

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
FACULDADE DE LETRAS



REPRESENTING LIFE, RESISTING POWER:
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO CONTEMPORARY BIOPOLITICS THROUGH THE LENSES OF
GONÇALO M. TAVARES, FRANCESCO VERSO, KEN MACLEOD, AND SUZANNE COLLINS

Igor Gonçalo Grave Abraços Furão

Orientador(es): Prof.a Doutora Susana Isabel Arsénio Nunes Costa Araújo

Prof. Doutor Andrea Cavalletti

Prof. Doutor Ricardo Gil Costa Fonseca Soeiro

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de Doutor no ramo de Estudos de
Literatura e Cultura, na especialidade de Estudos Comparatistas



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In memory of Teresa Grave

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore through literary texts new perspectives on the biopolitical devices and discourses that permeate contemporary western societies. To this end, I examine their representations in *Jerusalem, A Man: Klaus Klump*, and *Joseph Walser's Machine*, by Gonçalo M. Tavares, in “Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death!”, *The Walkers*, and *Nexhuman*, by Francesco Verso, in *Intrusion* and *The Execution Channel*, by Ken MacLeod, and in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, by Suzanne Collins. I start from the idea that by the beginning of the 21st century, *bios* and *polis*, life and politics have become almost completely juxtaposed, and that although the body is submitted to a constant and ubiquitous control, its materiality also constitutes a site of resistance. I go on to assess through a comparative analysis the connections and the differences between the selected novels of these four writers, with the intention of understanding how their dystopian aesthetics and essayistic dimension may potentiate a discussion on current social-political and economic problems that otherwise would have gone unnoticed. I likewise consider in what ways the fictional worlds of the characters in these works can provide us valuable insights regarding the devices and discourses through which political and economic powers govern human life.

Ultimately, I try to shed some light on cultural phenomena, such as an increasing medicalization of society, the spectacularization of everyday, or the disposability of human life, which are becoming increasingly common in contemporary western societies and have profoundly changed the relationships between people and institutions at a global level. In this way the present thesis hopes to make a small, yet significant, contribution to our understanding of a politics that now encompasses virtually every sphere of human life.

Keywords: dystopia; biopolitics; science fiction; mechanisms; contemporaneity; spectacle; immunology; exception.

RESUMO

Nesta tese, procuro explorar através de textos literários novas perspectivas sobre os dispositivos e discursos biopolíticos que permeiam as sociedades ocidentais contemporâneas. Para tal, examino as suas representações em *Jerusalém, Um Homem: Klaus Klump*, e *A Máquina de Joseph Walser*, de Gonçalo M. Tavares, em “La morte in diretta di Fernando Morales”, *I Camminatori*, e *Livido*, de Francesco Verso, em *Intrusion* e *The Execution Channel*, de Ken MacLeod, e na trilogia *The Hunger Games*, de Suzanne Collins. Parto da ideia de que, no início do século XXI, *bios* e *polis*, vida e política se justapõem quase completamente, e que embora o corpo seja submetido a um controle constante e ubíquo, a sua materialidade também constitui um espaço de resistência. Por via de um estudo comparatista, procuro analisar as ligações e os contrastes entre os romances escolhidos destes quatro escritores, com o intuito de compreender como a estética distópica e a dimensão ensaística destes podem potencializar uma discussão sobre alguns problemas sociopolíticos e económicos actuais que, de outro modo, passariam despercebidos. Indago igualmente de que forma os mundos ficcionais das personagens destas obras nos podem fornecer valiosas intuições sobre dispositivos e discursos através dos quais os poderes políticos e económicos governam a vida humana.

Em última análise, tento lançar alguma luz sobre fenómenos culturais, como a crescente medicalização da sociedade, a espetacularização do quotidiano ou a descartabilidade da vida humana, que se estão tornando cada vez mais comuns nas sociedades ocidentais contemporâneas e mudaram profundamente as relações entre as pessoas e instituições a nível global. Espero, assim, que esta tese possa dar uma pequena, mas significativa, contribuição para a nossa compreensão de uma política que hoje abrange praticamente todas as esferas da vida humana.

Palavras-chave: distopia; biopolítica; ficção científica; mecanismos; contemporaneidade; espetáculo; imunologia; excepção.

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INTRODUCTION: DIRECTING THE EYE

I realize that it might seem strange to the reader who has just picked up this thesis to come across such diverse set of works and authors. However, there is method to my madness. There are reasons underlying the choice of this heterogenous corpus, and there is a scientific film essay which may help me clarify these reasons: in *Powers of Ten* (1977), the Eameses¹ use a bird's eye-view angle to give viewers a close-up of a man sleeping near the lakeside of Chicago, viewed from one meter away. Following the narrator's cues, the "fictional camera" steadily starts to zoom out, moving towards the sky at rate of 10-to-the-tenth meters per second. Such zoom out provides us an increasingly wide field of view, helping us see new elements and having a broader context that goes from the bay of Chicago to the whole planet and the ridges of the milky way. Then, again at a rate of 10-to-the-tenth meters per second, the film takes us towards Earth again, continuing back to the sleeping man's hand and eventually down to the level of a carbon atom².

If the Eameses³ employed the system of exponential powers to visualize the importance of scale, illustrating the universe as an arena of both continuity and change, of everyday picnics and cosmic mystery, I believe that the comparative work that I propose here follows similar movements. The different novels of Gonçalo M. Tavares, Ken MacLeod, Suzanne Collins, and Francesco Verso have provided me the "lenses" to zoom in on several themes, institutions, and strategies of contemporary biopolitics. Conversely, in conjunction with theories from diverse critical areas of studies, such lenses have also enabled me to zoom out. To put it differently, these works have helped me to explore or confront different (and new) angles of a politics that seeks to control life, from its more banal elements of everyday, to its fate in a worldwide structure of power.

Yet, the lenses always need a human eye behind them. This introduction is an attempt to go back to the beginning and show how my project and my research developed.

¹ Charles Ormond Eames, Jr and Bernice Alexandra "Ray" Kaiser Eames were an American married couple of industrial designers who made significant historical contributions to the development of modern architecture and furniture through the work of the Eames Office. They also worked in the fields of industrial and graphic design, fine art, and film.

² The film essay is available on the Youtube channel of the Eames Office: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fKBhvDjuy0&t=452s&ab_channel=EamesOffice.

³ Charles and "Ray" used the 1957 book by Kees Boeke, *Cosmic View: The Universe in Forty Jumps*, as the basis for their film.

It tries to shed some light on my reasoning for choosing these specific lenses, but also on the way I have tried to direct them, directing the eye of the potential readers in the process.

Although the different themes and approaches I follow in this thesis are a direct result of my PhD research, my relationship with the dark counterparts of *utopias*⁴ and biopolitics is an older “love affair”. As a researcher in comparative studies, Critical Theory, Political Philosophy and Literature have always been my main focal interests, but it was only during the writing of my master’s dissertation that I really had the opportunity to probe deeper into the strong connection(s) between dystopian literature and biopolitics⁵. In *Between “Bios” and “Politics”*: the tetralogy “*The Kingdom*”, by *Gonçalo M. Tavares* (2013) I had the chance to explore the way fictional artworks, particularly those that portray somber worlds, can help revisit – or see with fresh eyes – well-known biopolitical theories, such as those developed by Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben. In the wake of works as *Dystopian literature: a theory and research guide*, by Keith Booker (1994), or Walter Benjamin’s *Illuminations* (1999), I made the case that literature often plays an important critical role by countering its fictional visions to present or future afflictions and injustices in societies. Literary *dystopias*, specifically, share several affinities and common goals both with works of philosophy and cultural criticism⁶, and thus they can be read as a critique of contemporary social conditions and political-economical systems.

At the same time, Tavares’ tetralogy provided me with insights that, ironically, left me with even more questions than I had started with. To a large extent, those insights and questions were the starting point and the compass that has guided me throughout the research and writing process of this thesis. “*The Kingdom*”⁷ helped me realize that dystopian literature can have a wider scope than merely making us reflect about the contemporary world through the filter of Critical Theory or Political Philosophy. The dark aesthetics and opaque language of the four novels – reminiscent of Kafka’s works – can provoke an estrangement effect in readers that distances them from their realities,

⁴ The term dystopia comes from the Ancient Greek *δυσ-* “bad” and *τόπος* “place”. It was coined by the English philosopher John Stuart Mill that, inspired by Thomas More’s writing on utopia, used the term to denounce the government’s Irish land policy in 1868. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “dystopia”, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/dystopia>.

⁵ Here I refer both to the branch of Political Philosophy and to the politics that aims to control human life.

⁶ Although these works clearly present different goals, methodological differences, and approaches.

⁷ As we will see further ahead, “*The Kingdom*” is a shared fictional universe composed by the following books in the following (original) chronological order: *A Man: Klaus Klump* (2014 [2003]), *Joseph Walser’s Machine* (2012 [2004]), *Jerusalem* (2009 [2005]), and *Learning to Pray in the Age of Technique: Lenz Buchmann’s Position in the World* (2011 [2007]).

potentially helping them face in theory *and* in practice biopolitical problems of their contemporary worlds. Consequently, in the present thesis I will consider dystopian literature not so much as a specific genre but rather as a peculiar kind of “oppositional and critical energy or spirit” (Booker 1994, 3). Not unlike what Arne De Boever does in *Narrative Care: Biopolitics and the Novel* (2013), I will try to demonstrate that literature can play a more significant role than one would expect in thinking and shaping the relationship between the material body, scientific-technological developments, and economic-political powers.

Moreover, Gonçalo M. Tavares’ novels seemed to point to the fact that the different lines of thought about contemporary biopolitics inevitably presented omissions or blind spots. Notwithstanding the great complexity of, for example, Michel Foucault’s notion of governmentality (1995), Giorgio Agamben’s vision of the *homo sacer* and the state of exception (1998), or Roberto Esposito’s immunological approach (2011), each perspective by itself seems unable to fully explain relatively new contemporary phenomena and/or entities that, in the words of Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, test our comprehension because “they persist and produce effects whose duration enormously exceeds the individual and collective scales of human life” (2017, position 691)⁸. Phenomena that challenge our perception of time and space like the unprecedented worldwide medicalization of societies, the unbridled shaping of the human body through cutting edge technologies, or the creation of policing states that determine global dynamics of power.

Dystopian artworks, on the contrary, are privileged spaces to examine these phenomena. Dystopian science fictions, in particular, often deal with hinge events or global catastrophes that have impacted (or might impact) profoundly human life, projecting readers into disenchanted worlds from where they can have a different perspective on their contemporaneity. That is to say, they enable us to better examine current phenomena of great magnitude – be it at a political, social, or economic level – by providing us imaginative extensions that scale them down to a more “human” and understandable dimension. Such scale down brings to the forefront the premises and contradictions of the biopolitical institutions and strategies that have shaped them. As we shall see further ahead, it also reveals that, if we want to better understand those institutions and strategies, it is best to consider the different lines of thoughts on

⁸ What Timothy Morton has called “hyperobjects”. See: Morton, 2013.

contemporary biopolitics as interconnected perspectives on the same subject, rather than isolated takes on different problems.

ZOOMING IN: THE WORLDS OF TAVARES, COLLINS, MACLEOD, AND VERSO

The eleven works I have chosen as the corpus of this thesis corroborate this idea. They might come across as an “odd pairing”, seeing that they are very different from one another and belong to authors that, apart from writing dystopian fictions, do not seem to share many connections. However, as an overview of these works can already indicate, their unique literary aesthetics and diverse cultural/historical backgrounds enable us to zoom in from different angles on the ways political, economic, and military powers use science and technology to increasingly control all areas of human life:

Gonçalo M. Tavares⁹ takes us to trough an uncanny, dark journey in *A Man: Klaus Klump* (2014), *Joseph Walser's Machine* (2012) and *Jerusalem* (2009)¹⁰. With his “clinical” style of writing – which, ironically, renders any univocal interpretation almost impossible¹¹ –, he transports us to a shared universe that revolves around disciplinary institutions with an almost intangible logic¹², and machine-like or crazy characters that could be considered Kafkaesque, seeing that they present an array of odd behaviors. His omission of most temporal and spatial references further contributes to the formation of the ominous atmosphere that pervades the novels. The only references he provides come in the form of photos of Nazi concentration camps and of a book entitled “Europa 02”,

⁹ Gonçalo M. Tavares is an Angolan born writer whose literary production spans over a wide range of genres, going from the novel in the “The Kingdom” or the epic in *Uma Viagem à Índia* (2010), passing through works of an essayistic or experimental nature, such as “Breves notas sobre ciência” (2006) and *Atlas do Corpo e da Imaginação: teorias, fragmentos e imagens* (2013).

¹⁰ The specific themes regarding the relationship between emotion and reason, together with the dichotomy religion/rationality that characterizes the final entry of the tetralogy, *Learning to Pray in the Age of Technique: Lenz Buchmann's Position in the World* (2011), did not fully fit the lines of thought developed in the three parts. For this reason, I have purposely left this novel out of the corpus of the thesis.

¹¹ This overtly direct and logical style of writing, alongside Tavares’ reflexive/philosophical vision regarding art, the body, science, and other subjects, can also be found in “O Bairro”, which includes several short stories such as “O senhor Calvino” (2005), “O senhor Brecht” (2004), and “O senhor Valéry” (2002).

¹² Such as the factory, the hospital, and the prison.

which contains descriptions of the medical experiments carried out in the camps. Seeing that both references relate to a European post-WWII reality, they bring to the present Europe's problematic political and medical past.



Suzanne Collins¹³, for her part, transports us to Panem, a post-apocalyptic country in a far future that was formed in the aftermath of the climatic catastrophe that destroyed the U.S. She guides us throughout its geography of inequalities in *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010), confronting us with a space where representations of extreme violence intermingle with others of great esthetical beauty, images of murder become indistinguishable from reality TV shows, and opulent bodies live alongside wretched ones. As a corollary of the logic that governs this country, she likewise introduces the novelty of a televised murderous game show that is watched all over the country. Although it noticeably prefigures a “worst-case scenario”, this game nevertheless highlights the perverse use that current political-economic powers often make of mass media to control the population. At the same time, it potentiates a specific reflection about the U.S. society and its mediatic context during the so-called “War on Terror”¹⁴.



¹³ Suzanne Collins is an American writer of science fiction. Her works are usually directed to a young adult audience, exploring social or mediatic challenges that teenagers must face in the contemporary, and while she became best known for her trilogy *The Hunger Games*, she has also written other significant works in this genre, such as *The Underland Chronicles* (2003-2007), inspired in *Alice in Wonderland*, and the rhyming picture book *When Charlie McButton Lost Power* (2005), illustrated by Mike Lester. She has recently returned to the fictional universe of *The Hunger Games* with the publication of the 2020 novel *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*.

¹⁴ In an interview published in the book *Space and Place in The Hunger Games. New Readings of the Novels*, Collins states that the idea for the books came to her late one night while watching television. She was alternating between channels covering the United States' war in Iraq and those showing reality television, and, at one point, the two seemingly disparate genres – news and reality television – converged in her mind until she could not tell them apart. She noticed that, despite their differences, these two genres are commonly characterized by the investigative, and sometimes judgmental, gazes of the camera and the audience. See: Dominus, 2011.

In the novels *The Execution Channel* (2007) and *Intrusion* (2013), Ken MacLeod¹⁵ touches upon several subjects, problems, and themes akin to those of the novels of Tavares and Collins. However, the Scottish writer resorts to distinct literary strategies: like in some of his other novels¹⁶, he places the reader in near futures, in worlds with well-defined spatial references that are anchored to real places and contexts¹⁷ but that still present significant differences from the historical contemporary time. In the case of *The Execution Channel*, he creates an alternative history narrative that refers readers to the atmosphere of fear created in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, underscoring the effects that the violent images spread by communication media have had on western societies, particularly the Scottish one. In *Intrusion*, by contrast, he introduces several medical and technological novelties¹⁸ that have a profound impact on the lives of the characters inhabiting his vision of a future London. He builds a world equally dominated by fear, but he changes the root of that fear, making the unrestrained control of new medical technologies by political-economic powers the fulcrum of the novel. In both cases, MacLeod directs the eye of the reader to the political, social, and economic effects that the pivotal event of 9/11 has had (or may still have in the future) at a global level, putting a special emphasis on how they have manifested themselves in British societies/contexts¹⁹.

¹⁵ Ken MacLeod is a Scottish science fiction writer. Alongside Iain M. Banks, Charles Stross, and Richard Morgan, he is part of a group of British science fiction authors who has specialized in Hard Science Fiction and space opera. His novels often explore socialist, communist, and anarchist political ideas, alongside technical themes as singularities, genetic engineering, and post-human cyborg-resurrection. His general outlook, which could be described as techno-utopian social, is particularly evident in the novels included in this thesis.

¹⁶ *The Midnight Sessions* (2008) or *The Highway Men* (2006) would be good examples.

¹⁷ Leuchars (Scotland) in the *The Execution Channel* and London in the case of *Intrusion*.

¹⁸ What Darko Suvin has called the “novum” (1979, 68).

¹⁹ In an interview that I had the opportunity to conduct with Ken MacLeod, he emphasizes the strong influence that the British context, particularly the Scottish background in which he grew up in, have in his worldbuilding: “Almost all the places referred to in my novels that are set on Earth are real places where I have been, whether that is New Zealand or London or Scotland and some of the parts of Scotland described are ones I am very familiar with. I take this to quite ridiculous lengths like there is a house in *Intrusion*, which is the actual house where I grew up in when I was a child. In my novella *The Human Front* (2001), the character also starts in that same village and it is a kind of inversion of my own past, my father was a minister, not a doctor, and so on. Obviously the [industrial town of] Greenock he goes to when he is 10 is kind of like the Greenock I went to when I was 10, but it is a somewhat different history, but the feeling of noise, of strong air pollution, the shock of finding people who are not physically healthy was something that was very real to me, because when I was growing up on the island [of Lewis], lots of people were not exactly poor, but they were not necessarily well-off so we had large families and children who were always wearing ill-fitting clothes that were passed down from older siblings, but everyone was well-fed. Even as late as 1965 in as a rich a country as Britain you could come to an industrial town and find older generations of people who had had rickets in childhood” (*Interview with Ken MacLeod*, 276).

Not unlike MacLeod, Francesco Verso²⁰ also projects us into a near future in his three works. He places us before representations of technological and scientific novelties that seem to be beneficial to the human body, and improve life in society in general, but turn out to have grave consequences at the hands of economic and political powers. In the novella “Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death!” (2015), this translates into the creation of a reality show that gives people the opportunity to die on live television. In *The Walkers* (n.d. [2018]), on the other hand, Verso builds a fictional version of a future Rome dominated by a corporatist spirit and ultra-sanitized rules, where nanotechnologies prove to have a profound impact on a society afflicted by a socio-economic crisis. In *Nexhuman* (2018), he takes us instead to a fictional megacity that, apart from its futuristic aspects, could be mistaken for many modern megacities. In this asphalt jungle of tomorrow, the extensive development of Prosthetics – allied to an implacable consumeristic hunger – has given rise to wealthy neighborhoods, filled with quasi-immortal “sleeves”²¹, and slums teeming with disposable bodies.

It becomes apparent that these novels refer to problems and challenges that affect the contemporary western world, from the economic difficulties that most countries had to face after the financial crisis of 2008, to the ever larger social-economic inequalities that characterize the modern, uber-technological city. But it also becomes clear that they do not refer to them in all their extension, i.e., to their impact at an international level. They rather evoke them by “trickle them down” to problems and challenges of an (imagined) Italian context and society²².

²⁰ Francesco Verso is an Italian science fiction writer and translator. He has co-founded the publishing house Future Fiction, which not only introduces the works of new science fiction writers but also publishes translations of authors from other sci-fi contexts that are far from the western context, such as the case of Chinese writers. Most of his works, such as *IMate* (2016), *Two Worlds* (2014), *BloodBusters* (2020) or *e-doll* (2009), portray near-future worlds where the exponential technological development and an unrestrained corporatist/consumeristic logic have impacted deeply the human body, changing the nature of personal relationships and the fabric of society itself.

²¹ Synthetic bodies to which a human conscience has been uploaded.

²² Regarding the introduction of the Italian context in his literary creations, in an informal conversation I had the chance to have with Francesco Verso, he stated that in the first novels he purposely tried to “detach” himself from the Italian reality, as he was afraid to tackle his culture. Still, he also added that, as he became more comfortable with his writing and worldbuilding, his Italian background inevitably started to be reflected in his works: “I cannot avoid seeing the world from the point of view in which I was born and raised, even if, fortunately, the Italian culture in general, my education, and the sources to which I can refer to, do not pertain exclusively to Italy” (*Interview with Francesco Verso*, 285).

With their wide array of literary strategies and devices that textually transform the world or displace readers in time, science fiction works – and dystopias in particular – are therefore irreplaceable allies in this arduous task of examining wide scale events and dynamics of power that involve entire populations. While it is true that a great number of sci-fi works belongs to popular literature – or what could be called a literature of consumption²³ –, the reach of sci-fi texts is also, for that exact reason, much wider than the “serious”, highbrow literature, or than more abstract/conceptual critical theories that are often out of step with reality.

Maybe more importantly, sci-fi is a 20th century popular literature, and, as such, is more attuned with pivotal events and undercurrents that are unfolding in this present time. Events in which we are inescapably involved, and from which we cannot gain the critical distance needed for an accurate reflection. For these reasons, I deemed critical for my critical examination of the novels to contemplate a strong historical dimension. From my perspective, they should not be considered as just a metafictional enterprise²⁴, but as artworks that emerge from and refer to several western historical contexts – at a political, cultural, and economic level.

Accordingly, I take into consideration different literary studies which focus on exploring the defining traits of each author’s works, putting them in relation with past literary traditions or present literary movements, but also locating them within their specific national/cultural contexts. Studies such as Pedro Quintino de Sousa’s *O Reino Desencantado: Literatura e Filosofia nos romances de Gonçalo M. Tavares* (2010), and “O Romance-reflexão segundo Gonçalo M. Tavares”, by Luís Mourão (2012), which probe deeper into the reflection that we have in “The Kingdom” about post-WWII Europe, while analyzing the strong philosophical register that shapes the novels in view of their European (Portuguese) literary backdrop. Other studies as Kimberly Reynold’s *Radical Children’s Literature* (2007), or Deirdre Garriott, Whitney Jones, and Julie Tyler’s *Space and Place in the Hunger Games* (2014), which examine the connections between Collin’s worldbuilding and the U.S. mediatic context in the aftermath of the 9/11

²³ And, lest we forget, its origins in the United States are strongly connected with genres usually associated with a literature of evasion, such as the detective novel or the western.

²⁴ In other words, within a framework in which most postmodern fiction is conceptualized “as fiction about the process of fiction making itself” (Breu 2014, 25).

attacks, but also highlight the trilogy's impact as a work of post-apocalyptic fiction targeted to a young adult audience. Or, for instance, Jana Vizmuller-Zocco's "(Un)Human Relations: Transhumanism in Francesco Verso's *Nexhuman*" (2016), which not only underlines the way Verso's characters and settings refer us to the deep inequalities of the contemporary, globalized world, but likewise brings to the forefront the connections of Verso's work to the Cyberpunk subgenre.

Nevertheless, I propose here a different reading of the above novels informed by distinct disciplinary areas such as Critical Theory and Political Philosophy. This reading, I argue, allows us to see that their differences in geographical, cultural, and linguistic/literary contexts, do not pull them apart, they rather bring them together. One of my objectives in this thesis is, precisely, to show that *not despite* but *because of* their distinctive starting points, these American and European novels offer diverse or complementary fictional depictions on shared subjects/problems related to the political control of the human body. *Mutatis mutandis*, they help us reflect about the collective western understanding of large-scale phenomena and problems that have arisen on both sides of the Atlantic in the aftermath of, for example, the 9/11 attacks²⁵ or the 2008 economic crisis, but also, concomitantly, about the relationship between dystopian works and biopolitics.

ZOOMING OUT: THE THESIS' STRUCTURE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

This ensemble of works is certainly far from exhaustive. Many other books address problems or themes related to modern-day biopolitics that could also be included here,

²⁵ Professor Susana Araújo probes deeper into this collective western understanding in *Transatlantic Fictions of 9/11 and the War on Terror: Images of Insecurity, Narratives of Captivity*. She explores the fictional responses of contemporary writers from Europe as well as the U.S. to the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the ensuing "War on Terror", thus inviting us to (re)consider the ways in which contemporary fiction has wrestled with anxieties about national and international security in the 21st century. See: Araújo, 2015.

bringing both converging and diverging perspectives to the discussion²⁶. But I argue that the specific works I have selected provide a small but in-depth representation of dystopias that touch upon events, strategies, and institutions crucial for a broad understanding and problematization of biopolitics in western contemporaneity, reverberating intensely with the vision of authors as Foucault, Deleuze, Esposito, Hardt and Negri. Another objective of my comparative approach of their narrative strategies and literary devices, which takes into consideration their respective cultural/historical backgrounds, is to show that the articulation, systemization, and comparative reading of these novels can grant us access to a “bigger picture”. In other words, to demonstrate in what way a comparative study of literary fiction can help us achieve a wider, richer perspective on a politics that has been increasingly controlling every sphere of life in western societies in the last decades.

Admittedly, this objective is not entirely original. The volumes I have mentioned of Keith Booker and Arne De Boever, together with, for instance, *Insistence of the Material: Literature in the Age of Biopolitics* (2014), by Christopher Breu, or Michael Mack’s *How Literature Changes the Way We Think* (2012), aim to do something similar – in a way, they have paved the way for this thesis. Yet, I follow a different route to reach that objective. While these volumes assemble a series of individual essays that study literary works from an isolated perspective, I believe that “zooming out” on these works, putting them in relationship with each other and assessing their recurrent scientific and technological themes or problems²⁷, produces more fruitful results. By observing them *en bloc* and from a distance, it becomes clearer they illuminate each other reciprocally, bringing out both their similarities and their contrasts, thus allowing us to unveil details and layers of meaning which would have remained obscure had them been considered by themselves. We have a good example of this in the fact that the reflection about the *Shoah* in *Jerusalem* accentuates the importance of eugenic/medicalized discourses in *The Hunger Games*, which is usually overlooked in many analyses due to the prominent role that the media play²⁸ in structuring the novels’ society. We can also consider how the industrial society and machinic bodies of *Joseph Walser’s Machine* provide us a wider

²⁶ *The Windup Girl* (2009) and *Ship Breaker* (2010), by Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Living* (2012) and *The Icarus Gland* (2014), by Anna Starobinets, or the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003, 2009 and 2017), by Margaret Atwood, are just a few examples of works that deal with themes and problems like those of the novels examined in this thesis.

²⁷ As well as similar figures and dynamics of power that they might present in their fictional worlds.

²⁸ Particularly reality TV.

historical background, and, consequently, a different key to interpret the cutting-edge technologies that shape the hyper-consumeristic society of *Nexhuman*.

As with the fictional camera of *Powers of Ten*, it is this change of perspective that allows us to reach a broader vision on contemporary biopolitics. In effect, the articulation of my selected works during the research and writing process of this thesis underscored the existence of three interconnected mechanisms that are primarily²⁹ used by political-economic powers. Three different sets of institutional, physical, and knowledge structures that work concertedly to maintain or enhance the exercise of power within the socio-political body³⁰. Concomitantly, it also brought to the forefront the strong and problematic bonds between these mechanisms and the novels themselves, making me rethink the relationship between literature, the material body, and power. To provide order and coherency to my analyses of this heterogeneous group of novels, I considered suitable to divide the thesis into three large parts that revolve around the workings of these mechanisms: on part I the spotlight falls on *the mechanism of the spectacle*, while *the mechanism of immunology* constitutes the focus of part II and *the mechanism of exception* drives the analysis of part III.

I open the three parts with a brief introduction in which I discuss the effects of the mechanisms in current western societies and undertake a genealogical research to establish their origins and defining traits throughout time³¹. In this initial moment I also begin to look at their representations in past fictional works, and, more importantly, at the way they are depicted in the contemporary dystopian novels at hand. Consequently, in a second moment, I show how these novels' ability to refer us to both past and present

²⁹ There are also other mechanisms, and corresponding biopolitical lines of thought, that would provide a more comprehensive view of contemporary biopolitics, but due to the limited number of pages of this thesis, could not be included. Daniele Giglioli's examination of the process of infantilization and victimization of western societies in *Stato di Minorità* (2015), or Achille Mbembe's expansion of the concept of a "politics of death" in *Necropolitics* (2019), are just two examples of other mechanisms and lines of thought that should also be considered.

³⁰ When I say mechanism, I wish to convey the same meaning of the well-known Foucauldian *dispositif*. I have chosen to call them this way since I would like to underline the idea that they work concertedly, like a system of parts working together in a machine. Regarding the concept of dispositive, Foucault uses the term in the 1977 "The Confession of the Flesh" interview, where he answers the question, "What is the meaning or methodological function for you of this term, apparatus (dispositif)?" as follows: "What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements" (1980, 194).

³¹ Such genealogical research is done through the priceless support of seminal works by Foucault, Esposito, Agamben, among others, which extensively and systematically have explored the complex relationship established throughout history between the different forms of political power and the body.

forms of control points to a continuation and an active connection between past and present iterations of the mechanisms. Through the contrasting perspectives provided by Tavares, Verso, MacLeod, and Collins, I highlight how past forms of control are still at work in the present, either in a direct way, being applied now as they were decades ago³², or in a more complex manner, by being updated and adapted to contemporary contexts³³. Finally, I probe into the problematic relation established between the mechanisms, dystopias, and the reader. I examine the ways in which dystopian works – particularly from sci-fi – are often placed, even if unintentionally, at the service of political-economic forces, blocking the readers’ critical thinking and reinforcing dynamics of power. But I likewise assess the valuable role that they play in engaging readers, in conjunction with other works that tackle biopolitics’ underside. Which is to say, I consider how dystopias provide critical tools to help us reflect and/or take part in the continuous (re)negotiation of the relationship between the powers in force, scientific/technological knowledge, and the body.

Part I – Exploring Dystopian Representations of the Spectacle: in the pathway of the insights provided by authors such as Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, Vanni Codeluppi, or Gilles Lipovetsky³⁴, I examine how political and economic forces resort to powerful mediatic images – in association with an insatiable consumer culture – to build societies where relations between commodities have supplanted relations between people. Through “Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death!”, *The Hunger Games* and *The Execution Channel*, I try to articulate the apparent continuation of the logic behind spectacular displays of the dying or broken human body in the 18th-19th centuries, and current mediatic images of violence in western societies. Especially taking into consideration the pivotal event of the 9/11 attacks, I explore how the different representations we find in the novels of the body and of the different media, refer us to

³² As it is the case of contemporary places/events that reproduce a state of exception akin to that of the Nazi lagers.

³³ Or, conceivably, to future ones.

³⁴ The fact that I have grouped in the theoretical framework of this and the other parts authors from different disciplinary areas, resorting not only to theories from Philosophy and Literary Studies, but also from Sociology, Critical Theory, or Psychoanalysis, does not mean that I ignore their differences. I am aware that these areas have their specific approaches and methodologies, but they also offer, each in its own way, unique perspectives and reflections on shared subject regarding the human body, and human life in general. Given the limitations in the extension of a doctoral thesis, and considering that I tackle the rich and multifaceted politics that seeks to control life in contemporaneity, I have chosen not to concentrate on methodological differences. I rather sought to highlight each author’s – and each area – perspective, so that I could provide a better and broader picture of this politics of the *bios*.

the role that contemporary mass media play in helping political-economic forces to control the body.

The comparative analysis of these novels helps me expose more clearly how current neoliberal regimes use the entertaining power of TV to de-realize the world, numbing the audience's ability to think critically. At the same time, it allows me to explore the power that the spectacular images and language created in the novels may have disrupted the flow of the spectacle, which is to say, the power that fictional representations of spectacles may hold of "seizing" the logic of the spectacle, potentially turning it against itself.

Part II – When Politics and Medicine Coincide: following the intuitions of authors as Roberto Esposito, Giorgio Agamben, Arne De Boever or Donna Haraway, I elaborate on an immunological logic of control which draws on fear(s) not only to validate an ever more direct technoscientific intervention of the State on the body of its citizen, but also to promote a widespread self-control on their parts. To better understand the workings of this mechanism, I firstly go back in time, revisiting other historical iterations of immunology as a mechanism. Through *Jerusalem* and *The Hunger Games* I try to investigate how the implicit and explicit allusions to the *Shoah* and the Nazi eugenics present in these novels seem to inquire the continuation of past medical therapies and perspectives into contemporary western societies. In a second moment, *Intrusion* and *The Walkers* catapult me into the future (or rather, into different futures). Their representations of "healthy" and "diseased" bodies propose a reflection about the possible future consequences of the diffusion that we are currently witnessing of physical and psychological fears fashioned by politico-economic powers and different media – such as those, for example, related to terrorism, disease, financial crisis or extreme climate change.

The different perspectives offered by these novels allow me to tackle topical themes that are very different in nature, such as Eugenics, physical and financial precarity, or the development of medical novelties; themes that at first sight may seem conflicting, but upon a closer look prove to be different faces of the same immunological form of control. My comparative study of the novels aims precisely to illuminate the contradictions of a mechanism that purports to potentiate the biological and the social bodies, but that, under the influence of political-economic powers, ends up destroying them. But it also tries to show that science fiction can be a medicine of sorts that

counteracts the effects of this flawed immunology. Its power to create future imaginaries that depict healthy and diseased bodies against their technological/medical backdrop, can ultimately affect the readers' imagination and critical thought regarding their own bodies and their technological/medical contexts.

Part III – Representing War, Representing Peace: Jibing with the perspectives of Paul Virilio, Giorgio Agamben, Theodor Adorno, or Walter Benjamin, in this final part I probe deeper into the current rise that we are witnessing of what could be considered a permanent state of exception shaped by political-military powers, which is stripping more and more bodies around the world of any real social or political significance. In the search to better comprehend the problematic notion of “exception” that shapes this mechanism, *A Man: Klaus Klump* and *Joseph Walser's Machine* enable me to go back to an industrial background pre-WWII, helping me revisit an aestheticization of war and a perverse scientific rationality that filled the early 20th century western world with shocked and machinic bodies. Through *Mockingjay* and *Nexhuman* I am subsequently able to “travel into the future”, getting a better grasp on the way political-military powers have evolved in the last decades, i.e., how they have established a symbiotic relation with technology and ever more intricate states of exception.

Ultimately, the articulation of the novels seems to convey the idea that economic and political powers conjure the dream of ameliorating the human body so that they can make use of science and technology to determine whose lives are worth living and whose lives should be discarded. This “selection process”, in turn, leads to the creation of a state of exception that is becoming increasingly permanent, confounding times of peace and times of war, progressively generating steeper divisions inside contemporary countries or megacities and joining disposable and “healthy” bodies inside the neoliberal order. But the representations provided by these novels also draw attention to the importance of intimate, personal relationships, and the private sphere of life (the *oikos*). In doing so, I argue that they help us (re)imagine our bodies and relationships, paving the way for a coming (bio)politics that is not necessarily associated to the sovereign/neoliberal state, and to a form-of-life that hinders the creation of bare lives.

Through these three parts I hope to reach what I consider to be the crux of the relationship between literature and biopolitics. As the “wider picture” composed by the parts indicates, biopolitics is not a static form of power, it is rather a system that evolves

with the understanding of the human body, adopting new strategies and forming new structures in different historical times. One could say that it feeds upon the scientific, medical, and technological developments throughout history, becoming almost indistinguishable from them. This can help us better understand why ordinary, non-political, everyday life is, in many ways, far more regulated in current democratic societies than it was in previously totalitarian societies. If we think back, for instance, to the National Socialist or the Stalinist regimes, it is noticeable that there was a direct and often ruthless control exerted on the body in a quite blatant manner, with the State being a coercive force that possessed an absolute power over the lives of its citizens. In contemporary democratic societies, where political-economic powers have access to subtler forms of control via the media or scientific/technological apparatus³⁵, we find instead the individual “in charge” of his/her bodies and lives. As we shall see, this change of “strategy” not only perversely creates the illusion that there is almost no coercive force at work, as it also allows biopolitical powers to pervade every sphere of life, controlling the body’s every move even in the most banal, day-to-day situations.

The wide perspective suggested by the three parts equally indicates that theoretical works which seek to critically approach biopolitical strategies and structures, by themselves cannot predict or stop its development. It points to the unfortunate fact that the critical analyses of, for example, the Nazi regime, could not prevent the arrival of new, more ingenious forms of medical/political control, substituting the older, more direct ways of regulating or containing the body³⁶. I argue that it is here that literature’s ability to textually transform the world through fiction, comes into play. As the novels of Tavares, Collins, MacLeod, and Verso show, many dystopian works do not ignore or stray away from the biopolitical context from which they emerge. On the contrary, they confront us with representations which are inextricably connected to a particular historical context, and to specific structures of power. But they do it so in a “future tense”. In my perspective, here lies their unique value. Unlike most theoretical works, which

³⁵ As a result of possessing a broader understanding of the human body.

³⁶ There is even the suggestion that critical approaches are used to fuel the development of new strategies and structures of control, which would imply that biopolitical powers use critiques to learn from past mistakes. Using the words of one of MacLeod’s characters, “‘Bloody Foucault’s where they got the idea from!’” (2013, 124).

often focus on the present or the past³⁷, they put us a step ahead, projecting us into possible futures where the unsuspected darkest facets of those structures are revealed, and their potential destructive effects on human life become more visible.



Although I approach these eleven works through different angles, I would like to make clear that my analyses do not intend to be all encompassing; it would be impossible to tackle all and each one of the issues that they raise, not to mention the distinct layers of meaning that compose them. Still, the more I go back to these works, revisiting passages that were particularly important to guide my research, the more I am certain that I have left something out, and that this thesis could have taken a completely different route³⁸.

Throughout the years, I have collected my share of papers and drafts that have, in a way or another, made me cross ways with biopolitics and science fiction, but many of them will not be part of the analyses I present here. The final selection I made for the thesis was influenced by the fact that biopolitics and science fiction also crossed their ways with me. The direct interviews that the writers Ken MacLeod and Francesco Verso have granted me³⁹, together with the interviews by Suzanne Collins and Gonçalo M. Tavares that I had the opportunity to come across⁴⁰, were fundamental to confirm my intuitions and direct the line of arguing of the thesis. They helped me have a clearer image of science fiction as a literary genre that is often discarded by academic studies, but has a unique, albeit ambiguous, position with power. As MacLeod says, it is a type of fiction

³⁷ We can think, for instance, of Foucault's archaeological method, Agamben continuous reference to the legal/political framework of ancient Rome or Esposito's focus on the historical roots of immunology, as well as on the *Shoah*. Hardt and Negri's vision on *Empire* would be an exception, as both authors strive to, like sci-fi works, provide different visions of what could be a brighter future of biopolitics, the more democratic future of the "multitude".

³⁸ The problematization of the gendered body, or of the post-colonial subject, which are undeniably important to fully understand the relationship between structures of powers and the material body in our contemporary world post-9/11, are just two examples of perspectives and critical approaches that I have consciously left out of this thesis. I am also aware of the absence of 'Ecocriticism' perspectives, its investigation of the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment. These perspectives would undoubtedly have enriched the analyses and provided a more comprehensive reading of the novels, but, as every PhD student, I am bound by temporal limits and resources.

³⁹ The interviews are included, respectively, in the appendices 1 and 2 of the thesis. I quote excerpts using the bracketed reference (*Interview with ...*, x). I have also tried to interview the other two authors, but unfortunately was not able to reach them.

⁴⁰ The interviews that I am referring to are specifically "Suzanne Collins's War Stories for Kids", conducted by Susan Dominus and published in *The New York Times Magazine* (2011), and "O Romance ensina a cair", conducted by Pedro Mexia and published in *O Público* (2010).

that is often “really affirmative of the social order [...]. Sometimes even when it is being quite radical from one point-of-view, you can see it can be blind to other issues” (*Interview with Ken MacLeod*, 265-266), but that, at many other times, can really play a decisive role in social-political criticism.

This social-political criticism possesses a reach that few works from other genres manage to achieve, as it can touch a truly wide audience, regardless of age, social strata, or education level. Unlike what happens, for example, with authors of metafictional works, who are especially interested in self-consciously alluding to the artificiality or literariness of their works – making us reflect about fictional writing and its conventions –, many authors of sci-fi openly admit having a critical position on current economic, social, or political issues; their works, despite their fictional nature, are a way to reflect about those issues together with the readers. As Francesco Verso notes:

[...] science-fiction, being a phenomenon of subversion, of transformation of the individual and of society, also plays a role that is not so much of prediction, but of individuation, of analysis, of proposing possible solutions. Or at least of giving some warnings, letting out some “warning cries”, showing some scenarios that we don’t want to get to. (*Interview with Francesco Verso*, 275)

I strongly share this vision, but I contend it only partially reflects the far-reaching effects of dystopian and sci-fi works. As I demonstrate throughout this thesis, Tavares, MacLeod, Collins, and Verso’s novels ultimately engage us (through our imagination), encouraging us to go beyond a theoretical or reflectional level. We should not perceive their somber atmospheres and bleak worlds as mere expressions of a pessimistic outlook on science and technology, nor as windows into a disenchanting future that cannot be altered. Both informing and reflecting the works of Critical Theory, Political Philosophy, and other areas of study, dystopian fictions acquire new meanings and a subversive force that can disrupt the “normalized” relationship established between the readers and the economic-political powers that shape not only social relationships, but also their material bodies. Dystopian fictions become capable of creating sites where resistance occurs as a fictional experimentation that tries to get ahead and, potentially, help readers to be engaged in reflecting upon and taking responsibility for their futures, which is to say, the future of biopolitics.

TECHNICAL/STRUCTURAL ISSUES

- Regarding translations: despite the three different original languages in which the novels were originally written, I have chosen to use English as the “*lingua franca*”. This decision has to do with my belief that biopolitical themes are being discussed across the world and keeping the original texts in different languages could not only make the reading experience cumbersome and lengthy, as it could prevent the thesis of reaching a wider audience. I have used a published English translation whenever one was available, otherwise I have provided my own version, which was revised by native speaker to whom I give credits in the acknowledgments. Moreover, I have likewise chosen not to include the original quotes since this would imply the creation of many additional notes, distracting the reader from the main ideas of the thesis.
- I have used many Kindle versions of books, and in almost every case the pages of these books are numbered by “position”, not by page. This detail is not contemplated in the author-date system of the Chicago Manual of style, but since it was my only way to reference the quotes, I left the word “position” after the year of publication.
- Given the very different framework I use to approach each mechanism, I have opted to include a smaller theoretical introduction at the beginning of each respective part, rather than maintaining the more typical structure with an entire first part just dedicated to theory.
- Instead of making a more comprehensive introduction and contextualization of each novel before its examination, I give more details about the novels as their analyses unfold.

PART I – EXPLORING DYSTOPIAN REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SPECTACLE: THE
EXPOSED BODIES AND IRIDESCENT SCREENS OF “FERNANDO MORALES, THIS
IS YOUR DEATH!”, *THE HUNGER GAMES*, AND *THE EXECUTION CHANNEL*



Execution of Robert François Damiens, place de Grève. Paris, on March 28, 1757,

Unknown author

The reigning economic system is a vicious circle of isolation. Its technologies are based on isolation, and they contribute to that same isolation. From automobiles to television, the goods that the spectacular system chooses to produce also serve it as weapons for constantly reinforcing the conditions that engender "lonely crowds." With ever-increasing concreteness, the spectacle recreates its own presuppositions.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

INTRODUCTION: ON THE REPRESENTATION OF PUNISHMENT AND VIOLENCE

In this first part I would like to focus my attention on the mechanism of the spectacle, specifically how it helps biopolitical powers invest and administer biological life. Considering this challenging task, the disenchanted worlds of “Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death!”, *The Hunger Games* and *The Execution Channel* will allow us to explore how political and economic forces resort to powerful mediatic images⁴¹ – in association with an insatiable consumer culture – to build societies where relations between commodities have supplanted relations between people⁴², and where there is a widespread state of social alienation. But these same worlds will also (hopefully) let us probe into ways to resist the complex dynamics and strategies of the spectacle. They might enable us to regain a critical distancing from contemporary spectacular societies and help us (re)locate our bodies within its dynamics of power.

Before diving into the analyses of the novels, I would like first to go back in time and revisit some spectacular displays of the dying or broken human body in the 18th-19th centuries. I believe these displays played a biopolitical role like the role currently played by mediatic images of violence in western societies, and thus may shed a new light on the functioning of this apparently contemporary mechanism. As noted by authors like Foucault (1995) or Bauman (1995), with the displacement of cemeteries from the center of the cities to the more isolated peripheries, and the veiling of punishment and sentencing processes behind the walls of penal and judicial institutions, from the 19th century onwards the suffering body, and death itself, tended to be hidden from the public eye. Still, if we look attentively to some events transmitted in TV news or in newspapers in the last decades, or even recently, we will undoubtedly find evidence that suggest otherwise: the 9/11 attacks to the World Trade Center, with *CNN* and many other channels showing the images of people jumping from the towers, the bloody war scenarios in Syria, the aftermath of natural catastrophes, or the more “mundane” images of premeditated or “passional” homicides, are just a few examples. They are clearly very different examples

⁴¹ Specially those of a violent nature.

⁴² In other words, how they seem to create in the massified viewers of those societies a passive identification with the spectacle that replaces genuine activity. As Guy Debord wrote in the seminal *The Society of the Spectacle*: “The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (2005, 10).

in nature, and others could be chosen or added, but all of them seem to point to the notion that there is a tendency on the part of the different media to transform the victims and events into pieces of a show; to build a narrative that might be presented as a useful piece of information to an informed viewer, but covertly also serves the purpose of satisfying the (perverse) curiosity of the consumers of media content, safely delivering a shocking outside world to the comfort of their homes.

Let us now make a digression in time and look at an excerpt from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, in which he underlines the intriguing, almost theatrical, performance that occurred in some public executions during the 18th century:

There were even some cases of an almost theatrical reproduction of the crime in the execution of the guilty man. [...] Hence the insatiable curiosity that drove the spectators to the scaffold to witness the spectacle of sufferings truly endured; there one could decipher crime and innocence, the past and the future, the here below and the eternal. It was a moment of truth that all the spectators questioned: each word, each cry, the duration of the agony, the resisting body, the life that clung desperately to it, all this constituted a sign. There was the man who survived 'six hours on the wheel, and did not want the executioner, who consoled and heartened him no doubt as best as he could, to leave him for a moment'; [...] (1995, 46)

Throughout this century – characterized by a power of *sovereignty* –, public executions functioned as a public theater. They were a display of sovereign power, i.e., of the king, on the body of the condemned, linking violence to spectatorship but also helping to constitute citizens as subjects⁴³. On Foucault's account, the drama of execution, which in many cases included the reproduction of the scene of the actual crime, is also “a way of exacting retribution that is both personal and public, since the physico-political force of the sovereign is in a sense present in the law” (48). The display of violence during the tortures thus functioned as an emphatic affirmation of power and of its intrinsic superiority (49), designed to create fearful, obedient subjects. It is worth noting that many of the expressions that Foucault uses to describe the executions that took place during 18th century France, are eerily reminiscent of the expressions we could use to describe a

⁴³ According to Foucault: “The public execution has a juridico-political function. It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular. The public execution, however hasty and everyday, belongs to a whole series of great rituals in which power is eclipsed and restored (coronation, entry of the king into a conquered city, the submission of rebellious subjects) [...]. [T]here must be an emphatic affirmation of power and of its intrinsic superiority. And this superiority is not simply that of right, but that of the physical strength of the sovereign beating down upon the body” (1995, 48).

contemporary audience witnessing, via a communication media, a shocking event: on both the viewing of the tortured body of the convicted man and the suffering bodies on the screen, there is a perverse delight and an “insatiable curiosity” in seeing this theater of pain on the part of the spectator. As the term already points out (from the Latin “*spectare*”, “to gaze at” or “to observe”), there is a dimension of distance and passivity underlying this action, but, concomitantly, there is also a dimension of participation in the scenes that are represented. Even though we are dealing with two different forms of suffering bodies in their specific contexts, both the ceremony of execution, that seeks to recreate the scene of the crime, and the journalistic piece about a shocking event, work because they establish a narrative capable of mediating, through representation, the message that sovereign or the communication media want to convey, and the audience.

Furthermore, the excessive violence used by the executioners seems to serve an instructive function not so different from the one we find in the TV pieces showing catastrophic events. The public display of the aching body of the convicted reinstates the law, reminding the audience of the limitless power of the sovereign, and it does it so by attributing an ambiguous role to the people who were, at once, fearful subjects, authorizing witnesses, and lustful participants⁴⁴. If it is true that in the modern period (from 1800 on), with the transition from a society of sovereignty to a disciplinary society, ceremony “gradually gave way to bureaucratic procedure played out behind prison walls, in isolation from the community [and where] [f]eelings are absent, or at least suppressed, in bureaucratically administered executions” (Johnson 1990, 5), it is also indisputable that displays of violence in TV broadcasts or internet platforms seem to play as well an important political role in the creation of docile subjects. Referring to the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers as a pivotal mediatic event in the history of contemporary western cultures, Frank Furedi writes in *Culture of Fear*:

What the events of 11 September 2001 show is that our culture encourages us to fear the wrong things. It is not Frankenstein food, stem cell research, mobile phones or new technologies that threaten the world. These achievements of science and ingenuity represent the constructive side of humanity. What happened on 11 September represents the destructive side of human passions. In many ways this was an old-fashioned act of terror, executed with low-tech facilities by a small number of zealots driven by unrestrained hatred. However, our obsessions with

⁴⁴ Foucault claimed: “Not only must the people know, they must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made afraid, but also because they must be witnesses, the guarantors of the punishment, and because they must to a certain extent take part in it” (1995, 58).

so-called theoretical risks actually distracts society from dealing with those old-fashioned dangers that have always threatened our lives. (1997, xvii)

The sociologist draws attention to the fact that, although our personal experiences shape our imagination and our fears, nowadays most of our anxieties are often not based on personal experiences (vii). Compared with earlier historical periods, people living in western countries have far less contact with misery, disease, and death than before⁴⁵. And still, despite an unparalleled level of public and personal security, fear seems to have a progressively larger impact in our lives and in our bodies. Western societies are increasingly dominated by what he calls a “culture of fear”, and the defining attribute of this culture is the “belief that humanity is confronted by powerful destructive forces that threaten our everyday existence” (vii)⁴⁶.

With the crisis in the traditional institutions that western societies are experiencing, what to make of these similarities in the use of public displays of violence to disseminate fear ubiquitously and to integrate the audiences in a logic of a spectacle⁴⁷? How can the strategies of the societies of sovereignty, whose goal and functions were to tax production and to rule death (Deleuze 1992, 3), coexist with the disciplinary institutions and *dispositifs* that have replaced them, whose purpose is to organize production and administer life (3-4)? More puzzlingly, how can they somehow also be attuned with our highly mediatic and technological society, a society characterized by the

⁴⁵ This idea is further supported by works such as *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, and *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress*, by radical optimistic thinker Steven Pinker. See: Pinker, 2011 and 2018.

⁴⁶ It is no coincidence that we have seen emerge in recent years works such as *A Philosophy of Fear* or *Fear and Fantasy in a Global World*, research projects as CILM – City and (In)security in Literature and the Media, or even whole research centers, as the Centre for Security and Society of the University of Freiburg, which investigate from different disciplinary perspectives how and why fear has insinuated itself into every aspect of life. See: Svendsen, 2008; and Araújo *et aliae*, 2015. See also <http://cilm.letras.ulisboa.pt/index.php>; and <https://www.css.uni-freiburg.de/>.

⁴⁷ Almost 30 years ago, Deleuze already described quite articulately the ongoing process of transition that western societies were undergoing, creating a crisis in the traditional institutions: “We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all environments of enclosure – prison, hospital, factory, school, family. The administrations in charge never cease announcing supposedly necessary reforms [...] But everyone knows that these institutions are finished, whatever the length of their expiration periods. It is only of matter of administering their last rites and of keeping people employed until the installation of the new forces knocking at the door. These are the *societies of control*, which are in the process of replacing the disciplinary societies. [...] / This is no longer capitalism for production, but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed. Thus it is essentially dispersive, and the factory has given way to the corporation. The family, the school, the army, the factory are no longer the distinct analogical spaces that converge towards an owner – state or private power – but coded figures – deformable and transformable – of a single corporation that now has only stockholders [...]” (1992, 4 and 6).

logic of the corporation⁴⁸ where each of his subjects is always in a field of constant visibility? If the spectacle is one of the mechanisms that replaced, or at least has become juxtaposed to, the traditional institutions and correspondent discourses in the control of the body, I would argue that, like Deleuze, Hardt and Negri hypothesized, it is borrowing some of the old methods from the societies of sovereignty, returning them to the fore with, understandably, the necessary modifications (Deleuze 1992, 7; Hardt and Negri 2001, 321).

Still, considering that contemporary western societies are increasingly dominated by a “culture of fear” that continually warns us about an imminent catastrophe and *quasi* apocalyptic scenarios – whether it is global warming, terrorism, or an outbreak/disorder that threatens the fragile human life –, we can already sense that identifying and exploring the complex strategies of the spectacle is a quite difficult endeavor. But I would argue that science fiction works can be of precious help in this endeavor. Books such as *1984* (2008), by George Orwell, Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1999), or Anthony Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange* (2013) have shown us that dystopian worlds provide particularly apt spaces to probe into the more obscure, destructive facets of mass communication media. On the path of these works, which emerge and refer to past historical contexts, the works of Verso, Collins and MacLeod propose possible scenarios where contemporary readers can explore their fears and anxieties, establishing a more direct dialogue with the present time. As we shall see throughout this part, their narrative strategies⁴⁹ and literary devices⁵⁰ enable us to distance ourselves from current technological/mediatic realities, seeing more distinctly their underside in everyday life or the dangerous paths they may take us in the future.

In chapter 1 we will zoom in the aging body of the protagonist of “Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death!”; this will allow us to explore how television and other modern mass media transform reality through their images, changing the nature of social relations and giving (or taking) meaning to human life itself. In chapter 2 the ultra-mediatic society of *The Hunger Games* will take us to a distant future, letting us explore more extensively the role that contemporary mass media play in helping political-

⁴⁸ Deleuze refers to the way corporative logic works in the following terms: “[...] the corporation constantly presents the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, and excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within” (1992, 7).

⁴⁹ Like what Darko Suvin, author of the seminal *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, has called “cognitive estrangement” (1979, 7-8).

⁵⁰ Such as, for instance, the “novum” (1979, 68).

economic forces to control the body. By examining the influence that the Capitol's TV has on the citizens of Panem, we will hopefully have a wider picture on how current neoliberal regimes⁵¹ use the entertaining power of TV to de-realize the world, numbing the audience's ability to think critically and creating void human relations. *The Execution Channel* will bring us back to the present in the last chapter, albeit not exactly the one we know. The novel presents historical references from the contemporary world, but not only does it change the outcome of the 2001 presidential election in the U.S., as it also introduces another perspective on the "War on Terror". In effect, it "drops" us in the middle of a panic atmosphere generated by mainstream media⁵², drawing our attention to the significance of fear in mediatic discourses. It highlights its power as a tool to manipulate the perception of the world and, more significantly, that this manipulated perception is not a mere response of the individual mind, but rather the flareup of anxieties within the collective imagination of society.

