Spring 2015

Occupy the future: A rhetorical analysis of dystopian film and the Occupy movement

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Occupy the Future:

A Rhetorical Analysis of Dystopian Film and the Occupy Movement

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication

May 2015

Dedication Page

This thesis is dedicated to the world's revolutionaries and all the individuals working to

make the planet a better place for future generations.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank a number of people for their assistance and support with this thesis

project. First, a heartfelt thank you to my thesis chair, Dr. Jim Zimmerman, for always

being there to make suggestions about my drafts, talk about ideas, and keep me on

schedule. I'd also like to thank Dr. Michael Klein and Dr. Scott Lunsford for taking part

of this project as committee members. I know that this is a massive time expenditure, and

I am extremely lucky to have such excellent support from knowledgeable faculty

members. Finally, I am always grateful to my partner, Marie Eszenyi, for her ongoing

support. She is always there to talk about ideas and keep me going. I could not have done

this without all of you.

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Abstract

The anarchic Occupy Wall Street protests, which began in 2011, had an immediate impact on politics and the global lexicon. By introducing the terms "the one percent" and "the 99%" into the public sphere, Occupy was able to draw attention to growing global income inequality. This revolutionary spirit was not lost on popular culture, as a number of films that followed the protests were linked to Occupy. *The Hunger Games (2012), The Dark Knight Rises (2012), and Elysium (2013)* represent films that were not only extremely successful in the box office, but were also connected to the Occupy Movement because of their themes of dystopian power relationships between small groups of super-rich oppressing the remainder of the population. In the following thesis, I apply rhetorical analysis and theory to these films in order to better understand the way each was influenced by the Occupy Movement. Furthermore, I analyze the message of each film to better illuminate their rhetorical goals and methodology. Ultimately, the application of rhetoric to these films allows for an analysis of the way that contemporary fears about increasing unequal global financial relationships manifest in popular culture via dystopian speculative fiction film.

Keywords: *Occupy Movement, Occupy Wall Street, Dystopia, Film, Movies, Speculative Fiction, Science Fiction, The Hunger Games, The Dark Knight Rises, Elysium, Ralph Cintron, Bruno Latour, Michel Foucault*

Chapter One: Occupy the Future

Does art reflect life? In movies, yes. Because more than any other art form, films have been a mirror held up to society's porous face.
-Marjorie Rosen

Pictures are for entertainment, messages should be delivered by Western Union.
-Samuel Goldwyn

Every viewer is going to get a different thing. That's the thing about painting, photography, cinema.
-David Lynch

Since its inception, film has been used as a medium to critique, parody, and advocate regarding contemporary events and societal conditions. Though a litany of genres are able to function in these ways, some in particular lend themselves to societal critiques. Notably, speculative fiction that depicts dystopian societies—visions of a futuristic world gone wrong—often functions as a predictive warning of the dangers of the existing socio-political landscape. As such, these films exist as evolving examples of overt and subversive everyday rhetoric. Moreover, dystopian fiction requires a kairotic exigency that prompts writers and filmmakers to create allegorical stories that attempt to persuade the movie-going populace of the evils of contemporary conditions.

The Occupy Movement is a ubiquitous global protest that has spawned political debate, changed the global lexicon, and influenced popular media. Occupy began as a mass protest that took place in the fall of 2011 in New York City (Akbaba 29). The movement gained international attention and global support by May of 2013, with an estimated 951 protests in 82 countries (Akbaba 30). Occupy brought the terms "the 1%" and "the 99%"," which represent a perceived divide between the extremely concentrated

wealth of a few individuals versus that of the majority of the world, into the contemporary parlance. Nevertheless, the movement has been criticized for exercising "rational ignorance" by promoting the problem of economic inequality with no real alternative (O'Rourke, n.p.). Though the movement has become less visible over time, the impact of Occupy cannot be ignored. Additionally, the fear of a future in which economic wealth, resources, and power is concentrated in the hands of an extremely small minority is one that resonates in dystopian films that followed this global phenomenon.

In the past 20 years, science fiction and fantasy films have grown in popularity, and have become one of the dominant genres in the U.S. Box Office (Redfern, n.p.). Furthermore, some of the most pervasive speculative fiction franchises are situated in a dystopian future.

While fear of extreme financial inequality is no novel concept for speculative fiction films, the message and dispersion of these films over time is not constant. Recent films and franchise series such as *The Dark Knight Rises (2012), The Hunger Games (2012),* and *Elysium (2013)* have been linked to the Occupy Movement, in that their central conflicts involve undesirable futures that mirror contemporary political concerns. Nevertheless, there is public debate as to the message of these movies, often driven by interviews with the film's writers, directors, and actors.

In the following chapters, I conduct a rhetorical analysis of the themes in the films *The Dark Knight Rises, The Hunger Games,* and *Elysium* in order to decipher the ways the film's rhetoric connects to the concerns of the ubiquitous Occupy Movement. At the heart of Occupy's message is the fear that resources, finances, and healthcare access, and

by extension, power, has become too heavily concentrated in a small 1% of the population. Rhetorical theory, then, including the work of Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, and Ralph Cintron, can help establish the connections between the rhetorics of power and inequality present in these three films and their connection to the Occupy Movement.

Justification

At the height of Occupy protests, various polls examined public support for the movement. A November 2011 Gallup poll found 24% of Americans in favor of the movement, while 19% opposed it, and 53% had no opinion (Saad, n.p.). A survey by Public Policy Polling from November 2011 found growing opposition by the American public to both the Occupy Movement and the Tea Party (Jensen, n.p.). These numbers stand in contrast to an October 2011 United Technologies/*National Journal* Congressional Connection Poll, which found that 59% of US adults either agreed or mostly agreed with the Occupy Movement, while 31% disagreed or mostly disagreed (Cooper, n.p.). While Occupy protests have become less pervasive in the years since 2011, the movement still exists on a global level. Notably, the 2014 Occupy Central with Love and Peace protests had enormous support from young people in Hong Kong, with a goal of electoral reform in the country. In the three years since its inception, Occupy Wall Street's impact on the American socio-political landscape is still debated in the news (Solnit, Zara, Cillizza). Studies have also analyzed the effect of social media on the movement (Tan, Ponnam, Gillham, Edwards, and Johnson). Additionally, other work has investigated the way the movement was negatively framed in the media through the use of the marginalization devices of lawlessness, official sources, show, and ineffective

goals (Kaibin, n.p.). Critics have noted Occupy's impact of creating a new political language and as novel political form and organization structure despite the lack of an overly simplistic single message or unified set of goals (Cameron, n.p.).

Though three years may prove too small a time frame to sufficiently analyze the impact of the Occupy Movement, it does seem clear that the protests helped to bring the debate of income inequality to the center of American politics and global discussions—particularly through the terms such as "the one percent" and the "99%." These contemporary fears of extreme inequality and tyranny by those who control the world's resources clearly resonate in the rise of dystopian fiction for young adults, as well as the prominent speculative fiction films that mimic the global zeitgeist impacted by Occupy (Sturgis, n.p.).

Thus, to better understand the message and themes of these prominent speculative fictions is to better understand the American and global landscape. In the illustrations provided by films such as *The Dark Knight Rises, The Hunger Games,* and *Elysium*, it is clear that some correlation exists between contemporary global conditions and the latent anxiety about the future. Through an examination of the rhetoric of these three films, it is possible to analyze their connection to the Occupy Movement, as well as the subversive messages about the future of domination and power relationships latent in each film.

Literature Review

The following literature review gives background information on the Occupy Movement, which creates essential context for this project. Furthermore, I provide an overview of the genres of science fiction and speculative fiction films in order to create genre parameters and definitions for this paper. Within this context, I also examine the

concept of the dystopia. I conclude by looking at literature that studies the link between science fiction and critical theory, as well the popularity of speculative fiction film in both domestic and international contexts.

The Occupy Movement

The Occupy Wall Street Movement began in Manhattan's Zuccotti Park in September, 2011 (Yates, 10). When New York City police attempted to shut down the protests, thousands more protesters joined in. Though police crackdowns and use of force eventually closed many Occupy Wall Street protest sites, the movement soon reached global proportions (Yates, 11). In the following years, Occupy spread by estimated 951 protests in 82 countries (Akbaba 30). Occupy operates without central leadership or defined goals—perhaps due to the group's anarchical roots. The occupywallst.org website states that the group's goal is "fighting back against the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process, and the role of Wall Street in creating an economic collapse that has caused the greatest recession in generations" ("About Us Occupy Wall Street", n.p.). Additionally, in the "What do we stand for?" section, the website creators continue to propagate the group's nebulous goals, writing, "Here are some documents published in New York that have been well received by the movement:" followed by three hyperlinks. The "Principles of Solidarity" lists nine statements and goals including participation in direct and transparent participatory democracy, ending and recognizing oppression, and the recognition that education is a fundamental human right. The "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City" identifies some of the movement's central issues with the global financial powers, such as illegal housing foreclosures, tax bailouts and exorbitant bonuses for

executives, discriminatory policies, monopolization of the farming system, mistreatment

of animals, excessive student debt, colonialism overseas, donations to politicians, control

of the media, and the end of privacy. As such, it is clear that the Occupy Movement is

united under a number of diverse, yet interrelated goals, which center on the loss of

power for the vast majority of the global population, or the 99%, to the one percent of the

global population that controls a disproportionate amount of resources and power.

Succinctly defining the Occupy Movement is difficult both due to the nebulous

and expansive list of the movement's goals, but also due to its unorthodox structure.

Studies of the Occupy Movement note the impact of social media in empowering

protesters in three key areas: "public attention, evading censorship, and coordination or

logistics" (Tufekci, 2). Moreover, these

> digital technologies certainly add to protester capabilities in many
> dimensions, but this comes with an unexpected trade-off: Digital
> infrastructure helps undertake functions that would have otherwise
> required more formal and long-term organizing which, almost as a side
> effect, help build organizational capacity to respond to long-term
> movement requirements (Tufekci, 12).

As such, Occupy's reliance on technology is a double-edged sword that both empowers

and weakens the movement. Finally, Tufekci notes that both other protest movements and

governments are learning to adapt to the use of technology utilized so effectively by

Occupy (Tufekci, 16).

The ubiquitous nature of the Occupy Movement situates the event as an object of

interdisciplinary study. Kellner postulated that Occupy arose as a response to increasing

global economic deregulation via neoliberal policies, which have allowed for growing

wealth discrepancies (Kellner, n.p.). Clark also notes the movement's anti-imperialism

and anti-war stance (Clark, n.p.). Occupy has been cast as a new generation of student

movements (McCarthy, n.p.), as well as a valuable ally to labor groups (Lewis and Luce).

However, some critics have taken to task the issues of white privilege latent in the

movement via interactions with police, language use, issue focus, and knowledge

(Campbell, n.p.). Finally, scholars have investigated Occupy's impact in influencing

political transparency in America (Featherstone, n.p.) and in other the policies and

political action in other countries (Oman-Reagan, n.p.). Taken together, it is clear that

although the Occupy Movement is still an ongoing global political movement, its

ubiquitous and revolutionary nature situate it as a focal point of study in various fields.

The Genre of Science Fiction

The genre of science fiction has long reflected societal conditions and provided a

space for social critique and expression of anxieties about the future. Nevertheless, the

science fiction genre is one that suffers from ambiguity in both definition and conception.

Theorists have attempted to define science fiction, creating a number of fundamental

disagreements as to the basis of the genre. There remains no consensus definition,

> beyond agreement that it is a form of cultural discourse (primarily literary,
> but latterly increasingly cinematic, televisual, comic book and gaming)
> that involves a world-view differentiated in one way or another from the
> actual world in which its readers live. (Roberts 2).

In this way, science fiction represents a broad category of storytelling, which is equally

elusive and identifiable to audiences. Contemporary sci-fi offers widely varying degrees

of differentiation, with stories that involve travel through space, travel through time,

imaginary technologies, and utopian/dystopian fiction (Roberts xvii).

There is no consensus among scholars as to the birth of science fiction. Though

the term was first used in 1851, "science fiction" did not enter common parlance until

1916 (Bould and Vint 1). Others argue for a "short history" of science fiction, in which the genre itself began with works such as Mary Shelley's Frankenstein in 1818 (Bould, et al. 3). Nevertheless, a wider history of science fiction traces the birth of science fiction to the Copernican Revolution, in that "science supplanted religion and myth in the imaginative economy of European thought; and sci-fi emerges from, and is shaped by, precisely that struggle" (Bould et al. 5). Scholars who take an even more expansive view of the genre classify some Ancient Greek texts that detail journeys into the atmosphere, the Moon, and solar system as the earliest examples of science fiction (Roberts 22). Regardless, the conception of the science fiction genre itself is irrelevant, as "genres are not objects that exist in the world and are then studied by critics, but fluid and tenuous constructions made by the interaction of various claims and practices" (Bould and Vint 2). As such, the genre of science fiction and its sub-genres should be understood as socially constructed, malleable, and continually evolving.

Science fiction film extends the notion of genre from its literary origins into the contemporary technological realm of storytelling. Scholars point to French filmmaker Georges Méliès as the father of the cinematic genre due to his influential 1902 film, *A Trip to the Moon* (Bould et al. 43). Historians chronicle the emergence of the science fiction film genre throughout the 1900s, often defining "eras" of science fiction. These eras are "The Age of Wonder" (1926-1937), "The Golden Age" (1938-1949), "The Age of Acceptance" (1950-1961), and "The Age of Rebellion" (1962-1973) (Del Ray 5-279). Regardless of these divisions, it is commonly accepted that the explosion, or "big boom" of science fiction film popularity occurred in the 1950s. Though there has been an ebb

and flow in the popularity of science fiction since the "big boom" of sci-fi films, there is

a clear

> development of specific themes and concerns, particularly in the last
> decades of the twentieth century, that have a particularly cinematic
> resonance—concerns with the reproducible being (robots, androids), with
> the construction of reality (virtual worlds, virtual selves), with spectacular
> threats to our fragile world (an environment on the brink). (Bould et al.
> 42).

Some scholars believe that science fiction films associate science, the future, and the

unknown with irrational fear (Hodges, n.p.). However, the meaning of science fiction and

disaster film is often situated in a cultural context, especially when following

monumental historical events (Kakoudaki, n.p.). As such, the rhetoric of dystopian

science fiction and apocalypse films has been appropriated by other areas of intellectual

inquiry, including urban crisis and "capitalism in crisis" rhetoric (Cunningham and

Warwick, n.p.). It is this continued emphasis on apocalyptic threats, massive disaster, and

dystopian futures that provides an area to study the mirrored cultural anxieties and

context for science fiction films.

The Genre of Speculative Fiction

Because genre is so fluid and subjective, it is difficult to define science fiction

apart from speculative fiction. Numerous scholars have remarked that the two are

extremely close in relation. This genre differentiation is also often made in order to give

credibility to the science fiction genre, which is often overlooked by academics (Thomas,

P.L., 15). In a piece dedicated to crafting a comprehensive definition of speculative

fiction, Gill writes,

> The key emphasis in this definition is on speculative representation of
> what would happen had the actual chain of causes or the matrix of reality-

> conditions been replaced with other conditions. In this sense, speculative fiction is similar, but not identical, to the concept of possible worlds, because possible worlds are logically possible even though they may be non-actual (Gill, n.p.).

Additionally, this more expansive scope allows for "Utopias, pastorals, and Gothic tales fit into this definition if they portray worlds notable for their differences from the operations of the ordinary world rather than just fictional events that function within normal parameters" (Gill, n.p.). This larger scope overlaps with many science fiction and fantasy fictional works while also encompassing works from genres outside of these realms. As Gill writes, "Optimally, a definition of speculative fiction will promote interpretation by suggesting affinities with similar explorations of human imagination and values. The looseness of the category provides opportunity for examination of varieties of classification and uses of genre" (Gill, n.p.). Thus, speculative fiction is more apropos than science fiction for this project in that while many dystopian visions of future gone wrong are works of science fiction, this is not always the case. For example, *The Dark Knight Rises* is not widely considered science fiction, yet the film still portrays an undesirable future that mirrors hyperbolized contemporary anxieties.

Speculative fiction has become increasingly relevant in popular culture in the years coinciding with the rise of the Occupy Movement. Sturgis notes, "The number of English-language dystopian novels published from 2000 to 2009 quadrupled that of the previous decade, and not quite four years into the 2010s, we have already left that decade's record in the dust" (Sturgis, n.p.). The author postulates that the reason for this genre growth is "a generation's lost wonder and mounting anxiety," though this is impossible to prove (Sturgis, n.p.).

Finally, scholars have investigated the connection between culture and speculative fiction in other countries. Buttes notes changes in contemporary Chilean speculative fiction as a response to the increasingly neoliberal economic policies of the country and world (Buttes, n.p.). Moreover, the relationship between the socio-political critiques present in speculative fiction has been noted in the African Diaspora (Thomas, n.p.), in young adult African fiction (Yenika-Agbaw, n.p.), British culture (Gannon, n.p.), and Canadian women's speculative fiction (Pilar, n.p.), among others. As such, it is clear that speculative fiction and the cultural critique the genre provides is not limited to American culture.

