State, and I will not yield this right. We, the numbers of our State, should not, must not give up this right-the only, and therefore the most precious, right that we possess. (*Zamyatin* 114-115)

In dystopias, subversive activities are related to sexuality and sex is controlled or even repressed. Usually, dystopian citizens are denied any personal relationships or affects because a “god figure, the embodiment of the State who demands absolute adoration and obedience” (Beauchamp, “Of Man’s Last Obedience” 286), should be the only object of man’s love. Zamyatin links rebellion with sex to prove that human emotions could awake irrational instincts that can rebel against the established order.

Foucault believes that once the body was discovered “as object and target of power, [i]t is easy enough to find signs of attention paid to the body -to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds becomes skilful and increases its

forces” (*Discipline and Punish*”136). Disciplinary methods such as “an interrupted and constant coercion, supervision of the processes of the activity ... exercised according to a codification that partition as closely as possible time space and movement” (137) produce subjected and docile bodies. The disciplinary regime “increases the forces of the body [that can be used] in economic terms of utility, and on the other hand, it turns the power that might result from it “into a relation of strict subjection ... and an increased domination” (138).

In *We* there are no familiar bonds, they cannot keep their own children and sexuality is programmed according to strict rules. D-503 notes that the forbearers of One State said: “Love and Hunger rule the world. Ergo: to conquer the world, man must conquer its rulers” (Zamyatin 20-21). Having conquered hunger after the Two Hundreds Years’ War, the One State directed its attack against love. For this purpose, The One State has devised a system of programmed promiscuity. Sex is a kind of mechanical service rather than anything emotional or caring and it is used as a basic commodity. As regards sex, D-503 writes in his diary: “this elemental force was also subjugated, i.e. organized and educated to mathematical order. ... Hence, you see how the great power of logic purifies everything it touches” (Zamyatin 21-22).

When the foolish passion that D-503 feels for I-330 awakens his instinctual freedom, and sense of individualism, the “worship of the State” (Beauchamp, “Of Man’s Last Disobedience 286), ceases to be his ultimate concern. This newly discovered experience leads him to realise that he has imagination, as he admits: “[t]he good fellow was offended by the hint that he might possess imagination ... only a week ago I would have been offended myself. Not today. Today I know that I have it, that I am ill. I also know that I do not want to be cured. I don’t and that’s all there is to it” (Zamyatin 81).

But he interprets his incipient transformation as an alarming sign of disease. D-503 feels he is “sick” because according to the dystopian standards of the One State, “individual consciousness is merely a sickness” (Zamyatin 128). Indeed, a doctor tells him: “[y]ou’re in a bad way! Apparently, you are developed a soul” (89). D-503 writes:

I became glass. I saw inside myself. There were two of me. The former one, D-503, number D-503, and the other ... Before, he had just barely shown his hairy paws from within the shell; now all of him broke out, the shell cracked; a moment, and it would fly to pieces ... And then...what?. (Zamyatin 56)

This splitting experience is a healthy self-awareness that there are two men in him. And one part of him is not “an efficient, obedient, mindlessly content robot incapable of freedom” (Beauchamp, “Zamiatyn’s *We*” 62). Also, he admits that to make a person doubt his own reality is “the cruellest thing” (Zamyatin120). Being robbed of imagination and independence for so long, he is confused when he recognises his true self. But it becomes harder for him to tell the difference between sanity and insanity:

I stand before a mirror. And for the first time in my life, yes for the first time, I see myself clearly, sharply, consciously. I see myself with certain astonishment as a certain “he”. ... And there, behind this steel... it turns out that I have never known what is there. And out of “there” ... I look at myself -at him- and I know: he ... is a stranger, alien to me, someone I am meeting for the first time in my life . And I , the real I am not he . No . period. All this is nonsense, and all these absurd sensations are but delirium . (Zamyatin 59-60)

D-503 becomes an enemy of the State as he follows his instincts and desires. He starts to hate his old self: “I saw it all clearly, everyone was saved but there was no salvation for me. *I did not want salvation*” (Zamyatin 186).

I-330’s rebellion is ideological as she is a member of an underground movement of resistance called MEPHI which embraces natural life outside the Wall. I-330 says that there, stripped of everything, people “learned to live from trees, from animals and birds,

from flowers and the sun”, and under their coat of fur “they have preserved their hot, red blood” (164). They try to hijack the Integral, blow up the Green Wall and overthrow the Benefactor. A sense of optimism and faith in their success surround their rebellion.

D-503 says to I-330: “[i]t is unthinkable! Absurd! Don’t think that what you are planning is revolution?” She responds: “[t]here is no final one. Revolutions are infinite” (Zamyatin 174).

Eventually, the couple succumb to the disciplinary and omnipresent power of the One State. D-503 is forced to undergo a kind of lobotomy to have his imagination excised. The Benefactor tells him that those who submitted to the Great Operation are now in paradise as “blessed angels” and “obedient slaves of God” because “they no longer know desires, no longer love or pity” (Zamyatin 214) . When I-330 was put to death under the Gas Bell, D-503 deprived of his feelings, watches passively convinced that her death is lawful since in the One State, “reason must prevail” (Zamyatin 232).

However, there is a possibility of hope at the novel’s end. I-330 manages to save O-90, who is pregnant with D-503’s child. I-330 tells him: “I sent her there -she is already safe, beyond the Wall. She’ll live...” (Zamyatin 201).

3.1.3 *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

The old civilizations claimed that they were founded on love and justice. Ours is founded upon hatred. In our world there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement.... There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. There will be no laughter, except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 220)

It is not easy to summarise in few pages the most celebrated dystopian text ever written. Orwell did not set his novel in a distant future; in fact the novel reproduces the gloomy and pessimistic landscape of the aftermath of II World War in London. If in the

anti-utopian society of the One State technology and machines becomes the measure of all things, the ideal state for man to imitate, Oceania prevents the advantages inherent in scientific and technical progress: “the machine did raise the living standards of the average human being ... but it was clear that all round increase in wealth ... was the destruction of a hierarchical society” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 197). A technologically advanced society where “the great mass of human beings ... would become literate and would learn to think for themselves ... would sooner or later realise that the privileged minority had no function”(198). Consequently, a community with marked inequalities would cease to exist. Therefore, it is only “on a basis of poverty and ignorance” (198) that the Party perpetuates *unfreedom* and *inequality* (211 emphasis in original).

One of the major themes emerging from the interpretation of this novel is Orwell’s fear that socialism has been corrupted by power-hungry bureaucrats. Orwell declares that “every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written direct or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism” (“Why I Write”). But after reading the book, one may think that Orwell, a committed socialist, has given up on this doctrine. For Goldstein, “in each variant of Socialism that appeared from about 1900 onwards, the aim of establishing liberty and equality was more and more openly abandoned” (Orwell , *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 211).

Through Goldstein’s words, Orwell claims that the middle class, under the banner of freedom justice and fraternity, had the conscious aim of establishing “a fresh tyranny as soon as the older one is overthrown” (Orwell , *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 211). The Utopian schemes of the past, described as “an earthly paradise in which men should live together in a state of brotherhood, without laws and without brute labour” (212), have given way to the Party’s political theories which “led back to hierarchy and regimentation” (213).

In a rather pessimistic tone, Frederic James contends that the force of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* springs from the conviction that “corruption and lust for power” of human nature “are inevitable, and not to be remedied by new social measures or programs, nor by heightened consciousness of impending dangers” (*Archaeologies of the Future* 198).

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a dystopia involving a warning against what might happen when totalitarianism is allowed to succeed. In his essay “*Review of Russia under the Soviet Rule by N. de Basily*” published in 1939, Orwell perceived modern dictatorships as a terrifying phenomenon because:

they are something entirely unprecedented. Their end cannot be foreseen. In the past every tyranny was sooner or later overthrown, or at least resisted, because of “human nature” ... which desired liberty.... But we cannot be at all certain that “human nature” is constant. It may be just as possible to produce a breed of men who do not wish for liberty as to produce a breed of hornless cows. The Inquisition failed, but then the Inquisition had not the resources of the modern state. The radio, press-censorship, standardized education and the secret police have altered everything. Mass suggestion is a science of the last twenty years, and we don't know yet how successful it will be. (524)

At the beginning of the novel we are introduced to Winston Smith, a member of the Party whose job in the Ministry of Truth consists of the systematic falsification of historical events and manipulation of documents according to the interests of the Party. The mutability of the past is one of the central tenets of INGSOC (English Socialism). The similarities between the Party's destruction of the past and “Stalin's decision to rewrite the History of the Russian Revolution” (Arendt 341) are appalling.

Winston Smith keeps a secret diary “[f]or the future, for the unborn” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 9). As an instrument for self-expression, he writes his most rebellious thoughts about the Party as an act of resistance against his oppression. This impulse is more powerful than the fear of being punished by death, because he thinks that

“he is already dead” (30). Full of rage he writes repeatedly DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, filling half a page (20 emphasis in original). His sin is called thoughtcrime, but he does not care about it because for Winston, “[t]houghtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death” (30).

The following excerpt of Winston’s records is really enlightening because it emphasises his deepest regrets about living in Oceania:

To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone, to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink, greetings!. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 30)

The objective of the all-powerful INGSOC consists of the control of citizen’s thoughts, feelings and actions to undermine free will, independent opinions and emotions such as compassion toward other fellow citizens, love and filial affect. These are the Party’s main goals and its way to achieve them:

- “[T]o extinguish once and for all the possibility of all independent thought” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 201), they have devised a new language, “Newspeak”, as an instrument with two-fold purposes: to make any heretic thought (called “thoughtcrime”) impossible for there will no words in which to express it (55), and to diminish the range of concepts available such as honour, justice, morality, democracy, science... considered undesirable by the Party and needed to be purged (318) . By “doublethink”, the Party exerts reality control and enforces blind obedience: “the Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, their most essential command” (84). For the Party, two and two makes five or “could have been three as easily as five, if that were what was needed” (271).

- To abolish all traces of humanity, the Party “have cut the links between child and parent... man and man ... and between man to women” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 280). Consequently, they have implemented The Two Minutes’ Hate, have encouraged little children to be informers of the Thought Police, or have sought to erase pleasure from the sexual act so that “[s]exual intercourse was to be locked on as a slightly minor operation” (69) or “a frigid little ceremony”(139).
- To attain total submission to the powers of the Party, for “[o]bedience is not enough” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 279), there exists punitive methods to tame bodies and minds of dissenters through techniques of mind control, physical pain and the devastating tortures inflicted in the Room 101. They recur to inflict pain and humiliation on inmates as “power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of [their] choosing” (279).

The participants of The Two Minutes’ Hate are confronted with the devilish image of Goldstein, the Enemy of the People, who was the object of their fury and wrath. The Party instils in them so hateful and bellicose emotions that they “desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces with a sledge-hammer” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 16). The very next instant, when Big Brother’s image appears on the screen, they acclaim him in a state of frenzy, self-hypnosis and histrionic outburst. As “masses have to be won by propaganda” (Arendt 341), in a totalitarian state like Oceania, there will not be other feelings than “hatred of foreign enemies and internal traitors, triumph over victories and self-abasement before the power and wisdom of the Party” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 220). Arendt explains that “the Nazis in the Eastern occupied territories at first used chiefly anti-Semitic propaganda to win firmer control of the population” (342). As she notes, propaganda and terror are necessary for appearing plausible to the masses, and to win adherents to the Party. The explanation is that “terror without propaganda would lose its psychological

effect, whereas propaganda without terror does not contain its full punch” (E. Kohn Brandstet, qtd. in Arendt 341).

On the summit of the pyramid of power comes the leader , Big Brother, as “an invincible, fearless protector standing like a rock against the hordes of Asia” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 17) opposing to the Eurasian soldier’s figure “advancing, huge and terrible, his sub-machine gun roaring and seeming to spring out from the surface of the screen”(17). Winston does not know how much of Big Brother’s legend as a leader of the revolution is true or it is invented, for “how could you establish even the most obvious fact where there existed no record outside your memory?” (38). A lie “which the Party imposed –if all the records told the same tale – ...passed into history and became truth” (37).

Comrade Ogilvy, the Revolutionary Brotherhood and its leader Goldstein, would probably be falsehoods invented by the Party. Similarly, the trial and subsequent execution of the three traitors Jones Aaronson and Rutherford, which Winston saw in a photograph ten years ago, is a lie concocted by the government because they are now agents at the service of Oceania in New York. When O’Brien tells Winston that this photo never existed, Winston replies: “[b]ut it did exist! It does exist! It exists in my memory. I remember it. You remember it. I do not remember it, said O’Brien. Winston sank. It was doublethink” (259) . The conversation between Winston and O’Brien follows in this way:

There is a Party slogan dealing with the control of the past [O’Brien] said. Repeat it, if you please. Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the future controls the past, repeated Winston obediently. ... It is your opinion, Winston, that the past has real existence? Again, the feeling of helplessness descended upon Winston. His eyes flitted toward the dial. He not only did not know whether ‘yes’ or ‘no’ was the answer that would save him from pain; he did not even know which answer he believed or not to be true. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 260)

In her bewildering discussion about the mechanics of totalitarian doctrine, Hanna Arendt holds that “the ideal subject of totalitarian rule ... is people for whom distinction between fact and fiction (i.e. reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e. the standards of thought) no longer exists” (474). Winston wonders that “[i]f the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event *it never happened*, that surely would be more terrifying than torture and death?”(Orwell , *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 37 emphasis in original). The chaotic uncertainty of this world is defined by the word “doublethink”: “[t]o know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully-constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions ... knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them”...(37). Arendt argues that “[i]n an ever-changing and incomprehensible world the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing was true”(382).