Through these sci-fi novels we can achieve a vantage point to understand and unravel the strategies of the spectacle in contemporary societies. But they may take us even further, letting us glimpse conceivable ways to resist it. Although they contain representations of violent spectacles, these novels do not simply aim at providing a form of escapism or a distraction that cancels any form of critical thought. To put it differently, they might belong to a popular genre that is highly marketable and is often associated with the notion of entertainment, but they seem to contradict the process of objectification/commoditization, straying away from other works of what Adorno has called the massified "culture industry" (1997, 12).

Thus, I would contend that the fictional representations of spectacles that they propose "hijack"⁵³ the logic of the spectacle, turning it against itself. They provide spectacular images and a language to disrupt the flow of the spectacle, which may lead to a reordering of life, politics, and art (Ford 2005). In a way, they encourage us to follow up the project started by Debord, waking up – inside us and in others – the spectator who has been drugged by spectacular images.

⁵¹ And future neoliberal regimes as well.

⁵² And by a mysterious channel that broadcasts violent images 24 hours a day.

⁵³ What the Situationists called "*détournement*" (the French expression for "rerouting" or "hijacking"), a technique developed in the 1950's by the Letterist International and later adapted by the Situationist International. Broadly speaking, *détournement* could be defined as "turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself" (Hold 2010, 252).

CHAPTER 1 – SHOWCASING LIFE (AND DEATH): THE UNUSUAL STORY OF
FERNANDO MORALES

DISPLAYING THE BODY IN A STORE WINDOW: ON THE EFFECTS OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES
AND NEW MEDIA

I would like to start by examining a particular spectator who has been drugged by spectacular images: the title character of “Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death!”. The close-up of his body will allow us to introduce some important concepts and, consequently, expand them to the societies of *The Hunger Games* and *The Execution Channel*. Looking at the opening words of Verso’s short story, we can readily establish a strong connection between Morales and the screens that surround him:

On the evening of 20th October, while he was surfing the net, Fernando Morales discovered how he was going to die. He had been browsing through websites promoting funerary services - some of them even promised the virtual presence of VIPs - when he came across an ad that suited him down to the ground.

THIS IS YOUR DEATH:

DIE ON LIVE TELEVISION, IT’S NEVER TOO LATE TO BE FAMOUS

It was the promo for a popular show, which the age group Fernando had now belonged to for years preferred over almost every other show. On several discussion forums he read that the participants died peacefully, almost with a smile on their lips, so he saved the address in his favourites. (position 32)

Living a trivial and lonely life after the death of his wife, when pondering about the possibilities regarding his own death and funeral, Fernando Morales decides to resort to a popular TV show to transmit his death on live television, hoping to have his 5 minutes of fame. Although fictional shows like *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), created by Alan Ball, or reality series like *Family Plots* (2004-) have already introduced and made familiar the emergence of Funeral Homes that provide tailor made experiences⁵⁴ that conceal (at least partially) the presence of death from the families of the deceased, Francesco Verso seems to shed a different light on the relationship between the concepts of “death” and “spectacle”. The world of Fernando Morales, along with his perspective on life, help us reprise or further explore, this time from a biopolitical perspective, several questions

⁵⁴ Such as personalized coffins or specific thematic scenarios and performances (with music included) for the funeral. A good, albeit extreme, fictional example is the episode of *Six Feet Under* entitled “An Open Book” (2001), in which a porn star has a porn-based theme funeral, surrounded by her friends and co-workers. See: Bates, 2001.

already posed by authors as Zygmunt Bauman (1995), Gilles Lipovetsky (2011) or Susan Sontag (2003): Why would someone expose such a painful and private moment such as death to an audience? To what lengths are people ready to go to become famous? Why do people seem to take pleasure from observing the pain of others? Why would anyone like to watch such a grim reminder of their own mortality?

Let us start to explore these questions by taking a closer look at “Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death!”. As far as the world created in this short story is concerned, there are no spatial references, and there is neither an explicit temporal location, but the use of a “palmtop”⁵⁵ (position 56), or even the existence of the “This Is Your Death” live TV show itself, point to the fact that the characters move around in a not-so-distant future, given that we are not very far away from these technical and mediatic realities. Although it is debatable if this could be considered a science fiction story *tout court*, perhaps the umbrella term of speculative fiction could also be applied here⁵⁶, the technological and mediatic novelties introduced by Verso (the novum)⁵⁷ do create a cognitive estrangement, drawing our attention to similar scenarios and problems that we face in our society and, afterwards, enabling us to reflect about them. Yet, if we are to understand Fernando Morales decision of dying on a live TV show, there are other aspects of this world that are particularly relevant: the main character is described as a somewhat fragile and apathetic old man; a loner that pushed away the members of his family, and a widower

⁵⁵ Which is to say, a computer that fits in the palm of your hand. This device will be recurrent in other works by Verso.

⁵⁶ According to the *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, “[t]he term ‘speculative fiction’ has three historically located meanings: a subgenre of science fiction that deals with human rather than technological problems, a genre distinct from and opposite to science fiction in its exclusive focus on possible futures, and a super category for all genres that deliberately depart from imitating ‘consensus reality’ of everyday experience. In this latter sense, speculative fiction includes fantasy, science fiction, and horror, but also their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres like the gothic, dystopia, weird fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction, ghost stories, superhero tales, alternate history, steampunk, slipstream, magic realism, fractured fairy tales, and more. Rather than seeking a rigorous definition, a better approach is to theorize ‘speculative fiction’ as a term whose semantic register has continued to expand”. *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, s.v. “Speculative Fiction”, by Marek Oziewicz, last modified March 29, 2017, <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-78>.

⁵⁷ In Suvin’s words: “A novum or cognitive innovation is a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author’s and implied reader’s norm of reality. [...] though valid SF has deep affinities with poetry and innovative realistic fiction, its novelty is ‘totalizing’ in the sense that it entails a change of the whole universe of the tale, or at least of crucially important aspects thereof [...]. As a consequence, the essential tension of SF is one between readers, representing a certain number of types of people of our time, and the encompassing and at least equipollent Unknown or Other introduced by the novum. This tension in turn estranges the empirical norm of the implied reader. [...] Quantitatively, the postulated innovation can be of quite different degrees of magnitude, running from the minimum of one discrete new ‘invention’ (gadget, technique, phenomenon, relationship), to the maximum of a setting (spatiotemporal locus), agent (main character or characters), and/or relations basically new and unknown in the author’s environment” (1979, 68).

with no children⁵⁸. Furthermore, he is portrayed as someone who, due to a frail and insecure character, prefers using technologies and new media, specifically, social networks, to establish social relationships:

Fernando's social life was largely spent on social networks, and even there discrimination was always lying in wait, pouncing just as soon as his age became clear. He could have lied, pretended he was a distinguished forty something and only post old photos of himself, or he could avoid posting any at all, but they were futile precautions: he was always found out when a dialogue started, and then dropped or ignored.

Fernando got bored on his own, but with other people it was even worse. He found a certain degree of relief sitting at his computer at the start of communication with someone he had just met on the network, when personal exposure was minimal, companionship unstable and fragmented, and he could maintain an illusion of hope. (position 97)

The first thing that I would like to point out from this excerpt is the sense of fragility and exposure that Morales feels about himself; he knows that even in the virtual environment created by social media, his old-aged, weakened body is subjected to discrimination, but at least the virtual nature of the interactions and relationships that he established online allowed a minimum exposure and, possibly more importantly, carried a certain superficiality and fragmentation that provided the illusion of establishing a meaningful relationship. What is paradoxical here, and becomes even more apparent as the plot develops, is that the loneliness that the main character feels in real life, as well as the discrimination he seeks to avoid by using the social networks, is originated and accentuated by the social networks themselves. The virtual mediatic spaces that allow the dematerialization of the body, conversely also put its physical traits on the spotlight, i.e.,

⁵⁸ The following description is quite elucidative. "One by one, the members of his family had either been pushed away or ignored. Arguments, misunderstandings, and tantrums had contributed to sweeping away most of his family relationships. The deaths of others had completed the job. Fernando belonged to the category of men who had adapted to old age, who had given up fighting the weakness of their bodies and never complained about the disappearance of certain pleasures. In other words, men who had made a lifestyle out of resignation, well aware of the fact that the world would continue to move on without them. When he started talking again his voice was more subdued. "I'm a widower with no children. Ada and I tried, but it never worked out. She had a problem with her tubes ... whatever, even IVF wasn't possible" (position 77).

create a continuous need of attention to one's own body as it is constantly exposed to the eyes of others⁵⁹.

The development of new technologies and new social networks, especially in the last twenty years, has undoubtedly brought a new level of comfort – or “relief”, a term used by the story's narrator – to people worldwide: not only did it create new ways of communication and expression, as programs and apps allow a high level of personalization, but it also (re)shaped social relationships, given that devices such as PCs, mobile phones or tablets allow its users to be constantly connected to potentially everyone and everywhere in the world. Still, if it is true that there are many positive aspects to this development, such as making worldwide communication easier, or providing more accessible and democratic platforms to express opinion and promote discussions on important matters, the destabilization, and, in some cases, complete effacement, of the limits *between the public and the private spheres*, has rendered the body more exposed to the world. Being continuously exposed, and without a private space to which safely withdraw, it is no wonder that Fernando Morales feels vulnerable. Nowhere in the short story is this effacement between public and private spheres more manifest than in the interview/inquiry to prepare the show “This Is Your Death”:

“So, Mr Morales, how would you like to die?” The directness of the question made him sit back in his chair. “I hadn't really thought about it ...” “In that case, may I make some suggestions?” It was a rhetorical question, used to introduce a series of elements that would make up the plot of his programme. Fernando was enveloped by heat, and not just because of his feet. [...] /

Lucio Fugante, who Fernando nicknamed “Mr Stylus”, continued chatting, running his fingers over the tablet's screen. “Has anybody threatened you recently? Any arguments with neighbours that could lead to revenge or retaliation?” [...] /

“I see, we can count the administrator out. Let's move on... Have you got any famous friends? Anyone who's already been on TV? Someone who might be willing to sponsor or talk about you?” [...] /

The funerary agent didn't give up, in fact every answer from Fernando seemed to whet his interest even more. There was something slightly bitter and unpredictable

⁵⁹ As the Italian sociologist Vanni Codeluppi would put it: “What happens is paradoxical, because today the human body is no longer that indispensable working tool that it was in the past, and so it would not need to be so much cared for. On the contrary, the more useless it has become at a practical level, the more it has been transformed into an object of a fetishization process, revered by its outside aspect rather than its ability to carry out functions. It is probable that this also depends on that growing process of dematerialization of the body determined by a social life conducted more and more inside telematics and communicative networks. A process that reactively develops the need for physicality, the need to feel one's own body and exhibit it to others” (2007, 31; my translation).

about the life of Fernando Morales. “Mr Morales, is there a place you really dislike? Somewhere that scares you for some reason? [...] / “Now Mr Morales, I have to ask you if you have ever had any rare diseases? Have you ever undergone any surgical procedures, or do you suffer from any kind of disability?” Fernando thought hard. He was fast absorbing the best strategy to adopt with these people: during normal conversations it was important to show people you were sharp and brilliant, and know when it was best to keep quiet and listen with rapt attention and empathy. On TV, things were different and you couldn’t risk appearing to be boring or dull. [...]. (positions 56-183)

As we can read in the excerpts from the interview, in order to put together a video contribution for the “Death Notice”⁶⁰, the two funerary consultants, Lucio Fugante and Patty, are only interested in acquiring information regarding the private life of Fernando Morales. One could say that, from the questions they ask, the more secretive, shameful or painful the information, the better: from small feuds with neighbors or legal issues, to disease related matters and even personal fears, Mr. Stylus and his assistant seek all the elements they can find to weave an interesting life story, a narrative that would function as a teaser in order to grab the audience’s attention, convince it that the death of Fernando Morales is something worth watching on a live TV show. Using the words of Vanni Codeluppi, Fernando Morales has been subjected to a process of being placed in a store window (*vetrinizzazione*), whereby his body is displayed like a good to be looked at by the public⁶¹. Heirs of the logic of the *vetrina* that came into existence with the development of the store windows in 18th century Europe (2007, 34), and of the “art of the gaze” born out of the arcades of the 19th century⁶² that Walter Benjamin would so luminously analyze in *The Arcades Project* (2002), the ubiquitous digital screens and television shows of Fernando Morales’ society – and of western contemporary societies – are indissociable from a voyeuristic passion.

Furthermore, the network devices to which he, like most of us, is constantly connected, carry a communicative logic that demands full transparency. Living in a mediatic society in which “all ‘having’ must now derive its immediate prestige and its

⁶⁰ A sort of a “teaser” which would be broadcasted the week before the actual program.

⁶¹ Apropos of the process of *vetrinizzazione*: “To ‘place oneself in a store window’ does not equate to merely show oneself, which still holds the possibility to withhold something. It is an act that implies an ideology of absolute transparency, in other words, the obligation to be available and expose everything in the store window. It is no longer possible to leave feelings, emotions or desires hidden in the shadow [...] Being completely exposed also entails the need to show that which is more private. It is no wonder, then, as Brian McNair has stated, that our society is increasingly characterized by a striptease culture, i.e., ‘a culture in which public nudity, voyeurism, and the viewing of sexual acts are allowed, indeed encouraged like never before’” (17-18; my translation).

⁶² That later would be changed by the advent of the shopping mall.

ultimate purpose from appearance” (Debord 2005, 13), it is no wonder that Fernando Morales sees himself as a failure. Looking to his reflection through the “eyes” of this society, a reflection made ever so intense during the interview with the funeral consultants, he decides to (re)create himself, providing a character to Mr. Stylus with a life story interesting enough, even if a fictitious one, to attract the curiosity of an audience to see his death live on TV. Guy Debord’s seminal work of critical theory, written more than 50 years ago, is critical in order to help us understand the protagonist’s desire of fame:

Stars — spectacular representations of living human beings — project this general banality into images of permitted roles. As specialists of *apparent life*, stars serve as superficial objects that people can identify with in order to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations that they actually live. The function of these celebrities is to act out various lifestyles or sociopolitical viewpoints in a *full, totally free manner*. They embody the inaccessible results of social *labor* by dramatizing the by-products of that labor which are magically projected above it as its ultimate goals: *power* and *vacations* — the decision making and consumption that are at the beginning and the end of a process that is never questioned. (25; emphasis in original)

As we shall see, his decision has substantial consequences to the ending of the story, helping us to better understand the logic behind the mechanism of the spectacle in contemporary western societies.

BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN REALITY AND TV: FERNANDO MORALES’ LAST SHOT AT FAME, OR HOW HE TRIED TO CHEAT DEATH

However, there is another important motivation behind Morales’ actions that should be considered here:

“I [Fernando Morales] saw Ada die by my side. In all those years it was the first time she didn’t answer me. I called to her for hours, quietly at first, and then more loudly. We had lived together for so long I hadn’t the heart to leave her, until her body became a corpse. The elegance of her face, still intact until her last evening, was already a putrefied form after a few days. When she began to smell,

she began to scare me. It was only then that I could convince myself that that was no longer my Ada. When the ambulance men came, they understood, they felt sorry for me. My neighbours didn't. They have never stopped looking at me strangely, giving me dark looks. That's why I don't want to die alone..." [...] During the last part of Fernando's existence, the days had followed each other in mechanical repetition, a copy of a copy of a copy...taking part in "This Is Your Death" had marked a change in direction, a break with the past. Fernando found a small measure of consolation in this. It was almost a source of joy, though perhaps the term was a little over the top. (Verso 2015, positions 269 and 290)

We can find this excerpt right after the moment when, during the filming of "This Is Your Death", the assistant Patty informs Mr. Stylus that she did a background check and all the information that Fernando Morales had provided was false. It functions as a *peripeteia* in the short story, where we learn that, unlike what the protagonist had stated, he was not friends with the famous Flavio Cocolato; that his wrist monitor was not connected to the police station but, rather, to a doctor in a medical clinic that monitored Morales' frail health condition and depression; finally, that he did not rent a room alone at the Palace Motel to morbidly hear lovers in the adjacent rooms.

More significantly, we also learn that Ada Morales's, his deceased wife, did not die of cancer, but of a natural death (position 246). Therefore, one possible reading of the excerpt is that, in his lonely old age, Fernando Morales wanted to give some meaning to a life that, looking retrospectively, seemed rather unmemorable and unsuccessful, where he lost his wife simply because of the inevitability of death, did not have any important achievements or leave any offspring. He wanted to transform his senseless existence after the death of his wife through the lens of a detective story and a medical drama⁶³ worth watching on prime-time TV.

This spectacular *mise-en-scène* of the old and dying body that takes place in the program "This is Your Death" can be interpreted as a paradigmatic example of how, in the contemporary world, the phenomenon of the *vetrinizzazione sociale* not only permeates a sphere of human existence that in previous times was deemed to be sacred, but is even able to put into TV shows and social media a subject that for a long time was a taboo, and, hence, kept away from the eyes of the general population. Zygmunt Bauman already noted that the search for material satisfactions and pleasures was one of the main strategies used in postmodern western cultures to "escape death". The goal of this

⁶³ Not by chance, two genres popularized by cinema and TV shows that are usually associated with escapism and, especially in the case of medical drama, an "obsession with the bodily welfare" (McLuhan 1964, 31).

strategy, which the Polish theorist calls the deconstruction of immortality, is to erase the irreversibility of death by discarding the idea that anything lasts forever and, so, the focus should be on the *hic et nunc*; living a risky life becomes a means of rehearsing death in daily life, thus rendering it less terrifying (Bauman 1995). Still, in a world that is marked by a generalized feeling of social, political, and cultural disenchantment, like our world seems to be, this strategy does not suffice anymore, and therefore another one is required:

Death is also placed in a store window (*vetrinizzata*) to try to eliminate its unbearable weight. A “showcased death” is, in fact, a death “stripped” of everything that disturbs people. It is as if the memory of the past did not possess any interest to human beings any longer, who externalize it in the microchips of their computers and forget about it, satisfied by the immediate gratification of consumption and the instant image communicated by the store window. (Codeluppi 2007, 88; my translation)

Bearing clear resemblances to other TV shows that actually exist (or existed), such as “Miracle Workers”⁶⁴ or the *Court TV Network*⁶⁵, I would argue that Verso’s fictional show “This Is Your Death” draws our attention to the fact that, once absorbed by the logic of the *vetrina*, death is transformed into an object. It becomes a good to be consumed or, rather, a show to be enjoyed. The electronic gaze of the TV transforms the faceless and perishable individual; in a way, it sanctifies him by creating “a sort of ‘aura’ which extends the presence of the body beyond its physical limits and which recalls the traditional halos of the saints in medieval and Renaissance paintings, but at the same time humanizes the subject” (91; my translation).

Furthermore, it is an inquiring gaze that, when associated with a portable camera of a live transmission, reveals even the most casual gestures. It fragments the body, capturing it in its most intimate details. It is the importance of the casual gestures of Fernando Morales that precisely helps us understand the relation between real life and show/performance in the logic of the mechanism of the spectacle:

Slowly, Fernando began to rub his feet back and forth against the floor. Then he stamped violently. Everyone in the room stared at him, appalled.

⁶⁴ Which allowed the viewers to follow closely the suffering of people with severe diseases that, thanks to the program, can undergo experimental treatments.

⁶⁵ That transmitted programs in which we could witness the detailed confessions of rapist and murders to the police.

“It’s not what you think, I’m not mad... I have an acute mycosis infection on my feet. I have bacterial infections and eczema. Didn’t the good doctor tell you that too when you spoke to him?”

Stricken by a kind of frenzy of itching, Fernando kicked off his shoes.

“No, he didn’t tell you, because he didn’t know how to get rid of it!”

To the horror of all those present, he ripped off his socks.

“I’m sorry but I really have to ...”

Fernando scratched so hard to get rid of the itching that his feet started to bleed. Then he hung his head, slurring pathetic half-finished sentences.

“I wanted to end it all without suffering. I’ve earned that right haven’t I, in eighty years of life? I’ve never done anything to deserve being treated like that. Do you think I can last until I’m 90 or 100?”

This last question had been directed towards the camera, and that was when Mr Stylus interrupted Fernando’s stream of delirious statements.

“No, Mr Morales, you won’t last that long. You signed a contract and have to die now.”

“You don’t have to remind me.”

Mr Stylus was clever. He had not stopped the cameras rolling and the studio had just informed him that their ratings were going through the roof.

“Listen, I’m sorry about your wife, but I’ve got deadlines to meet. There are other people waiting to die.” (Verso 2015, position 290)

The excerpt is fairly revealing: what really matters is the display of the protagonist’s breakdown on live TV, i.e., the ratings went through the roof not because of the fictional plot that Morales had concocted, but because of his display of raw, sincere feeling of desperation. The almost contradictory exclamation by Mr. Stylus that “‘This Is Your Death’ is a serious show!” (position 246) synthesizes perfectly the notion that, as a biopolitical mechanism, it is through the model of the reality show that the spectacle most effectively exerts its control⁶⁶. The model of the reality show works, on the one hand, because there is a clear kinship between the flux of everyday life/the television flux of events, and, on the other hand, the life that is represented in the reality show appears to be more convincing than real life itself.

⁶⁶ Unlike what happened in a first stage, when TV sets that started to become a standard object in every household, the broadcasts of TV channels had a limited scope and influence: they would just provide shows that viewers would watch “passively”, so to speak. However, from the 80’s onwards, a new notion of TV experience started to arise. This new TV, that several Italian theorists have called “*neotelevisione*” (Eco 1983; Casetti 1988 and Bruno 1994), sought to integrate within itself the body and the existence of the viewer, firstly with the presence of an audience in the set or with the active participation of spectators in the show via a phone call, and posteriorly, during the 90’s, by absorbing their own living realities. As Codeluppi refers: “Pieces of the individual’s daily reality have gone to form the backbone of several television programs, progressively defining the new genre of the ‘reality show’, and the contact between viewer and medium has gradually become the central theme of the medium’s content” (2007, 56-57; my translation).

Notwithstanding, while it is planned in meetings, scripted, and directed down the smallest detail, the reality show should not be considered just an instrument of representation. Due to the “ultrarapid forms of free-floating control that replaced the old disciplines operating in the time frame of a closed system” (Deleuze 1992, 4), there is an increasing incapacity of traditional disciplinary institutions and their enclosed logic to provide stable identities and mechanically shape the body. Consequently, people in contemporary western societies turn to narrative and discursive devices from TV, tablet, or smartphones screens to interpret and give meaning to their lives. In trying to deliver an orderly appearance to the chaos of everyday life, reality TV has become one vibrant source of interpretative models, principles, and topics through which the viewer may build his own identity and structure his life (Codeluppi 2007, 57).

Having reached the closing moment of the short story, we, the readers, alongside the audience of the show, witness the gloomy demise of Fernando Morales:

Mr Stylus sighed, his tone was decisive. He turned to the film crew.

“All right, call the coffin people. We’re ready here.”

“Coffin? What coffin? You never said anything about a coffin.”

“That’s right. I just decided right now.”

Fernando hunched his shoulders as if looking for comfort, or a caress. As if anyone would cry with him and for him.

If Mr Stylus’s choice was a kind of punishment, he didn’t think he deserved it.

“So you know about my claustrophobia ...”

“Mr Morales, you may have lied to us about your past, but Doctor Brogli told us all about your problem with closed spaces.”

Fernando’s eyes were suspiciously bright and he sagged.

He felt like a flower whose stem had been unexpectedly cut. Lying had stripped him of the possibility of dying on live TV with a smile on his lips in front of a massive audience.

Mr Stylus read out a clause from the contract.

“In the event that the client fails to fulfill his obligations, the Studio reserves the right to proceed with burial in compliance with the methods and timescale described in point 11.”

The body of Fernando Morales, placed in the coffin when it was still warm, was accompanied out of the Palace Motel room with a peak of 13 million viewers. (Verso 2015, position 290)

In a move that reminds us of the grim end of Winston Smith in *1984*, Mr. Stylus shocks the claustrophobic Fernando Morales by showing his last place of rest, a coffin. There are several relevant implications that we can extract from this ending, which will help us to proceed with the exploration of this biopolitical mechanism throughout the analysis of

the other works in this part: firstly, whether we are talking about the dread that Morales demonstrates of having lived an unsuccessful life, of being judged by others, or the extreme claustrophobia that leads to his death, *fear* plays a particularly important role regarding the manipulative strategies of the spectacle. Not only does it function as a mediatic tool to control the individual mind, but it is also used to trigger anxieties within the collective imagination of society. Secondly, that 13 million viewers did tune in to watch Morales' death, confirms there is undeniably what Virilio (2006) calls a "synchronicity of emotions" or "globalization of the affects"; in this process, television (as a medium) equates important actual events, like natural catastrophes or terrorist attacks, to fictional events or reality shows with huge ratings, widely amplifying the reach of both to worldwide audiences and, thus, creating a collective participation in which everyone, everywhere may experience similar emotions. Lastly, the feeling of helplessness that Fernando Morales experiences before the merciless Mr. Stylus condemns him to a dishonorable death, proves that, rather than transforming death and offering a meaning to life, the spectacle uses the human body, particularly its emotions, to create a show capable of controlling the mass audiences. As we shall explore in a more extensive manner during the analyses of *The Hunger Games* and of *The Execution Channel*, the great displays of athleticism or of impactful/shocking events – such as football matches or live warfare, for instance – nowadays play a similar role to that of the ancient roman circus. As Mario Vargas Llosa notes:

[these events] are no longer used as a pretext and liberation of the irrational, a regression of the individual to the condition of participant of the tribe, [...] but rather as a ritual that triggers the individual irrational instincts and drives that allow him to renounce his civilized condition and behave during the game as part of the primitive horde. (2013, 22; my translation)

Although, at first, the technological advances that have allowed the creation of new communication media seemed to merely reflect the stage of scientific and technical knowledge that our societies have achieved, which happens to meet the social needs of the contemporary age, it now becomes apparent that this might not be the case. Seeing Fernando Morales stripped from his choice of dying according to his own narrative, points to the fact that they were thought out to be used unilaterally by the powers that control the mediation process. As Debord noted, the spectacle – be it in the guise of a TV show or another mass media – works according to its own inner dynamics: "[...] is the ruling

order's nonstop discourse about itself, its never-ending monologue of self-praise, its self-portrait at the stage of totalitarian domination of all aspects of life" (2005, 14)⁶⁷.

In the days that followed his death, the public opinion was divided between those who argued that Mr. Stylus had proceeded justly ordering the death of Morales, those who accused him and the show of murder, and those who simply thought the ending presented "sub-standard quality" (Verso 2015, position 315). That the death of a human being on live TV becomes just the mortuary case of the month, illustrates the effectiveness of the mechanism of the spectacle in rendering death innocuous through its representation. Concomitantly, it also reveals that, what were once directly lived experiences and events, now have ebbed into representations, representations that alienate the spectators by uniting them⁶⁸.

As we shall see, this representational aspect of the spectacle is one of critical importance, and so it needs further examination. Also, up to this point we have focused our attention mainly on the logic of mediation that underlies the relation between media (television and Internet) and the body of the spectator. Through the case of Fernando Morales, we have analyzed at an individual level the effects and symptoms produced by putting the body in display. However, we have only begun to unravel this mechanism, since there are many aspects that have not been fully explored: why does the audience of "This Is Your Death!" derive pleasure from watching the death of the old man? To what extent do violence (like the one implicit in Morales' death) and fear play a role in the articulation between power and social media? More importantly, we have yet to identify the other side of the coin: what power structures control this mechanism? Is it possible to resist them?

⁶⁷ The French author further specifies that: "[T]he spectacle is not the inevitable consequence of some supposedly natural technological development. On the contrary, the society of the spectacle is a form that chooses its own technological content. If the spectacle, considered in the limited sense of the "mass media" that are its most glaring superficial manifestation, seems to be invading society in the form of a mere technical apparatus, it should be understood that this apparatus is in no way neutral and that it has been developed in accordance with the spectacle's internal dynamics. If the social needs of the age in which such technologies are developed can be met only through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact between people has become totally dependent on these means of instantaneous communication, it is because this "communication" is essentially *unilateral*. The concentration of these media thus amounts to concentrating in the hands of the administrators of the existing system the means that enable them to carry on this particular form of administration. The social separation reflected in the spectacle is inseparable from the modern *state* — the product of the social division of labor that is both the chief instrument of class rule and the concentrated expression of all social divisions" (2005, 14-15).

⁶⁸ Apropos of the reaction of the audience of "This Is Your Death!" and rendering death innocuous, Susan Sontag refers that "[c]ompassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers. The question of what to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated. If one feels that there is nothing 'we' can do — but who is that 'we'? — and nothing 'they' can do either — and who are 'they' — then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic" (2003, 101).

CHAPTER 2 – A DANGEROUS SHOW: THE RESIGNED BODIES OF THE
DISTRICTS AND THE “CIRCENSES” POLITICS OF THE CAPITOL

The story of terrorism is written by the state and it is therefore highly instructive... compared with terrorism, everything else must be acceptable, or in any case more rational and democratic.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

ENTERING PANEM: A GEOGRAPHY OF INEQUALITIES

Differently from the world constructed by Francesco Verso, the world created by American author Suzanne Collins is in a distant, albeit strangely familiar, future from ours. *The Hunger Games* trilogy follows the path of the main character, Katniss Everdeen, from her humble beginnings to her ascendancy as a symbol of resistance in a fictional country called Panem. Largely thanks to its cinematic adaptation in recent years, the trilogy has been acclaimed by audiences worldwide – both in sci-fi and mainstream circles –, achieving a great commercial success as well⁶⁹. However, as a group of works that falls into the label “Young Adult sci-fi”⁷⁰, its critical reception in academia has not been so enthusiastic. I would argue that the trilogy may have this effect if interpretation is kept at surface level, but if we dig deeper, we find different layers of meaning. There are indeed already several published volumes that explore these novels critical reach (Garriot *et aliae* 2014; Dunn and Michaud 2012), as well as other works that, albeit not entirely dedicated to the *The Hunger Games*, also argue that YA sci-fi does not solely talk to a-critical readers, attracted to fashion and fun (Reynolds 2007; Kaplan and Hayn 2012). My line of argument regarding the trilogy will be akin to the one presented by these studies. As I will try to demonstrate, Collins’ novels assume the tropes and themes of YA sci-fi to question and, in some cases, even deconstruct them.

In this chapter, we will focus our attention on the first and third books of the trilogy, mainly the way Collins’ worldbuilding enables us to tackle some problematic

⁶⁹ The trilogy was adapted to the big screen in four films: *The Hunger Games* (2012), directed by Gary Ross, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2013), *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1* (2014), and *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2* (2015), all directed by Francis Lawrence.

⁷⁰ A popular subgenre of science fiction which, as Kimberly Reynolds states, usually has an escapist/conformist effect on younger readers. See: Reynolds 2007, 81.

subjects concerning the spectacle. Let us start by taking a closer look at the first book, which documents Katniss' journey to the 74th edition of the games:

Just as the town clock strikes two, the mayor steps up to the podium and begins to read. It's the same story every year. He tells of the history of Panem, the country that rose up out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America. He 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. The result was Panem, a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. Then came the Dark Days, the uprising of the districts against the Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games. (18)

Through the first-person point of view of Katniss, who is also the narrator of the trilogy, we are confronted with the disconcerting scene of the ceremony known as the "reaping", a mandatory ceremony for all the adolescents from 12 to 18 years old (12), that consists of a lottery show in which the "tributes" of each district are chosen to participate in the Hunger Games⁷¹. In this live show broadcasted to the whole country, a temporary stage is set up before the Justice Building, in the main hall of the district, and two large glass balls, one with the names of the boys and one with names of the girls, are placed on a podium (16).

As we learn through Katniss painful description of the ceremony, Panem, the post-apocalyptical country created in the aftermath of the destruction of North America, was at one point in time a prosperous nation, with its 13 districts ruled by its economic-political center, the Capitol⁷². However, after a failed uprising of the districts – that became known as the "Dark Days" – a treaty was signed in order to give the Capitol, and the technocratic government headed by President Coriolanus Snow, a stronger grip on the

⁷¹ Although the "reaping" is presented as arbitrary and impartial system to choose the participants, in reality it favors the wealthy over the poor, as the exchange of a year of grain and oil (the "tesserae") for having their name added once more in the glass balls clearly is a necessity for the families of the poorer districts. See: Collins 2008, 11.

⁷² Each district is placed radially in relation to the Capitol and corresponds to a specific economic activity: in District 12, for instance, it is coalmining, while in District 11 is agriculture (fruits and vegetables) and, in District 10, livestock farming. On the other end of the specter, we have electronics in District 3, masonry, weaponry and law enforcement units in District 2, and luxury items in District 1. As we can tell from these examples, the nearer a district is to the Capitol, District 1 being the closest one, the richer it is.

districts and avoid another possible uprising. The main novelty introduced by the Treaty of Treason was the “Hunger Games”, according to which

each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate. The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins. (18)

From this historical retrospect we are given some coordinates to navigate this fictional universe. We have entered a dystopia, a disenchanting future society that can be interpreted as an imaginative extension of some utopian conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions (Booker 1994, 3). Also, this society is located in a post-apocalyptic time, something which allows the reader to tackle a “hyperobject”, i.e., a “relatively new type of phenomena and/or entities that [...] defy our perception of time and space because, among other things, they persist and produce effects whose duration enormously exceeds the individual and collective scales of human life” (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2017, position 691).

Moreover, although it is not clear if the hyperobject in question is climate crisis and its consequences, the effects of an uncritical use of technology or the overconsumption of natural resources, this society that arises after the apocalypse⁷³ bears witness to the fact that, firstly, it is seemingly unconceivable the end of the world as the actual vanishing of human life, which is to say, it is difficult to separate the “idea of world from the idea of life, and this idea from that of agency, perspective or experience” (position 2272). Secondly, as I have previously mentioned, while the increasing acceleration of capitalist machinery in the contemporary globalized and mediatic world may be presented as an expected outcome of the current stage of economic-technological development, in reality it follows its own logic, being in contradiction with “the inexorable process of positive feedback of environmental transformations that have nefarious consequences for the species’ *Umwelt*” (position 1642).

But how is this imaginary society shaped? How does its dynamics and structuring mechanisms work? It is by now noticeable that the logic behind the creation of this murderous live TV game show is akin to that of the public executions of the 18th century

⁷³ Here understood in the modern sense of the word as a cataclysmic event (not in OED 2nd ed., 1989).

Europe. If the display of violence during the tortures had an emphatic affirmation of the sovereign's power and of its intrinsic superiority over the body of the convicted, the Hunger Games were the Capitol's way of reminding the district's subjects that they are totally at their mercy, standing little chance of surviving another rebellion. In an analogous image of the ceremonial of the public executions, that usually included the reproduction of the scene of the actual crime as a way of reconstituting a momentarily injured sovereignty, the Hunger Games performed a ritualistic reenactment of what had happened during the "Dark Days", which served as "yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated" (Collins 2008, 18) and continuously reconstituted the power of the Capitol from the offense of the districts. Nevertheless, this spectacular logic also throws us further back in time,

The Gamemakers appeared early on the first day. Twenty or so men and women dressed in deep purple robes. They sit in the elevated stands that surround the gymnasium, sometimes wandering about to watch us, jotting down notes, other times eating at the endless banquet that has been set for them, ignoring the lot of us. But they do seem to be keeping their eye on the District 12 tributes. Several times I've looked up to find one fixated on me. They consult with the trainers during our meals as well. We see them all gathered together when we come back. (97)

In this post-apocalyptic future, Suzanne Collins creates an updated version of the gladiator games. In effect, to introduce the novum in her trilogy, not only does she reimagine the Roman Colosseum arena in the shape of the arena where the Hunger Games take place, but she also re-introduces, via the Capitol's elite, typical names of ancient Rome, such as Caesar Flickerman, Seneca Crane, or Plutarch Heavensbee⁷⁴, pieces of clothes as the robes, or objects such as the chariots (71, 124 and 375). What is more significant, she transports to the future, *mutatis mutandis*, what the satiric poet Juvenal (2012) called the politics of "*panem et circenses*" ("bread and circuses"), a politics implemented in the days of the Roman Empire according to which, "in return for full bellies and entertainment", the roman people would give up "their political responsibilities and therefore their power" (Collins 2010, position 2378).

⁷⁴ Flickerman is the host of show that airs before the games, while Seneca Crane and his substitute, Plutarch Heavensbee, are "Head Gamemakers", the masterminds behind the traps used in the arena during the Games.

Following Foucault's analysis of the theatrical performances that preceded public executions in the 18th century, one could argue that the reaping and the Games act as a promise: the disciplining attention of the government will be centered on the youngsters instead of the whole community. And yet, the status of the tributes of Panem is vastly different from the status of a convicted criminal like Damiens (Foucault 1995), or of the criminals, runaway slaves, and traitors that entered the Colosseum's arena⁷⁵. If punishment is conceived as a symbolic ritual to focus the penalty and prevalence of the law on a specific body, concomitantly satisfying an audience that feels that has taken part on a just act, what sense of justice could come from torturing young innocent civilians⁷⁶? As far as the logic of punishing the body in a live spectacle is concerned, I believe the precise choice of teenagers by Suzanne Collins is meaningful and serves a specific purpose that I will try to examine further ahead. Still, I would also add that, in the relationship that is established between the reader in its contemporary context, the references to ancient Rome, and the futuristic society created by Collins, it is *the medium used to display the suffering of the body and the very different nature of the audience it creates* that can really help us understand the undertones of the mechanism of the spectacle in Panem – as well as, potentially, in our societies.

Let us now look at the Capitol and its residents:

R-i-i-i-p! I grit my teeth as Venia, a woman with aqua hair and gold tattoos above her eyebrows, yanks a strip of fabric from my leg, tearing out the hair beneath it. "Sorry!" she pipes in her silly Capitol accent. "You're just so hairy!" Why do these people speak in such a high pitch? Why do their jaws barely open when they talk? Why do the ends of their sentences go up as if they're asking a question? Odd vowels, clipped words, and always a hiss on the letter s . . . no wonder it's impossible not to mimic them. [...]

I've been in the Remake Center for more than three hours and I still haven't met my stylist. Apparently he has no interest in seeing me until Venia and the other members of my prep team have addressed some obvious problems. This has

⁷⁵ There were also some volunteers to enter the arena, but they were the exception rather than the rule. See: Dunn and Michaud 2012, 79-80.

⁷⁶ Andrew Shaffer also considers the possibility of understanding the logic of the Hunger Games according to a hereditary notion of Christian guilt: "Can the punishment of random stand-ins provide us with the satisfied feeling that justice has been served? There is a long-standing idea in Western society of "the sins of the fathers being visited upon the sons." Even though it's not part of our current legal system (sons are not literally punished for their fathers' crimes), it's a concept found in the Bible: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the sons for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me" (Exodus 20:5). So it's not unthinkable that the crowd at Caesar's might feel that some measure of justice was being achieved by punishing the tributes for their ancestors' "crimes" against Panem (2012, 79-80). I would not exclude this interpretation, but I think that it is not essential to understand the dynamics between the spectators and the Hunger Games as a TV show.

included scrubbing down my body with a gritty foam that has removed not only dirt but at least three layers of skin, turning my nails into uniform shapes, and primarily, ridding my body of hair. My legs, arms, torso, underarms, and parts of my eyebrows have been stripped of the stuff, leaving me like a plucked bird, ready for roasting. [...]

Venia and Octavia, a plump woman whose entire body has been dyed a pale shade of pea green, rub me down with a lotion that first stings but then soothes my raw skin. Then they pull me from the table, removing the thin robe I've been allowed to wear off and on. I stand there, completely naked, as the three circle me, wielding tweezers to remove any last bits of hair. I know I should be embarrassed, but they're so unlike people that I'm no more self-conscious than if a trio of oddly colored birds were pecking around my feet. The three step back and admire their work. "Excellent! You almost look like a human being now!" says Flavius, and they all laugh. (Collins 2008, 61-62)

After the reaping, all the tributes are transported to the Capitol to be prepared, to be TV ready for the Games. During Katniss' preparation for the event, her so-called "remake", we have a closer look at some of the Capitol's residents; her description of the whole "beautification" process and of her prep-team, composed of Effie, Venia, Octavia, Flavius, and Cinna, confronts us with strange characters that resemble "oddly colored birds", almost not-human. Their body modifications, like "aqua hair", "gold tattoos", "body dyed a pale shade of pea green" or "orange corkscrew locks", are common amongst the rest of the residents of the Capitol, calling our attention to the fact that aesthetics, and a strong sense of fashion, are compulsory requirements of their society.

In the ultra-mediatic reality of the Capitol, these modifications are distinctive traits of an elite, but, at same time, of what is considered a "normal" human being. Reminding us of some highly mediatic Hollywood figures that became famous for their odd look after undergoing extreme plastic surgeries⁷⁷, the Capitol citizens are motivated primarily by an externally generated sense of self-worth and importance; as the philosopher Christina Van Dyke refers in her article "Discipline and the Docile Body", "their energies are directed toward subjecting themselves to the dictates of a fashionable society and transforming themselves accordingly (2012, 256)⁷⁸. For the most part, they base their assessment of whether their lives are going well or badly on the extent to which they've

⁷⁷ Pop singer Michael Jackson, billionaire socialite Jocelyn Wildenstein or actor Mickey Rourke being perhaps some of the most known examples.

⁷⁸ Gilles Lipovetsky refers that the bottom-up account of sartorial mimesis, whereby "the lower classes imitate the life-style and appearance of the upper classes", forcing the latter to innovate in order to maintain their social distinctiveness, has blinded us to "the controlling, determining feature" of fashion, specifically, the "headlong quest for novelty as such: not the cumbersome, deterministic mechanics of class conflict, but 'modern' exaltation, the endless excitement of gratuitous aesthetic play" (1994, 41).

succeeded at “‘improving’ themselves to fit the latest style” (257). In stark contrast with the residents of most districts, whose first concern is to survive, or with Katniss, who has volunteered to participate in the games so that she could protect her sister Prim, the prep team’s self-absorbed demeanor means that they experience even the televised horrors of the Hunger Games in personal terms: “‘I was still in bed!’ ‘I had just had my eyebrows dyed!’ ‘I swear I nearly fainted!’” (Collins 2008, 354).

This self-centered preoccupation with the body should not be, nonetheless, simply read as a mere critique of an evil upper-class/elitist social stratum that stands in opposition to a victimized/exploited low-class. The notion that the prep team develops a genuine affection for Katniss, and that they are oblivious to the difficulties that the residents of the other districts must face to provide for their luxurious way of life, seems to indicate that this demand for a self-centered worldview and narcissistic lifestyle is a strategy used by the government of Panem to reinforce the power of the Capitol over its citizens. Subjected to a process of *vetrinizzazione* even more extreme to the one we had scrutinized in Fernando Morales, they suffer a voyeuristic passion and (morbid) curiosity that makes them watch the hunger games, while creating a continuous need to expose themselves in the giant store window of the Capitol.

I would contend that the physical presentation and worldview of the Capitol’s citizens could be read as an exaggerated representation or, rather, a possible extreme representation of what could happen if fashion and entertainment were unrestrictedly abused by the political-economic power to control the population. An argument could be made, then, for a possible identification of the reader of the contemporary western societies with the citizens of the Capitol. As author Andrew Shaffer points out, “[t]he only people in Collins’ universe who are remotely like us are the people in the Capitol. Glutted with food, fashion, and nationalized reality television, the cosmetically altered, materialistic Capitol residents aren’t a far cry from modern Americans” (2012, 87).

We will reprise this question of identification ahead, but we must first probe the relationship between the Capitol’s citizens and the mechanism of the spectacle utilized to control their lives:

The anthem booms in my ears, and then I hear Caesar Flickerman greeting the audience. Does he know how crucial it is to get every word right from now on? He must. He will want to help us. The crowd breaks into applause as the prep teams are presented. I imagine Flavius, Venia, and Octavia bouncing around and taking ridiculous, bobbing bows. It’s a safe bet they’re clueless. Then Effie’s

introduced. How long she's waited for this moment. I hope she's able to enjoy it because as misguided as Effie can be, she has a very keen instinct about certain things and must at least suspect we're in trouble. Portia and Cinna receive huge cheers, of course, they've been brilliant, had a dazzling debut. I now understand Cinna's choice of dress for me for tonight. I'll need to look as girlish and innocent as possible. [...]

Caesar Flickerman makes a few more jokes, and then it's time for the show. This will last exactly three hours and is required viewing for all of Panem. As the lights dim and the seal appears on the screen, I realize I'm unprepared for this. I do not want to watch my twenty-two fellow tributes die. I saw enough of them die the first time. My heart starts pounding and I have a strong impulse to run. How have the other victors faced this alone? During the highlights, they periodically show the winner's reaction up on a box in the corner of the screen. I think back to earlier years . . . some are triumphant, pumping their fists in the air, beating their chests. Most just seem stunned. (Collins 2008, 360 and 361)

Like what happens in "American Idol" or other similar reality shows, an opening ceremony is broadcasted in the evening before the beginning of the Hunger Games. During this ceremony, filmed inside a studio with a live audience, the beloved host Caesar Flickerman interviews the 24 tributes. As each of the tributes' interviews take place, it becomes clear that behind the seemingly unprompted conversations, the show is scripted: the host conducts it in such a way as to explore the tributes private lives and personal feelings, arousing the audience's curiosity by creating interesting narratives about them – the "star-crossed lovers" story of Katniss and Peeta is the best example (136). The tributes, in turn, have the opportunity to show their qualities, to appeal to the audience's sympathy and, more importantly, to win the favor of "sponsors", wealthy citizens of the Capitol that may help the tributes survive the games by providing them "gifts" (food, medicine or weapons) in the arena (45).

Up to this point we do not find significant differences with what happens in "Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death!". In both cases, the model of the reality show works because, in it, the flux of everyday life and television flux coincide, creating a scripted representation that puts some order into the chaos of life; it becomes, consequently, a source of interpretative models, values and themes through which the

individuals may built their identities and give life meaning (Codeluppi 2007, 57)⁷⁹. Nevertheless, the content of the Games themselves is quite the opposite from this glamorous show, and poses different questions:

A boy, I think from District 9, reaches the pack at the same time I do and for a brief time we grapple for it and then he coughs, splattering my face with blood. I stagger back, repulsed by the warm, sticky spray. Then the boy slips to the ground. That's when I see the knife in his back. Already other tributes have reached the Cornucopia and are spreading out to attack. Yes, the girl from District 2, ten yards away, running toward me, one hand clutching a half-dozen knives. I've seen her throw in training. She never misses. And I'm her next target. (Collins 2008, 150)

Even if the death of Morales on live TV carries undoubtedly a charge of violence, it is conducted in a very orderly, almost bureaucratic manner. As we can already picture from this description of the initial moments, the Games, on the contrary, could be characterized as a gore display of cruelty, an artificially recreated Hobbesian state of nature of everyone against everyone, where only the strongest survive⁸⁰. So, what does this conflation between reality TV and a warlike scenario entails in the trilogy? As far as the privileged are concerned, the mediatic representations broadcasted in the screens of the Capitol, and the body of its own citizens, are a reminder of how capitalism, in its plasticity, manages

⁷⁹ This idea is also represented in "Fifteen Million Merits" (2011), an episode of the science fiction TV show *Black Mirror*. Throughout the episode we follow the daily life of the main character "Bing" Madsen, a young man living in a perhaps not so distant society, located in an automated and enclosed compound. With nearly every surface in this dystopian space being composed of black interactive video screens, Bing and the rest of his young, fit colleagues ride on stationary bikes for the most part of their days, generating power in exchange for "Merits", a form of currency. One of the starkest principles this fictional society abides by is that overweight and ugliness are a result of lack of commitment or effort and, therefore, should be punished, while talent and beauty are commended. As such, talented and beautiful people are rewarded for their merits, being able to achieve fame by participating in the reality show *Hot Shot* when they finally gather 15 million Merits. The episode brings to the forefront the notion that the spectacle turns people into "fuel" (fodder) to feed its own needs, numbing their feelings while creating a need to be exposed to the judgment of a public authority that controls their lives. It points to the idea that, in this society much like in current contemporary societies, the spectacle controls all aspects of the relations of power, producing a world where, like on a reality show, "reality" and "fiction" are inextricable. See: Lyn, 2011.

⁸⁰ Regarding Thomas Hobbes' "state of nature": "And because the condition of man [. . .] is a condition of war of every one against every one, in which case every one is governed by his own reason, and there is nothing he can make use of that may not be a help unto him in preserving his life against his enemies; it followeth that in such a condition every man has a right to every thing, even to one another's body. And therefore, as long as this natural right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, how strong or wise soever he be, of living out the time which nature ordinarily alloweth men to live. And consequently it is a precept, or general rule of reason: that every man ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war. The first branch of which rule containeth the first and fundamental law of nature, which is: to seek peace and follow it. The second, the sum of the right of nature, which is: by all means we can to defend ourselves" (Sic; 2005, XIV, 190).

to appropriate the artistic sphere. By stripping it from its autonomous and potentially subversive realm, and detaching it completely from the erudite culture, the representations born out of an economic interest reflect an artistic process that has abandoned *mimesis* in favor of a monstrous attempt at self-originating and self-referencing power (Dunn and Michaud 2012, 16).

What I am trying to convey is that, while the narratives that Caesar Flickerman creates about the tributes effectively solicit an emotional response on the viewers of the Capitol – giving the games a tragic *pathos* –, they are not a real imitation of a tragic action⁸¹. The perverse imitation of life that they witness does not make them potentially sager nor better, given that it does not make them think about the heroes' misfortunes and re-evaluate their lives. Quite the opposite, the empathy that they feel for the tributes exists only to intensify their own delight of the spectacle being performed, to immerse them in a form of entertainment that anesthetizes emotions and blocks any kind of critical thinking. As the researcher Esser Silva argues, their society is a “consecration of an ‘artsy’ world, present in multiple dimensions, from fashion industry to architecture, cinema and shopping malls, uttered in tasteless and swift changes” (2015, 441), the only possible *katharsis* comes in the shape of a farce.

On the other end of the specter, the creation of a murderous game to which every adolescent of the districts must “compulsory volunteer”, involves even deeper implications. Along the lines of Hobbes' political philosophy⁸², the Capitol counts on the fear of violent death, as well as on the painful memories of the “Dark Days”, to secure obedience. Just as Hobbes and the Capitol expect that, whether in the state of nature or in the arena, one's worry for self-preservation will override the moral scruples, they also expect that rational people will recognize that it is in their self-interest to submit to a political authority that may “protect them”. The installation of this “culture of fear” that

⁸¹ Aristotle defines Tragedy, and its corresponding form of *mimesis*, as “a representation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude [. . .] and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting the *katharsis* [purging] of such emotions” (2013, 13-14). However, as Adorno and Horkheimer note, with the development of rationality, the “impulse of *mimesis*” is used to establish control over nature and humanity. They elucidate how *mimesis* is transformed from its redeeming form, that allows the development of individual self-identity, into a “perverse” form underlying anti-Semitism and racism (1990, 168–208).

⁸² In *Leviathan*, Hobbes states that “[t]he attaining to this Sovereigne Power, is by two wayes. One, by Naturall force; as when a man maketh his children, to submit themselves, and their children to his government, as being able to destroy them if they refuse, or by Warre subdueth his enemies to his will, giving them their lives on that condition. The other, is when men agree amongst themselves, to submit to some Man, or Assembly of men, voluntarily, on confidence to be protected by him against all others. This later, may be called a Politicall Common-wealth, or Common-wealth by Institution; and the former, a Common-wealth by Acquisition. And first, I shall speak of a Common-wealth by Institution” (Sic; 2005, 137).

engulfs the citizens of the districts, making them inclusively sacrificing their youths, has the specific political effect of disempowering the citizens, stripping them of their agency. In an inversion of roles, the sons and daughters of Panem are the ones that provide safety to the family/community. As researcher Susan Tan contends, the acceptance of this rule means that the adults comply, out of fear, with the terms imposed by the government, forfeiting theirs and the next generation's political voice:

The “successful” adult citizen, the adult who has survived the Hunger Games system, is one stripped of both threat and promise: who has successfully left childhood behind, relinquishing innocence, but also relinquishing the element of danger implicit in this model of childhood. Indeed, adults are subsumed into a model of mute, impotent political community. With the tesserae system, the adult world is denied true agency, power stripped from them in a reversal of family nurture and provision. [...] In a profound inversion, children provide for their parents through their own susceptibility to the Games. A carnivalesque reversal of family hierarchy emerges: children possess an agency which enables them to provide for their families but puts them in danger as a result, while adults are “safe,” and yet, because of their safety, unable to provide. Adult disempowerment emerges as a direct result of the child/adult role reversal. (2014, 87)

Parallely to this disempowerment process, the Games also dehumanize the citizens of the districts at the eyes of the Capitol's elites, first figuratively, then literally. The innocent remark that Effie makes during the train ride from District 12 to the Capitol, saying during dinner that Peeta and Katniss had “decent manners”⁸³, or the “compliment” that Flavius pays to Katniss when they have finished the re-make process (““Excellent! You almost look like a human being now!” [62]) are just two of examples of how the spectacular power of the Games reduces the people from other districts to an animalistic/barbaric condition, or, at best, to a doll to dress up and play with. This reinvention of *panem et circenses* allows the viewers to enjoy the spectacle in a detached manner, without any ethical concerns, and, at the same time, makes them forget that their luxurious lifestyle comes at the cost of human suffering. But it gets even worse:

They put their snouts on the horn, sniffing and tasting the metal, scraping paws over the surface and then making high-pitched yipping sounds to one another. This must be how they communicate because the pack backs up as if to make room. Then one of them, a good-size mutt with silky waves of blond fur takes a running

⁸³ Unlike the tributes from the previous year that “ate everything with their hands like a couple of savages” (Collins 2008, 44).

start and leaps onto the horn. Its back legs must be incredibly powerful because it lands a mere ten feet below us, its pink lips pulled back in a snarl. For a moment it hangs there, and in that moment I realize what else unsettled me about the mutts. The green eyes glowering at me are unlike any dog or wolf, any canine I've ever seen. They are unmistakably human. And that revelation has barely registered when I notice the collar with the number 1 inlaid with jewels and the whole horrible thing hits me. The blonde hair, the green eyes, the number [...] it's Glimmer. (333)

Adding insult to injury, the Gamemakers take dehumanization to its greatest extreme in the final phase of the 74th Hunger Games. After the death of almost all the tributes in the arena, Katniss, Peeta and Cato, a career tribute from District 2⁸⁴, are the sole survivors. Seeing that audiences were losing interest in the show, to give them a climatic denouement, president Snow and Head Gamemaker Seneca Crane literally transform the defunct tributes into subhuman mutations, growling and snarling human-wolf hybrids. This transformation is particularly indicative of how the mechanisms of spectacle and the *mechanisms of immunology* may work interconnectedly, bearing witness to the fact that contemporary biopolitics has achieved a degree of complexity hitherto unheard. I will probe deeper into this topic and the logic of immunization in part II of this thesis, for now it suffices to say that these hybrids are the final insult to the districts; they represent the complete domination that the centralized government of president Snow exerts over the bodies of the citizens of the districts, disposing of their lives and deaths at will.