The Dystopia

The concept of the topian fiction was created in 1516 through Sir Thomas More's work, *Utopia*. Over time, speculative fiction led to countless variations of the utopia. An evolutionary offshoot of utopian literature, the "critical utopia" is a form of utopian writing that "tends to reflect the sociopolitical concerns of an era characterized by demands for change in the areas of global exploitation" (Bould et al. 313). These concerns include ecological exploitation, gender and race inequality, and class antagonism (Bould et al. 313). Another sub-category, the dystopia, rejects the possibility of the utopian world and features worst-case-scenario futures of proto-fascism, racism, sexism, police states, and ecological crisis in which characters struggle to survive (Bould et al. 313). In many ways, the critical utopia and dystopia are synonymous. Moreover, the critical utopia and dystopia have become prominent fixtures in speculative fiction films. In particular, numerous dystopian speculative fiction films depict an undesirable societal condition based on extreme financial inequalities.

Similar to the definition and conception of both science and speculative fiction, there is fierce debate as to the scope of science fiction film genre and the sub-category of the dystopian film. Susan Sontag argues that "the science fiction film is rooted in a fundamental triad of reason, science and technology—that is, in a certain way of thinking, a body of knowledge that derives from that thinking, and an instrumentality produced by and reflective of that knowledge" (Telotte 19). Building from this definition, Telotte defines fundamental themes of science fiction films: the marvelous context, which explores themes of the fantastic other; the "kiss and tell" motif, in which characters are sure of their humanity, even in a world that diminishes or denies that attribute; the fantastic motif, which creates a world situated between the mysterious and the real (Telotte). Nevertheless, Telotte cautions that these themes are not the only ones found in an extremely complex and all-encompassing genre (Telotte 24). Nagl also comments on the elusive nature of the science fiction genre, writing,

> In the case of the SF film, it seems more helpful and sensible to start not from the concept of sharply divided, mutually exclusive typological areas, but from that of a continuous scale with broad transitional zones or a field essentially constituted by three poles—horror, fantasy, and SF—in which the individual, concrete film can be located for the purpose of discussion (Nagl 2).

Furthermore, Nagl believes that subcategories of science fiction film—space opera, fantastic journey, future world, apocalypse, utopia/dystopia, and others—should not be considered unique, discriminatory categories, but instead as compositional elements (Nagl 2). The understanding that the genre of science fiction film is one that is flexible, contested, and frequently overlapping is essential when working within the medium.

Of these sub-categories of science and speculative fiction, it is the dystopia that is central to this project. However, the dystopia, much like the genres of science and

speculative fiction, is difficult to neatly define. Science fiction is, by nature, a predictive

genre, in which authors anticipate future possibilities (Brooke 126). Furthermore, topian

fiction "is a subset of this: where science fiction explores what might be, utopian and

dystopian fiction explores what should and/or should not be" (Brooke 127). This genre

and sub-set separation is therefore predicated on minute differences. In all science fiction,

through

> the choices made in building a credible fictional world the author is taking sides, arguing that some approaches can be made to work while others are likely to fail; the distinction remains that topian fiction explicitly takes this as a starting point, rather than it being a by-product of the world-building process (Brooke 127).

As such, the dystopian sub-genre of speculative fiction can be viewed as a matter of

focus—the author sets out to create a world that serves as an allegory, predictor, or

warning of a future. The subsequent story is built around this world, not the other way

around. For example, one could argue that the world of Panem in the Hunger Games is

the most central aspect of the film's critique. Without the dystopian world that depicts an

extreme divide between the rich and the poor, the story of the film could not function.

Research into the particular distinctions of utopian speculative fiction works to

separate and further define this sub-genre. In a comparison between the films *Gattaca*

and *Children of Men*, Towner argues that the former represents the science fiction genre

and the latter the dystopian genre. His analysis of difference between sci-fi and dystopias

is predicated on differences in imagined, futuristic technology versus existing technology,

the role of the protagonist as redemptive versus resurgent, and the unrecognizable

technological world versus a realistic warning (Towner 52-54). Nevertheless, these

distinctions may be too sharp. For instance, the genetically engineered future of *Gattaca*

mirrors contemporary conditions, and as such, serves as a semi-plausible warning of a

dystopian future. Moreover, Towner recognizes that films such as *Minority Report* and

Idiocracy blur the lines between science fiction and dystopian fiction (Towner 54).

Hughes claims that while dystopian landscapes seem often unrecognizable, nature is an

essential element of dystopian film (Hughes 22). In particular—"dystopian film has

responded to two largely competing contemporary perspectives on 'nature' and 'the

natural'" (Hughes 23). Furthermore, control and colonization of the Earth and the human

body are key elements of dystopian sci-fi films (Hughes). Therefore, it is essential to note

the contested thematic elements that exist when attempting to define the dystopia—either

as a separate genre or a sub-category of science and speculative fiction.

Finally, others have conceptualized the dystopia with a distinctive analysis of the

rhetorical appeals of the genre. McAlear examines the necessity of the "fear appeal,"

which attempts to persuade the audience that there is a necessity of intervention to

prevent an undesirable future situation (McAlear, n.p.). Additionally, a number of authors

focus on various elements of the dystopian film including tradition, history, and place

(Katerberg, n.p.), the influence of dystopian film on literature (Simut, n.p.), and the

evolution of the social contract in dystopian futures (Curtis, n.p.). Therefore, it is clear

that the dystopia merits further understanding, critical attention, and definition as it

continues to evolve.

Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction, and Critical Literature

The intersection between science and speculative fiction and academia is long

established through critical literature. A myriad of work examines science fiction film

through various theoretical lenses. Science fiction has been conceptualized under the

lenses of critical race theory, cultural history, fan studies, feminism, language,

postcolonialism, posthumanism, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, queer theory,

environmentalism, and animal studies, to name a few (Bould, Butler, Roberts, and Vint).

Each of these lenses provides an established methodology of analyzing particular science

fiction films in various contexts.

Of particular relevance to the focus on dystopian futures with an extreme resource

disparity is the intersection of science fiction and Marxism. This connection focuses on

art, film noir, spectacle, species and subjectivity, and historical aspects of science fiction

film (Bould and Miéville).

Literary work from the 1970s and 1980s concentrated on the relationship of

science fiction and Marxism via "insistence on historical specificity, analysis of form,

and attention to utopian dynamics" (Bould et al. 238). By offering a definition of form

that encompassed science fiction, in 1979, Darko Sunvin helped to validate science

fiction as a credible literary genre (Bould et al 238). Sunvin also conceptualized the

utopia and sf "in terms of the former being '*the sociopolitical subgenre*' of the latter"

(Bould et al 239). Thus, utopian sci-fi, as well as its various forms, is inherently

predicated on a convergence of politics and social context, including economic climates.

Theorists have postulated that

> the telos of critical theory in general can only be the transformation (in
> thought, language, and action) or reality into utopia. The elaborate
> demystifying apparatuses of Marxist...thought exist, ultimately, in order to
> clear space upon which positive alternatives to the existent can be
> constructed (Freedman 68).

As such, utopian, critical utopian, and dystopian fiction is inextricably tied to Marxist

analysis by virtue of a number of accepted conceptualizations of the genre and sub-genre.

Furthermore, Marx influenced the examination of thematic elements of speculative

fiction, such as subjectivity, imperialism, and gender (Bould et al 239).

Science fiction is further examined in the field of cultural studies, linking sci-fi to

collectivism, feminism, African studies, and cybertechnology (Barr, n.p.). Moreover, the

strong theological connections and thematic elements of sci-fi film is explored by authors

in 2007 (McKee, n.p.). Taken together, it is apparent that science and speculative fiction

films offer a space for analysis by a number of critical lenses.

Popularity of Speculative Fiction Film

Recent studies highlight the growth in popularity of the science fiction film in the

American box office. From 1991 to 2010, the range in genres among the top 50 grossing

box office movies became narrower (Redfern 153). Furthermore, action/adventure and

fantasy/science fiction movies have similarly come to dominate the box office (Redfern

160). Nevertheless, this article places science fiction and fantasy films into the same

category. A different study of films since the year 2000 found an ascendency of the

fantasy genre at the expense of science fiction (Sobchack, n.p.). The author postulates

technology, film strategies, post 9/11 zeitgeist, inappropriateness of post-modern irony,

global catastrophes, and the impact of digital technology and electronics on the everyday

life of the individual as reasons for generic shifts (Sobchack, n.p.). Though there appears

to be no comprehensive analysis of the box office popularity of speculative fiction films

over time, there are numerous reference guides that provide a list of science fiction films

(Burgess, n.p.). These guides are useful when analyzing the evolution and quantity of

speculative fiction over time.

Methods

Calls for increased use of rhetorical theory in the study of film history have

existed for some time (Klenotic, 45). Numerous articles employ rhetorical analysis

techniques to various films, including the rhetoric of chance, global inequality, and

resistance in *Slumdog Millionaire* (Magala, n.p.), rhetorical discourse and Autism in *The*

Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (Marinan, n.p.), rhetorical vision in *The Day After* (Foss and

Littlejohn), the rhetoric of disability in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Rutten, Roets,

Soetaert, and Roose, n.p.), and cultural representation in Mulan (Cheng, n.p.). Taken

together, most rhetorical criticism of film "views film and filmic technique as implicitly

rhetorical: acts of representation and communication to audiences (spectators) in scenes

and contexts that direct attention, shape interpretation, and foster identification or

division" (Blakesley, 17). Additionally, this perspective "views film as necessarily

invoking a rhetorical situation in which form, content, and technique function as

symbolic action or inducement" (Blakesley, 18).

To examine a film without reference to the rhetorical situation and cultural

context in which it was written, directed, and displayed is to ignore a critical component

in any kind of analysis. Because of the complex relationship between rhetors, texts, and

audiences, "Hollywood films reflect their times, of course, but they also shape the

sentiments of the public who view them, functioning as both symptom and (proposed)

cure, as ideology and hegemony (Blakesley, 125). As such, a rhetorical analysis of film

is able to further contextualize the complex meaning-making and interaction that

combines to give a film cultural significance. Moreover, this method of analysis is able to

illuminate the latent fears, anxieties, and overall zeitgeist of the society in which this visual media was created.

Thus, in order to better understand the connection between the Occupy Movement and dystopian cinema in the years that followed, I conduct a rhetorical analysis on the themes of *The Dark Knight Rises (2012), The Hunger Games (2012),* and *Elysium (2013).* These three films were selected for a number of reasons. First, the films were heavily advertised and extremely popular; thus, they were not only seen by a large number of people, but were also discussed and dissected in the public sphere. The box office success of the three movies—*The Dark Knight Rises* ($1,084,439,099 worldwide), *The Hunger Games* ($691,247,768 worldwide), and *Elysium* ($286,140,700)—as well as their strong opening weekends (each film ranked #1 in the domestic box office on their respective opening weekends) demonstrates the ubiquitous nature of these selections (gross earnings courtesy of Box Office Mojo). Secondly, a large number of reviews and articles about the films, as well as interviews with the film's writers, directors, and actors, question and debate their thematic connections to the Occupy Movement. Taken together, these factors justify the analysis of these three film selections.

By employing a rhetorical analysis on these three choices, it is possible to better understand the way these films reflect their socio-political context, as well as the way their symbolic actions influence audiences. Central to the Occupy Movement's social critique is one of unequal power relationships, class-based struggles, and an unequal distribution of resources (including healthcare). For this project, I watched each film ten times in order to identify themes, situations, and dialogue that connected to the goals of the Occupy Movement. I then sorted these themes into categories that decipher the film's

connections to the goals and messages of the Occupy Movement. By connecting these themes with rhetorical theory, it is possible to interpret the impact of a major socio-political movement on popular culture, at a time when terms such as the "one percent" and the "99 percent" were critical to dialogue about global conditions and fairness in the public sphere.

Chapter Two: Capitalism, Revolution, and Power in *The Hunger Games*

For me, the cinema is not a slice of life, but a piece of cake.
-Alfred Hitchcock

> *President Snow: So you like an underdog?*
>
> *Seneca Crane: Everyone likes an underdog.*
>
> *President Snow: I don't. Have you been out there? 10? 11? 12?*
>
> *Seneca Crane: Not personally. No.*
>
> *President Snow: Well, I have. There are lots of underdogs. Lots of coal, too. Grow crops, minerals, things we need. There are lots of underdogs. And I think if you could see them, you would not root for them either.*

Set in the nebulous, yet eminently familiar future of Panem, *The Hunger Games* (2012) depicts the struggle between oppressed masses of the Districts and the voyeuristic ruling class of the Capitol. Though the film franchise is based on a book trilogy released from 2008 to 2010, the series' connection to the Occupy Movement has been analyzed and intellectualized by the media, fans, and academics alike. Central to *The Hunger Game's* dystopian vision of the future is widespread population control through resource inequality—in particular, the denial of adequate food to the majority of the population. Moreover, the series addresses issues of climate change, over-consumption, voyeurism, violence as a spectator sport, and government oppression.

As the film was released and achieved massive box office success during the zenith of the Occupy Movement, it is important to analyze the rhetoric of *The Hunger Games* in order to understand the way the film's message and symbolic language use mirrors its social context. Additionally, an analysis of the way power and control is enacted in *The Hunger Games* can better illuminate the latent anxieties of the contemporary American landscape. In order to successfully understand the way that power is employed by a small number of individuals in order to dominate the masses, Bruno Latour writes, "we have to turn away from an exclusive concern with social

relations and weave them into a fabric that includes non-human actants, actants that offer the possibility of holding society together as a durable whole" (Latour, 103). Much of the control and resistance in *The Hunger Games* is derived, at least in part, through both technology and symbolic actants. As such, Latour's actor-network theory provides a system that can further existing understanding of the film.

In the following chapter, I provide a two-part analysis of *The Hunger Games*. In the first section, I conduct a rhetorical analysis of the way the film connects to The Occupy Movement. In the second section, I examine the methods of control, domination, and coercion in the film by applying Bruno Latour's actor-network theory. Through this analysis, it is possible to not only understand the way that *The Hunger Games* functions as a reflection of the contemporary socio-political landscape through its rhetoric, but also to create a more nuanced understanding of the dystopian social order that is increasingly disrupted by Katniss' unwitting revolutionary actions.

The Hunger Games Background

The Hunger Games (the first of a four-film franchise) was released on March 23, 2012. By the premier date of the first film, the first book, upon which the movie was based, had sold over 17 million copies (Lee). Due to the franchise's immense popularity, it was unsurprising that the film debuted to a $152,535,747 opening weekend and an eventual worldwide gross of $691,247,768, which is the 74th highest figure of all time (Box Office Mojo). The film received a generally positive critical response as well, with an aggregate score of 67 on Metacritic and 84% on Rotten Tomatoes. While the book series itself was written and released between 2008 and 2010, the film adaptation and releases coincided with the zenith of Occupy Wall Street's media presence.

The Hunger Games takes place in the dystopian North American country of Panem. The twelve Districts of Panem produce food, luxury items, and resources to support the wealthy and lavish lifestyles of the Capitol residents. It is unclear exactly how far into the future the series is set, but background information from the book series states that Panem rose from "the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance remained." Moreover, the film immediately explains to viewers that although the Districts once attempted to rebel against the Capitol, the rebellion was defeated. To commemorate the occasion of the defeat, every year a male and female "tribute" between the ages of 12 and 18 is chosen from each District to battle to the death in an arena. *The Hunger Games* opens on the day of the "reaping" in which the contestants are chosen for the 74th annual Hunger Games.

The series' central protagonist, Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), lives in the coal producing District 12 in present-day Appalachia. District 12 is one of the poorer areas, and its residents are underfed and extremely impoverished. Nevertheless, Katniss is a skilled hunter who sneaks outside the district border into the forest to hunt with a bow and arrow, an expertise she learned from her deceased father. The squirrel and deer Katniss is able to kill are used to trade for food to provide for her mother and sister, Prim (Willow Shields). She is often joined on her hunts by her friend Gail (Liam Hemsworth), who dreams of revolution against the Capitol.

During the reaping ceremony, Prim's name is called as the District's female tribute. In order to save her sister, Katniss volunteers in her place. The male tribute from the District is Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson), whose family owns a bakery in District

12. It is shown through flashbacks that Peeta once intentionally burned a loaf of bread so that he could give the would-be-discarded good to the starving Katniss. Katniss and Peeta are shuttled to the Capitol by guide Effie Trinket (Elizabeth Banks), given training by former District 12 victor, Haymitch Abernathy (Woody Harrelson), and are provided moral support by sympathetic stylist, Cinna (Lenny Kravitz). After two weeks of training, Katniss, Peeta, and 22 other tributes are transported to the forest arena to fight to the death.

Katniss' open defiance of the Capitol throughout the games creates problems for game maker, Seneca Crane (Wes Bentley) and President Snow (Donald Sutherland). Moreover, Peeta's confession for his love of Katniss in the pre-game interviews situates the pair as sympathetic figures, even to the Capitol residents watching the games. Though Snow does not want to see Katniss become a winner or a martyr, she and Peeta are eventually the two tributes left standing in the games. The pair agree to defy the Capitol and eat poisoned berries simultaneously, resulting in no winner of The Hunger Games. However, a shocked Crane announces the pair as dual-victors, sparing the lives of both. While Katniss and Peeta have survived, President Snow is demonstrably upset, and forces Crane to eat poisoned berries as a price of his failure. Snow knows that the spark of Katniss' defiance can soon become full-blown revolution against the Capitol, and viewers are left with the suggestion of Snow's retaliation.

Literature Review

The prominence of *The Hunger Games* in popular culture as both a book series and a film situates the series as an object of study in both academic and media discourse. In the following section, I examine interviews conducted for and entertainment news

articles about the first *The Hunger Games (2012)* film. I then provide a brief overview of some of the academic literature about *The Hunger Games* series—both the film and novel versions.