The telescreen is a two-way instrument of control and surveillance in the hands of the Thought Police. It simultaneously emits and receives information: “[it] could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 4). Citizens can be heard and seen as well as long as they remain within its field of vision and “had to live ... in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised (7). Surveillance has a negative effects on people’s nervous system because it supresses personal privacy and individuality.

It provokes feelings of powerlessness and intimidation because it “is a power that insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 220). This form of disciplinary power is permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent, “capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 214). Winston knows that “for seven years the Thought Police had watched him like

a beetle under a magnifying glass” (289). Arguably, panopticism is a rapid, effective and subtle form of control for it guarantees a permanent state of self-discipline:

[h]e who is subjected to a field of visibility , and who knows it , assumes responsibility for the constraints of power” and “becomes the principle for his own subjection ... it tends to the non- corporal; and, the more it approach this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects. (*Discipline and Punish* 202-203)

The telescreen not only force humans to control their actions, but also it forces them to regulate their own thoughts since the smallest thing like a nervous tic or an unconscious look of anxiety could betray them (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 65) even though they were asleep, as Winston considers:

Your worst enemy ... was your own nervous system. At any moment the tension inside you was liable to translate itself into some visible symptom. ...And what was frightening was that the action was quite possibly unconscious. The most deadly danger of all was talking in your sleep, for there was no way of guarding against that”. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 67)

Children have become the complement of the Thought Police. They spy on their parents and neighbours looking for signs of unorthodoxy. Heavily indoctrinated and being very fond of the Party’s paraphernalia (songs, processions, banners the yelling of slogans, etc) ,“they adore the Party and everything connected with it” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 26). Winston thinks that Mrs Parsons is frightened of her off-springs: “with those children ..., that wretched woman must lead a life of terror” (26). Unsurprisingly, Tom Parsons is denounced by her little daughter. However, he shows pride on “her right spirit” and does not “bear any grudge for it” (245). Parsons’ admission of his “guilt” confirms his complete submission to the regime. Firstly, he shows incredulity:

What are you in for? said Winston.‘Thoughtcrime, said Parsons, almost blubbering. The tone of his voice implied at once complete admission of his guilt and a sort of incredulous

horror that such a word could be applied to himself. ... You don't think they'll shoot me do you old chap? They don't shoot you if you haven't actually done anything, only thoughts which you can't help?. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 244)

Then, Mr Parsons adjusts his discourse to the doctrine of the Party and incriminates himself trying to appear as a “goodthinker” in front of the cameras:

Are you guilty? said Winston. Of course I am guilty!’ cried Parsons with a servile glance at the telescreen. ‘You don't think the Party would arrest an innocent man do you?’ ... ‘Thoughtcrime is a dreadful thing, old man’. ... ‘Do you know how it got hold of me? In my sleep! ...I'm glad that they got me before it went any further. Do you know what I'm going to say to them when I go up before the tribunal? “Thank you ... for saving me before it was too late”. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 245)

Foucault declares that “in every society the body was on the grip of very strict powers, which impose on it constraints, prohibitions and obligations” (*Discipline and Punish* 136). This policy of coercion that acts upon the bodies of dystopian citizens is concerned with the suppression of sexual liberty. As the body is the target of power, it includes the control of human instincts and feelings like sexuality and love. The elimination of sexual impulse is a way to suppress any threat to Party Loyalty and this energy is turned into hysteria and catalysed into “war-fever and leader-worship” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 139). Airstrip One is an extremely puritan society where prostitution is “sexcrime” punished by five years in a forced-labour camp and sexual activity must be aimed only at procreation, or in Julia's words, to accomplish “our duty to the Party”(139) . Orwell equates sexual activity to a form of political unorthodoxy. Julia says to Winston:

[w]hen you make love you're using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don't give a damn for anything. They can't bear you to feel like that. ... If you're happy inside yourself, why should you get excited about Big Brother and the Three-Year Plans and the

Two Minutes Hate and all the rest of their bloody hot? ...There was a direct connection between chastity and political orthodoxy. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 139-140)

Resistance against oppression could be manifested through the body and the couple use sex as a form of political agency. Winston approves that Julia had been very promiscuous. He claims “I hate purity, I hate goodness. I don’t want any virtue to exist anywhere. I want everyone be corrupt to the bones”. She responds: “I’m corrupt to the bones” (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 132). After they made love, the narrator affirms that “[t]heir embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory” and “a blow struck against the Party” ..., a political act” (133).

Chapter III is entirely devoted to show Winston’s torture sessions and his final defeat in the Room 101. Beauchamp holds that Winston, “psychologically terrorized by a brutally perfected totalitarianism, is reduced to an even more appalling fate: screaming for Julia’s death to save his own life” (“Of Last’s Man Disobedience” 296).

O’Brien’s tactics show how human degradation and loss of human dignity are efficient tools to break down Winston’s body and soul. O’Brien’s final objective is the resetting of Winston’s mind so that he could die loving Big Brother. In the end, when the Party’s total victory over Winston is completed, he is released from prison “rehabilitated” and awaiting his execution. Big Brother had succeeded.

3.2 Biologically-based dystopias : *Gattaca* (1997) by Andrew Niccol

3.2.1 Introduction

In his 1904 conference “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims”, Francis Galton defined “eugenics” as “the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage” (45).

Exposing his arguments in the guise of a fable, he contended that all animals in a zoological garden would agree that “it was better to be healthy than sick, vigorous than

weak, well fitted than ill-fitted for their part in life” (46). Thus, “[t]he race as a whole would be less foolish, less frivolous, less excitable and politically more provident than now” (47). But this practice applied to the improvement of the human race would lead to eliminate members of racial or social minorities or unwanted individuals. It is well known the implement of eugenic sterilization program practised in fascist Germany to retarded, homosexuals, and non-Aryan citizens, the prosecution or extermination of entire races of people based on physical or ethnic characteristics or the killing of female or disabled babies as a form of genetic selection. Films like *Gattaca* deals with the new eugenic manipulation of human’s physical traits, personality and behaviours which lead to a social categorization of individuals establishing social discrimination and an order of hierarchy between “non-enhanced” and “enhanced” humans.

Modern eugenics is as a sort of human-directed “attempt to accelerate human evolution by improving the genetic makeups of humans” (Kirby 3). The genetic determinism propounded by this technique “is a reductionist ideology in that it seeks to explain a complex whole (a human being) in terms of its component parts (individual genes)” (6).

Set in a not too distant future, the world of *Gattaca* is grounded on the possibility of using science and technology to achieve genetic perfection in unborn babies while naturally conceived humans labelled “in-valids” or “faith births” constitute an underclass of people. Limited access to this genetic manipulation sets up a twofold system of social organization in which the former form the privileged and dominant group, and the latter are considered “sick” from the day they are born, suffering segregation because of their lack of genetic purity and treated as second-class citizens. The world projected in this film extrapolates today’s limited use of gene modification to a future society where eugenics is

a reality. Also, it reflects on the social acceptance of the genetic determinist ideology that admits that human beings are nothing more than the sum of their genes.

3.2.2 *Gattaca*

The story focuses on Victor Freeman's life, a "non-enhanced" individual who has to face many forms of discrimination since childhood: he is not allowed to go to kindergarten, he has no right to medical insurance, he cannot access to high education and eventually is relegated to a humble work as a janitor. As he longs to become an astronaut to enter Gattaca Aerospace Corporation, Vincent has to adopt Jerome Morrow's identity. Morrow is an "enhanced" but crippled man as a result of an attempted suicide after having failed to win a gold medal in a swimming competition. By falsifying Jerome's blood, urine, hair and skin cells containing Jerome's DNA, Vincent manages to enter the aeronautic company after passing numerous identity checks since the presence of an "in-valid" subject is detected within the systems. Finally, Vincent is able to achieve his dreams to flight in a mission to Titan, showing that any "in-valid" citizen destined for failure "is as good as any, and better than most" (*Gattaca* 01:55:51-01:55:55). Vincent demonstrates to be apter than the rest of genetically valid characters like Irene, Jerome or his own brother Anton. As the caption for the poster of the movie reads, "There Is No Gene For The Human Spirit" (*Gattaca* Poster), because human success does not come from the perfection of individual's genome.

The film *Gattaca* addresses the following bioethical issues:

- The widespread use of genetic engineering to modify the genetic makeup and hence the human condition to create a perfect social order based on "geneism". This term is used by Vincent to define discrimination on the basis of genetics, where the manipulation of human embryos produces enhanced human beings destined to form social elite holding a higher status in the community.

- The relationship between humans who are genetically modified and those who are not focusing on the individual's fear of failing to meet their assuming superiority on the grounds of eugenic ideas.
- And the topic of human objectification, categorizing people as bearers of genetic "purity" and genetic "degeneration". Consequently, human beings are nothing but a designed product determined by science according to the socially accepted standards of disability or normalcy.

Gattaca represents a utopian society in search for genetic perfection because unwanted elements such genetic abnormalities or undesirable physical features are suppressed or invisible "to the naked eye" (Atkinson, 9). What supports the illusion of integrity of the state is the invisibility of imperfect genetic sequence rather than the fulfilment of positive principles and goals. This externalisation of perfection is constantly monitored by "biometric" techniques and DNA tests for identification, control and classification of human genes based on arbitrary requirements.

Jürgen Habermas theorised about the bioethical and moral dilemmas regarding eugenics. He departs from the premise that "[i]n liberal societies, every citizen has an equal right to pursue his own individual life projects "as best as he can"" (60). However, it all may go wrong when "eugenic programming of desirable traits and dispositions ... commits the person concerned to a specific life-project" and deprives the subject of choosing a life of his or her own (61). What is worse, in liberal eugenics there is no opportunity for the subject to break away from "pathogenic socialization process" (62) that affects "the capacity of being oneself" (63). Genomic project determines people's sense of identity.

Habermas holds that in first place, the person is subjected to a permanent dependence by ascription to "a genetic determination carried out according to the parents' own preferences" (62). In second place, "[e]ugenic programming establishes a permanent

dependence... which is irreversible ... [and] foreign to the reciprocal and symmetrical relations of mutual recognition proper to a moral and legal community of free and equal persons” (65). Certainly, not only enhanced but also non-enhanced subjects are victims of this oppressive system.

On one side, in-valids’ discrimination is akin to any form of racism or classism. Vincent claims: “I belong to a new underclass no longer determined by social status or the colour of your skin. No. We have now discrimination down to a science” (22:22-22:36). On the other side, genetically manipulated subjects bear all the pressures to live up to what is expected of them, as the Vincent’s voice-over says : “Eugene never suffered from the routine discrimination of a utero of faith birth or invalid as we were called ... he suffered under a different burden , the burden of perfection” (39:02-39:18). Failure is an unthinkable option for enhanced people, because success is inherent to their genetic code.

These “modified humans” are depicted as unhappy characters for live under strain of reaching the standards of perfection expected of them. Jerome, being engineered to be an Olympic winner is a loser. He says to Vincent: “Jerome Morrow was never meant to be one step down the podium. With all I had going for me, I was still second best. Me. So, how do you expect to pull this off?”(33:39-34:00). Vincent claims that Anton, his genetically enhanced brother, carries the burden “of being a son worthy of [his] father’s name” (14:55-14:58). Programmed to surpass physically Vincent, Anton never beats him in swimming; on the contrary, he has to be saved by Vincent from drowning. Irene, a genetically enhanced girl who works for Gattaca has a heart condition, a fact that lessens her expectations to promote in the Corporation showing that many predictions based on genetics are not an exact science.

Foucault’s genealogical concepts are valuable to discuss state-controlled eugenics. The form of genetic determinism practised in *Gattaca* corresponds to what is described by

Foucault as a form of bio-power. Foucault defines this term as “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power” (*Security Territory Population* 16). He explains that the numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations marked the beginning of an era of bio-power (*The History of Sexuality* 140). Focusing on the species body, Foucault affirms that:

the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population*. (*The History of Sexuality* 139 emphasis in original)

The extreme forms of surveillance and control practised in *Gattaca* correspond to a pseudo-fascist social organization. The population was supervised by regulatory controls ensured by the procedures of power that characterize the “*anatomo-politics of the human body*” (*The History of Sexuality* 139 emphasis in original). These controls are conducted through the checking of samples of fluids, skin, hair, urine and fingerprints aimed at assuring that citizens possess a valid genetic makeup and purity of blood. People willingly accept these techniques of classification and identification due to the social normalisation of eugenic ideology. This state-implemented eugenic system is what Jameson would call “Utopia of privation” (*Archaeologies* 185) where “there is a removal of freedoms in the name of state but this system of privation is not evenly distributed across the population due to the maintenance of genetic hierarchy” (Atkinson 20).