Therefore, what is at stake here is the uninhibited control over the body by a political-economic power via the manipulation of communicational media. Collins' trilogy draws our attention to the idea that the constant bombardment that we, the viewers, suffer of warfare images in TV news, action movies, or reality shows, makes the task of differentiating reality from fiction almost impossible, practically merging them together. In doing so, it provides not only a treatise on reality television, but also what Professor Linda J. Rice calls "a critical lens for self-reflection and societal analysis of our insatiable thirst for entertainment that is built upon violence, conspiracy, and manipulation" (Rice and Wrabel 2014, 194). Concurrently, it also constitutes several warnings regarding the

⁸⁴ A Career Tribute – also commonly known as a Career – is "a tribute who trains throughout their life to compete in the Hunger Games. They attend a special combat academy to be trained by victors until they're 18, when they volunteer. Careers come from the wealthier districts: 1, 2, and 4. Being a tribute is seen as a great honor. The Careers in the 74th Hunger Games were led by Cato". *The Hunger Games Wiki*, s.v. "Career Tribute", accessed March 7, 2019, https://thehungergames.fandom.com/wiki/Career_Tribute.

loss of critical reasoning, excessive government control and consumerism. As Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux so suitably put it:

Spectacles of violence are powerful modes of public pedagogy that function, in part, to fragment and alienate an active and engaged citizenry, transforming it into a passive audience. Who is targeted tells us a great deal about the strategic ambitions and rational underpinnings of the violence. Contemporary neoliberal societies deal with spectacles of violence in a particularly novel way. Unlike previous totalitarian systems that relied upon the terror of secrecy, modern neoliberal societies bring most things into the open. They continually expose us to that which threatens the fabric of the everyday. Even the violent excesses of neoliberal societies—which past generations would surely have viewed as pathologically deranged—are all too easily repackaged for acceptable public consumption. While serial murder, excessive torture, cruel and unusual punishment, secret detentions, and the violation of civil liberties are deeply ingrained in the history of Western imperial domination, in the contemporary moment they no longer elicit condemnation, disgust, and shame. (Evans and Giroux 2015, 37)⁸⁵

Not so differently from Panem, in contemporary societies the omnipresence of computer, television or mobile phone's screens, transforms the contemporary global citizen in an "*homo ecranis*", as Gilles Lipovetsky would put it (2007, 23). It gives him almost unlimited access to information, music, games, knowledge, but, simultaneously, makes him constantly visible and susceptible to be manipulated. It follows that the geopolitical disposition and economic relations of the fictional country created by Collins, could be interpreted as a cautionary example regarding the consequences of a neoliberal power that is unmediated in its effects on people as it works throughout the global space of unregulated flows.

The trilogy's wide reach as post-apocalyptic science fiction grants us a privileged perspective on how sovereignty, in an economically driven environment, might become a military and policing protectorate put to the service of global capital (Evans and Giroux 2015, 14-15), using the new mass media and latest technological developments to create

⁸⁵ In the path of the analytical framework of Jacques Rancière on the theatrical nature of the spectacle, Evans and Giroux also add: "This passivity implies that the spectator is doubly debilitated, separated from the ability to know the conditions of the performance as well as from the ability to act in order to change the performance itself. It therefore forbids us from acting with any degree of knowledge. Passivity works by rendering the audience catatonic and incapable of grasping the magnitude of what just happened. Such passivity thus denies us the ability to act, except in ways that are coded into and prompted by the program. What therefore is required is the creation of countercultures that don't simply retreat into some pacifistic purity avoiding violence altogether, but engage the subject of violence with the ethical care and consideration its representation and diagnosis demand" (2015, 43).

a culture of fear. By enabling us to see what would happen after the fall of the current North American societies, these novels can be read as warnings about the normalization of unquestioned neoliberal ideologies, policies, and methods of government, which may ultimately corrode all social contracts, traditional institutions, legal frameworks, public spaces and democracy itself:

For it is through the spectacle of violence that we begin to uncover the abilities to strip life of any political, ethical, and human claim. Violence seeks to curate who and what is human even though the physical body might still be in existence. When violence becomes normalized and decentered, the disposability of entire populations becomes integral to the functioning, the profiteering, and the entrenchment of the prevailing rationalities of the dominant culture. Such violence, in other words, offers the most potent diagnosis of any political project by revealing what is deemed culturally acceptable and socially normalized. (17)

All in all, they provide us valuable insights about a biopolitical mechanism that has survived and adapted throughout the time, a seemingly harmless mechanism that may in the long run turn everyone, from the highest elite to the poorest homeless, disposable. But I would claim that *The Hunger Games* do not solely engage us at a reflexive or “passive” level, so to speak. Their worldbuilding, specifically, their future scenarios of familiar depictions of reality TV and aestheticized violence, provide spectacular images and a language that take us right to the core of the spectacle while keeping us conscious, unscathed from its numbing effects. In the words of the reviewer Ann Childs, they enable readers to be more than mere spectators, providing:

a “safe space” from which privileged readers, neither literally nor physically subjected to the terrors of the Games, can view the action of the Games, with Capitol citizens, from the position of audience not subjected to oppression by a dominant group. I argue that the combination of Katniss’s accounts of oppression from a first- person narrative and the readers’ dual position of privileged reader and privileged Capitol audience distances the readers from the oppressive system and violence of the Hunger Games Arena. Katniss’s narrative intervenes to make possible the reader’s identification with her, the social “Other,” possible. (2014, 102)

Far from leading to a loss of critical reasoning, rendering the reader even further paralyzed by new displays of violence, the novels produce a cognitive estrangement that Darko

Suvin⁸⁶ considers central to the strategy of science-fiction. Suvin suggests “that the essential tension of SF is one between readers, representing a certain number of types of people of our time, and the encompassing and at least equipollent Unknown or Other introduced by the novum. This tension in turn estranges the empirical norm of the implied reader” (2010, 68)⁸⁷. So, the novels potentially allow the reader to see more clearly, even if for just a while, dark facets of his contemporary world that hide in plain sight. They let him see through the outside perspective of an unprivileged other that, at the hands of unchecked neoliberal powers, mass media may be a powerful tool in shaping socially and economically unequal societies. To put it another way, they give him the opportunity to become, like Katniss, a resistant body to the spectacle.

At the same time, it seems that Collins is aware and wants to respond to a very important and valid objection that is usually raised: sci-fi works are often labelled as a literature of consumption, products of the entertainment industry that create mythological worlds which have little connection with the real world. According to this perspective, these works are a form of escapism that steers away, or even in the opposite direction, from the social-political critiques of dystopian novels, inclusively entering the logic of the spectacle and reproducing its effects⁸⁸. While this is true for some works of sci-fi, and its origins in the United States are strongly connected with genres usually associated with a literature of evasion, such as the detective novel or the western⁸⁹, we should also take into consideration that sci-fi is indeed a popular literature, but its reach is, for that exact reason, much wider than the “serious” or highbrow literature, most of the times aloof

⁸⁶ In the *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) Suvin derives the concept from the Russian Formalism’s notion of *ostranenie* and Bertolt Brecht’s closely related (albeit with a Marxist inflection) notion of the estrangement-effect, in an attempt to distinguish science fiction writing from other forms of fiction.

⁸⁷ According to Suvin, “SF is a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (7-8). This goes to show that despite their differences (the use of the *novum*, for instance), dystopian fiction and science-fiction overlap in several ways, as it is the case in the works of Francesco Verso and Suzanne Collins – and, as we shall see, in the works Ken MacLeod.

⁸⁸ Both Keith Booker and Tatiana Chernyshova seem to share this perspective in relation to science-fiction. See: Booker, 1994; and Chernyshova, 2004.

⁸⁹ Pablo Capanna makes the following reflection: “Can we apply this fundamental critique to science fiction? Its origins, at least in the U.S., are highly analogous, and it is disturbing to see how some classics from the first decades of the genre indifferently wrote both detective novels or ‘cow-boys’, as a scientific fantasy, and there was even the case of authors from the field of comics” (1966, 15; my translation).

from the general audience⁹⁰. Perhaps more importantly, it is a 20th century' popular literature that may allow evasion, but it is an evasion very different from the individual evasion provided by the fictional worlds of the adventures or detective novels (Capanna 1966, 15); as I am trying to demonstrate, it exceeds and is able to convey a more critical and profound message than a commercial literature for a mass-market.

Even though the dystopian world of *The Hunger Games* also presents a speculative vein that relates to scientific conjectures and settings distant from our current reality, it does not merely theorize far-off future societies where one can take refuge from the world⁹¹. On the contrary, it questions the impact that technologies, fashion, and visual media – that are part of a system based upon economic, and political purposes – may have on humans. Granting it could be argued these two forms of articulating literature and scientific knowledge are certainly related and complement each other, broadening the range of these novels as works of sci-fi, I would contend that Collins falls back upon implausible hypotheses, such as the creation of the Capitol or of a murderous game, mainly as plot devices and not so much as a way to recreate models of the world. In contrast to Tatiana Chernyshova's perspective on science fiction, she does not elaborate or deepens "already existing 'mythological' themes and situations, the already classical themes of alien visitations, extraterrestrial civilizations and their relations, or near-light speed space travel" (2004, 355)⁹². In the complex interaction between scientific knowledge and the everyday consciousness of the reader, Collins' dystopia emerges from a search of consistency between narrative and the predominant scientific/technological perspectives of our current historical time. It constitutes an effort to imagine and describe as faithfully as possible the worlds that such scientific and technological perspectives may bring in the future (Capanna 1966, 16), but also a possible answer – or perhaps resistance

⁹⁰ Regarding the relationship between popular literature and escapism, sci-fi, like many other popular genres (romance fiction, for instance), entails elements of fantasy that, according to many critics, play an important role in the formation and development of identity. As Pablo Capanna mentions: "Due to its peculiar characteristics, sci-fi tends, under ideal conditions, to create a mentality more adapted than others to technological and social changes, not prone to being carried away by easy enthusiasms, but not lacking in that basic optimism that is present in all creative attitude. The worldwide proliferation of a network of confederate associations, which have representatives in the most remote places, although it may superficially be confused with the mania of public relations and assemblies, shows, on the contrary, the existence of groups aware of their situation and their aspirations, for whom the genre is a substitute for what conventional literature has failed to give" (16; my translation).

⁹¹ But also, in the case of the other two works examined in this part I.

⁹² I explore this problem more thoroughly in the article "Controlar e Imunizar: a(s) política(s) do corpo em *Intrusion*, de Ken MacLeod" (2017).

reaction – to a current technocratic society where the connection between science, media, and economic-political powers is often overlooked, or even actively obscured⁹³.

A GAME OF SMOKE AND MIRRORS: ON THE POWERS THAT CONTROL THE SPECTACLE

In the conclusion of the trilogy's first book, Katniss and Peeta refusal to provide a perfect ending to the Games constitutes not only an act of defiance in the face of Snow's technocratic rule, but also a rebellious refusal to comply with the demands of the spectacle itself⁹⁴. Indeed, throughout the second book of the trilogy, *Catching Fire*, we will get a glimpse on how even the population of the Capitol starts to question the methods of its government. When the possibility arises of a new rebellion by the districts encouraged by the young couple's actions, the choice of president Snow to draft only past living victors of the Games to participate in the 75th Hunger Games proves not to be the soundest⁹⁵. This change of the rules of the Games should have been perceived as a reiteration of political-economic power over the bodies, showing that not even the bodies of the victors and their "star power" are safe from the limitless violence of the government. Nonetheless, the fact that these tributes survived the Games and were by now well-known

⁹³ Capanna goes on to defend the unique role of science fiction as a genre in the following terms: "The problem posed by this state of affairs is [...] significantly serious: the issue that should be radical in our time, the issue of the impact of science and technology on the human soul, does not find significant echoes in literature, which has embarked on formal renovations and become stagnant in a 'human, too human' theme. The unsuccessful attempts of Futurism and many other later 'isms', including perhaps Pop and the ready-made, to reflect in art the anguish and experiences of the man of our industrial environment, committed to technology until he alienated himself in it, show that the approach on the side of the "Humaniors" suffers from an incurable sterility. [...] We will try here to show that sci-fi is an attempt made at a mythological level, that is to say, only partially conscious of itself, to reflect the impact of the technological medium on man and to somehow trace the cards of that Terra Incognita that is the future" (13; my translation).

⁹⁴ After becoming the last remaining tributes of the Games, Peeta and Katniss are informed that there can only be one victor. When pondering on which one of them should die to comply to the Games' rules, they come to the conclusion that, while the Capitol can control all aspects of their lives, they can at least control their own deaths, and so they decide to die together, ingesting a handful of poisoned berries. See: Collins 2008, 344-345.

⁹⁵ The difference in behavior displayed by the audience during the interviews with Caesar Flickerman in the previous edition and in the 75th edition of the Games is revealing: "By the time I'm introduced, the audience is an absolute wreck. People have been weeping and collapsing and even calling for change" (Collins 2009, position 2609).

faces in Panem makes the choice backfire, for it becomes harder to reduce them to an animalistic/barbaric condition, to enjoy the violence of the Games in a detached manner.

But then again, as impactful as the ending of the 75th Games might be with the destruction of the dome, the spectacle is not as easily shattered by an arrow, as was the dome of the arena. While in *Catching Fire* we have a development of the questioning of the strategies of the spectacle, it is the final entry in the fictional world of Panem, *Mockingjay*, that sheds a different light on the relation between resistance and the spectacle itself.

The action of the closing volume starts *in medias res*, taking us back to District 12 where we are readily brought up to speed on the developments. After discovering at the end of the second book that District 13 still existed and was behind a rebellion plan against the Capitol that included rescuing Katniss from the arena⁹⁶, we learn that the rebellious act of destroying the dome led to the bombardment of District 12. We also discover that the survivors of this District are now refugees in District 13, a place described as an underground military compound governed by president Alma Coin, where we can find an Orwellian-like society⁹⁷ that controls and disciplines the bodies of its citizens with a machinic like precision and scientific accurateness⁹⁸. Moreover, we find out that most of the districts are now openly at war with the Capitol, and, more notably, that Alma Coin and Plutarch Heavensbee want Katniss to do more than defying the Capitol in the Games. They want her to “become the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution” (Collins 2008, position 114): the Mockingjay⁹⁹.

In the materialization of their plan of using Katniss’ image to reach the other districts, it is worth noticing the similarity between the remake process that the tributes must go through and the makeover that Coin and Heavensbee put Katniss through in order

⁹⁶ It was believed that District 13 had been obliterated by the Capitol during the “Dark Days” (Collins 2008, 18).

⁹⁷ As the professor of Political Science, Bruce Martin, observes in his article “Political Mutations: ‘Real or Not Real?’”, this society could be described as a form of “totalitarian scientific socialism” (2014, 234).

⁹⁸ The daily schedules and biometric controls are some of the aspects of disciplinary and surveillant nature of District 13’s society: “In the morning, I see that 7:00 — Breakfast is directly followed by 7:30 — Command, which is fine since I may as well start the ball rolling. At the dining hall, I flash my schedule, which includes some kind of ID number, in front of a sensor. As I slide my tray along the metal shelf before the vats of food, I see breakfast is its usual dependable self — a bowl of hot grain, a cup of milk, and a small scoop of fruit or vegetables. Today, mashed turnips. [...] They have nutrition down to a science. You leave with enough calories to take you to the next meal, no more, no less. Serving size is based on your age, height, body type, health, and amount of physical labor required by your schedule” (Collins 2010, 381).

⁹⁹ As we will further explore in part III, the mockingjay is a mutated bird with very specific characteristics that not only allow us to fully understand Katniss’ character arc, but also the reach of the final entry of the trilogy, *Mockingjay*, as a Young Adult sci-fi novel.

to transform her into the symbol of the revolution: “They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances — as if that doesn’t sound horribly familiar — and all I have to do is play my part” (position 114). In fact, when asked to record an inflammatory “propos”¹⁰⁰ that should be broadcasted to all Panem, her prep team of stylists, who were kidnapped to District 13, are called upon to transform her into the Mockingjay. Still, this strategy of fighting the Capitol’s machine of spectacle through scripted TV spots filmed in a studio quickly proves to be ineffective, as the lack of a real gravitas¹⁰¹ to the situation makes Katniss a mere emotionless figure that audiences are unable to empathize with¹⁰². Acknowledging that the model of the reality show has become one vibrant source of interpretative models, principles and topics through which the viewer may build his own identity and structure his life, Haymitch and President Coin decide instead to send Katniss record her propos in problematic warfare scenarios in the districts:

I slowly turn my back to the hospital and find Cressida, flanked by the insects, standing a couple of yards in front of me. Her manner’s unrattled. Cool even. “Katniss,” she says, “President Snow just had them air the bombing live. Then he made an appearance to say that this was his way of sending a message to the rebels. What about you? Would you like to tell the rebels anything?”

“Yes,” I whisper. The red blinking light on one of the cameras catches my eye. I know I’m being recorded. “Yes,” I say more forcefully. Everyone is drawing away from me — Gale, Cressida, the insects — giving me the stage. But I stay focused on the red light. “I want to tell the rebels that I am alive. That I’m right here in District Eight, where the Capitol has just bombed a hospital full of unarmed men, women, and children. There will be no survivors.” The shock I’ve been feeling begins to give way to fury. “I want to tell people that if you think for one second the Capitol will treat us fairly if there’s a cease-fire, you’re deluding yourself. Because you know who they are and what they do.” My hands go out automatically, as if to indicate the whole horror around me. “This is what they do! And we must fight back!”

I’m moving in toward the camera now, carried forward by my rage. “President Snow says he’s sending us a message? Well, I have one for him. You can torture us and bomb us and burn our districts to the ground, but do you see that?” One of the cameras follows as I point to the planes burning on the roof of

¹⁰⁰ Short for “propaganda spots” (Collins 2010, position 491).

¹⁰¹ The humoristic remark of Haymitch, Katniss and Peeta’s mentor, after hearing Katniss recite in the studio the slogan “People of Panem, we fight, we dare, we end our hunger for justice!”, illustrate to what point Katniss is unable to act without being in a real situation: “And that, my friends, is how a revolution dies” (position 792).

¹⁰² This also could be read as a caricaturised and typified representation of socialist figures that goes back to early cold war sci-fi series and films. For instance, in *The Body Snatchers* (1955), one of the quintessential works that reflects the Cold War fears and anxieties, the population of a small American town is replaced overnight by automatons, replicas devoid of human feeling known as “pod people”.

the warehouse across from us. The Capitol seal on a wing glows clearly through the flames. "Fire is catching!" I am shouting now, determined that he will not miss a word. "And if we burn, you burn with us!" (positions 1075-1089)

Escorted by a military squad team and a filming TV crew directed by Cressida, another citizen of the Capitol that joined the rebellion (position 930), Katniss is sent to District 8 to visit and encourage the wounded rebels that are recovering in a makeshift hospital. After witnessing the hospital's horrible conditions and the desperate state most of the wounded were, the area is targeted by an air raid; as Katniss and the rest of her escort team are firing back, trying to repel the Capitol's airplanes, the hospital ends up being destroyed.

As the excerpt above shows, Cressida uses her directing skills to take advantage of the situation and record Katniss raw emotional burst after seeing the hospital in flames. We later know that this strategy was a success: the footage captured was edited and a propos was played all over Panem (position 1157), helping to further inflate the rebellion. This episode could be understood as an illustration that television as a media, and the new media that have spread exponentially in the last few decades, not only generate new modes of appropriation and production, but also *radicalize the conditions for creating critical forms of social agency and resistance*. As the critical theorists Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux sustain:

[...] organizing, disruption, and resistance based on wireless technologies are on full display in the spontaneous emergence of social movements like Occupy, [...] the advance of citizens holding corporate and government powers more accountable through online reporting, and the sudden street protests that can unexpectedly erupt when a smart phone video circulates documenting state violence against civilians, as is increasingly the case of police brutality and killings of unarmed civilians in communities of color. (2015, 34)

Even though this first propos does remind us that technology and the mass media themselves are not inherently good or bad, as they potentially provide a democratic and ethical use of knowledge, information, and images, this positive light soon starts to dim. As the real war between the Capitol and the districts advances, a mediatic war ensues between the propos aired by the Capitol and the ones broadcasted by the rebels. On the one hand, we have President Snow's propaganda, composed of several interviews with an increasingly debilitated Peeta Mellark that, after being captured and brainwashed by

the Capitol's using Tracker jacker's¹⁰³ venom, is instructed to ask for a cease-fire on both parts (Collins 2010, position 287). On the other hand, we have the several clips prepared by Cressida and her crew, comprising of a series of "*We Remember*" propos that revolved around some of the dead tributes from each district, so as to target each district with a very personal piece (position 1186). Irrespective of the obvious emotional manipulation on which both sides rely to achieve high audience ratings and recruit people to their respective causes, up until the decisive moment when the rebels reach the doors of President Snow's palace, we can perceive the rebels' actions as justified, since we are given the impression that there is a dichotomy between "good" rebels and "evil" elitists. However, the air raid that kills dozens of innocent civilians at the doors of the palace, including Katniss' sister, Prim, introduces a weighty plot twist:

There are two possibilities, although the details associated with them may vary. First, as I've believed, that the Capitol sent in that hovercraft, dropped the parachutes, and sacrificed its children's lives, knowing the recently arrived rebels would go to their aid. There's evidence to support this. The Capitol's seal on the hovercraft, the lack of any attempt to blow the enemy out of the sky, and their long history of using children as pawns in their battle against the districts. Then there's Snow's account. That a Capitol hovercraft manned by rebels bombed the children to bring a speedy end to the war. But if this was the case, why didn't the Capitol fire on the enemy? Did the element of surprise throw them? Had they no defenses left? Children are precious to 13, or so it has always seemed. Well, not me, maybe. Once I had outlived my usefulness, I was expendable. (position 3814)

This air raid puts a definite end to the civil war, dictating the imprisonment and trial of President Snow. Dreadfully searching for answers to explain her sister's senseless death, Katniss visits the ousted president in the eve of his public execution, but she ends up getting more than she had bargained for. After being told that the raid was a masterful move on Alma Coin's part, i.e., Coin wanted people to think that Snow was bombing the Capitol's own helpless children to end any feeble loyalty his allies still felt to him (position 3800), Katniss is left questioning herself about the authenticity of everyone and everything.

¹⁰³ Tracker jackers are "genetically engineered wasps, conceived and created in the Capitol. They are genetically coded to attack anyone or anything that disturbs their nest. Once they make a person their target, they will follow him or her far away from their nest, unlike natural vespids. Tracker jackers were used as land mines during the war and planted around the districts of Panem. After the Dark Days, the Capitol destroyed some hives around themselves, but still kept the hives around the districts as a way to show their power over the inhabitants". *The Hunger Games Wiki*, s.v. "Tracker jacker", accessed March 13, 2019, https://thehungergames.fandom.com/wiki/Tracker_jacker.

From my perspective, the hypothesizing that we have in the excerpt above configures a direct interpellation to readers, who are asked to guess who is really behind the attack. It puts them in a position of uncertainty by confronting them with the discrepancies between the actual event, its mediatic representation, and Snow's account. Following the protagonist's thought process, it gradually becomes evident that the bombing was indeed an idea of president Alma Coin, an idea reflecting a Machiavellian logic of the "ends justify the means" that resorts to the spectacle of the death of innocent children in order to end the war¹⁰⁴. This conclusion provides some insights regarding the relationship between power and spectacle: whether if we are referring to a hedonistic society, with its high fashion elite, omnipresent screens and biotechnologies, or a militarized underground society, with its stark discipline, propagandist TV emissions and daily control of the biometrics of its citizens, both competing forms of government – in diametrical opposing ends of the economic specter – follow the spectacle's self-referential logic in the regulation of the relationships of power.

It consequently should be noted that Coin's totalitarian scientific socialism and Snow's authoritarian consumerist corporatism constitute totalitarian regimes that are common descendants of the politics that earlier led to rebellion of the "Dark Days". They are representative figures that constitute possible ways of imagining the future, but that, concomitantly, refer us back to the dangerous political-economic ideologies that prevailed during the second half of the 20th century, and somehow found their way into the 21st century. Not only do they retrospectively warn us of the potential dangers of ecological collapse and global war that such ideologies may (again) be leading us to, but they help us gain distance from their discourses and mechanisms of control, revealing their flaws or shedding light on their contradictions. By doing so, they underline the characteristics and plasticity of a biopolitical mechanism that, as we have seen, has survived and rearranged itself through different incarnations across time – from imperial Rome and 18th century monarchies in Europe, to the 20th century's nation-states –, while

¹⁰⁴ The following passage gives us a good example of Katniss train of thought: "Then what's nagging at me? Those double-exploding bombs, for one. It's not that the Capitol couldn't have the same weapon, it's just that I'm sure the rebels did. Gale and Beetee's brainchild. Then there's the fact that Snow made no escape attempt, when I know him to be the consummate survivor. It seems hard to believe he didn't have a retreat somewhere, some bunker stocked with provisions where he could live out the rest of his snaky little life. And finally, there's his assessment of Coin. What's irrefutable is that she's done exactly what he said. Let the Capitol and the districts run one another into the ground and then sauntered in to take power. Even if that was her plan, it doesn't mean she dropped those parachutes. Victory was already in her grasp. Everything was in her grasp" (Collins 2010, position 3814).

incessantly relying on its own representations of violence to create atmospheres of fear that shape social relations.

Katniss' rejection of the "ends justify the means" mentality shared by the Capitol and the rebels, together with her choice to assassinate Coin to prevent its perpetuation and the subsequent organization of a new edition of the Hunger Games, give the trilogy, at once, an ominous and hopeful closing. She manages to resist and to put an apparent end to the cycle of spectacular violence exerted on Panem's younger generations, signaling that resistance may lead to the creation of the conditions for a mature political voice and agency¹⁰⁵. Additionally, after having returned to District 12 to rebuild her life with Peeta, she chooses to deal with her past and pass the memories of the Games to her children in a profoundly significant way:

I got the idea from our family's plant book. The place where we recorded those things you cannot trust to memory. The page begins with the person's picture. A photo if we can find it. If not, a sketch or painting by Peeta. Then, in my most careful handwriting, come all the details it would be a crime to forget. Lady licking Prim's cheek. My father's laugh. Peeta's father with the cookies. The color of Finnick's eyes. What Cinna could do with a length of silk. Boggs reprogramming the Holo. Rue poised on her toes, arms slightly extended, like a bird about to take flight. On and on. We seal the pages with salt water and promises to live well to make their deaths count. Haymitch finally joins us, contributing twenty-three years of tributes he was forced to mentor. Additions become smaller. An old memory that surfaces. A late primrose preserved between the pages. Strange bits of happiness, like the photo of Finnick and Annie's newborn son. (Collins 2010, position 4119)

The album that she and Peeta start, gathering photographs of both family members and tributes in happy or relaxed moments, together with the fact that memorials have been built in the places where the arenas of the Games once were (Collins 2010, position 4139), mark a radical departure from the notion of memory that were implicit in the Games. The relation she develops with the photographs, and the relationship that she expects their children and future generations of Panem will establish with them, suggest that these new forms of representation may produce comparable effects to those that the trilogy itself, as a collection of sci-fi works, might produce on the reader. As Marianne Hirsch

¹⁰⁵ As Susan Tan would put it, she embodies the idea that "radical adolescences can open up new forms of adulthood" (2014, 94).

perceptively notes apropos of the notion of “post-memory”¹⁰⁶, future generations that were born after traumatic events will be conscious that their memories do not consist of events, but of *representations of events*. It is precisely due to consciousness of the mediatization that “repetition does not have the effect of desensitizing us to horror, or shielding us from shock” (2001, 8), and so a reiterated contact with such images may potentially transform the passive memory of the spectator into the active ethical act of remembrance, taking death out of the *vetrina* that the spectacle had put it in and returning its almost unbearable weight and restlessness. Antitheses of the spectacle, these representations are not instrument of paralysis or “simple re-traumatization”, but helpful vehicles of working through a traumatic past (9).

Eppure, her status as the Mockingjay is a double-edged sword: it implies that she is a symbol of future hope and of transformation of the past, but, conversely, that she will always be connected to that past, scarred, and shaped by it. She resists its logic, has awoken from the bad dream of modern society, but is unable to completely escape the fact that she, as most people born in the contemporary western world, was born into a society where the spectacle, as Debord suggested back in *The Society of the Spectacle*, constitutes social relations between people mediated by images (2005, 10). It is no wonder that she feels disoriented about her future, now that her gestures belong to herself again and she is no longer alienated from her own life and desires, she must relearn to live, unmediated.

Ultimately, this disorientation and lack of alternative political perspectives that befall the otherwise “happy end” of *Mockingjay*, are symptomatic of a political and economic reality that seems to be slowly setting in current western societies. They indicate the possible effects of an everchanging global society of control that has been flattening national boundaries and accelerating the decline of the traditional State structures/institutions, paving the way for the formation of a global police state¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁶ Marianne Hirsch defines the concept as such: “Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they ‘remember’ only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right. [...] The term ‘postmemory’ is meant to convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary, or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness. Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection, and creation—often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible. That is not, of course, to say that survivor memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly—chronologically—connected to the past” (2001, 9).

¹⁰⁷ Which would be the final state-form, as Agamben would say: the “spectacular-democratic State” (2000, 85). I will further develop this notion in part III.

Namely, they point to the nefarious impact that the use of violent images to regulate (inter)national relationships may have in the formation of social/political identities, creating fear-ridden societies of disposability where a “generalized, illogical, and often unspecified sense of panic is facilitated” (Evans and Giroux 2015, 69).

As we will explore in greater detail during the analysis of *The Execution Channel*¹⁰⁸, the spectacularization of anxieties or fears, and the cumulative policing of everyday life, seem to have become the principal cultural experiences molding identities, principles, and social relations. Through MacLeod’s novel we will be able to revisit what is perhaps the defining moment in the 21st century that has sparked such spectacularization/policing: the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11. Such revisitation may help us reflect on how the mediatic coverage of the attacks, as well as the whole coverage of the “War on Terror”, have ever since helped to thrust a gradually unequal world order inside which increasingly more bodies are stripped of any real social or political significance.

¹⁰⁸ But also, in part III of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3 – THE SPEED OF POLITICS AND THE TOTAL WAR (OF
INFORMATION) IN *THE EXECUTION CHANNEL*

“‘Truth,’ it has been said, ‘is the first casualty of war’”.

Philip Snowden, introduction to *Truth and the War*, by E. D. Morel.

REIMAGINING HISTORY: A NOT SO DIFFERENT “WAR ON TERROR”

Up until this point in the thesis I have been exploring dystopias that refer to contemporary societies and current biopolitical problems, but that, nonetheless, have their temporal and spatial coordinates located in a fictional sphere. With Ken MacLeod’s *The Execution Channel* we face a different situation. The novel, which takes its title from a mysterious TV channel that broadcasts state-sponsored executions, plunges us into a fast-paced spy story, packed with chases between rogue spies and government agents. It offers us the depiction of a world in the early decades of the 21st century, where the military of the U.S, together with some of its allies, have conducted a “War on Terror” for some time and additional terrorist acts have continued, including an unspecified one at Rosyth in Scotland. But *this* War on Terror and *this* world are not exactly the ones we know:

We don’t like to think that one random joe or jane off the street could make that kind of difference. But they can, sometimes without even knowing it. Here’s an example, and I swear it isn’t a stretch. Everybody agrees the 2000 election – or the November Coup, if you like – made a huge difference to America and the world. What nobody knows is who decided it. It wasn’t Bush or Gore or even the Florida Electoral Commission. It was some guy or gal in Florida who said no to a bunch of commies trying to get on the ballot. I’ve checked this out, and it turns out that the Workers World Party – that’s the commies – fell short of their ballot-access requirements by just one signature. Boo hoo. But think about it. In any state there’s always a few hundred pissed-off losers who’ll vote commie if they can, and Democrat if they can’t. If the WWP had run in Florida they’d have pulled hundreds of votes from Gore – just enough to swing it for Bush. — OK, so imagine Bush wins. In August 2001 Bush is in the White House. On August 6 he gets a President’s Daily Brief across his desk headed ‘Bin Laden determined to strike in US’. (I know, I know – there’s serious doubts over the reality of that memo, but let’s leave that aside for now.) Would he have turned around and ordered a cruise missile attack on Afghanistan? Like hell he would. He’s like his daddy, an oil man and a spook man. He would’ve worked through the FBI, CIA and the mukhabarats – the Arab secret police forces, nasty pieces of work but basically on-side against radical Islamicists – to track down Al Qaeda. [...] Can

you imagine the 9/11 attacks happening without that? Out of a clear blue September sky? I can't. Without 9/11, Gore couldn't have attacked Afghanistan again, then invaded Iraq, then taken out the Iranian nuke program. Without the Iran attack: no oil spike, no world slump, no Chinese export crisis, no worker-peasant upheaval, no Two Necessary Corrections in Beijing, no Straits Incident, no PRC slo-mo break-up, no ... and so it goes on, right on down to the totally fucked-up mess we're in today. And there you have it, a whole chain of consequences from a tiny decision. For want of a nail ... jeeze, it's like chaos theory. Talk about a sensitive dependence on initial conditions! Some unknown dude in Florida who said no to a commie with a clipboard changed the course of history. (MacLeod 2007, 120-122)

Although the historical references are in our world, MacLeod changes the outcome of the 2001 presidential election in the U.S., creating a world where the 54th president of the country is Al Gore, not George W. Bush. Given this choice for creating his narrative plot, one would expect that that this alternate history story¹⁰⁹ would bring significant changes to the events that followed the election, namely, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Surprisingly enough, the Scottish writer follows a different direction, distancing his notion of alternate history from, for instance, the world of *The Man in the High Castle*, where the Axis power has won WWII (Dick 2015).

Albeit, as we will see, he does introduce significant worldwide changes, as we can read in the excerpt, the attacks still took place, with the difference that they targeted the Hancock and the Prudential Towers in Boston (123), and, ironically, they were triggered by the fact that Al Gore, unlike Bush, took the Daily Brief about the threat of Osama Bin Laden seriously, ordering a cruise-missile strike that killed Bin Laden himself. MacLeod then seems to suggest that the attacks and the subsequent "War on Terror" were inevitable, regardless of the presidential election, which is to say that they did not merely depend on the actions of sovereign power(s) /figure(s). So, admitting this possibility, does he hint a different culprit or cause in the novel? Furthermore, how can we interpret the statement included in the cover that "The War on Terror is over... Terror won"?

¹⁰⁹ A possible definition of this concept would be: "Alternate History stories take place on a world where history takes a different course. Often, a single event is the trigger for the alternate timeline. Usually these are pivotal moments. These moments are often referred to as points of divergence, meaning creating two histories or replacing a future that once existed. While these reimaginings are sometimes mere conjecture, sometimes they are based on science. There are a few tropes of Science Fiction that have become widely used in Alternate History stories: cross-time travel between alternate histories, splitting of time lines, and an awareness of the existence of other timelines. Some common historical foci: WWI, WWII, American Civil War, Roman Empire, historical figures like Napoleon and Kennedy" (*Best Science Fiction Books*, n.d.).

Not unlike “Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death!”, *The Execution Channel* is set in a near and eerily familiar future, and, as in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, it is also located in the aftermath of a catastrophic event: following the attacks, there was a flu pandemic, as well as wars with Iraq and Iran, a conjuncture that made CCTV and security surveillance become omnipresent. Throughout the novel we follow the path of the protagonist, Roisin Travis, one of the protestors in a peace camp outside the U.S. base at RAF Leuchars, in Scotland. Alerted by a comment on the blog of her brother, Alec, serving in the army in Kazakhstan, she risks photographing a strange device being unloaded from a transport airplane¹¹⁰.

When the device explodes not long after, in what at first appears to be a nuclear attack, she realizes she has evidence of something far bigger than she anticipated and goes on the run from British and American agents. Meanwhile, her father, James Travis – an IT engineer that, as we find out, is an agent of the French intelligence service that has been for years doing sabotage operations against Britain (65) –, in the process of trying to reach Roisin and assure her safety, is exposed and implied in the series of attacks that take place in England. As we can already tell, MacLeod’s book is a spy novel that builds its narrative thread around the chase betwixt rogue spies and government agents. This choice, I would argue, also provides us a new perspective on how images and information can be used and manipulated, placed at the service of the spectacle:

A knock on the table top as he sat down nudged four of the five flat screens out of screensaver mode. Mark popped the Bud and scanned as he sipped. To his left was the news on multiple split-screen: CNN, Fox, Al Jazeera, BBC. Midwest tornadoes, none of them near Evansville and therefore of no immediate concern to him. Missing white kid. Syria, Saudi, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Xinjiang: same shit, different day. Next along, the Execution Channel. Straps, gurney, lethal injection, Georgia. Yawn. Right in front of him was the screen with his current project, an ugly spatter of HTML code, much of it pointing to yet-unwritten Javascript applets. Sigh. The screen to his immediate right showed the latest posts linking to his blog (which was called Mark Dark). The other, once he’d keyed a password, displayed a rolling trawl through the porn sites that partially financed it. (26)

¹¹⁰ The description of the strange device creates from the get-go an atmosphere of mystery and uncertainty around the events in the novel: “Before the aircraft had come to a halt she was looking through the viewfinder and zooming the lens. It was almost as if she was hauling the plane back as it moved away. So she saw what happened after the aircraft came to a halt, outside the hangars. The tailgate opened, the ramp lowered, and an object whose main component was a black cylinder that looked about a metre in diameter and four metres long was rolled out on a gurney. A utility vehicle drew up, and the gurney was towed away into the nearest hangar” (MacLeod 2007, 10).

The news told him nothing he didn't know, and omitted much that he did. Satellite and Space Station images showed the black plumes of the refinery and depot fires, now hundreds of kilometres long. The speed-camera shots of the collapsing motorway pillars had dropped out of the coverage. More fires were visible from the bay window than on screen. The focus was clear and narrow, on the rescuers' toil in the motorway catastrophes and at Grangemouth and Leuchars. People who had fled south from Edinburgh and Fife, fearing fallout or further attacks, were urged to return. Parliament was in emergency session; while the emergency lasted, sittings would be from eight in the morning until long past midnight. The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary answered questions that were not the ones asked. Later the news cut away to the war. Truck bomb in Tehran. Civil defence exercise in North Korea. Pyongyang deploys anti-aircraft missiles – Japan protests. (113)

The rest were jammed with almanacs and atlases, reference works, military and paramilitary handbooks, war memoirs, and about ten yards of weird shit: conspiracy theories, UFO books, religious and occult texts, science fiction, pseudo-science and real but unorthodox science, journals and books from the political fringes. Cartwright and his colleagues knew that they couldn't rely on online material, because they and hundreds like them spent every working day fucking it up. Contaminating online information was what Information Management Services did. Outsourcing the supply of disinformation to a swarm of freelance contractors had been one of Homeland Security's smarter moves. (41)

In the “cat and mouse” game that ensues between Roisin and her father, and agents Jeff Paulson (CIA) and Maxime Smith (MI5), the characters, and, by extension, the reader, communicate with each other and try to find out the truth about the mysterious device that Roisin photographed at Leuchars¹¹¹ through different channels of communication. The three lengthy excerpts that I have transcribed above expose the way those channels are covertly used to transmit information, but also *who* uses them. In the first excerpt, we have the case of Mark Dark, a respected blogger/programmer that tackles mainly conspiracy theories in his blog. On the second, we have television broadcasts, the official channel of information, so to speak, fed by images of CCTV cameras. Lastly, we have the case of Bob Cartwright, Anne-Marie Chretien, and Sarah Henk, who work for the office of Information Management Service, a euphemistic designation for an office at the service of governmental institutions and corporations, with the purpose of contaminating online information; in the narrator's words, a “freelance contractor” that functions as an outsource supplying disinformation for Homeland Security (41).

¹¹¹ As well as the following attacks on the refinery at Grangemouth and on the motorway intersection outside Birmingham. See MacLeod 2007, 58-59.

In my perspective, these cases are representative of the notion that today's networks of the new information infrastructures are what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call a hybrid between two models, a democratic network, and an oligopolistic network (2001, 298). On one hand, Mark Dark epitomizes a "completely horizontal and deterritorialized model" of the democratic network *par excellence*, and, on the other, television news alongside the office of Information Management Service refer to a broadcast system defined by a "centralized production, mass distribution, and one-way communication" controlled by corporate or political powers (299). The informational triangle that is established between these three parties draws our attention to the idea that transnational corporations and governments are trying to sway the new information infrastructure. As Hardt and Negri put it, whilst it is true that there are, and will be, democratic portions of this consolidated web "that resist control owing to the web's interactive and decentralized structure", there is already under way a "massive centralization of control through the (de facto or de jure) unification of the major elements of information and communication power structure: Hollywood, Microsoft, IBM, AT&T, and so forth" (300).

BROADCASTING FEAR: DISINFORMATION, MISINFORMATION, AND THE POLITICAL USE OF MEDIA

As we have seen in the analysis of *The Hunger Games*, the current neoliberal trend towards the privatization of energy, communication, and services in general, marks an increasing intrusion of an economic private sphere in the public space. The attempt to privatize social security or national health systems¹¹², or the increase control that corporate powers seek to have over schools, military forces, or the telecommunications superhighway, are just a few examples of how a privatization of key aspects of public or social life is underway. But I would argue that MacLeod's novel emphasizes a different element in this process, an element that was hinted at in Katniss' confusion over what had really happened during the bombings that killed her sister: *disinformation*. In the search

¹¹² The campaign by the former president Donald Trump to privatize social security and Medicare provides us perfect example of this.

for a complete control and integration of the human life in the spectacle, the fear of warfare and violent conflict have assumed an increasingly psychological dimension that relates to the way in which people cognitively and emotionally process information.

Whether we refer to misinformation, i.e., information originally presented as truthful but that posteriorly reveals to be false, or disinformation, utterly false information that is spread for propagandistic goals and that may be identified as false later, one the effects of this culture of fear, amplified by the media, is the straining of personal relations under the weight of a constant feeling of risk. This feeling of being constantly “under the sword of Damocles” estranges people, strips them out of any possible active agency before the authority of autonomous and ubiquitous risk factors (Furedi 1997, 19), fostering an atmosphere of distrust where violence looks so random and thoughtless that it lacks the need for justification. Using the words of Giroux and Evans, under the interlocking regimes of neoliberal power,

[a]ll that matters instead is to re-create the very conditions to further and deepen the crises of neoliberal rule. Violence, with its ever-present economy of uncertainty, fear, and terror, is no longer merely a side effect of police brutality, war, or criminal behavior; it has become fundamental to neoliberalism as a particularly savage facet of capitalism. And in doing so it has turned out to be central to legitimating those social relations in which the political and pedagogical are redefined in order to undercut possibilities for authentic democracy. Under such circumstances, the social becomes retrograde, emptied of any democratic values, and organized around a culture of shared anxieties rather than shared responsibilities. The contemporary world, then – the world of neoliberalism – creates the most monstrous of illusions, one that functions by hiding things in plain sight. (2015, 15)

The constant news broadcasting and speculative accounts that bombard the characters via television, radio newscasts, and their mobile phones¹¹³, in conjunction with the

¹¹³ The news broadcasts consist either of chaotic images captured by CCTV and mobile phone cameras that are not narratively framed – reminiscent of the case of the 9/11 attacks of the World Trade Center –, or statements of government representatives vis-à-vis the official position on the attacks on British soil. The following passage illustrates well the “chaotic profusion” of images that both characters and readers have to deal with: “Travis climbed back to his seat, turned his phone from map to news and looked at the incoming pictures. [...] The worst of it, which he could now see in a shot from the Virgin ambulance helicopter hovering up ahead, was the hundreds of other vehicles that had been on the overpasses, underpasses and bridges when the support pillars had gone down, or whose drivers had been unable to stop when the road in front of them fell away. A chance use of a phone camera had delivered shots of that, too, like a chase-movie stunt. Every minute or so the news ran a loop of speed-camera footage: flashes, then puffs of smoke or dust coming from a support pillar, followed by that entire section of the pillar showing daylight for a moment before the overpass came down” (69-70).

disinformation spread on the internet by agents like Bob Cartwright and Anne-Marie Chretien, or isolated conspiracy theorists as Mark Dark, have grave consequences on British society, consequently also disturbing the balance of worldwide political relationships. As the narrative unravels, the inability to pinpoint the culprits of the attacks, or to identify the enigmatic object spotted by Roisin at the beginning of the book, builds up an atmosphere of insecurity and panic. This atmosphere propels violent xenophobic attacks on Muslim communities around Great Britain (MacLeod 2007, 36), but also, in a ripple effect that underlines the global network that binds international relationships, makes re-emerge old fears of a global nuclear warfare, re-dividing the world into a new Cold War that puts Britain and the U.S. in potential confrontation with France, Russia and China (117-118). Additionally, MacLeod introduces one more element that perfectly condenses the way this unknown and deterritorialized fear binds all countries together under the mechanism of the spectacle:

Like most CCTV and mobile-phone cameras, the one in the facility had been manufactured in the United States, where debt-bondage and environmental refugees ensured a steady supply of cheap labour and the devalued dollar kept the products competitive. As was the case with almost all such cameras made in the US, its firmware had been designed in India. Like most such designs, the high-level concept work had been done in Bombay, and the low-level programming grunt work had been farmed out to Guangzhou, which under what was officially known as Socialism With Even More Chinese Characteristics had become what was officially known as a Skilled Socialist Labour Export Zone, or, less respectfully, as the cubicle-farm of the world. Certain particularly skilled socialist labourers of Guangzhou had incorporated some undocumented features in the machine-code level of the programs. The most notable, and quite unnoticed, of these features was one that selected, copied, encrypted, and transmitted data at random intervals and by diverse routes to a secret annexe of the Department of Artificial Intelligence of Beijing University. The data's selection criteria were set and continuously refined by a natural neural network cultured from the cortical cells of a long-deceased cat, genetically predisposed and behaviourally conditioned to recognise images of death and pain. The only human intervention required, when the images reached Beijing, was to select those most appropriate to upload to other parasitic programs, distributed across dozens of quite unrelated communications and surveillance satellites, which generated the phantom presence in near-Earth orbit of a so-called virtual satellite, whose principal output was the Execution Channel. (190-191)

This novum introduced by the Scottish writer could be interpreted as a less entertaining incarnation of "This Is Your Death", or perhaps a more verisimilar and less grandiose version of the *Hunger Games*. Inconspicuously present across the book mainly through

encrypted loose references that end some chapters¹¹⁴, we learn through the words of Mark Dark that the “Execution Channel” is an automated broadcast that is not controlled by anyone in a specific location, and that displays uncontextualized and narratively unframed CCTV recordings of deaths of random people across aleatory locations around the world. This extreme example of displays of violence in media constitutes, therefore, a narrative strategy that creates an estrangement effect in the reader, bringing further into daylight that, while the spectacle generally functions as if there was a point of central control, there is not a single locus of control that dictates the spectacle.

Following the vision of Hardt and Negri in *Empire*, the novel allows us to escape the blind spots of the characters that grope in the disorientation created by the intelligentsia and counterintelligence activities of the military and secret services, or the blame game of the representatives of each country. It reveals that conspiracy theories of governmental and non-governmental schemes of worldwide domination¹¹⁵, should be acknowledge, at once, as both true and false (2001, 323). The spectacle of politics functions, using the philosophers’ words, “*as if* the media, the military, the government, the transnational corporations, the global financial institutions, and so forth were all consciously and explicitly directed by a single power even though in reality they are not” (323).

In the denouement of the novel the breaking news that several cities around the world seem to have been decimated by a new weapon of incalculable destructive capabilities, push the escalation of the tensions concerning a global nuclear war to a breaking point. The interaction that Roisin and James Travis – and the MI5 and CIA agents – establish with the communication devices that provide them information about the latest developments, brings forth yet another characteristic of the mechanism of the spectacle:

One channel was now showing a live shot from outside Dongtan, China, alongside an archive picture taken from the same location, the top floor of a Shanghai skyscraper. The earlier picture showed the eco-suburb, all green wooded parks and glittering faceted domes and sweeping concrete curves and early-evening lights. The live shot showed the same evening skyline with a flat gap and drifting smoke where Dongtan had been. Dongtan had been one of the places where the

¹¹⁴ For example, the uncontextualized references that we have at the end of Chapter 2: “Susi Abudu; Nigeria; stoning; witchcraft. Matthew Holst; Syria; decapitation; invasion. Tariq Nazir; Scotland; burning; charge unknown” (MacLeod 2007, 38).

¹¹⁵ Which have been widespread in our western societies in recent years.

US had claimed that the new anti-missile weapons had been deployed. As far as Roisin could see from the spatter of dots coming up on a map shown on another channel, the same was true of a swathe of cities and industrial zones along China's east and south and into North Korea, as well as a few Moscow suburbs and Siberian towns. Whatever had hit Dongtan wasn't a nuke. No mushroom cloud, no heat-flash, and very little blast damage. It looked all the more terrifying for that – death from above, against which anti-missile missiles or the alleged new particle beams offered no protection. It didn't even seem to be a kinetic-energy weapon: one big enough to destroy a small city would have had effects at first indistinguishable from a nuke. Roisin guessed it was some space-based beam weapon, far more powerful than anything yet imagined. If what she'd seen at Leuchars was a beam weapon, as she now supposed had to be the case because the US President had said as much, America must already have weapons that made it look like a laser pointer. No wonder the alarm had sounded: one rational strategy for the Russians right now was to launch everything they had before it was destroyed on the ground. (338-339)

As it had already happened in several pivotal moments throughout the novel with the presence of computers, mobile phones or radios, Roisin gets to witness in the TV newscast the apparent devastation that is taking place in China, North Korea, and Russia in real time. The different media that transmit the violent and baffling content are permanently at hands reach, instantaneously giving access to everywhere and everyone, and, in my reading, these qualities have two important implications that help us reflect about our own experiences: firstly, in a similar fashion as industrial modernization did in the 19th and 20th centuries, today's informatization signals a new mode of becoming human. Interactive and cybernetic machines become prostheses embedded into our flesh and our brains, functioning as a lens (or a screen) through which we redefine our bodies and minds (Hardt and Negri 2001, 291)¹¹⁶. Secondly, the possibility of the "live transmission", brought about by the "turning the limit-speed of waves to effect", converts the old spectatorship experience into a "planetary grand-scale optics" (Virilio 1998, 12). With the advent of this new form of experiencing life and the world, a *world time* arises in which the simultaneity of actions precedes their sequential chronological order (13). In this world time, the audiovisual continuity also progressively overrides the geographical adjacency of nation-states, which have been increasingly losing their importance together with their correspondent institutions. That is to say, the political frontiers shift from the real space of geopolitics to the time of the "chronopolitics" of the transmission of imagery (13-14).

¹¹⁶ As Donna Haraway would put it, we have reached a new "cyborg" condition. See: Haraway, 1991.

Following the visionary line of thought of Paul Virilio, which was born out of the 80's Cold War context but seems to still be valid today, there are two complementary aspects of globalization that must be considered nowadays: on the one hand, there is an extreme reduction of distances, which “ensues from temporal compression of transport and transmissions”; on the other, there is “a general spread of tele-surveillance. A new vision of a world that is constantly ‘tele-present’ 24/7 thanks to the artifice of this ‘trans-horizon optics’ which puts what was previously out of sight on display” (13-14). This trans-horizon optics of the world of a chronopolitics carries a game-changing aspect as far as political-military action is concerned, for its underlying *speed* entails the passage from *wartime* to the *war of peacetime* (Virilio 2007, 158). The speed of the uninterrupted flow of images provokes, ironically, a glare effect that does not translate into freedom from geopolitical constraints, but, rather, into the extinction of space as the field of freedom of political action. As we shall explore in more depth in part III, the adoption by political-economical forces of the dromocratic¹¹⁷ logic of the military “fleet in being”¹¹⁸ allows the installation of a permanent state of emergency/exception that provokes such desperation in people to the point of forcing them to relinquish political agency without recurring to direct physical contact.

This notion that fear is a mind-killer, “the little-death that brings total obliteration” (Herbert 2018, 605), is seamlessly portrayed in the fictional society of *The Execution Channel*. The extreme proximity of the parties, in which the immediacy of information instantly generates the successive crises, leads to a pervasive state of panic and normalized war. Indeed, the unidentified ultra-advanced weapon of mass destruction that keeps lurking in the news throughout the narrative, condenses the idea that, in the self-referential logic of the spectacle, the unforeseeable technological developments in weaponry reflect an increased degree of autonomy of danger that excludes human action from the process of deciding its fate. Regardless of their position in the power structure, both Roisin, James, Maxine, Paulson, and Mark Dark feel, as we also feel to a certain degree, that they are at constantly at risk, facing hazards that are independent of them and that are not simply a consequence of an individual act, but have an autonomous existence.

¹¹⁷ A term used by Virilio to express a kinetic, circulatory, and swift quality. See: Virilio 2007, 157-158.

¹¹⁸ Developed from the 19th century onwards in association with the concept of a total warfare located, at once, everywhere, and nowhere. As Virilio notes, the exponentially fast technological developments in long-range weaponry (such as submarines or missiles) meant the passage from a continental (territorial) notion of war with defined spatial and temporal battlefield limits, to “a permanent presence in the sea of an invisible fleet able to strike no matter where and no matter when, annihilating the enemy’s will to power by creating a global zone of insecurity” (158).

Ultimately, they fear that “an imperceptible movement on a computer keyboard, or one made by a ‘skyjacker’ brandishing a cookie box covered with masking tape, can lead to a catastrophic chain of events that until recently was inconceivable” (Virilio 2007, 158). The statement that we have in the cover of the novel now makes more sense: the “War on Terror” is over, as terror becomes part of a war-ridden everyday life.

Taking into consideration all that we have said previously, the plot twist that we are left with at the end of the novel may come as anti-climactic. The explanation that the several cities that had disappeared were transported either to the Earth’s orbit or directly to the moon through “several experimental space platforms applying plasma focus-fusion technology and Heim Theory anti-gravity propulsion” (MacLeod 2007, 358), seems to be an implausible manner to resolve the tension that MacLeod had been building up to that point, leaving the reader in dismay before such an improbable conclusion. While I reckon that this choice might be divisive, even seemingly going against the novel ethos, the insertion of such speculative element in the novel with the inclusion of more rigorous scientific references and extrapolations, not only reminds us of the Scottish writer’s scientific background and interest in Hard Science Fiction¹¹⁹, but also may be read as a final insight regarding the way the spectacle produces fear through different media:

[...] the hope that it will prove a stinging rebuff to the schemes of imperialism, hegemonism, revisionism, dogmatism, and great-power chauvinism, and deliver a severe and serious setback to the criminal manipulation of legitimate popular discontent by these and other dark forces using the spiritual poisoned daggers of backward superstition, reactionary fundamentalism and national separatism to drive deep and painful wounds into the suffering and bleeding body [...]. (360)

The use of terms such as “dark forces”, “spiritual poisoned daggers”, “backward superstition” or “national separatism” in the official press release emitted by China¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ The subgenre of Hard Science Fiction could be defined as follows: “Item of sf Terminology coined by P. Schuyler Miller in *Astounding* (November 1957) and since then widely used by sf Fandom and readers; it has sometimes overlapped in meaning with “hardcore sf”, often used in the 1960s and 1970s to mean the kind of sf that repeats the themes and (to a degree) the style of the Genre SF written during the so-called Golden Age of SF. Though still sometimes used in a way that implies the element of nostalgia associated with ‘hardcore sf’, the term ‘hard sf’ now seems to refer to something rather simpler, as summarized by Allen Steele (in “Hard Again” in *New York Review of Science Fiction*, June 1992): ‘Hard sf is the form of imaginative literature that uses either established or carefully extrapolated science as its backbone’”. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, s.v. “Hard SF”, accessed March 19, 2019, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/hard_sf. Many of the works by the Scottish writer, from his space opera *Newton’s Wake* and his different trilogies to the novel *Intrusion* – which will be subject of analysis in the next chapter –, could be considered “Hard SF”.