The Hunger Games in Popular Media

Of particular importance to understanding the message of *The Hunger Games* are interviews with the series creator, Suzanne Collins, and director Gary Ross. Though she avoids ascribing any direct contemporary political stance to her work, Collins notes that she intends to write "a war-appropriate story for every age of kids" and that *The Hunger Games* depicts

> people [who] are oppressed, their children are being taken off and put in gladiator games. They're impoverished, they're starving, they're brutalized. It would for most people be an acceptable situation for rebellion (Grossman).

Moreover, Collins articulates in press notes about the first film a number of elements she hopes young audiences take from the series, stating

> I hope they question how elements of the books might be relevant to their own lives. About global warming, about our mistreatment of the environment, but also questions like: How do you feel about the fact that some people take their next meal for granted when so many other people are starving in the world (Krumboltz).

It must also be noted that while these particular issues are considered by many as indicative of the series' liberal political leanings, Collins also discussed the necessity of skepticism and awareness of the choice their governments are making, which some believe indicates that the series' promotes the conservative values of anti-big government.

Interviews with director Gary Ross yield similarly ambiguous statements. Ross believes in the relevance of the film's message, stating

> Suzanne, in the subsequent books, talks about a nation addicted to bulimia, where they're gorging themselves and then vomiting and this is pretty resonant to a world in which so much wealth is invested in so few hands, and so many other people are struggling. It isn't hard to see those parallels (Cornet).

In the same interview, Ross notes that he hopes that young people are able to take away from the film the ideas of the power of the individual and the struggle between survival and maintaining one's ethics and humanity (Cornet).

While it is understandable that both Collins and Ross would avoid any direct political stance that could in turn alienate potential readers and viewers, other actors and observers are far less neutral on the series' themes. Actor and Occupy Wall Street supporter, Penn Badgley, remarked at the film's premier that *The Hunger Games* revolution mirrors the conditions and goals of Occupy (Vineyard). Actor Donald Sutherland, who plays the series' central antagonist has answered questions on the link between Occupy and The Hunger Games, stating, "I bet Lionsgate doesn't want us to dwell too much on Occupy Wall Street. But you're right. I went there. I went to Occupy Vancouver. It felt so good" (Lesnick). Moreover, Sutherland connects Occupy with the political activism of the 60s and 70s, and reads from the Port Huron Statement, a 1962 activist manifesto calling for disarmament and university reform. Sutherland highlighted the statement, "You might think that what we are proposing is unattainable. But we're proposing that because otherwise what is going to happen is unimaginable. And that's what happened" (Lesnick). While Sutherland obviously does not speak for the political

meaning ascribed by *The Hunger Games* by its author and director, his openness about the film's importance and connection to the Occupy Movement is noteworthy.

Finally, the themes of *The Hunger Games* books and films are discussed in numerous articles. A number of articles reference the central importance of climate change to the series, pointing to a particular passage, in which the mayor of District 12 "lists the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance remained" (O'Konski). Others note the debate over the political meaning of the series, as *The Hunger Games* has been called liberal, conservative, or a mix of both by pundits (Zeitchik). Taken together, the popular culture and entertainment news media response to the series makes clear that the central themes of the books and films have not gone unnoticed.

The Hunger Games in Academic Literature

Its ubiquitous existence in the public sphere and ambiguous social critique situates *The Hunger Games* as an object of academic study in various fields. Ringlestein examines *The Hunger Games* as it relates to religion, particularly its rejection of both modernism and postmodernism in favor of a different critical perspective (Ringlestein, n.p.). Tan's work explores the literary significance of child sacrifice (Tan, n.p.). Additionally, Potts connects the series and central characters to the theories of philosopher and theorist, Jean Baudrillard (Potts, n.p.). Additionally, Dubrofsky and Ryalls theorize the series from a critical cultural perspective. They argue that because the surveillance state makes performance of authentic whiteness and femininity limited, Katniss' rejection of performing the gendered constructions of Panem situate her as

authentic and trustworthy in the eyes of viewers (Dubrofsky and Ryalls, n.p.). Other

academic work directly connects to the socio-political critique and the themes of power

and control in the series. Hubler situates *The Hunger Games* in dystopian, utopian, and

anti-utopian young adult literature in order to explore the themes of political

unconsciousness, resistance, individuality, and social critique (Hubler, n.p.). Fisher also

comments on the politics of precariousness present in *The Hunger Games*, as well as

other recent dystopian films (Fisher, n.p.). Others have identified the importance of the

apocalyptic landscape in *The Hunger Games* trilogy and other young adult dystopian

books (Simut, n.p.). Moreover, numerous scholars highlight the way that food and hunger

is used in the series as a way of population control (Peksoy, Gobey). Additionally,

literature examines elements of reality television and voyeurism in the series (Godbey,

n.p.). Echoing the idea of the series' self-awareness is Keller's investigation into the

metacognition of *The Hunger Games* film, in that the game-making aspect of the story is

used to parallel film-making itself (Keller, n.p.). Others still have examined the

construction of media literacies within the series, used both by Katniss to survive and by

the oppressive government as a method of control (Latham and Hollister, n.p.).

Finally, critics examine the value of *The Hunger Games* from a critical thinking

and pedagogical standpoint. Scholars advocate the use of the film as a way of teaching

critical consumption to adolescents (Begoray, Higgins, Harrison, and Collins-Emery,

n.p.). The potential for the film to encourage social action on a number of contemporary

conditions is also examined (Simmons, n.p.). Ultimately, as this brief literature review

demonstrates, *The Hunger Games* has become not only an object of popular culture

fascination, but also academic study. The layered societal critique present in the film's

dystopian landscape, coupled with the ambiguity of its politics, creates an intersection of investigation and debate in a number of fields.

Methods

The following sections contain a two-part analysis of *The Hunger Games.* In the first section, I conduct a rhetorical analysis of *The Hunger Games* based on ten viewings of the film. As I watched the film, two central themes emerged—the games as a critique of capitalism and the depicted divide between classes. In these thematic analysis sections, I examine the way the film functions as a critique of the contemporary socio-political landscape. Moreover, I discuss the manner that these themes directly reflect the primary concerns of The Occupy Movement.

In the second section, I examine the way that power and control in *The Hunger Games* can be better understood by applying Bruno Latour's actor-network theory—particularly his focus on the way that technologies function to recruit actors into networks. Though coercion in *The Hunger Games* is achieved through force and outright domination, non-human actants, in particular the games themselves, work to control the population and create a social structure. Nevertheless, the actions of Katniss and others produce symbolic circumstances that lead to an unstable relationship between the Districts and the Capitol that sows the seeds of revolution. As such, an investigation of the film through Latour's lens provides a way to understand power and domination and how they are disrupted.

The games as a critique of capitalism

Central to the Occupy Movement is a critique of capitalism itself. Occupy contends that extreme wealth disparity and global deregulatory neoliberal economic policies have created a system in which a tiny fraction of the population controls close to half the world's wealth. *The Hunger Games* employs a number of rhetorical moves—both subtle and overt—to create a similar critique of capitalist policies gone astray and the ensuing greed and oppression generated from an extreme resource disparity.

Perhaps no element of *The Hunger Games* functions as a criticism of capitalism more than the games themselves. While the tributes selected each year from the Districts live in extreme poverty, the games provide the winner an escape from this situation. The victor of the games is bathed in riches—they are given ample food, superior housing, and a yearly stipend. As such, the victor of the games represents the hope that one can escape their situation in life. However, it is extremely unlikely that one is even chosen for the games, let alone survives as the lone champion over 23 other tributes. The importance of utilizing an infinitesimal glimmer of hope as a method of control is exemplified by a conversation between President Snow and game maker Seneca Crane.

President Snow: Seneca... why do you think we have a winner?

Seneca Crane: [frowns] What do you mean?

President Snow: I mean, why do we have a winner? I mean, if we just wanted to intimidate the districts, why not round up twenty-four of them at random and execute them all at once? Be a lot faster.
[Seneca just stares, confused]

President Snow: Hope.

Seneca Crane: Hope?

> **President Snow:** Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective. A lot of hope is dangerous. A spark is fine, as long as it's contained.
>
> **Seneca Crane:** So...?
>
> **President Snow:** So, CONTAIN it.

The promise of class mobility for impoverished populations is a fixture of the landscape of the U.S. and other capitalist nations, as the ideas of "hope" and "escape" are touted as the great leveling factor and inherent fairness of the system itself. Much like in *The Hunger Games*, narratives of those who have risen from poverty into higher classes are touted as proof that such an escape is possible. Nevertheless, statistics overwhelmingly demonstrate that these ideals are statistical aberrations (Corak, Brittain, Pestano, n.p.). While the games serve as an allegory for the false promise of hope in capitalism, they also demonstrate a number of aspects to the system that are often overlooked by proponents. Most notably, the impacts of sponsorship, upbringing, and luck are demonstrated as critical to the tribute's survival.

When Katniss and Peeta are introduced to their mentor and sole District 12 game's victor Haymitch, he surprises them with the secret to surviving the games.

> **Haymitch:** You really wanna know how to stay alive? You get people to like you. Oh! Not what you were expecting. Well, when you're in the middle of the games, and you're starving or freezing, some water, a knife or even some matches can mean the difference between life and death. And those things only come from sponsors, and to get sponsors, you have to make people like you. And right now, sweetheart, you're not off to a real good start.

Central to Haymitch's advice is the influence of sponsors on the games. Sponsors are the richest citizens of Panem who are able to spend large amounts of money to send support to certain tributes during the games. This support can come in the form of medicine, food, and other useful items. To get sponsors, Katniss and Peeta must put on a show for the

Capitol citizens. Although they have been consigned to almost certain death, the tributes are forced to amuse those who profit from using them. Moreover, Katniss and Peeta's popularity in the Capitol is largely based on the "star-crossed lovers" narrative introduced, invented, and propagated by Peeta. Thus, appearing to conform to heteronormative expectations is critical in the central protagonist's success.

Outside assistance comes in other forms as well. Haymitch mentions that the games are almost always won by tributes from Districts One and Two. Although the individuals of these Districts are subjected to the same political oppression, they have relatively more abundant resources due to their proximity to the Capitol. As such, tributes from these Districts are almost always volunteers, who train from the games from a young age. The so-called "Career" tributes band together as a pack to hunt down the other District's tributes. While they are described as talented and ruthless, Haymitch points out that they are also arrogant, which is their downfall. The career pack, then, functions in the film as a sort of an upwardly mobile class. Although they are small in number and still face poor odds of success, the career class is confident in their ability to join the rich. However, what is overlooked is that to do so means to fight and kill those who are similar to themselves in order to amuse and appease their oppressors. At the end of the film, District Two tribute, Cato, is left to battle Katniss, Peeta, and a pack of genetically modified wolves. Though he has trained his entire life to succeed in the games, a now distraught Cato realizes the impossibility of his situation.

> **Cato:** Go On, shoot and we both go down and you win. Go on, I'm dead anyway — I always was, right? I couldn't tell until now. How's that? IS THAT WHAT THEY WANT? Huh, I can still do this. I can still do this; one more kill. This is all I knew how to do to bring pride to my district, not that it matters.

Now nearing death, Cato sees the futility of the hope provided by the games. The horrors he has experienced in his quest for wealth and glory come at the cost of his humanity— something he now realizes has been lost for some time.

Taken together, audiences are shown the games as a black mirror for capitalism itself. Tributes die in their struggle to escape impoverished conditions; the small glimmer of hope serves as their reward. Much like the central critique of the Occupy Movement, *The Hunger Games* works to convince audiences that the current economic system is flawed. By demonstrating that the struggle to join the rich is a literal battle to the death by the poor and middle class, the film persuades audiences in a subversive manner. Moreover, both the Occupy Movement and *The Hunger Games* function in the public sphere as rhetorical actants that shape the conversations about contemporary socio-political conditions.

The depicted divide between classes

It is possible that the most lasting contribution of Occupy on the public sphere is the way that the movement created a growing emphasis on issues of wealth inequality. The introduction of the terms "the 99%" and "the 1%" to the global lexicon functions as an "us and them" dichotomy that unites the vast majority of the population against the continuing control of resources by a small minority of wealthy individuals. This divide is echoed by *The Hunger Games,* which depicts the Districts and Capitol citizenry as polar opposites.

In the film, the Capitol citizens live in such stark contrast to the District that they appear almost alien. They wear ornate and futuristic outfits that are more akin to the high-concept styles of contemporary fashion shows than everyday clothing. Their hairstyles

are intentionally made to look colorful, gravity-defying, and unnatural. Moreover, the appearance of the Capitol citizens' skin and bodies are made to look generically or surgically modified. In brief exchanges and scenes that focus on these individuals, they are made to appear callous toward the suffering of the Districts and tributes, as well as wasteful and consumeristic. Additionally, it is unclear whether the majority of Capitol citizenry work, as they are shown enjoying the spoils of their position. Finally, males and females are often depicted as sexually ambiguous or excessively feminine.

In contrast, the citizens of the Districts appear in a way that reflects contemporary audiences. While District 12 and many of its inhabitants are shown as impoverished and neglected, the main characters do not appear starving, unhealthy, or underfed (though this is likely due to marketability concerns).

District 12 is the farthest from the Capitol, set in present-day Appalachia. As the primary export is coal for the Capitol, District 12 and its inhabitants are presented as "blue collar" workers who engage in dangerous manual labor. Katniss' father was killed in a mining accident, and the ripple effects of this tragedy are demonstrated through haunting dream sequences and her mother's emotional vacancy. The only other District shown in the film is the agricultural 11, an equally poor region. District 11 inhabitants are primarily black, and engage in open revolt when their young tribute, Rue, is killed in the games. The riots mirror imagery of the protests for African-American civil rights of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the recent protests in Ferguson, Missouri and other locations, in which hoses and riot-gear-equipped "Peacekeepers" (no doubt an ironic moniker) are enlisted to stop the uprising.

Despite the challenges of life in District 12, the film depicts positive aspects to living in this area. Katniss is comfortable in the forest, which benefits her during the games. Even in the glamorous tribute penthouse where she stays while training for the games, Katniss is uncomfortable. It is only when she is able to project a scene of the forest on her wall that she feels at home. Thus, Katniss lives in harmony with nature—she demonstrates a love and respect for her surroundings. In contrast, the Capitol attempts to control nature—whether it is by creating the artificial settings of the games, genetic modification of animals and humans, or the exploitation of the continent and the majority of its inhabitants to hoard resources for a select few. This contrast connects to the themes of climate change and human neglect that are more central to the book's capitalist critique.

Taken together, the Districts and Capitol are heavily contrasted in a number of fundamental ways. This juxtaposition, moreover, directly parallels the Occupy Movement, which seeks to warn the public of the problematic worldwide income disparity. To achieve these ends, both Occupy and *The Hunger Games* draw on the concepts of labeling and othering. Maharawal notes that the strategies of Occupy

> can be thought of as a populist logic of inclusion that employs a liberal universalist conception of inclusivity in which "the 99 percent" is a taken-for-granted category and understood to exist in itself; the second is what I am calling a *radical politics of inclusion* enacted through anti-oppressive practices in which ideals of inclusivity are understood as a *process* and a struggle (Maharawal, n.p.).

As such, it is clear that the coalition-building through creating binary categories is central to the Occupy Movement. This strategy of "us versus them" is more overtly elucidated in *The Hunger Games*, in which the minority elite is the bloodthirsty and voyeuristic enemy,

there to give audiences no doubt of what side they should support in the film's central

conflict.

Actor-network theory and revolution

Developed by Bruno Latour and others, actor-network theory (ANT) expands the

academic understanding of sociological networks by treating non-humans as potential

actors. In "Technology is society made durable" Latour argues,

> in order to understand domination we have to turn away from an exclusive
> concern with social relations and weave them into a fabric that includes
> non-human actants, actants that offer the possibility of holding society
> together as a durable whole (Latour, 103).

When investigating the way that power is enacted, Latour and others believe that one

must account for non-human actants in order to create a complete picture of a network.

Müller writes, "ANT also conceives of relations of human and non-human entities as

producing new actors and new ways of acting. For ANT, all entities—whether it is atoms

or governments—stand on equal ontological footing to begin with" (Müller, 30).

Furthermore, Müller notes that ANT is particularly beneficial in understanding the ways

order emerges, is molded, and falls apart—all of particular significance to a study of

power and politics (Müller, 27).

Other scholars have noted the potential of actor-network theory to better

understand power relationships, politics, control, and resistance. Marrero-Guillamón

applies ANT to a case study of political activism via an urban social movement. Holifield

utilizes a synthesis of ANT and Marxism to explore concepts of environmental justice.

Finally, Sayes elucidates exactly what it means to say that nonhumans have agency, as

well as the potential problems with non-human actors. Despite issues, Sayes notes that

the model "we find in ANT seems to be one that provides a useful *starting point* for

providing a proper rendition of the complexity of the associations we form with others

and with nonhumans" (Sayes, 145).

Actor-network theory is of particular relevance to an examination of *The Hunger*

Games for a number of reasons. First, similar to the aforementioned scholarship that

extends ANT to case studies of political and social action, *The Hunger Games* depicts a

dystopian scenario predicated on domination and resistance. While the actions in the film

and book are fictional, the medium nevertheless provides a space for understanding

revolution. Secondly, the use of actor-network theory delivers a more complete picture of

the control enacted by the Capitol. The Capitol oppresses the Districts through language

and direct force, but also through a number of non-human actants, as the annual games,

the District border, and food function as critical elements to the power relationship

depicted in the film. Furthermore, the burgeoning rebellion is also enacted through non-

human actants as well.