Foucault argues that the emergence of eugenics was one of the great innovations of the 2nd half of the nineteenth century. Whence the study of heredity, marriages, births and life expectancies, sex and its fertility had to be managed by the medical and political agencies

of the state and sex “appeared the source of an entire capital for the species to draw from” (*The History of Sexuality* 118).

Psychiatry, jurisprudence, legal medicine and agencies of social control or surveillance among others, functioned for a long time on the basis of “degenerescence” or the fear that heredity were burdened by maladies (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 119). The analysis of heredity was placing sex “in a position of biological responsibility with regard to the species ... (118), hence “[a]n entire social practice took the exasperated but coherent form of state-directed racism with a formidable power and far-reaching consequences” (119). Family, government and medical organizations act as institutions of power and “agents of segregation and social hierarchization, generating inequality and social prejudices “guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony” (141).

In *Gattaca*, the ultimate decision about genetic enhancement is made by parents, but the coercive reproductive policies advise them that undesirable physical or behavioural characteristics will make their children unfit or inadequate socially. In its search for perfection, the state determines peoples’ access to education, jobs, health insurance and personal relations following a model based on genetic choice and inclusion or exclusion of individuals. Within the class structure described in *Gattaca*, bio-power is exerted through “the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 141) which is required to the establishment and development of a capitalist society. It is achieved through the maintenance of human groups such as the “invalids” who constitute the productive workforce in *Gattaca* .

In the end of the film, Vincent escapes their fate by showing that genes cannot predict the future. Although he initially accepts his destiny admitting that “from an early age I came to think of myself as others thought of me, chronically ill” (12:31-12:36), he proves to be more successful than all the genetically enhanced characters. The denouement

of the story is a parable of the triumph of people's determination and perseverance to fulfil their dreams over a world that has surrendered to the principles of genetic determinism.

3.3 Post-apocalyptic dystopias: *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy and *Elysium* (2013) by Neill Blomkamp.

3.3.1 Introduction

Introduced recently after our increasingly self-awareness and concern about the growing destruction of our planet, environmental dystopias depict the absolute annihilation of nature after an apocalyptic event and its aftermath. Its consequences are animal species extinction, food scarcity, lack of medical resources and the absolute absence of human values due to people's dramatic struggle for survival. This type of narrative is premised on the idea of the end of the world as we know it since traditional notions of family, solidarity and human empathy are undermined. McCarthy's narrative goes even further. The concept of cannibalism is laid out by him in *The Road* associated with human's brutality and human's return to an animal state owing to the absence of moral principles of humanist order.

In *Elysium*, the earth is a wasteland filled with poverty and sickness in contrasts to the eponymous space station where its high-powered inhabitants enjoy a life of luxury and comfort free of death, disease and scarcity. This film is a critical dystopia of the present day's global capitalism with its class divisions, citizen's unequal access to technological resources and rampant militarism to administer Elysium's laws, all of it framed within the context of an ecological catastrophe. The works of speculative fiction I will discuss in this thesis imagine future dystopias posing the question of what on our own's account has led to the dystopian circumstances portrayed in these texts.

The 15th edition of the 2020 World Economic Forum includes a Global Risks Report of the interconnections among the continued environmental degradation and its harmful consequences the based on the information we have now (see fig.1).

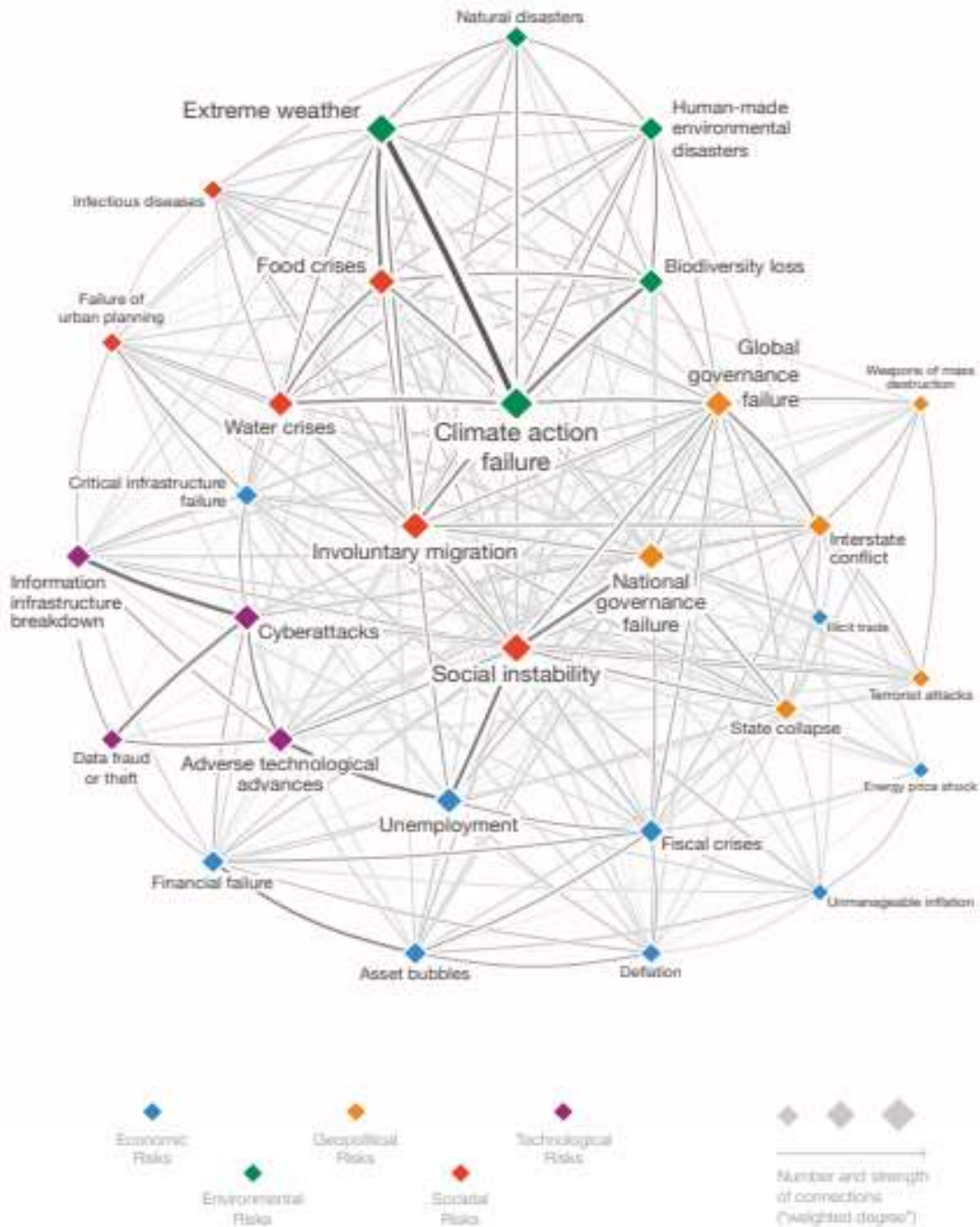


Figure 1. “The Global Risks Interconnections Map 2020”. *World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2020.*

The analysis of this Report reveals a profound connection between environmental, geopolitical, economic and societal disasters leading to:

- The loss of biodiversity resulting in severely depleted resources for humankind.
- Food and water crises. Inadequate or unaffordable access to appropriate quantities or qualities of food and nutrition on a major scale.
- Large-scale involuntary migration induced by conflicts, disasters, environmental or economic reasons.
- Rapid and massive spread of infectious diseases.
- Adverse consequences of technological advances such as artificial intelligence or information networks causing human vulnerability through the wrongful exploitation of private or official data. (Global Risks Report 2020 pp.86-87).

3.3.2 *The Road*

In late 2019, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned us that a “point of no-return” on climate change is “in sight and hurtling toward us” (WEF Global Risk Report 12). 2020 Forum’s Global Risks Perception Survey shows that climate action failure and related environmental issues dominated all of the top-five long term environmental risks ranked by likelihood. It is followed by natural disasters, biodiversity loss and environmental man-made disasters (see fig. 2 below).

The nuclear bombs that U.S. dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II demonstrated the real possibility of destruction of human race in few seconds, and environmental disasters like Chernobyl radioactive scape function as a kind of warning signal. The model of science-fiction that sustains the novel is based on a “direct temporal

extrapolation” of facts which exist in our social and environmental context providing an accurate survey of “the new maps of the hell” (Suvin “On the Poetics”378).



Figure 2. “The Evolving Risks Landscape 2007-2020”. *World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2020*.

The novel depicts a collapse of the world after the occurrence of a nuclear deflagration that has wiped out most of the planet's biosphere. We only know that “the clocks stopped at 1:17” following a “long shear of light and then a series of low concussions” (McCarthy 52). The signs pointing at the existence of a nuclear winter seem unmistakable. There are cracks of dead trees falling on the mountain (35) or in the blackness (97), earthquakes (28), rain of drifting soot (15), and freezing cold (42).

Ibarrola-Armendariz contends that:

[a]lthough the cause of this global disaster that has filled the atmosphere with soot and transformed the earth into a greyish, barren desert is never explicitly established in the text, we do know that it is human-created and probably related to nuclear weaponry. (84)

The Road narrates the voyage of an unnamed father and son along a “barren, silent and godless” (McCarthy 4) landscape moving southwards to reach the coast and survive the nearing winter. In a plain and detached style devoid of referents and signifiers to describe an empty world, McCarthy offers a detailed chronicle of a vulnerable society after a nuclear disaster:

In those first years the roads were peopled with refugees shrouded up in their clothing. Wearing masks and goggles, sitting in their rags by the side of the road like ruined aviators. Their barrows heaped with shoddy. Towing wagons or carts. Their eyes bright in their skulls. Creedless shells of men tottering down the causeways like migrants in a feverland. The frailty of everything revealed at last. (McCarthy 28)

In the middle of this environmental crisis, father and son wander through a barren and devastated land struggling to stay alive, escaping from the bands of cannibals who are described by possessing “reptilian calculations ...in cold and shifting eyes” and having “the gray and rotting teeth claggy with human flesh (McCarthy 75).

Hanna Arendt notes that:

the great danger arising from the existence of people forced to live outside the common world in the midst of civilization is that they are thrown back on their natural givenness, on their mere differentiation ... no longer allowed to partake in the human artifice... they belong to the human race in much the same way as animals belong to a specific animal species...The danger in the existence of such people is that this civilization may produce

barbarians from its own midst... forcing millions of people into conditions... which are the conditions of savages. (302)

This travel is a journey of physical survival and an allegory of father and son's spiritual voyage trying to be "good guys" in spite of adverse circumstances. There is a rule to distinguish the "good boys" from the "bad boys" or between the humans and those who have lost the moral qualities of humanity. Their code of values include: do not eat people, do not steal, do not lie, keep your promises, help other survivors and never give up (Wielenberg 5-6). What defines them as "good guys" is that they are "carrying the fire". As the father says, "nothing bad is going to happen to us ... [b]ecause we're carrying the fire" (McCarthy 83). This oft-repeated phrase is a metaphor meaning the flame of humanity that still burns inside their hearts compared to the uses of the fire that cannibals do, as they roast little infant before eating him (McCarthy198).

Unlike his wife who finds her life meaningless and decides to commit suicide, the father chooses to live and undertakes the quest to protect and save his son's life in the middle of hunger, cold, illness and gangs of criminals who threaten their lives. He holds the strong conviction that it is his divine mission to preserve his son's life and declares: "[m]y job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God" (McCarthy 77). As a consequence, the father is distrustful of the company of others fearing that the child could be raped and eaten, so he keeps a gun loaded with two bullets, one for himself and other for his child.

The boy's goodness and compassion toward other badly wounded or deranged human beings contrast with the man's egoism and watchfulness because the father is convinced that heroism and solidarity do not work in a world lacking in all signs of civilization or authority. The child is a moral reference which reconciles the human race with humanness and compassion. He always wants to help the most disadvantaged (the old

man, the man who robs them of their belongings) at the risk of threatening his own survival by giving away the food he would need later.

Main themes explored in the novel:

- Decline of Western civilization. In absence of socio-economic context, the consumerist culture before the apocalypse is represented by few objects which become apparent throughout the narration. They compose powerful metaphors symbolising the end of the world. Hence, the shopping cart containing their possessions represents the excesses of consumer society, or the discovery of a can of Coca-Cola, an icon of the most recognized trademark in the planet, is turned into an extraordinary event because it is his first and probably the last one that they could find.
- Vulnerability. During their odyssey, father and son have to face horrifying experiences of natural disasters, famine and human cruelty. But before he dies, the father convinces his son not to give up because he believes that the boy is “carrying the fire”. So he says to the boy: [i]t’s inside you. It was always there. I can see it” (McCarthy 279). The fire symbolizes the essence of human morality and provides the strength to cope with the evil forces around him.
- Loyalty and love and care for each other as the more crucial element for survival. The love of the father for the boy is limitless and the deep connection between them “provides their lives with meaning and value amidst their suffering” (Wielenberg 12).
- Collapse of the nuclear family due to the absence of the figure of the mother. McCarthy subverts the traditional cultural representation of motherhood and fatherhood since the mother is fragile, weak and unable to fight for her life and her son’s while the father only lives to take care for his boy: “[i]f you died, I

would want to die too”(McCarthy 11), the father says to him. Only the close emotional bond with his boy provides father’s life with meaning because “the boy was all that stood between him and death” (McCarthy 29). Nevertheless, in the end of the narration, the role of the traditional family as a source of emotional stability and support is repositioned when the child falls in the hands of a “complete” family composed of mother, father and two children. The boy decides to join this new family because they “carry the fire” as these parents do not eat their own children. The “new mother” adopts him with love and tenderness: “when she saw him puts her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you” (McCarthy 286). She says the breath of God was the child’s breath to assure the boy that all was right with them. By evoking the presence of God, the woman provides hope in survival and confidence in a better future for her family.