¹²⁰ One of the countries that have developed the experimental space platform.

after the disappearing of the cities, is quite revealing. It highlights the acute opposition between the obscure and illogical subjective perception of the dangers, and the actuality of the danger. More significantly, it stresses that this manipulated perception of the world is not a mere response of the individual mind, on the contrary, the flareup of anxieties concerning risk(s) occurs *within the collective imagination of society*. The inclusion of this passage in the official press release could perhaps be read as a final nod to the fact that the Bush administration used the fear of weapons of mass destruction as a pretext to solicit the general populations' support on their "War on Terror" and invade Iraq. By revealing that the strange object shaping the characters' imagination (and fears) turns out to be a peaceful and experimental scientific device, MacLeod exposes the way political-economic power uses media to spread disinformation/misinformation, stimulating fantasies and unsubstantiated fears at a global level that can be used as instruments to manipulate and make people forfeit their political agency¹²¹.

¹²¹ This idea is also expressed by Al Gore in his article "The Politics of Fear", and by Frank Furedi in *Culture of Fear*. On the one hand, Al Gore emphasizes that the political use of fear aims at distorting the political reality of a nation, "creating fear in the general population that is hugely disproportionate to the actual dangers" (2004, 779). Furedi, for his part, goes on to say that the constitution of this collective imagination is "subject to a variety of influences, which form an integral part of the prevailing social and cultural climate, and express a mood, a set of attitudes, which cannot be characterized in terms of rational or irrational any more than the individual expression of happiness or sorrow. That is why officials and experts who try to influence public perception through better risk communication are often ineffective. The many panics or overreactions to a particular incident are by no means mainly the outcome of poor communication. They often provide interesting insights about how society makes sense of itself. Such reactions can only be understood in relation to the wider social processes [...]" (1997, 16-17).

CONCLUSION: A FEAR BY ANY OTHER NAME WOULD SMELL AS SWEET

The novels we have analyzed in this part have undoubtedly helped to have a better understanding of the inner works and complexity of the spectacle as a biopolitical mechanism. Regardless of their narrative strategies and aesthetic differences, and despite all their rich and diverse insights regarding the dynamics of this mechanism, there seems to be one unambiguous conclusion: whereas it is certainly possible for one to become conscious of being inside the world of the spectacle, to resist it is quite hard, and to escape it is almost unimaginable.

The enigmatic chapter that closes *The Execution Channel*, in which Bob Cartwright visits several times the Glass Flowers exhibit at the Harvard Museum of Natural History (2007, 369), converges precisely with this conclusion:

Bob walks past the entire sequence of long glass cases, which contain life-size models of North American flora. The models are, for the most part, of hallucinatory precision. The minutest visible hair on a stem, the dots of pollen on stamens, the sharpness and size of every spike on a cactus, the slight drying and withering of some of the originals, are reproduced so well that it is, in some cases, almost impossible even on close inspection to distinguish them by sight from real plants.

He takes his time over these visits. He studies every model, every label with great care. And he leaves, shaking his head. After he has left, Bob sometimes finds himself looking at real plants – the grass and shrubs outside – as if they might be some uncanny simulacrum. (369-370)

During each visit he studies every model, carefully observes every label, and between each visit he looks at real plants, as if they might be some “uncanny simulacrum”. In their final phone call, his former colleague Anne-Marie tells him that there is a message for him in the exhibit, but, despite all the visits, he is not able to figure it out (369-370). I would argue that, like the models of hallucinatory precision, the lives represented in violent live images and in reality shows appear to be more convincing than real life itself. They make extremely difficult for Katniss to perceive the world and her body without mediation, prevent Fernando Morales from denying the narrative of its death imposed by the show “This Is Your Death!”, and warp Bob Cartwright’s perception, making him believe that the artificial plants are more “truthful”, so to speak, than the real natural ones.

All these characters, each in its own way, echo aspects of the condition of the contemporary western citizen, and their respective societies pose a black mirror capable of reflecting a perhaps not so distant future in which all possession must derive its immediate prestige and its ultimate purpose from appearance, and where social relations between people are completely mediated by images (Debord 2005, 10 and 13). Looking retrospectively, in the relationship each protagonist establishes with their peers and with the structures of powers within their societies, we glimpse that the passage from a disciplinary society to a society of control does not equate to the end of discipline. As disciplinary *dispositifs* have become “less limited and bounded spatially in the social field” (Hardt and Negri 2001, 330), traditional nation-state institutions and their vertical structure of power are transformed into the horizontal circuit of the technological society of the spectacle. This transformation indicates that the external voice that once dictated disciplinary practices from above is being substituted by a sort of “inner compulsion indistinguishable from our will, immanent to and inseparable from our subjectivity itself” (329), but also that there is in motion a collapse of boundaries both at a national and at a global level.

The formation that subsequently is taking place of an everchanging global society of control has flattened national boundaries and created a constant flux of people, goods and information that goes together with the realization of the world market and “the real subsumption of global society under capital” (329). As we have seen, the fear of violence – but also of loneliness, war, or death – is, ultimately, the primal force that creates and maintains this new global order, and, as I have argued, the crucial content of information that mass communication media seek to provide is precisely *fear*. The continuous feeling of distress and the different anxieties over the future seem to be more than ever central in maintaining the spectacle going on 24/7, making this emotion the decisive tool to keep modern societies imprisoned in the nightmare that Debord so clearly saw and tried to expose more than half a century ago.

Given the increasing propagation of fake news or post-truths in every laptop and mobile phone, alongside the proliferation of broadcasts composed of reality shows intermingled with violent images in newscasts or action films, one could say that the nightmare has become ever so vivid. In the search of ways to try to wake up from it, literature, and, specifically, dystopian science fiction, may prove to play an irreplaceable role. The dystopias that emerge from a search of consistency between narrative and the predominant scientific-technological perspectives (but also problems) of the current

historical time, reflect an effort to imagine and describe as faithfully as possible the worlds that such scientific and technological perspectives may bring in the future. Due to their cosmological, apocalyptic, and social character, these disenchanted worlds address precisely the fears that the spectacle uses to control the minds and the bodies, exposing its perverse relation with power – be it economic, political, or military –, mass media and information technologies. In my perspective, they go even further, jibing with the viewpoints of authors from other scientific areas, such as Debord, Lipovetsky or Codeluppi. They “assume” the shape of spectacles themselves, enabling readers to seize their logic. In other words, they show that it is almost impossible to escape the fantasies and unsubstantiated fears that political-economic powers spread through the media, but that literature – and other artforms – can recreate those fantasies; it can displace them to a space in the future where readers may become acquainted with, transform them, and, eventually, learn to resist them.

Overall, the narrative strategies and aesthetics of “Fernando Morales, *This Is Your Death!*”, *The Hunger Games* and *The Execution Channel* allow readers to distance themselves from the rapid fire of information and violent visual stimuli that block any glimpse of a positive future. As I have demonstrated in this comparative analysis, they create diverse spectacular scenarios and estrangement effects that enable us to mull over the process of identity formation in current western societies¹²², but also over our own mediated bodies and political agency.

Conversely, these novels may also leave us disoriented about the future. After all, if we can make our gestures our own again and come out of an alienated life, we must relearn to live, unmediated. But such disorientation and apparent lack of alternative political perspectives that we, like the protagonists of the novels, are left in, should not be perceived as a purely negative outcome, rather as an opportunity for change. As Katniss, Roisin or Bob have shown, the act of detaching ourselves from all communication devices – even if only temporarily –, together with the refusal of the “dream worlds” incessantly proposed by mass media, might finally give us the chance to (re)build genuine emotional connections with other human beings. These and other characters provide us instances of how resistance to the spectacle is possible, even if it requires to lose the only compass that nowadays seems to guide us through our chaotic world.

¹²² At a social, political, and economic levels.

PART II – WHEN POLITICS AND MEDICINE COINCIDE: ON THE
REPRESENTATION OF HEALTHY AND DISEASED BODIES IN *JERUSALEM*, *THE
HUNGER GAMES*, *INTRUSION*, AND *THE WALKERS*



Title page woodcut illustration by Sebastian Brandt of the *Tractatus de pestilentiali scorra sive mala de Franzos* (1496), by Joseph Grünpeck

“[Has] not yet finished this Inquiry, which will, when completed, be laid before the House [of Commons]. This Inquiry will lay all those troublesome ghosts which have so long haunted the Metropolis with their ox-faces, & dismal hootings against Vaccination. However, tis all for the best – you may depend upon it the new Investigation will prove the touchstone of the vaccine discovery. /

“A word more respecting your little one. Altho’ I should be happy to shield it myself from the speckled Monster, yet I would advise you not long to risk my coming to Town. I will just add that I consider the Vaccine Lancet in the hand of [Dr.] John Ring, just as safe as in my own.”

Edward Jenner, *Letter to Mr. Phillips, Jan. 16, 1807*

INTRODUCTION: FROM THE DEPICTION OF THE SPECTACLE TO THE PORTRAYAL OF DISEASE

As we have seen in part I, the mechanism of the spectacle plays a pivotal role in shaping the “war of terror” and the highly mediatic Scotland of *The Execution Channel*. However, I would contend that there is also a second mechanism insinuated in the novel, one that strengthens the grip that the political powers and the media have on the characters. This mechanism works in a complementary fashion to, and juxtaposes itself with, the spectacle:

The news told him nothing he didn't know, and omitted much that he did. Satellite and Space Station images showed the black plumes of the refinery and depot fires, now hundreds of kilometres long. The speed-camera shots of the collapsing motorway pillars had dropped out of the coverage. More fires were visible from the bay window than on screen. The focus was clear and narrow, on the rescuers' toil in the motorway catastrophes and at Grangemouth and Leuchars. People who had fled south from Edinburgh and Fife, fearing fallout or further attacks, were urged to return. Parliament was in emergency session; while the emergency lasted, sittings would be from eight in the morning until long past midnight. The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary answered questions that were not the ones asked. Later the news cut away to the war. Truck bomb in Tehran. Civil defence exercise in North Korea. Pyongyang deploys anti-aircraft missiles – Japan protests. (MacLeod 2007, 113)

From the way the TV news “jump” from the stories of the incidents in the Scottish towns of Grangemouth and Leuchars to the British Parliament and other points of tension across the world, there is a glimpse of a connection between concrete physical threats, as the fear of injury or death of the biological individual body, and other more generalized fears that fall upon the novel's fictional societies. Using the concept/metaphor of “body politic” which equates the nation to a body/corporation, I am referring to fears that threaten the

political body of society¹²³. Be it the case of a nuclear attack, the outbreak of a pandemic disease, or the mere presence of Muslim communities, all these events and elements are politically and “mediatically” framed as possible dangers, different forms of hazardous agents that threaten the normal functioning of the healthy western body(ies). Additionally, the continuous (re)introduction and dissemination through different types of mass media of the dangers, activate defensive reactions. As fear and panic become widespread throughout the book, the resource to the police or the army to control the population, the ubiquitous surveillance of the cities through CCTV cameras, or the monitorization of the country’s frontiers, can thus be perceived as ways to “protect” the body politic.

There are also already hints in *The Execution Channel* that seem to point to an even more complex notion of this control mechanism: given that the European governments turn out to be involved in the fabrication of those risks, and that even innocent Scottish citizens throughout the book are caught in the crossfire, one could say that we are dealing with an exacerbated reaction of protection. While the fictional society of this novel still focuses predominantly on the mechanism of the spectacle, there is another work by Ken MacLeod that brings this second mechanism (and its flaws) to the forefront: *Intrusion* (2013).

The analysis of this novel, alongside the examination of the others works included in this part, will give us the chance to tackle its intricate dynamics and strategies. It will allow us to explore the way it helps political powers in conjunction with medical authorities to monitor the health and security of the national and biological bodies. Therefore, it is my hope that these fictional societies may provide some insights on the innerworkings of this mechanism in western contemporary societies. I believe that the symptoms of its characters may help to start delineating a diagnostic process, so to speak,

¹²³ Although I am using the concept of “body politic” as it is understood by medievalist historian Ernst Kantorowicz, i.e., as concept that derives from the medieval political concept of the “King’s two bodies” and is a point of theology as much as statehood, the concept possesses an extensively older origin (Kantorowicz 1997). The first recorded use of the “body politic” metaphor appears in the *Rigveda* (c. 1500 BCE), one of the sacred books of Hinduism. This metaphor articulates and explains the South Asian caste system by comparing the priesthood to the mouth, soldiers to the arms, shepherds to the thighs, and peasants to the feet of humankind. In the 4th century BCE, Plato articulated and refined the political usage of the metaphor in his *Republic* and *Laws*. His metaphoric conception of the state emphasized fitness and well-being over illness, the latter condition occurring when the different parts of the state fail to perform the functions proper to them. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, Academic ed., s.v. “Body politic”, by Joëlle Rollo-Koster, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/body-politic>. As I will show further ahead, this concept suffers severe changes in its nature throughout western history, changes that are essential to understand immunology as a control mechanism.

that might be picked up and developed through other analytical works that probe deeper into the hitherto little explored relation between literature and biopolitics.

Contemporary dystopian or science fiction novels seem to likewise suggest that, contrary to the chronological and sequential development that is generally established from sovereign to disciplinary and, consequently, to control societies, nowadays there is an immunological mechanism that enforces the convergence of the paradigm of sovereignty and the paradigm of biopolitics¹²⁴. As far as the control of the biological body and the construction of the body politic are concerned, such mechanism is characterized by an immunity logic, that being indivisible from the technoscientific developments of each historical period juxtaposes with increasing complexity the juridical, the medical and the political spheres in order to control life in community. In the words of Roberto Esposito:

Although the most evident vector of meaning in the idea of immunity is expressed in its primal juxtaposition with community, this oppositional relation does not exhaust its significance. To fully understand the term, we must follow another semantic trajectory that does not entirely coincide with the first. This second meaning originally derived from the biomedical aspect that little by little began to take its place alongside the legal one we have been discussing. From this point of view, what is meant by immunity is the refractoriness of an organism to the danger of contracting a contagious disease. [...] But what makes it significant for the purposes of our reconstruction is the turn it takes within its own field between the 18th and 19th centuries [...]. The passage that most interests us is the one leading from natural to acquired immunity – in other words, from an essentially passive condition to one that is actively induced. The basic idea that came into play at a certain point was that an attenuated form of infection could protect against a more virulent form of the same type. (2011, 13)

In his archeological analyses Esposito draws our attention to the fact that, from ancient western societies onwards, the notion of immunology had a two-folded origin. To its more known expression in the field of medicine¹²⁵ we must add a juridical one: the exemption of an obligation or duty in force in society, whether it is a personal, fiscal, or social one, is what in ancient Rome characterized immunity at a juridical level. Vis-à-vis the roman notion of onus or obligation – the *munus* –, the noun *immunitas* is thus a negative that derives its meaning from that which denies (*im + munus*), in contrast to the positive and

¹²⁴ An idea that seems to match the suggestions of the novels I have analyzed in part I regarding the development of the spectacle as a control mechanism.

¹²⁵ That achieves a significant importance with the development of vaccination in the 18th/19th centuries.

binding *communitas* (*cum + munus*) (11). In the light of these two-folded origins, we start to understand that this second mechanism governs the individual biological processes of the community quite differently from the mechanism we had in the part I. As in *The Hunger Games* and *The Execution Channel*, there is a risk agent that presents ideological and nationalistic contours that threaten the political system, but now such risk agent ought also to be perceived as a sort of a criminal, or, using the words above, a contagious disease that poses a risk to the laws and moral principles of the whole society.

Furthermore, the fictional works included in this part II highlight the indelible connection between several situations or events in our contemporary societies that, at first, might seem unrelated and heterogenous. In effect, the continuous exchange and indistinctive use that we make of immunology-related terms in medical, political, and social discourses shed further light on that connection. Regarding the recent mass migration waves, for instance, beside its social-political and juridical configurations, we also have its representation in the media as a menace to public order, if not even a potential endemic risk to the host country¹²⁶. Such representations perpetuate the trope of the foreigner as a disease, extensively used by the Nazi propaganda during the *Shoah*, but also help to understand why one of the most dreaded terrorist attacks nowadays is that which may be perpetrated with biological weapons.

From another angle, these representations likewise help us notice the curious parallel between the journalistic narratives that depict the 2008 financial crisis¹²⁷ and those usually used to describe epidemic emergencies caused by grave infectious diseases, along with its specific economic, political, and military implications. If to all this we add the innumerable self-help shows¹²⁸, or the documentaries about climate change that generally appeal to an eco-consciousness in order to avoid extinction¹²⁹, it becomes clear that there is the creation of an image of life that is under attack in all its valences¹³⁰. The

¹²⁶ I am thinking, for instance, about the refugee crisis, also known as European migrant crisis, that started in 2015, or the particular episode of the (in)famous captain of the Sea Watch 3, Carola Rackete, that in 2019 was arrested for docking a migrant rescue ship without authorization in the port of Lampedusa, Italy.

¹²⁷ Which helped shaped the “official” discourse around the crisis through the recurrent use of expressions as “strain on the system”, “spread” or “weakened” (*New York Times* 2008).

¹²⁸ Shows as “The Biggest Loser” (2004), “Extreme Makeover” (2002-2007) or “DietTribe” (2009).

¹²⁹ Such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), directed by Davis Guggenheim, or *Before the Flood* (2016), directed by Fisher Stevens.

¹³⁰ By mentioning these documentaries/shows I am not trying to deny the value or positive impact that they may have. The acclaimed success of “An Inconvenient Truth”, for example, has certainly open a new space to discuss climatic changes at a global level. I am rather depicting how even fictional or documental works that aim to tackle serious health problems may ultimately contribute to the control or manipulation of the biological and political bodies.

bigger and the closer the danger is, the stronger the response must be from the powers that govern it, and it is precisely here that the immunological mechanism is potentiated. I would argue, thus, that the diffusion of the fear of all these dangers, fashioned by the politico-economic powers and the media themselves, not only validates an ever more direct technoscientific intervention of the State on the bodies of its citizens but, concurrently, promotes a widespread self-control on their parts through the creation of a health morality.

We have many examples of contemporary series, films, or novels that offer fictional disaster scenarios where we can explore some aspects of this intricate mechanism¹³¹. Not taking any merits from these works, which allow viewers/readers to project fears and health anxieties, they often refer only to contemporary expressions and strategies of immunology. Let us return briefly to the epigraphic references at the beginning of this introduction: the woodcut illustration (1496) by Sebastian Brandt¹³² and the excerpt of an unpublished letter of Edward Jenner¹³³ to a one Mr. Phillips (1807)¹³⁴. On the one hand, the illustration is divided in three planes: the Virgin Mary and the Christ child on the center, shooting punishing arrows to the figures infected with syphilis on the right¹³⁵ while giving the crown to the noble figures on the left. On the other hand, reverberating with several medieval and renaissance representations of diseases as monstrous figures¹³⁶, Edward Jenner uses the term “speckled Monster” to refer to smallpox in his letter regarding vaccination. Both references reveal, hence, that the connection between the individual body and the body politic, between physical disease

¹³¹ Such as the TV adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017-), situated in a near future where fertility rates collapse as a result of sexually transmitted diseases and environmental pollution, and a totalitarian, theonomic government takes complete control over the process of reproduction/birth. Another example is the *Black Mirror* episode “Men against fire” (2016); set in a future with dystopian and post-apocalyptic elements, this episode revolves around the story of Stripe, a soldier in a military organization hunting and exterminating mutants known as “roaches”. One last example could be the film *The Island* (2005), a science fiction thriller that takes place in a highly structured and isolated compound where its inhabitants are clones used for organ harvesting, as well as surrogates for wealthy people in the outside world. See: *The Handmaid’s Tale*; Verbruggen, 2016; and Bay, 2005.

¹³² This illustration was created to accompany a 1496 text by Joseph Grünpeck, *Tractatus de pestilentiali scorra sive mala de Franzos*. Sebastian Brandt was a 15th century German humanist and satirist, best known for his satire *Das Narrenschiff* (*The Ship of Fools*) that Foucault alludes to in *Madness and Civilization*.

¹³³ Usually called “the father of immunology”, Jenner was an English physician and scientist, and the pioneer of smallpox vaccine, the world’s first vaccine. The terms *vaccine* and *vaccination* are derived from *Variolae vaccinae* (smallpox of the cow), the term devised by Jenner to denote cowpox. He used it in 1796 in the long title of his *Inquiry into the Variolae vaccinae known as the Cow Pox*.

¹³⁴ This and other autograph letters of Jenner can be found at the New York Academy of Medicine.

¹³⁵ Something that beckons an early awareness that the disease could relate to sex.

¹³⁶ The triptych “The Temptation of Saint Anthony”, by Hieronymus Bosch, is a good example. See appendix 3.

and morality, and the notion that a higher power may provide protection both at individual and communal levels, has deeper roots in the western societies than one might think. Yet, if such representations supposedly pertain to a closed past, another particularly problematic question arises and deserves further investigation: Why do these depictions of a religious morality closely connected with medical and sovereign powers still reverberate with our secular and highly technocentric societies? How can we explain their lasting resonance in the 21st century?

Building upon the approach of part I, I will once again avoid concentrating on “the project of theorizing about the form of the novel” (De Boever 2013, 5). To put it differently, I will not focus my analyses exclusively on the homodiegetic level of the narratives, nor on the literary devices used to craft them. To avert the limitations and representational problems inherent to any attempt to theorize the novel’s relation to biopolitics, I shall equally contemplate an historical dimension, taking into consideration the political, economic, or social backgrounds to which the novels refer us to. Such approach is further justified, in my perspective, by the fact that the rise of the novel is concurrent with the ascendancy of what Foucault called governmentality and biopower, raising the question of whether there might be a relation between governmentality, biopower and the novel (2013, 9). As Edward Said has observed:

In Western literature, the form of the novel is coincidental with the emergence of the bourgeoisie in the late seventeenth century [...] This is why, for its first century, the novel is all about birth, possible orphanhood, the discovery of roots, and the creation of a new world, a career, a society. (2006, 4)

The cultural critic remarks that the novel explores what could be called the logic of the living (5), and I believe that the works I have chosen encourage us to explore this connection. They invite us to consider a literary articulation of the concept of immunology as opposed to stricter philosophical notions. Accordingly, one of my main objectives is to present the considered novels as works where both political interests and concerns with the resistance of the biological body converge. They may be conniving with biopolitics, but they are also, and for that same motive, sites where experimentation with resistance occurs, and where resistance’s imagination “exists in perpetual struggle with the novel’s biopolitical origins” (De Boever 2013, 13).

I will follow a similar path of that of De Boever, trying to understand to what extent narratives that relate to medical (bio)power can have an impactful role in our time of ubiquitous risk and unbridled crises. Alongside the imagination of care of the self in our present-day, it is equally at stake in part II the temporal connection that dystopian and sci-fi novels seem to convey between the expansion of immunology as a biopolitical mechanism, and the medical-technological advances associated with a utopian vision of human progress. Such connection not only reflects the concomitant and interrelated development of biopolitics and novelistic themes/strategies, but it may also perform an ethical and formative function: by exploring the origins and the different shapes immunology may assume in the future, the novels at hand enable the reader to see it in the present day from different perspectives, which may lead to more conscious health-related choices both at a personal and political level. More significantly, they present new imagined possibilities that, in the long run, prefigure a priceless contribution to face the future challenges raised by a relentless technological development and an ever-changing notion of biological life.

Although these works convey significant differences – both in terms of worldbuilding, aesthetic qualities and literary strategies –, their fictional universes share relevant interconnections. As far as the use of medicine and technology in the control of the body is concerned, it is precisely their heterogeneity and plurivocality that will enable me to tackle such a multifaceted mechanism. If I have previously explored how contemporary novels integrate the logic of the spectacle while introducing representations that problematize or challenge it, I will now tap into characters that reflect an epoch of health crisis and risk but that may also serve as balm to the body of the reader, constantly bombarded by death or disease-ridden discourses.

In this sinuous path, the hospital practices and sanitizing discourses represented in *Jerusalem* and *The Hunger Games* invite us, in a first moment, to (re)discover the origins of immunology, from its Christian and sovereign roots till its systematization in disciplinary societies. In a second moment, their implicit and explicit allusions to the *Shoah* and the Nazi eugenics seem to inquire the continuation of past medical therapies and perspectives into our contemporary western time. In a third and final moment, by imagining futuristic medical devices and new health practices/discourses, *Intrusion* and *The Walkers* suggest a reflection about the potential dangers resulting from the abuse of current medical technologies on the part of political-economic powers. Conversely, these

novels also explore the role literature in tapping the latent transformative powers that such technologies may hold.

Throughout this second part I will tackle sci-fi/dystopian worlds where politics and medicine coincide, exploring the connection between the mechanism of immunology and the role of the novel. My argument is that, performing a similar inoculation function as that of the biopolitical mechanism itself, the novel can be, at once, medicine and venom. To rephrase it, there is a relation between the preemptive medical perspective that shapes a biopolitical immunology, and the philosophical notion of *pharmakon* developed by Plato, and more recently reprised by Derrida (1981)¹³⁷.

However, this complex relation between fictional artworks and the prevalent health/medical perspectives of their respective contemporary contexts is far from clear, raising several questions: How does sci-fi and dystopian novels relate to life/death and health/disease? To what extent do fictional narratives converge (or diverge) from the narratives used by medical and political powers to control the body? Can the novel be a sort of aesthetic medicine to the self and to others¹³⁸? The critical perspectives of authors as Benjamin, Foucault or Esposito will certainly be valuable guides in this search for clarification, but my eventual goal is to explore how dystopian narratives may take us beyond in our comprehension of immunology. I aim, ultimately, to understand if narration can be a form of “therapy” that potentiates different political choices, rather than merely a-critical obedience to commonly accepted medical or scientific “truths” or, even worse, misplaced resistance against an unsound “other”.

¹³⁷ In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the Egyptian god of writing, Thoth, offers King Thamus writing as a “*pharmakon*” that can help memory. Thamus refuses the gift on the grounds that it will only create forgetfulness: for him, it is not a remedy for memory itself, but merely a way of reminding. Writing is thus a “poison” (“*pharmakon*”). In his reading of the *Phaedrus*, Derrida focuses on the “*pharmakon*” – which can also mean drug, recipe, charm, medicine, substance, spell, artificial color, and paint – as that which produces a flickering and disorienting play in conceptual/philosophical oppositions: remedy/poison, good/bad, true/false, positive/negative, interior/exterior. According to Derrida, the *pharmakon* of writing itself “cannot be reduced to the series of oppositional concepts that it precedes and produces” (1981, 103).

¹³⁸ As it is suggested, for instance, by Arne De Boever in *Narrative Care*: “As I stated above, my aim is ultimately to present the novel as a work of bioart that is traversed by both political concerns and by concerns with the care for the self and the care for others” (2013, 13).

CHAPTER 4 – ON THE REPRESENTATION OF MADNESS: DISCIPLINARY POWER
AND THE INTERNALIZATION OF FEAR IN *JERUSALEM*

Jerusalem, by Portuguese writer Gonçalo M. Tavares, is the third entry in his tetralogy “The Kingdom”. The peculiar aesthetics and narrative strategies that characterize this novel are also present in the other three works that constitute this series¹³⁹, so, for now, I will only briefly introduce this shared fictional universe. Madness, illness, social vices, and a generalized feeling of the irreducible arbitrariness of the events that occur in the tetralogy signal the pronounced dystopian nature of these representations. The critical perspectives and essayistic tone underlying the four books seem to meet the vision traced by Keith Booker in *Dystopian literature: a theory and research guide* (1994), according to which it is possible to find several affinities and common goals shared both by dystopian, philosophical, and cultural criticism works¹⁴⁰.

In this light, we can read them as a critique of contemporary social conditions and political-economic systems, seeing that, as Booker suggests, “through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts can more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions” (3). In effect, Gonçalo M. Tavares weaves throughout the tetralogy an a-temporal and a-spatial dystopian worldview that highlights the tensions between the bodies of the characters and the structures of power in their respective societies, allowing us to reflect about the devices of control used by the institutional (sovereign and biopolitical) powers during the 20th century.

The Portuguese author acknowledges the process by which the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction is deprived of its aura¹⁴¹, becoming a mass product to be a-critically enjoyed by the general consumer (Benjamin 1999, 215). By deliberately avoid

¹³⁹ Also known as the “black books” (os “livros pretos”), a title that is suited if we bear in mind the black covers they all share. This enigmatic title of the tetralogy is not explained in any of the novels, but not only does it seem to allude to a disenchanting Europe that has fallen from grace after WWII, as it is also a reference to Lars von Trier’s homonymous miniseries *The Kingdom* (1994-1997). As the researcher Luís Mourão mentions in his article “O Romance-reflexão segundo Gonçalo M. Tavares”, the title and context of the series, which takes place inside a psychiatric hospital, are particularly relevant to the analysis of the third novel of the tetralogy, *Jerusalem*. See: Mourão 2012, 51.

¹⁴⁰ While naturally considering the different goals of each respective field of studies, or the methodological differences of each specific approach.

¹⁴¹ I.e., of the *auctoritas* and autonomy it previously possessed due to its insertion in a specific spatial-temporal context. See: Benjamin 1999, 214.

giving its novels an enjoyable aesthetics¹⁴² – making them what I have elsewhere called anesthetic (Furão 2015)¹⁴³ –, Tavares seems to contradict that process: despite asking for an interpretation out of the reader, the overtly objective writing and the dark tones always end up canceling any univocal reading. Furthermore, the application of an almost strictly scientific/rational logic to all the events¹⁴⁴ hints that we are dealing with books which, far from the conformist acceptance of the current notion of the work or art as pleasant cultural good/product, represent an attempt to restore the critical force of the work of art in relation to its historical reality¹⁴⁵. It is not accidental that in the pathway of works as *1984* or *The Trial*, the characters of “The Kingdom” refer us to what Booker calls the “incommensurability of the physical and spiritual in the modern world [...] and the absurdity of political oppression” (1994, 184). Their bodies embrace the material effects of some of the darkest facets of contemporaneity¹⁴⁶, retaining a heft and a tangible suffering that block any transparent reading.

Tavares’ offers us a wide range of strange elements and settings, from bizarre characters to several institutions that display an almost impenetrable operating logic¹⁴⁷. Together they provide the narratives of “The Kingdom” with various situations and settings that could be considered *uncanny* (Freud 2003), bestowing a dense texture to the language of the novels. Not so differently from what happens with Gregor Samsa’s transformation, or the unusual village to which K. is called, this texture creates an unsettling effect in which estrangement and familiarity converge (Kafka 2014 and 2009).

Such effect is essential in generating a fictional space that moves away from the spaces generally created by a massified cultural industry, whose main goal is, as Booker points out, “to numb the minds of the populace [...] thereby rendering them incapable of

¹⁴² I am referring to the concept of aesthetics understood as the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of art, beauty, and taste, as well as the creation or appreciation of beauty. See: Aristotle, 2013; Hegel, 1998; and Kant, 2002.

¹⁴³ The use of the negative (anti-aesthetics) is meant to convey the negativity that Adorno and Marcuse ascribe to the artwork which, by its autonomous nature, is a space of rupture with the experience of everyday life. See: Adorno, 1997; and Marcuse, 2007.

¹⁴⁴ I would argue that what Keith Booker refers apropos Kafka’s *The Castle* also applies to these works of Gonçalo M. Tavares: “Readers are thus placed in very much the same situation as K., struggling to understand what they encounter but never quite being able to do so” (1994, 183).

¹⁴⁵ In the words of Adorno, they no longer constitute a “mere plenipotentiary of a better praxis than that which has to date predominated” but are “equally the critique of praxis as the rule of brutal self-preservation at the heart of the status quo and in its service” (1997, 12).

¹⁴⁶ At a political and medical level, specifically.

¹⁴⁷ Hinnerk Obst, a former soldier suffering from PTSD, or Joseph Walser’s eccentric boss would be two good examples of bizarre characters. As far as the settings are concerned, we have the enigmatic inner workings of the psychiatric hospital of *Jerusalem*, the factory in *Joseph Walser’s Machine*, or the prison in *A Man: Klaus Klump*.

the kinds of critical abstraction required to mount a meaningful challenge to the official ideologies of modern society” (1994, 13). By shedding light on some oppressive aspects of contemporary western societies – confronting readers with the rational and scientific principles that had previously inspired several utopian social projects –, one could argue the novels of the tetralogy reflect the Adornoian vision of a radical art. Their anti-aesthetic quality gives us the chance to explore the anxieties and contradictions of these societies, such as those regarding medicine and the health of the body.

Jerusalem begins with an episode in which Mylia Busbeck, one of the main characters, is in a painful state of insomnia. Although the causes of this state are difficult to trace at first¹⁴⁸, it is soon revealed that the pain is a symptom of a mortal disease from which Mylia suffers, an illness that is already spreading inside her and will kill her in a couple of years (Tavares 2009, 8). This disease unsurprisingly carries a fear of death¹⁴⁹ that transforms the character’s vision of the world and shapes her actions:

She didn’t waste time on trivialities. [...] She paid attention to things. She knew she had only a few years left to live. The disease had already begun its work: we’ll be together for a few years, then the disease will stay and I’ll go. She focused her energy on whatever time she had left in her body, and directed it – her energy – like a rolling pin. Poised to roll. *No more trivialities.* (8; emphasis in original)

Facing the anguish provoked by the pain, Mylia decides to go out looking for a church, but at 4 a.m. she only finds closed doors. These elements foreshadow the intersection between medicine and religion, attaching a significant symbolic value of great reach to this initial episode that will guide us in our reflection about the condition of Mylia and the remaining characters. Indeed, the equivocal temporality and absence of a specific location of the action of *Jerusalem* gives it an opaque quality that, paradoxically, seems to make its symbolic dimension shine brighter. The image of someone in pain looking desperately for relief only to find closed doors can be interpreted as a representation of the sickly human condition that fails to find relief from pain in the salvific transcendence of the promised land of the Judeo-Christian religion¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴⁸ As we learn from this passage: “The pain was constant, coming from her stomach – or maybe lower. Where exactly was it coming from? Maybe from her womb” (Tavares 2009, 7).

¹⁴⁹ The narrator’s remark: “She couldn’t close her eyes because she was afraid of dying” (7), is an explicit allusion to this fear.

¹⁵⁰ But also, as we will note throughout the novel, in the limitless scientific and technological progress promised by the Enlightenment projects.

Building on the main notions referred to in the introduction of this part, we will find in *Jerusalem* a specific medical context that help us glimpse the immunization process underlined by Esposito in *Immunitas*. Gonçalo M. Tavares includes some hints to guide us along spatial-temporal coordinates that vaguely locate the action of the novel in a world post-World War II¹⁵¹. However, the physicians and therapeutic practices within the Georg Rosenberg hospital, where most of the plot unravels, seem to constitute fictional extensions that refer to a previous time, interfering with the linearity of the historical references. As Pedro de Sousa argues, their allegorical quality allows us to question the “*modus operandi* of the madhouses, the way they choose to normalize the thoughts of the individual and the dialogic separation between madness and reason, being reason the language of the correct” (2010, 142; my translation). The allusion to the principles of modern psychiatric therapy, thus, not only helps us reflect on the presuppositions of the immunological perspective developed in modern times, but also to think about the possible contact points between biopolitical institutions in the contemporary post-war world, and the eugenic practices behind the concentration camps. In other terms, the fictional world of the novel may be interpreted as a bridge between previous institutions of disciplinary power and present-day societies of control, allowing us to articulate the continuity/evolution of the immunological mechanism.

THE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL AND THE DIFFERENT VISIONS OF MADNESS

In this articulation, it is paramount to explore the particularly important hinge role of the psychiatric hospital. Although only later in the narrative will we discover that Mylia had been admitted to hospital, another fear quickly manifests in the character alongside the fear of death that is mentioned in the opening episode: the fear of being considered crazy:

So it was important to Mylia that she not seem crazy. Of course, after their initial error (look at that lunatic!), any chance witnesses to her wall-peeing would presumably come to their senses and realize that Mylia wasn't crazy after all; that, really, what she was doing was perfectly normal. But the possibility that someone might think, even for a moment, that she wasn't in her right mind – it was too

¹⁵¹ Such as the introduction of photos of concentration camps and the book “Europa 02” (40-41, 117-126).

much for her. She thought: I won't let anyone call me crazy ever again. (Tavares 2009, 13)

It is important to notice the adjectives used by the narrator to describe Mylia's position on the idea of being labeled by others as "crazy", when she affirms that the mere thought of that possibility was overwhelming. This fear can be read as an allusion to the position that madness will come to occupy in western societies during the 19th and 20th centuries. During this period, the status of madness goes through a weighty transformation that places it under the "protection" of medical positivism, steering it away from the view that places it as a social vice or moral flaw, predominant during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance¹⁵².

Nonetheless, in the process, it also causes a displacement of the function played by fear in its therapy. The game of mirrors between the physician's gaze and the patients themselves leads to the creation of an environment in the Georg Rosenberg psychiatric hospital where madness is objectified; from an unknown object that rouses fear and fascination/wonder, it is transformed into medical positive knowledge, which is to say, it is codified and enclosed in a discursive formation (Foucault 1965, 195-196). Becoming hostage of a scientific rationality that places madness and reason in the same ontological plane, this discursive formation will ultimately imprison and reduce the madmen of the Georg Rosenberg to their shameful and guilty condition of irrationality. The following passage articulates this idea quite expressively:

One way of fighting off loneliness in the asylum was to remind yourself that you were under constant surveillance; it was almost a comfort to feel the heat of so many eyes on your back, and after a while you started to wonder how you ever did without them. True, not everyone was so well socialized: some of the more independent patients cursed at the nurses whenever their glances lingered a little long... and true, whenever more than two patients got together in the common room, they almost always started talking about how many enemies they had [...] (2009, 153)

¹⁵² The path this "condition" traverses from the Middle Ages till the 19th century is indissociable from the scientific and medical advances of those centuries, and reflects vividly, perhaps more than any other illness, the development of the notions of protection or contagion at a social-political level. More importantly, possessing a status that, due to its mental – and therefore concealed – nature, is hard to define not only in medical but also in social terms, the therapy and management of madness have been somehow always connected to the religious sphere and its institutions. See: Foucault 1965, 3-38.

The fear stemming from constant surveillance holds an instrumental function in the psychiatric hospital. While it could be argued that the instrumentalization of fear is not something new in the relationship between madness, politics, and medicine (Foucault 1965, 246), it is mainly this new therapeutic function that in *Jerusalem* shapes the relationship between normality and abnormality, mental sanity and insanity, psychiatrist and patient. The novel implies, then, that the modern psychiatric hospital – and its practices – no longer seeks to correct or segregate a disgraceful and amoral condition, i.e., it has lost its 18th century status of moral institution and labor camp. Quite the contrary, it returns madness back to the public eye, seemingly liberating it after centuries of confinement¹⁵³.

Inside the walls of the Georg Rosenberg, the psychiatrists Gomperz and Theodor play a decisive role in the codification of madness as a discursive formation. Through their clinical gaze, they determine “the difference between a healthy mind and a sick one” (42), not only authorizing new forms of contact between physician and patient, but a whole new relationship between alienation and medical thought. They are the ones who ultimately drive and direct the experience of madness. One could say that this *persona* that the hospital introduces to the world of madness is specially suggested in *Jerusalem* through the character of Dr. Gomperz, considering that in the descriptions of his medical appointments he radiates evident moral and social powers. The aura of wisdom that he possesses enables him to “diagnose” and qualify his patients as clinically insane, thus alienating them. His fatherly figure not only knows better but is the guardian of “correct thought”. Like a “professor giving a quiz on math or grammar”, he knows and determines what his “pupils” “*should* be thinking” (93; emphasis in original).

The continuity between the Judeo-Christian moral perspective of madness and the scientific positivist perception of madness, as well as the contiguity between priest and

¹⁵³ Before having its current contemporary medical meaning, confinement in the hospitals was not only directly related with the treatment of madness or other illnesses. The development of hospitals as confinement spaces in 18th century Europe is a “police matter” (Foucault 1965, 58). The *Hôpital* minutely described by Foucault (38-65) does not represent a shelter for those who due to old age, social-economical condition, or illness are kept from working. Not only does it have the aspect of a labor camp, but also of a moral institution, accountable for punishing certain moral flaws which do not merit the tribunal of men but cannot be corrected by the severity of penance alone.

physician, starts to become clearer¹⁵⁴. Still, what until this point in the narrative was only implied, will be explicitly formulated in the description which perfectly overlaps the figure of Gomperz with that of a priest that reads the Bible to his congregation during mass:

On Sundays, Dr. Gomperz usually read passages from the Bible to the patients himself: faith keeps one's thoughts correct and thus heals the body. [...] Dr. Gomperz with his authoritarian voice. This is still therapy. We shall be changed. Matthew 4:1: "Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted for days and forty nights..." "He was hungry," said Mylia. (203)

Gomperz's intervention as a physician is not validated *only* because of his clinical experience or medical power, backed up by a corpus of objective scientific knowledge. It is not his status as a physician or scientist alone that bestows authority on the *homo medicus*, using Foucault's terms, but also his aura of wisdom. Through the novel, hence, we can glimpse that madness is effectively transferred to the sphere of pathology, trespassing the limits of the physical body. Perhaps even more noteworthy, the novel conveys the idea that the expansion of psychiatry, and of the scientific-medical disciplines in general, helped develop a body of knowledge and therapeutic practices extensively more profound that denote a greater familiarity with the disease/condition. Dr. Gomperz's speeches suggest that after the collapse of the belief in the healing power of the Catholic Church, psychiatrists and psychiatric hospitals may have become a new medium to disseminate ethical and moral principles:

¹⁵⁴ What the 17th and 18th centuries will limit is not only an abstract unreason that blends madman, criminals, invalids as well as libertines, but mainly a vast reservoir of the monstrous fantasies that had been left dormant since they were portrayed in Hieronymus Bosch paintings. Moreover, it could be argued that the walls of the hospital or workhouses added quite the opposite cultural function to their role of social segregation: while effectively removing "unreason" from society, they preserved in the shadows the iconographic power of the otherworldly animals and beasts that was thought to have vanished when madness ceased to be a "mystical eschatological figure" (Foucault 1965, 209). This unsuspecting function is of great importance for our analysis of *Jerusalem*, *THG* and *Intrusion*, for it preserves the 16th century's memory of enigmatic characters and figurations of diseases that will be transmitted and updated in the 19th and 20th centuries, via the figure of the Jew or the trope of the foreigner I have mentioned earlier. The development of medical knowledge and of new clinical methodologies and facilities will also create, however, a new therapeutic and scientific space for madness, inconspicuously covering this latent subtract of irrationality and its iconographic power.

Where should a man direct his thoughts so as not to be considered mentally ill? Such was the problem set forth by Dr. Gomperz, and which occupied Dr. Theodor Busbeck...

Yes, the root of the question, of our profession – not just a matter of therapeutic practice, restricted to the treatment of the mentally ill, but a basic question of morality, concerning all mankind

What should the moral man think about? What *shouldn't* he think about?

Of course the Church had tried to answer this question. Well before the advent of psychiatrists, it had been directing its ever-vigilant eyes not only at a man's deeds, but at his thoughts...[...]

Thus, though he would never have dared to say so, Dr. Gomperz's concept of madness was not medical but ethical. Simply put, a person who acts immorally is mentally ill – as is a person who acts morally, but has immoral thoughts. [...] The difference between criminality, so-called, and insanity, likewise so-called, was, to Gomperz, taxonomical: they were two forms of madness, and, consequently, two forms of immorality: on one hand the madness of someone driven to act in an anti-social manner, and on the other the madness of someone only minimally aware of the world in which he must act. (94-95; emphasis in original)

As an institution of constant surveillance, the psychiatric hospital attributes an authority to Gomperz that does not merely allow him to exercise control over patients according to specific therapeutic protocols, but that rather gives him complete power over their bodies. In order to “help” them return to a correct and healthy state, the psychiatrist is accorded the authority to regulate all actions, supervise all movements, imposing a “normalizing” standard to such a totalizing extent that it may even entail the annihilation of the patient's subjectivity.

ON THE THERAPEUTICAL USE OF FEAR AND ITS SIDE-EFFECTS ON THE (SOCIAL) BODY

The context of clinical psychiatry portrayed in *Jerusalem* signals a process of inoculation of fear through fear, that is, it highlights a mechanism that potentiates the propagation of madness in society. Accordingly, the examination of the immunological terminology that is used in the novel reinforces our understanding of this mechanism, enabling us to further reflect on the complex historical development of contemporary biopolitics. After Mylia's reaction of fear, there is later in the novel a reflection on Ernst Spengler, a schizophrenic

patient that had also been previously treated at the Georg Rosenberg¹⁵⁵. The frail condition to which both characters are reduced to after leaving the hospital attests the efficiency of the psychiatric treatment, the effects of the positivist knowledge of madness:

But... since nothing had changed, since nothing had emerged in Ernst Spengler's life that might serve as a compensation for his lack of progress, he became uneasy – ferociously so – in the presence of people who'd known him back then. Seeing them was nothing more than having his nose rubbed in the evidence of his own, ongoing failure: *You suffered so much, and for what? You barely even have a normal life...* Ernst could see them thinking it [...]

Ernst spent hours walking around the city, making up stories, imagining relationships, connections, friendships between the strangers he saw on the street; he was trying to relearn how to relate to normal people again – and not just normal people, but normal life, normal days: days that just sit there waiting for a human being to decide how to fill them; exactly the opposite of the life in the asylum, where he'd been trained for years to sit and accept the regimen that had been decided for him, to follow other's people's rules, to fit into other people's schedules. [...]

His head was safe territory now – for himself as well as for others – but he found it terrible hard to concentrate; [...] his thoughts were always in flux, running together, forming unpredictable, even paralyzing, floods of undifferentiated matter: he could hardly tell one idea from another [...] (2009, 180-181; emphasis in original)

The process of “normalization” of madness – a therapy that seeks to help patients regain their reason so that they can be safely reintegrated in society – is characterized by a discourse of fear¹⁵⁶. According to this discourse, rationality ought to be associated with health, whereas irrationality is usually related to madness, an excess that leads the individual astray from the right path and is a source of disease. As Ernst mentions, recalling his period at the Georg Rosenberg¹⁵⁷: “[...] ‘he didn’t want to share us [Ernst e Mylia] with anyone else in the city. Or like we were diseased: he didn’t want anyone else to catch what we had... didn’t want to see the city decimated by our plague.’ \ But no, there was no plague. They were simply crazy” (182-183). This positioning of madness on the part of a biopolitics that strives to control all aspects of life is achieved through a self-

¹⁵⁵ With whom Mylia will have a son.

¹⁵⁶ A good example of this discourse of fear could be found in this excerpt: “Ernst had been punished for the “incident” with Mylia. His tormentor, the person who had made his life a waking nightmare for years and years, was the director of the Georg Rosenberg, Dr. Gomperz” (184).

¹⁵⁷ The fact that Mylia was admitted by Theodor because she was able to see the soul is indicative of the artificial association that is created between irrationality and disease inside the production of a fear discourse.

referential twofold movement of negation: following the first negation of madness *qua* unknow object, there is a second one, accomplished via the edification of an apparent positivistic knowledge of madness that integrates it in the realm of the social and scientific experiences. Placed at the service of the immunological mechanism, this integration will play a crucial role in structuring the dystopian worldview of *Jerusalem*, for it will steer human action in the direction of the technical-scientific rationality precisely by positioning madness in its center.

The sharp eyes of the Portuguese writer do not miss the contradictory effects resulting from this twofold structuring process, and the critical force of the novel guides our attention to the symptoms of an *autoimmunity* that is triggered by the movement. The symptoms that I am assessing here are firstly exhibited by Mylia and Ernst. Besides the fear of being considered mad¹⁵⁸, we know through the narrator's overviews that, from the moment Mylia and Ernst leave the hospital, they become aware of the "regulating" and "normalizing" effects of the therapy at the Georg Rosenberg¹⁵⁹. They gradually realize that such "therapy" was not focused "on building strength, since strength is disruptive", but rather "on consistency of pressure, on equilibrium – [the] muscles, in fact, had been tamed, made into daydreamers: contemplative, patient" (170).

If the "deactivation" of the body and the decline of the ability to reason and to act already foreshadow the contradictory results of a therapy that was supposed to cure Mylia and Ernst's disease, the symptoms of Hinnerk¹⁶⁰ (a former combatant of the war that takes place in the first two entries of the tetralogy) prove to be much more acute. In the aftermath of the conflict, Hinnerk is forced to readapt to a peacetime context, but its warfare experience follows him closely:

There were only two things – if you could call them that – that Hinnerk kept from the war: a gun, [...] and constant feeling of fear that – precisely because it never went away – took on a very different place in his life, over the years, as compared to the other more-or-less dramatic crises that interfere, time to time, with our

¹⁵⁸ A reaction that reflects the efficacy of the inoculation of madness at the heart of a society that is purportedly founded on rationality.

¹⁵⁹ It is worth mentioning that the awareness we gradually achieve of the conditions of Mylia and Ernst, is only possible due to the convergence of the comments of a heterodiegetic narrator and an increasing self-knowledge of the characters themselves; we know this because both characters blame Gomperz e Theodor, and they deeply resent them. In Hinnerk's case, this degree of self-knowledge is never achieved. We have access to his symptoms and his psychological sphere only via the descriptions of the narrator.

¹⁶⁰ Hinnerk Obst is one of the characters that connects the worlds of the novels that compose the tetralogy, making a brief appearance in *Joseph Walser's Machine*.

nervous system. Since it never left, this fear was like a tangible, physical fact for Hinnerk [...] (58)¹⁶¹

The constant fear that is born out of the traumatic experience that Hinnerk endured during the war¹⁶² has irreversibly transformed him in “something else”, something that, despite its human traits, is no longer human. He has turned into a being in permanent competition (91) whose primary instincts have been so exacerbated by the military experience - which has determined how he is supposed to feel and to think –, that danger and the need to kill have become the main driving forces in his survival:

Danger was privileged zone, as far as Hinnerk was concerned – a place where things *happen*; as though danger made men faster, more competent, into doers at last: great doers, great builders. Danger inspires us to build strong buildings – houses raised in safety seem fake, inept, ignorant of the great motivating fear that strips us bare, that reveals the truth... both of bricks and of human beings. (2009, 88; emphasis in original)

The threshold situations faced by these three characters, alongside their subsequent symptoms, suggest that by introducing “pathological” elements that disseminate madness in the social body, and consequentially resorting to fear as an instrument of control, the biopolitical immunization starts transforming into a form of control that replicates the effects of an autoimmune disease. This transformation is explained by the fact that the immunological mechanism itself creates other kinds of madness (as in the case of Hinnerk) or seriously debilitates the human rational faculties (in the cases of Mylia and Ernst). In doing so, not only does it undermine the capacity to have natural emotional responses – necessary to the normal thinking processes –, but it also exacerbates emotions that, albeit biologically based, are likewise socially constructed and, thus, may become self-destructive due to the influence of biopolitical institutions and discourses.

It is according to this immunological configuration – in this specific case, of madness – that the biopolitical relationships are structured and legitimized in the novel.

¹⁶¹ Another example could be: “By keeping to a predictable and monotonous routine, Hinnerk tried to diminish the incursion of what might be called *novelty* into his life. In peacetime, he’d quickly come to understand that there was a link between fear and the unexpected; thus, he subjected his days to unrelenting surveillance, splitting himself in two – prisoner and warder – so as to keep as close a watch as possible on both the world and himself” (2009, 61; emphasis in original).

¹⁶² Let us not forget that, as Walter Benjamin so eloquently put it in his *Illuminations*, war is one of the resources that political powers use to mobilize and direct the forces of the populations towards technical progress.

The contradictory effects of such immunology that start to surface in *Jerusalem* and will become globally spread in the societies of *Intrusion* convey the idea that the antigen used in the process of inoculation, as well as the medical expertise involved in its production, do not represent merely a positive knowledge that effectively masters the pathological element. As it is both implicitly and explicitly highlighted in Tavares' novel, they are an extension of practices – or at the least an attempt to extend those practices –, and a set of knowledges inherited from a theological horizon. These practices and knowledges unsuspectedly endow medicine with its sacred dimension, turning it into a mighty tool in the hands of the political-judicial powers closely associated with it.

Madness and the unknown brought about by the finitude of life ultimately maintain their unfathomable natures in *Jerusalem*, but the “negative affirmation” of scientific knowledge over madness will allow Gomperz and Theodor to place themselves in a position of authority, transforming them into figures that hold a supra-institutional reach and possess unlimited power inside their field of expertise. As the novel seems to suggest, in the critical passage that occurs in the 19th and 20th centuries from a theocentric to an anthropocentric immunology, old institutions, such as the hospital, will seek to readjust and redefine themselves, in order to overcome the obsolete enclosed logic of discipline. However, as I will now examine, this search and experimentation with new strategies to regulate the sovereign and biopolitical relationships will have catastrophic consequences; those consequences arise precisely in the moment these new strategies become fully actualized in reality, when the immunological mechanism reaches its plenitude and uses death to mobilize political life. *Mutatis mutandis*, when biopolitics turns into thanatopolitics¹⁶³.

¹⁶³ While the concept of a “politics of death” (from the ancient Greek *thanatos* + *politikos*) was already present in Foucault's *History of Sexuality I* – but also in Carl Schmitt's body of work – its full significance and effects have only been developed and elaborated in the recent theories of Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, among others. The works of these authors point to the idea that the association of the positive power over life and the negative power of death is not coincidental, but, quite on the contrary, lies precisely at the core of the biopolitical project. As Sergei Prozorov mentions: “While the interpretations of this conjunction of the powers of life and death are certainly diverse and resort to ontological, anthropological, historical, and ideological arguments, they clearly demonstrate that the problematic of biopolitics may no longer be viewed in terms of a simple temporal succession from the dark age of sovereign negativity to the glorious age of positive power that makes life live. Biopower, however we define it, is always already a power of life *and* death, not only in the sense that fostering the life of some presupposes the death of others but also in the more ominous sense that the life fostered, amplified, and optimized in biopolitical practices remains in proximity to death precisely by virtue of being enfolded in an apparatus of power, whose biopolitical productivity does not exclude sovereign negativity” (2013, 191).

CHAPTER 5 – FROM JERUSALEM TO PANEM: REMEMBERING THE *SHOAH* AND
THE APEX OF BIOPOLITICS

Black milk of morning we drink it at dusk
we drink it at noon and at dawn we drink it at night
we drink it and drink
we dig a grave in the air there you lie without crowding
A man lives in the house he plays with the snakes he writes
he writes at nightfall to Germany *Your golden hair Margarete*
he writes it and steps out in front of the house and the stars
are aflash and he whistles his hounds
he whistles his Jews and makes them dig a grave in the earth
he commands us *Strike up a dance tune*

Paul Celan, "Fugue of Death"

EXAMINING A DIFFERENT DISEASE

The post-war atmosphere explored by Gonçalo M. Tavares displays relevant similarities with the ones created in the works of, for instance, Samuel Bak, Anselm Kiefer, or Lars von Trier¹⁶⁴. Drawing on the post-World War context, these somber, dreamlike atmospheres transport the memory of the *Shoah* into the present day. They place modern-day readers face to face with a problematic medical past of western societies that is still not fully fathomable, and yet is intensely attached to current notions of health and disease.

In effect, not only the readers but the characters themselves are forced to face this past. The psychiatrist Theodor Busbeck proves to be incapable to escape the dark shade of one of the pivotal events of the history of mankind: the genocide of the Jewish people¹⁶⁵. Pursuing the goal of elaborating "a single graph to establish, to summarize, the relationship between history and atrocity" (Tavares 2009, 44), Theodor examines photos and works that document life in the concentration camps, seeking to study with scientific

¹⁶⁴ Bak's "Creation of Wartime III" (1999-2008), Kiefer's "Lilith" (1987-1990) (see appendices 4 and 5), and Lars von Trier's *Europa* (2003), would be good examples of works that create those atmospheres. Another one would be the poem "Fugue of Death" (1955), by Paul Celan.