The oppression and disenfranchisement of the Districts by the Capitol is largely

symbolic and legislated by both human and non-human actants. The film opens with the

rhetorical choice to bring audiences into the dystopian future of *The Hunger Games* with

text from The Treaty of the Treason, which reads:

> In penance for their uprising, each district shall offer up a male and female
> between the ages of 12 and 18 at a public "Reaping." These Tributes shall
> be delivered to the custody of The Capitol. And then transferred to a
> public arena where they will fight to the death, until a lone victor remains.
> Henceforth and forevermore this pageant shall be known as The Hunger
> Games.

The film then transitions to its first scene, in which talk-show host Caesar Flickerman

interviews game maker Seneca Crane. In reference to the games, Crane explains,

>**Seneca Crane:** I think it's our tradition.

>**Caesar Flickerman:** Mmhmm.

>**Seneca Crane:** It comes out of a particularly painful part of our history.

>**Caesar Flickerman:** Yes. Yes.

>**Seneca Crane:** But it's been the way we've been able to heal. At first it was a reminder of the rebellion, it was a price the districts had to pay. But I think it has grown from that, I think it's uh...something that knits us all together.
>*[the audience claps]*

For the Capitol, the games themselves act as perhaps the most central element in controlling the Districts. Audiences are shown the effectiveness of these tactics through the fear demonstrated by all characters on reaping day. Prim awakens in a panic after being chosen as the female tribute in her nightmare. Even the more stoic Katniss and Gale are aware of the importance of the games, as Gale muses, ""What if everyone stopped watching? No one watches, they don't have a game." This dialogue illuminates the cognizance of the actant of the games within the story itself. Without the threat of the games, the Capitol loses power over the Districts. However, compliance with the games requires the Districts to not only take part, but to watch and cheer for their tributes.

A number of other non-human actants function to control the citizens of the Districts on reaping day. Tributes are expected to dress nicely for the ceremony and are accounted for via DNA identification to ensure they are present. The names of the male and female tributes are then drawn from large bowls. If a citizen under the age of 18 wants to take the "tesserae," a meager supply of grain and oil from the Capitol, their name is entered additional times. This is true of both Gail and Katniss. Thus, resource control is manifest in multiple ways. Not only are citizens of the Districts intentionally

starved and deprived of resources, but they are also penalized via their multiple entry into the games.

Additionally, the video that plays for the broadcast of the reaping ceremony works to create propaganda that situates the Districts as misguided and inconsiderate rebels and the Capitol as benevolent protectors of the country. The voiceover by President Snow places the blame of rebellion on the Districts, and credits the re-building of Panem to the Capitol. Additionally, Snow also states that the games were created as a punishment for the treason of the Districts, enacted to ensure that they would never rebel again. As such, the games act as both a deterrent of revolution for the Districts and safeguard of the status quo for the Capitol. While this ideological posturing demonizes the collective Districts, physical barriers work to ensure each area is kept separate in order to forestall any potential uprising. The "electrified" fence around District 12 is never operational; however, this non-human actant serves as an essential aspect of control. This border not only keeps the residents of District 12 in the set confines established by the Capitol, but it also keeps them out of other areas (which prevents a unified rebellion).

In addition the actants of the reaping and the District boundaries, the Hunger Games themselves act to control contestants within the arena. Although there is a single victor who must emerge from the games, the film depicts a number of instances in which the game makers use their near-omnipotent power to shape the outcome of whether a tribute lives or dies. Tributes are watched by countless cameras, as well as a tracking device implanted into their arms that also monitors their physical condition. A number of established rules and procedures also create layers of control within the arena. Once they

enter the arena, tributes cannot step off of their pedestal early, lest they will be killed via explosive mines. The central "cornucopia" acts as a landmark for the tributes, but also serves to create conflict in the games, as it is loaded with weapons and survival gear. Nevertheless, Katniss and Peeta are warned that the initial battle for supplies results in the death of many tributes, as the allure of the supplies functions as a way to create action for viewers. Deaths are marked by a cannon sound, and the night sky broadcasts the specific tributes who have fallen. Lastly, the supreme control over the physical arena by the game makers is utilized to create conflict. When Katniss is too far from other tributes, the game makers create a spontaneous inferno to turn her toward the others in the games. The creation of "werewolves" to hunt the final four survivors is also used as a way to force the action and move the games toward an artificial conclusion.

While the god-like power of the game makers to employ non-human actants and rules creates an immense level of control, a number of these same actants are turned against the Capitol throughout the games. In particular, three specific instances demonstrate the way that the Katniss and others are able to transform actants and anti-programs into what Latour refers to as an anti-anti program (Latour, 105). The first of these occasions takes place during the tribute parade, in which tributes are dressed in costumes representing their Districts in order to introduce them a Capitol crowd of over 100,000. Though the costumes are often humiliating parodies of the resources produced by each specific District, stylist Cinna fashioned Katniss and Peeta's costumes to appear on fire, giving them an awe-inspiring presence. In the games themselves, Cinna also attaches to Katniss' uniform a mockingjay pin, which functions as symbol of rebellion. Through both of these subversive disruptions, Cinna is able to utilize non-human actants

to recruit followers into the rebellion. While subtle, these actions are identified by President Snow, who strongly suggests that Seneca Crane needs to handle the situation.

The second non-human actant of defiance takes place during the games themselves. When Rue is killed by a tribute, Katniss is there to hold her as she dies. Instead of abandoning Rue's body as per the norm, Katniss picks flowers and creates a memorial around Rue. This symbol resonates with the Districts, who see the injustice of the games magnified by the memorial. By creating the non-human actant of a memorial—an event that would not traditionally occur during the callous games—Katniss further humanized Rue's death in a way that defied expectations. This catalyzed an uprising in Rue's District, and further recruited individuals into her anti-anti program.

The final non-human actant of the Capitol that becomes subverted are the poisoned berries, initially found by Peeta, who believes they are a food source. Unbeknownst to him, he is followed by a District five tribute, who eats them and dies. Katniss, familiar with the berries, instantly understands what has happened and decides that the pair should keep them as a potential trap for the remaining tributes. The berries go unused until Katniss and Peeta are the two remaining tributes and Seneca Crane announces that the previous ruling that states the two can win has been revoked. Peeta implores Katniss to kill him and save herself, stating, "They have to have their victor." An astute Katniss replies, "No they don't" and reveals the berries as a way for her and Peeta to die simultaneously. An astonished Crane, forced to intervene, declares both the victors of the games.

In this final act of rebellion, the berries are central to the story. Without this factor, the insurgence of the series would not proceed. The audience is shown the dire

consequences of this revolt, as Haymitch warns the pair that the Capitol does not take defiance lightly. In one of the final scenes of the film, Seneca Crane is locked in a room with a bowl of the same poisoned berries—the transmuted Capitol actant turned instrument of resistance.

As previously mentioned, a number of studies employ ANT in order to examine real-world social action. In regard to power, Latour writes,

> When actors and points of view are aligned, then we enter a stable definition of society that looks like domination. When actors are unstable and the observer's point of view shift endlessly we are entering a highly unstable and negotiated situation in which domination is not yet exerted (Latour, 129).

The Hunger Games creates a dystopian world in which the rich are firmly entrenched in control the majority of the population. This dominance is enacted not only through human coercion and force, but also through non-human actants, such as the District boundaries and the games themselves. Throughout the story, nevertheless, the situation of Panem begins to become unstable as the actions of Katniss and others, as well as symbolic non-human actants, create the potential for revolution.

Although this analysis of *The Hunger Games* is merely exploratory, this work suggests the possibility of applying actor-network theory in order to better understand control, resistance, and oppression in film.

Conclusion

While conceptualized and written before the start of the Occupy Wall Street, *The Hunger Games* shares many of the movement's concerns. Central to both *The Hunger Games* series and Occupy is a fear of the widening gap between those with money,

resources, and power and those without. Moreover, both projects critique elements of capitalism and its impacts, including the ongoing threat of global climate change.

Suzanne Collins is understandably coy about her political leanings and inspiration for the series (ostensibly to keep from polarizing audiences), yet the message of *The Hunger Games* is not subtle—audiences are meant to witness the dangers of a dystopian future in which an extreme income disparity has led to an entrenched haves and have-nots class system. The academic and entertainment media analyses of the series attempt to politicize the film as far-left or far-right, further entrenching the importance of *The Hunger Games* as a noteworthy reflection of contemporary socio-political conditions. Additionally, interviews with the film's director and Donald Sutherland echo both *The Hunger Games'* attempt at societal critique and its connection to the Occupy Movement.

As demonstrated by this chapter's rhetorical analysis*, The Hunger Games'* themes function as a criticism of capitalism and the growing divide between the wealthy and the remainder of the population. At the heart of these fears is one of near-insurmountable power relations, in which the majority is controlled by a small, brutally oppressive minority. The dominance and resistance present in *The Hunger Games* are also examined in this chapter's application of actor-network theory, which serves as a way to fully map this dystopian power struggle.

It is impossible to know whether the book series influenced the leaders and protestors of the Occupy Movement or whether the ever-present Occupy Wall Street protests beginning in 2011 influenced the film. However, it is clear that *The Hunger Games* and the Occupy Movement stem from a rising social and political call for fairness that permeated the early 2010s. Occupy gave the world imagery of an army of protestors

outside America's chief financial establishments and *The Hunger Games* answered with the starving masses subversively resisting the oppressive rich. *The Hunger Games* series introduced the struggle between the Districts and the Capitol, while Occupy gave the world the pellucid terms of the 1% and the 99%.

Though *The Hunger Games* and Occupy remain an integral part of the socio-political zeitgeist of the contemporary world, Latour notes that, "the *force* with which a speaker makes a statement is never enough, *in the beginning*, to predict the path the statement will follow. This path depends on what successive listeners do with the statement" (Latour, 104). It is myopic to attempt to decipher the lasting impact of either of these phenomena; however, what is clear is the way both *The Hunger Games* and the Occupy Movement reflect societal concerns with the unsettled future of wealth distribution and power relationships.

Chapter Three: Democracy, Limitations, and *The Dark Knight Rises*

You should look straight at a film; that's the only way to see one. Film is not the art of scholars but of illiterates.
-Werner Herzog

"We take Gotham from the corrupt! The rich! The oppressors of generations who have kept you down with myths of opportunity, and we give it back to you... the people. Gotham is yours. None shall interfere. Do as you please. Start by storming Blackgate, and freeing the oppressed! Step forward those who would serve. For an army will be raised. The powerful will be ripped from their decadent nests, and cast out into the cold world that we know and endure. Courts will be convened. Spoils will be enjoyed. Blood will be shed. The police will survive, as they learn to serve true justice. This great city... it will endure. Gotham will survive!"—Bane

When the central antagonist of *The Dark Knight Rises (TDKR)*, Bane, takes over Gotham City, he gives a speech that can be construed as a hyperbolized and violent version of the rhetoric of the Occupy Movement. Because *The Dark Knight Rises* was released at a time when Occupy was at the forefront of the socio-political landscape, it is not surprising that many believe the film functions as a black mirror of contemporary conditions that lead to a not-so-distant dystopian future. Nevertheless, film critics, academics, political pundits, audiences, and fans have interpreted *The Dark Knight Rises* in a number of ways. Some believe that the film is heavily influenced by the Occupy Movement, in that the crumbling civilization and bureaucratic corruption represent the central issues Occupy hopes to address. Others claim that the film is anti-Occupy, in that Bane is a false revolutionary whose ideals bring large-scale destruction that only a member of the 1% in a mask and cape can thwart.

In many ways, the seemingly conflicting depictions in *The Dark Knight Rises* render any strictly "right versus left" political analysis impossible. The film is, at times, equally scathing in its depictions of violent anarchist revolutionaries, incompetent bureaucrats, and corrupt politicians alike. In addition, it is possible that such an analysis

ignores the principal critique of the film, which centers on a conflict between idealized democratic rhetoric, the material systematic failures of democracy in action, and the false promise of anarchy.

In his work, *Democracy and Its Limitations*, Ralph Cintron investigates the link between democracy and rhetoric. Cintron writes that, "at the heart of my discussion of democracy is the notion of topoi (commonplaces) as storehouses of social energy. The basic claim here is that topoi organize our sentiments, beliefs and actions in the lifeworld" (Cintron, 100). The topoi of democracy (and its related ideals of freedom, equality, rights, transparency), then, help to "organize in particular ways our subjectivities, social relations, and material conditions" (Cintron, 102). Cintron believes that energy is inherent in emotion and thought, and that rhetoric is the transmission of these energies, through signs, in order to influence the decisions and actions of others (Cintron, 101). However, central to Cintron's critique are the material limitations of democracy. He believes that these "idealized versions of democracy, those that implicitly or explicitly depend on democracy as automatic virtue, do so by ignoring material limitations" (Cintron, 103). As such, any societal change must involve a shift in power, restricted by the physical reality that the world does not consist of unlimited resources— be it monetary gain, energy, rights, or power.

Central to the Occupy Movement's criticisms are the ideas of power and resource limitations, namely that financial wealth, resources, and political influence, has become too concentrated in the hands of an elite few. Cintron understands "democratic governance, like all governance, is a relation of power that can only be understood through an analysis of motive since the same terms can mobilize both human and

inhumane actions" (Cintron, 105). For example, nebulous terms that are often considered synonymous with democracy such as justice, equality, fairness, and rights would be explained in an entirely different manner if one was to talk to an Occupy Wall Street protester and a Wall Street investment banker. While both tout the same ideals, their methods for achieving these ideals through government, policy, and bureaucracy are markedly different. Our society implicitly recognizes that when these competing ideas of democracy do battle,

> eventually some concrete mechanism (a law, an institution, a principle) must be formulated to adjudicate competing claims over the same bounty; we may ask (demand) that the mechanism and adjudication be "fair" or "democratic," but fairness is not only difficult to determine, but in the final instance, only a certain amount of "fairness" can be permitted (Cintron, 106).

Although the material limitations of democracy are implicitly understood, the reality of finite resources and power ensures that democracy in practice will never reach its lofty ideals.

While *The Dark Knight Rises* does mirror contemporary conditions, the central critique of the film is not a battle fought on the right wing or left wing of the political spectrum. The film is as consistently critical of the anarchic revolutionaries of the Occupy Movement as it is of the greedy board member, the thieving hedge-fund manager, and the incompetent bureaucrat. As such, *The Dark Knight Rises* depicts a dystopian future of undesirable power relations in which Batman represents idealized democratic rhetoric—the only one capable of stopping the failures of democratic governance and the false hope of revolution.

***The Dark Knight Rises* Background**

  The Dark Knight Rises was released on July, 20th 2012 to immense fan anticipation. The film marked the conclusion to director/co-writer Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy, which began in 2005 with *Batman Begins* and continued with the 2008 sequel, *The Dark Knight*. Nolan's trilogy garnered acclaim for its grittier and relatively realistic depiction of the iconic superhero—a notable departure from the gothic style in which Tim Burton directed *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992) and the campier, neon-lit Joel Schumacher-directed *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman and Robin* (1997). The negative reception of *Batman and Robin* led to a film hiatus for the classic character, yet Nolan's re-boot was able to breathe new life into the Batman franchise, as *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* rank 19th and 11th on the All Time Box Office Worldwide Gross list ("All Time Worldwide Box Office Grosses"). In addition to grossing over $1 billion worldwide, *The Dark Knight Rises* opened to favorable reviews, compiling scores from movie review aggregators Metacritic at 78/100 and Rotten Tomatoes at 88%/100% (Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes).

  The Dark Knight Rises is set eight years after the previous film, where viewers were left with conversation between police commissioner Jim Gordon (Gary Oldman) and Batman (Christian Bale) in which Batman made a decision to take the blame for the murders caused by Gotham's fallen paragon of virtue, district attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart). Since this time, Bruce Wayne has become a reclusive shut-in, Batman has disappeared, and the death of Dent has been used to pass legislation giving the police force more power to imprison criminals. Gordon is having a difficult time adjusting to a "peace-time" Gotham City, and considers revealing the that the Dent Act has been passed

based on a lie. Meanwhile, terrorist and new leader of the League of Shadows, Bane (Tom Hardy), has come to Gotham City in a plot to aid Wayne Enterprises board member Roland Daggett (Ben Mendelsohn) in his takeover of the company. When cat burglar Selina Kyle (Anne Hathaway) steals Wayne's fingerprints to give to Daggett and Bane, Batman returns to action.

Wayne must also contend with the trouble caused by Bane's plan. Wayne's fingerprints are used by Bane to make a series of stock trades that leave Wayne bankrupt and the company susceptible to the control of Daggett. Wayne, along with board chair Lucius Fox (Morgan Freeman) must convince board member Miranda Tate (Marion Cotillard) to gain control of the company instead. They persuade her by demonstrating that the company's failed energy project, which uses a fusion reactor to generate power, was secretly as success—Wayne only decided to hide the results because of the potential to weaponize the project. Although Tate is able to take over the company, Bane defeats Batman in combat and banishes him to a foreign prison. Bane turns the reactor into a nuclear bomb, traps the city's police force in underground tunnels, and destroys the bridges in and out of the city. This plunges Gotham into chaos, as Bane incites a revolution to overthrow the rich. Wayne eventually escapes the prison and works with police officer John Blake (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) and Gordon to take down Bane. In the final conflict, Tate reveals that she is the daughter of Ra's Al Ghul, Batman's mentor turned nemesis from the first film in the series. Ultimately, Batman is able to prevail and the city of Gotham is left to believe that he died piloting the bomb out to sea. His sacrifice is memorialized by the city and Blake is left to take up the mantle of justice.