- Reflection on morality and human depravity or on the dichotomy between good and evil. Father and son’s commitment and loyalty to ethical values are contraposed to human cruelty and degeneration manifested by violence and cannibalism.
- The topic of the travel as a metaphor for an inward journey of spiritual survival and search for meaning in the middle of a world devoid of “warmth, food, safety and solidarity” (Ibarrola-Armendáriz 92). While the dystopian element is constituted by the external physical world, the psychological inner life of the two main characters is essentially utopian.

The Road contains the formal characteristics labelled by Suvin as a technique of “cognitive estrangement”. This post-apocalyptic work of Sci-Fi describes familiar scenarios because the settings, the plot or its characters could appear “in comics, films, or

computer games in recent times” (Ibarrola-Armendariz 86). Also, the author himself recognises that in this place, people are like “the walking dead in a horror film” (McCarthy 55). Indeed, the description of humans’ lives in this barren landscape is reminiscent of any of the scary movies at the box-office and hence totally recognisable for us. The world represented in *The Road* is unreal but it describes characters and settings realistically with the purpose of arising our curiosity and fear about the future.

The Road has “the consistency of extrapolation and the precision of analogy” (Suvin, “On the Poetics” 381) because it is a work of anticipatory knowledge that deals with an environmental disaster and makes a severe warning about potential risks of technology and the dramatic degradation of nature caused by human agency.

3.3.3 *Elysium*

Released in the year 2013, this film imagines life in 2154, where humanity split in two communities. While the earth’s wealthiest members “fled the planet to preserve their way of life” (*Elysium* 01:18-01:22) to live in an artificial orbit where no-one else is allowed access, the vast majority of humans remain in a dirty and poverty-stricken Earth. Many of *Elysium*’s earthly scenes were shot in the slums and garbage dumps of Mexico City (Mexico), a perfect location to represent what the opening shot of the film informs as a “diseased, polluted, and vastly overpopulated” Earth (00:56-01:02). Contrariwise, the privileged elites of Elysium enjoy unprecedented levels of wellbeing at the expense of the miserable and degrading life conditions endured by earthly inhabitants.

This film consists of a critical dystopia that reflexively critiques hegemonic the order of things in the capitalist present. In the process of preconfiguring itself, Moylan argues, once “the capitalism reached the end of its post-war curve ... commodifying

everything in sight, the possibilities for a complex, equitable, just, and ecologically balanced world receded” (xiv). Moylan claims that:

the critical dystopias give voice and space to such dispossessed and denied subjects. [T]hey go on to explore ways to change the present system so that such culturally and economically marginalized peoples not only survive but also try to move toward creating a social reality that is shaped by an impulse to human self-determination and ecologic health rather than one constricted by the narrow and destructive logic of a system intent only on enhancing competition in order to gain more profit for a select few. (*Scraps* 189)

This Sci-Fi film gives voice to those whose position is not contemplated by hegemonic discourse, such as poor people, women, children and non-white subjects. Based on present-day capitalist conditions, *Elysium* lays bare the bad conditions of the present as unchangeable and getting worse in the future and imagines a society where greed, destruction and death flourished (Moylan, *Scraps* xi). Neill Blomkamp explores the topic of socioeconomic issues and hegemony relationships among race and class differences to build up an allegory for real world concerns. Interviewed by John Hiscock³ of *The Telegraph*, the director declares that his film deals actually with the present: “[p]eople have asked me if I think this is what will happen in 140 years, but this isn’t science fiction. This is today. This is now” (Blomkamp).

The spiral of decay and human misery determines the birth of a terrifying society that descends into social injustice and lack of civil and political rights. *Elysium* is a socially-conscious story that touches on topics such as absence of opportunities for people prompting the emergence of illegal immigration. It portrays the unequal distribution of health care services, the abuse and exploitation of workers, the rampant re-localization of capital and labour, and the environmental degradation and lack of natural resources like

³ I accessed this interview freely in the electronic version of *The Telegraph* in May of 2020. Currently this information is only available under subscription to the website.

fresh air, water supply and proper housing conditions endured by Earth's impoverished inhabitants.

Led by the powerful corporations such as Armadyne, capital in *Elysium* seeks "to revive its generation of surplus" at the expense of reducing costs by "finding cheaper sources of labour and material; eliminating social costs by refusing obligations to social entitlements, labour contracts and ecological health" (Moylan xiv). Scenes at Armadyne factory show workers' degradation and lack of rights of under the operations of a rampant capitalism for they labour to receive the minimum wage required for subsistence. In the manufacturing plant, a pre-recorded voice encourages workers that they "must meet weekly quotas" (11:10). They work under the constant surveillance of Carlyle, Armadyne's Chief Executive Manager, who oversees the workers from above.

Max is a "blue-collar" employee of the Company which manufactures robotic androids for Elysium. His work is supervised by an Amadyne's foreman who treats him as a disposable element in a machine reminding him that he is still lucky to have his job. He forces Max to enter the chamber where is resulted contaminated by saying "either you go in right now or we find someone who will and you can go clean out your locker. That's the deal, in you go" (21:38-21:41). Inside the chamber, Max suffers a lethal dose of radioactivity that would kill him in five days due to a "catastrophic organ failure". After the accident nobody in the factory cares for him. He is dragged by an android as if he were a load, is given some pills to keep him alive for five days and is thrown away from the factory after having been coldly thanked for his services in the Company.

He seeks help from a smuggler to get a shuttle ticket to Elysium to cure himself by using the Med-Bay machine, a kind of scanner that fixes medical problems in seconds. In return, Max agrees to steal a computer program to reset Elysium's core so that by opening their borders, earthly inhabitants would acquire Elysium citizenship instantaneously. This

program is stored in a chip inside Carlyle's brain. Max is commissioned to hijack Carlyle and download this information from Carlyle's chip to his own brain. Eventually, Max succeeds and brings salvation to his compatriots who are recognized by the system as "new citizens in need of medical attention" (01:40:35). The film ends by Elysium sending ships to Earth full of Med-Bay machines making universal health care and Elysium citizenship accessible for all.

Elysium puts on the table the use technologies of control at the service of the powerful elites to protect their economic interests. Ruthless androids administer justice and make arbitrary inspections on any citizen they consider suspicious, or kill people when they trespass Elysium's airspace. Biometric control and identification of population is accomplished by checking "citizenship stamps" tattooed into the arm of Elysian subjects to maintain class divisions and to defend the borders between rich and unprivileged masses that they have established.

The society of *Elysium* is based on exclusion and racist "otherness" portrayed in the figure of the undocumented immigrant who is stigmatized as a second-class citizen. It is easy to connect Blomkamp's portrayal of illegal immigration with similar circumstances of migrant people today in the Mexico/U.S frontier or in any other place where there exist strict controls and massive deportations of people. Subjects trying to improve their lives by reaching Elysium are Black, Asian and Latino characters appearing as vulnerable, diseased and unable to fight for their rights. Border walls are set up not only through physical containment for when undocumented ships violate Elysium airspace defence systems pursue and destroy them mercilessly. These boundaries are also mental and interiorised by Earth's citizens. When the film starts, a conversation between little Max and a nun who runs the orphanage where he lived is quite revealing:

NUN: Max, has estado robando de nuevo? Me parte el corazón. Porqué lo haces? Para ahorrar? para algún día comprarte un pasaje e ir ahí arriba? Ese lugar no es para ti, ni para mí.

MAX: No es justo hermana. Por qué no puedo ir?

NUN: A veces en la vida suceden cosas y solo hay que aceptarlas. Pero una cosa sé con seguridad..., algún día vas a hacer algo maravilloso, naciste para ello. (03:30-04:21)

Drawing from Bordieu's theories about symbolic power I would like to emphasize an important concept implied in this passage. On the one hand, the nun shows an immediate adherence "in the doxic mode" to an unjust social order of things that reproduces relations of exclusion and inequality which she interiorizes as "natural world" and "taken for granted" (Bordieu, *Outline of Theory and Practice* 164). Bordieu also affirms that owing to the correspondence between objective structures and internalized structures, "the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary ... but as self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned" (*Outline of Theory and Practice* 166).

Hence, the nun teaches the child Max to accept that his dream of going to Elysium is a delusion and things could scarcely be otherwise, because they do not belong to the capitalist ruling class. Therefore they would have to submit to the despotic rule that Elysium's rulers impose on them. On the other, Max has learnt that Elysium's citizenship is a commodity for rich people for they possess the money to pay for it, and it is the only way to achieve it. He saves money for he knows the access to Elysium is not a right, is only an asset which can be sold and bought.

In this scene, the nun foretells Max's future involvement in the movement of resistance to overthrow Elysium's oppressive system. He will lead a working class revolution aiming to break the wall that separates the two communities, opening borders and saving lives.

These are some of the issues explored in the film:

- The existence of high technology to monitor and coerce population through drones and cyborgs used as police force.
- The stigma of immigration and the refusal to bestow them civil rights like the access to citizenship based on social class, race or background differences.
- The strict and ruthless control to defend borders against illegal immigration, including the use of violence against people.
- The lack of accessibility to universal healthcare services to everyone based on class or race divisions. While the Spanish-speaking Latinos and non-white people inhabitants of L.A. were crowding destitute hospitals in which medical resources are limited, Elysium's citizens enjoy cheap and available homely treatments.
- The ecological catastrophe surrounded the planet, with its vast slumification, skyscrapers full of garbage and unbreathable air, compared to Elysium's beautiful landscape. The Earth has turned into a huge factory because Elysian elites extracted all what is valuable from it at the cost of destroying the planet.
- The criticism of capitalist systems and the alienating effects of labour under the hegemonic system which exploits the worker for the owner's profit.
- The striking socioeconomic differences between rich and poor communities and the consequences of a neo-liberal ideology that gives rise to struggle of the working class to achieve Elysian citizenship .

In "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular", Stuart Hall highlights the value of popular culture and argues that "ordinary people are capable of recognising the way the realities of working-class life are reorganised, reconstructed and reshaped by the way they are represented" in cultural industries (232). He contends that:

[p]opular culture is one of the sites where [the] struggle for and against the culture of the powerful is engaged ... the arena of consent or resistance ... where hegemony arises. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture ... might be "expressed"... but it is one of

the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why “popular culture’ matters” (239).

Filmmakers like Blomkamp demonstrate the value of popular culture to approach political and class-conscious issues and the utility of critical dystopia to denounce the devastating effects of global capitalism and of reactionary neo-liberalism on the oppressed, excluded classes.

3.4 Feminist dystopias: *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood

3.4.1 Introduction

Atwood presents the dystopian vision of a near future society marked by repression and exploitation of women who are deprived of their rights under the command of a religious movement which revolutionized the society to impose an extreme authoritarian regime. For Moylan, Atwood’s portrayal of Gilead has recognizable elements taken “from the New Right and Christian fundamentalism conjoined with deformed and distorted feminist formations ... and the military-industrial ... variant of “friendly fascism”” (*Scraps* 163). Like other dystopian writers do (Zamyatin and Orwell), Atwood reflects on contemporary issues. According to a clearly stated precept, she promises that she would not include “anything that human beings had not already done in some other place or time, or for which the technology did not already exist” so that she could not be blamed for “misrepresenting the human potential for deplorable behaviour” (“Haunted by the Handmaid’s Tale”). She admits having delineated the malign machinery of Gilead republic drawing upon the “the heavy-handed theocracy of 17th Century Puritan New England with its marked bias against women” (“Haunted by the Handmaid’s Tale”).

Professor Pieixoto’s lecture “Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid’s Tale*” uncovers the real stories displayed in the argument. For instance, the need for “surrogate mothers” had biblical precedents, the use of polygamy was “practised

both in the early Old Testament and in the former State of Utah in the nineteenth century” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* 317), or the “Salvaging” ceremony had its origin in the Philippines and became a general term for the elimination of political enemies (319).