¹⁶⁵ If we remember Lars von Trier's *Europa*, we can see that Busbeck constitutes an almost a mirror image of Leopold Kessler, a young American that travels to spectral post-war Germany. In the ending of the film, we witness Leopold Kessler drowning inside the coach of a train that derailed and fell into a river, a scene that carries a complex reading: not only does it allude to the symbolism of the train coach in the German context at the time, but it also conveys the final message that the genocide of the Jewish people will forever haunt the European memory. As Kessler says: "Follow the river. As days go by... Head for the ocean... that mirrors the sky. You want to wake up, to free yourself of the image of EUROPA. But it is not possible" (Trier, 1991).

accuracy the occasions in which “one side has absolutely no ability [...] to inflict casualties on the other, and in which the strong side, without any justification whatsoever, decimated the weaker” (45).

The inclusion in *Jerusalem* of the only explicit historical reference present in the four novels of “The Kingdom” assumes a role of the utmost importance: not only does it structure the internal logic of the fictional space-time in the novels, but it likewise draws our attention to the transformation the immunological mechanism seems to undergo throughout the 20th century. The convergence of the medical strategies and discursive creations regarding madness in the character of Theodor Busbeck, along with the reference to the *Shoah* brought about by his research, could be perceived both as a transition point and a confrontation introduced by the Portuguese writer. This may help us reflect about: firstly, the implications and unsuspected connections between the intense process of the politization of life carried by the scientific advances of the 19th century and the attempt to exterminate the Jewish people; secondly, the new orientation that, from the hints provided by the novels, biopolitics seems to take in post-war western societies¹⁶⁶.

When applied to madness, the immunological mechanism places this condition at the core of its functioning to doubly negate it afterwards. This immunity logic already presents a specificity that partially distances it from the closed logic of discipline. However, it is only inside the concentration camps that it will be fully hypostatized. The paradox of medical action – that in order to protect and treat the German body requires the death of the Jewish one – is suggested in *Jerusalem* when Theodor comes across a work entitled “Europa 02”:

(IV) Medical Examination

Medical exams are carried out in public places.

You take a seat. Suddenly, they tap you on the shoulder and say: your turn. You get up immediately, lean against the wall, and fall apart.

¹⁶⁶ Given the connections between Tavares and Lars von Trier’s works, it would also be interesting to explore possible intertextualities between *Jerusalem* and the miniseries *The Kingdom* (*Riget*, in the original Danish title), to which I have alluded previously. The title of the tetralogy certainly resonates with the show’s title, which happens to be also the name of the Danish hospital where the action takes place. It would be particularly relevant to our reflection about *Jerusalem* the relationship Lars von Trier establishes between medicine and religion, rationality, and belief/superstition: he creates a fictional world where, despite the reiterated affirmation of the importance of scientific rigor by the part of the physicians, we also have an underworld of cults and rites of a secret society entitled “the lodge” that is composed, coincidentally, by those same physicians. Unfortunately, given the scope of this thesis it is impossible to dig deeper into this connection. See: *The Kingdom*.

At each Medical Exam they mark a cross on the back of your hand. There are people who've already had dozens. And everyone knows that you're only chosen for an examination if you're diseased. [...]

(V) Instruments

They never touch you. They do their work through the tips of the instruments. They contaminate you with the tips of their instruments. You can't really see anything at all, and yet the tips of their instruments seem to be covered in a coarse powder.

Until you fell the instruments, you aren't afraid. Afterwards, you are. [...]

(VIII) Diseases

They hunt for strange diseases. They hunt for sick people who are themselves strange. Whoever is found to have a strange disease is no longer a sick person, however. Now he is a criminal.

Having a regular disease means one that has been obedient and dutiful in his work. A strange disease is a sign of failure: a lack of personal hygiene. A lack of honesty. (117-121)

The clear allusion that we have in "Europa 02" to the medical examinations conducted on the bodies that were condemned to the excruciating conditions of the camps, as well as to the "medical experiments" that the physicians of the *Reich* performed on their "patients", causes Theodor to face a reality of his profession that he does not understand, and even rejects. In effect, the narrator describes to the reader his irascible reaction when reading those passages, throwing the book away to concentrate in a different aspect of his research. Here lies the unspoken truth of the *homo medicus*: born together with the clinic, the modern hospital, new medical expertise, and therapeutic practices in general, he is nonetheless endowed with a sacred aura. It is him that finally judges who is healthy and deserves to live, and who is born sick and should be eliminated. That is to say, he decides whose lives are worth of being lived (Agamben 1998):

[...] "six million Jews, six million human beings, were helplessly, and in most cases unsuspectedly, dragged to their deaths. The method employed was that of accumulated terror... Last came the death factories – and they all died together, the young and the old, the weak and the strong, the sick and the healthy; not as people, not as men and women, children and adults, boys and girls... but brought down to the lowest common denominator of organic life itself... like cattle..." (2009, 126)

The intersection between the principles of modern psychiatric therapy and the role of the physician in the concentration camps would imply that, in both cases, there is an immunological model at work. Whether we refer to the “normal healthy society” in general, or the vital force of the German nation, when facing a disease that may potentially spread and threaten its existence, there is a resort to a specific process of inoculation of the healthy (political) body. Not surprisingly, then, the health/hygiene discourse and terminology produced by the scientific disciplines regarding madness, together with the instrumentalization of fear, is also shared and officialized by the National Socialist Party.

Given the specificity attributed to this “disease”¹⁶⁷, and adding the factors of the historical context from which it arises¹⁶⁸, the immunity logic that I have analyzed in madness will be exacerbated. The eugenic project adopted as a flagship by the Nazi regime against the Jewish people prefigures a total politization of life in all its aspects, including death, as well as an attempt to create a “normalizing” speech which will be in the basis of the “lowest common denominator” mentioned by the narrator when referring to the people that were in the concentration camps. As it is suggested in the excerpt, the concretization of the immunological mechanism in its plenitude will determine the negation of life, turning biopolitics into its exact opposite, a thanatopolitics: if biopolitics is a productive power that necessitates or silently calls for death as the consequence of “protecting and potentiating live”, as Esposito or Agamben would say, then thanatopolitics is not merely the deadly underbelly of biopolitics, but is itself a productive power in the hands of those who biopolitical power “lets die”¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁷ To be noted that the *maladie* that the Jewish people constituted to the German nation is of a different nature from notion of madness that existed in disciplinary societies: unlike the latter, that was circumscribed at a spatial-temporal level, the “Jewish disease”, as it is described in Nazi propaganda, is epidemic and hereditary. An infectious disease caused by parasites, which, if left untreated, could lead to the contagion of the superior Arian beings, and possibly to the degeneration of the “superior race”. In the words of Esposito: “The regime propagated the fight to the death against the Jews as the resistance put up by the body (and originally the healthy blood) of the German nation against the invading germs that had penetrated within and whose intent it was to undermine the unity and life of the German nation itself” (2008, 116).

¹⁶⁸ Such as the technical-scientific development in the field of Genetics, or the political-economical conjuncture that Germany was facing since the first World War.

¹⁶⁹ The following passage from *Bíos* is quite elucidative: “It’s true, of course, that the political lexicon has always adopted biological metaphors, beginning with the long-standing notion of the state as body. And it is also true, as Foucault showed, that beginning with the eighteenth century the question of life progressively intersects with the sphere of political action. Yet both occurred thanks to a series of linguistic, conceptual, and institutional mediations that are completely missing in Nazism: every division collapses between politics and biology. What before had always been a vitalistic metaphor becomes a reality in Nazism, not in the sense that political power passes directly into the hands of biologists, but in the sense that politicians use biological processes as criteria with which to guide their own actions” (Esposito 2008 112-113).

In this point, the critical power of the work of Gonçalo M. Tavares intervenes. The act of rejection and incomprehension of Theodor before the paradoxical reality of the Nazi therapeutic procedures in the concentration camps reveals a blindness regarding his own actions:

Theodor Busbeck kept thumbing through his book, in which there were several photographs of corpses lying one on top of another on a stairway: small bodies, large bodies, naked, men and women joined together in a parody of pornography, a parody of obscenity; or rather, embodying another sort of obscenity, see it nestled in between those bodies, one on the top of the other [...] Theodor Busbeck, sitting up straight in his chair [...] looking on, and on, in horror [...] at the photographs of bodies that are beyond saving, that are beyond the reach of his tools and techniques [...] Indeed, he seems to lack any sort of human response to the photos, aside from the repulsion... he isn't even able to force himself into a sort of makeshift human response turning page after page, seeing photograph after photograph, the horror mounting and mounting until it's lost its impact, intensity, awfulness. (40-41)

The reflection that these photos and the work "Europa 02" could propitiate by their quality of documents that preserve a historic memory is noticeably discarded. We will learn later in the novel that this is explained by the fact that Theodor represents a continuity with this "therapeutic" logic of immunity. His reactions throughout the development of his research could point to the difficulties that contemporary readers, born after the war, still face as far as the knowledge of the *Shoah* is concerned: regardless the existence of numerous documented studies and research works in the most diverse areas of study, when confronted with a concrete evidence of the horror of the concentration camps, we are unable to formulate a scientific discourse that fully grasps and explains the human flaw in question. Gonçalo M. Tavares seems to convey in fictional terms what is argued by the researcher Pedro de Sousa:

to the man of the postwar are not conceded the instruments, the methods of thinking which allow to unveil the *ethic fail constituted by the Holocaust*, not only because to theorize morally the Holocaust would mitigate it, but also because contemporary man lacks the ethical notions that would invalidate the recurrence of such behavior [...] (2010, 128; my translation; emphasis in original).

To put it differently, the character of Theodor potentiates a discussion that, departing from a confrontation between the biopolitical reality during the *Shoah* and the biopolitical

reality of the post-war, makes us wonder to what extent is it still possible to resort to “health” strategies similar to those central to the development of the eugenic Nazi project?

The ethical failure that Theodor recognizes in himself is related to the absence, an even impossibility, of a political and legal response to the perpetrators of the Jewish genocide, seeing that this event expresses a blurring of the limits between Justice and Injustice, Dignity and Indignity. Indeed, there is a detail that is indicated in one of the chapters to which I would like to draw attention to: during the description of Theodor’s reaction to a photograph that displays a pile of dead bodies in a ditch next to a camp, the narrator makes the following observation:

[...] the obscenity of stasis, without pleasure, without excitement, the obscenity of bodies that would never be desired again, bodies with nothing to offer but horror [...] as though to trick you into thinking you aren’t looking at people at all, not at men, women, and children reduced to lifeless skin and bone, but at something else, something [...] bodies that now seemed as though they’d never even been alive: *members of an entirely different species, a species that had experienced such enormous obscenity that it had been definitely removed from the core family of Homo sapiens*, as represented here in the library by one of its exemplary units: a doctor. (Tavares 2009, 40; emphasis added)

This excerpt hints that the totalizing politization of life does not translate, as it is usually assumed, a zoopolitics *tout court*. The notion that the “treatments” the Jewish were subjected to in the camps would equate them to animals is simplistic and deceptive, since the muddling of the limits between *zôê* and *bios* during the National Socialist regime implicated the removal of the Jewish body (bodies) of the political sphere, but also its recodification in the sphere of biopolitics.

In the redefinition of the sovereign relationships that had been established by the declaration of 1789, founded in the rapport “birth-nation”, the enforcement of the Nuremberg laws regarding the “*Reich*’s citizenship” and the protection of the German blood and honor will enable the German nation-state to completely seize natural life, “discriminating within it between a so to speak authentic life and a life lacking every political value” (Agamben 1998, 85). This change will lead, in turn, to a gradual distancing from citizenship rights and human rights, as well as a recodification of both, and it is at this point that admission to the concentration camps becomes possible. Born out of a state of exception that becomes the norm and overrides the German

constitutional/juridical framework, the camps remove the “humanity” from the individual Jewish body, separating it from the human species.

Similarly, the limitations in terms of personal and juridical autonomies of the patients after they leave the Georg Rosenberg hospital, particularly in the case of Mylia who is deprived of the right to stay with her son Kaas, foreshadows the failure of the process of “normalization” of madness. The “inhuman” status that it is attributed to them by Dr. Gomperz and the psychiatric institution is evident in the failure of Mylia and Ernst’s attempt to return to a normal life (Tavares 2009, 182). This failure to return to an “old language” after being absent in a different country interrogates the parallel between the survivor of the concentration camp, whose existence was removed from the socio-political world during his period of captivity, and the patient of the Georg Rosenberg, who “knows that he has been in a social coma which dictated his submission to whatever chance presented itself of being adequately reintegrated in society” (Sousa 2010, 152; my translation). This parallel is further explored by Gonçalo M. Tavares:

With each passing week, now removed from life at Georg Rosenberg, Ernst grew more and more resentful of the way he’d been treated. What had then seemed like the only solution – those methods, that discipline [...] – seemed completely inadequate and even brutal now that Ernst was free to walk the streets among normal man and women. Dr. Gomperz [...] was gradually becoming rather intimidating in his mind, something of a childhood nightmare [...] While he’d never been aware of the full extent to which Gomperz had been *pursuing* him at the asylum, after the birth of Mylia’s child – a pursuit that never violated the letter of the Georg Rosenberg law, but that was real, honest, pure, and malicious persecution nonetheless, with Ernst having indeed been marked with the invisible mark of the eternal victim – and while he was even less aware of the increasingly aggressive surveillance Mylia had been subjected to in the years following all these events: son, divorce, etc. [...] Ernst had been punished for the “incident” with Mylia, His tormentor the person who had made his life a waking nightmare for years and years, was the director of Georg Rosenberg, Dr. Gomperz. (Tavares 2009, 183-184; emphasis in original)

The terminology usually employed in the descriptions of the concentration camps – exemplified in the excerpt through the words “nightmare”, “discipline”, or “malicious persecution” – is also applicable to the experience on the Georg Rosenberg. The internment of Ernst and Mylia is depicted as a period of persecution and terror, during which both characters are subjected to punishments and incomprehensible treatments, such as the unauthorized sterilization of Mylia at the hands of a figure whose authority

goes beyond the legal sphere. As stated before, we can read the experiences of these fictional characters as imaginative extension of political/social conditions into different contexts that can reveal their flaws and contradictions. By tracing a parallelism between the extreme examples of these characters and the medical practices in the concentration camps, the novel implies that the immunological mechanism behind the Nazi project¹⁷⁰ may find echoes in the way power relationships are structured in post-war western societies. This particular excerpt – and the whole novel – helps us to enquire about the growing juxtaposition between the two vectors of the immunological semantics (the biological and the juridical); it assists our work of probing deeper into the process of the “biologization” of the *nomos* and of the “jurisdiction” of the *bios* that is taking place in contemporary western societies, from which the importance that is still given in our time to the control over reproduction, pregnancy and birth transpires.

The existence of a possible connection between Mylia, Theodor and the spiritual healing requirements of the German people to eliminate the Jewish infection, acquires even more pertinence if we take into consideration that Mylia, herself also Jewish, utters the biblical verses: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither...” (149). This act bears significant implications regarding the historical memory and identity of the Jewish people, but also the urgent need to remember the events that took place in the concentration camps. The repetition of a variation of these verses¹⁷¹, and the title of the novel itself, gain a biopolitical sense hitherto unanticipated: the subversive power of Tavares’ writing reveals that, contrary to expectations, the historical memory of Jewish persecution and genocide does not teach anything to Theodor and Gompers, who remain oblivious to the abuse of medical power they perpetuate. The medical experiments in the camps, and the alterations to the juridical order implemented by the National Social regime, maintain several affinities with the immunological strategies developed in the post-war society that arises at the end of the novel.

We can find a relevant connection between the photos that Theodor finds, the book “Europa 02”, and the album that Katniss and Peeta begin, gathering photographs of family members and tributes in happy or relaxed moments. In all three cases there is a suggestion that photography, and other physical testimonial objects such as books, can have a therapeutic function in dealing with traumatic experiences. As we had seen in part I,

¹⁷⁰ Which resorts to strategies such as the complete regulation of the bare life, or its suppression even before birth.

¹⁷¹ “If I forget thee, O Georg Rosenberg, let my right hand wither” (177).

contrary to the numbing notion of memory that was implicit in the Games (and that also affects Drs. Theodor and Gomperz), the relation Katniss develops with the photographs, and the relationship that she expects their children and future generations of Panem will establish with them, suggests that these new forms of representation may produce comparable effects to those that *The Hunger Games* trilogy, as a collection of sci-fi works, might produce on the reader. Through his tetralogy, Gonçalo M. Tavares seems to convey a similar message, but with a different inflection. On the one hand, both groups of works solicit an active effort of memory, as they can be seen as fictional representations that provide a stimulating space where the reader may confront their notions of the past with those created fictionally, and confront their stance with the stance of the characters that are irreversibly connected and shaped by that past. On the other hand, the dystopian character of the “black books” is not so much associated with the notion of “post-memory” that the post-apocalyptic nature of Collins’ book seems to portray, but rather to a direct memory that resists interpretation and representation¹⁷².

This difference is of the utmost importance to my understanding of the novel as a *pharmakon*, for it signifies that different literary strategies and genres propose different therapeutic approaches that, nonetheless, work in conjunction to create a critically healthy reader. In *The Hunger Games* there is a notion that future generations born after traumatic events will be conscious that their memories do not consist of events, but of *representations of events*. It is due to the consciousness of the phenomenon of mediatization that a reiterated contact with images of past traumatic events may potentially transform the passive memory of the spectator into an active ethical act of remembrance, taking death out of the *vetrina* and returning its almost unbearable weight and restlessness. “The Kingdom”, conversely, retains this weight and restlessness of death not by transforming textually the traumatic events, but rather by presenting a narrative deprived of spatial-temporal references that is able to transport gruesome direct representations of those events to our present time. By reviving such representations, the

¹⁷² Tavares seems, in a way, to share Adorno’s perspective regarding the problematic representation of holocaust related events expressed in the 1949 essay “Cultural Criticism and Society”, reprinted as the first essay in *Prisms*: “*The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation*” (1983, 34; emphasis in original).

characters, counterparts of post-war contemporary readers, are faced with a problematic reality of the political and medical past of western societies that is still not fully fathomable, and yet is intensely attached to the current notions of body, health and disease.

A JUMP INTO A DISTANT FUTURE: REVAMPING OLD IMMUNOLOGICAL DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES

I would thus argue that Tavares' narrative opaqueness and the estrangement effect produced by the "black books" have strong bonds of kinship with the cognitive estrangement that Darko Suvin¹⁷³ considered central to the strategy of science-fiction, in the sense that it denies the difference between literary and non-literary discourse, and links the emergence of new perspectives on literature to specific social and political issues in the real world¹⁷⁴. This goes to show that despite their differences (the use of the novum, for instance), dystopian fiction and science-fiction overlap in several ways. Indeed, there is another common figure represented, with specific traits and differences, in both genres that merits our attention, *the monster*:

Mutations. No question about it. I've never seen these mutts, but they're no natural-born animals. They resemble huge wolves, but what wolf lands and then balances easily on its hind legs? What wolf waves the rest of the pack forward with its front paw as though it had a wrist? These things I can see at a distance. Up close, I'm sure their more menacing attributes will be revealed. (Sic; Collins 2008, 331)

Recalling the image of "enormous obscenity" that Theodor finds during his research, or the "different species [...] removed from the core family of Homo sapiens" to which

¹⁷³ In the *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) Suvin derives the concept from the Russian Formalism's notion of *ostranenie* and Bertolt Brecht's closely related (albeit with a Marxist inflection) notion of the estrangement-effect, in an attempt to distinguish science fiction writing from other forms of fiction.

¹⁷⁴ According to Suvin, "SF is a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7-8).

Mylia and Ernst's were relegated, in the first book of the *Hunger Games* trilogy the citizens of the districts are promptly dehumanized by the Games at the eyes of the Capitol's elites; first figuratively, then literally. The remarks and compliments that Katniss and Peeta's "prep team" makes during the train ride from District 12 to the Capitol¹⁷⁵, letting transpire a sort of admiration for their almost human appearance and manners, are just two of examples of how the spectacular power of the Games reduces the people from other districts to an animalistic/barbaric condition, or, at best, to dolls to dress up and play with.

Adding insult to injury, the Gamemakers take dehumanization to its greatest extreme in the final phase of the 74th Hunger Games. After the death of almost all the tributes in the arena, in order to give the audience a climatic denouement, president Snow and Head Gamemaker Seneca Crane literally transform the defunct tributes into subhuman mutations, growling and snarling human-wolf hybrids. This reinvention of *panem et circenses* allows the viewers to enjoy the spectacle in a detached manner, without any ethical concerns, and, at the same time, makes them forget that their luxurious lifestyle comes at the cost of human suffering.

While what is more clearly brought to the frontstage here is the uninhibited control over the body by a political-economic power via the manipulation of communicational media, there is also an immunological rhetoric at play. Collins draws our attention to the idea that the constant bombardment that we, the viewers, suffer of warfare images in TV news, action movies, or reality shows, makes the task of differentiating reality from fiction almost impossible. However, in this desensitizing process, the status that is attributed to the citizens of each district is of equal importance to the constitution of a healthy political body:

We hadn't had meat in months. The sight of the rabbit seemed to stir something in my mother. She roused herself, skinned the carcass, and made a stew with the meat and some more greens Prim had gathered. [...] The woods became our savior, and each day I went a bit farther into its arms. Any sign of danger, a distant howl, the inexplicable break of a branch, sent me flying back to the fence at first. Then I began to risk climbing trees to escape the wild dogs that quickly got bored and moved on. Bears and cats lived deeper in, perhaps disliking the sooty reek of our district. /

¹⁷⁵ During dinner Effie states that Peeta and Katniss had "decent manners", unlike the tributes from the previous year that "ate everything with their hands like a couple of savages" (Collins 2008, 44), whereas Flavius pays a "compliment" to Katniss when they have finished the re-make process, stating: "Excellent! You almost look like a human being now!" (Collins 2008, 62).

Both Peeta and I run to the window to see what we've only seen on television, the Capitol, the ruling city of Panem. The cameras haven't lied about its grandeur. If anything, they have not quite captured the magnificence of the glistening buildings in a rainbow of hues that tower into the air, the shiny cars that roll down the wide paved streets, the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal. All the colors seem artificial, the pinks too deep, the greens too bright, the yellows painful to the eyes, like the flat round disks of hard candy we can never afford to buy at the tiny sweet shop in District 12. (51 and 59)

These depictions of, respectively, the Capitol and District 12, illustrate the abysmal contrast between the glowing and grandiose center of power of Panem, a fortress of technological and architectural prowess that radiates wealth and health, and the gloomy, peripheral district, which the narrator describes as a place almost in the state of nature inhabited by people that live in insalubrious conditions. The terminology used to describe this statutory difference plays a key role in the creation of a rule of fear in Panem, helping to reproduce and disseminate throughout the districts the message that is symbolically condensed in the televised Games. Along the lines of Hobbes' political philosophy, the Capitol counts on the fear of violent death, as well as on the painful memories of the "Dark Days" reenacted by the Games, to secure obedience¹⁷⁶. But in the installation of this "culture of fear" that engulfs the citizens of the districts, the creation of an immunological discourse that associates animality, illness and death to the poorer districts, and progress, health and vitality to the richer ones, is decisive in disempowering the citizens, stripping them of their agency.

¹⁷⁶ To rephrase it, the Capitol expects that one's concern for self-preservation will override moral scruples, but also that rational people will recognize that it is in their self-interest to submit to a political authority that may "protect them. Such vision strongly resonates with Hobbes' words: "[t]he attaining to this Sovereign Power, is by two wayes. One, by Naturall force; as when a man maketh his children, to submit themselves, and their children to his government, as being able to destroy them if they refuse, or by Warre subdueth his enemies to his will, giving them their lives on that condition. The other, is when men agree amongst themselves, to submit to some Man, or Assembly of men, voluntarily, on confidence to be protected by him against all others. This later, may be called a Politicall Common-wealth, or Common-wealth by Institution; and the former, a Common-wealth by Acquisition. And first, I shall speak of a Common-wealth by Institution" (Sic; 2005, 137).

Echoing Hobbes' political template in *Leviathan*¹⁷⁷, the *topos* of the corporal metaphor "harmony generates health, discord breeds disease"¹⁷⁸ is therefore crucial to the Capitol's structuring power. Only through the strict eradication of all social relationships located outside of the individual pact of protection and obedience, can the sovereign political order be established. As far as self-preservation is concerned, once the "com" in *communitas* is deemed as risky it must be radically removed in favor of a political form that places the subjects in direct contact with the sovereign power that represents them. In the same manner that the fear provoked by the leviathan state "heals" the fear of death in the state of *homo homini lupus*, so does the apparent equality of all the citizens of Panem before President Snow cancel the danger that comes from the equivalent capacity to give, or receive, death before a civil order is instituted:

The result was Panem, a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. Then came the Dark Days, the uprising of the districts against the Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games. (18)

This fragile balance established between the Capitol (the head of Panem) and the remaining districts (its members)¹⁷⁹, reproduces in an eerily similar way Hobbes' image of the body politic in the 16th century¹⁸⁰. However, what in Hobbes was simply a

¹⁷⁷ In the footsteps of 12th century philosopher John of Salisbury, Hobbes attributes a role within the body politic to categories such as "magistrates" and "officers", but, at the same time, shows a greater inclination than any of his predecessors to include in this template some non-individual elements, which are not parts of the body politic but rather features, such as memory, health, strength or harmony. Also following the old template, Hobbes establishes the same link between the relationships existing among the parts of the body and its health: following the traditional medical maxim, the more blatant the absence of unity, the more precarious the health of the body. Indeed, the negative effect of the "discord" is so great it can destroy even something which, in principle, should not have been able to destroy, such as the "soul of the Commonwealth". See appendix 6.

¹⁷⁸ That could arguably be considered the inaugural moment of the modern mechanism of immunology.

¹⁷⁹ That, as we have seen, was achieved by the treaty of treason which gave Snow's technocratic government a stronger grip on the districts to avoid another possible uprising.

¹⁸⁰ The following passage is quite illustrative: "And in which the sovereignty is an artificiall soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body; the magistrates and other officers of judicature and execution, artificiall joynts; reward and punishment (by which fastned to the seate of the sovereignty, every joynt and member is moved to performe his duty) are the nerves, that do the same in the body naturall; the wealth and riches of all the particular members are the strength; *salus populi* (the peoples safety) its businesse; counsellors, by whom all things needfull for it to know are suggested unto it, are the memory; equity and lawes, an artificiall reason and will; concord, health; sedition, sicknesse; and civill war, death. Lastly, the pact and covenants, by which the parts of this body politique were at first made, set together, and united, resemble that fiat, or the Let us make man, pronounced by God in the Creation" (Sic; Hobbes 2005, XVIII-XIX).

theoretical template, in Panem will become a living reality. Both the hybrid mutts and the tributes can be interpreted as representations that crystallize the complete domination that the centralized government of this post-apocalyptic world exerts over the bodies of its citizens, disposing of their lives and deaths at will. They constitute several warnings regarding the loss of critical reasoning and excessive government control, also mirroring a juxtaposition of biological life and medical-political power that was only achieved during the persecution and genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis.

Incidentally, one might argue that such juxtaposition refers us to a modern-day control of the body that, in a way, has an even wider reach than the one achieved during the *Shoah*. Building upon the eugenic Nazi project, the liberal eugenics that Collins seems to be alluding to is not restricted by the technological and scientific limits that the Nazi scientists had in their time: seeing that contemporary genetic engineering does not abide by a natural dynamic, it brings together and blurs the lines between what is considered “natural” in the human being (what is “contingently grown” in Habermas words), and what is “made” or intentionally manipulated:

To the degree that evolution of the species, proceeding by random selection, comes within the reach of the intervention of genetic engineering and, thus, of actions we have to answer for, the categories of what is *manufactured* and what *has come to be by nature*, which in the life-world still retain their demarcating power, dedifferentiate. (2003, 46)

Genetic engineering poses, thus, important questions as far as human reification and self-determination are concerned, for genetically interfering in an individual’s “natural” characteristics alters the self-understanding of that individual, together with their rapport with the social environment. Both consequences result from the fact that the “natural” traits or characteristics of the altered individual are a manifestation of an extraneous and subjective determination. As a result, not only does Collins draw our attention to the severe ethical consequences of this degree of genetic manipulation, but she also seems to emphasize, as Habermas did in *The Future of Human Nature*, that genetic engineering fundamentally differs from any form of determination by external forces. It goes beyond the control of the muscles and the mechanic actions of the physical body, offering the possibility of manipulating individuals at a molecular level, i.e., of “altering human biology itself” (64).

From the opening pages of the first book of the trilogy, we get a sense that there are elements in this future society that refer us to aspects and events that took place during World War II, but are textually transformed into something else, or, if we will, presented at a different light:

Our part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. Men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles, many who have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails, the lines of their sunken faces. But today the black cinder streets are empty. Shutters on the squat gray houses are closed. The reaping isn't until two. May as well sleep in. If you can.

Our house is almost at the edge of the Seam. I only have to pass a few gates to reach the scruffy field called the Meadow. Separating the Meadow from the woods, in fact enclosing all of District 12, is a high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire loops. In theory, it's supposed to be electrified twenty-four hours a day as a deterrent to the predators that live in the woods — packs of wild dogs, lone cougars, bears — that used to threaten our streets. But since we're lucky to get two or three hours of electricity in the evenings, it's usually safe to touch. Even so, I always take a moment to listen carefully for the hum that means the fence is live. (Collins 2008, 4-5)

In conjunction with the sorrowful condition of the citizens of the district, whose wretched bodies could almost be mistaken for the bodies we see in photos of live prisoners inside the concentration camps, fence imagery is perhaps the primary means through which readers can identify allusions to the *Shoah* within Suzanne Collins trilogy. As Katniss describes it, the fence surrounding District 12 is barb wired and probably electrically charged, presumably to keep wild animals out the district. Still, the presence of predatory Peacekeepers¹⁸¹ near the fence, who regularly monitor the movements of the district's citizens, may make young readers realize that the fence image here does not signify a protected space but, rather, an imprisoning one, much like the fences and walls of the ghettos and concentration camps. Following Katniss' description of the geography of Panem, the means through which the tributes circulate between the enclosed spaces of the districts and the Capitol adds yet another element that reinforces this connection with the *Shoah*:

We have to stand for a few minutes in the doorway of the train while the cameras gobble up our images, then we're allowed inside and the doors close mercifully

¹⁸¹ The "Peacekeepers" are a fictional faceless military police force at the service of Panem's government.

behind us. The train begins to move at once. The speed initially takes my breath away. Of course, I've never been on a train, as travel between the districts is forbidden except for officially sanctioned duties. For us, that's mainly transporting coal. But this is no ordinary coal train. It's one of the high-speed Capitol models that average 250 miles per hour. Our journey to the Capitol will take less than a day. [...] / The tribute train is fancier than even the room in the Justice Building. We are each given our own chambers that have a bedroom, a dressing area, and a private bathroom with hot and cold running water. We don't have hot water at home, unless we boil it. There are drawers filled with fine clothes, and Effie Trinket tells me to do anything I want, wear anything I want, everything is at my disposal. Just be ready for supper in an hour. I peel off my mother's blue dress and take a hot shower. I've never had a shower before. It's like being in a summer rain, only warmer. I dress in a dark green shirt and pants. (41-42)

Though Katniss describes the tribute train as being extravagant and in pristine condition, in sharp contrast with the decaying cars used to transport the Jews to the concentration camps, we know it is used with a similar purpose, namely, to transport the tributes to their place of death. One could say that second fence image in the trilogy is, therefore, the metaphorical one that surrounds the Hunger Games arena itself: if readers – particularly young adult readers – notice this association, they may then identify the Hunger Games arena as being symbolic of a concentration camp environment, with the force field and cameras that surround it replacing the barbed wire fence¹⁸². From my point of view, this correspondence between the ultramodern train/arena and the old trains/concentration camps expresses the persistence of a totalizing and unmediated immunological control that, nonetheless, no longer cancels the private/personal sphere in order to achieve a full integration of the body in the public sphere, but makes the public and the private spheres coincide instead, privatizing the public.

Contrasting with previous totalitarian systems that depended on the terror of secrecy, modern neoliberal societies – represented in Snow's technocratic government as a worst-case scenario – bring most things into the open, incessantly subjecting their citizens to that which threatens the fabric of the everyday. Thanks to the mediatic dissemination of epidemiologic notions and the development of genetic practices¹⁸³, each person's future becomes increasingly individualized and dependent on one's past and present behavior. In fact, the Capitol citizens are motivated primarily by an externally generated sense of self-worth, importance, and aesthetic beauty. They generally base their

¹⁸² We have seen in part I that the arena is a sort of artificial state of nature, a place where constitutional law and individual rights are suspended, just as it was the case in the concentration camps.

¹⁸³ But also, to statistical profile techniques developed by the insurance industry, marketing practices.

assessment of their status and success in life, of their well-being and of the sanitized conditions that surround them, not only on their success at “improving” themselves to fit the latest style, but also on the notion that their bodies, unlike the sickish figures that they see in the Capitol’s screens, are not constantly subjected to hardship¹⁸⁴.

A major transformation in relation to “welfare” state practices¹⁸⁵ is signaled here, drawing our attention to the “unpooling” of risk” we are witnessing nowadays (Ericson, Barry and Doyle 2000, 534). We have already seen in part I that neoliberalism operates not so much through coercive means as through the creation of certain conditions that allow the people to govern themselves (Petersen and Bunton 2002). The characters of *The Hunger Games* further suggest that such a shift of responsibility not only privileges the health-related care of the self, but also that attention is cast upon the social concern with “lifestyle”, a term that, in broad strokes, signifies a consumer “choice” that may be both influenced by advertising techniques and by epidemiological recommendations.

Observing the socio-political concern with lifestyle that reigns in Panem help us to better understand the role science and technology play in everyday life, a role that is not based on the direct intervention of medical professionals¹⁸⁶, but rather on a “medical knowledge” conveyed via the media¹⁸⁷. Collins’ trilogy leaves us a clear admonition: the tie between medicine and the media defines the aspects of lifestyle that individuals must care for, but this does not imply a “medicalization” of society in the sense that individuals should follow unquestioningly the authority of medical knowledge or live a truly healthy lifestyle. Quite the opposite. Far from creating healthier bodies, medical and technological progress fills the highly sanitized and artificial world of the richer districts with sickening bodies, disfigured either by the abuse of cosmetic and genetic alterations, or by the possibility of eating *ad nauseam* (Collins 2009, position 841).

This medical and technological progress also leads to the existence of poorer districts, where life is carried on in insalubrious conditions, not far from those of concentration camps. The trilogy’s wide reach as post-apocalyptic science fiction grants us a privileged perspective on how sovereignty, in an economically driven environment,

¹⁸⁴ If in disciplinary modern societies the relation between truth and experience was established through the effort of conquering the identity of a normal citizen, the concepts of risk and self-control, conversely, do not operate through identity, but through the promise of a longer life and continuing consumption. As Paulo Vaz and Fernando Bruno state: “social concern is directed to self-control in relation to pleasures and not primarily to the form of obtaining pleasure” (2003, 284-285).

¹⁸⁵ In which risk – such as that of the Jewish malaise – entailed a collectivization of suffering.

¹⁸⁶ As was the case with normalizing/disciplinary power.

¹⁸⁷ Such “medical knowledge” generally assumes the form of advice on “healthy” lifestyles to individuals interested in taking control of their lives.

might become a military and policing protectorate at the service of global capital, using the new mass media and latest technological developments to create a sanitized society. It suggests that rather than a shift or an amendment from the events that occurred during World War II, the current normalization of unquestioned neoliberal ideologies, policies, and methods of government, expresses concomitantly a transformation and a continuity of the logic and immunity strategies behind those events.

In the long run, this continuity might give rise to a new politics of death that encourages individuals to accept the existence of a “healthy self” as separated from the “unhealthy other” in the unequal “order” of the world. Such thanatopolitics that hides the sovereign power to negate life behind “wellbeing” mediatic discourses would without a doubt be extensively differently from the one behind the *Shoah*; yet, due to its apparent “benign”, “wholesome” face, it could have an even broader corrosive effect on all social contracts, traditional institutions, legal frameworks, public spaces, and democracy itself. What is even more alarming, it seems to have already established quite solid foundations. If we consider, for example, the drastic measures most European governments adopted to deal with the massive immigration (refugee) waves, the rise of terrorist factions, or the several economic crises of the last decades, we have clear signs that politics is once again being placed in direct contact with biological life.

Drawing on the overall analyses of *Jerusalem* and *The Hunger Games*, death has been steadily resurfacing at the core of the political scene. The fate of the western world seems to increasingly dangle on the silk thread that separates the protection of life from a politics of death in an unpredictable scale. Yet, these works are not a mere passive reflection of the world. As Pablo Capanna states, due to their cosmological, apocalyptic, and social character, science-fiction works – and dystopian works, I would add – are

a response to the challenge of the technocratic society, a response that may not be perfect or satisfactory, but that is one of the few healthy reactions that have been recorded: it tends to create a mentality capable of distancing itself before the seemingly obvious, with such useful dispassion as that of the wisely exercised scientific attitude. (1966, 16; my translation)

The use of the term “healthy” by Capanna has a deeper gist than maybe the author originally intended to give it. Taking into consideration the novels at hand, if it is in the light of an immunological/pharmacological sense that we should understand the metaphor

of the body politic¹⁸⁸, we must add that both dystopian and sci-fi novels (where we often find representations of the body and of technological/scientific innovations) can also be understood as performing a function of medicine and venom at once.

We have seen in Tavares' and Collins' works that the body is the most direct point of contact between politics and life, since only in the body can life be protected from that violence that it carries inside and threatens to implode. In *Jerusalem* and *The Hunger Games*, disease and death seem to be, ironically, the figures that have most profoundly shaped the way life is governed. Placing the body as the main political object and the potential of disease at the core of the body – firstly, of an infectious disease, and, subsequently, of a different disease we have yet to explore –, biopolitical powers turned death into the outer limit from which life should always distance itself from, concurrently making it the internal fold which continuously redirects it to itself. But the worldview woven in the novels, and the novels themselves, are indissociable from the biopolitical control they address. They explicitly embrace their relationship with it, but they do it so actively, transforming it in their fictional worlds and creating, in the process, a space and a time for readers to also become aware of their position within its strategies and dynamics of control. While it remains true that, by embracing their relationship with biopolitics, the novels can also be read as imaginary worlds that merely fantasize or entertain the possibilities that our current technologies will bring, this could be considered a “necessary evil”. It is the proximity that sci-fi and dystopian novels have with this politics of life that allows them to have such a unique relationship with it, granting us access to some of its past and future aspects that are still blind spots to other literary genres or critical works.

The novels examined in these two chapters allow us to reflect about present (and future) western societies by emphasizing their strong connection with and references to a problematic medical-political past. Whether by placing us before ghastly historical pictures of concentration camps or transforming the camps textually in a distant future, they elicit an active effort of memory that keeps the *Shoah* alive and unsettling. At the same time, they produce an estrangement effect that help us see more clearly how recent

¹⁸⁸ Explicitly referred in the governmental treaties of the early modern period, and later, when in the 20th century the metaphor seems to be fully actualized in the body of the population.

landmark events¹⁸⁹ or current mediatic discourses around the “healthy” body¹⁹⁰ reflect “sanitizing” perspectives strangely akin to those of the Nazi regime. Ultimately, they enable us to underline how these perspectives have found their way into the present, i.e., how political immunology has been transformed throughout time, while also giving a glimpse of the dangerous paths they may take us in the future.

Let us now probe into the future worlds of *Intrusion* and *The Walkers*, where the shadow of the *Shoah* is dimmer and we can explore more thoroughly the political and medical challenges the immunological mechanism may pose in years to come. But the possibilities it may open as well.

¹⁸⁹ As I have mentioned previously, we could think of events like the 2015 European migrant crisis or the 2007-2008 financial crisis.

¹⁹⁰ Discourses that, through a twisted process of medicalization, emphasize the individual responsibility for the health-related care of the self, thus helping to normalize/naturalize the existence of an “unhealthy other” – be it the migrant, the poor people from the lower classes or the terrorist – inside the neoliberal order of the world.

CHAPTER 6 – THE DISSEMINATION OF MEDICALIZATION AND HEALTH
MORALITY IN *INTRUSION*

Why this sudden bewilderment, this confusion?
(How serious people's faces have become.)
Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,
everyone going home lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven't come.
And some of our men just in from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.

Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution.

Konstantínos Kaváfis, *Waiting for the Barbarians*

A RISKY PREGNANCY: EXPLORING THE PROMISES AND DOWNSIDES OF BIOTECHNOLOGIES
IN AN EERILY FAMILIAR FUTURE

I would like to briefly contextualize *Intrusion* before diving into its analysis. In spatial-temporal terms the narrative takes place in a near future¹⁹¹, which is to say, it is a sci-fi history that creates an imminently real world of which we cannot have any certain knowledge. This reality, while existing only imaginatively and hypothetically, is “nevertheless a world in which we may one day have to live, and towards which our present plans and ambitions must be directed”¹⁹². This particular near future is set in the context of an advanced state of global warming, where there is an ongoing “Warm War” (MacLeod 2013, 43). This war opposes, on the one hand, the highly sanitized society of

¹⁹¹ This characteristic of MacLeod's novel promptly distances its ethos from Tavares' “Kingdom” but also from Collins' Panem, seeing that the far future is associated with (post)apocalyptic notions, and is dominated by metaphors of aging, deterioration, or obsolescence. As we have seen through Katniss, it displays images of a world permanently transformed, and it is viewed from a detached (protected) perspective that reflects, paradoxically, a mood of nostalgia. In other words, the far future, like the dead past, can be accessed only imaginatively, and has meaning only in terms of its emotional resonances.

¹⁹² *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, s.v. “Near Future”, accessed September 20, 2019, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/near_future.

the U.S., Europe, and China¹⁹³ and, on the other, India and Russia, the countries that supposedly are contributing the most to global warming. More noteworthy, the only pieces of information we have regarding the latter nations come either from the subjective perspectives of the characters, or from the communication media. India and Russia are depicted as failed states governed by tyrants, as unsanitary societies where the populations work painstakingly to avoid starvation, and as the origin of a terrorist group known as the “Naxals” (153 and 184). Considering that we also seem to be dealing with the circulation of misinformation/disinformation by the media¹⁹⁴, through this contextualization we can already establish numerous connections between the world of *The Execution Channel* and *Intrusion*¹⁹⁵. This further reinforces the idea that biopolitical mechanisms work in conjunction, potentializing one another.

Still, the fact that we have health related terms and a “health inflection”, so to speak, of the subjects we have examined in part I, points us in a very different direction:

Over the past ten years, synthetic biology – syn bio, as everyone in the trade calls it – has changed our lives in many unexpected ways. Now, with the Kasrani case, it looks like changing it again – and unexpectedly, again! But first – what is synthetic biology? One way of putting it is that it’s like genetic engineering, but done by real engineers. Just as civil engineering doesn’t mean building a dam by bulldozing soil from the riverbanks into some convenient shallow, syn bio doesn’t take whatever happens to be there in the DNA and modify it. Instead, it builds new genes – and other biologically active molecules – from scratch, out of their basic components, and according to a detailed understanding of how they work. The differences between this approach and the trial-and-error, suck-it-and-see methods of what used to be called ‘genetic engineering’ are immense. Synthetic biology has given us New Trees, which take up carbon dioxide twice as fast as natural trees, and endless varieties of other new plants, from the tough new woods to the ethanol fruits. Closest to home, it’s given us the

¹⁹³ These societies are characterized as highly sanitized not only due to their strong health measures and restrictions – food quality and the use of substances such as alcohol or tobacco are rigorously controlled –, but also because of their extensive environmental supervision which seeks to eliminate carbon monoxide emissions. See: MacLeod 2013, 124.

¹⁹⁴ The following passage is elucidative: “There were scientists who claimed to have evidence that the climate was changing under the impact of human activity. They were called deniers. They argued that the New Trees and other engineered organisms were removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere far too fast, and that this – along with the increasing use of non-fossil-fuel energy sources – risked tipping the planet into a new ice age. Their work appeared only in the unregulated wilds of the internet, beyond the firewalls and filters that kept most discussion relatively sane. But even that was hardly necessary – it was generally taken for granted that the deniers were beholden to the polluting industries of the smokestack states, Russia and India, where denial was policy. Hope was only sporadically aware of the deniers’ existence. In her mind, as in the online world, they inhabited the same spaces as people who posted bomb-making instructions, Naxal agitprop, and child-violation videos. But some days, such as this first day in May, she had the fleeting thought that they might have a point” (131-132).

¹⁹⁵ And that the term “terrorist” is again present.

fix, a complex of gene-correcting machinery made up into a simple tablet which when swallowed during pregnancy fixes errors in the baby's genome, and confers immunity to almost all childhood ailments. (2013, 16-17)

This passage condenses some of the most important aspects of this version of London, where the main characters, Hugh and Hope Morrison¹⁹⁶, live: in this near-future world, the medical advances, especially in the field of Genetics, have allowed the correction of DNA anomalies in fetuses or the eradication of diseases such as cancer. Furthermore, technological developments have made possible the creation of augmented reality glasses with several functions, such as online shopping, the use of a GPS, the projection of 3D images, watching TV or reading online newspapers. We can therefore notice that, in this diegetic space-time, topics that are familiar to us, like global warming, terrorism or the new virtual technologies, are taken to a transgressive stage of development. To put it differently, their logic reaches new consequences as they are textually transformed by/in the fictional universe of the novel. It is in the dynamic between the known and the unknown that a plausible world is established: MacLeod creates a credible and somewhat familiar reality to which the reader can relate. Additionally, he also integrates futuristic elements and a new world order scenario, enabling the reader to better envision this world's contours and problems, to approach it from different angles. As Jan Johnson-Smith states:

Every text has a fundamental need: regardless of its medium. It must quickly and efficiently establish a convincing and sustainable reality. Science fiction's alternative realities are created both in and through visual or verbal language: its imaginary worlds are initially formed in a manner identical to those of other genres. The difference is that in sf these worlds must also distinguish themselves from the realities of our everyday world by creating new or different rules by which their realities function. [...] at the heart of reading is an act that helps to: create a world, built out of words and memories and the fruitfulness of the imagination. Usually, we miss the complexity of the process. Like poetry and postmodern fiction, sf tests the textual transparency we take for granted, contorting habits of grammar and lexicon with unexpected words strung together in strange ways. (2005, 19)

¹⁹⁶ But also, to a certain extent, as we shall see further ahead, the secondary character of the social scientist Geena Fernandez.

In this world, pregnant women must use a monitoring ring that is connected through a personal account to the local health centers and to a national database. Not only does the ring work as tracking device, similar to the augmented reality glasses, but it also registers and broadcasts all sort of information regarding the future mother's activity¹⁹⁷. In the effort to apply preventive measures that secure the health of both mother and fetus, there is also a pill, known simply as "the fix", developed by the new scientific field of Syn Bio (Synthetic Biology [MacLeod 2013, 18]). This pill is not legally required but is strongly advised to all mothers-to-be¹⁹⁸, a nuance that, as we shall see, presents significant implications. Hence, alongside the medical and technological developments we have alluded to previously, there is likewise the creation of fictional scientific innovations that influence in a decisive manner the life of the characters. To the "estrangement effect" we then must add the novum as one of the most important structuring elements of *Intrusion*, as it effectively propels the narrative thread and provides a reflexive and essayistic tone to the novel¹⁹⁹.

More significantly, it helps us locate the novel inside Biopunk, a sci-fi subgenre which approaches themes related to genetic engineering/enhancement and explores their potential dark side²⁰⁰. The society created by MacLeod in *Intrusion* does suggest a better future, a time marked by substantial technological leaps that allowed improvements on human health, implying the State's increased responsibility over future generations. Yet, that society also asks: What happens when someone rejects these innovations, or doubts their benefits? When someone refuses to abide by the society's conventions and rules? These and other questions with perceptible Huxleyan outlines (Huxley 2006) are raised right from the beginning of the narrative, when Hope declares: "Well I'm not bloody doing it [taking the 'fix']" (MacLeod 2013, 5). Her controversial insistence on proceeding with a natural pregnancy against all odds unveils an unsuspected (and negative) facet of

¹⁹⁷ Such as the consumption of substances or foods that could affect the fetus, blood pressure levels, body temperature, etc.

¹⁹⁸ Seeing that it "fixes" any kind of genetic anomaly in the fetus.

¹⁹⁹ Still regarding the notion of novum: "the narrative hegemony of a fictional innovation or novelty, the novum, where the narrative is determined by a change/changes to the mundane experience based upon some scientific or logical innovations. This idea can be simplified to suggest that most science fiction stories are based upon the premise 'What if...'. Science fiction creates new histories or new futures and examines their impact upon societies and individuals" (Johnson-Smith 2005, 25).

²⁰⁰ This subgenre of science-fiction is related to the Cyberpunk subgenre, which emerged during the 80's especially through the works of William Gibson. However, Biopunk differs from its "relative" by focusing on the questions and problems raised by synthetic biology, rather than dealing with a blurring of the online and real worlds. The 1992 novel *The Children of Men*, by P.D. James, or the 1997 movie *Gattaca*, directed by Andrew Niccol, would be two good examples of works that represent this subgenre.

these sanitizing policies that otherwise might have remained hidden to the reader. The crescendo of social, medical, and political pressure that the character faces, leads her to a breaking point during the second prenatal appointment, when she sees herself involved in a heated discussion with her physician, Dr. Garnett:

She couldn't articulate her objection even to herself, let alone to anyone else [...]. Back at the flat, [...] she still felt defeated and down. Her choices, given that she wanted to continue the pregnancy [...] remained what they'd always been: to take the fix; to feign some faith position that would give her a conscience exemption; or to continue to refuse. The last of these would mean to escalating pressure, all the way up to having some court order slapped on her and being finally, physically, forced to take the fix. The second was beneath her dignity... That left the first. The fix. It wasn't so bad. [...] She winced at that way of putting it to herself. She was still thinking of it like a suicide. And so it would be; it would be killing something of herself. But what? Was it even an admirable part? She had no colours nailed to her mast, no principle to betray. Just this wordless objection. What if it was just spite? (169-170)

Hope seems unable to find specific moral coordinates that can back up her refusal, *but also* to reflect or conceptualize her subjectivity as a political agent. Her self-questioning transpires an undeniable direct connection between politics and life, as the act of giving birth, one of the most imperative questions of public concern in this fictional society, no longer seems to be interpretable outside a deep connection with the *bios*. Therefore, the complete control over this life process and, by extension, over the act of reproduction, combined with control over dietary habits or bodily functions, points us to the complete medicalization of *Intrusion's* society. It makes us reflect on how, in this near-future London, non-medical issues come to be defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illnesses or disorders²⁰¹.

While such process was already suggested to us in *Jerusalem*²⁰², and in the *The Hunger Games* was presented as an extreme-case scenario, here it seems to be distanced from the *Shoah*, yet also brought close to home. Given that Hope's world is not so different from our own, *Intrusion* seems to imply that, in western contemporary societies,

²⁰¹ Although there is not a univocal or closed definition of "medicalization", one could say that it consists of using medical language to describe a problem; adopting a medical framework to understand said problem; and/or resorting to a medical intervention to treat it. In the words of Peter Conrad, "it is a social-cultural process that may or may not involve the medical profession, lead to medical social control or medical treatment, or be the result of intentional expansion by the medical profession. Medicalization occurs when a medical frame our definition has been applied to understand or manage problem, this is as true for epilepsy as for 'gender dysphoria' (transsexualism)" (1992, 211).

²⁰² Albeit in an incipient form.

the lessons learned from the Jewish persecution have not been forgotten but, ironically, instead of being used to potentiate the protection of life, have rather been used to develop more “refined” tools to negate it. This idea is plainly expressed in the following passage:

‘Whereas here, it’s a sterile pin, a sticking-plaster, a helpline to prolong your feeling of being a victim, and no hug from me. Contrary to received wisdom [from media and political authorities] that control over there is physical and over here it’s ideological – hegemony, false consciousness and all that Critical Theory 101 guff – it’s almost exactly the other way round. Ordinary, non-political, everyday life is far more regulated here than it is in Russia or India. Why else do you think we maintain the low-carbon regulations, the holiday-flights ban for instance, and all the preventive health measures, when syn bio has cracked the carbon problem and fixed cancer and heart disease?’

‘That sounds kind of ... Foucauldian,’ said Geena, trying to keep her mind on an academic track. ‘Like, it’s all about control over bodies? Biopower? But isn’t that already part of the critique?’

Ahmed laughed. ‘Exactly! Bloody Foucault’s where they got the idea from!’ (124-125)

This discussion between the social scientist Geena Fernandez and her supervisor, Ahmed, not only emphasizes the dangerous and intricate relationship between biopolitics as a critical concept²⁰³ and biopolitics/biopower *qua* a politics that aims to control life, but also highlights the absence of a critical approach to the concept of “medicalization”. I would thus interpret this episode of the novel as an allusion to the contemporary world’s scarce (or perhaps faulty) questioning of the relationships between medical-scientific development, political institutions, and mass media. The ideas exchanged between the two characters implicitly suggest that this shortcoming has been greatly responsible for the wide spreading of medicalization across western societies, being applied to so-called “medical deviant behaviors” (e.g., eating or infertility problems), but also to “natural life processes” (e.g., sexuality, childbirth, child development, aging, or even death). By enabling us to explore the specific origins and consequences of each of these distinct forms of medicalization, MacLeod’s novel helps us to reflect on how, in our own societies, after the politicization of the biologic, initiated in late modernity, there is now a “biologicization” of politics that turns the care and health of human life into the only real and legitimate universal project:

²⁰³ As well as a branch of Political Philosophy.

From the growing prominence of ethnicity in relations between peoples and state, to the centrality of the question of health care as a privileged index of the functioning of the economic system, and to the priority that all political parties give in their platforms to public order, what we find in every area is a tendency to flatten the political into the purely biological (if not to the body itself) of those who are at the same time subjects and objects. (Esposito 2008, 146)

What is more unsettling, but also opens new possibilities, is that this violent superimposition (the “flattening”, as Esposito puts it) of politics over the body – which strips the citizens of the control over their bodies, their subjectivity and political agency – ends up, ironically, also canceling the body as a dispositive of political identification. Hope has “no colours nailed to her mast, no principle to betray”, she does not feel integrated in a political or institutional body, be it secular or religious, meaning that the “corporative” model and the metaphor of the “body politic” which enabled the protection, development, and reproduction of life, is starting to fail. Conversely, if Hope cannot articulate her position, if the politicization of life does not necessarily entail a semantics of the body, then this might open a debate on the materiality of the human body outside a Christian and Nationalistic frame of reference and language. Even though it is true that, if used for political control – as in the case of *Intrusion* –, biotechnologies²⁰⁴ play a negative role in the protection of life, if considered by themselves, they open new possibilities for humans to transform their own bodies, to regain their own subjectivity²⁰⁵.

CAUGHT BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS: THE CONJOINT ACTION OF MEDICALIZATION AND HEALTHICIZATION

I will go deeper into this idea during the analysis of *The Walkers*. For now, I would argue that the responsibility to eat well and exercise, to monitor vital functions of the body, or

²⁰⁴ Such as “the fix”, prostheses or implants, for instance.