Literature Review

In the following literature review, I provide an overview of articles that connect *The Dark Knight Rises* to the Occupy Movement. Additionally, I briefly examine the connection between the Batman character and critical literature. Finally, I note the existing academic literature that connects the themes of Batman to democracy.

The Dark Knight Rises and Occupy

Numerous reviews of The Dark Knight Rises, along with interviews with director/writer Christopher Nolan and his brother, writer Jonathan Nolan, explicitly connect the film to the Occupy Movement. Despite the potential Occupy influence, Jonathan and Christopher have denied that the movement was part of their inspiration for the film. In interviews about the films influences, Christopher Nolan responded that,

> To be perfectly honest, we really try to resist, at the script stage, being drawn into specific themes, specific messages. Really, these films are about entertainment; really, they are about story and character. But what we do is we try and be very sincere in the things that frighten us or motivate us or would worry us when you're looking at, 'Okay, what's the threat to the civilization that we take for granted?' (Torrance).

His brother Jonathan is equally quick to dismiss any critique of contemporary society, stating that, "After the second film came out, it was before the recession and Occupy Wall Street. Rather than being influenced by that, we looked at old books and movies, and at some point I found *A Tale of Two Cities* to be captivating" (Gille). Echoing Christopher Nolan's sentiments, he states,

> Resonances that people find or that happen to occur with what's going on in the real world, to me they come about really as a result of us just living in the same world that we all do and trying to construct scenarios that move us or terrify us, in the case of a villain like Bane and what he might do to the world (Torrance).

In the most direct connection to Occupy, Christopher Nolan did admit that he is worried

about economic fairness, and that these ideas do seep into the film,

> What I see in the film that relates to the real world is the idea of
> dishonesty. The film is all about that coming to a head. … The notion of
> economic fairness creeps into the film, and the reason is twofold. One,
> Bruce Wayne is a billionaire. It has to be addressed. … But two, there are
> a lot of things in life, and economics is one of them, where we have to take
> a lot of what we're told on trust, because most of us feel like we don't
> have the analytical tools to know what's going on. … I don't feel there's a
> left or right perspective in the film. What is there is just an honest
> assessment or honest exploration of the world we live in—things that
> worry us (Zizek).

The brothers, nevertheless, do admit that other dystopian films influenced *The Dark

Knight Rises*, including *Blade Runner* and *Metropolis* (Vejvoda).

Regardless of the message that the writers and director hoped to convey,

numerous media outlets remarked on the film's connection to Occupy Wall Street (Scott

and Dargis). These readings include postulation that the film is conservative and right-

wing in its scathing allegorical depiction of Occupy (Bowyer, Zizek). Moreover, the

apparent connection between *TDKR* and Occupy was so strong that news sources

interviewed Occupy Wall Street protestors and organizers about the film's themes (Bell,

Schultz). Regardless of *TDKR's* potential to paint to Occupy Movement in a negative

light, one commentator believes that the ensuing conversation created by the film is

positive in and of itself, writing,

> But there's one striking thing about this conversation and that's that we're
> having it in the first place. The present economic crisis and the emergence
> of Occupy have managed to change the discourse about inequality and
> social change to the point where the plot of a film like *Dark Knight
> Rises* attracts attention for its political content. A conservative backlash in
> the form of a summer blockbuster is a good sign. Can anyone imagine
> something of the sort happening even at the peak of the anti-globalization
> movement? (Sunkara).

Altogether, it is clear that despite denials by the Christopher and Jonathan Nolan, *The Dark Knight Rises* has been inextricably linked to the Occupy Movement and themes of inequality and power relations in the public discourse.

Batman and Critical Literature

In addition to Batman's ubiquitous presence in popular culture and the public sphere, the iconic superhero has long been the subject of academic literature. Articles have investigated the previous films in Nolan's trilogy, including an analysis of *The Dark Knight* as an allegory for America's battle against terrorism (Wopperer, n.p.) and general commentary on the thematically darker Batman trilogy in a more pessimistic world (Tyree, n.p.). Other articles, including some in the field of communication studies, study the societal reflection present in the post 9/11 rise in superhero films (Treat, n.p.). In the field of psychology, the personality traits of Batman and other fictional characters have been investigated (Jonason, n.p.). The hypothetical actions and legality of Batman as a state actor have even infiltrated law review articles (Lisk, n.p.). Finally, critical literature has connected the themes of the comic series with democracy—particularly Alexis de Tocqueville's famous 1835 and 1840 socio-political observations, *Democracy in America* (Blackmore, n.p.). As such, there exists not only a body of literature dedicated to the Batman series, but also the series' evolving thematic connection with the socio-political landscape in which it was created.

The Dark Knight Rises and Democracy

As previously mentioned, *The Dark Knight Rises* opened to global success and critical acclaim. Christopher Nolan has been referred to as an auteur, despite his

proclivity to create studio films. Moreover, scholars note Nolan's ability to bring "'an indie sensibility' to studio filmmaking" and that this creates the potential to "examine the extent to which indie film and its sensibilities have been inflected by neoliberal ideology" (Molloy, 41). Molloy presents Nolan as the idealized neoliberal subject, in that his neoliberal aesthetics are "a marketable form of political dislocation that masquerades as an immersive pleasure" (Molloy, 41). In an examination of the Nolan trilogy, St. Clair postulates that "at some disavowed level of narrative knowledge, the Batman films are about the contradictions between democracy and capital" (St. Clair, 4). Moreover, the revolution in *TDKR* is cast as

> standard Hollywood fare; any alternative to capitalism or parliamentary regimes is invariably and nebulously referred to as anarchy – an-archos in the strict sense of the absence of law as such (above all, the absence of private property and due legal process) (St. Clair, 5).

The controversy and public discourse about the film's themes has not been ignored by scholars, as literature examines the contradictions and dilemmas inherent in the film and how this relates to contemporary film scholarship (Fradley, n.p.). Finally, an existing thematic analysis of *The Dark Knight Rises* examines these same apparent socio-political contradictions, ultimately concluding that,

> As *Dark Knight Rises* presents it, the chief danger isn't the overt violence of Bane but the vision of balance perpetuated by Tate and her father. The idea of balance is an expression of ideology: it posits a world without excess of subjectivity or a world in which one might correct that excess. Balance is the great danger, and it requires an investment in the mask to confront it (McGowan, 5).

This particular chapter seeks to synthesize some of the existing ideas and postulate a different analysis of *The Dark Knight Rises* from a rhetorical lens. As such, the following sections deal with my own thematic analysis of the rhetoric in *The Dark Knight Rises*.

Methods

In order to decipher the themes of The Dark Knight Rises, I conduced a rhetorical analysis of the film over the course of ten dedicated viewings. As I watched, a number of themes emerged. Batman was consistently construed as idealized virtue, most notably representing themes synonymous with the democracy he endeavored to protect. The other characters and events in the film were regularly depicted as flawed. Some, such as the police, bureaucrats, and board members were representative of institutionalized failure, greed, and injustice. Others, such as Bane, Talia, and the revolutionaries were shown as equally undesirable representations of anarchists and those seeking to overthrow an established order. As such, Batman himself is the ideal solution to these problems of democracy—he serves as one man attempting to fix the corrupted elements of the system and fight off those who believe democracy is beyond saving.

Taken together, I have sorted these thematic observations into three groups— Batman as idealized democratic rhetoric, systematic failures of corrupted democracy, and the false hope of revolution and Occupy. In the following sections, I examine the way that *The Dark Knight Rises* warns of contemporary socio-political power inequalities, yet offers a solution that critiques both neoliberal deregulation and the revolution of the Occupy Movement.

Batman as idealized democratic rhetoric

Throughout *The Dark Knight Rises*, Batman is consistently depicted as a symbolic figure of justice, representing ideals such as justice, fairness, self-sacrifice, and balance in numerous ways—through Batman/Bruce Wayne's direct dialogue and actions and through the way that others characterize Batman.

The connection between Batman and democracy is firmly established in the second film of the series, *The Dark Knight*, in a dinner table discussion between Bruce Wayne and Gotham district attorney, Harvey Dent. In the conversation, Dent responds to assertions that Batman's vigilante actions are anti-democratic by stating, "When their enemies were at the gates, the Romans would suspend democracy and appoint one man to protect the city. It wasn't considered an honor, it was considered a public service." This idea of Batman as a protector of freedom at any cost continues in an even greater extent in *The Dark Knight Rises*. Bruce Wayne is unfailingly hesitant to give his direct assistance via his access to advanced technology to the police, as it is assumed that the general public is not capable of handling the burden or responsibility that accompanies immense power. When Alfred insists that Wayne could help the city more by giving the police his knowledge and resources as opposed to becoming Batman again, Wayne dismisses the notion, stating, "One man's tool is another man's weapon." Despite Alfred's assertion that Wayne is not Batman anymore and that he needs to find another way, Wayne remains undeterred.

Bruce Wayne's inability to share power and decision-making with Gotham's population occurs in numerous other occasions. It is noted early in the film that Lucius Fox hides a number of secret weapons projects that were acquired by Wayne Enterprises as a way to keep weapons from falling into the wrong hands. Additionally, Wayne was willing to hide the successful result of his company's clean energy project because of the possibility that the reactor could be turned into a nuclear bomb. When he is finally forced to show the project to Miranda Tate, he is quick to note that the room can be flooded in

order to destroy the reactor. Tate is astonished, asking, "Destroy the world's best chance for sustainable future?" to which Wayne responds, "If the world's not ready. Yes."

These frequent examples demonstrate Cintron's conception of idealized democracy. Although it would be more democratic for the citizens of Gotham to decide these choices, "fairness, because it is an innate threat to power, is permitted only up to the point that it jeopardizes the stability of the social system" (Cintron, 106). Because of the high-threat potential that allowing the general populace to decide what to do with these technologies presents, Wayne must make a decision to protect democracy by circumventing it. As Cintron points out, there is a breaking point that creates a "moment when practice must overthrow whatever theory gives it meaning in order to save the theory itself" (Cintron, 110). Moreover, Cintron notes that democracy can only be understood as a mixed system—one that contains forms of totalitarianism (Cintron, 109). While it may seem disturbing to viewers to see Bruce Wayne and Batman act in ways that circumvent democracy altogether, the character remains the ideal of freedom and justice because the rationale for his actions is transparent. Cintron writes,

> democratic governance, like all governance, is a relation of power that can only be understood through an analysis of motive since the same terms can mobilize both humane and inhumane actions (Cintron, 105).

Thus, the audience is able to simultaneously watch Batman circumvent democratic deliberation yet still embody the central topoi of rule of law, rights, equality, justice, and fairness. Because his actions are transparent and motivated for the greater good, Batman/Bruce Wayne is able to act in an autocratic manner in the name of idealized democracy.

In addition to his direct actions, Batman is able to take on a symbolic status for the citizens of Gotham City. In *TDKR*, the image of Batman and the bat symbol are used throughout the film to inspire hope in the face of worsening conditions. Moreover, audiences are able to see the self-sacrificing nature of Bruce Wayne, as he must give up his own happiness and life in order to save others. Though he is always capable of permanently walking away from the mask, Wayne feels compelled to adhere to an abstract moral code of his own devising in order to save the city he loves. Batman is unwilling to use guns and kill his enemies. He is also honor-bound to return to the city and sacrifice himself for its continued existence. In these ways, Batman provides Gotham City with a glimmer of hope, the idea that even during anarchic revolution or institutionalized corruption, the ideas of justice, fairness, and equality still exist. However, these implicit calls for democracy also

> stymie the revolutionary, unruly, destabilizing "red" spirit, whether right-leaning or left-leaning, that constitutes much of the history of democratic movements in order to emphasize the more conservative defense of the status quo interests of the state (Cintron, 113).

Therefore, the central purpose of Batman in *The Dark Knight Rises* is to serve as a symbol of idealized democracy, one that fights off threats to the system of governance and maintains the comfortable status quo for audiences.

> Late in the film, Batman interacts with Selina Kyle before the film's final conflict.
>
> **Selina Kyle:** Come with me. Save yourself. You don't owe these people anymore--you've given them everything...
>
> **Batman:** Not everything. Not yet.

Throughout *The Dark Knight Rises*, audiences are given Batman and Bruce Wayne as the incorruptible symbol of justice, fairness, rule of law, and other democratic ideals. Batman is able to harness these topoi and persevere over the dual threats of systematic corruption

and anarchy. In doing so, Wayne/Batman must often circumvent the same laws and public decision-making processes he hopes to preserve. Nevertheless, because Batman's motive is transparent and moral in the eyes of the audience, these transgressions are not only tolerated, but lauded.

Systematic failures of corrupted democracy

Batman's symbolism as an embodiment of the ideals of democracy functions, in part, because he is defined against the hyperbolized shortcomings of Gotham's corrupted institutionalized systems. However, as identified by Cintron, "idealized versions of democracy, those that implicitly or explicitly depend on democracy as automatic virtue, do so by ignoring material limitation" (Cintron, 103). In the case of *The Dark Knight Rises*, Batman transcends the limitations of resources such as power, finances, and the law. In the film, the systematic failures of practical democracy function to show the necessity of the ideal of democracy, represented by Batman. Nevertheless, these failures also demonstrate a more realistic depiction of the limitations of democracy.

Two of the primary limitations that *TDKR* addresses are that of law enforcement and bureaucracy. The film opens with a memorial for Harvey Dent, whose death creates an exigency for the Dent Act, legislation that gives Gotham's law enforcement greater power. The act is so successful, in fact, that it renders Batman irrelevant for eight years and keeps crime down. Nevertheless, the legislation is depicted as corrupt in the film because it was created via a lie. Early in the film, Jim Gordon wrestles with the implications of telling the truth at the cost of invalidating all the Dent Act has done, yet ultimately decides against it. Later, he remarks, "Now there's an evil rising from where we tried to bury it," referencing the long-term failure that comes with

abusing a democratic system, even for a short-term positive outcome. This situation echoes Cintron's anecdote on talking with a political organizer about power and democracy, in that "democracy, for him, is a ritual to be manipulated by the power that he has collected so that he might have even more power to do what he thinks is right" (Cintron, 103). In this case, Gordon has twisted the power gained by Harvey Dent's symbolic death to create legislation that gives his police force even more power. Because this failure is so important in the film, it is clear that the manipulation of democracy is central to the film's critique of contemporary conditions.

Frustration with the system is also demonstrated by detective John Blake's storyline. Throughout the film, Blake is depicted as an idealist who is stifled by those around him who are unwilling or unable to act due to bureaucracy. He criticizes others for blindly following orders, and ultimately quits the police force at the end of the film because the "structures around him have become shackles." In the closing scene of the movie, it is assumed that Blake will take up the mantle of Batman and fight for the ideals he believes in, now outside the system. Blake's storyline represents that

> Democracy and its attendant terms (transparency, rule of law, rights, equality, and so on) are quintessential topoi that exhibit sufficient malleability to mobilize the most disparate collective desires and actions, and as a result have competing meanings (Cintron, 105).

For Blake, the idea of justice differs from the majority of those around him; however, his ideals mirror those of Batman. As such, the character of John Blake helps to further the critique of democracy's misuse throughout the film.

In the world created by Nolan, the failures of democracy and, by extension, neoliberal capitalism are depicted as well. Wayne Enterprises board member Roland

Daggett is a minor villain in the film, though his nefarious plans are far less sinister than that of Bane and Talia. Daggett is instead motivated by greed, profit, and power. He scoffs at the Wayne and Tate's project to save the world through renewable energy and employs Bane to bring about Wayne's financial ruin in order to take over the company. Moreover, the other members of the board are also depicted as lazy and unwilling to help others. Early in the film, Wayne is notified by Blake that the funding to the orphanage that Wayne Enterprises annually pledges has been exhausted. The explanation Wayne is given is that because the company's profits had fallen, there was no ability to engage in charitable donation. This resource constraint is a key component of the limitations of democracy as defined by Cintron. He writes that over time the reality of

> material life will force a severe readjustment of democratic rhetorics that will cause them to lose their original enthusiasm, become pale and gray, and finally dissipate into bureaucratic management whose main function will be to preserve hierarchy in the name of public order that will be translated as synonymous as public good (Cintron, 106).

In *TDKR*, financial hardship by Wayne Enterprises results is an adjustment of the company's rhetoric. While charitable good was considered the only just option, the financial limitation faced by the board required a readjustment that served to protect those in power.

Finally, the competing rhetorics of democracy are symbolically depicted throughout the film. In the battleground that is Gotham City, the populace is continually shown as helpless. Moreover, the final battle between the "armies" of Gotham's police force against Bane's revolutionaries takes place in front of City Hall—a fight for control of the city's governance. An image of the tattered American flag lingers before the initial charge, Nolan's symbol for the state of democracy. In this way, *TDKR* is able to shown

that "contending parties wielding the same democratic rhetorics is a permanent condition; these investments/positions/desires are incompatible and insatiable" (Cintron, 106). As such, the battle for control in Gotham is one that requires competing rhetorics to literally attack one another.

In *The Dark Knight Rises*, Batman/Bruce Wayne never falters to the idea of giving up on Gotham, no matter how corrupt the system of governance there has become. Thus, in order to situate Batman as the protector of democracy and its attendant terms, the city itself must represent the failures and limitations of democracy. Moreover, as Cintron writes, "a call to improve the public sphere, whether from a left-leaning or right-leaning group, is a synonym for "let me in" and not really a call to genuinely improve the public sphere" (Cintron, 112). Taken together, the corruption of Gotham, particularly in regard to "improvements" made by legislation, bureaucracy, and the rich are instead merely attempts at greater power for these groups. While Batman is incapable of ceding to these pitfalls, the film's primary villains represent a different kind of threat to his idealized democracy.