In the 2019 documentary *A Word after a Word after a Word is Power*, Atwood recalls what she was thinking while writing her book, and she says: “what I was writing was scary. That is why people are scared: they know it is not far away from what those people would like to do if they got all the power” (49:38-49:44). Atwood tells that:

nothing went to it that had not happened in real life, somewhere at some time” because “[she] didn’t want anybody saying “you certainly have a twisted, weird, evil imagination to make up those bad things. I didn’t make them up, these were all from the mid-80s. (51:42-51:09)

For instance, the disciples of the “Sect of the 1100 Members” “subordinate women, they discourage social contact with non-members, they arrange marriages, use brainwashing and the wives of the coordinators are called handmaidens” (51:12-51:30). “Ceausescu in Romania mandated that women should have four children; he gave them pregnancy tests every month and if they weren’t pregnant they had to say why” (51:35-51:46). She states that the eighties were a “pushback decade” where people were pushing back against 70s feminism as they thought that feminists “had achieved all [their] goals so...what [was] the fuss? ... this is going too far” (50:07-50:20). And in the religious fundamentalist area of the U.S. they were saying [that] women belong in the home” (50:26-50:32). Atwood claims that:

The only way to get women back into the home is to reverse the financial progress that they made, over the past say, 150 years. So they moved from a point where they couldn’t control their own money into the twentieth century and the twentieth first century in which they gained the right to control their own finances, own their bank accounts own houses...so how would you get them back?”...“you would have to immediately cut off the

access to money and the credit card; unfortunately it allows you to do that should you wish to very quickly. (52:26-53:05)

Atwood declares in *The Guardian* that Orwell became her source of inspiration when she began writing *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood "My Hero"). The book shares with *We* and *Nineteenth Eighty-Four* the capacity for social critique by means of an alienated character who expresses his or her dissent in contrasts to the hegemonic order deployed by the "official" story. Similarly to D-503 and Winston's examples, Offred's text is a record of her personal experiences intended to be known by future readers. Her narrative is a tool for empowerment to resist the arbitrary and dogmatic form of oppression based on corruption, fear and terror.

Atwood asserts that she had a particular sympathy with Winston's desire to write his forbidden thoughts down in a secret diary. She wanted to try a dystopia from the female point of view, or "the world according to Julia" since most of the dystopias have been written by men and have males' viewpoints, and women appearing in them "have been either sexless automatons or rebels who've defied the sex rules of the regime" (Atwood "My Hero"). However, in "Haunted by *The Handmaid's Tale*", Atwood puts it that the label "feminist dystopia" applied to the novel is not strictly accurate, because this term would imply that "all of the men would have greater rights than all of the women", and certain women in the book have as much if not more power as men have. Such is the case with the Aunts.

I argue that the Wives' power is illusory, and in one way or another they contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting the limits imposed on them. As Bourdieu points out in *Masculine Domination*, the mechanisms and structures that enable the symbolic violence towards women act by coercion and consent of the victims. The author calls these strategies "paradox of the doxa": "the established order with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices [that] ultimately

perpetuates itself so easily that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable or even natural” (1) and therefore accepted by people disadvantaged by this social order. Symbolic violence is imposed on its victims by means of imperceptible, invisible and subtle violence exerted through language, lifestyle (a way of thinking, speaking and acting), leading to the transformation of cultural arbitrariness into the *natural* (2 emphasis in original).

When we read the book or we watch the TV series, we feel that the events depicted are frighteningly real. The dystopian society imagined by Atwood is not too far removed from ours. As Michiko Kakutani argues, “enduring dystopian novels look backward and forward at the same time and *The Handmaid’s Tale* extrapolates some historical horrors like the rise of fundamentalist movement in the America of the 70s or early 80s, public executions in North Korea or Saudi Arabia, (“The Handmaid’s Thriller”) to delineate the wicked political apparatus in the Gilead republic.

The Handmaid’s Tale is a feminist work devised to inform about the dangers of a misogynistic culture and a reflection on gendered violence and the achievement of male’s fantasies of domination and commodification of the female body as a source of symbolic capital, i.e. to the procreation of children for their masters. The female body is thus converted into real and symbolic extensions of male authority. I have titled this section “Feminist dystopia” to deal with gender inequality, but Gilead society is a Totalitarian dystopia in its own right. Offred’s memories of her old life with Luke and her daughter suggest that it is possible to live in a utopian place, and these memories are the driving force for her to survive in the Republic of Gilead.

In last years, the success of the TV series adapting the book released in Hulu has provoked an awakening of the political use of dystopian narratives centred on the psychophysical oppression by patriarchal powers against women. Besides, the proliferation

of social movements such as #MeToo to denounce sexual harassment by the film producer Harvey Weinstein or Ni Una Menos in Argentina against femicides have called our attention to gender-based violence demanding more severe laws against sexual abuses and commodification of women. Stories such as *The Handmaids' Tale* have gained social relevance today to spot the dangers of the cult of masculine domination and violence towards women, increasing our opposition to male abuses. This kind of speculative fiction delivers powerful warnings about what happens when we tolerate the growth of misogynistic societies. On the other hand these stories help increase more assertive attitudes on women and emphasise the need of raising more respectful men.

3.4.2 *The Handmaid's Tale*.

“Some books haunt the reader. Others haunt the writer. *The Handmaid's Tale* has done both” (Margaret Atwood “Haunted by the Handmaid’s Tale”).

*The Handmaid's Tale*⁴ is a dystopia concerned with gender based domination, objectification and disempowerment of females through techniques of control, manipulation and suppression of their roles and identities. Offred's story describes her isolation and helplessness under a totalitarian theocracy set by The Sons of Jacob Think Tanks, a fundamentalist party that seized the power after a military coup implementing a despotic male rule that keeps women silenced, abused and subjugated. Firstly, women were dismissed from their jobs, were forbidden to hold their bank accounts and finally were confined to the domestic sphere. As the revolution progresses, the fertile ones were captured and sent to sterile families with the aim of bearing children for the Commanders and their Wives .

⁴ For the sake of brevity, hereafter *THT*.

Since childbearing was women's most praised value and the most important purpose for them to fulfil, they were trained in domesticity, maternity and submission. The Handmaids were denied education and are not allowed to read and write because their hands are not essential for reproductive purposes (Atwood, *THT* 102). They lost their own names and adopt a patronymic composed of the possessive preposition "of" and the Commander's first name letting us know that they are their master's properties. As Gilead enforced maternity and sexuality upon them, they were reduced to the subservient gender roles of wives or whores. On a monthly basis, they were forced to maintain sexual relationships with the Commanders during a ceremony which they claim to be founded on the Old Testament, particularly in the story of Rachel and her handmaid Bilhah who gave birth two children on Rachel's behalf: "*Give me children or else I die*" said Rachel, but there is more than one meaning to it" (Atwood, *THT* 71 emphasis in original). This statement has a double sense, for women who fail to fulfil their reproductive role are sent to "the Colonies", a polluted environment where they will find a certain death because of the toxic radiations and hard work.

The handmaid's physical body is a source of totalitarian control. Foucault believes that once the body was discovered as a target of power, it was easy to find signs of the attention paid to it: the body can be "manipulated, shaped and trained which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces" (*Discipline and Punish* 136). To achieve "docile bodies" at the service of the Republic of Gilead, the Handmaids were kept locked and indoctrinated by the ruthless Aunts in the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centres, more known as the Red Centres. These places are similar to the disciplinary institutions mentioned by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* following the model of the army and religious congregations, since both of them have been the masters of discipline for centuries (150). The regimented life of the Handmaids is materialized by techniques that

can be found in the militia. Aunt Lydia addresses to the Handmaids as if they were soldiers; she says to them: “[t]hink of it as being in the army” (Atwood, *THT* 17). “[Y]ou are the shock troops, you will march out in advance, into dangerous territory. The greater the risk, the greater the glory” (122-123).

In the Red Centres, the Handmaids are distributed in space “the protected place of disciplinary monotony” because “[d]iscipline requires *enclosure*” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 141). To meet the needs of totalitarian control, “[i]t was a question of distributing individuals in a space in which one might isolate them and map them” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 144). Offred explains:

we tried to sleep in the army cots that had been set up in rows, with spaces between so we could not talkThe guards weren't allowed inside except for our walks, twice daily, two by two around the football field which was enclosed now by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. ...We learned to whisper almost without a sound. In the darkness, we could stretch out our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking”. (Atwood, *THT* 14)

There, the Handmaids are systematically brainwashed by the Aunts through techniques of control of mind and body so that they assimilate the doctrines that keep them subjected to the male rule and to follow a blind adherence to their role as surrogate mothers. The disciplinary space of the Red Centres will be continued in the Commander's houses, as the Handmaids were confined in their rooms arranged as a kind of monastic cells, because the best model for the control of inmates' activities was suggested by institutions that retain “a religious air” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 149). As Offred explains, there is no glass in her room, the window only opens partly, time is measure by bells as once in nunneries, and there are few mirrors (Atwood, *THT* 18). There are Bibles in the dresser drawers, the glass in the windows is shatterproof” (62). He feels that “the threshold of a new house is a lonely place” (24), and refuses to call her room as her room: “[t]he door of my room –not my room, I refuse to say *my* –is not locked” (18).

Aunt Lydia's idea of "freedom to" corresponds to debauchery and immoral hedonism and is opposed to that of "the freedom from", meaning more security for women as there is no pornography, "no man shouts obscenities at us, speaks to us, touches us, no one whistles" (Atwood, *THT* 34). But these advantages are obtained at the cost of the total absence of liberty. There is no escape from totalitarian control. In the Republic of Gilead women are deprived of the ability to act independently and to make their own free choices. Aunt Lydia tells the women that there is no escape: "the Republic of Gilead ... knows no bounds. Gilead is within you" (33).

Offred feels that she is no longer in control of her body and rejects that her fertility is the most important feature that defines her role and identity as a woman: "I avoid looking down at my body. My nakedness is strange to me already. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely" (Atwood, *THT* 72-73). Later, she reflects on her new condition and her inability to give meaning: "[w]e are containers, it is only the insides of our bodies that are important", and "two-legged wombs ... sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (107, 146).

As access to books, magazines and newspapers has been denied, the Handmaids have forgotten the use of their own language. When Offred and the Commander play Scrabble she barely finds words available to express herself properly: "[m]y tongue felt thick with the effort of spelling. It was like using a language I had once known but had nearly forgotten, a language having to do with customs that had long before passed out of the world" (Atwood, *THT* 164). The impoverishment of language contributes to the patriarchal objectification of women and makes it easier for the leaders of Gilead to implement their doctrine. On the other hand, knowledge is a danger in the hands of transgressors and non-aligned individuals, as Limpkin, a sociobiologist of Gilead affirms: "[o]ur big mistake was teaching them to read. We won't do that again" (320). Offred

believes that the pen is a powerful instrument in her hands due to “the power of words that it contains” (198).

Bourdieu and Wacquant argue in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* that gender domination shows that the effects of naturalising such invisible violence do not work at the level of consciousness: “symbolic violence lies beyond or beneath the controls of consciousness and will, in the obscurities of the schemata of the habitus that are at once gendered and gendering” (172). In the novel, women misrecognize this relation of domination and unwittingly cooperate with their dominator by tacitly accepting the limits imposed on them in the form of humiliation, submission and punishment. Nicole-Claude Mathieu goes further in the critique of the notion of consent, “which denies virtually all responsibility on the part of the oppressor and ... once more casts all the blame on the oppressed (qtd. in Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 41). The Aunts made Janine accept that her gang rape was her fault since “she led them on”, and that such terrible thing served as “a lesson” for her to learn, while the other Handmaids call her Crybaby and jeer at her. Offred admits that “for a moment ... we despised her” (Atwood, *THT* 82). Later on, Janine says : “it was my own fault ...I deserved the pain” (82).

Bourdieu contends that while the same psychosomatic work “applied to boys aims to virilise them... takes a radical form when applied to girls [b]ecause woman is constituted as a negative entity, defined only by default” (*Masculine Domination* 27). Offred affirms that: “we were the people that were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. ... We lived in the gaps between the stories ”(Atwood *THT* 66-67).

For Bourdieu, “[a]ll the work of socialisation ... tends to impose limits on her, which all concern the body, thus defined as sacred...and which have to be inscribed in the dispositions of the body” (*Masculine Domination* 27). When Offred is in the boy’s washrooms at the Red Centre, she marvels at the “nakedness of men’s lives: the showers

right out on the open, the body exposed for inspection and comparison, the public display of privates” (Atwood *THT* 83) and wonders “why women do not have to prove to another that they are women” (83).