²⁰⁵ As Esposito states: “What in the experience of prosthesis (of the transplant or the implant) penetrates into the human organism is no longer the divine, but the organ of another person [*uomo*]; or something that doesn’t live, that “divinely” allows the person to live and improve the quality of his or her life. But that this new biopolitical feature (which inevitably is technopolitical) doesn’t lose every point of contact with its own Christian archetype is witnessed in the artist who, perhaps more than any other, has placed the theme of flesh outside of the body (or of the nonorganic body) at the center of his own work” (2008, 168).

to take a pill that genetically alters the fetus, carries profound consequences to the notion of freedom(s) that human beings experience in western societies. Tampering with this/these freedom(s) might even pre-determine the future of an individual even before he is born. The development of technoscientific innovations as “the fix” or the monitoring ring, which, in the long run, blur the limits between self-determination and chance, emerges out of a society not so distant from ours, where a health ideology prevails. Both Hope and us, the readers, are thus forced to question certain health practices and common knowledge perspectives concerning the care of our own bodies²⁰⁶. Such practices and perspectives reflect what could be called a health morality, a process of “healthicization” that emphasizes personal responsibility and control over one’s own lifestyle. Rather than truly reflecting choice or political agency, these practices seem to be taking on the social role of regulation that was initially played by religion, and later by medical-judicial institutions in secularized nation-states²⁰⁷.

This concept of “health morality” that is raised in *Intrusion* (and was already implicit in *The Hunger Games*) is highly problematic and carries important implications for my analysis. Several theorists have suggested that medicine has removed – or even replaced – religion and its institutions from their role as the dominant moral ideology and social control apparatus in modern societies (Zola 1977; Turner 1987). While medicine has undoubtedly played a vital role in marginalizing religion, the intersection of medicine and religion is more complex than a simple secularization thesis would suggest (Conrad 1992, 215). As we have seen in *Jerusalem* in the case of madness and of the “Jewish disease”, the immunological mechanism used to achieve a pervasive medicalization of

²⁰⁶ Jürgen Habermas in *The Future of Human Nature* precisely conveys this idea: “Shifting the ‘line between chance and choice’ affects the self-understanding of persons who act on moral grounds and are concerned about their life as a whole. It makes us aware of the interrelations between our self-understanding as moral beings and the anthropological background of an ethics of the species” (2003, 28).

²⁰⁷ When we think of immunology in the biological and political senses of the word, we assume that human *communitātēs* hold within themselves the violence of each individual in the state of nature (the “‘savage’ flesh” [Esposito 2008, 164]), and therefore cannot prevail without the presence of an artificial higher order that is able to neutralize such potential violence. Reflecting on the extensively medicalized and sanitized societies we have been examining, the vision that we have of a medical-political power that will cure all the bodily ailments and lead to a “promise land” free of conflict and suffering, brings clear echoes of the salvific passage from the flesh to the body mentioned, for instance, in the “The Bread of Life discourse” (6:25-71) of the New Testament: “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. ‘He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ‘For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink’” (John 6: 53-57). According to the teachings of this discourse, reenacted in the Holy Eucharist, the body of Christ enters the body of the believer, making it, in turn, become one with the body of the Church. As Esposito puts it, in order to set in motion the process of formation of the Christian Church *qua* institution, it was necessary that “the dispersed flesh of the multitude became reunited in one body” (2008, 164).

society is based on an extension of practices, and on knowledge inherited from a theological horizon. These practices and knowledge magnify medicine, and the political-juridical hand that is closely associated with it, providing the basis of sovereignty itself. However, if medicalization refers to the emergence of medical definitions for previously nonmedical problems, when social activities are deemed medical risks and treated as biomedical conditions²⁰⁸, we cannot say that this is a case of medicalization²⁰⁹. I would argue, hence, that Hope feels trapped “between Scylla and Charybdis” because “healthicization” should be considered an autonomous process that, nonetheless, develops a complementary function to medicalization, also contributing to the diffusion of medicine as a depoliticization strategy. It does not address the expansion of the jurisdiction of medical professionals or institutions, as in the medicalization process that took place during the *Shoah*, nor is it necessarily concerned with medical practices and treatments. Instead, it focuses on lifestyles, i.e., attitudes, behaviors, and emotions regarding disease prevention, health maintenance, and wellness promotion (Crawford 1980, 370).

In this increasing apposition of the public and the private domains, not only does the individual become the focus of medical explanation and intervention, but he/she is also responsible for his/her own health²¹⁰. Hope, for instance, finds herself attacked on all fronts, having to face, at once, the far-reaching powers of contemporary medical technologies that define and regulate life and death²¹¹, coupled with an even wider-

²⁰⁸ Hope’s refusal to take the pill would be a good example.

²⁰⁹ Taking the recent concerns with health and fitness as an example, though “Health promotion” and “wellness” activities are advertised as beneficial to individual health and reducing risk of disease,²⁰⁹ even if we admit that health promotion may indeed “create a new health morality” (Becker quoted in Conrad 1992, 223) based on individual responsibility for health and lifestyle change, they do not constitute a new medicalization of exercise or diet. As Conrad refers: “While the process is similar to medicalization in that it fuses behavioral and medical concerns it may be better conceptualize as healthicization. With medicalization, medical definitions and treatments are offered for previous social problems or natural events with “healthicization”, behavioral and social definitions are advanced for previously biomedical define events heart disease periods medicalization proposes biomedical causes and interventions “healthicization” proposes lifestyle and behavioral causes and interventions. One turns the moral into the medical, the other turns health into the moral” (1992, 223).

²¹⁰ This differs from the medicalization process, especially in its early formulations since it gave all agency to the medical professional. Consequentially, individual responsibility entails a process of blaming which generates a new form “moralism”, according to which “healthy behavior (becomes) the paradigm of the good living” (Crawford 1980, 380). The exploration of the difference between “medicalization” and “healthicization”, carried by theorists such as Irving Kenneth Zola (1977) or Robert Crawford (1977), is deeply connected with Foucault’s notion of the construction of subjectivities as a by-product of both the disciplining of a population and “technologies of the self”.

²¹¹ Represented in the novel through the cutting-edge innovations of genetic engineering and wearable technology.

ranging health morality shared by her family, friends, and co-citizens²¹². Further complicating the situation, as the narrative unfolds and the protagonist remains inflexible in her decision, we start to see the intervention of institutional figures that also try to “persuade” her to take the pill. The second visit that she receives from Fiona Donnelly, the nurse designated by the health center to assist her pregnancy, provides a prime example:

‘You know’, Fiona said, with an impatient frown. ‘Your personal profile is automatically updated all the time, from surveillance, and from your interactions – purchases, interpersonal connections, interactions with official bodies, social services, health, police...’ [...] She slipped her computer out of her breast pocket and laid it on the table. ‘Here, let me show you some of the dots they joined. Just put your glasses on.’ Hope did. The devices linked. She saw a dark background spidered with red lines linking her with Maya, with a woman she didn’t know, with Hugh, Nick, Jack Crow, various sites: ParentsNet, SynBioTech, the health centre: phone and street-camera photos of all these people and locations and more... it just went on and on, the viewpoint zooming and swooping through the web, while Fiona’s murmured voice-over kept up a running commentary. (MacLeod 2013, 212, 213-214)

Although this excerpt might appear to reproduce the surveillance discourses of Orwell’s *1984*, the information that we have regarding the legislation of “the fix” leads us to believe that Hope lives in a constitutional democratic State, rather than a totalitarian one²¹³. Therefore, Fiona and the medical surveillance system that she stands for can be interpreted as fictional representations of a new form of institutional control over the body, or even a warning regarding the dangers of a direct state interference over the body of its citizens. Alarming, such interference occurs in a pluralist society, democratically constituted, and it is enacted through surveillance technologies that penetrate the private sphere and keep the individuals in a field of constant sight.

Yet, if it is true that the “ultrarapid forms of free-floating control that replaced the old disciplines” (Deleuze 1992, 4) have led to an increasing incapacity of the traditional

²¹² Turrini focuses on holistic medicine and self-care as examples of patients’ claims to a more active role in the healthcare process. He describes how these movements challenge modern medical detachment and the objectification of the patient, by proposing new models of healthcare based on patients’ experience and expertise. He also notes that, ironically, the attempt to attribute a more active role to the patient turns out to strengthen the disciplinary power of medicine implicit in its epistemology and, specifically, in the “clinical gaze”. See: Turrini 2015, 17.

²¹³ We know that there had recently been a legal precedent that may in the future attribute a mandatory status to “the fix”, but that at the time of Hope’s decision it was still legal and a matter of choice. See: MacLeod 2013, 4-6.

institutions to offer alternative models, what to make of this direct control of the body by the medical institution on a contemporary scenario? If societies of control and their corporativist/deterritorialized logics are in the process of replacing the disciplinary societies, how is it possible that a disciplinary apparatus still seems to operate inside the framework of control? To clarify the presence of this apparently anachronistic apparatus, let us return to some of the points regarding Fiona's intervention in Hope's pregnancy:

'You see, it starts with that disturbance outside the nursery, and all of a sudden you're a part of a flash mob initiated by that woman Maya [...] You go skipping off with her to a dodgy place, an unlicensed café no less, where you take off your monitor ring, and later it shows cotinine traces, very bad sign, Hope, as you should know. [...] This woman here, Geena Fernandez, is picked up and questioned about a terrorism-related offence. She's already connected to you because she's shown an interest in your case [...] and – she visited your husband at work yesterday! So...' [...]

'...that's it, that's why the police and social services databases are thinking about you right now. Nothing strong enough yet to alert a human operative, but definitely moving in that direction. I am sure there are perfectly innocent explanations for every one of these links and nodes, but...' [...]

'But nothing!' Hope said. 'It's just ridiculous. Terrorism? Come on. [...]' (MacLeod 2013, 214-215)

There are two aspects that I would like to emphasize: firstly, it is almost Kafkaesque that the mere contact with Geena, an academic that is submitted to police interrogation for having written an article about the "Naxals", is enough to attribute a dangerous profile to Hope and extrapolate a connection with the alleged terrorist organization. Comparably to what happens to Josef K. (Kafka 2008), Hope must also face a series of borderline surreal accusations, born out of an intangible logic and a moral law which, nonetheless, govern *de facto* the society she is living in. Secondly, that Fiona would assert that the refusal to take the pill is tantamount to a terrorist act, exposes an inextricable connection between nature/disease/terrorism, and, respectively, society/health/order. These two aspects raise, in turn, even more questions: if we accept the premise of Guattari and Deleuze²¹⁴, that an everchanging global society of control has flattened national boundaries and created a constant flux of people, goods and information, why does the metaphor of the "body politic"²¹⁵ still play a vital role in the govern of life in MacLeod's novel? How can we

²¹⁴ Or of Hardt and Negri in *Empire*.

²¹⁵ A metaphor indissociable from the birth of the modern nation-states, as Hobbes so vividly articulates in his *Leviathan*, and significantly expanded throughout the disciplinary societies till the contemporary time.

explain the overlay that seems to take place in *Intrusion* between sovereignty, discipline, and control?

The novel does not provide us clear cut answers but implies that a “politics of life” cannot remain unaltered before the impact that the shifting demography of population and the molecularization of biology have had on the “life of the species” during the 20th century. Not only has biopolitics been changed by the contemporary scientific understanding of what a living being is²¹⁶, it has likewise been transformed by what has been happening to the populations of developed societies. As the fictional “Warm War” and the tense global climate built in *Intrusion* seem to indicate, all around the world scientific and technological breakthroughs are presently transfiguring “the biopolitical security technologies of health management as much as they are those of military strategic discourse, such as the “War on Terror”, Homeland Security or allied corporate security practices” (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008, 284).

In immunological terms, we could say that if the notion of “infectious disease” helped shape regulatory mechanisms and discourses in 20th century western societies²¹⁷, curative medicine, allied to other biopolitical ‘social’ security strategies, transformed the morbidity of western populations by practically eradicating such illnesses. An entirely distinct demographic of morbidity has subsequently emerged, carrying with it a new notion of immunology which relies heavily on the emergence of a self who is responsible for safeguarding his/her own health care, and reflects a strong personalization of medicine. It is a notion that aligns the common preoccupations of the general population with the main concerns of military and homeland security – alongside with policing/medical devices –, marking a decisive shift from a re-active to a pre-emptive approach in the immunological mechanism.

While the questions raised by this new notion – which authors like Esposito have named “autoimmune” – are being debated across many institutional sites²¹⁸, sci-fi still stands as perhaps the most privileged space to explore such questions, shedding a different light on them. *Intrusion* – and, in a different way, *The Hunger Games* – is an example of how this genre can create fictions of the future, i.e., can project vibrant

²¹⁶ As well as of how life processes can be manipulated to extend and potentiate living organisms.

²¹⁷ In the United States, for example, tuberculosis was the number one killer while smallpox, diphtheria, tetanus, and other infectious diseases were prevalent. See: Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008, 285.

²¹⁸ Such as, on the one hand, Political Science, or International Relations departments, and, on the other hand, Ministries of Health and Ministries of Justice and Public Security across the world.

fictional extensions that scale down hyperobjects²¹⁹ that would otherwise be too complex to comprehend. Possibly even more significantly, such fictions can also be a powerful influence upon culture, creating a feedback loop of images and ideas that might prove to have a therapeutic, or at least reflexive, value. The way the bodies of Hope or Geena, for example, reflect the ongoing technical, medical, and political changes that we are experiencing in our present-day societies, does not translate into a mere passive role on the part of fictional literature. The reflexes that we may perceive of our worlds in MacLeod's near-future London are actively transformed in/by the literary work; they refer to our past and present, while concomitantly showing us what our future could be, giving us an opportunity to also be a transformative force in that process of becoming²²⁰.

Referring specifically to the outcome of the protagonist, MacLeod does not offer us a particularly encouraging message, let alone answers. Hope is finally "persuaded" to take "the fix" (MacLeod 2013, 379) and the advanced state of global warming is still a certainty. Moreover, the "Warm War" proceeds with governments and media continuing to spread news of the dangers resultant of living an insalubrious and risky life. I would interpret this ending as more than a generalized version of the Nazis' politics on life, seeing that the imposition of a constant preemptive war alludes to perhaps the most significant aspect of an autoimmune tone of contemporary biopolitics: conflict no longer represents the other face of biopolitics in times of peace, but the only effective reality of a global "pacific" coexistence. In fact, many worldwide conflicts in recent years²²¹ have showed us that the excessive concern with the protection of the population (and the nation) ends up overthrowing the individual and political bodies. As with an autoimmune

²¹⁹ As we have seen in part I, an hyperobject is a "relatively new type of phenomena and/or entities that [...] defy our perception of time and space because, among other things, they persist and produce effects whose duration enormously exceeds the individual and collective scales of human life" (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2017, position 691).

²²⁰ Richard Crownshaw expresses a similar vision regarding sci-fi and the U.S. reality: "This expression [of sci-fi] is through a hyperbolic imagination (and negotiation) of the realities of racialised state control, historical violence and the ideological fantasies that underpin a collective sense of nationalist identity. These speculations on thinking and being otherwise in scenarios of oppression and violence will always foreground their ideological mediations (as well as the navigation of their material historical contexts) in a literary mode that calls attention to itself as a remediation of the historicist work done by previous forms of realism. Put otherwise, the expressive potential of speculative realism lies in its foregrounding the mediation of mediation of extreme American realities, in other words in its self-reflexiveness as a genre. As such, Marshall finds that this cultural apparatus of speculation lends itself to the future as much as to the present and the past, or more particularly to the (re)mediations of the future" (2017, 889).

²²¹ Such as the "War on Terror" or the European refugee crisis.

reaction²²², both bodies ultimately wear themselves out as they are continuously solicited to fend off an infinite number of dangers and risks²²³.

Still, when tackling questions regarding control and scientific development, *Intrusion* also suggests that the boundaries of the ethical community no longer coincide with the boundaries of humanity. Scientific developments, such as genetic engineering, stem-cell research, cloning, or the Human Genome Project – that in the novel are represented in the new field of “Synthetic Biology” –, do more than merely pose new ethical challenges within the framework of already established moral principles. They call into question the very notion of the human being, and thus require a radical restructuring of the basis for moral judgment²²⁴. As Vint refers: “the fact remains that technology is rapidly making the concept of the ‘natural’ human obsolete. We have now entered the realm of the posthuman, the debate over the identities and values of what will come after human” (2007, 7). In the conclusion of this part, I will elaborate on this point, exploring how Francesco Verso’s *The Walkers* points to a “realm of the posthuman” that involves a drastically different conceptual chart from the one applicable to the notion of “human community” that is nowadays commonly, and acritically, accepted. In Verso’s version of Rome, the characters struggle to navigate the coordinates of their “healthy” and “hygienized” society, searching for ways to transform themselves into something more than a sound body, something more than human. They signal, I would argue, that the boundaries of humanity, always subject to conflicting political ideologies and religious worldviews, are now being eroded by advances in the biosciences and technology²²⁵.

²²² In which autoantibodies or T cells attack the molecules, cells, or tissues of the organism that are producing them, which is to say, the organism becomes its own sickness.

²²³ Such preemptive efforts involve the exponential multiplication of the same risks that they claimed to prevent, through tools – such as the use of mass media – that inexorably will end up replicating a more intensified version of those risks. As Roberto Esposito so poignantly puts it: “That the greatest threat (or at least what is viewed as such) is today constituted by a biological attack has an obvious meaning: it is no longer only death that lies in wait for life, but life itself that constitutes the most lethal instrument of death” (2008, 148).

²²⁴ There are authors who have already probed into these questions/subjects through the lenses of fiction. For example, in *I Am the Other: Literary Negotiations of Human Cloning*, Professor Maria Aline Ferreira traces the fictional representations of human cloning, from their earlier manifestations in novels as *Brave New World* to their iterations in more recent novels or short stories such as “World of Strangers” (1998), by Lisa Tuttle. She shows that a reading of these representations in the light of a feminist and psychoanalytic framework allows us to reflect about future implications of the development of genetic engineering, as well as the possible implementation of human cloning. See: Ferreira, 2005.

²²⁵ In the words of Elana Gomel: “Despite the well-meaning efforts of human rights activists, there is nothing natural or self-evident about human rights because there is nothing natural or self-evident about humanity. The rights—if any—of posthuman subjects must rest on a revision of the fundamental criteria by which ethical status is ascribed to an entity; and the question of what such criteria might be, is at the core of any debate on human rights in the posthuman age” (2011, 340).

CHAPTER 7 – REPRESENTING BROKEN AND ENHANCED BODIES: THE SEARCH
OF A “POST-HUMAN” IN *THE WALKERS*

ON PRECARIOUSNESS AND THE NANOTECHNOLOGIES OF CONTROL: THE WRETCHED LIFE
OF ALAN FARCHI

After transiting from a vaguely located place in Post-war Europe in *Jerusalem* to a far future North America in *The Hunger Games*, we now travel from the near-future London of *Intrusion* to the near-future Rome of *The Walkers*. In the conclusion of this journey what perhaps stands out the most are the differences between these novels: not only do they present distinct aesthetics and divergent narrative strategies, but they also emerge (and refer us to) different national/cultural contexts. Yet, their interconnected representations of biopolitical problems draw our attention to a change in the scales of literary creations related to hinge events and their impact on the bodies²²⁶. Such change marks a distancing from the representations revolving around the “War on Terror” so pervasive in literary production – an in creative practices in general – in the decade following the attacks on the World Trade Center²²⁷. Concomitantly, it also signals that the novel’s capability to generate empathy across cultural and social divisions does not easily extend to self-reflexive thinking as a species²²⁸. While literary strategies usually aim to provoke emotional responses, the global scale of complex processes such as climate change or the technological transformation of the world, prove to be difficult focal points for such dramatization. It is here that, in my view, lies the force of a comparatist analysis of the novels at hand. Each one offers nuanced representations that scale down complex events, which extend throughout space and time²²⁹.

Let us therefore explore the perspective Verso’s novel brings to the discussion. In a brief introduction that precedes the first chapter, the narrator characterizes the 21st century society of Miriam Farchi and her son Alan as a place marked by profound changes

²²⁶ Both at a political and individual level.

²²⁷ Such distancing becomes evident if we place side by side the novels we are analyzing and the novels published till around 2010, such as *Falling Man* (2007), by Don DeLillo, *Saturday* (2005), by Ian McEwan, or *Netherland* (2008), by Joseph O’Neil.

²²⁸ As Richard Crownshaw notes: “[N]arrative emplotment, symbolism and imagery cannot contain environmental events, such as tipping points, which are not ‘unitary’ by nature but the ‘contingent emergent sum of innumerable and probably incalculable processes happening across the Earth at divergent time scales” (2017, 896).

²²⁹ I should add that by confronting these representations the reader has access to several multiscale and concomitant perspectives, i.e., to a “complex, intertextual and nonlinear evolution of the deep, planetary time of the relation between the human species and Literature” (Crownshaw 2017, 898). Crownshaw’s theorization is closely connected to Timothy Clark’s *Ecocriticism on the Edge* (2015).

in nutritional and dietary habits²³⁰. These changes were made possible by a giant leap in nanotechnologies, allowing the creation of both public and domestic versions of advanced ATM's that produced objects and food through *nems* (nano electromechanical systems)²³¹. In its aftermath, not only were social relationships altered due to the disappearing of rituals of food preparation and consumption, but there was also a complete privatization of the food industry, with the process of production being carried out by multinational corporations as NESTLÉ, KRAFT, UNILEVER, and DANONE. We could say that similarly to MacLeod, the Italian writer creates a verisimilar future Rome by anchoring the narrative space to innumerable references to real places that are, consequently, textually transformed via the introduction of significant innovations. However, as far as the control of the body is concerned, such innovations shift our focus from medical technologies involved in health screenings or birth control, to nanotechnologies that can alter or replicate biologic structures. This subtle change helps us pinpoint *The Walkers* inside the realm of Nanopunk, another subgenre of science fiction that deals with a world where the theoretical promises made by nanotechnology are, for better or for worse, a reality²³².

Additionally, in the historical period of “Drift” (Verso, n.d., 3), the characters’ lives and the rapport between people and labor was also deeply impacted. As expressively embodied by Alan Farchi, the takeover and expansion of multinational companies over the work market led to a decrease in workers’ labor rights, and, as we shall see ahead with the “pulldogs”, to new forms of precarity. The background depicted in the introduction of a historical (fictional) time during which most people could only aspire to the most basic human needs, is instantiated in Alan’s precarious working position in a multinational technology company called Globalzon²³³. The attitude previously hinted at

²³⁰ Among other changes, “natural” and homemade food has practically vanished, being substituted by artificial food composed in 3D printers – the “nutraceuticals” (Verso, n.d., 5).

²³¹ They are called, respectively, “Public Matter Compositors (CPM)” and “home- and portable-nanomats” (Verso, n.d., 3).

²³² Like most aspects of nanotechnology, Nanopunk is still at an early stage. One of the first examples of Nanopunk is Linda Nagata’s *Tech Heaven* (1995), a novel that examines the healing promises of nanotechnology, whereas more recently Michael Crichton’s novel *Prey* (2002) examines a potential doomsday scenario caused by nanotechnology.

²³³ A clear allusion to Amazon and some cases that have surfaced in newspapers of the company’s morally and legally dubious treatment of its employees. See: *Business Insider* 2019; and *Guardian* 2019a.

of complete disregard for the workers' wellbeing on the part of the company is fully confirmed with Alan's incident²³⁴.

Alan has only been working at GLOBALZON for a few months. Its Roman hub lies inside one of Tiber's loops, near the Marconi Bridge. It's a shipping company but, unlike its competitors, it has invested next to nothing in machinery, opting for more inexpensive human labor. Well, at least that is what Alan told her, when he first accepted an on-call contract to help cover the Christmas-holiday peak times.

"Mom..."

"Alan, how are you? What happened?"

"A disaster," his voice is fractured, pained. "Listen, these assholes say they won't call me an ambulance. They say... that they can't let anyone into the warehouse."

"But, how are you? Can you stand?"

"No, my legs... I can't feel them."

The fear of what may have happened renders Miriam speechless.

"Call someone, Mom. Hurry! They say that the most they can do is... leave me outside of the gate. That's already doing me a favor. They can't stop working." (Verso, n.d., 11)²³⁵

The refusal of the workhouse's supervisor to call an ambulance despite Alan's grave situation, is symptomatic of an increasing privatization of healthcare²³⁶ but also of how in the society of *The Walkers*, much like in many contemporary societies, there is a control in force that works according to a corporative logic. As we have seen in part I, the impulse to get ahead in the global market, even if it implies the creation of an atmosphere of insecurity and precariousness between employees, reflects how corporations "constantly present[s] the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, and excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another [...]" (Deleuze 1992, 7). Thus, I would contend that the economic relations of the fictional Rome created by Verso could be interpreted as a cautionary example regarding the consequences of a neoliberal power that

²³⁴ Such attitude is suggested by the narrator when he describes Miriam's initial reaction to her son's distressful message: "When she reads Alan's name on the display, she starts to worry. Her son has often told her that there's no point in calling him at work, since it's forbidden to take phones into the warehouse. All personal items have to be left in external lockers, on pain of receiving a reprimand. He has told her, resigned, that the scanners at the entrance to GLOBALZON ensure compliance with that rule. The ones at the exit, meanwhile, check that no one makes off with a game console for his children or a pair of sneakers or some undergarments for himself" (Verso, n.d., 9).

²³⁵ The English version of Verso's novel, translated by Sally McCorry, has not been published yet. However, the author graciously granted me access to the unpublished manuscript, so that I could include the quotations in English.

²³⁶ The information we get from one of Allan's colleagues tell us explicitly that Globalzon's does not provide health insurance to its employees. See: Verso, n.d., 11.

is unmediated in its effects on people as it works throughout the global space of unregulated flows. This scale down provided by the novel grants us a vantage point in relation to a global problem. It can be read as a warning of how, in economically driven environments, the normalization of unquestioned neoliberal ideologies and policies might ultimately turn everyone into a disposable asset, regardless of their economic or social strata²³⁷.

The description of Alan's gloomy reaction to his incident stresses yet another aspect of this disposability. Deprived of any kind of justice or financial compensation, Alan resigns himself to his condition of disability (and unemployability). Equally importantly, he lets transpire a feeling of guilt from his forced involvement in a system that encourages the "subjugated to embrace their oppression as though it were their liberation" (Giroux 2015, 15). In western contemporary societies this aspect is particularly evident in the notion of "resilience" and its usage in neoliberal/political discourses. I would argue that *The Walkers* strongly draws our attention to the importance of a positive understanding of resilience, highlighting its value in cases such as the fight of underprivileged groups in the face of economic liberalization, or the individual struggle to affirm a cultural identity²³⁸. Nevertheless, Alan's predicament seems to be an allusion to the lasting impact that the economic crisis of 2008 has had on an educated generation destined to "answering telephones, delivering mail and packages, filling up cars at the gas stations, working as private tutors, serving hamburgers and French fries" (Verso, n.d., 33). In my perspective, the disenchanting character points to the mental, social, and

²³⁷ I would argue that Alan's condition also reflects the notion of "precariousness" explored by Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* (2004) and in the 2015 blog post "Precariousness and Grievability". It refers us to the notion of a life that is injurable or can be destroyed, and, precisely for that reason, underlines not only its finitude but also that it requires various social and economic conditions to be met in order to be sustained as life. In Butler's words: "To say that a life is precarious requires not only that a life be apprehended as a life, but also that precariousness be an aspect of what is apprehended in what is living. Normatively construed, I am arguing that there ought to be a more inclusive and egalitarian way of recognizing precariousness, and that this should take form as concrete social policy regarding such issues as shelter, work, food, medical care, and legal status. And yet, I am also insisting, in a way that might seem initially paradoxical, that precariousness itself cannot be properly *recognized*. [...] Indeed, there ought to be recognition of precariousness as a shared condition of human life (indeed, as a condition that links human and non-human animals), but we ought not to think that the recognition of precariousness masters or captures or even fully cognizes what it recognizes" (Butler 2015).

²³⁸ The community of "walkers" represented in the book condenses several instances in which resilience can be used with a positive valence. We could perceive it as fictional creation that reflects some of the different academic perspectives on the notion: "Scholars have employed resilience to describe the actions employed by individuals and groups in the face of economic liberalization, labour market reforms, and change in public service reforms. Others have highlighted the utterly positive influence of resilience on individuals caught up in violent conflicts, while still others have underscored the role of resilience in counter-terrorism strategies, focusing on multifaceted efforts to improve preparedness in terms of psychological preparation and management infrastructure responses" (Bourbeau 2015, 2).

economic effects of the extensive use of resilience in “troika’s” discourse towards the European countries²³⁹ most affected by the crisis. He and his generation remind us that such a rhetoric of resilience urges citizens to accept their vulnerabilities without providing the tools for a genuine transformation of the processes that have rendered them insecure²⁴⁰.

ON TRANSFORMATION AND THE NANOTECHNOLOGIES OF RESISTANCE: NICOLAS TOMEI’S JOURNEY OF CHANGE

Despite the ostensible similarities with Hope’s fate in *Intrusion*, Alan’s hardship quickly proves to be the first step of a significant *volte-face*. The immunologic mechanism that leads to a desire for safeguarding one’s own health care, does brake Alan’s will. Yet, his mother’s determination and the emergence of unexpected friends will cause both physical and mental changes in the character. In a last effort to give his son a normal life, Miriam Farchi manages to acquire therapeutic nanites, an experimental nanotechnology that is potentially able to heal diseases and severe lesions by substituting the affected cells and assuming their function:

Ever since he ingested the nanites, Alan has been drinking more than three liters of water a day, but he hardly ever uses the bathroom. Most of the liquid he takes in he just sweats back out. The nanites are absorbing a large amount of his body’s energy. They are likely to be reproducing at an extremely high rate as they deploy and will do so until they reach the number that is optimal for her son's body. [...] /

Miriam knows that what he is going through is called “apoptosis,” or programmed cell death. It happens every day – billions of cells stop functioning, for our own good. In Alan’s case, billions of nanites have accelerated the process dramatically. By the time they have finished, they will have altered his biological state. (57-59)

²³⁹ The so-called P.I.G.S. (Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain).

²⁴⁰ I am referring to the notion of “resilience” as it is understood by authors such as Giroux and Evans in *Disposable Futures*, or Foucault in his governmentality thesis: “[...] resilience is a product of contemporary neoliberalism and constitutes a strategy permitting states to abdicate responsibility in times of crisis. For these scholars, beneath resilience lurks a dehumanizing political agenda, the continuity of a state’s dominance, and a strategy for creating unequal regimes of power” (Bourbeau 2015, 2-3).

As we can read in the excerpt, the machines inside Alan's body start to accelerate the process of cellular death, leaving him in a constant state of pain for months and facing an uncertain future. This process resembles the immunologic process that I have been analyzing up until now, but it also presents meaningful differences. Far from leading to an impairment of the body and to its insertion into the medical dynamics that structure power relations in society, Verso proposes us an alternative scenario: Alan's successful recovery triggers an enhancement of his physical capabilities, as well as a progressive distancing from his social context in the city. Influenced by the newly discovered philosophy of Silvia Ruiz's life and the pulldogs²⁴¹, the already skeptical character decides to drastically alter his lifestyle. These changes mark a turning point in the novel, carrying hefty implications not only regarding the development of the plot, but also concerning the notion of immunology itself, embodied in the characters. They introduce a positive register that distances us from the dystopian tone we had in the beginning.

Such changes bring an optimistic outlook that serves as counterpoint to the pessimistic representations of technology, and to the overall feeling of disenchantment that prevails in this fictionalized Rome. The new self-sustained community that Alan wishes to establish with Silvia and the rest of the pulldogs is, I would contend, the best expression of such outlook, placing the vision of a genuine inclusive community in direct opposition to the corporate model:

[...] the nanites have given me a second chance, something that, until last year, would have been inconceivable. I'm talking about how I can walk – and move, and run – without feeling a fraction of the fatigue I felt before, about how I don't have to worry about eating like I did before, but just when I feel like it – once or twice a week, if that, if I train myself to do it.”

“You still eat when you're with me.” [...] /

“True, but I do it for the pleasure of sharing the experience, not because I'm actually hungry. Think about all the time, money and energy people spend to feed themselves. They work ten hours a day for money. They go to the supermarket to buy food. They take it home, unwrap it, peel it, prepare it, cook it and, finally, they eat it, more out of habit and necessity than for any real pleasure, knowing that there is no alternative to that system.” [...] /

He holds out the sign board. “Tell me, isn't what I'm proposing worth a

²⁴¹ The pulldogs are a group of youngsters from different nationalities who drive rickshaws for a living and resides in a “hippie community” in the outskirts of Rome. The name and symbol of the community derives from the famous coffee-shop in Amsterdam “Bulldog” (Verso, n.d., 72) but it is also an allusion to the status of quasi animality that the youngsters are reduced, in their precariousness becoming sled dogs. The group and Alan cross paths because Silvia Ruiz helped save his life after the incident.

try?”

The sign reads: LAIR OF THE PULLDOGS.

“Are you offering us the nanites? Me and the others from Serra Spino?

“Yes, if you want them [...]” (80-81)

Verso seems to suggest a complete revolution of the notions of “humanity” and “lifestyle” as they are understood in developed western societies. While in the first chapters the pulldogs already reclaim a human dimension that is generally denied by the immunological mechanism(s)²⁴², the introduction of nanotechnologies marks a definite change in the relationship between political-economical structures and the bodies of the outcasted characters. Indeed, as Alan’s project comes to fruition and the members of the community ingest the nanites to improve their bodily functions, one could argue, using Haraway’s framework, that they form a “cyborg community”²⁴³. At the entrance of their lair, we find the motto “NO MONEY NO CRY”, quite suitable seeing that its members have severed all connections with the labor market and ceased to rely on the products of multinational companies for survival. Once inside we come across an extensive international family whose members display a myriad of dressing styles and philosophical/cultural stances, spanning from Rastafarian to Punk and New Age. Perhaps more noteworthy, the members are described as beings of improved athletic abilities who can go for days without eating, and whose musculature is developed to the point that feminine and masculine traits become indistinguishable (146).

We can thus read this fictional community as a representation of the posthuman subject as polymorphous, surpassing the dichotomies of organic and inorganic, human and animal, male and female. Still, sci-fi novels do not foresee the future, but rather examine or question the present-day. In elaborating posthuman scenarios, the genre confronts us with the problematic concept of the “Universal Man”²⁴⁴, placing us in

²⁴² A certain animal dimension that, nevertheless, is completely different from that which was used to remove the Jewish body (bodies) of the political sphere and recodify it in the sphere of biopolitics.

²⁴³ Although it is undisputable that the notion of “posthuman” is far from univocal, posthumanity has arisen as a cultural response to the ideological, religious, and philosophical attempts to police the borders of humankind.²⁴³ With the irruption of postmodernism both as a cultural episteme and a theoretical body, the question of posthumanism has become vital to the creation of a new paradigm of biopolitical relations that may challenge old genocidal dichotomies, pitting “humanity” in whatever way defined, against its enemies. This is particularly noticeable in Donna Haraway’s influential “The Cyborg Manifesto”, where the Philosopher/Biologist defines the posthuman (or “the cyborg”, as she calls it) as a new modality of human subjectivity linked to a utopian remaking of the world. See: Haraway 1991, 149.

²⁴⁴ This concept is heavily questioned by posthumanists. A good example of this questioning can be found in Rosi Braidotti’s reflection on the universal man paradigmatically represented in Da Vinci’s Vitruvian man. See: Braidotti, 2013.

fictional contexts where its flaws are more easily perceived. *The Walkers*, particularly, suggests that human nature, Foucault's "recent invention"²⁴⁵, is being superseded by cyborgs, gene-modified organisms, and disseminated networks. Conversely, it also suggests that we are still far from reaching something that can be truly called a posthuman time. I would contend that, accordingly, the novel's far reach does not lie in its ability to stir a discussion on whether the long-range promises of technoscience – to provide treatments that eradicate disease, for example, or to substantially prolong the lifespan of the body – are realistic or not. Verso's book can be read as an engaged literary work that elicits a critical reaction, both in terms of theory and praxis. It challenges the informed reader to keep a critical eye on the use of new technologies and on the scientific discourses disseminated throughout his/her society. But it also encourages him/her to actively question and engage those discourses, to play an active role – no matter how small it might be – in shaping the way these technologies might be used in the future.

One could claim that herein lies the novel's "therapeutic" function: its characters and techno-scientific scenarios may influence our individual and collective fantasies which will, in turn, affect our handling and development of new technologies. In other words, *The Walkers* offers a more luminous outlook on an evolving immunological biopolitics, encouraging us to adopt an active stance in the future²⁴⁶. It reminds us that biotechnologies might play a negative role if used for political control, but if considered by themselves they hold a vast transformative potential regarding the human body, cultural identities, or political agency. It is certainly not by chance that these technological possibilities are fully embraced by the character of Nicolas Tomei, an overweight and spoiled man that works for his father's "smartfume" company²⁴⁷:

Nicolas reaches into the nutraceuticals compartment, pulls out a tube of curry-flavored PRINGLES, removes the wrapper, and tucks five layers of starch molecules

²⁴⁵ Alan's project of forming a community that surpasses the "human" condition seems to echo Foucault's pungent statement in *The Order of Things*: "It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form" (1974, xxiii).

²⁴⁶ One could rightfully object here that the influence between technoscientific and cultural (re)production is hard to trace and cannot be mapped onto a cause-and-effect model. However, we do not argue that sci-fi narratives only follow or reflect technoscientific facts, nor do we claim the opposite, that the shaping power of the imagination is unidirectional. Resorting to the words of Manuela Rossini, the different types of sci-fi "form a cultural matrix in which a causal perspective gives way to an understanding that lines of influence between texts or disciplines are never direct but interwoven in very complex ways. As part of a larger network of forces, the cultural matrix participates in the equally complex, material-semiotic construction [...] of the future, including the future of the human species and [...] the humanities" (2005, 5).

²⁴⁷ A perfume that changes its fragrance according to specific needs and contexts.

into his mouth. He always tries to concentrate on the sensory stimuli that the first mouthful offers: the surface of the chip is crisp, in contrast with the softness of its interior. The fragrance of the curry lingers pleasantly, while the flakes of starch dissolve in little explosions of flavor on his palate. [...] /

His Medical Agent, a life-saving software that his mother, Olga, recommended he install on his phone, has been crystal clear.

“Execute diagnosis.” Nicolas lays his palm against his phone’s touchscreen. [...] /

The agent, having completed its diagnosis, shows him a graph. If the daily food intake to which Nicolas subjects his body does not drop dramatically, he will have six months left to live. Under the graph is a very long list of harmful ingredients and the relative quantities he has ingested of each. In Nicolas’s eyes, it is a death sentence. (90-91)

The excerpt conveys expressively the contradictory effects of medicalization and of “healthicization” that we have seen in *The Hunger Games* and *Intrusion*. In the image of what happens to the citizens of the Capitol or Hope, the tie between medicine and the media defines the aspects of lifestyle that Nicolas must care for. In fact, the ingestion of artificial food (“nutraceuticals”) and the shift of responsibility that privileges the health-related care of the self²⁴⁸, suggest us that the role of science and technology in everyday life²⁴⁹ assumes the form of an advice on “healthy” lifestyles to individuals who are interested in regaining possession of their lives. And yet, this does not imply a medicalization of society in the sense that Nicolas and his co-citizens unquestionably follow the authority of medical knowledge or live a truly healthy lifestyle. Far from creating healthier bodies, medical and technological progress fills the highly sanitized future Rome with sickening bodies, some of them, like Nicolas, with a short lifespan.

However, midway through the narrative there is a surprising turn of events, as Nicolas manages to escape the fate of his fictional counterparts. The unexpected confrontation with Silvia Ruiz, a character whose muscular body and anti-conformist attitude are diametrically opposed to his own, shakes him to the core and triggers a profound changing process²⁵⁰. The resulting bold political stance, expressed through

²⁴⁸ Reinforced here by the creation of a “medical app”, a novum that is similar to the monitoring ring in *Intrusion*, but perhaps closer to our current technological reality, seeing that many smartphones already come with pre-installed health-related apps.

²⁴⁹ A role that, as I have mentioned, is not based on the direct intervention of medical professionals but rather through a “medical knowledge” conveyed to individuals via the different media.

²⁵⁰ The following passage describes eloquently the character’s changing process: “Nicolas [...] perceives that his familial limitations, like his biological ones, are vanishing – no, are actually already broken. His own body, whose foundations have been reinvented, is the driving force behind this revolution. He is his own future. By breaking the cycle of dependence on food, by changing his own basic molecular structure, he has altered his human condition” (178).

Nicolas' decision of also ingesting the nanites and joining the pulldogs, signals his awareness (and refusal) of the perverse control that multinationals exert on people's bodies, but it does not equate to a technological rejection *tout court*. Unlike all the other characters, Nicolas seems to perceive the untapped potential of medical technologies, such as the nanotechnologies, and uses them to change his body even further:

Nicolas turns on the light, and himself with it. His torso glows with a phosphorescence composed of the movement of the heliotrons, which trace arabesques on his shoulders, down the lengths of his arms and his torso. [...] /

“We've become immobile, static human beings. At best we sit, and always with the help of a whole variety of prostheses. Our bodies – before the nanites – were genetic scrap, anatomical derelicts of modern life. More speed, more stamina, more efficiency – it's all bullshit, because the prostheses are there to prove our biological insufficiency, the genetic limitations imposed on us by nature. In my life before the PULLDOGS, I couldn't even use my body to transport myself. I couldn't allow myself to *waste* an hour walking to RENDEZVOUS, so I spent half an hour on the seat of my scooter instead, nice and comfortable, sitting in traffic. Now I know that the difference is one of just a few minutes.” (244 and 246; emphasis in original)

The figure of the monster is again present, but its symbolic meaning is quite different. The cyborg Nicolas, a hybrid of both plant and human characteristics, has been reconfigured and depathologized. Such changes signal that hybrids, mutants, and other creatures have also been embraced in sci-fi as positive figures of thought that express and transform, in imaginary terms, many perspectives in line with critical post-humanist theory, criticism and cultural production²⁵¹. They underline that in spite of their perverse use in previous political discourses – as, for example, the Nazi rhetoric about the Jewish people – and literary contexts, monstrous creations can ultimately express a meaningful positive response towards dealing with the radical changes brought about by the rapidly increasing technologization of every sphere of human life.

²⁵¹ It is important to mention that, from the second half of the past century onwards, the figure of the “cyborg” has been increasingly present within sci-fi worlds, undergoing significant transformations throughout time that reflect different technological states of development and visions of the world. According to Samuel Dokko, in science fiction the merging of organic and inorganic forms builds a “cognitive being” (2007). In sci-fi stories, scientists play God by creating incredible technological and scientific enhancements to make human beings greater than normal humans through the “cyborgisation” process. Dokko views cyborg as the intertwined creation of flesh and machine which can have unbelievable power and speed. He describes these cyborgs as “medical cyborgs”, seeing that many of them are equipped with mechanical devices and implantations to overcome their weakness and illness. To Dokko this collaboration between medicine and technology for creating the medical cyborgs is a great goal to upgrade and restore our biological processes. See: Dokko, 2007.

It is critical, nonetheless, that we do not consider these representations as mere metaphors but rather as living charts which, in their process of change, provide coordinates that may guide us through our own process of becoming political and technological individuals. I choose to read Verso's monster in a similar light of the thought of Braidotti and others posthumanist thinkers, as a "transformative account of self" (Braidotti 2014, 179). Nicolas constitutes a symbol of how we can reshape ourselves through advanced technology, overcoming, or at least confronting, the normalization and control of the body imposed by a biopolitical notion of "humanity". By placing the emphasis on the transformation of the biological and material body, the characters of *The Walkers* help readers challenge their understanding of embodiment beyond the parameters of cultural and discursive construction. They draw attention to "the intertwining of the biological and the subjective as they are bound up in a process of becoming" (Breu 2014, 7), making us reflect about an uncoded materiality of the body that resists but also conforms to cultural schema, presenting aspects that exceed or refuse our symbolic and imaginary constructions of it²⁵².

²⁵² In *Insistence of the Material*, Christopher Breu presents a similar perspective: "Theorizing this real body [...] enables a discussion of the resistance that the body has to, for example, gendered, sexual, and cultural scripts, as well as contemporary scientific, philosophical, and theoretical accounts and mappings of the body. This concept of the real body, then, allows an attention to what Anna Fausto-Sterling has theorized as the resistance of bodies [...] to the sexual scripts placed on them by culture, by the medical establishment, and even sometimes by the subject herself. In emphasizing this real body, I am not trying to maintain a Cartesian mind/body split. Our thinking selves and our speaking selves are always embodied, and this embodiment shapes the knowledge and speech we produce" (2014, 10).

CONCLUSION: A PICTURE MOSAIC OF POSSIBLE FUTURES

In the laborious task of approaching the relation between medicine, technology, and the biopolitical body (bodies), literature certainly plays an essential role. But how? Does (or should) it relate to the material? If so, in what ways? The contrast and similarities between the works I have explored in this part II demonstrate the far-reaching vision of science fiction, a genre that, with its wide range of aesthetical configurations, imagery, and literary strategies, manages to represent both local and global, earth-bound problems. All these works, published in the 21st century, are a way to look at our own societies and technologies, a step into the future. They offer literary representations of devices, institutions and discourses that help us chart, from a close range, the effects of pivotal events and cultural changes – such as the decoding of the human genome, the several refugee and financial crisis, or the development of nanotechnologies –, of a period that is proving to be a tipping point for contemporary biopolitics.

If we consider the first three novels, there seems to be a preponderant inclination towards a dystopian or apocalyptic future, but Francesco Verso's novel adds a nuance to this somber vision. In the pathway of other works²⁵³, *The Walkers* should not be regarded as simply dystopian nor utopian. It accepts the notion that technology can be placed at the service of biopolitical powers, creating a dystopian future. It can also help to craft a brighter future by contributing to the long-range survival of humans alongside other biological and artificial life-forms. Therefore, it makes us confront two different images of possible futures, two diametrically opposed scenarios that broadly reflect the two different styles of representing the future we have explored in this part. On the one hand, the pessimistic worlds built by Gonçalo M. Tavares, Suzanne Collins and Ken MacLeod reflect an ethical and political concern for anticipating terrible socio-political and technological tendencies that could, if continued, turn our world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia's underside. On the other hand, the solar characters of Verso's futuristic vision of Rome seem to embrace the possibilities brought by cutting-edge technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unbounded power or

²⁵³ Such as *Ecotopia* (1975), by Ernest Callenbach, *The Dispossessed* (1975), by Ursula K. Le Guin, or the more recent *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* (2010), by Ted Chiang.

disembodied immortality. They prefigure an understanding of human life as something embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our survival, stressing the living bodies' corporeal interconnectedness to the world and other actors – regardless of if these other actors are humans, animals, or machines²⁵⁴.

Nicolas' speech at the ending of the novel configures a final challenge, or an invitation, to the rest of the “pulldogs” and, by extension, to the reader:

“We will shed our skins, we will shed our lives. Just as we have stopped feeding ourselves like animals, now we will be able to take our sustenance from epithelial photosynthesis. We must remove the stigma of nourishment from the human species. We must evolve and learn to be like plants. Then we will be able to leave this place, because we cannot build a New World inside the shell of the Old.”

“Why not?” a powerful voice shouts from the crowd.

“Because this is the land of a promise that's been broken. You know it as well as I, that *we walkers* don't need the city, just like the city doesn't need us. This life of ours has no place within a system of artificial competition, where dreams are standardized, imagination is industrialized and creativity is something to be traded away. When things take a turn for the worse, it is better to try to update our species' software than insist on trying to make the original version run on hardware that is not suited to cope with the demands of modern life.” (Verso, n.d., 266-267)

The title of the novel acquires a new dimension in this speech. Attributes such as “precariousness”, “detachment” or “marginality” that at the beginning of the novel negatively characterized the life of the community of walkers, are now assumed as the necessary qualities to face an uncertain future. Francesco Verso builds Nicolas as a strong symbolic character that literally resists the corporative logic of his society and chooses a rootless life of a continuous transformative journey, hypostasizing the complex

²⁵⁴ I acknowledge that there is a substantial confusion between “trans-humanism” and “post-humanism”, and that it is debatable which concept *The Walkers* truly reflects. Although the novel suggests that the characters are not post-human yet, but that human enhancement through technological advancement will allow them to achieve that stage, it diverges significantly from transhumanist thought. While it is true that transhumanism is more ingrained in popular culture than critical posthumanism, especially in science fiction, this specific novel does not retain humanism's focus on the *homo sapiens* as the center of the world, it converges instead with the “critical posthumanist” view. Resorting to the words of Pramod Nayar in *Posthumanism*, Verso's book “rejects both human exceptionalism (the idea that humans are unique creatures) and human instrumentalism (that humans have a right to control the natural world)” (2014, 8).

theoretical notions of “nomadism” and “deterritorialization”²⁵⁵. Consequentially, I would argue that *The Walkers* – like other science fiction novels – allows a wide specter of readers, especially young-adult western readers²⁵⁶, not only to have an indirect access to the theories of authors as Deleuze or Guattari, but also to perceive tangible aspects of contemporary biopolitics that are unexplored in the abstract formulations of these theories. If we read the novel, for instance, in the light of the 2014 refugee crisis, the concepts of “sedentary”, “migrant” and “nomad”, engaged by the French authors to consider the use of space and people’s relationship to the land they inhabit, gain a particular hermeneutical relevance. The different worldviews displayed by Verso’s characters remind us that, although our political reality has moved us towards the nomadic way of inhabiting the place where we live, a large part of the population is still thinking in a sedentary way. The old idea of a European identity based on belonging and exclusion to sovereign nation states still operates a sedentary distribution, and the migrant, differently from the nomad, is someone who moves across, and according, to a sedentary model of distribution of land²⁵⁷.

Considering the far-right political movements and negative populist reactions that have arisen in recent years, political and practical realities of 21st century western societies, such as the development of a E.U. with increasingly permeable borders or the creation of infrastructures/policies that help to welcome migrants fleeing from problematic contexts, clearly provoke strong reactions of fear, anxiety, and nostalgia. These reactions, felt in many sections of a population strongly influenced by mediatic discourses, are caused by challenges to traditional notions of national belonging and

²⁵⁵ In the conclusion of *A Thousand Plateaus*, deterritorialization is defined as the movement or process by which something escapes or departs from a given territory, where a territory can be a system of any kind: conceptual, linguistic, social, or affective. Deterritorialization can take either a negative or a positive form. It is negative when the deterritorialized element is subjected to reterritorialization that obstructs or limits its line of flight. It is positive when the line of flight prevails over the forms of reterritorialization and manages to connect with other deterritorialized elements in a manner that extends its trajectory or even leads to reterritorialization in an entirely new assemblage. See: Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 508-510.

²⁵⁶ Although the novel does not fall into the category of “young-adult sci-fi”, as it was the case with *The Hunger Games*, I refer here the young-adult reader because the novel tackles many problems that nowadays affect a large portion of this age group.

²⁵⁷ As Deleuze and Guattari express several times (in distinct registers) throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, the nomad does not just differ from the State, but “brings a furor to bear against sovereignty” (1986, 352). This furor is for the purposes of undermining and abolishing the well-ordered territories of States. Nomads are thus said to be “the Deterritorialized par excellence” (1986, 381), since their onto-ethical prerogative and political aspiration is to evade territorialization and sedentarization, whether on a reservation or through the gradual appropriation of their smooth space by State forces.

familiar forms of identity²⁵⁸. *Eppure*, the pulldogs also depict several optimistic facets of this world where we may no longer feel a connection to the “home”, where our sense of identity might shift. They resonate with the projects of alternative political parties that have recently emerged in Europe²⁵⁹, as well as with resistance and occupation movements²⁶⁰. This suggests a reflection on how we are continuously exposed to people who cross national borders, defy language barriers, and unsettle cultural traditions. In this light, *The Walkers* can be understood as a response to the words of Rosi Braidotti, when she states that “we are lacking a social imaginary that adequately reflects the social realities we already experience of a postnationalist sense of European identity” (2011, 261). The novel is undoubtedly an incomplete and incipient response to this problem, but it is still an undeniable contribute towards imagining a future Europe where there are neither migrants nor permanent inhabitants. A possible Europe where connections to a place are contingent and able to shift, admitting overlaps and even contradictions, engendered both by the movement of the subject itself and the movement of others around it.

I have sought to evidence throughout my analyses in this part II that the bodies of these characters can be *loci* of resistance to biopolitics, even if they also map the way in which material life is shaped in increasingly intimate ways by biopolitics. They can be equated to the converse side of biopolitics, one that acknowledges its integration with the world of medical control, while at the same time questioning the structures and premises of that world. The different science fiction and dystopian novels that I have studied share themes and motifs such as birth control, health monitorization or the development of medical technologies. Nonetheless, they depict the indissociable transformations of the human body and medical control through different angles.

In trying to comprehend and articulate the reasons behind such difference, it became increasingly apparent that the opaque or overtly post-apocalyptic views of worlds that seem to be more distanced from our present time, as it is the case of *Jerusalem* and *The Hunger Games*, do not contradict representations that are closer to our reality or offer a more luminous prospect, like the ones in *Intrusion* and *The Walkers*. On the

²⁵⁸ The election of Donald Trump and of Jair Bolsonaro for, respectively, the U.S. and Brazilian’s presidencies, BREXIT, and a string of small far-right parties that have emerged across Europe illustrate quite well the extent of this negative reaction.

²⁵⁹ The Portuguese parties Livre and PAN, the Spanish party Podemos, the German Alliance 90/The Greens, or the Greek coalition SYRIZA are just a few examples.

²⁶⁰ “Occupy Wall Street”, “99%” or “Indignados” would be good instances of resistance movements.

contrary, a comparative approach of all the novels enables readers to access a historical dimension of the expansion of immunology as a biopolitical mechanism. This approach generates a reflective space where they can ponder about the medical-technological advances associated with a utopian vision of human progress, from its initial form of the metaphorical “body politic”, to the more recent iterations of a complete medicalization of society. Literary devices as the novum, the aesthetical choice of a Kafkaesque writing, or the dislocation and imaginary development of current medical technologies into near or far futures, are powerful tools. These tools give readers of science fiction, and of the dystopian sub-genre, the opportunity to shift away from the hierarchical relations shaped by the immunological mechanism. They offer them access to a form of radical repositioning through a strategy of de-familiarization from the dominant vision of their worlds, which allows them to critically reflect on the issues raised and, where possible, to actively tackle them.

Ultimately, the tribulations endured by Mylia, Katniss, Hope and Nicolas, together with the different western contexts they refer us to, offer nuanced representations that bring into the limelight the material/biological body, and actively scale down global medicalization processes. They potentiate a dis-identification and a deterritorialization, as Deleuze and Braidotti would call it, of familiar habits of thought and representation to pave the way for creative alternatives. In this regard, they converge with theoretical approaches from other scientific areas as Political Philosophy, Critical Theory or Gender Studies, reiterating that whether we consider the physical or the political sphere, the individual is a creation whose potential is continuously updated but never fully realized. These novels go a step further: in assuming their inextricable bond with biopolitics, they become sites where resistance’s imagination exists in perpetual struggle with the novels’ biopolitical origins (De Boever 2013, 13). Complementing De Boever’s vision in *Narrative Care*, I would add they become likewise sites where resistance occurs as a fictional experimentation that tries to get ahead and, potentially, be actively involved in shaping the future of biopolitics.