The false hope of revolution and Occupy

As observed by Cintron, "Democracy from the early Enlightenment until now has defined itself against its negatives: monarchy, the uncivilized, Fascism, Communism, and, more recently, religious fundamentalism and terrorism" (Cintron, 99). Serving as the counter-balance to Batman is Bane—a ruthless revolutionary willing to sacrifice others in the path toward his goal. Bane's revolution is often conflated with Occupy Wall Street, and his speech (which opens this paper) acts an exaggerated list of the movement's goals. Additionally, Bane's preaches symbolic action and commitment to revolution through

dialogue such as "It doesn't matter who we are, what matters is our plan." Perhaps most telling is Bane's situation early in the film as the anti-Batman when he states, "No one cared who I was until I put on the mask." As such, it is clear that Bane is meant to serve as the anarchic other to Batman's idealized democracy, as his actions demonstrate throughout the film.

Perhaps no scene illuminates the dichotomy between Batman and Bane more clearly than when Bane banishes Wayne to prison. Bane's prison is a deep pit guarded only by the impossibility of the climb out. Bane remarks that he intends to torture Wayne's soul through despair, in that he will feed the people of Gotham hope before they are destroyed in a nuclear blast from the weaponized nuclear reactor. In this interactions, Bane notes that there can be no true despair without hope—a sentiment that applies to both Wayne and Gotham's populace. This scene, which depicts Bane's true intentions, is soon followed by his revolutionary speech to the public once he has succeeded in his coup. Here, his rhetoric becomes a mimic of the Occupy Movement, as he states, "People of their status deserve to experience the next era of western civilization" and implores the masses to "Take control of your city" to ensure "the powerful will be ripped from their decadent nests and cast into the cold world the rest of us have known and endured." The false nature of Bane's revolution is not witnessed by Gotham citizens, who are shown callously engaging in violence toward those in power. Nevertheless, Gordon is able to see through the ruse, stating, "You think this is part of some revolution? There's only one man with his finger on the button—Bane." This critique calls into question the real-world parallel of Occupy and other movements for change, as Nolan's creation of Bane as a

pseudo-revolutionary with ulterior motives serves as a warning to those who believe in Occupy.

Finally, the rhetoric of Bane and the League of Shadows demonstrates their anarchic and destructive goals. Though Bane claims, "we come not as conquerors, but as liberators to return control of this city to the people," his actual goal is destruction. The true purpose of the League of Shadows is "to restore balance to civilization," particularly in cases they believe a city has transgressed beyond saving. Batman's "victory" over crime in Gotham is considered to be based on a lie by the group, who believe that destroying the city remains the only viable option. The use of the both Bane and the League of Shadows echoes Cintron's observations of the anarchistic power of energy (Cintron, 100). In particular, Cintron cautions of "the 'increasing allure of extremist rhetorics in public discourse and its perils for democracy. The central peril was the erosion of a sense of compromise and mutual respect that tends to distort and corrupt democracy" (Cintron, 111). In these ways, Bane and the League of Shadows function not only a representations of the Occupy Movement, but also as extreme and uncompromising forces that put democracy at peril.

The character of Selina Kyle serves as a stand-in for those taken in by a revolutionary spirit, yet who come to regret it. Early in the film it is revealed that Kyle is a cat-burglar who lives by an abstract moral code. She comes face-to-face with Wayne at a benefit dinner thrown by Miranda Tate, in a scene that is particularly scathing toward those with money and power. Although she is a professional thief who has stolen from Wayne, Kyle explains her actions—"I take what I need from those who have more than

enough. I don't stand on the shoulders of those who have less." In a prescient diatribe about the rich, Kyle asks,

> You think all of this can last? (Wayne glances around the sumptuous party). There's a storm coming, Mr. Wayne. You and your friends better batten down the hatches, because when it hits you're all gonna wonder how you ever thought you could live so large and leave so little to the rest of us.

Nevertheless, when Bane's revolution actually arrives, Kyle is not enthusiastic. In particular, her character appears despondent when rich families are cast out of their homes and harmed by revolutionaries. When Kyle picks up a broken family photo in a destroyed apartment, she claims "This was someone's home", to which her friend Jen replies, "Now it's everyone's home." Through these interactions, the audience is shown that the human consequences of revolution are dangerous and, in Nolan's view, negative. Cintron warns of potential violence, as material limits and their distribution in a democracy may ultimately lead to civil war (Cintron, 109). The insurgence granted by Bane initially seems justified to Selina Kyle; however, once the true human cost is shown, the conditions become undesirable. As such, Kyle's character serves as a misguided revolutionary, who is used by Nolan to demonstrate that while democracy has limitations, it is a more desirable alternative to anarchy.

Though Bane's revolution is demonized, it must be noted that Wall Street itself is also depicted in a negative fashion in *The Dark Knight Rises*. When Bane leads a team into the Gotham City Stock Exchange, two traders used to convey Nolan's perception of those who work in Wall Street. In their opening lines, the traders mention that change is either good or bad, but care only for its effect on stocks. Moreover, they set off to the floor of the stock exchange to the line of "Let's go scalping", a statement that associates

the actions of day traders with violence. When Bane invades the building, one trader tells

him "This is a stock exchange, there is no money you can steal", to which he replies,

"Really, then why are you people here?" Taken together, Nolan's depiction of the Wall

Street via the Gotham stock exchange is highly critical. Although this may, on the

surface, seem to indicate a pro-Occupy stance, the interaction between the stock

exchange security chief and the police officers responding to Bane's invasion of the stock

exchange complicates these scenes.

> **Security Chief:** It's a robbery! They've got direct access to the online trading desk.

> **Foley:** I'm not risking my men for your money.

> **Security Chief:** It's not our money, it's everyone's!

> **Allen:** Really? Mine's in my mattress.

> **Security Chief:** If you don't shut these guys down, the stuffing in that mattress might be worth a whole lot less, pal.

Although the audience is made to feel no sympathy for those looking to exploit the stock

exchange for personal gain, this interaction does create a defense of capitalism at large.

Even though some may believe, like Allen, that the loss for Wall Street does not affect

them, the security chief reminds audiences that there is an interconnectivity that

negatively impacts everyone when the stock exchange is harmed or attacked.

Before Bane initiates his takeover of Gotham City, he first must take care of

Roland Daggett, his employer.

> **Daggett:** You stay right there! I'm in charge! (Bane places a gentle hand on Daggett's shoulder).

> **Bane:** Do you feel in charge?

> **Daggett:** I've paid you a small fortune—

      Bane: And that gives you power over me?

Power, to Bane, is not derived from money. As evidenced in the aforementioned scenes,

Bane is situated early as the anti-Batman—representing anarchy and the Occupy

Movement. While Batman is genuine, Bane is merely a ruse for a transfer of power from

one group to another. Selina Kyle believes in these ideals, but soon sees the reality of the

false revolution. Ultimately, Bane and the League of Shadows are depicted as false

prophets of revolution who want to obliterate the status quo with violent revolutionary

actions.

Conclusion

      At the end of *The Dark Knight Rises*, John Blake and Jim Gordon reflect on the

events of the film's central conflict.

      Gordon: Can I change your mind about quitting the force?

      Blake: No. What you said about structures. About shackles. I can't take it. The injustice. (Gestures at Bruce Wayne's grave). I mean…no one's ever going to know who saved an entire city.

      Gordon: They know. It was Batman.

Batman is, to the fictional citizens of Gotham and real-world audiences alike, a symbol.

He embodies pure and incorruptible justice, freedom, and fairness—virtues that Cintron

identifies as the topos of democracy (Cintron, 102). These ideals, however, are not

without material limitations that make them unreachable. In *The Dark Knight Rises*, the

reality of democracy is shown for all its flaws—the corrupt politician, the greedy

businessmen, the self-serving bureaucrat—all misuse power in order to keep it for

themselves. Nevertheless, the alternative to democracy is painted by Nolan as equally

detestable—the Occupy-esque anarchy of Bane and the League of Shadows provide an even bleaker substitute for democracy.

As such, readings of *The Dark Knight Rises* as either leftist or rightist on the political spectrum fail to take into account the film's central thesis: democracy, in its purest form, can save us. Nolan was clearly influenced by contemporary conditions when writing the film, and readily admits it. Nevertheless, the presence of Occupy Wall Street in the public sphere serves as a way to update a timeless struggle for contemporary audiences. Cintron terms "actual existing democracy oligarchic-democracy, a more revealing term, and the other democracy an *energia* that functions largely in the symbolic and rhetorical" (Cintron, 114). Thus, for audiences, Batman is the energy, the symbol, and the rhetoric of democracy and all of its idealized accompaniments. *The Dark Knight Rises*, then, functions as Nolan's critique of the way that limitations of material conditions have derailed democracy, caused a rift between the haves and have-nots, and fostered anarchy. In a world that mirrors these conditions, it seems that only Batman can save us.

Chapter Four: The Dystopian Medical Gaze and a Foucauldian

Analysis of *Elysium*

Film is more than the twentieth-century art. It's another part of the twentieth-century mind. It's the world seen from inside. We've come to a certain point in the history of film. If a thing can be filmed, the film is implied in the thing itself. This is where we are. The twentieth century is on film. You have to ask yourself if there's anything about us more important than the fact that we're constantly on film, constantly watching ourselves.
-Don Delillo

Early in the 2013 film, *Elysium*, the protagonist Max De Costa, played by Matt

Damon, is ordered to visit with a robotic parole officer. The ensuing dialogue exemplifies

the dystopian police state depicted in the film.

Max De Costa: Hello, uh, before we start I'd just like to explain…

Parole Robot: Max De Costa, 36 years old, violation of penal code 2219 today at

bus stop 34B…

Max De Costa: Yes, that's exactly what I wanted to talk to you about. You see, I

believe there's been a misunderstanding.

Parole Robot: Immediate extension of parole duration by a further eight months.

Max De Costa: Wait, what? No, no, no, no, no, I can explain what happened. I

just made a joke and, uh, you know.

Parole Robot: Stop talking. Elevation of heart rate detected. Would you like a

pill?

Max De Costa: No, thank you. What I'd like to do is explain…

Parole Robot: Stop talking. Personality suggests a 78.3% chance of regression to

old behavior patterns: Grand theft auto, assault with a deadly weapon, resisting

arrest. Would you like to talk to a human?

Max De Costa: [In a robot voice] No, I am okay. Thank you.

Parole Robot: Are you being sarcastic and/or abusive?

Max De Costa: [In a robot voice] Negative.

While this callous interaction epitomizes *Elysium's* hyperbolized dystopian future, the

film's depiction of the way the body is policed is rooted in contemporary realities and

fears. In his 1963 work, *The Birth of the Clinic*, Michel Foucault writes,

Medicine must no longer be confined to a body of techniques for curing ills and
of the knowledge that they require…In the ordering of human existence it
assumes a normative posture, which authorizes it not only to distribute advice as
to a healthy life, but also to dictate the standards for physical and moral relations
of the individual and the society in which he lives (Foucault 34).

Foucault's work illuminates the history of institutionalized power relations that combine to define normative behavior and enact unseen, yet ever-present, control of individuals. Moreover, *The Birth of the Clinic* defines the evolution of the medical gaze—the de-humanizing power relationship created by medical practices, which reduces the identity of the patient to that of their ailment or disease. While Foucault was focused on his own form of archeological investigation into the past, contemporary speculative fiction films such as *Elysium* represent a space in which present-day anxieties become predictive warnings of worst-case futures. In the case of *Elysium*, the anxieties of a future in which a small minority of the rich have subjugated the vast majority of the population closely mirrors the concerns of the Occupy Movement.

Although *Elysium* focuses on themes of financial and resource inequality, the plot of the film centers on unequal access to healthcare. As such, Foucault's theories about the construction of power and control in the medical realm via *The Birth of the Clinic* illuminate and forecast the dystopian and authoritarian power relations present in *Elysium*. Thus, an examination of *Elysium* ossifies an extension of the Foucauldian medical gaze, which travels through the realities of the contemporary world and into the fears of the future one. In this chapter, I conduct a Foucauldian thematic analysis on *Elysium* in order to demonstrate the way the film extends the contemporary socio-political warnings of the Occupy Movement to persuade audiences of the dangers of power and control via the medical gaze and healthcare access.

Elysium **Background**

Elysium is set in the year 2154 in a dystopian future in which Earth's wealthiest citizens have left the polluted, diseased, and overpopulated planet to live in a space

colony known as Elysium. The vast majority of the Earth's population are left to toil on a

dying Earth, devoid of resources, comfortable living conditions, and adequate healthcare.

"Illegal immigrants" often attempt to reach Elysium via shuttle in order to

instantaneously cure any ailment in the colony's medical bays; however, Elysium

Secretary of Defense Delacourt (Jodie Foster) uses ruthless tactics to protect the colony.

Meanwhile, Max De Costa, a former criminal turned factory worker, is exposed to a

deadly dose of radiation via a job accident and given five days to live. Motivated by the

desire to survive, De Costa turns to human smugglers and criminals for assistance

reaching Elysium. Grafted with a cybernetic exoskeleton to enhance his strength, De

Costa makes a deal to take part in a heist to steal sensitive information by directly

downloading it from the brain of a weapons manufacturer, John Carlyle (William

Fincher). When it is discovered that Carlyle's brain data contains a program that can

override Elysium's computer system and make everyone on Earth a citizen of Elysium,

De Costa embarks on a mission to bring down the oppressive system. Along the way, he

is aided by childhood friend, now nurse, Frey (Alice Braga), and her leukemia stricken

daughter. He must also contend with a mentally unstable sleeper agent, Kruger (Sharlto

Copley).

     Director/writer Neill Blomkamp uses the narrative to level heavy-handed critiques

of immigration, healthcare, and poverty (Carleton). These social criticisms are

particularly relevant in the contemporary socio-political landscape, as they reflect the

some of the major issues facing the U.S. (and the world at large) both now and at the time

of the film's release. Moreover, these issues are central to the Occupy Movement, which

was at the forefront of world news at the time the film was conceived, written, and shot.

Though statements by director Neil Blomkamp are often conflicting, it is clear that Elysium is intended to level a critique of contemporary power relationships and growing inequality.

Literature Review

The Birth of the Clinic

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault traces the development of the "medical gaze" in 18th century medicine. The medical gaze is the result of a series of historical events that culminates in a medical practice in which the patient is subtracted in order to make an illness known (Foucault 14). As such, the patient becomes the portrait of the disease (Foucault 15). Central to the development of the medical gaze is the evolution of power relations between the patient, clinic, and medical professionals.

Additionally, responses to and further articulations of Foucault's work in *The Birth of the Clinic* represent areas of relevance to this project. Foucault's work illuminates control via morality, governmentality, and demographic changes—each of which relates to the society in *Elysium* (Petersen and Bunton). Moreover, scholars have noted that deregulation in the 1980s, both in the U.S. and the U.K., created enthusiasm for a "risk society," in which the world is considered more "uncertain, contingent, flexible, and risky" than ever before (Turner xvii). Risk society not only places a greater onus on the individual for their personal success or failures, but also relies on more subtle and systematic forms of control (Turner xviii). Additionally, contemporary means of surveillance, access to medical care, and the burden of individual responsibility have been investigated by scholars (Harding). Furthermore, the particular methods of control

and governing this "risky self" that represent contemporary extension of Foucault's work have been studied and theorized (Nettleton).

Foucault's analysis of the gaze, the doctor-patient relationship, and methods of control have also been extended by scholars (Jones and Porter). Others still have credited Foucault's work in *The Birth of the Clinic* as the most comprehensive and powerful account of the way that power relationships shape and define the body, disease, and medical power (Armstrong). Finally, scholarship investigates the application of Foucault's work to a changing landscape (Watson). Taken together, it is clear that Foucault's theories remain influential in understanding power relationships and control. Though *The Birth of the Clinic* is limited in scope the developments in medicine of 18th and 19th century France, scholars have utilized Foucault's "archeology" in order to better understand the world today. Moreover, the application of *The Birth of the Clinic* to dystopian science fiction film creates an opportunity to extend Foucauldian theory in order to not only better understand the contemporary world, but also the latent anxieties of a hypothetical dystopian future in which power relationships have created an technologically-based totalitarian system.

The Occupy Movement and Healthcare

Although Occupy is most commonly associated with financial inequality, a central pillar of the movement's message is that of universal healthcare access. Numerous profiles of the movement detail the push for equal access to healthcare (Engler, 53, French). Moreover, offshoots of the Occupy Movement include groups such as Occupy Healthcare, which seeks an overhaul to the perceived shortcomings to global healthcare systems ("Occupy Healthcare' Issues Principles" 10). Finally, the Occupy Movement has

united with various labor actions in order to assist these groups in their campaigns for better healthcare for themselves and their families (Thompson, 29-31). Taken together, it is clear that the central message of the dangers of inequality in *Elysium*—most notably inequality regarding healthcare access—parallels the concerns of the Occupy Movement. Because these connections are so explicit, understanding the pervasive nature of the Occupy Movement of 2011 to 2013 and its relationship to the message of *Elysium* is critical to any analysis of the film.