Femininity is imposed “through the constraints of clothing and hairstyle” (*Masculine Domination* 27). The Handmaids are dressed in red, “the colour of blood which defines [them]” ... and wear white wings “to keep [them] from seeing but also from being seen” (Atwood, *THT* 8). Display of “bare backs and shoulders, on the street, in public” or legs without stockings on them were distasteful, horrible and filthy *things* that “do not happen to nice women” (65 emphasis in original). In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu explains that the body is “the *site of sexual difference*” (17):

The public, active uses of the upper, male part of the body ... are the preserve of men; women who, in Kabylia, keep away from public places, must in a sense renounce the use of their gaze (they walk in public with eyes directed to the ground) and their speech only utterance that suits them is ‘I don’t know’, the antithesis of the manly speech which is decisive and clear-cut affirmation. (17)

This policy of coercions acting upon the body includes control of movements, gestures, attitudes and behaviour. Bourdieu insists that “female submissiveness seems to find a natural translation in bending, stooping, lowering oneself “submitting”- curved and supple postures and the associated docility being seen appropriate to women” (*Masculine Domination* 27). The Aunts’ disciplinary techniques aim at achieving this:

Tonight I will say my prayers. No longer kneeling at the foot of the bed, knees on the hard wood of the gym floor, Aunt Elizabeth ... arms folded, cattle prod hung on her belt, while Aunt Lydia settles along the rows of kneeling nightgowned women. ... She wanted our heads bowed just right, our toes together and pointed, our elbows at the proper angle. ... She wanted us to look Christmas-card angels, regimented in our robes of purity. (Atwood, *THT* 204)

Also, for Foucault, “[d]isciplinary control imposes the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body” (*Discipline and Punish* 152). When she first met Serena Joy, Offred declares that she “wasn’t looking at her face, but at the part of her [she] could see with [her] face lowered” (Atwood, *THT* 34). Offred remembers that “Aunt Lydia said it was best not to speak unless they asked you a direct question” (24). The only words that she answers to the Wife are: “Yes, Ma’am”, or “No, Ma’am” (Atwood, *THT* 24-25). Later, when Offred meets Nick, the chauffeur, she “drop[s] [her] head and turn so that the white wings hide [her] face” (28). When Offred goes shopping with Ofglen, she recalls that “nobody talks much” (35) and Ofglen “stands in silence, head down” (36). She thinks: “Ofglen’s head is bowed, as if she’s praying. She does this every time...She does such things to look good” (41).

Control of activity is enforced by three grand methods aiming to “establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate cycles of repetition” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 149). By analysing the socio-political plots in the Republic of Gilead, we can recognise the following strategies:

- There is social division of labour, “a very strict distribution of activities assigned to each sex” (Bordieu *Masculine Domination* 9). Each woman is categorized and assigned a function and they are colour-coded according to their social status and occupation. Apart from Handmaids and Wives, the other female groups in Gilead include Marthas (servants), Jezebels (prostitutes), Econowives (poorer’s men women), and Unwomen (female rebels who are sent to the Colonies, a contaminated place where they are assigned harsh tasks and die in about three years as a consequence of “the toxic dumps and the radiation spills” (Atwood *THT* 260).

- The Handmaids only leave the house for shopping purposes. Their movements and activity are overseen by the vigilant gaze of Guardians and the secret police force, the “Eyes”. But the more perfected system of surveillance is effected by the Handmaids themselves:

We aren’t allowed to go there except in twos. This is supposed to be for our protection, though the notion is absurd: we are well protected already. The truth is that she is my spy as I am hers. If either of us slips through the net because of something that happens on one of our daily walks, the other will be accountable.

(Atwood, *THT* 29)

- The Handmaids are taken to the doctor’s once a month for medical examination and several tests. Their survival depends on their ability to conceive healthy babies for the Commanders and their wives. “You must be worthy vessels”, Aunt Lydia says to the Handmaids (Atwood, *THT* 75).
- The Republic of Gilead is a totalitarian theocracy concerned with the low rates of birth due to “various nuclear-plant accidents ... leakages from chemical and biological warfare, stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites”(Atwood, *THT* 317), among others. Every month, when the Handmaids are in their fertile days, they must undergo a state-sanctioned rape during a so-called “Ceremony” legitimized by its appearance as a religious ritual. In it, the Commander rapes the Handmaid with the help of his Wife.
- The Handmaids are obliged to recite or listen to a series of slogans taken from the Scriptures intended to support Gileadean repressive practices. Biblical language is incorporated to everyday speech as the Handmaids’ dialogue consists of phrases as “blessed be the fruit” or “may the Lord open” (Atwood, *THT* 29). This constitutes a kind of symbolic violence which for Bordieu is acting “through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition” (*Masculine Domination* 2) and

practised in form of daily routines. Before The Ceremony, the Commander reads a passage from the Bible, which Offred recognises as being “the usual story, the usual stories” (Atwood, *THT* 99). Then, it comes

the mouldy old Rachel and Leah stuff we had drummed into us at the Centre. *Give me children or else I die ... Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.* They had this story read to them every breakfast. (99)

Similarly, they had to recite three times after the dessert the following scriptural passage taken from St. Paul in Acts as not every Commander has a Handmaid for some of them have children: “[f]rom each [Commander] ... according to her ability; to each according to his needs”(Atwood, *THT* 127). Finally, “for lunch it was the Beatitudes” (Atwood, *THT* 100) a prayer blessing the poor in spirit, the meek, the silent...” which encourages submission and docility in the Handmaids.

In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu calls attention to the strength of the androcentric worldview which serves as an organizing principle of the society which “legitimizes the relationship of domination” by embedding it in “an arbitrary construction of the male and female body” (23). According to this gendered vision of the world, each individual occupies a position in a social space determined by his/her gender or social class which generates symbolic power and reproduces inequality.

The Handmaid's Tale depicts an arbitrary social order in which men are endowed with a dominant status, and women are relegated to inferior positions “by excluding [them] from the noblest tasks” (*Masculine Domination* 24). As Bourdieu argues, women are stayed at home and are assigned to domestic labour and duties that “are private and hidden, invisible and even shameful... especially the dirtiest, most monotonous and menial tasks” (*Masculine Domination* 30).

Contrarily, it corresponds to men to perform “external, official, public, straight... dangerous and spectacular acts” (30). Serena Joy, who was once a TV star, used to give religious speeches advocating the sanctity of the homely life and encouraging women to stay home. Now, confined in the household, she spends her time sewing or knitting, taking care of the garden or supervising other women’s tasks. Although she is a woman of higher rank, she is also silenced, repressed and pushed into domesticity. Offred comments ironically upon it: “She does not make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn’t seem to agree with her” (Atwood, *THT* 56).

In the Ceremony, Serena’s body is reshaped as an extension of Offred’s body: “Serena Joy grips my hand as if it is she, not I who’s being fucked, as if she finds it pleasurable or painful. ... But it isn’t this everyone’s wet dream two women at once?” (Atwood, *THT* 105). The Commander’s wife cries silently suffering a great humiliation but she “tries to preserve her dignity”. However, they can detect “the tension between her lack of control and her anger to suppress it” (101), and for Offred, this was horrible. After having performed the Ceremony, Serena’s state of frustration and anger leads Offred to wonder which of them is worse for, Serena or her (106). This demonstrates that the Wives are also a pitiable kind of women, and that is why Aunt Lydia calls them “a defeated ones” (56).

On the other hand, the real power comes from the Commander. He is the head of the household and “he has something that [women] do not have: “he has the word” (Atwood, *THT* 99). Offred says that he works long hours and has a lot of responsibilities (101) and she fears that “if he were to falter, fail or die what would become of [them]?” (99). She compares him as a boot, “hard on the outside, giving shape to a pulp of tenderfoot” (99). The Commander enjoys a freedom that only men enjoy in this society. On the contrary, women are colonisable and exploitable commodities, usable bodies (172).

Prostitution is another extension of patriarchal power. At Jezebel's, Offred admits that the Commander is breaking the rules getting away with it and thus demonstrating "his mastery of the world" (Atwood, *THT* 248). Jezebel's is a place where male fantasies of empowerment can be fulfilled. Perhaps, Offred thinks, "he's reached to a state of intoxication which power is said to inspire, the state in which you believe you are indispensable and can therefore do anything, absolutely anything you feel like, anything at all" (248). Bordieu explains that manliness "is felt *before others*" and "must be validated by other men in its reality as actual and potential violence, and certified by recognition of membership of the group of "real men"" (*Masculine Domination* 52). Offred describes the Commander's bodily disposition displayed in the brothel in front of other men, and the masculine dominant view through the sexualisation of Offred's body:

He retains hold of my arm, and as he talks his spine straightens imperceptibly, his chest expands, his voice assumes more and more sprightliness and jocularly of youth. It occurs to me he is showing off. He is showing me off, to them, and they understand that ... they keep their hands to themselves, but they review my breasts, my legs, as if there's no reason why they shouldn't. (Atwood, *THT* 248)

Gilead follows the two traditional models of femininity: the virgin or the whore. Whether serving as surrogate mothers, or as prostitutes at Jezebel's, women are treated as assets in the economy of symbolic goods. Young girls marry at an early age. Marriages are of course arranged because "girls haven't been allowed to be alone with a man for years" (Atwood *THT* 231). Some girls are no more than fourteen as Gileadean policy is "*to [s]tart them soon*" since "*there is not a moment to be lost*" (231). The matrimonial market according to Bordieu "is the central device in the relations of production and reproduction of symbolic capital, and the foundation of the whole social order. In this order, women appear as objects whose function is to the expansion of symbolic capital held by men" (*Masculine Domination* 42-43). Pieixoto explains in his lecture that:

[m]en highly placed in the regime were thus able to pick and choose among women who had demonstrated their reproductive fitness by having produced one or more healthy children, a desirable characteristic in an age of plummeting Caucasian birth rates (Atwood, *THT* 316).

Accordingly, Serena Joy admits that Offred's presence in the house "is like a business transaction" (Atwood, *THT* 25).

Finally, I would like to devote some words to the role played by the Aunts. The inclusion in the plot of these female figures shows that women can oppress women. Professor Pieixoto makes note of this in his final lecture: "to institute an effective totalitarian system or indeed any system at all you must offer some benefits and freedoms, at least to a privileged few" and "the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves" (Atwood, *THT* 320).

Whereas the Wives cannot use force or any implement to punish them, the Aunts are allowed to torture the Handmaids with steel cables and electric cattle prods to make them more obedient, to "lick [the Handmaids] into shape" (Atwood, *THT* 124). The Aunts are in charge of preparing the future of Gilead for the next generations playing an active role in the indoctrination and enslavement of the Handmaids. In return, the Aunts

escape redundancy, and subsequent shipment to the infamous Colonies which were composed of portable populations used mainly as expendable toxic cleanup squads, though if lucky [they] could be assigned to less hazardous tasks such as cotton picking and fruit harvesting. (Atwood, *THT* 321)

Tara J. Johnson in her essay "The Aunts as an Analysis of Feminine Power In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*", attributes three main functions to the Aunts. "The first is to delete the women from history" when they enter into the Red Centres. The second objective "is to teach women to betray other women" reporting on those who try to undermine the Gileadean regime, and the third goal is to teach the Handmaids that the

ritualistic rape at the hands of the Commanders is acceptable (72). The efficacy of such violence will be visible in few years when the dominant principle of vision is not a simple ideology, “but a system of structures durably embedded in things and in bodies” (Bordieu, *Masculine Domination* 42). That is why Aunt Lydia says to the Handmaids: “[f]or the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts” (Atwood *THT* 127).

3.5 Posthuman and Cyperpunk : *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) by Philip K. Dick and *Blade Runner* (1982) by Ridley Scott

3.5.1 Introduction

“Today we live in a society in which spurious realities are manufactured by the media, by governments, by big corporations, by religious groups, political groups....So I ask, in my writing, what is real?. Because unceasingly we are bombarded with pseudo-realities manufactured by very sophisticated people using very sophisticated electronic mechanisms. I do not distrust their motives; I distrust their power. They have a lot of it. And it is an astonishing power: that of creating whole universes, universes of the mind. I ought to know. I do the same thing.” (Philip K. Dick “How to Build a Universe that Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later”)

Philip K. Dick’s novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*⁵ depicts a post-apocalyptic world set in San Francisco in 1992. Later, the text was adapted into a film by Ridley Scott and titled *Blade Runner*, who placed the action in Los Angeles in the year 2019. Both works reflect the earthly extinction of nature and natural forms related to environmental degradation and the collective dehumanization of people. Owing to an advanced technology linked to corporate capitalism, consumerism and a commodity culture, social values and personal relationships among humans are overthrown. Simulacra

⁵ Hereafter *Do Androids?* for the sake of brevity.

and simulation are at the core of Techno-science which is shown in the narratives by way of fake cultural icons, ersatz animals, or arbitrary distinctions between organism and machine.

Blade Runner is engaged in the representation of the fixed categories of “human” and “non-human” beings. The film revolves around the idea that empathy is an exclusive human quality that even the most advanced androids lack. *Blade Runner* “depersonalises” the androids who “represent the victims of the empire, the African-American slaves brought to the new world in ... that act of “hazardous colonization” (Harley 65) and obliged to operate “under colonial laws” (Dick, *Do Androids* 24).

Successfully, the cinematic version portrays visual images of the humanoid robot which, being similar to ourselves, inspire in us empathetic and compassionate feelings about its plight. They suffer exploitation and oppression from humans serving as labourers doing hazardous jobs, as soldiers, as servants or as prostitutes. Harley contends that

the film projects into the future the American slave-trade (having turned its attention from Africans to Replicants), American imperialism (from Nicaragua and Vietnam to the Off-world colonies), and American-wrought environmental destruction (from its current disproportionate and unsustainable use of natural resources to complete environmental apocalypse) . (64)

Harrison Ford’s voice over, which was finally eliminated from the director’s final cut, is equivalent to the literary technique of the stream of consciousness. He starts by commenting on his boss’ racism toward the replicants, who are referred to by the latter in derogatory terms. Deckard wonders: “skin-jobs, that’s what Bryant’s called replicants, in history books he’s the kind of cop used to call black men niggers” (*Blade Runner* 12:18-12:25).