How is this resistance achieved? To what extent can narratives that relate to medical (bio)power have an impactful role in our time of ubiquitous risk and unbridled crises? I have established throughout my analyses that, regardless of pessimistic or optimistic undertones, fictional visions of limitless technological-scientific developments are inseparable from the technological and medical imaginary of the historical period from which they emerge. Yet, they do not necessarily translate into a form of escapism,

a space to which the reader retrieves from the world and merely fantasizes. Such visions can create an imaginary picture mosaic that displays healthy and diseased bodies against their technological/medical backdrop, thus affecting the readers' imagination and critical thought regarding their own historical contexts. The examined works may consequently prove to be a precious contribution to the effort of building a social and political imaginary. They may provide a stimulus to make us think about our physical bodies, our use of medical-technologies, or the realities we are starting to experience of a post-nationalist sense of western identity(ies).

The characters we have encountered in part II forecast that once the “com” in *communitas* is deemed as risky, it is radically removed in favor of a political form that places the subject in direct contact with the sovereign power that represents it. More disturbingly, they testify that the outcome of this political act is almost inevitably an immunological deficiency or, worse still, a politics of death. Concurrently, these characters also imaginatively propose a different notion of immunology, in which we may continuously and actively transform our identities and our bodies. Even though their “fictional wounds” force us to concede that the single individual is not definable outside of the political relationship with those with whom he/she shares his/her life experience, they also remind us that the community should not neutralize, or oppose, individuality, but rather attempt to achieve more elaborate forms of it. They tell us that, in the long run, there are no guarantees that such pursuit will come to fruition, but if we aspire to someday achieve this “common immunity” (Esposito 2011, 184) we must start by trying to imagine it, together.

PART III – REPRESENTING WAR, REPRESENTING PEACE: THE BARE LIFE AND
THE EXCEPTION(S) IN *A MAN: KLAUS KLUMP*, *JOSEPH WALSER'S MACHINE*,
MOCKINGJAY, AND *NEXHUMAN*



“War and Peace” (1637), by Antoon van Dyck. Portrait of Sir George Digby, 2nd Earl of Bristol, English Royalist politician with William Russell, 1st Duke of Bedford.

Althorp House

War is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means.

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

INTRODUCTION: OF UNCANNY WORLDS AND ANESTHETIZED CHARACTERS

We have seen in the previous chapter that the sanitized society and modified bodies of *The Walkers* illuminate the flaws and contradictions of the immunological mechanism. If we take a closer look, though, they also highlight the outlines of the third mechanism at work in contemporaneity, bringing us further proof that biopolitical powers use these three mechanisms concertedly in their pursuit of absolute control over human life:

The reporter has a predilection for stories with dramatic repercussions, stories on burning topics that extend to impact other issues. In this case, those issues could be the right to housing, the DIY industry, urban mobility. Instead the discussion has become mired in urban warfare, military logistics and sterile pseudo-political claims, all of which have produced, until now, the typical images of armored vehicles going up and down, patrolling the area that is closed to traffic, the usual news of rioting in the streets in a variety of spots around the city, and run-of-the-mill interviews with cookie-cutter demonstrators camped out in front of the viaduct – soporific reports that have already been broadcast by the thousand and fail to increase ratings by a single viewer.

“Terrorism is cutting-edge, elite and specialized in tactics and organization. It represents the war of the few against the many. Regardless of the circumstances of any specific struggle, its purpose is to win over the local population. If it succeeds in doing so, it is transformed into an insurrection, the exact opposite of terrorism, because it is of the masses – amorphous and heterogeneous in its engagements and in its dispersal. It is, in fact, the war of the many against the few”. (Verso, n.d., 237)

As the home of the pulldogs becomes prey of the corporate power²⁶¹, we see the outskirts of Rome become something that resembles a true warzone. The creation of such warzone in a period that is clearly of peace, suggests within the novel an indistinction between the spatial-temporal limits of war and those of a peaceful, political time. More noticeably, far from relying on past tactics of military secrecy, this specific form of war presents highly mediatic contours and, oddly enough, an almost immediate association with “terrorism”. Although the narrative does not dwell very long on this notion of war, we can glimpse here a clear allusion to the fact that the over-exposition of live transmissions of war allows

²⁶¹ We find out through Nicolas that there are plans to destroy the viaduct and build in its place a luxurious structure that would accommodate apartments and business stores.

political-military powers to bring it into everyday life. Not by coincidence, there are parallels in terms of mediatic representation between contemporary “unofficial wars”²⁶² – such as the “War on Terrorism” – and Verso’s fictional war. Such parallels seem to indicate that political-military powers use strategical broadcasts and deceitful images to transform passive viewers into a mass of “survival spectators” that participates in the conflict. More disconcertingly, they suggest that nowadays there is a confusion, or even indistinction, between terrorist civil wars²⁶³ and international wars.

This juxtaposition of a political time and a wartime, which confounds military and civil conflicts, reaches its maximum expression in the death of Little Simon, one of the youngest members of the pulldogs. The unpunished murder of the boy who is trapped by two officers inside his house (217) draws our attention to the idea that the suspension of law in everyday life²⁶⁴ is becoming increasingly common. The dreadful fate of the character emphasizes how the continuous suspension of law turns the body of individuals in contemporary societies into *bare life*. In Agamben’s words, it signals that our political reality is increasingly founded on a permanent state of exception that excludes the body from the political sphere of the *bios*, reducing it to its biological reality (the *zōē*):

Schmitt himself assimilates this zone “beyond the line” to the state of exception, which “bases itself in an obviously analogous fashion on the idea of delimited, free and empty space” understood as a “temporary and spatial sphere in which every law is suspended”: It was, however, delimited with respect to the normal legal system: in time, at first through the declaration of the state of war and, in the end, through an act of indemnity; in space, by a precise indication of its sphere of validity. Inside this spatial and temporal sphere, anything could happen as long as it was held to be *de facto* necessary according to circumstances. [...] The process [...] that began to become apparent in the First World War, through which the constitutive link between the localization and ordering of the old *nomos* was broken and the entire system of the reciprocal limitations and rules of the *ius publicum Europaeum* brought to ruin, has its hidden ground in the sovereign exception. What happened and is still happening before our eyes is that the “juridically empty” space of the state of exception (in which law is in force in the figure – that is, etymologically, in the fiction – of its own dissolution, and in which everything that the sovereign deemed *de facto* necessary could happen) has transgressed its spatiotemporal boundaries and now, overflowing outside them, is

²⁶² When I say “unofficial war”, I am mostly thinking about the highly mediaticized conflicts in which there was not a sanctioned and official declaration of war, i.e., a formal act by which one State goes to war against another.

²⁶³ Which is to say, wars against civilians since most casualties are civilian rather than military.

²⁶⁴ A suspension that is contemplated in modern Constitutions but, in principle, should only apply to extraordinary situations as, precisely, war situations. See: Agamben 1998, 107-116.

starting to coincide with the normal order, in which everything again becomes possible. (1998, 26-27)

As Agamben has shown in his body of works around the concepts of state of exception and bare life²⁶⁵, another process is set in motion along with the disciplinary procedures identified by Foucault²⁶⁶, by which man as a living being presents himself no longer as an object but as the subject of political power²⁶⁷. These processes – which in several aspects oppose and seemingly conflict with each other – nevertheless converge insofar as both concern the bare life of the citizen, the new biopolitical body of humanity. So, the Italian philosopher completes Foucault's thesis, demonstrating that modern politics should not be solely characterized by the inclusion of the *zōē* in the polis, nor by the fact that life became the principal object of the projections and calculations of State power. Its key feature is rather that

together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, bios and *zōē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested. (9)

Although Agamben states that the Nazi concentration camps constituted the most extreme case of indistinction between *bios* and *zōē* (15), in his later works he also suggests that the corollary of this “permanent exception” is the contemporary decline of the traditional State structures and institutions, which slowly give way to the arrival of the final state-form: the “spectacular-democratic State” (Agamben 2000, 85). In effect, the global tendency that we see nowadays of using images of violent conflicts to regulate international relationships²⁶⁸, as well as the rampant development of neoliberal

²⁶⁵ The “*Homo Sacer series*” is composed by *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (1998), *State of Exception* (2003), *The Sacrament of Language: An Archeology of the Oath* (2010), *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Glory* (2011), *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (2011), *Opus Dei: An Archeology of Duty* (2013), *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm* (2015), and *The Use of Bodies* (2016).

²⁶⁶ By which State power makes man as a living being into its own specific object.

²⁶⁷ A process that, to a large extent, “corresponds to the birth of modern democracy” (Agamben 1998, 9).

²⁶⁸ Shaping the citizen's political perspective of the world in the process.

economies, seem to corroborate with Agamben's vision²⁶⁹. They bear witness to a rising new borderless world that would, supposedly, help usher in new identities and better life opportunities, but in reality translates into the nullification of the norms of international law, alongside a dangerous juxtaposition of the private and public sphere of life (85-86). The attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, and the whole mediatic coverage of the "War on Terror", would perhaps constitute the starting point as well as the pinnacle of this tendency. As I will try to demonstrate in the following chapters, this emerging world order is the basis for the formation of void social bonds and identities, as well as the establishment of spaces where law is suspended. It helps create a permanent state of exception that, via the concerted action of the new media and political-military powers, covers increasingly larger areas of the globe, stripping more and more bodies of any real social or political significance.

Agamben's theoretical analysis of the state of exception, our third mechanism, presents an extension and level of precision crucial to a thorough understanding of contemporary biopolitics. Yet, his continuous resort to political concepts from Ancient Greece or juridical notions from Roman law may encumber the already difficult task of examining recent, complex events²⁷⁰. I would argue that literary works – particularly dystopias – may once again help us, in conjunction with Agamben's theories, to get a better picture of the functioning of this mechanism. In fact, the fictional worlds created by, for example, Franz Kafka (2008), George Orwell (2008), Primo Levi (2003), or William Godling (1954), have proven to offer priceless intuitions and nuanced representations of how exception and disciplinary logic coexist side-by-side, both resorting to scientific-technological tools to control the body either in war or peace periods.

Unfortunately, these works refer us to a notion of exception particular to the political/cultural context of the first half of the 20th century, and therefore can only take us so far. The contemporary novels that I have selected for this third part, on the other hand, not only lead us to our present reality but likewise bring to the spotlight the exponential technological development that occurred in the move from the disciplinary societies of the 19th/20th centuries to the hyper-consumeristic societies of the 21st century.

²⁶⁹ Confirming what Debord had foreseen more than 50 years ago in his *The Society of the Spectacle*.

²⁷⁰ Case in point, the *homo sacer* (the sacred man), from which derives the notion of bare life, is an obscure figure of archaic Roman law, according to which human life is included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion, i.e., of its capacity to be killed. See: Agamben 1998, 8.

Consequently, a comparative analysis of the bodies represented in *A Man: Klaus Klump*, *Joseph Walser's Machine*, *Mockingjay* and *Nexhuman* offers us a prismatic view over the way biopolitical powers have historically used technology to shape the body and social relationships. They allow us, ultimately, to examine from a close range a progressively overarching state of exception that globally determines which lives are worth living, and which are deemed disposable.

The fictional universes of Gonçalo M. Tavares, Suzanne Collins, and Francesco Verso, in my perspective, give us the chance to probe different war and peace sceneries where the exception is, nevertheless, always present. In the first chapters, *A Man: Klaus Klump* and *Joseph Walser's Machine*²⁷¹ will take us back to an industrial background pre-WWII, revisiting a geopolitical notion of war and one of the institutions that best represents the disciplinary logic: the factory. Meeting the “produced bodies” of their protagonists can help us rethink an aestheticization of war²⁷² and a perverse scientific rationality that, in the first half of the 20th century, filled the western world with shocked and machinic bodies. Such reassessment will unveil the unsuspected weight that past biopolitical institutions/discourses still have in present-day power relations.

In the last two chapters, conversely, the works of Suzanne Collins and Francesco Verso project us into a future of highly mediatic wars and high-tech societies of consumption. Therefore, reading *Mockingjay* and *Nexhuman* as counterpoints to Tavares' novels enables us to see distinctly the way political-military powers have evolved in the last decades, establishing a symbiotic relation with technology and ever more intricate states of exception. Perhaps even more significantly, by weaving future dystopias that exacerbate current political-military tendencies²⁷³, these two sci-fi works provide us tools not only to reflect about, but to actively resist the ongoing creation of a global police state where the exception is becoming the rule.

This interplay between *praxis* and theoretical reflection is of great significance for my analyses, raising several questions regarding the problematic relationship between literary works and their corresponding political/cultural realities. Given their contemporaneity, Tavares, Collins, and Verso's novels are irretrievably connected to our mediatic age, where aestheticized representations of violence²⁷⁴ play a key role in

²⁷¹ In view of the extensive titles of Tavares' novels, for practical reasons I will henceforth use the initialism KK to designate *A Man: Klaus Klump*, and JW to refer to *Joseph Walser's Machine*.

²⁷² An aestheticization that, as we shall see, was also propitiated by modern art.

²⁷³ Such as the mediatic use of representations of war/violence to build a global police state.

²⁷⁴ Reflected everywhere, from cinema and TV screens to the pages of books.

normalizing violence itself and hiding human suffering in plain sight. Indeed, the effects of such representations become quite apparent if we think, for example, how the live coverage of bombardments during the Syrian war, the footage of brutal events in slums around the globe, or even the “iconic” still of the drowned refugee boy broadcasted in 8 p.m. news broadcasts worldwide²⁷⁵, not only seem to be de-realized by our screens, but lose almost all their weight by 10 p.m., when we are transported to the middle of an action movie or series. Yet, these novels certainly stray away from such aestheticization, seemingly striving for the opposite effect: they constitute imaginary extensions that fully embrace the dark facets of our societies of exception, underlining their destructive material effects on the human body. I would contend that they possess negative qualities²⁷⁶ that challenge the characters’ understanding of the fictional world they inhabit, but likewise the readers’ ability to interpret those worlds *and* the realities they refer to. We can call these negative or anesthetic qualities, respectively, a homodiegetic/in-world anesthetic, that is related to the characters’ experiences, and an anesthetic of reception/interpretation, which concerns the reader’s relation with the text.

Elaborating on these negative qualities, the anesthetic present in the reception/interpretation of the text refers us to the domain of Aesthetics, the branch of philosophy that examines the nature of the Beautiful and the foundations of Art²⁷⁷. More specifically, it brings us back to Benjamin and Adorno’s²⁷⁸ discussion of the process by which, when stripped of its aura²⁷⁹, the work of art in the era of technical reproducibility became a product available for the enjoyment of the masses (Benjamin 1999, 214-215). I will show that that our three authors aim precisely to contradict this process by deliberately giving an *an*-aesthetic quality to their works. For instance, the objective writing and dark tones that in KK and JW ask for interpretation but always make any

²⁷⁵ I am talking about the tragic death of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian toddler who drowned off the Turkish coast in 2015, amid the migrant crisis. In effect, Roy Greenslade’s article “Images of drowned boy made only a fleeting change to refugee reporting” emphasizes precisely the fleeting influence that such iconic image of such sad event had on the European politics regarding the migrant crisis. See: *The Guardian* 2015.

²⁷⁶ I am referring to the negativity that Adorno and Marcuse attribute to the work of art, that, because of its autonomous nature, is a space of rupture with daily experience, which contradict established order. See: Adorno, 1997; and Marcuse, 2007.

²⁷⁷ This notion of aesthetics is analyzed quite at length in seminal works as *Poetics*, *Aesthetics*. *Lectures on Fine Art*, or *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. See: Aristotle, 2013; Hegel, 1998; and Kant, 2002.

²⁷⁸ Although neither Benjamin nor Adorno explicitly use the term, the notion of anesthetic is particularly evident in the defense that Adorno conducts of the importance of ugly or unpleasant artistic representations.

²⁷⁹ That is, of its own *auctoritas* and autonomy that are given to it by its origin from a certain tradition at the spatial-temporal level.

unambiguous reading impossible²⁸⁰, allow us to foresee that these works represent both a recovery of the artwork's negative force in the face of reality, and a rebuff of the conception of art pieces as mere pleasant assets²⁸¹. The choice of the black color for the covers of the novels, therefore, is not accidental, nor is it a coincidence that their fictional universe seems to refer to what Keith Booker calls the "incommensurability of the physical and spiritual in the modern world [...] and the absurdity of political oppression" (1994, 184).

The grotesque characters of *Mockingjay* or the fetid slums of *Nexhuman* also place us before other uncanny elements/scenarios, making us clash with an opaque, often disconcerting language²⁸². Unsurprisingly, then, Collins and Verso's novels provoke a disquieting feeling like the one produced by Tavares' somber creations, a feeling of strangeness and familiarity²⁸³ that enables readers to explore the underside of the utopian projects upon which their societies are built. One could say they jibe with the Adornoian vision of radical art, distancing themselves – and the reader – from a massified culture industry which renders the minds of the "populace incapable of the kinds of critical abstraction required to mount a meaningful challenge to the official ideologies" (Booker 1994, 13).

The homodiegetic or in-world anesthetic that likewise characterizes the novels, on the other hand, reflects a different notion of aesthetics. It no longer refers us to an exclusive philosophical questioning about the nature of and foundations of Art, but to an autonomous field of inquiry that, especially from the perspective of Alexander Baumgarten²⁸⁴, theorizes the knowledge of the body as a physical-cognitive apparatus,

²⁸⁰ It seems to me that what Keith Booker says regarding *The Castle*, by Kafka, may equally apply to these works: "Readers are thus placed in very much the same situation as K., struggling to understand what they encounter but never quite being able to do so" (Booker 1994, 183).

²⁸¹ In other words, they no longer constitute only the "plenipotentiary of a better praxis than that which has to date predominated" but are "equally the critique of praxis as the rule of brutal self-preservation at the heart of the status quo and in its service" (Adorno 1997, 12).

²⁸² I am referring to the concept of the uncanny theorized by Sigmund Freud in his work *The uncanny* (2003).

²⁸³ A feeling of estrangement comparable to the one provoked by Gregor Samsa's transformation in *The Metamorphosis* (2014), or the unusual setting of the village in *The Castle* (2009).

²⁸⁴ This field brings us back to the original meaning of the term (from the ancient Greek *aisthêtikós*, which means "that which is 'perceptive by feeling'" [Buck-Morss 1992, 6]), producing a rehabilitation of the sensory sphere in the study of aesthetics. See: Baumgarten, 1970.

source of sensory stimuli²⁸⁵. This sphere of aesthetics establishes a dialogue with the “essence of modern experience” that Walter Benjamin identifies in *Illuminations*, and the concept of anesthetic/anesthesia is already suggested in this work: due to the intensity of the stimuli it contains, the experience of shock brought by modernity may activate a defense reaction in the sensory apparatus that will lead to a dullness of the senses (1999, 157). Benjamin’s view of the modern experience²⁸⁶ prefigures with remarkable clarity the way the anesthetic process is developed:

The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (*Erfahrung*), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one’s life (*Erlebnis*). Perhaps the special achievement of shock defense may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents. (159)

Such state of numbness also characterizes the disfigured or machine-like characters that inhabit the militarized societies of Tavares and Collins, as well as Verso’s hyper-consumerist world. Throughout the following four chapters we will come across many modified bodies. These hybrids, half-humans, half-machines, could be considered the “illegitimate” sons and daughters of militarism and patriarchal capitalism (Haraway 1991, 152), mirroring unmistakably the shortcomings of political western realities. Consequently, they can help us tackle some of the more obscured aspects of the state of exception, such as the symbiotic relationship that political, military, and economic powers have historically established with scientific-technological development, shaping worldviews and bodies across time.

But these characters do more than simply show us the alienating and anesthetizing effects of this third biopolitical mechanism. Such monstrous creations – that Donna

²⁸⁵ The effort to continue this rehabilitation will be at the origin of the formation of two key concepts by the German philosopher Wolfgang Iser. According to the line of analysis that Jerome Carroll draws from his view, Iser disagrees that art should be placed on a plane of transcendence, arguing that its role must also be considered in the analysis of the sensory experience of perception, *aisthesis*, since the trend towards beautification and harmonization that characterizes the modern age is common to artistic and everyday experiences (Carroll 2006, 23 and 26). Based on this idea, Iser affirms that the sensorial overload that exists in artistic and everyday experiences, at the service of a technical-scientific logic that instrumentalized the ideals of harmony and perfection associated with beauty, leads to a reality to such an extent estheticized that ends up producing a desensitization of the sensory apparatus.

²⁸⁶ That builds upon some of Freud’s intuitions in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. See: Freud, 2011.

Haraway has dubbed cyborgs²⁸⁷ – can also express a positive response to the radical changes brought about by the increasing technologization of life. They prove that cyborgs have been embraced in sci-fi, and in dystopian works in general, as powerful fictional figures that transform, in imaginary terms, many perspectives in line with Critical Theory, Posthumanism or Gender Studies. Accordingly, we should not consider Klaus Klump, Joseph Walser, Katniss Everdeen, and Peter Payne as mere metaphors, but rather as living charts that, through their transformative journeys, help us map our social and bodily reality. As I will seek to establish, they constitute painful reminders that we are irretrievably vulnerable to the many wars of our globalized world; yet they also embody vibrant, imaginative alternatives to strengthen or regenerate ourselves in the future, guiding us through our own process of becoming political and technological individuals.

²⁸⁷ Haraway defines a cyborg in the following terms: “A cyborg is a hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine. But, cyborgs are compounded of special kinds of machines and special kinds of organisms appropriate to the late twentieth century. Cyborgs are post-Second World War hybrid entities made of, first, ourselves and other organic creatures in our unchosen ‘high-technological’ guise as information systems, texts, and ergonomically controlled labouring, desiring, and reproducing systems” (1991, 1).

CHAPTER 8 – ABOUT THE PRODUCTION OF A MAN: *KLAUS KLUMP*

Following the theoretical framework outlined so far, in this first moment of the analysis I will focus on an aspect that will serve as an introduction to KK, and that, ultimately, will be decisive for understanding the ethos of this novel: the relationship between artwork and politics. Returning to the question of sensory overload/desensitization that occurs in artistic experience and everyday experience, in the epilogue of his well-known essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” Benjamin states categorically that “[a]ll efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war” (1999, 234). In a pessimistic final note that contradicts the otherwise serene tone of Benjamin’s reflection on the effects of new technologies on the role of art and its relationship with mass culture, the author articulates the triad art, politics and technology in the following terms: given that the “normal” resort to the productive forces is stopped by the property system itself, only through war, a form of “artificial” use of productive forces, it becomes possible to mobilize the technical resources necessary for progress, maintaining, at the same time, the property system (235). However, political power²⁸⁸ is unable to solicit such forces through arguments based on a crude logic of economic/technical development, so an aestheticization of war capable of organizing the masses becomes necessary. Such aestheticization has the perverse effect of placing them at the service of power while providing them with the illusion of their own expression and existence (234).

The link between art, war, and technology that underpins the dynamics and mechanisms of biopolitics becomes clearer: the sensory overload in everyday experience²⁸⁹ produced a new sense of perception in the human being. It shaped its body. The application of the same aesthetic principles to war, especially from the point of view of *Il Manifesto del Futurismo* by Marinetti, will provide an important instrument to a political power that seeks to achieve an increasing dominance over the social body, since war provides “the artistic gratification of a sense of perception that has been changed by technology” (235).

²⁸⁸ It should be noted that Benjamin’s analysis addresses the specific case of the Nazi regime.

²⁸⁹ Resulting from the immense technological development driven by the growing mastery over nature and the search for beauty/pleasure underlying the aesthetic view of modernity.

It is no wonder that a large part of KK's action takes place in wartime, and we find written already in the initial pages: "A country's flag is a helicopter: gasoline is needed to keep the flag aloft; the flag isn't made of fabric, but of metal; [...] The country is unfinished, like a sculpture. Look at its geography: it lacks terrain, this unfinished sculpture. The neighboring country invades to complete the sculpture: warrior-sculptors" (Tavares 2014, 9). The statement that matches the flag of a country to a helicopter brings to the equation the role that technological development plays in the formation of geopolitical power. At the same time, in the exhortation to war made by the narrative voice that questions the reader, the comparison of a country to a sculpture, followed by the verb "to invade" in the imperative, highlights the aestheticization of war at the service of a force that controls the "warrior-sculptor".

Even more evidently, let us remember that in his manifesto on the colonial war in Ethiopia Marinetti writes:

War is beautiful because it establishes human domination over the subjugated machinery [...] War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt of metallization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns. War is beautiful because it fuses gun-fire, cannonades, the scents and stench of putrefaction into a symphony. War is beautiful because it creates the new architectural form of big tanks, geometrical flight formations, smoke spirals from burning villages (...). (Marinetti *apud* Benjamin 1999, 234-235)

In this excerpt, there is the recurrence of the adjective "beautiful" and the constant association of words related to war armament, (e.g.: "machinery", "machine guns", "gun-fire", "cannonades" or "tanks") with terms usually connected with beauty at an aesthetic level, such as "flowering", "scents" or "symphony". Such association conveys, on the one hand, the idea of the superiority of human technological creation over nature, and, on the other hand, exalts the aesthetics of war. In effect, in the novel we come across several descriptions that almost reproduce Marinetti's words. See for example a variation of the symphony that synesthetically intertwines the firing of the cannons with the fetid smell of putrefaction: "But there are those who believe that the military orchestra goes out to sea in boats, and that they play out on the water. Water contaminated by music" (Tavares 2014, 24); or the big tanks that move from the manifesto to KK: "An enormous tank is a masterpiece next to water. How simple water is, how insignificant, next to powerful technology" (31). It seems to me, though, that the narrative voice does not merely expose

the articulation established between politics, art, and technology. It allows the reader to think about the assumptions of this articulation.

ABOUT THE “FORCES” AND THE TELEOLOGICAL ABSENCE

The starting point of my analysis is the access to the vision of an instrumentalized art that, under the aegis of political power, impels the occupation of the city where Klaus lives. Turning rape – and violence in general – into a daily routine, the action of the invading soldiers not only expresses a mechanized level of instinctual violence, as it likewise bears witness to an alienating sensory numbness that prevents any moral reflection (11 and 30).

Let me now highlight an aspect of a different nature related to the relationship between politics and technology, which is introduced by this initial reflection and will remain in tension throughout the action, pulsing in its substrate. The bellicose scenario constructed by Tavares’ fiction, thus, provides evidence that the destructiveness of war is a direct result of society’s inability to deal through technological progress with the elementary forces that compose it²⁹⁰. With regard to the ethos of the novel, what we have at an essential level is precisely this notion of a dynamic of “forces” within society, illustrated by the following description: “A soldier with a very red face *forcefully* lowers his manly pants to the ground. *Forcefully* his hands remove the dress [...] Red matter fornicates with a *weak* woman for a long time” (11; emphasis added). In this account of the rape of a woman by an invading soldier, as well as in several other passages²⁹¹, it is noticeable the use of adjectives and adverbs which clearly convey a binary relationship of opposing forces. Indeed, note that it is precisely through another rape that the opposing forces are more clearly delineated: the rape of Johana, Klaus’ girlfriend, at the hands of soldier Ivor. This and the other invading soldiers prefigure themselves as the active force

²⁹⁰ Converging with the German philosopher’s perspective in *Illuminations*. See: Benjamin 1999, 235.

²⁹¹ In addition to this more explicit formulation, the game of chess played by Klaus and Alof, a fellow resistance fighter, also ends up symbolically condensing this continuous confrontation of forces, present in the war logic upon which the KK universe is built. Another example would be: “Life during wartime means only one of two things: with them or against them. If you don’t want to die, kiss the boots of the strongest, that’s all there is to it” (Tavares 2014, 14).

that exerts violence and Klaus as the reactive force²⁹² that fails to prevent the violation of his girlfriend.

Still, *a contrario sensu* to the view of Walter Benjamin – product of his time –, in KK there is no longer a teleological perspective towards which society tends. Despite already guessing with a notable acumen the self-destructive effects of the modern technological society²⁹³, Benjamin’s reflection on the failure of the Enlightenment’s ideals assumes the existence of a meta-narrative that permeates, articulates, and transcends events throughout history²⁹⁴. In this novel by Tavares, such meta-narrative is absent.

Without a horizon of transcendence or a metaphysics that may hold a salvific power, after the death of God and Man, the struggle of forces that takes place in the novel’s battlefield is much closer to Nietzsche’s idea of a competition between *wills*²⁹⁵. This idea is crucial for the line of analysis I intend to develop around KK, and I would venture saying that it is from the Nietzschean view of the State as a space of competition between wills to power²⁹⁶, that Foucault will form his conception of a bellicose historicity underlying the formation of biopolitics’ mechanics. A historicity that, as we are seeing in KK, is characterized by a continuous combat between forces fighting for domination (1995, 26). In fact, for both Nietzsche and Foucault, such a fight takes place in a world of effective history where there is neither providence nor a final cause, and where each historical moment dominates itself in a ritual, imposing “obligations and rights” and

²⁹² Friedrich Nietzsche probes deeper into the notions of active and reactive forces in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*. See: Nietzsche 2007, 49.

²⁹³ As the German philosopher notes: “Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order” (Benjamin 1999, 235).

²⁹⁴ For a more detailed reflection on the notion of historical meta-narrative, see: Benjamin, 1999.

²⁹⁵ For a better understanding of the concept of the “will to power”, see: Nietzsche, 2001 and 2007.

²⁹⁶ A view from which Nietzsche derives anti-nihilist qualities *par excellence*, which might give birth to the man of the future who “will redeem us, not just from the ideal held up till now, but also from those things *which had to arise from it*, from the great nausea, the will to nothingness, from nihilism, that stroke of midday and of great decision that makes the will free again, which gives earth its purpose and man his hope again, this Antichrist and anti-nihilist, this conqueror of God and of nothingness” (Nietzsche 2007, 66-67).

constituting careful procedures²⁹⁷. In other words, the vision of Law and Politics as an extension of the domination of the active forces over the reactive forces during wartime²⁹⁸, implies a constant alternation between periods of war and periods of peace. But in a kingdom deprived of a tangible teleology, where the “iron hand” of need prevails, the tension between the forces is never resolved.

I believe to have shown that this initial reflection in KK about the relationship between politics, technology and art leads us to the idea of a perennial struggle of forces that serves as the engine of history. At this moment, however, I would like to focus on the structuring quality that the mechanism of exception bears – through its institutions and devices – in the transition from a situation of primordial chaos to an apparent social order. I will elaborate on the way this mechanism produces discourses or notions of justice and inscribe them into citizens’ bodies, seemingly surpassing the nihilism to which (post-) modern subjects have been voted. Therefore, I aim to answer the following question(s): how does power “produce” individuals, and what are the consequences that result from such production? In this search for an answer, I will follow the three different moments of the novel that articulate this “production process” and the emergence of an order in society: the chaos of nature, discipline and, finally, integration into the order/ “emergency”.

THE CHAOS OF NATURE

²⁹⁷ In relation to this point, Foucault almost reproduces the words of Nietzsche, who sees the State as a place of competition between the will of power and the implementation of law as a confirmation that the struggle for supremacy is carried out according to specific rules that always aim at dominance. As Nietzsche affirms: “viewed from the highest biological standpoint, states of legality can never be anything but *exceptional states*, as partial restrictions of the true will to life, which seeks power and to whose overall purpose they subordinate themselves as individual measures, that is to say, as a means of creating greater units of power. A system of law conceived as sovereign and general, not as a means for use in the fight between units of power but as a means *against* fighting in general [...]” (Nietzsche 2007, 50). See also: Foucault 1995, 11.

²⁹⁸ In *Discipline and Punish*, the French author articulates with great clarity the relationship between war and politics: “It may be that war as strategy is a continuation of politics. But it must not be forgotten that ‘politics’ has been conceived as a continuation, if not exactly and directly of war, at least of the military model as a fundamental means of preventing civil disorder. Politics, as a technique of internal peace and order, sought to implement the mechanism of the perfect army, of the disciplined mass, of the docile, useful troop, of the regiment in camp and in the field, on manoeuvres and on exercises” (1995, 168).

The outbreak of war that interrupts the normal rhythm of life and order in the city where Klaus and his girlfriend Johana live, sets in motion the forces that until then had remained under the control of a peaceful society²⁹⁹. As the war progresses, “a different sort of dust” settles in the city, exposing the body of the characters and turning clarity into “a bad thing” (Tavares 2014, 37). Through this game of *chiaroscuro*, Gonçalo M. Tavares reverses the usual association of light/order to a positive sphere and of darkness/chaos to a negative sphere, “forcing” Klaus, Alof, Clako and other members of the resistance to abandon the luminous city and escape into the *dark forest*. A quintessential symbolic site of primordial chaos and anomie prior to the formation of human consciousness and society³⁰⁰, the forest holds the potential for Klaus and his companions to discover what Heidegger would call their ontological truth (2002, 10-15). In a logic that reproduces the Heideggerian idea of a clearing, a place that at first is covered – because inside the forest – but which ends up being a space of revelation, Klaus could find here a greater understanding of his being integrated into the world, the non-being covered (*Unverborgenheit*) of his truth³⁰¹. Using the words of Irene Borges-Duarte in the prologue to the Portuguese edition of *Off the Beaten Track*:

The forest is not, in its proper sense, a mere grove that the hand of man could have planted. It is not a park. It is jungle and bush, nature in a pure, wild state. The paths of the bush, narrow and winding, more than crossing it, lead those who try to make it discover it as such, delving into its dead end. To “get lost” on these paths is, therefore, to find the forest, to find oneself in it. (Heidegger 1998, IX; emphasis in original; my translation)

The multiple references that we find to the forest are, in effect, steeped in a dismal tinge, achieved by the iterative use of the black color: “The different colors of the fire end up painting the paths *black*”; “Alof is drinking under the *black* sky. This is the sky’s true

²⁹⁹ This prefigures the initial moment that opens the door to a transition which will give rise to a new order at the end of the novel.

³⁰⁰ As it is well evidenced in the story of the medieval hero of the Sherwood forest. See: Pyle, 1968.

³⁰¹ As Heidegger refers apropos a painting of Van Gogh: “What is happening here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, in truth is. This being steps forward into the unconcealment of its being. The unconcealment of beings is what the Greeks called ἀλήθεια (aletheia). We say “truth” and think little enough in using the word. In the work, when there is a disclosure of the being as what and how it is, there is a happening of truth at work. In the work of art, the truth of the being has set itself to work. “Set” means here: to bring to stand. In the work, a being, a pair of peasant shoes, comes to stand in the light of its being. The being of the being comes into the constancy of its shining. The essential nature of art would then be this: the setting-itself-to-work of the truth of beings” (2002, 16).

color, today I don't doubt it" [Tavares 2014, 29; emphasis added])³⁰². This tonality strengthens the idea of a wild/natural order of things, at the same time strange and familiar to the human being, in which the only law is the law of force. The following passages are illustrative of this: "Shame does not exist in nature. Animals know the law: strength, strength, strength" and "There aren't any unjust animals [...] There aren't unjust floods or evil landslides. Injustice isn't part of the elements of nature; [...] If injustice turned into an organism – a thing that can die – then, yes, it would be part of nature" (13 and 14)³⁰³. Nevertheless, Klaus' revelatory path in the forest is cut short as he is abruptly redirected to the biopolitical order. Denounced by Herthe³⁰⁴, his lover, he will be captured by the invading soldiers who imprison him. Consequently, "discipline" and "punishment" are the terms that we will have to address next.

THE INCARCERATING SYSTEM

Contemporary to the establishment of disciplinary societies, the birth of the 19th century prison as a new model of punishment signals the transition into detention as a form of

³⁰² Other examples would be: "No one saw a big bat fly past, but there are black animals that cause things to happen at night" or "Alof vomited with his body seated and his throat bent over the grass, black with night" (Tavares 2014, 29).

³⁰³ It is interesting to note that the value and function of the artwork are also questioned in the forest. There is a particularly significant passage in this regard, in which, after having vomited, Alof takes out a light-colored flute that is inside a black bucket that he always carries with him and begins to play. Note that since the beginning of the war, Alof had stopped playing, because "[h] has too much music. The military orchestra kept circulating through the city" (Tavares 2014, 43). The idea that Alof must be in the forest to be able to play Mozart, jibes with the Heideggerian operative concept of "clearing" that I mentioned earlier, this time applied to the autonomy of the work's value and identity of art. Furthermore, I would venture saying that what is found here is an example of the expression of the negativity of the work of art through what Adorno calls "natural beauty". Reflecting on the instrumentalization of art, he states that "[t]he transition from natural beauty to art beauty is dialectical as a transition in the form of domination. Art beauty is what is objectively mastered in an image and which by virtue of its objectivity transcends domination. Artworks wrest themselves from domination by transforming the aesthetic attitude, shaped by the experience of natural beauty, into a type of productive labor modeled on material labor. As a human language that is both organizing as well as reconciled, art wants once again to attain what has become opaque to humans in the language of nature" (1997, 77).

³⁰⁴ Herthe is a secondary character whose story arc is in several ways connected to that of Klaus Klump, and, therefore, it is valuable to our understanding of the mechanism of exception in KK. She starts off as poor girl that provides sexual favors in exchange for protection during the war, going on to become a rich businesswoman at the end of the novel. See: Tavares 2014, 38 and 92.

penalty³⁰⁵. A phenomenon historically rooted in the rise of masses and the drive to control them, the success of prisons placed them at the centre of the development of the disciplinary society, given that their double standing – both in juridical/economical and technical/disciplinary terms – is inseparable from the technical, scientific, and economical advancement erupting with the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution.

In the creation of the modern nation-states, the first purpose of prison, according to Foucault, is to organize and make the phenomenon of the masses useful. In structuring a hierarchy of power-based relationships within its multiplicity, prison

must also master all the forces that are formed from the very constitution of an organized multiplicity; it must neutralize the effects of counter-power that spring from them and which form a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate it: agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions – anything that may establish horizontal conjunctions. (1995, 219)

Conversely, to punish individuals by depriving them from their freedom, prison introduces the notion of humanity into the penal system, in the sense that this new form of legality defines the power to punish as a general function of society, one that is applied in equal terms to all its members. Thus, this contradictory movement is part of the birth of prison. It translates a power in which “justice is supposed to be ‘equal’, a legal machinery that is supposed to be ‘autonomous’, but which contains all the asymmetries of disciplinary subjection” (232).

The prison to which Klaus is committed to mirrors this dual function: it removes Klaus from the interior of the masses’ multiplicity, or even more accurately, from its chaos, thus neutralizing the counter-power symbolized by the act of resistance. By taking away his freedom, it turns him into a member of a society which supposedly exerts its power in equal measure over its members, thus making him part of the hierarchical and asymmetric structure binding power relations in the disciplinary society.

³⁰⁵ Up until this moment in history the penalty and punishment for crimes was conceived in the form of public punishment, as the infamous public tortures described by Foucault, which aimed at a ritualistic representation of vengeance by a sovereign king over the individual who, through his disorderly actions, had dared to defy the instated power.

Yet, the image of prison in KK is not the realization of the utopian vision of Bentham's panopticon, but instead a prison representing a compact discipline³⁰⁶ whose effect is contrary to what might be expected: instead of re-educating and neutralizing the criminal individual, it potentiates him. The "failed prison" pictured in Tavares' novel illustrates the failure of the reforming and re-educational ideals behind a certain vision of detention penalty which aimed at "arresting evil, breaking communications, suspending time" (209). Here, there is no rehabilitation nor requalification through the imposition of constant discipline and surveillance, there is no training of movements of the prisoners' bodies so as to make them more docile and reinsert them into society. Prison effectively produces the body of the individual but does so through elaborating on the concept of delinquency, which is defined as "a specific type, a politically or economically less dangerous – and, on occasion, usable – form of illegality". The delinquent is then "a pathologized subject" produced in "an apparently marginal, but in fact centrally supervised milieu" (277)³⁰⁷.

We find this perverse effect in Xalak and in the other cellmates of Klaus. The inscription of the incarcerating power in the bodies of Klaus and the other inmates is made via their literal and metaphorical nudity (Tavares 2014, 34). The predisposition for insane violence in Xalak – who after escaping prison rapes Catharina, Johana's mother – symbolizes the production of the delinquent as a "pathologized" subject integrated into the domination mechanisms. There is, nonetheless, another detail arising from this production of delinquency: the exposure of the responsibility of the judicial power, together with the penal power, in determining the outlines of what is considered illegal, in such a way as it can identify and control it. This underlies the fact that, besides using the delinquency it produces to validate its own role as the guardian of order in society, the political/judicial power – generally attributed to the wealthiest classes – excludes itself from the normalizing laws it sanctions. Thence the central elements around which

³⁰⁶ To characterize this notion of discipline, Foucault refer us to "those compact, swarming, howling masses that were to be found in places of confinement, those painted by Goya or described by Howard. Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (1995, 197).

³⁰⁷ According to Foucault, "one would be forced to suppose that the prison, and no doubt punishment in general, is not intended to eliminate offences, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them; that it is not so much that they render docile those who are liable to transgress the law, but that they tend to assimilate the transgression of the laws in a general tactics of subjection. [...] And, if one can speak of justice, it is not only because the law itself or the way of applying it serves the interests of a class, it is also because the differential administration of illegalities through the mediation of penalty forms part of those mechanisms of domination" (1995, 272).

disciplinary devices formed are not transgressions to a central law, but the system of production (“commerce” and “industry”), their specific role in profit and the different destiny given to them by the punitive mechanisms³⁰⁸. In other words, disciplinary devices which should answer to a notion of law regulating society are, in reality, exerting a protective function of the production system, enhancing the working of the latter by attributing punishment to disruptive elements (such as Klaus or Alof) and validating the conduct or covering up the flaws of those behind it³⁰⁹.

The visit to the prison by Klaus’ parents and the unexpected attack by Klaus on his father are key moments in *KK* to understand this idea. Upon gaining knowledge of the stable situation of his parents, rich merchants before and after the beginning of the war, and faced with his father’s proposition to release him, Klaus reacts violently, sticking a piece of broken glass into his eye³¹⁰. This reaction can be interpreted as Klaus’ recognition of the subordination of penal power to political and economic forces under the principle of production. As the object subjugated by the violence of the punitive system, Klaus acts as a reactive force against power, wounding the active force attempting to control everything it sees. But far from constituting a rejection of this centralized and normalized human society, such rebellious act only further confirms that Klaus, both the result and an instrument of complex relations of power, is already integrated in that society.

THE INTEGRATION IN ORDER AND THE “EMERGENCY”

With Alof’s help, Klaus and Xalak manage to escape from prison and after going to Klaus’ ex-girlfriend’s house, they return to the forest. This is a pivotal moment in the building of the narrative: as revenge from the violence suffered at the hands of Xalak while in prison, Klaus murders him on their first night in the forest. From this moment on the process of “Klaus’ personal death”, as named by Tavares, begins as he enters “the

³⁰⁸ The irony in the sentence “Brutality is luxurious and fine in the eyes of rich people” (Tavares 2014, 40) encapsulates this subordination of the forces of war and the punitive mechanisms to the productive system (Foucault 1995, 308).

³⁰⁹ Which is to say, the wealthy classes, that in the novel are represented by Klaus’ parents.

³¹⁰ His father proposes to use his status and economic power to quickly release him from prison.

most personal night, a night that shared his name” (Tavares 2014, 62). This night can only be the “affirmative negation” of Klaus: his disappearance as an individual *will* and his integration in the “Klaus-man” is produced by the operative biopolitics of the disciplinary society.

Despite his initial response as reactive force, the time spent in prison had an effect over Klaus even after his liberation. Unaware of the changes occurred both at the social and political level, when Klaus returns to society, he is faced with power devices which are an extension of the logic behind the incarcerating system, even if they are more ingenious. For instance, when a vision of certain instruments from an infirmary triggers a fever, Klaus’ conscience is compared to a hammer, a symbol of its instrumentalization, and described as a machine whose only possible movement is forward (66). This continuous impulse towards action leads to an emptying of thought or reflection and reinforces the urgency for the physical need for survival. The satisfaction of the latter depends on the integration of the individual, including his physical body, in the all-dominating economic logic: “No one can escape economic logic. Gains, losses, profit. Your coin might be strange – it might be your body, for instance – but it’s a coin, an instrument of commerce” (69). This is the logic of production of the political and economic powers that finally dominates Klaus. In fact, the narrator’s comments on the importance of the hands and the *ad aeternum* repetition of the sound of bullets, confirms the complete integration of the protagonist in his society, a man whose production has been concluded. The act of placing his hands in his pockets³¹¹ not only expresses Klaus definitive resignation, an acknowledgment that he is no longer a reactive force, but also his newfound fascination and belief in the production system and in technique, omens of “a new God” (74).

The devices of power are thus expressed: in order to expand their dominion to the entire social body and become all-encompassing, they apply their political technology to the bodies by means of direct physical action of its institutions, building discourses based on the axis *truth-knowledge-power*. By creating natural needs where they do not exist, the trick of this technique, presented as “the embodiment of Reason for the benefit of all social groups” (Marcuse 2007, 11), acts effectively over the individuals, empowering them in economic terms as working instruments and stripping them of the power of political reflection, alienated/anaesthetised in the production process. As the end of the

³¹¹ Hands are described as the specialized tools of survival instinct and the basis for war. See: Tavares 2014, 69.

war is announced, “Klaus-man” is born to an *emergency*, i.e., to a “determined state of forces” in which the confrontation for domination ceases, replaced by a ritual imposing obligations and rights (Foucault 1995, 11). To put it another way, “Klaus-man” is part of a new historical stage of the domination of one class by another, in which the active forces behind the invasion have assimilated the reactive forces. Fittingly enough, the novel ends with Klaus taking charge of his father’s business and forming a new alliance with Herthe, who had also become a rich businesswoman³¹²; in a celebratory gesture of his ascension to a position of superiority, he puts aside past differences with his former lover and chooses to rejoice with her the beginning of their new, wealthy lives.

There are, hence, three important conclusions to take from the novel’s ending: (1) the voluntary loss of an historical memory³¹³ is accompanied by a sense of cyclic alternance between war and peace, confirming the theories by Nietzsche and Foucault which state that we are dominated by a bellicose historicity, undercurrent to the formation of biopolitics; (2) peace time, or political time, is an extension of war and in both the confrontation of forces aiming at domination is subject to economic interests³¹⁴; (3) echoing Nietzsche’s view, the new democratic state is “the establishment of mutual cowardice [...] Democracy results from a group of men losing power. It’s a global acquisition of weakness” (Tavares 2014, 85). From this loss of *willpower*, an attribute of democratic liberal states, comes a loss of strength and here lies the pernicious effect of the mechanisms of biopolitics highlighted by Gonçalo M. Tavares in *KK*: by producing man, these mechanisms both counter and conceal the nihilism of the world in which he lives, but they do it so at the expense of his own alienation. Identified and individualized inside the State, man becomes an instrument, diluted in it.

As the novel concludes, the despair of the characters is numbed by the loss of conscience of their real situation – after all, Klaus and Herthe seem to begin a happy life. The promise of salvation in the technical and scientific progress held by biopolitics submerges them in an illusion of political and economic freedom. As enunciated in the penultimate chapter of the novel: “There are exercises for practicing truth, like, for

³¹² Herte is finally able to climb the social ladder after inheriting the empire of her dead husband, the rich industrial Leo Vast. See: Tavares 2014, 76.

³¹³ “It’s not useful to dwell too much on what’s occurred. The same force that previously threw the country into war, that same force now imposes its end” (83).

³¹⁴ Leo Vast’s disillusionment with the end of the war expresses the end of power for those who benefitted from it, whereas the ascension of Klaus and Herthe completes the turning of the tables and expresses the establishment of a new social and economic order in peace time, as illustrated in the following excerpt: “Money is democratic if necessary, and dictatorial if necessary. [...] It obeys the laws that imposes upon itself: thus is money” (85).

example, being afraid. Or being hungry. Then there are exercises for practicing lies: all groups are examples of this, and all businesses [...] Klaus was in charge of the family business for the first time. He wasn't afraid, wasn't hungry; nor was he in love. Each day was, thus, a new exercise in lying" (92).

CHAPTER 9 – *JOSEPH WALSER = MACHINE*

We shall sing the great masses shaken with work, pleasure, or rebellion: we shall sing the multicolored and polyphonic tidal waves of revolution in the modern metropolis; shall sing the vibrating nocturnal fervor of factories and shipyards burning under violent electrical moons; bloated railroad stations that devour smoking serpents; factories hanging from the sky by the twisting threads of spiraling smoke;

Filippo Marinetti, The Manifesto of Futurism

CONTINUING THE CARTOGRAPHY OF “THE KINGDOM”

Sharing the same bellicose setting and presenting characters with similar worldviews to those characters of KK, it does not come across as strange that, from the 5th edition on, JW was published as a companion piece to the first novel of the tetralogy – thus, strengthening the continuity between the two narratives. In JW not only can we witness the perpetuation of an icy, gloomy style that reduces the characters to the infinitesimal reality of their bodies, but also the use of Germanic names that invoke World War II as a historical referent of the fictional construction. Additionally, we see a few elements and characters of the plot of KK transition to this novel. The carcass of the decomposing horse on one of the streets, and the attack on Ortho, the soldier of the invading army that in KK is murdered during his wedding to Herthe, would be two good examples of this (Tavares 2012, 26 and 95).

However, these elements of continuity will not suffice to establish a foundation upon which one can begin the study of this novel. The dystopian quality with which Gonçalo M. Tavares imbues the works of “The Kingdom” is quite specific, because in each novel the author not only explores the different facets of the mechanics of biopolitics, but also assesses its principles and practical effects. Tavares endows the four different novels with a negativity that affects both characters and readers, turning them into problematic objects. In the cartography of this kingdom, the very titles reveal the element that will be the focus of each novel. Thus, in KK, the title relates to the definition of Klaus’ humanity, something that translates into an analysis of the bellicose matrix behind the creation of power relations and the economic logic of production. Prison³¹⁵

³¹⁵ Specifically, the way this institution disciplines individuals.

and the production of a speech with a truth value are, respectively, the disciplinary institution and the device that KK places under scrutiny. In JW, on the other hand, the title presents an immediate reference to technology, and as we shall see the factory and the process of alienation/anesthesia of the human being in the modern industrial society are the analytical targets of this novel.

A careful reading of tetralogy shows that the titles reveal themselves in a retrospective fashion as a prelude of the negativity that will be unfolded throughout the novels: the use of a colon in the title *A Man: Klaus Klump* signals the beginning of a clarification³¹⁶ of the general concept of “man”/“humanity” that has just been presented. Nevertheless, the plot of the novel unfolds distinctively: it depends on the inversion of these terms, i.e., firstly, there is the presentation of Klaus Klump, and then, the description of his humanity. The same reversed thinking can be found in JW: according to Pedro de Sousa, the title of the novel “conveys us synthetically the idea of the relationship between a machine that can be someone’s *property* and, therefore, the *responsibility* of an individual whose name is Joseph Walser. Nonetheless, the analytical restriction to the title would mean that this would be a unilateral relationship and therefore devoid of any danger to the human being who manages it” (2010, 89; emphasis in original; my translation). Even though the title announces an active position before the machine, it is made clear, from the beginning of the novel, that Joseph Walser felt that he was being observed by his machine. The hierarchies of the two existences were rather clear to him: the machine belonged to a superior hierarchy: it could either save him or destroy him; it could make his life repeat itself, almost endlessly; instead, overnight, it could provoke a sudden change in his days (Tavares 2012, 16-17).

THE FACTORY INCARCERATION

If prison presents itself as an institution that is used to extend the characteristic features of wartime – such as control and discipline – to peacetime, the factory must also be seen as a holder of this function. Still, there is a fundamental difference between the prison of

³¹⁶ Or a justification/specification.

KK and the factory of JK: denoting a transformation in the disciplinary program, we go from a *compact model*, that compartmentalizes and immobilizes, to a *panoptic discipline*, which is “a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons” (Foucault 1995, 205). Although it was thought to be used at the criminal detention level, the application to the factories of the architectural and optical system designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1785 meant that, even after that century, these were organized as if they were prisons. Foucault's description of the manufacture of OberKampf in Jouy is quite illustrative:

By walking up and down the central aisle of the workshop, it was possible to carry out a supervision that was both general and individual: to observe the worker's presence and application, and the quality of his work; [...] All these serializations formed a permanent grid: confusion was eliminated: that is to say, production was divided up and the labour process was articulated, on the one hand, according to its stages or elementary operations, and, on the other hand, according to the individuals, the particular bodies, that carried it out: each variable of this force - strength, promptness, skill, constancy would be observed, and therefore characterized, assessed, computed and related to the individual who was its particular agent. (145)

The description of this factory will certainly be familiar to the readers of JW: as a part of an assembly line whose purpose he cannot grasp³¹⁷, and reduced to the compartment where he spends almost an entire day alone with the machine³¹⁸, Joseph's body acquires a steady work pace that reproduces the pace of the machine. Furthermore, as an expression of the incorporation and constant effects of the panoptic systems, Joseph experiences a feeling of constant surveillance and control of someone whose presence he does not perceive. Symptoms of this can be found in excerpts such as: “Factories are keeping up the *diligent commotion* that corresponds to the routine movements of their peaceful machines” (Tavares 2012, 7; emphasis added). Nonetheless, the biggest

³¹⁷ As a matter of fact, there is no reference to the type of manufacture or to the type of machine Joseph Walser works with.

³¹⁸ Regarding the verticalized, hierarchical organization that the *panopticon* is responsible for, the spatial distance between the workstations of the several factory workers – who work in an inferior floor of the factory – and the supervisors or members of the superior seats in the factory, is emphasized by the fact that Joseph Walser only saw Leo Vast, the factory owner, “twice and at a considerable distance” (Tavares 2012, 14).

indication of that surveillance is the supervisor Klober Muller, whose presence and action are discontinuous but seem to be endowed with an almost omniscient power. Being a keen observer of the factory's workers, it is precisely Klober who offers us the most detailed characterization of Walser, providing several descriptions in which his factory skills and bodily functions seem to merge:

You, Walser, are a particular sort of thing, what might be called a versatile worker, it's in your eyes: you'll do whatever is necessary to maintain your habits. Your urine will maintain a perfectly level concentration of elements from the beginning of the war until the end. It's obvious that, on the inside, your body is made up of substances that do not change; it's startling to even imagine you growing old. Your nature is that of an astonishing eternity; you're a perfect copy of that which, in this life, is commonly called wise. (45-46)

This passage captures ingeniously the ability that the disciplinary power has to engrave itself and train the bodies, to develop skills, and swiftness. Under the discipline of the factory where he works, of the supervision of Klober and his machine, Joseph Walser becomes "an unpredictable and non-animalistic animal, an organism without instability" (16), it mechanizes itself into a being of perfect reproducibility. However, this discipline of the body exceeds the frontiers of the factory, and due to its totalizing character, it becomes the only logic that defines Joseph Walser's living experience. His strict daily schedule, his personal collection of small metallic pieces, or the usual Saturday night dice game are elements that reinforce the fact that disciplinary power spreads throughout all levels of the social body (14). In an inversion of their initial functionality³¹⁹, the disciplines start to enhance the individual capacities of each citizen through the panoptic logic, thus branching out their mechanisms that tend to deinstitutionalize and circulate freely in society (Foucault 1995, 211). Nonetheless, by doing it, they are covertly feeding their own power: potentiation entails yield and therefore also profit, making bodies enter a machine, i.e., making them become forces in an economy.

Still regarding the excerpt presented above, and making the connection with what I have just mentioned regarding the body, it is worth noting that one can find scattered throughout the novel several references both to the semantic field of health/hygiene, and to the health/disease and cleanliness/dirt antitheses. To understand their use in JW and extract their true meaning, one must consider the historical processes which would slowly

³¹⁹ But without ceasing to have the moralizing and regulatory imposition role of the compact disciplines.

transform disciplinary societies into societies of security, as Foucault would call them (2007, 110).