Social Context and Elysium

Interviews with *Elysium* writer/director Neill Blomkamp yield often conflicting statements regarding the film's influences. When answering questions about the *Elysium*, Blomkamp responded, "People 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" (Hiscock). Other interviews demonstrate Blomkamp's insistence on the inevitability of a future wealth divide, stating, "You'd literally have to change the human genome to stop wealth discrepancy. But it's happening now on a globalised level" (Godfrey). He also links the future with a dichotomy in which, "either we're going to end up coming out of this through technological innovation—leaps in genetic engineering, say, or artificial intelligence—or we're going to go down the road of a Malthusian catastrophe" (Yarm). Nevertheless, Blomkamp has also joked that, "*Elysium* doesn't have a message" and has claimed that there are no parallels between *Elysium* and the ubiquitous Occupy movement, which featured protestors unified against growing financial inequality and the corporate domination over politics and everyday life (Schneider 14, Yarm). However, each of the aforementioned interviews heavily profile the ways that Blomkamp's South

African upbringing and firsthand observance of apartheid influence both his views and films.

Regardless of Blomkamp's statements, the message of Elysium has been acknowledged and analyzed by others involved in the film's creation. When promoting *Elysium* at the 2012 convention, Comic-Con, actor Matt Damon responded to questions about the film's themes, stating that both U.S. political parties and the mainstream media haven't paid enough attention to groups like the Tea Party and the Occupy movement (Cohen). Damon also remarked, "I don't think the Republicans or the Democrats really understand the level of anger at the sense of unfairness that the majority of people in the country feel" (Cohen). In these comments, Damon makes a clear connection between Elysium's message, current global conditions, and groups such as the Occupy Movement that were rebelling against perceived injustices. Moreover, numerous reviews of the film note the obvious thematic connection to the Occupy Movement (Gibbs, Heaton, Simon).

Ultimately, these interviews make clear a number of relevant aspects of *Elysium's* message. First, *Elysium* appears to be a critique of current global conditions that acts as a predictive warning of an undesirable future, thus satisfying the conditions of a dystopian film. Secondly, at the heart of this critique is the theme of unequal power relationships and societal control. While *Elysium* is quite overt in depicting a future of unequal resources (both financial and otherwise) that allows a small population of individuals power over the vast majority of the Earth's population, the crux of the film's plot is medical care. Because the elite "1%" population of Elysium are able to control and define the body of Earth and its population, they are afforded a level of power that even transcends financial inequality. As such, the film exists as a relevant piece of

contemporary cinema that extends the theories of Michel Foucault by illuminating present-day fears of unequal power relationships, medicine, and the body thereby creating an allegory that depicts these fears in a worst-case dystopian future.

Methods

Foucault is one of the most influential theorists of the 20th century, and his work is utilized in many disciplines. Examples of scholarship that uses a Foucauldian analysis to better understand elements of film and popular culture include Henson's 2012 work, which uses Foucault to explore marginalization and exclusion of Afro Brazilians in contemporary Brazilian film (Henson 2). Linder's 2011 piece uses Foucault's theories of power and neoliberalism to examine themes of the film, *2 Million Minutes*. Additionally, Foucault's theories have been applied to the performance of the masculine body in the film, *Jarhead* (Godfrey, Lilley, and Brewish, n.p.). Finally, Foucauldian analysis technique as applied to film have also been referenced in regard to an analysis of *Shutter Island* (Pheasant-Kelly, n.p.).

In a rhetorical analysis of *Elysium* under a Foucauldian lens, a number of themes quickly emerged. I have categorized these themes as controlling the body, Earth and Elysium as the body, and risk society and the body. Each of these categories focuses on the way that *Elysium* works to persuade viewers of the central tenets of the Occupy Movement. By depicting a dystopian future of extreme inequality—particularly in regard to healthcare—*Elysium* creates a hyperbolized dystopian future based on the runaway neoliberal policies identified by Occupy. Furthermore, power and control of the body represents a direct extension of Foucault's conceptualizations of the gaze, policing the body, the medical body, and the clinic.

Controlling the body

As referenced in the beginning of this chapter, in *Elysium*, earthbound citizens are regulated by machines in the form of a robot police force. In the aforementioned exchange, a robotic parole officer declares De Costa 78.3% likely to regress toward criminal behavior based on a personality profile. This de-humanizing interaction with a non-human machine is rigid and limited form of dehumanizing communication. Furthermore, the extreme surveillance depicted in this scene is extended throughout the movie, as *Elysium* portrays a dystopian control of the body.

Due to his likelihood of regression, De Costa is given a parole extension. In this case, *Elysium* demonstrates two key elements of the medical gaze—symptoms and signs. Both the symptom (the form in which a disease is presented) and the sign (what will happen, what has happened, or what is taking place) are part of the emergence of the clinical method. Foucault writes, "Signs and symptoms are and say the same thing, the only difference being that the sign *says* the same thing that *is* precisely the symptom…Hence 'no sign without a symptom'" (Foucault 93). *Elysium* depicts this concept taken to the extreme—an individual's personality profile is considered a sign that they are or aren't likely to commit a crime, or the symptom. By ignoring the possibility that not every sign is a symptom, the rule of law is applied is a twisted manner, which allows those in power to construct the body in a way that permits an immense level of control.

The constructive nature of the medical gaze has been noted by scholars in their extension of Foucault's theories. Armstrong writes,

> Disciplinary power…is concerned not with repressing but with creating. It is disciplinary power, through the surveillance and subsequent

> objectification of the body, which actually serves to fabricate the body in the first place (Armstrong 23).

It is exactly this "creation" of the sick and dying body that is central to *Elysium*. Not only is De Costa determined to shed this identity, but his childhood friend, Frey, is also motivated to find a cure for her daughter's advanced leukemia. Moreover, they are all considered "illegal immigrants" attempting to reach Elysium, risking death in order to use the colony's medical bays to rid themselves of their conditions. As such, the theme of inequality is most acutely demonstrated through the medical gaze. In contrast, Elysium citizens are afforded not only the comforts accompanying wealth, but also freedom from permanent definition and control by the medical gaze.

DeCosta is immediately subject to the audience's scrutiny, as he is introduced as a well-known local felon and blue-collar criminal; a former car thief now working on an assembly line in an Armadyne Crop factory that produces weaponry and robotics. Through interactions with former acquaintances imploring him to help them in an upcoming theft, we learn that De Costa was a local legend as a car thief, yet has vowed to not engage in criminal activities again due to fears of going back to prison. *Elysium* opens with a flashback, in which the audience is given glimpses of Max De Costa's childhood in an orphanage. When a young Max is caught stealing by the nuns, he is told that individuals all have a destiny, and that he is intended to do something special.

The narrative of a hero from ignominious background destined to change the world for good is nothing new. Moreover, De Costa follows the "ambivalent hero" trope—one that is increasingly common in science fiction (Prieto-Pablos). De Costa does not set out to change the world or even to do any particular good. As a character, he is demonstrably self-motivated. When he is exposed to radiation in a work accident and given five days to

live, he is willing to do any crime for local human trafficker, Spider (Wagner-Lawlor, Moura), in exchange for a chance to reach Elysium and heal himself.

The key component of De Costa's transformation from relative nobody to hero of destiny is that it takes the exigency of a disease diagnosis to set in motion the central storyline. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault writes that medical perception works as "'a magnifying glass, which, when applied to different parts of an object, makes one notice other parts that one would not otherwise perceive', thus initiating the endless task of understanding the individual" (Foucault 15). When a diagnosis transforms an individual into the portrait of disease, "he is the disease itself, with shadow and relief, modulations, nuances, depth" (Foucault 15). Thus, when De Costa is diagnosed with a terminal radiation poisoning, he becomes re-constructed as an individual. It is only through this new identity that De Costa feels compelled to undertake events that change the course of human history. Moreover, this metamorphosis works to recreate the film's central character in a relatable manner. The way that De Costa is able to relinquish his own selfishness in order to benefit the greater good is central to the Occupy Movement. Through self-sacrifice, De Costa creates opportunity for others. In doing so, he transforms from ambivalent anti-hero to altruistic protagonist. As such, placing the needs of others over the needs of oneself is depicted as aspirational by *Elysium*.

Central to De Costa's destiny is death. De Costa is initially motivated by a fear of dying; however, when it is discovered that the program downloaded to his brain can bring about the end of unequal conditions and provide all citizens access to healthcare, De Costa becomes more altruistic. Though he learns that the program has been protected with coding that will kill him upon use, De Costa is still committed to his new cause.

Death, while essential to *Elysium*'s plotline, is also central to the medical gaze. Foucault writes,

> Life, disease, and death now form a technical and conceptual trinity. The continuity of age-old beliefs that placed the threat of disease in life and of the approaching presence of death in disease is broken; in this place is articulated a triangular figure the summit of which is defined by death (Foucault 144).

As such, death provides a reference point for both life and disease that illuminates both conditions. In regard to the individual, "it is in death—on the dissecting table—that the individuality of disease is finally isolated…that the course of diseases within living individuals can ultimately be known" (Armstrong 37). De Costa sacrifices his life in order to run the program so that Spider can reboot Elysium's central computer system and redefine all citizens of Earth as citizens of Elysium, thus allowing them medical care. In this way, death in *Elysium's* story arc mirrors Foucault's theories, in that, "the clinical conception of death is actually constructive, so far as Foucault is concerned, of the modern experience of individuality" (Armstrong 37). Through his death, De Costa not only fulfils his destined hero role, but also becomes an individual—an individual serving the greater needs of humanity.

Through the thematic elements of *Elysium* that I have labeled "constructing the body," the film extends *The Birth of the Clinic* by following Foucault's conceptualizations of individuality, the medical gaze, and death. Although on the surface the methods of control depicted in *Elysium* appear based on resource inequality, the driving force behind the story arc is one of death and disease. Without these labels, De Costa is just another nameless human on a dying Earth, destined to live an otiose and quotidian existence. However, due to the result of the medical gaze, he is able to carry

out his destiny and become an individual. As such, Foucault's theories represent a method of understanding not only the way that the body is constructed in this dystopian future, but also the way that the medical gaze is central to the film's narrative. Furthermore, the selfless nature of De Costa's actions in freeing the population from the tyranny and control of the wealthy minority mirrors the goals of the Occupy Movement. These overt parallels create an allegory for the movement that depicts the goals of universal healthcare and greater equality as laudable.

The Earth and Elysium as the body

Earth and Elysium represent two different bodies—Earth as the diseased, polluted, overpopulated, and corrupted body and Elysium as the aspirational and uncontaminated realm. This sentiment is reinforced throughout the film as both Earth and Elysium are the subjects of constant gaze. Additionally, the Earth is subjected to gaze, regulation, and quarantine by Elysium that is not reciprocal.

Elysium begins with scenes of a ruined Earth—crumbling buildings, dead landscapes, and impoverished cities. These images are accompanied by the text, "In the late 21st century Earth was diseased, polluted, and overpopulated." The deliberate use of the term "diseased" immediately establishes the Earth as the body metaphor, one that is continued throughout the film. Moreover, by constructing the Earth as a diseased body, its existence becomes subject to the medical gaze. This allows the diseased conditions of the Earth to become its prominent characteristic, as "in relation to what he is suffering from, the patient is only an external fact; the medical reading must take him into account only to place him in parentheses" (Foucault 8). Therefore, in *Elysium*, the primary control of Earth is not only through a glaring resource and financial inequality, but through

definition by the medical gaze. This control reflects the contemporary concerns of Occupy, and further illuminates the ways the film uses a hyperbolized vision of an undesirable future to highlight contemporary problems.

The medical gaze continues to feature prominently in the film, as gaze itself is a recurring theme throughout the story. In *Elysium's* opening sequence, images of the brown, barren, and crumbling landscape of Earth's dying body is juxtaposed with the verdant, green, and healthy landscape of the Elysium colony. In flashbacks, a young De Costa is seen constantly looking upward toward Elysium, his goal to one day to reach the colony. De Costa is given a locket by a nun, who tells him to imagine how beautiful the Earth looks to citizens on Elysium. This theme comes full circle by the end of the film, as a dying De Costa holds the locket of Earth's image while he looks at the planet with his own eyes from Elysium. The theme of gaze works as Foucault describes,

> The strange character of the medical gaze; it is caught up in an endless reciprocity. It is directed upon that which is visible in the disease—but on the basis of the patient, who hides this visible element even as he shows it; consequently, in order to know, he must recognize, while already being in passion of the knowledge that will lend support to his recognition (Foucault 9).

From the distance of space, the Earth's diseased nature is hidden, despite the fact that this condition is understood by all. However serene the planet may seem from afar, subjection to the gaze is inevitable.

Moreover, Elysium is also referred to as a body in the film. Elysium Secretary of Defense Delacourt orders Armadyne owner John Carlyle to create the program to re-boot Elysium's computer system and give her presidential power. In her justification for assuming power she states, "Our habitat is dying. There is a political sickness inside of it, a tumor that needs to be removed." In this interaction, Delacourt follows Foucault's

medical anthropology "by linking medicine with the destinies of states" (Foucault 34).

Delacourt's definition of a diseased state is due to leadership actions she finds

problematic, and her prescribed medical intervention is "no longer confined to a body of

techniques for curing ills and of the knowledge that they require; it will also embrace the

knowledge of a *healthy man,* that is, a study of *non-sick man* and a definition of the

model man" (Foucualt 34). As such, the diseased body metaphor in *Elysium* is extended

to encompass the power of the medical gaze to define not only the sick, but also the

normative and healthy. Finally, these interactions depict the ruthless nature that the film's

antagonist employs to remain in power and maintain the status quo for the rich. Similar to

the way that the selfless actions of De Costa position the character on the side of "good,"

the selfish nature of Delacourt positions the rich as the film's villains.

When discussing the increasingly deregulated economic landscape of the 1980s,

Turner postulated that neoliberal governments would need to rely on more subtle and

systematic forms of control (Turner xvii). *Elysium* depicts a neoliberal economy gone

wrong, in which a few wealthy individuals control the vast majority of resources. In order

to keep this concentrated power, the government of Elysium must invoke Foucauldian

concepts of control—including the use of the medical gaze—to construct the body of the

Earth as undesirable and sick and the body of Elysium as aspirational and healthy. This

characterization illuminates the central concept of the film via a Foucauldian lens.

Moreover, the extension of Foucault's theories to risk societies, both contemporary and

imagined, has other implications in *Elysium*.

Risk society and the body

The citizens of Elysium are able to heal any disease or affliction instantaneously through medical bays that exist in each home. In this way, wealth is the direct correlative factor of health. Thus, *Elysium's* conditions work as a critique of contemporary neoliberal deregulation, "including the marketization of the provision of social services" (Turner xvii). This deregulation mirrors the creation of a risk society, in which the individual is responsible for their own success or failures via their actions, choices, and behaviors. Scholars have explored the way that that money, time, and access to facilities allow for healthier and less "risky" choices for individuals (Harding 143). Moreover, "The political significance of this conceptualization of health is that it is formulated as a series of common endpoints for groups and individuals, obscuring their sheer impossibility for some" (Harding 144). The contemporary divide between those with access to healthcare and those without is a contentious issue brought to the forefront of world politics, which has been reinvigorated in large part due to the Occupy Movement. *Elysium* takes these fears to an extreme scenario in which principles of neoliberalism create a society of haves and have-nots that extends beyond pure material resources to the realm of physical health.

Ultimately, this extreme risk society invokes Foucault's theories of power and control over populations. In enacting this dominance over the Earth's population, Elysium's government "requires and develops a knowledge of its population and the families and individuals of which it is comprised" (Nettleton 211). Elysium uses this information in order to insure a productive population. Foucault refers to this role as "pastoral power", an "individualizing form of power which requires a detailed knowledge

of the mental and physical attributes of its subjects" and is designed to "ensure the well-being of the object of government—the population—and its subjects—individuals" (Nettleton 211). This form of control requires individuals to know themselves—in the case of *Elysium,* to know whether they belong to the privileged minority of the downtrodden masses. As such, the governing power of Elysium ensures that individuals on Earth are not only "recruited to take care of themselves, but the techniques that are deployed by the 'experts' of human conduct must in turn invariably shape how individuals come to think about themselves''—particularly in reference to their mental health, sense of inferiority, and subservient status (Nettleton 212). As such, access to healthcare in *Elysium* extends Occupy's fears of the contemporary risk society and governmental control through Foucauldian theory to further an unequal dystopian vision of the future.

A number of the film's physical spaces exemplify both the dystopian risk society and extreme inequality. The hospital shown on Earth is the only vestige of contemporary and historical medicine depicted in the film. Moreover, it is shown as overcrowded, understaffed, and lacking in resources. When Da Costa is stabbed, he attempts to get help from Frey, who tells him that he has to "go through the system to get treatment." Though Frey is a skilled nurse who is able to treat Da Costa's wound at her home, she laments the inferior conditions of the home space to the hospital. Foucault discusses this evolution of the hospital space as superior to the home for the treatment of the body (Foucault 18-20). Moreover, the rationale for this evolution is purely an economic one—left untreated, the poor are incapable of working, which in turn hurts the state, in that sick individual's presence at home opens the possibility of harming others in close proximity. Finally, the

confines of the hospital space ensure the state is able to monitor that a true art of curing

exists (Foucault 20). In an examination of contemporary health care, Nettleton writes that

healthcare is increasingly considered part of an individual's personal responsibility, in

that a wide range of possibilities are presented by experts, yet it is up to the individual to

make correct choices (Nettleton 208). In the hospital space and landscape of the

dystopian Earth, limited resources restrict choice, yet at the same time, unforgiving

conditions continue to place responsibility for health and even mere survival on the

individual.