The female android Rachael suggests obliquely the same connection between androids and African-American slavery when she asks Deckard: [w]hat if I go North, disappear,

would you come after me? Hunt me? (1:03:06- 1:03:20). ‘North’ was a place of refuge given to slaves by the abolitionist northern states (Harley 65-66). Just before Batty saves Deckard’s life, Batty emphasizes his condition of servant by claiming: “quite an experience to live in fear isn’t it? That’s what it is to be a slave” (1:45:20- 1:45:26). In her insightful review of *Do Androids?* Katherine Hayles claims that “the ultimate horror for the individual is to remain trapped “inside” a world constructed by another being for the other’s own profit” (162).

Some preoccupations explored by Dick in *Do Androids?* are closely followed by Scott:

- Racism and concern about biological hierarchies. The ethical question of whether androids should be considered humans or not and if they should be granted the same rights as them.
- The validity of the Voigt-Kampf⁶ test to tell androids and organic beings apart. The test evaluates the emotional response in androids, but it proves to be ineffectual. While bounty hunters like Deckard and Phil Resch show little or no empathy toward androids, Rachael and Roy Baty⁷ have empathic feelings toward her fellow companions and humans as well. This test is a form of discrimination by which the dominant group (humans) discriminate those who are considered inferior.
- The deliberate dehumanisation of androids which are built according to the immoral system of slavery. The robot is a metaphor for exploitation, exclusion and oppression of other people for personal or commercial gain.
- The blurring of distinctions between humans and machines and difference between original and copies in the age of cyberpunk technologies. According to Rhee in “Beyond the Uncanny Valley”, Dick’s novel “features the uncanny as a force that destabilizes normative and exclusionary boundaries around “the human”” (303).

⁶ In the film, the test is called Voight-Kampf.

⁷ In Scott’s version, the replicant’s name is Roy Batty.

Dick recognises in his essay “Man Android and The Machine” to get frightened by a robot if it imitates human behaviour since he has the uncomfortable sense that they are trying to pass themselves off as humans. As a consequence of their close resemblance to humans, androids are source of considerable unrest and anxiety.

My reading of the text is based on three main topics: firstly I argue that replicants are not mere biological machines. Rather, they can be considered humans or a new category of humans, called cyborgs or posthumans. This new paradigm has been theorised by Haraway as a coupling between organism and intelligent machine (1).

For Elana Gomel, in *Blade Runner* , “the very ease with which their memories could be implanted indicates that the replicants put into question the biological and social foundations of human identity” (Gomel). The motto of the Tyrell/Rosen Company claims that android robots are “more human than human” (*Blade Runner* 22:41). Indeed, they show human feelings drawing a true self-consciousness about their own mortality in contrast to human’s lack of concern about the suffering of others, represented by heartless bounty hunters such as Deckard or Phil Resch.

Then, I will focus on the lack of social values generated by an over-technologized world that makes human addicted to machines and their spiritual isolation as a consequence of absence of communication among them. And finally, I will consider Dick’s social critique the capitalist world, and the role played by government’s enterprises without scruples about turning androids into mere commodities.

3.5.2 *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

In the dystopian world of *Do Androids ?*, our planet is a bleak and inhospitable place contaminated by radioactive dust after the occurrence of The World War Terminus. Owing to the resulting radioactive fallout almost all animals have become extinct.

“Electric” or mechanical animals supplant real ones, and humans who have not migrated to Mars are mentally and physically affected by environmental decay and pollution. People remaining in Earth are called “specials”, are classified as “biologically unacceptable, a menace to the pristine heredity of the race” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 13) and represent a hostile force to its self-esteem as a species. Consequently, “[o]nce pegged as special, a citizen, even if accepted sterilization, drooped put of history. He ceased ... to be part of mankind” (13).

To promote emigration, the government has scheduled a program by which each family will receive an android robot absolutely free “either as body servants or tireless field hands” (14) and continuously bombards citizens with slogans supporting the colonizing campaign: “Emigrate or Degenerate! The choice is yours!” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 6). When a group of these androids kill their masters and return to Earth, Rick Deckard, a bounty-hunter, is required to track down and kill them as they pose a threat to humankind because they cannot be told apart from humans. He accepts this hazardous job because he needs the reward to accomplish his dream of buying a real animal, a symbol of social status and the most prized object of humans’ care and concern.

In *Do Androids?* massive use of technology replaces human’s need for companionship and affect. Penfield organs produce in people altered perceptions of reality by artificial brain stimulation and Mercerism provides emotional fulfilment enhancing human’s capacity for empathy. Commercials encouraging migration to Mars offering humanoid robots constantly pervade TV channels being sponsored by the state power on account of its colonizing program, which citizens like the “special” J. R. Isidore “are forced to listen to” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 14).

Scott Bukatman emphasises the totalitarian exploitation of the screen image in the novel. He contends that “the spectacle controls by atomizing the population and reducing

their capacity to function as an aggregate force ... among which the viewer may electronically wander and experience a simulation of satisfaction” (36).

Besides the social control exerted through TV programmes, the government is also behind the fake cultural icons of Mercer and Buster Friendly, who mediated by technology, intend to “foist this image off any number of gullible citizen-consumers” (Galvan 416). As stated by this author, Mercer’s image serves for the individual’s total disintegration and passivity, and these are the main objectives pursued by the government to avoid public unrest (416). Galvan argues that in being encouraged to fuse with Mercer, citizen’s feelings of rebellion and transgression were recuperated into bounds limited “*to the controlled space of [their] own living room*” (417 emphasis in original). All in all, Mercerism is accommodated by power structures as a “safety valve for sedition” (417) in order to manipulate the population. That is why Mercerism is highly valued by American and Soviet Police: it “has the power to reduce crime by making citizens more concerned about the plight of their neighbours. Mankind needs more empathy, Titus Corning, the U.N. Secretary General had declared several times” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 65).

J.R. Isidore holds that the empathy box is “an extension of your body, the way you touch other humans and the way you stop being alone” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 57). Mercer’s followers enter a virtual world and share hallucinatory experiences of fusion with this deity as he climbs up a hill and suffers an attack by stones thrown by an unidentified menace.

Buster Friendly is a showman who hosts a popular program on radio and television and is another cultural icon who turns out to be a fake. J.R. Isidore wonders how Buster finds the time to tape both his vid and audio shows “twenty- three unbroken warm hours a day” and this is repeated “month after month, year after year” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 63, 64). The sagacious J.R. Isidore is aware that both Mercer and Buster Friendly are in

competition “for control of [their] psychic selves; the empathy box on the one hand, Buster’s guffaws and off-the-cuff on the other” (65).

Dick’s delineation of Mercerism is ambivalent. We do not know if it is a real and genuine experience or a complete delusion. For Hayles, Dick’s treatment of Mercer is very ambiguous; even “Mercer acknowledges that he is at once fake and genuine” (175). When the screen image of Mercer appears, his practitioners are subject to a state of total separateness from the environment, as Deckard realises after his wife Iran grabs the handles of the box: “Rick stood holding the phone receiver, conscious of her mental departure. Conscious of his own aloneness ” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 153). Eventually, Buster Friendly reveals that Mercerism is fictitious and Wilbur Mercer is a retired actor called Al Jarry, while Buster Friendly is himself an android. Friendly says that with this doctrine the government controls the population “like an ambitious politically minded would-be Hitler” (183). Baty is delighted to hear that Mercer experience is a falsehood and claims: “Mercerism is a swindle. The whole experience of empathy is a swindle” (183) and this reveal destroys the distinction between androids and humans that marginalizes their lives. After all, as Galvan claims, “what passes for “empathy” among humans derives far more from a cultural construction rather than from any categorical essence” (415).

Owing to the overlap of technology and biology, the blurring of distinctions between organism and machine problematizes the definition of “human” on strictly biological grounds. Having “retired” the last android, Deckard is devastated by the death of his goat and goes to the desert. There, being alone and without the empathy box, Mercer shows up and the result is that Deckard does not fuse with him, it is that Deckard himself *becomes* Mercer. “Mercer isn’t a fake”, he said.“ Unless reality is a fake” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 205).

Dick's narrative explores the construction of human identity mediated by technology, and the tension between the traditional humanistic values of the autonomous self and the new cybernetic paradigm. In "A Cyborg Manifesto", Haraway defines the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149). The key component of the cyborg is the breaching or blurring of boundaries between the self and the world because "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (149). This figure undermines the dualisms which have hitherto structured how we think and live. Haraway claims: "[b]y the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are all cyborgs" (151).

The novel highlights that boundaries between human and android machine are very imprecise because "our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert" (Haraway 152). Deckard is called to identify and "retire" humanoid androids to maintain the hierarchy between dominant and dominated. The coldblooded Phil Resch reminds Deckard that their mission as bounty hunters is to "stand between the Nexus-6 and mankind, a barrier which keeps the two distinct" (Dick, *Do Androids?* 122).

In *Do Androids* men are incapable of empathy for other men. We may delve into J.R. Isidore's thoughts suffering about his social isolation for being a "special". When he thinks that another resident has taken one of the empty apartments he exclaims: "I have to keep calm, [he] realised. Not let him know I'm a chickenhead. If he finds out I am a chickenhead he won't talk to me; that's always the way it is for me. I wonder why? (Dick, *Do Androids?* 22). On the contrary, androids are caring and helpful to each other, are courageous and stand for their rights, being smart and resourceful. Deckard admits that

“the Nexus-6 android types surpassed several classes of human specials in terms of intelligence”, becoming “more adroit than its master” (25-26).

In her concept of the new entity called the posthuman, Hayles pleads that when information loses its body, it can be dematerialized into an informational pattern and rematerialized again regardless of the material substrate “in which it is thought to be embedded” (2). This new entity is a new paradigm of humanity which transcends the liberal humanism with its fixed definition of the human subject as it “privileges informational pattern over material instantiation... so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history” (2). The consequence is that “equating humans and computers is especially easy” (2).

Technology has invaded human’s lives and makes humans dependent either on Penfield mood organs or on the empathy boxes to induce desires and synthetic emotions. For instance, to cope with depression, Iran purposely can dial feelings of hopelessness and despair about everything such as “how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence of life” or “staying here on Earth after everybody who’s smart has emigrated” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 3). Memories and images of human experiences implanted in replicants’ brain made them undistinguishable from humans. This paradigm of humanity called posthuman, disregards consciousness “as the seat of human identity”, and “configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines” (Hayles 3). These biologically engineered beings disrupt the binary categories of machine/human and authentic/ersatz because they resemble human beings in body and mind.

In Dick’s text, replicants develop capacity for empathy and have the same feelings as humans. Although Deckard claims that “[a]n android doesn’t care what happens to another android” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 88), there are several examples of androids’ empathic responses. Rachael shows concern for Luba Luft’s death. She says to Deckard that she and

had been “close friends for almost two years” (172). Likewise, Rachael’s pushes Deckard’s goat off the roof because she is jealous of his love for the goat, or in revenge for killing the androids, an act that conflates “[t]he mixture of human passion and cold calculation” (Hayles 173). Pris says to J.R. Isidore that Roy and Irmgard Batty are her best friends and if they are got killed, nothing really matters to her (Dick, *Do Androids?* 129). Irmgard Baty shows kindness and respect to J.R. Isidore: “I want you to know we appreciate it very much, Mr. Isidore. You’re the first friend I think any of us have found here on Earth” (Dick, *Do Androids?*139).

In spite of being a ‘special’ or ‘chickenhead’, J.R Isidore shows the most insightful and sophisticated reasoning in the text. He understands that androids are not very different from humans. J.R. Isidore thinks that they are even smarter:

You’re intellectual, Isidore said [to Roy Baty]; he felt excited again at having understood. Excitement and pride. “You think abstractly ... As usual. ‘I wish I had an IQ like you have; then I could pass the test, I wouldn’t be a chickenhead . I think you’re very superior ; I could learn a lot from you. (Dick, *Do Androids?*142)

To hunt and to kill androids is legal because the humanoid robot is a solitary predator separated from human due to its lack of empathy, and because according to Mercer, killing only killers “does not violate the rule of life” (Dick, *Do Androids?*27). However, the Voigt-Kampff test happens to be a unreliable tool which fails when applied to subjects with diminished empathic faculty with flattening affects (32). Then it is impossible to discern the difference between humans and androids and it calls into question human superiority over mechanical beings. The writer holds that a clear cut divide between human being and android proves impossible because a “human being without the proper empathy or feeling is the same as an android built so as to lack it, either by design or by mistake”(Dick “Man, Android and the Machine”).

Dick's narrative extends his political dimension to the critic of capitalism embodied by powerful enterprises such as Rosen Association which epitomises the capitalist industry and lays bare the ideology of mercantilist doctrine. This Company codifies, markets and sells electric animals to satisfy human needs for companionship and empathy. Deckard thinks that "they control inordinate power" because the Company is "one of the system's industrial pivots" as "the manufacture of androids has become linked to the colonization effort" (Dick, *Do Androids?* 38-39). When Deckard complains that the development of humanoids almost indistinguishable from real humans could cause that they be erroneously identified as androids and "retired", Eldon Rosen answers back in purely business-like terms:

[w]e produced what colonists wanted. ... We followed the time-honoured principle underlying every commercial venture. If our firm hadn't made these progressively more human types, other firms in the field would have. ... Your policemen department- others as well- may have retired, very probably have retired, authentic humans with underdeveloped empathic ability, such as my innocent niece here. Your position Mr. Deckard is extremely bad morally. Our isn't. (Dick, *Do Androids?* 46)

Katherine Hayles states that for many distinguished researchers, among whom she quotes Norbert Wiener, it is crucial in cybernetics that human beings "were to be seen primarily as information-processing entities ... essentially similar to intelligent machines" (7). Furthermore she states that for Wiener, "the point was to show less that a man was a machine than to demonstrate that a machine could function like a man" (qtd. in Hayles 7).

Eventually, Deckard ends up convinced that androids were biologically alive, as he says to Rachael: "[y]ou're not made out of transistorized circuits like a false animal; you're an organic entity" (Dick, *Do Androids?* 171). After all, he says, "electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are" (211).

To conclude, I would like to state that despite the dystopian world envisaged by Dick, Deckard's final conviction that androids are living entities hints a hope in the existence of a community where humans and machines could coexist peacefully. Haraway claims that "cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (154).

3.5.3 *Blade Runner*.

The film opens with a scroll proclaiming that:

The Nexus-6 Replicants were superior in strength and agility and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers who created them. They were used Off-world as slave labour in the hazardous exploration and colonization of other planets. After a mutiny, they were declared illegal and special police squads were commissioned to shoot to kill, upon detection any trespassing Replicant. (02:13-02:36)

Life in the Off-world colonies is advertised as "a chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure" (07:54-07:80). We can assume from this assertion that the colonising enterprise is the main issue in the plot, and from the opening sequence that the replicants are a kind of sub-human slaves designed to satisfy human needs.

At the beginning of the movie, what strikes audiences most is the blending of high technologically and over-industrialised L.A with the images of a chaotic, filthy and decayed city with huge screens on the top of skyscrapers, oil refineries spouting blazing fire, acid rain falling incessantly and streets crowded with peddlers exhibiting diverse cultural codes and languages . We are struck with powerful visions of a future world dominated by multinational corporations such as COCA-COLA, PAN AM, ATARI or TDK advertised by huge billboards. Emerging from this world we find two main

characters: the cool and emotionless and self-appointed “ex-cop, ex-blade runner and ex-killer” Deckard who displays a kind of resentment against his own past, and the human-like replicant Roy Batty, a leader of a gang that have escaped the Colonies fleeing from a life of servitude and oppression.

Deckard’s lack of empathy toward the replicants is obvious from the beginning of the film. He denies them their status as humans: “replicants are like any other machine. They’re either a benefit or a hazard. If they’re a benefit it’s not my problem” (15:27:32-15:27:35). In this world of corruption, violence and artificial experiences, Eldon Tyrell, the powerful robotic manufacturer, represents the source from which power emanates:

Commerce is our goal here at Tyrell, “more human than human” is our motto. Rachael is only an experiment, nothing more. We began to recognize in them a strange obsession, after all they’re emotionally inexperienced If we gift them with a past, we create a cushion or a pillow for their emotions, then consequently we can control them better. (22:40-23:07)

At the middle of the film, Deckard feels confused about the true nature of the replicants and his newly discovered empathy for them. Similarly, Deckard in *Do Androids* is reluctant to “retire” (or kill replicants in cold blood) since he thinks that becoming a killer means to “violate his own identity” (Dick, *Do Androids?* 155). To cheer him up, Mercer tells him that sometimes it was required to do wrong because “it is the basic condition of life” (155), meaning that shooting androids down is both faulty and necessary. After ‘retiring’ Luba Luft, Deckard thinks to himself that she was a great artist and he does not understand “how can a talent like that can be a liability to [their] society” (119) .

Deckard had always assumed that the android was no more than “a clever machine” (Dick, *Do Androids?*122). And yet, he wonders why he feels so sad about Luba’s death. He reflects that if Resch were an android, he “could have killed him without feeling anything” (124) for “[Resch] is a menace in exactly the same way, for the same reasons”

(119). Inside the elevator with Resch and Luba, “[Deckard’s] feelings were the reverse of those intended. Of those [he is] accustomed to feel, of those [he is] *required* to feel (124 emphasis in original). He thinks that “[s]he was a wonderful singer. The planet could have used her. This is insane”(118). For him she was “genuinely alive; it had not worn the aspect of a simulation” (122).

In *Blade Runner*, when Deckard “retires” Zhora, he is also sickened by the absurd waste of her life, and begins to consider his job morally questionable and dehumanising. His affair with Rachael increases this anxiety: “[t]he report would be routine retirement of a replicant which didn’t make me feel any better about shooting a woman in the back. There it was again feeling in myself for her, for Rachael “(58:59-59:13).

Once the androids take conscience of their own mortality, they seek out the person who created them, claiming to be granted more life because their lifespan is limited to four years. When finally Roy Batty confronts Eldon Tyrell, he asks him to get his DNA recoded to avoid his rapid ageing. This is their conversation:

BATTY: It is not easy to meet your maker.

TYRELL: What can I make for you?

BATYY: Can the maker repair what he makes? ...

TYRELL: What seems to be the problem? ...

BATTY: Death. I want more life, father. ...

TYRELL: You were made as well as we could make. But not to last. ... Look at you, you’re the prodigal son. You’re quite a prize.

BATTY: I’ve done questionable things...

TYRELL: And also extraordinary things. Revel your time. (1:22:57-1:25:24)

Deckard discovers Batty’s humanity when androids’ leader spares Deckard’s life in their confrontation at the end of the film. Deckard understands that Batty’s decision is an act of forgiveness and empathy as the android really understands the value of human life.

Deckard reflects on the replicant's motives to show mercy on him, and realises that humanoids are innocent victims of a system that denies them the condition of humans:

I do not know he saved my life, maybe in his last moments he loved life more than he ever had before, not just his life, anybody's life, my life. All he wanted where the same answers the rest of us want: where do I come from, where am I going, how long have I got.
(1:47:43-1:48:10)

As Hayles puts it, the third wave of cybernetics “stretching from 1980 to the present, highlights virtuality” (7). Computer programs “are designed to allow creatures ... to evolve spontaneously in directions that the programmer may not have anticipated” (11), showing that “such self-evolving programs are not merely models of life, but are themselves alive” (11). Androids develop new emotional capabilities and accumulate experiences as the time passes to the point where it is impossible to distinguish human consciousness from artificial consciousness. In other words, while replicants are more and more humans, humans resemble more and more to machines dehumanized by technology, violence and consumerism. They live in a dystopia where androids were denied their rights as living beings and as legitimate subjects.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this project I have examined eight dystopian narratives placed in imagined settings but bearing uncomfortable resemblances to our own world. In Jameson's view, dystopia is essentially what in language of science fiction criticism is called a “near future novel”: it tells story of an imminent disaster ...waiting to come to pass in our own near future, which is fast-forwarded in the time of the novel” (*The Seeds of Time* 56).

Through my analysis I have highlighted the role of Sci-Fi and dystopian literature to provide foreshadowing visions about the future of humanity while constituting a critique of “existing or potential ills and injustices in society” (Booker 3). These fictions have the

power to depict strikingly bad scenarios: nuclear disasters, tyrannical regimes, gender-based and racial forms of violence, continuous surveillance of population, excess of consumerism and the use of economic and political power to enjoy a series of benefits such as excellent healthcare, unpolluted environment and technological advances. All dystopias reviewed involve a social critique exposing the injustices and inequalities inherent to the human's desire to materialize the dreams of constructing an utopian place.

By means of “defamiliarization”, these accounts “estrangle” us from usual assumptions about reality for the events take place in another place or time or these worlds simply do not exist. However, we are compelled to observe, judge and interpret with renewed perception dystopian texts because they contain foreshadowing visions about the future of humanity. Also, I have argued that their authors project in the plots the dominant preoccupations of their age in the shape of imaginary societies. As a mode of summary, I will point out the key facts that I have found useful to support this assertion.

Zamyatin and Orwell published their novels in 1921 and 1949 respectively. They reflected monolithic totalitarian states and warned the readers about the dangers of communism and fascism. In her introduction to the novel, Mirra Ginsburg notes that although Zamyatin wrote *We* when the totalitarian future was only discernible, “he projected from present trends...to an encompassing vision of the society to come”(xiii). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a criticism of Stalin's regime. One of the major themes that emerge from the text is Orwell's recognition that intellectuals of the socialist movement had been corrupted by power-hungry and had ceased to be honest and morally capable leaders.

Gattaca focuses on the risks of using biological information to discriminate people on the basis of physical traits, race, sex, or medical and familiar antecedents. Throughout history, people have been prosecuted, marginalized or killed on the same grounds. Today,

insurance companies elaborate profiles based on age, condition and disabling conditions, and employment selection applicants are segregated by age, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, etc.

Written at the turn of the twentieth first century, the topic surrounding the events depicted in *The Road* is focused on the aftermath of an ecological catastrophe and it constitutes a warning against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Ibarrola -Armendariz remarks that many critics believe that the “book is about the uncertainties and anxieties that U.S. citizens began to feel in the wake of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror” (85) and perhaps “the ghosts and anxieties emerging during the Cold War period were not gone” (87).

Elysium conveys the Earth’s dramatic degradation of nature related to overexploitation of natural resources and industrial production leading to contamination and climate change. Blomkamp shows great skill in drawing correspondences between environmental concerns and the film’s representation of deteriorated urban settings and social collapse. The film portrays the processes of economic globalization which produce a range of negative consequences falling upon the unprivileged classes such as unequal access to public resources like medical healthcare, extreme poverty, and undermined welfare state that leads them to forced migration.

The Handmaids’ Tale denounces religious fundamentalism and misogyny. The novel was published in 1985 during ultra conservative Reagan’s term of office and it can be argued that *The Handmaids’ Tale* is a direct extrapolation of social policies in Reagan’s administration. In her Master’s thesis, Aldekogarai Zubia argues that the book was published toward the end the Second Wave feminism in Canada, an epoch marked “by the fact that women were determined to recover agency over their own bodies ... reflected in the fight to demand rights over birth control and abortion” (7). In her study, Aldekogarai

Zubia demonstrates the similarity between the Republic of Gilead and Reagan's restrictive laws against abortion. Reagan was associated with Moral Majority, "an organisation created to spread traditional Christian family values" (34) and was deeply convinced that in the 80s., women's role "was to provide affection and support, take care of the household and bear children for their husbands"(36). To demonstrate the ultra-conservative and theocratic nature of his ideology, the documentary *A Word after a Word, after a Word is Power* includes a fragment of one of Reagan's speeches held in 20 January 1981: "I'm told that tens of thousands of prayer meetings are being held on this day and for what I'm deeply grateful, we are a Nation under God and I believe God intended for us to be free" (49:51-50:05).

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? and *Blade Runner* marked the beginning of the Cyberpunk Sci-Fi. The rapid advancement of computer technologies and their impact on human social relations have been object of contemporary scholars such as Haraway and Hayles. New models of subjectivity emerged from concepts of embodied virtuality and cybernetic organisms hybrids of machine and human. The territory of the posthuman "is a subversion of the traditional pieties of the liberal humanism" (Gomel). Furthermore, the texts warn about the harmful impact of new technologies when they are managed either by corporations or by states directed to manipulate and to control subjects. As Bina et al. explain, oppression, inequality and dehumanization are inseparable from innovation, technology and science (175).

At the beginning of this Master's thesis , I have highlighted the role of Sci-Fi and dystopian literature to offer ways of "embodying, telling imagining and symbolising "futures"" (Bina et al. 166) to enrich our understanding of potential threats and to convey warning signals in relation to the four patterns that I have discussed in this work⁸.

⁸ See point 1.6 pp.15-16.

As regards to these patterns I have found that:

- The prevailing factor which brings about inequality and oppression of citizens is the manipulation and control of people through science and technology. It promotes the rise of hierarchical and stratified communities leading to the loss of human dignity and values and may hasten the emergence of dystopian scenarios.
- The irresponsible use of Techno-science has devastating effects over nature whose consequences are the destruction of natural resources supporting life on Earth. My fictions explore the human impact on natural systems and how they transcend our lifetime and affect future generations.
- The excesses of consumerism and the worship of capital and economic interests in socio-political contexts where democratic principles are undermined or absent are obtained at the cost of human's suffering. It includes stratification of workers including the use of humanoid robots manufactured to serve as enslaved workforce.
- The portrayal of women in unequal positions and roles with respect to men are central to the representation of women's existence in dystopian texts. Masculine domination against women includes submission, deprivation of their rights and forced confinement in home.

I believe in the need to create more stories capable of providing alternative understandings and precautionary messages to make people more self-conscious about the dangers implicit in the future that we have ahead. I hope that this study would contribute to the interpretation of these warnings and will trigger the production of more projects devoted to rethink today's challenges in order to prevent tomorrow's problems.

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