Elysium depicts other forms of dystopian surveillance that allow for a level of

complete control. On Earth, body scanning is administered by the police and before

entering certain zones, such as the factory in which De Costa works. Conversely, on

Elysium, citizens are constantly scanned—any sign of medical deviation prompts the

central computer system to advise they immediately use a medical bay in order to cure

their ailments. This awareness of the bodies of Elysium citizens also occurs when they

are on the Earth's surface, as Delacourt and others are instantly notified when John

Carlyle is in imminent bodily harm.

These surveillance techniques continue in a myriad of other ways throughout the

film. From Elysium, surveillance allows for a positive identification of Earth's citizens

through a knowledge of their DNA and features. De Costa is identified from Elysium

during his hijacking of John Carlyle. Furthermore, when he escapes from the crime,

Kruger employs drones in order to scan and survey the area for De Costa. When

expanding Foucault's theory of the medical gaze to contemporary medicine, it is

important to "map the various transformations which have been made to the objectified

body during the twentieth century," which include "new knowledges of the body and their accompanying practices which sought to transform (fabricate) a new object" (Armstrong 24). These include mental hygiene, pain control, dentistry, and childbirth (Armstrong 24). *Elysium* portrays these technologies of control through a dystopian prediction of future possibilities. Moreover, the extreme surveillance of *Elysium* is used for a variety of methods—dependent on the class of the individual under their gaze. De Costa's character is a criminal and non-citizen; thus, he occupies a body that is not privileged by the system. As such, the ever-present gaze of Elysium is employed as a method of control to police his body. Conversely, for citizens such as John Carlyle, the gaze of Elysium is a protective force. Nevertheless, the gaze itself is not liberating, yet still a form of policing, in that any deviation must be corrected.

Finally, Earth is a "risky" body in *Elysium* as well. Earth is, in essence, a quarantined zone. The opening text of *Elysium* explains that the rich "fled to preserve their way of life," in this case, an existence uncorrupted by a diseased and dying planet. When non-desirable bodies of illegal immigrants reach Elysium, they are quickly captured and sent back to the quarantined Earth. In his discussion of the hospital space Foucault writes,

> A structure had to be found, for the preservation of both the hospitals and the privileges of medicine, that was compatible with the principles of liberalism and the need for social protection—the latter understood somewhat ambiguously as the protection of the poor by the rich and the protection of the rich against the poor" (Foucault 82).

As such, the space of the Earth works as another form of control along the lines of class and economic worth. This tyranny follows the mastery of the medical gaze, the "majestic violence of light, which is in itself supreme, brings to an end the bounded, dark kingdom

of privileged knowledge and establishes the unimpeded empire of the gaze (Foucault 39).

When applying Foucault's conceptualizations of control to the contemporary world,

Watson writes, "The sovereign used physical means of torture and execution, the state

employed 'discipline' or the regulation of the body through various regimes governing

time, space, and communication" (Watson 137). In the case of *Elysium*, the body is

policed by instantaneous surveillance on the highly controlled spaces of both Earth and

the Elysium colony. Together, these strategies provide a predictive vision of a worse-case

dystopian level of control that follows Foucault's conceptualizations of the control of

bodies.

Overall, healthcare in the film *Elysium* connects to theories of control via

morality, government, and demographic changes. In the dystopian conditions of

Elysium's imagined future, individual responsibility, the risk society, and neoliberalism

are taken to their extremes to create an undesirable future. As such, the theories of

Foucault represent a relevant point of inquiry into both the contemporary reality that

inspired *Elysium*, and the dystopian vision created by the film itself. This hyperbolized

future might be seen as an attempt to persuade audiences of the danger inherent in this

systematic control by extending the deregulation observed in contemporary capitalism,

resulting in dystopian financial inequality (Turner via Peterson and Bunton xvii).

Moreover, this paradigm of extreme neoliberalism is the crux of *Elysium's* central

critique of the contemporary world—one that mirrors the Occupy Movement's call to

action.

Conclusion

When local crime boss and human trafficker Spider finds out that the information he tasked De Costa to steal will allow them to reboot Elysium's central computer, he exclaims, "We can control the system! We can be in change! We can change the course of history!" In 2011, the Occupy Movement set out to overthrow corrupt systems of power and take charge of ridding the world of inequality. Whether or not the movement has fundamentally altered the course of human history remains to be seen; however, it is impossible to argue that Occupy has not had an impact on popular culture, film, and in framing the global lexicon. Despite conflicting statements by writer/director Neil Blomkamp, *Elysium's* message mirrors the concerns of the Occupy Movement, in particular fears of a future in which unequal resources and healthcare access creates a new level of power and domination by the "1%" over the remaining "99%" of the world. In this chapter's rhetorical analysis of *Elysium,* the theories of Michel Foucault are utilized to illuminate the way that power relationships and control of the body have been constructed throughout history. Moreover, a better understanding of these techniques demonstrates the way *Elysium* is able to persuade audiences of the danger inherent in the control of the medical gaze and the denial of healthcare access.

In order to better understand the world, Foucault looked toward the past. In his conceptualization of the medical gaze, he worked not to predict the future, but to explain the present. Dystopian fiction, in contrast, attempts to act as a harbinger of the future—a grave warning for the citizens of the present that they must work to alter the course of the world, lest they fall prey to a grim future. Meanwhile, events of the present exist between

two these two conceptual temporalities—sitting on a precipice between the chasm of the

past and the unknown world of the future.

Chapter Five: The Dystopian Future Awaits

In good films, there is always a directness that entirely frees us from the itch to interpret.
-Susan Sontag

When it's good, cinema can be one of the most important things in a person's life. A film can be a catalyst for change. You witness this and it is an incredibly spiritual experience that I'd never lived before; well, maybe only in a football match.
-Gael Garcia Bernal

Somewhere, a video exists of my seven-year-old self explaining that, "when I grow up, I want to be a paleontologist." Although I was quickly becoming obsessed with dinosaurs due to weekend trips to the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences and the anticipation of studying the Mesozoic Era in my upcoming second grade science class, there was one vital component of my future plans that was not based on the influence of my school or family—*Jurassic Park.* The ability to see my favorite dinosaurs brought to life on a 40-foot screen was simply too much for my young mind to ignore. Hence, the zeitgeisty 1993 film that ushered in a summer of dinosaurs, theme parks gone awry, and fictional science about cloning long-extinct creatures using frog DNA and also had a tangible impact on my young self and future ambitions.

Years later, I am, admittedly, not a paleontologist. It is possible that seven-year-old me would lament seeing his future incarnation studying rhetoric in a climate-controlled building instead of crouched down in a pit in a in the middle of the desert dusting off Velociraptor bones. Perhaps it is also possible that the fact that my career was not irrevocably influenced by *Jurassic Park* stands as a stark counter point to the claim that movies have an influence on society. Nevertheless, I can safely say that I never have lost my love for dinosaurs, scientific discovery, and the sense that human beings are capable of wonders and dangerous things. What is one individual's pedantic summer action thriller replete with rubber dinosaurs is another individual's transformative experience. Such is the nature of film.

The most difficult part of a rhetorical analysis of film, such as this one, is the ultimate purpose to the analysis. Obviously, there is no way to craft a quantitative study with the ability to decipher exactly how much people are influenced by each specific film they see. Moreover, I concede that anecdotes, such as mine, do not prove the effects of film on a societal level. In fact, it is possible that what I took away from *Jurassic Park* was in fact a convergence of influences, not merely the film itself. That point notwithstanding, it is clear, at the very least, that film serves as some kind of reflective force—a contemporary artwork that functions not only as entertainment, but also as a medium with a message.

While a direct causation between the isolated impact of film on an individual or society is currently impossible, numerous studies in various fields attempt to explore potential correlations. These studies examine the reflection of the human experience on film and the media, and the more insidious inverse—the way that film and media can impact society and individual actions. This includes the realms of gender and human sexuality, such as the way gender portrayal in teen movies impacts young adults (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, n.p.), the influence of media on sexuality and norms (Brown, n.p.), and the impact of sex and rape depictions in film on public opinion (Bufkin, n.p.). The definition of societal norms, such as disability/ability is also linked with film and media (Safran, n.p.).

Regardless of the magnitude, it is generally accepted that film and media have the capability to effect individuals in a more latent, sinister, and certainly capitalistic fashion. Studies of the effects of mass media on children (Banning, n.p.), smoking in movies and its influence on adolescents (Kachroo, Etzel, and Wilkinson, n.p.), media influence,

alcohol, and race (Gibbons, et al, n.p.), and the effectiveness of brand placement (van Reijmersdal, Tutaj, and Boerman, n.p.) are well-documented. Moreover, there is compelling evidence that the media and film has a tangible impact on young children (Banning, n.p.) as well as college students (Bannerman and Lewis, n.p.). In a far less devious sense, articles have shown the influence of film on other elements of human existence. Work on the impact of international cinema regarding the conception of romance (Khairiah, n.p.) and the influence of film on fashion trends (Warner, n.p.) demonstrate the way that media effects daily human interaction.

Finally, studies link film and the media to contemporary events. There is a long-established history of the connection between commercial entertainment and the onset of moral panic (Springhall, n.p.). In a more specific sense, critics have investigated other connections between humanity and film, such as the influence of terrorism on horror movies (Korstanje, n.p.), the way that movies helped to create the most recent global financial crisis (Ribstein, n.p.), and the way that the contemporary corporate state mirrors science fiction dystopias (Byers, n.p.). Existing literature also examines popular culture and its impact on political agenda (Timothy, n.p.). Taken together, these efforts represent a mere fraction of the studies that explore the connection between film and human action. While it is impossible to quantify just how much a particular film influences an individual, these articles, and others, maintain that there is at least *some* tangible connection between media and reality.

The dedication by scholars and journalists in exploring the relationship between film and culture underlies the critical importance movies have on our world. Both film and the culture in which it was produced are reflective in nature; nevertheless, it is

impossible to gauge whether a film impacts the world through its message, or the world impacts the message of a film. Perhaps it is more accurate to imagine both film and culture as an echoing hall of mirrors—each one serving to reflect, replicate, imitate, amplify, and distort the other.

It is also of particular importance to note the power of film from a financial standpoint. The 2014 American domestic box office gross for all films in 2014 is $10.4 billion, a figure that has held relatively steady for the past decade (Box Office Mojo). Moreover, continued growth in the export of American film, along with the rise of "Hollywoods" in other countries enhances the reach of a movie's message. These conditions are coupled with lower costs of filmmaking tools and greater access to intuitive computer editing software, as well as the ability to share and release films in new venues, free from the costly traditional structure. The end result is the increased ability to tell stories in new ways—not only for Hollywood directors, but also for filmmakers around the globe.

As citizens, students, scholars, and consumers, it is more important than ever to cultivate a sense of media literacy. Some messages embedded in media are obvious, so overt that they have become commonplace. The purpose of a film, however, is often more difficult to decipher, as the medium can be interpreted differently by various individuals. Nevertheless, the role that movies have in contemporary American and global life necessitates that consumers view media as not merely entertainment, but as a medium containing directed symbolic language with an intended causation. Thus, rhetorical analysis exists as an ideal tool to decode the meaning, purpose, and message that films convey to their audiences.

The link between *The Hunger Games* and Occupy has been discussed in the media *ad nauseam*, and for legitimate reasons. As Chapter Two illustrates, a rhetorical analysis of the former provides ample evidence for a reading of the series as critique of neoliberal capitalism gone wrong. *The Hunger Games* not only functions as a critique for capitalism, but is also critical of the divide between the wealthy elite and the remainder of the population. Though the book series preceded the Occupy Movement, the release of the first film coincided with the height of the protests, and the interviews with author Suzanne Collins, director Gary Ross, and actors such as Donald Sutherland further legitimize the series as a reflection of contemporary global conditions and a warning of a future of insurmountable class division. In addition to my rhetorical analysis of the film, the application of Latour's actor-network theory provides a method of analysis that illuminates the way that domination and control is enacted through the use of non-human actants, such as the games themselves and the District boundaries. Furthermore, the growing revolution in the film is also reliant on non-human actants, which are subverted by rebellious characters in order to challenge the powers of the Capitol.

The Dark Knight Rises is perhaps the most contentious film of the three, as it is often conflated with an anti-Occupy message. However, in Chapter Three I argue that these readings of *TDKR* as either a pro-right or pro-left political statement are incomplete in nature. In my rhetorical analysis, I apply Cintron's *The Limitations of Democracy* in order to illuminate the way power is enacted in the series. Moreover, this reading allows for an extension of the long-standing scholarship that links Batman with democracy, in that I argue for Batman as our conception of idealized democracy. My analysis, then, allows for a reconciliation between the scholarships that conceptualize *The Dark Knight*

Rises on various points of the political spectrum. This is because *TDKR* is not simply against the anarchy that director Christopher Nolan perceives from the Occupy Movement, but also the degeneration stemming from the corrupted democracy, brought on by excessive unchecked wealth, predatory members of Wall Street, and unethical politicians.

It is clear that the most heavy-handed of the three films, *Elysium,* is greatly influenced by the Occupy Movement. Not only was the film conceptualized and created after Occupy's zenith, but the themes of the rich versus the remainder of the population, as well as immigration and healthcare reform, closely mirror the politics of Occupy. Because the themes of the 1% against the 99% are so overt, my analysis of power relationships and their connection to Occupy in Chapter Four focus primarily on the film's critique of healthcare. By applying Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*, as well as subsequent scholarship that extends Foucault's archeology of power relations in medicine to current conditions, I am able to read *Elysium* as a predictive, worst-case example of contemporary fears. Taken together, these chapters work to decipher the way that these three films were influenced by the Occupy Movement, yet also function to persuade audiences of a particular message that reflects the concerns of Occupy.

The week that I was writing the final chapter of this project, *Elysium* director Neill Blomkamp was in the midst of his media publicity tour for his new film, *Chappie*. As noted in the Chapter Four, Blomkamp has a habit of contradicting himself when discussing the meaning of his films (if he is even willing to admit his films have a meaning on that specific day). I was particularly struck to answers from his March 2015 interview with British style magazine, *Dazed*.

You've spoken before about your past films being an allegory for something greater.

Neill Blomkamp: The filmmaker cannot be making a film without a reason. The reason can be as simple as what I was saying with horror movies. It can be that simple but it's still a reason. Or it can be like *Aliens* with James Cameron, which was a play on Vietnam; we're more heavily armed, we're more technologically sophisticated, why are we losing? It doesn't appear that way, it appears when you watch it that a Xenomorph is gonna eat you. There's always a reason.

After seeing your films, do you hope people will change how they think?

Neill Blomkamp: Not necessarily.

Then what's the point?

Neill Blomkamp: Well that's a really big question. In a sense that is the core reason behind what is art. For me, when filmmakers start to talk about changing the world, that's when I grab my coat and leave. There's a million better ways you could effectively change the planet than making a film. I have no misunderstandings about how limited I think films are. People work in the week and then want two hours off and they want an emotional journey or an emotional connection to something. People don't come out of theatres and join political movements, it just doesn't happen. I think that a slow burn with hundreds of films in a single topic can begin to push the needle in one direction. You can take the most influential films on the planet, let's say *Star Wars*, the results of the film on a societal level are not able to be determined. You can make an argument about *Avatar* being about environmentalism and it being the biggest film ever made and that kids in elementary school now are more acutely aware of not polluting the planet, but it's still incremental changes. I never think that I'm making a difference (Taylor).

While Blomkamp does concede that his films, along with others have a central message, he shirks any responsibility as a director and denies the possibility of a film to change the world. However, I and many others disagree. Movies do not have to encourage an individual to radically change their lives to have an impact. By simply starting a conversation that would not otherwise occur, movies change the world.

It has been only a few short years since the first Occupy Wall Street protestors met in Zuccotti Park. In regard to its long-term impact, the future of Occupy is relatively unknown. In reflections on Occupy Wall Street, Gitlin notes that,

> OWS changed the political landscape, but it can't build a home there. Thus its predicament. What it built, in a burst of social entrepreneurship, was camps – useful for a time, inspired, inspiring, and self-limited. The camps animated just about all the anarchists and full-time radicals in America, and inserted the movement into the public topography (Gitlin, n.p.)

The piece also postulates that Occupy 2.0 will require a reconfiguration that allows the movement to unite many kinds of organizations via social networks and spinoff projects (Gitlin, n.p.). Perhaps one of the places that Occupy has already found a home is in the messages of film, a social network capable of transcending global borders and reaching audiences that may have never before entertained the movement's "radical" ideas.

Although the long-term effects of the Occupy Movement have yet to fully materialize, it is clear that the contemporary lexicon and global politics have been altered by the introduction of the 1% versus the 99%. Moreover, the attention given to major studio film releases such as *The Hunger Games, The Dark Knight Rises, and Elysium*, not for their massive box office appeal, but because they are perceived to reflect the Occupy Wall Street is proof of the movement's impact on the global landscape. Through the use of rhetorical analysis and the application of rhetorical theory, I have provided an initial investigation into post-Occupy media that is said to relate to the movement. These readings demonstrate the potential to better understand the use of symbolic language employed by these films. However, work still remains in deciphering both the long-term impact of the Occupy Movement on the rhetoric of films, as well as the rhetoric of films influenced by Occupy Movement on the American and global population.

   If nothing else*, The Hunger Games, The Dark Knight Rises, and Elysium* demonstrate the difficulty in predicting the future. It is impossible to know whether or not these films or the Occupy Movement will retain cultural relevance in the coming years. Nevertheless, if film is capable of convincing a second grader that he wants to be a paleontologist in the future, perhaps there are current seven-year-olds stating that when they grow up, they want to overthrow the one percent.

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