The historical conjuncture that matters is, on the one hand, that of the advent of the “masses” with the demographic explosion of the 18th century, and, on the other hand, the growth of the production apparatus that is a direct consequence of the industrial revolution. In view of the need of making the costly and large production apparatus into a profitable one, and considering the arrival of an undifferentiated “mass”³²⁰, the plurality that constitutes society is now perceived as an organism, a body that needs to be treated and secured. The development of scientific techniques in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, especially in the field of Medicine, proved to be vital to this vision of the political body which would come to be best articulated in Foucault’s notion of “population”³²¹. It is no wonder that the formation of such political body – in which the social practices of the institutions perform a therapeutic role (Buck-Morss 1992, 29) – happens at the same time of the emergence of the anesthesia techniques, or the new standards of hygiene and medical care that hospitals institutionalize.

Through labor specialization, rationalization, and integration of the social functions, the factory where Joseph Walser works³²² helps to create an orderly and socially hygienic technical-body. To the filthy month that is approaching, a carrier of the turmoil of war, and to Joseph’s dirty and “irresponsible” shoes, Klobner replies that “[w]e must fight filth with hygiene or we’ll be defeated [...] order is more important every day” (Tavares 2012, 10). The process of inoculating the individual and the political bodies is so effective that not only the city itself is personified as a kind-hearted citizen that cleans up “the filthy mess that the passage of hell leaves behind” (31), but Joseph also shows an absolute indifference towards the entrance of the army into the city. His realization – “If I don’t understand this vileness, if I can’t identify it, if I don’t pay

³²⁰ A dangerous “mass”, given that it carried social diseases.

³²¹ Foucault articulates the difference between the sovereignty and govern, between territory and population, in the following terms: “And maybe, in a completely general, rough, and therefore inexact way, we could reconstruct the major forms, the major economies of power in the West in the following way: first, the State of justice, born in a feudal type of territoriality and broadly corresponding to a society of customary and written law, with a whole interplay of commitments and litigations; second, the administrative state, born of a territoriality that is no longer feudal but bounded [*de type frontalier*], that corresponds to a society of regulations and disciplines; and finally, a state of government that is no longer essentially defined by its territoriality, by the surface occupied, but by a mass; the mass of the population, with its volume, its density, and for sure, its territory over which it is extended, but which is, in a way, only one of its components. This State of government, which essentially bears on the population and calls upon and employs economic knowledge as an instrument, would correspond to a society controlled by apparatuses [*dispositifs*] of security” (2007, 110).

³²² Together with other disciplinary mechanisms.

attention to its language, then I remain clean” (26) – is the clearest statement of his specialized instrumentalization at the hands of an order he does not understand.

ON THE ALIENATION AND ANAESTHESIA OF THE BODY/BODIES

In the coexistence of war and peace in the action of this second novel is expressed the interchangeability I have mentioned before between two situations of different nature that, nonetheless, result from the same warlike model. We find side by side: the military army, composed by the invaders pursuing Klaus Klump and the other members of the resistance, and a civilian force consisting of the masses, which Foucault considers a kind of army to the extent that its members are mobilized – socially, politically, and economically – and made to serve the production apparatus. The aestheticization of war by power³²³ is, thus, seconded by the attempt to form a disciplined mass, a docile and useful troop which politics, in the capacity of technician of internal peace and order, aims to produce in society³²⁴.

In which way can this corporeal training be attained? What is the common denominator that ties the mobilization of an instrument of aggression with the useful force of the masses? If until now we have investigated the operating logic of institutions and similar disciplinary devices, on the way they touch and mould the body, there is yet to clarify in detail the process taking place on that very body. The character Joseph Walser may help attain this objective.

After the incident at the factory which makes him lose his right index finger, Joseph acquires a new awareness of his body, and this awareness puts before the readers’ eyes two processes which we would say, at first glance, to be contradictory: the dormancy and the alienation shown in his reaction to the outbreak of the war³²⁵ end up meeting a

³²³ Which, as we have seen, seduces the masses to participate in an event which mobilizes the productive forces and the technical resources necessary to progress.

³²⁴ Let it be noted that the concept of “mass” as a docile force brings us to the way Nietzsche and Foucault present it, and it should be understood more as an objective to be attained by the political forces than as a stable reality. In fact, Klaus Klump, Aloh and the other members of the resistance point towards the fact that the civilian mass is not always docile.

³²⁵ Character traits of “a constant, general state of alienation” in Walser (Tavares 2012, 15).

sensorial overcharge in which his body's sensibility to sounds "seemed to be turned up to maximum intensity, as if controlled by a switch" (Tavares 2012, 58). Following the development of the anaesthetic techniques of the late 19th century, what we find represented in Joseph Walser is precisely the use of these techniques through the discipline of factory work. Being an environment which controls the workers' movements, forcing them to learn how to coordinate their movements with "the uniformly constant movements of an automaton" (Marx *apud* Benjamin 1999, 172)³²⁶, the sensorial overcharge exerted by the factory³²⁷ causes the synaesthetic system to block sensorial stimuli, self-anaesthetising so as to avoid both physical and psychological trauma. As Susan Buck-Morss puts it, the function of the synaesthetic system is inverted, "[i]ts goal is to numb the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory" (1992, 18). As a result, this new cognitive way of experiencing reality, the experience of modern life, is no longer a way of being in contact with reality but a way to block out reality, consequently destroying "the human organism's power to respond politically even when self-preservation is at stake (...)" (18).

In this coexistence of sensorial overload and anaesthesia, one of the outcomes is the inability to register or reflect on stimuli. The impassibility and the absence of an emotional response by Joseph Walser faced with the danger of war are certainly in consonance with this idea. On the other hand, the way Joseph's intensity and accuracy in the manoeuvring of the machine are described to us account for the sensorial overload to which he is daily exposed:

Joseph Walser is taking a little break right now, stepping away from his piping-hot machine, which is almost suffocating him after two straight hours of exertion. These pauses are becoming more and more important, because the excessive heat from the machine and his own fatigue get intermingled with the noise from the sirens that flood in through the windows during the brief silences of the motor, which is located just inches away from Walser's chest. (Tavares 2012, 49-50)

³²⁶ The description of the relationship between Joseph Walser and the machine wonderfully captures the way the operator duplicates the machine's movements, fusing them both as one: "At various moments the sound of the motor and its vibrations get interwoven with the beating of his heart as well, for both of these 'organs' are functioning perfectly, in a state of perfect excitation; they are pressed up against each other and thus start to become intermingled, which causes ridiculous jolts of alarm in Walser, from time to time, when, at precisely planned moments, the machine's motor suddenly stops. It is at those times that Walser notices the connection between his body and the machine" (Tavares 2012, 50).

³²⁷ Which is to say, the experience of shock mentioned by Benjamin I have previously alluded to.

An instrument of a power which takes away from him the product of his labour, in the alienation of his private life Joseph remains subdued to the same logic of repetition and constancy imposed on him by the factory, but in his collection of little metallic pieces and the dice game³²⁸ in which he usually indulges he has the chance, or at least the illusion, of getting back the control over his life³²⁹. Like Camus' characters in *L'Exil et le Royaume* (2012), it is on these small habits that Joseph Walser finds a personal realm in which he can seek exile, forget his circumstances of serfdom in the factory, his feelingless marriage to Margha, and to keep the fantasy of an order, in a life which is so clearly chaotic and incomprehensible. The dice in Joseph's hand

simplified the world. \ Life was reduced to six numbers, embedded in each die, as if the die were not merely an object belonging to a game of chance, but some concrete substance with the ability to produce a formula that could explain all the interconnected forces on earth. [...] It was this precision that excited him, this precision that was well-defined by immutable limits that, nonetheless, allowed room for his peculiar decisions, which, in truth, were not decisions at all. (21-22)

Considering this ludic issue pertaining playing and gambling, I would like to bring to this reflection on anaesthesia and alienation an important note which Gonçalo M. Tavares subtly includes in one of the novel's chapters, and which contributes as well to a better understanding of the way in which war and peace may coexist without contradiction.

In contrast with the severe world of the factory and the shadow of the impending war which looms throughout the first part of the novel, on chapter XVII – section 1 we have the description of the different distractions, the seduction play, and the general intoxication of joy that pervade the city on a Saturday night. Imbued with a celebratory, “urge for normality” feeling, this chapter, of a singular nature when compared to the remainder chapters, seems to point towards a consequence of automation of work that takes place in industrial society and whose effects are felt on the advanced industrial

³²⁸ It is equally relevant to mention the correspondence established by Benjamin, following the steps of Baudelaire, between the worker and the gambler. According to Benjamin, this is based, on the one hand, on the forging of mental disposition consonant with a work logic, meaning, the search for profit through a *hic et nunc* action, which seems to erase every other work actions so far and, on the other hand, the very automatic and sudden gesture which is transported from the work of operating a machine to the gambling. See: Benjamin 1999, 173.

³²⁹ Something quite evident when the narrator affirms that his useless, absurd, and secret collection “had gradually become the center of Walser's existence” (Tavares 2012, 80).

civilization: it gradually comes into existence a greater degree of sexual freedom and several ways of gratification through pleasure.

Let me render explicit the origin and consequences of this transformation: with mechanization/automation of the production processes, the energy once used on the effort of manual labour is saved and becomes available to be invested in other forms. However, since that very automation process brought along the destruction of the natural erotic landscape in which the human being used to invest that energy, by means of a mechanized environment the saved energy is intensified and settles in sexuality. As a consequence, that sexual energy will be turned into market value and a factor for integration of customs, insofar as, while still a work tool, the body is allowed to “to exhibit its sexual features in the everyday work world and in work relations” (Marcuse 2007, 77).

The sexual freedom expressed on the above-mentioned chapter of *JW*, in which a couple seals “reckless kisses”, boys lurk the nudity of a maid, and women exchange concupiscent glances with a few soldiers (Tavares 2012, 106-107), reveals a kind of socialization that completes the “deseroticization” of the surrounding environment. Thus, sex is integrated into work and public relations, given that the technical progress of a more comfortable life allows for the systematic inclusion of the libidinal energies into the domain of production and commercialization of goods. Here lies the importance of this chapter: the intensification of the sensual stimuli through the establishment of a society that, because of its greater lever of sexual freedom, asks for and validates sexual gratification, generates submission precisely through entertainment and pleasure. As Marcuse rightly points out, this “mobilization and administration of libido may account for much of the voluntary compliance, the absence of terror, the pre-established harmony between individual needs and socially required desires, goals, and aspirations” (2007, 78)³³⁰.

Producing effects close to those of the disciplining effects of the factory, and having a complementary action concerning the latter, the sensuous or ludic experience offered by the society in which Joseph lives proves to be an important device towards the maintenance of the “Ministry of Normality” by power, alienating the individuals from

³³⁰ It is true that Marcuse’s vision distinctly diverges from that of Foucault which I have been exploring so far, and there is no place in the work of the French philosopher for the ideological criticism in which Marcuse engages in many of his works, as for example, the *One-Dimensional Man* (2007). However, I think that the analysis undertaken by Marcuse on the way the energy not applied to work in advanced industrial societies will be channelled towards a ludic exploration, helps us better understand the specificity of the episode which, in the novel, refers to playing and leisure in general.

reality (Tavares 2012, 109). The anaesthesia administered to them through an intoxication of senses contributes to make productivity and destruction, war and peace, inhabit the same space, in an insecure harmony between freedom and oppression³³¹.

ON TECHNIQUE

This “happy conscience” and the double effect of overload and anaesthesia we have analysed so far would seem to stem from the fracture which occurs within the totalitarian universe of technological rationality. This universe, in turn, reflects the belief in a reality that is effectively rational and in which the productive apparatus – a system that, despite a few problems, actually works, supplying the goods it supplies – assumes the role of a *moral agent*.

These are the terms of the agreement with which Klaus Klump and Joseph Walser daily exercise the lie. Insensitive and alienated from the scenery of suffering and destruction caused by the war, Joseph Walser’s indifference and acritical vision are attained not only through a historic suppression undertaken by the rationality of the technological-scientific progress – incidentally, a fairly meaningful sign of the political control of the individual and collective memories³³² – but also by a “normalizing” moral imposed by the disciplinary institutions and biopolitical devices. By founding a world where there is no place for the guilt that would stem from a historical reflection, and in which “[e]vil is a category that comes about instinctually, to be sure, but also by reason,

³³¹ In my view, this chapter may introduce in the novel traces that hint at a changing that has occurred with the passage from the industrial society to the advanced industrial society. Taking into account the context set by Gonalo M. Tavares in this chapter, the reference to the couple who endeavour to “inaugurate a new century, [...] a private century” (Tavares 2012, 108) may be interpreted as an allusion to the hedonistic consumer society that will flourish on the path of the industrial society – which we will examine in more detail in *Nexhuman* –, but whose seed is already planted on the latter.

³³² On this matter, note the following excerpt: “But since such was not the case—that is, since individual perception resists codification into an objective science able to observe and explain its inner workings, each individual memory remains just that: individual, different from any other; indeed, marked by a retreat from others. If a collective shared the exact same memory, it wouldn’t be a collective; it would be a single unit of existence. Therefore, to speak about the collective memory of a nation is simple foolishness—but is, at the same time, an excellent political strategy. [...] Events occur alone, apart from us, uncomprehended; deep down, they are solitary beings—please excuse the ridiculous metaphor, but that’s precisely what they are: no event has ever been perceived to date” (Tavares 2012, 119-121).

by intelligence” (Tavares 2012, 32)³³³, the individual Joseph Walser is submitted to his daily work routine and small habits in a never-ending logic of repetition. He is asked, in a mellifluous state of dormancy, to contemplate his own destruction and that of those around him. He is even asked to stop existing: “your country, tells you, or asks you, to cease to exist. Cease to exist, says the collective morality!” (123).

It is true that this “cancellation” of Joseph’s existence entails his production as a citizen belonging to the social body, “creating” his body and giving it a horizon of meaning. But it also involves a diminishing of Joseph’s forces as an individual being, a notion which starts to be hinted at from the moment the machine takes away his index finger, and will be more clearly specified during his sexual “failure” with Claire³³⁴, when she says “Stop, please!” [...] “Turn on the lights.” [...] “I’m sorry Mr. Walser,” [...] “It’s your finger. I can’t get it out of my mind!” (159).

As if already guessing the causes behind this diminishing of forces, Oswald Spengler’s vision in *Man and Technics* – published more than 90 years ago – is still extremely important, and allows us, based on a few of its intuitions, to better understand Joseph’s situation. Describing man as a “predatory animal”, a bird of prey that has a “maximum of freedom for self against others, [...] and an extreme of necessity where that self can hold its own only by *fighting and winning and destroying*” (1963, 22), Spengler states that through the predominance of vision human beings have an innate superiority both internally and externally: externally, this superiority is mirrored by the fact that it transforms the world of light and colour that their prey inhabits; internally, in the psychic nature of strong animals, that is, in the divine spark of the souls whose outlines are sharper in solitude, and inhabit the living body that “in this divinely cruel, divinely indifferent world has either to rule or to submit” (25)³³⁵.

A variation of the warlike scenery both Nietzsche and Foucault identify in the matrix of a historicity that dominates human being, Spengler’s vision of the predatory

³³³ The epigraph by Hans Christian Anderson also conveys this idea: “*He wanted to say the Lord’s Prayer, but all he could remember was his multiplication tables*”.

³³⁴ The wife of the host of the dice games he is a part of.

³³⁵ To this “theoretic” superiority bestowed upon man by vision, Spengler adds a “practical” superiority granted by the *human hand*, “weapon-member”, that dominates and transforms the world. It should be added that the development of the human hand is inseparable of the development of utensils/instruments as an extension of it. Within a technical process that, through the capacity of human intellect, allowed to dissociate the production of the utensil and its use, man becomes a predator unlike the others since, reflecting a utilitarian perspective, he not only selects his weapons but also creates them according to his personal intentions. See: Spengler 1963, 35-40.

nature of man seems to be suggested mostly by the utterances of Klobler to Joseph. Concerning the relationship between individual and nation, Klobler affirms that

[e]very creative instinct begins with this primeval necessity, which the collective memory would have us forget: we're creative because we want to find a solitary explanation, an individual explanation [...] There is only one true non-collective being, or asocial being, as it's sometimes called. And this being isn't someone who isolates itself, isn't someone who runs off into the mountains or the forest, no, it is a being that kills other beings, the one who wants to kill all other ones so it can finally be alone: this is the true solitary being. (Tavares 2012, 122-123)

Conversely, the idea that technique is an extension of the human body – particularly of the hand – is featured through the nearly symbiotic relationship between Joseph and his machine, which is exposed in the description mentioned above, on the subject of disciplining the body.

However, there is an aspect here that is extremely important for the understanding of the events following Joseph's loss of the finger: the technical development process involves a reciprocity of the relationship, meaning, man moulds technique, but technique also moulds man. The complete identification between Joseph and his machine happens insofar as the machine becomes the "foundation of his very existence [...] what saved him, day after day, from being some other person, eventually his own negative" (17). But the machine does not just produce/fixate his identity, it ultimately gives a sense to his existence, given that when the motor stopped "Walser saw himself fully exposed in the world; he looked all around: everything could retreat from everything else (51). In this point precisely is situated one of the most disquieting aspects of industrial civilization represented on the novel: the technology developed by man may become itself a form of social control, configuring an extension that does not potentiate the body, but rather debilitates it.

The loss of Joseph's right index finger³³⁶ and his subsequent transfer to an administrative function that sends him away from his machine, would necessarily have as a consequence a gain of conscience of his condition of submissive individual, conscious and embarrassed about his weak hand; but, on the other hand, from that conscience is born a deeper alienation expressed not only in his more frequent retiring to

³³⁶ That will originate a deep investigation on the anatomy of the human hand. See: Tavares. 2012, 74.

the personal division of his house where he has the metallic pieces of his collection³³⁷ but also by a loss of will. With the amputation of the finger, it is also consummated “the most violent amputation of all had been accomplished: the amputation of his desire” (94) and nowhere do we find this amputation of desire more distinctively expressed than in the moment in which Claire pushes Joseph away.

By symbolically pointing to an impotence on Joseph’s part, be it sexual as well as existential/political, this episode draws attention to a historic stage of technological development in which the possibilities brought on by the development of human language³³⁸ will override the action of the hand as a world transforming power, giving birth to a new gigantic being – the State – that organizes an action made of united and coordinated parts. In this stage, as Spengler suggests, by consciously and systematically insisting on increasing their superiority far beyond their physical forces, “once habituated to the collective doing and its successes, man commits himself more and more deeply to its fateful implications. The enterprise in the mind requires a firmer and firmer hold on the life and soul. Man has become the slave of his thought” (1963, 58 and 59).

With the end of the war in the novel and the establishment of democracy, it could be said that, adjacent to the reference we had seen in *KK* of the democratic system characterized by the “the establishment of mutual cowardice and [...] a global acquisition of weakness” (Tavares 2014, 85), we have a stage of technical progress that itself leads to a loss of will, a loss of force by the individual. This force is then made available to the productive apparatus through a process of disciplining of body and mind; it is not by chance that Joseph is “automated” by his own machine, an extension of his body that, nevertheless, ends up amputating his finger.

The outcome of the novel brings with it another aspect concerning the control exercised by biopolitics through technology: by placing face-to-face foreman Klober and Joseph Walser in a dice game that will decide who is to be shot, Gonçalo M. Tavares seems to allow us to draw new conclusions from Spengler’s tragic vision of the fall of the

³³⁷ The growing alienation of Joseph, increasingly confined to the isolated universe of his pieces, is made explicit above all in the following passage: “As such, it wasn’t long before Walser had progressed to the point where he began ascribing certain affective qualities to concrete measurements. [...] His continual lack of awareness during conversations and his often quirky behavior both certainly resulted from the same cause: his collection” (79-80).

³³⁸ That allows reflections and intellectual calculus.

Faustian man³³⁹: neither “Hands” (Joseph Walser), nor “Brains” (Klober) “can alter in any way the destiny of machine-technics, for this has developed out of inward spiritual necessities and is now correspondingly maturing towards its fulfilment and end” (1963, 90). On the technological democratic society, the active forces composed by leaders have not lost the predator’s secular feeling – as a matter of fact, neither has Klober. However, like the masses they dominate, they too as organic life succumb to an increasing mechanization and technological-scientific rationality which, taking root in a universalizing logic, is transformed by the hands of political-economic power as the only way of thinking the world, its consequences escaping human understanding.

To conclude this second chapter, I would like to reiterate that, by focusing mostly on the question of technological rationality in a society in which the panoptic discipline dominates, JW is articulated as a logical continuation and complement of the warlike/political matrix of the disciplinary society sketched in KK. Thus, there are naturally several points of contact between the two novels, especially regarding the process of anaesthesia of the individual and political bodies. But both novels reflect the construction of a worldview that places the forces of individuals at the service of the production apparatus, while concomitantly providing them an illusory sense of security within a horizon of meaning dominated by the light of progress. Klaus starts practicing the lie daily, Joseph claims that he does not have any inclination towards love or friendship, but, in both cases, the absence of fear or any other sensation is not a sign of strength, revealing on the contrary a condition of perfect submission to a biopolitics that infinitesimally controls human life, “feeding” on it.

³³⁹ The points of contact between Gonçalo M. Tavares’ contemporary vision and Spengler’s pre-modern vision, born in a decadent context, should naturally be considered with caution. However, I think that some elements that we find in these works by Tavares allow us to explore intuitions that Spengler already presented in his time and that may help to bring a different perspective to the relationship between technique and biopolitics.

CHAPTER 10 – THE MANY FACES OF WAR IN *MOCKINGJAY*

All warfare is based upon deception.

Sun Tzu, The Art of War

WAR AS MORE THAN A SPECTACLE: FROM HOME TO THE CITY

We have seen throughout part I of the thesis that the murderous Hunger Games could be characterized as a gore display of cruelty³⁴⁰, an artificially recreated Hobbesian state of nature where only the strongest survive. In this conflation between reality TV and a warlike scenario the mediatic representations broadcasted in the screens of the Capitol would be a reminder of how capitalism, in its plasticity, manages to appropriate the artistic sphere. We have learned that while the tragic narratives Caesar Flickerman creates about the tributes effectively solicit an emotional response on the viewers of the Capitol, they are not a real imitation of a tragic action. The perverse imitation of life that they witness does not make them potentially sager nor better, given that it does not make them think about the heroes' misfortunes and re-evaluate their lives. Quite the opposite. The empathy that they feel for the tributes exists only to intensify their own delight of the spectacle being performed, to immerse them in a form of entertainment that anesthetizes emotions and blocks any kind of critical thinking.

Probing into the perspective of the poorer districts, we have also realized that the creation of a game to which every adolescent must "compulsory volunteer" involves deeper implications. Along the lines of Hobbes' political philosophy, the Capitol counts on the fear of violent death, as well as on the painful memories of the "Dark Days", to secure obedience. Whether in the state of nature or in the arena, Hobbes and the Capitol expect that one's worry for self-preservation will override the moral scruples. But they also expect that rational people will recognize that it is in their self-interest to submit to a political authority that may avoid another bloody civil war. The installation of this atmosphere of fear that engulfs the citizens of the districts, making them inclusively

³⁴⁰ As I have already introduced the fictional universe of *The Hunger Games* trilogy in the Introduction and in the first part, I will dive straight away into the representations of war as a biopolitical mechanism present in the novels.

sacrificing their youths, has the specific political effect of disempowering the citizens, stripping them of their agency. In an inversion of roles, the sons and daughters of Panem are the ones that provide safety to the family/community, and the acceptance of this rule means that the adults comply, out of fear, with the terms imposed by the government, forfeiting their political voice as well as that of the new generation.

Since the presence of violent warfare scenarios and the anesthetization of the characters are two essential pillars in the worldbuilding of both authors, we can see there are motifs and settings that surely and strongly connect Collins' trilogy to the two books of Tavares. That being said, the connection between the bleak, Kafkaesque world of Klaus Klump or Joseph Walser, and Katniss' world of spectacle remains far from evident. What possible link could there be between a narrative that refer us to an uncanny version of the post-Second World War context, and one located in a post-apocalyptic and hyper-technological war? One could even say the opaque and seemly machinic realities of Tavares' characters are on an opposite end to the diaphanous and irrational logic that govern the life of Panem. Even from a literary perspective, it could be argued that Collins' Young Adult sci-fi seems to fall into the category of an art product made for mass consumption, diametrically opposed to the notion of radical art that is conveyed by Tavares' dystopias. Against this backdrop of apparently contrasting perspectives, I aim to demonstrate that there is a key connection regarding the *ius belli et ius pacis* that runs deep between the worlds of Klaus, Joseph, and Katniss. Still, I believe that if such connection is to be brought to light, the representations of war in these sci-fi novels should not be perceived as mere tools used by the spectacle³⁴¹ but rather as key components of a mechanism of exception that helps biopolitics structure power relationships³⁴².

I would say that, unexpectedly, such structuring function of war is already implied in the initial pages of the first book of *The Hunger Games*, although we lack an interpretative key at this early point in the narrative to fully understand it. We learn from the get-go that the draft known as "reaping" is staged as a collective event secured by the police, during which each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate in the televised Hunger Games (Collins 2008, 18). In a grim history lesson that precedes the actual draft, we are also told the Games are a festivity that re-enacts symbolically the Dark Days of the rebellion, thus preemptively protecting the people of Panem from the atrocities of another civil war (19). From the previous chapters

³⁴¹ As it was the case in part I of the thesis.

³⁴² In conjunction with the spectacle and the immunological mechanisms.

we know that the classic Greek myth of “Theseus and the Minotaur” is one of the major influences on the creation of the Hunger Games *mythos* and is, therefore, indispensable to make sense of this aberrant Game. But this is not, I contend, the only influence of ancient Greece:

[...] the case of a small Greek city in Sicily, Nakōnē, where, in the third century BCE, the citizens decided to organise the reconciliation following a *stasis* in a particularly striking way. They drew the names of the citizens in lots, in order to then divide them into groups of five, who in this way became *adelphoi hairatoi*, ‘brothers by election’. The natural family was neutralised, but this neutralisation was accomplished simultaneously through a symbol par excellence of kinship: fraternity. The *oikos*, the origin of civil strife, is excluded from the city through the production of a false fraternity. The inscription that has transmitted this information to us specifies that the neo-brothers were to have no family kinship between them: the purely political fraternity overrules blood kinship, and in this way frees the city from the *stasis emphylos*. With the same gesture, however, it reconstitutes kinship at the level of the *polis*: it turns the city into a family of a new kind. (Agamben 2015, 9)

The description that Giorgio Agamben makes of the process chosen by the citizens of Nakōnē to (re)organize the political life after a ferocious civil war³⁴³ has an eerily resemblance to the “reaping” process used in Panem to reorganize the country after the failed rebellion of the districts. At its core, both “lotteries” aim to neutralize the natural family, excluding the origin of the civil strife from the picture and allowing for the constitution of a symbolical kinship at a political level. Nevertheless, there is a negligible difference that completely changes our notion of the role of (civil) war in Collins’ novel, but also in our contemporary world: in the case of the districts of Panem – as well as in the myth of Theseus – the emphasis falls heavily in a sacrificial dimension, or rather in an abdication at a political level from one of the parts to achieve such reconciliation. Such loss of political voice/strength is absent in the case described in the quote. As Agamben notes, in ancient Greek societies *stasis*, or civil war, was clearly not considered a positive event, nor a public good, but it was recognized as a structuring and inherent event to the formation of the *polis*, “a reactant which reveals the political element in the extreme

³⁴³ Agamben uses the term *stasis* to refer, in its essence, to a civil war, a “war within the family” (2015, 10-11) which comes from the *oikos* and not from outside. Etymologically, *stasis* (from *histemi*) designates the act of rising, of standing firmly upright (*stasimos* is the point in the tragedy when the chorus stands still and speaks; *stas* is the one who swears the oath while standing). See: Agamben 2015, 13-14.

instance as a threshold of politicization that determines for itself the political or unpolitical character of a certain being” (2015, 17).

This notion of a civil war intrinsic to the formation of every political society changes the way we perceive the formation of Panem as a country and the use of the Games themselves. The Arena where the ritualistic reenactment of the conflict during the Dark Days takes place, does not merely represent an artificial Hobbesian state of nature, a reminder of what happened in the past, in a time of absence of political peace. It conceals, in broad day light, a deeper truth: its continuous presence on the screens of Panem symbolically refers us to the presence of *stasis* as a structuring device that is not opposed to politics but is rather one of the founding stones of political life. In other words, it signals that war performs a structuring function akin to that of the state of exception, dormant but always potentially active in the interstices of society. Just as in the state of exception, *zōē*, natural life, is included in the juridical-political order through its exclusion, so correspondently the *oikos*, the home, is politicized and included in the *polis* through the *stasis*. In the words of the Italian philosopher:

What is at stake in the relation between *oikos* and *polis* is the constitution of a threshold of indifference in which the political and the unpolitical, the outside and the inside coincide. We must therefore conceive politics as a field of forces whose extremes are the *oikos* and the *polis*; between them, civil war marks the threshold through which the unpolitical is politicised and the political is ‘economised’. (22)

Such perspective helps us unravel the cryptic affirmation of President Snow, when he responds to Katniss’ provocative remark regarding his technocratic government system: “‘It must be very fragile [the system], if a handful of berries can bring it down.’ There’s a long pause while he examines me. Then he simply says, ‘It is fragile, but not in the way that you suppose’” (Collins 2009, position 223). Furthermore, it elucidates the importance of the Games as a political and formative concept, highly resonating with the Athenian concept of amnesty (“*amnēstia*” [Agamben 2015, 21]): both confirm the essential connection between *stasis* and politics, serving as an exhortation to participate in the political life³⁴⁴ and to not to make bad use of memory³⁴⁵. Insofar as the *stasis* constitutes

³⁴⁴ Although in the case of the Games “exhortation” might be a euphemism.

³⁴⁵ As Agamben refers, the Athenian *amnēstia* is not simply a forgetting or a repression of the past, “the *stasis* is not something that can ever be forgotten or repressed; it is the unforgettable which must remain always possible in the city, yet which nonetheless must not be remembered through trials and resentments” (2015, 21-22).

a political paradigm inherent to Panem, which marks the becoming-political of the unpolitical (the *oikos*) and the becoming-unpolitical of the political (the *polis*), the citizens of the districts have the responsibility to participate in the Games. Their participatory gesture refers to the foundation of the political sphere and, at once, sustains that sphere. For this very reason they must not hold any grudges against the citizens of the other districts once the Games are over. In this fictionalized country, peace lies in the fine balance between something that must not be forgotten and something that must not be remembered.

This preliminary assessment of the effects and strategies of war in *The Hunger Games* certainly makes the mechanism of exception converge with the mechanisms of the spectacle and of immunology. Placed at the service of political powers, each on its own way creates a destabilization, or even a complete effacement, of the limits between the public domain of politics and the private sphere of the *oikos*. But this parallel with the ancient Greek context can only take us so far at this point in our analysis. In the light of a contemporary biopolitical reading of the novels, what relationship could there be between the civil war in this post-apocalyptic world and the Global Security/Diplomatic Affairs of our own? In a 21st century that has seen a drastic decrease in the number of sanctioned and official declarations of war³⁴⁶, what dialogue could young readers, the main target of the books, carry with the characters? One could even assert, given the stylization of war and the aestheticization of violence that it produces, that *The Hunger Games* are more likely to glorify war at the eyes of those readers, rather to allow them to think critically about it.

Yet, I would argue that the examination of the civil war that deflagrates in *Mockingjay* can help us achieve a more accurate understanding of the references to the ancient Greek context – as well as to other past political/war contexts – that Collins introduces profusely throughout the trilogy. The final entry of *The Hunger Games* allows

³⁴⁶ When I say sanctioned and official declarations of war, I am referring to the classic definition of war, the foundation of International Relations studies, written by Carl von Clausewitz. According to the Prussian military, war is a sanctioned clash between great powers and an attribute of the State. Because war is related to the conduct of government objectives, it is the continuation of politics by other means – just one of several ways to resolve differences (Clausewitz 1993). As Agamben notes, there has been in recent years a transformation of the concept of war, with sanctioned and official declarations of war decreasing in favor of other forms of conflict: “Not only has no war officially been declared in many years (confirming Carl Schmitt's prophecy according to which every war in our time has become a civil war), but even the outright invasion of a sovereign state can now be presented as an act of internal jurisdiction” (2000, 116). This fact is undoubtedly connected to the overwhelming impact that World War II and 30 years of Cold War have had on International Relations. However, war imagery from conflicts such as the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the Gulf War (1990-1991) or the Kosovo War (1998-1999) have also certainly contributed to it.

to undertake a fictional military excursion into a future that is concomitantly familiar and strange to us. Its narrative action drops us off in a war zone where the scope of a camera and the flashy images of entertainment shows have become almost indistinguishable from the scope of a weapon and the blasts of real explosions. As I will try to demonstrate, in doing so this book may provide us powerful insights regarding the role that war plays nowadays, not only inside distant military battlegrounds³⁴⁷ but also right next to us, in the heart of many western cities.

LIGHTS, CAMERA... WAR: EXPLORING THE BONDS BETWEEN CINEMA/TV AND WAR IN
MOCKINGJAY

The opening episode of *Mockingjay* takes place a month after the apothecotic end of *Catching Fire*, in which we witnessed Katniss getting rescued out of the arena and found out that District 13 still existed and was behind a rebellion plan against the Capitol (Collins 2010, 18). Katniss' somber words readily bring us up to speed on the events that transpired during that time: we learn that the rebellious act of destroying the dome had led to the bombardment and complete destruction of her own district a month earlier. We also learn that the survivors of District 12 are now refugees in District 13, a place described as an underground military compound governed by president Alma Coin (Collins 2008, position 100), where we can find an Orwellian-like society³⁴⁸ that disciplines the bodies of its citizens with a machinic precision and scientific accurateness. Moreover, we discover that most of the districts are now openly at war with the Capitol, and, more notably, that Alma Coin and Plutarch Heavensbee want Katniss to do more than defy the Capitol in the Games, they want her to “truly take on the role they designed

³⁴⁷ As it is the case of the ongoing wars in the middle east.

³⁴⁸ A form of “totalitarian scientific socialism” (Garriot *et aliae* 2014, 234).

[...]. The symbol of the revolution. The Mockingjay³⁴⁹. [...] become the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution” (position 114).

In the materialization of Coin and Heavensbee’s plan to use Katniss’ image to reach the other districts, it is worth noticing the similarity between the remake process that the tributes must go through³⁵⁰ and the makeover that Coin and Plutarch Heavensbee³⁵¹ put Katniss through in order to transform her into the symbol of the revolution: “They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances — as if that doesn’t sound horribly familiar — and all I have to do is play my part” (position 114). It is not by chance that, when asked to record a grandiose “propos” that should be broadcasted to all Panem, her prep team of stylists³⁵² is called upon to transform her into the Mockingjay:

I sit patiently through the rest of the paint job and don my costume, which now includes a bloody bandage over the scar on my arm to indicate I’ve been in recent combat. Venia affixes my mockingjay pin over my heart. I take up my bow and the sheath of normal arrows that Beetee made, knowing they would never let me walk around with the loaded ones. Then we’re out on the soundstage, where I seem to stand for hours while they adjust makeup and lighting and smoke levels. [...] I’m beckoned over to a monitor. They play back the last few minutes of taping and I watch the woman on the screen. Her body seems larger in stature, more imposing than mine. Her face smudged but sexy. Her brows black and drawn in an angle of defiance. Wisps of smoke — suggesting she has either just been extinguished or is about to burst into flames — rise from her clothes. I do not know who this person is. [...]

I’m hustled back to my place, and the smoke machine kicks in. Someone calls for quiet, the cameras start rolling, and I hear “Action!” So I hold my bow over my head and yell with all the anger I can muster, “People of Panem, we fight, we dare, we end our hunger for justice!” There’s dead silence on the set. (position 773 and 790)

³⁴⁹ Vis-à-vis the use of the mockingjay as a symbol: “The mockingjay is a species of bird that was created through the accidental mating of jabberjays and mockingbirds. Black in color with white patches on the undersides of their wings, Mockingjays are famous for their ability to mimic a wide range of sounds produced by humans. When Katniss Everdeen wore a pin bearing an image of this bird in the 74th Hunger Games, it angered the Capitol; the bird’s very existence was a result of a mistake on the Capitol’s part, and it represented a slight against them. This association with the bird later caused Katniss to be dubbed ‘The Mockingjay’, the symbol and leader of the Second Rebellion”. *The Hunger Games Wiki*, s.v. “Mockingjay (bird)”, accessed March 14, 2019, [https://thehungergames.fandom.com/wiki/Mockingjay_\(bird\)](https://thehungergames.fandom.com/wiki/Mockingjay_(bird)).

³⁵⁰ For a comprehensive description of the remake process that the tributes undergo, see: Collins 2008, 61-62.

³⁵¹ As we have seen in the other parts of this thesis, Plutarch Heavensbee is the resistance agent who infiltrates the Games as the new “Head Gamemaker”, in other words, the person responsible for planning the traps used in the arena during the Games.

³⁵² Who had been kidnapped to District 13.

There are several ideas condensed in this passage that I would like to highlight, ideas that bring us back to the war context of Klaus Klump but also distance us from it. For instance, when Katniss utters the battle cry, she echoes the exhortation: “The country is unfinished, like a sculpture. Look at its geography: it lacks terrain, this unfinished sculpture. The neighboring country invades to complete the sculpture: warriors-sculptors” (Tavares 2014, 9). The creation of this seductive and defiant feminine symbol can be interpreted as a variation of the aestheticization of war that in Tavares’ novel was achieved by the conflation of beauty related terms with warfare expressions: the ornamental and spectacular elements, such as Katniss’ imponent war costume, sexy makeup, or special effects, become indissociable from martial elements as the bloody bandage or the artificial wartime scenario. Consequentially, such symbol refers us back to Walter Benjamin’s affirmation “[a]ll efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war” (1999, 234). It reminds us that to mobilize the masses and the technical resources needed to advance Progress, it becomes necessary for political power to aestheticize war, providing “the artistic gratification of a sense of perception that has been changed by technology” (235).

So, while I would not consider *Mockingjay* a military sci-fi novel *tout court*³⁵³, after all its representations do not focus exclusively on the weapons used for war or on the role of military organizations, it indisputably sheds a varicolored light on the ties between aesthetics, war, and politics. I would argue that it produces a noteworthy game with Tavares’ “black dystopias”, as the characters of this novel represent, to some degree, a continuity of the shock experience that we have witnessed in *A Man: Klaus Klump* and *Joseph Walser’s Machine*. As we have seen in part I, the sheer number of stimuli that they are exposed to – especially visual stimuli related to various futuristic technologies and media – activates a defense mechanism which compromises the integrity of the contents of experience, anesthetizing their bodies. As we are seeing in our present analysis, Panem’s political powers take further advantage of this shock experience. They channel it via an aestheticized vision of war that (perversely) galvanizes people to fight and, in the process, produce economic and technological development. Such

³⁵³ Regarding the sub-genre of Military sci-fi, and specifically narratives that take place in the future, the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction refers that: “One of the principal imaginative stimuli to futuristic and scientific speculation has been the possibility of War (which see for an overview of this encyclopedia’s coverage of the broader theme), and the possibility that new Technology might transform war. This stimulus was particularly important during the period 1870-1914 and in the years following the revelation of the atom bomb in 1945”. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, s.v. “Future War”, accessed May 18, 2020, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/future_war.

aestheticization can only be accomplished by distorting all negative aspects of the reality of war and canceling the capacity for critical thinking³⁵⁴.

It is precisely in the process of aestheticization of war, I would argue, that Collins' novel starts shying away from the other two novels. The cinematic quality of the propaganda spot, which seeks to give Katniss a larger-than-life stature – a star-like stature would perhaps be more accurate – refer us to the indelible tie between cinema and war/politics. Resorting to Paul Virilio's vision to clarify this tie, in *War and Cinema* the author explores how representations of battle have been used across time as means for dominating the enemy as much as any explosive shell or artillery round. From this perspective, he tells us, war ceases to be solely a matter of physical destruction becoming rather a matter of dominating the enemy's spirit and will to do battle. It becomes a spectacle, acquiring a symbolical dimension³⁵⁵. Giving the increasing interlacing throughout the 20th century between war, the new visual arts³⁵⁶ and technical developments³⁵⁷, it does not come as a surprise that the ability of cinematic images to capture people's imagination becomes the ultimate "weapon of perception". It is no accident either that we should find a disconcerting parallelism between Hitler's propaganda machine, that through its filmic production³⁵⁸ turned Europe into a giant cinema screen³⁵⁹, and Coin's strategy to create the cinematic hero of the *Mockingjay*, counteracting Coriolanus Snow's propaganda machine.

This propaganda spot in *Mockingjay* makes a clear allusion to the way politics, war, and cinema were articulated in the mid-20th century. To the contemporary reader, finding such allusion in a postapocalyptic Panem may underline, I believe, a notion of continuity: to use war as a mechanism, from that moment onwards political powers started to integrate "filmmaking" into their techniques of governance. But the "dead silence" referred at the end of the passage, together with Haymitch's snarky remark following

³⁵⁴ The "goods of the Culture Industry", as Adorno would put it (1997, 16).

³⁵⁵ Using the authors' words: "War cannot detach itself from magical spectacle because the production of this spectacle is its goal: destroying the enemy is less a matter of capturing him than it is a matter of captivating him; it is a matter of inflicting upon him, before his death, the horror of death" (1989, 5).

³⁵⁶ A connection that is established in the pathway of the long historical connection between theater and war. See: Virilio 1989, 63.

³⁵⁷ Virilio notes that the rise of photographic and cinematic technologies in the waging of war point to a "conjunction between the power of the modern war machine, the plane and the new capabilities of observation machines: aerial photography, the cinematographic photogram" (71).

³⁵⁸ Leni Riefenstahl's films or the documentaries about Hitler's rallies would be good examples.

³⁵⁹ The so-called "*Lebensraum*" (120).

Katniss' war cry³⁶⁰, further complicates things. It shifts the events in the narrative, making us question the continuity that had just been established:

I slowly turn my back to the hospital and find Cressida, flanked by the insects, standing a couple of yards in front of me. Her manner's unrattled. Cool even. "Katniss," she says, "President Snow just had them air the bombing live. Then he made an appearance to say that this was his way of sending a message to the rebels. What about you? Would you like to tell the rebels anything?"

"Yes," I whisper. The red blinking light on one of the cameras catches my eye. I know I'm being recorded. "Yes," I say more forcefully. Everyone is drawing away from me — Gale, Cressida, the insects — giving me the stage. But I stay focused on the red light. "I want to tell the rebels that I am alive. That I'm right here in District Eight, where the Capitol has just bombed a hospital full of unarmed men, women, and children. There will be no survivors." The shock I've been feeling begins to give way to fury. "I want to tell people that if you think for one second the Capitol will treat us fairly if there's a cease-fire, you're deluding yourself. Because you know who they are and what they do." My hands go out automatically, as if to indicate the whole horror around me. "This is what they do! And we must fight back!"

I'm moving in toward the camera now, carried forward by my rage. "President Snow says he's sending us a message? Well, I have one for him. You can torture us and bomb us and burn our districts to the ground, but do you see that?" One of the cameras follows as I point to the planes burning on the roof of the warehouse across from us. The Capitol seal on a wing glows clearly through the flames. "Fire is catching!" I am shouting now, determined that he will not miss a word. "And if we burn, you burn with us!" (Collins 2010, positions 1075-1089)

The strategy of counteracting the Capitol's machine of spectacle through a propaganda spot filmed in a studio quickly proves to be ineffective, and so Haymitch and President Coin decide instead to send Katniss record her "propos" in problematic warfare scenarios in the districts. As we can read in the passage, this turns out to be the right decision. After witnessing the bombardment of a hospital full of injured rebels, Katniss delivers a knockout "performance", finally becoming the inflammatory symbol that unites the districts in the war against the Capitol. Right out of the bat this passage triggers a few questions: why would Collins include a failed attempt to create a propaganda spot in a studio? How should a contemporary reader interpret the contrast between the two propaganda spots? Finally, how should we interpret Katniss' ability to express herself in a live context in contrast with her inability to deliver a convincing performance in a studio?

³⁶⁰ "And that, my friends, is how a revolution dies" (Collins 2010, position 792).

One possible interpretation of the failed spot is that District 13, a vestige of the Dark Days that had remained hidden underground, represents an older way of thinking war and politics. In fact, the District's commanders initially privilege combat strategies much closer to the geopolitical vision predominant in pre-WW2 International Relationships and Defense Affairs than to our own present vision of war³⁶¹. The inefficiency of their first efforts, hence, reinforces the idea that the vision of war construed as an instrumental means available to the state as actor might still formally exist, but it has become inoperative. As Foucault refers apropos the biopolitical function of war:

No matter what philosophical-juridical theory may say, political power does not begin when the war ends. The organization and juridical structure of power does not begin when the war ends. [...] This does not, however, mean that society, the law, and the State are like armistices that put an end to wars, or that they are the products of definitive victories. Law is not pacification, for beneath the law, war continues to rage in all the mechanisms of power, even in the most regular. War is the motor behind institutions and order. In the smallest of its cogs, peace is waging a secret war. (2003, 50)

The aftermath of Panem's civil war, in contrast, is an evident nod to our contemporaneity, drawing our attention to the decay of the geopolitical paradigm alongside the "old disciplines operating in the time frame of a closed system" (Deleuze 1992, 4). The 70 years of Capitol dominance after the Dark Days leave little room for doubt that the "war effort" must now be focused on the control of the *bios* itself in its day-to-day, rather than on the safeguard of geographical frontiers or amplification of national territories. They show us how this focus shift has inverted Clausewitz's famous dictum, allowing us to better understand Coin's swift strategical adjustment: in our world as in Panem, politics have become the extension of war by other means³⁶². *Mutatis mutandis*, war has ceased to be a mere instrument, devolving into a framework of intelligibility from which political subjectivity arises³⁶³.

Against this background, how should we read the success of the second propaganda spot? How should one interpret the confluence in the "propos" of a

³⁶¹ As we have previously seen, the District is characterized by Katniss as a Totalitarian Scientific Socialism with noticeable resemblances to the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. See: Collins 2010, position 381.

³⁶² The famous dictum being "War is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means" (Clausewitz 1993, 77).

³⁶³ This notion of war is also explored by Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero in their article "Biopolitics of security in the 21st century: an introduction". See: Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008, 34 and 275.

filmmaking scene and an actual combat scenario, with even the film crew being composed of ex-members of the Capitol's army?³⁶⁴ Given that this is a symbolically charged and nuanced passage, we will need to analyze it more closely. On a broader reading, the juxtaposition of the martial sphere and the sphere of the spectacle suggests us that it is through television that political powers use war to effectively exert their control over biological bodies. The development of smaller and affordable TV sets, provides political powers with a weapon even more powerful than movie theaters, reflecting the indivisible relationship between visual media, war, and technical progress from the mid-20th century onwards. It extends the control of perception to a far greater number of people, entering households everywhere.

If we consider that Katniss delivers a convincing performance only because she experiences the shock of an actual war scenario, the passage also implies that the model of reality TV made popular in the last decades³⁶⁵ holds a special importance. The massive response of the districts of Panem is indicative that a seemingly genuine Katniss enables viewers to create a deep emotional identification that would have been impossible with the larger-than-life figure of the studio spot. In the path of dystopias like *Battle Royale* (2000) or *Lord of the Flies* (1954)³⁶⁶, we find underlined here the dangerous difference between the cinematic/theatrical experience, in which the suspension of disbelief fades away once viewers exit the premises of the theater, and the television experience, in which viewers are daily bombarded with warfare images in reality shows, newscasts or action movies³⁶⁷. Such perverse reproduction of war not only makes the task of differentiating reality from fiction almost impossible, as it also intensifies the viewer's own delight of

³⁶⁴ I am referring specifically the way the "insects" flank Cressida, the red blinking light of the camera, or the different shooting angles.

³⁶⁵ Reality television came to prominence in the early 1990's with "Real World" and the early 2000's with the global successes of the series *Survivor*, *Idols*, and *Big Brother*, all of which became global franchises.

³⁶⁶ In *Lord of the Flies*, it is an adult, a naval officer, who rescues a pack of boys who are marooned on an island and who have devolved into brutal behavior. The officer arrives just in time to "re-civilize" the errant youths with his comment to protagonist Ralph: "I should have thought that a pack of British boys – you're all British, aren't you? – would have been able to put up a better show than that" (1954, 242). In *Battle Royale*, the youngling rebel against the adult-designed game in which youths must fight to the death. While several youths manage to escape, the narrative's somewhat open-ended conclusion suggests that the horrors will continue beyond the boundaries of plot. See: Fukasaku, 2000. *The Hunger Games* invokes these important plots, but advances them by showing Katniss, as an adolescent, successfully dismantling the Capitol - with her statements, actions, and finally her own narrative, as a way to reconcile, amplify, and complicate the adolescent – adult tensions within herself.

³⁶⁷ I have also mentioned previously that reality shows and reality television in general are not just instruments of representation: before the increasing incapacity of the traditional media institutions to deliver an orderly appearance to the chaos of everyday life, reality TV has become one vibrant source of interpretative models, principles, and topics through which the viewer may build his own identity and structure his life. See: Codeluppi 2007, 57.

the violent spectacle being performed. It immerses him in a form of mesmerizing entertainment that anesthetizes emotions and blocks any kind of critical thinking. As I shall demonstrate further ahead, this representation of war turns the cinematic effect of the scenography of war into a technical effect deprived of substance³⁶⁸. As a result, it creates dazed citizen-soldiers in an everyday life that vanishes into war, whilst making war as we know it vanish from everyday life.

At this point a conundrum inevitably arises. From the moment Katniss utters “Fire is catching!” she stops being just an insecure girl from an underprivileged district and becomes the Mockingjay, the fiery and spectacular symbol of the rebellion. As she grows into her role throughout the narrative, an argument could be made that she accepts the part that was written for her by Plutarch Heavensbee and Alma Coin. In other words, she reinforces the idea that teenagers are inexorably influenced by the images of violence they watch on TV, integrating in their worldview the narratives and aesthetics such images weave. So, in the eyes of the reader, how is Katniss’ propaganda spot any different from the Hunger Games, or from President Snow’s “propos”? Does it not produce a distorted representation of war that puts the bodies at the service of political powers? After all, just as the citizens watch the Games for fun, readers could devour the novels just for entertainment, consuming the spectacles of war and violence inside the text as an additional spectacle...

Taking into consideration the action-packed cinematic adaptation of the trilogy, it would be difficult to deny that *The Hunger Games* also reflect a distortion of the war experience. Still, a *contrario senso* of what perhaps the film would lead us to believe³⁶⁹, Katniss is far from being a puppet in the hands of the Capitol and of District 13. I would contend that she is fully aware of the multiple narratives in which she is participating and, moreover, knows the power of employing those narratives to have a (political) voice³⁷⁰. In effect, there is a consistent preoccupation on her part to avoid adhering to Alma Coin’s war rhetoric, which seeks to eliminate dissension and unequivocally unite the rebel districts against the Capitol and its allies. This is particularly noticeable in the episode in which the rebel forces take a military base in District 2:

³⁶⁸ On the representation of war and its cinematic/technical effects, see: Virilio 1989, 140.

³⁶⁹ This may have to do with the fact that the movie is more action oriented, excluding most of the characters’ mental life, while the book grants us access to Katniss’ thought process and, most of the time, includes us in her decision making.

³⁷⁰ As Canavan and Petrovic rightly note, Katniss manages four, at times conflicting, narratives in the novel: the role of the strong daughter and sister, the star-crossed lover, the tribute, and finally the Mockingjay. See: Canavan and Petrovic 2014, 47.

[...] “We blew up your mine. You burned my district to the ground. We’ve got every reason to kill each other. So do it. Make the Capitol happy. I’m done killing their slaves for them.” I drop my bow on the ground and give it a nudge with my boot. It slides across the stone and comes to rest at his knees. “I’m not their slave,” the man mutters. “I am,” I say. “That’s why I killed Cato . . . and he killed Thresh . . . and he killed Clove . . . and she tried to kill me. It just goes around and around, and who wins? Not us. Not the districts. Always the Capitol. But I’m tired of being a piece in their Games.” [...]

“When I saw that mountain fall tonight, I thought . . . they’ve done it again. Got me to kill you — the people in the districts. But why did I do it? District Twelve and District Two have no fight except the one the Capitol gave us. [...]

“Who is the enemy?” whispers Haymitch. “These people”— I indicate the wounded bodies on the square — “are not your enemy!” I whip back around to the train station. “The rebels are not your enemy! We all have one enemy, and it’s the Capitol! This is our chance to put an end to their power, but we need every district person to do it!” The cameras are tight on me as I reach out my hands to the man, to the wounded, to the reluctant rebels across Panem. “Please! Join us!” My words hang in the air. I look to the screen, hoping to see them recording some wave of reconciliation going through the crowd. (Collins 2010, position 2288)

On the verge of defeating the forces barricaded in the base, Katniss engages in a fleeting discussion with one of her “adversaries”, questioning him about the meaning and reasons behind the conflict. Despite her reconciliatory speech, she fails to achieve some sort of truce, learning later that Alma Coin ordered the complete obliteration of the base. At a first glance, this episode seems to just express a difference between Coin’s and Katniss’ perceptions of war. In my perspective, however, it achieves so much more. It demonstrates a homodiegetic – or in-world level – agency on the part of Katniss that is essential to the creation of her own genuine (political) identity despite the multiple characters and narratives that are imposed upon her. In effect, the creation of identity through narrative is important not only to Katniss but also to her readers. As Jeffrey S. Kaplan and Judith A. Hayn explain in their work about the importance of teaching Young Adult literature:

Questions about self-identity and self-discovery continue to underlie narratives for teens, and no matter the literary style or genre, young people often find comfort and solace in engaging reads that attempt to define their journey toward self-understanding. (2012, 20)

Katniss' narrative building proves to be crucial not just for the progression of the action but also for the reflection about agency that we have within the novel. Her struggle to develop a personal story seems to resonate with contemporary readers, allowing them to consider the difficulties of trying to live outside a mediated or unscripted reality. Indeed, her sinuous journey into adulthood appears to project into the future the very topical concern that our identities might already be irretrievably shaped by communication media and political powers³⁷¹. But, as we shall see in the following sections, the girl on fire also offers a compelling example of how we can navigate the countless narratives of war and violence that enter our lives through action movies, newscasts, or reality shows.

FROM A WAR TO A POLICING OF IMAGES: REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE CONCLUSION OF
MOCKINGJAY

I would like to elaborate on the game-changing moment that occurs in the aftermath of the rebel's victory: the final encounter between Katniss and Coriolanus Snow. Despite the enmity between the two characters, their final meeting could be described as an intimate and frank conversation not only about the air raid that determined the rebel's victory – and caused Prim's death – but also about the nature of war in general:

“However, I must concede it was a masterful move on Coin's part. The idea that I was bombing our own helpless children instantly snapped whatever frail allegiance my people still felt to me. There was no real resistance after that. Did you know it aired live? You can see Plutarch's hand there. And in the parachutes. Well, it's that sort of thinking that you look for in a Head Gamemaker, isn't it?” Snow dabs the corners of his mouth. “I'm sure he wasn't gunning for your sister, but these things happen.” [...] /

“My failure,” says Snow, “was being so slow to grasp Coin's plan. To let the Capitol and districts destroy one another, and then step in to take power with Thirteen barely scratched. Make no mistake, she was intending to take my place

³⁷¹ Canavan and Petrovic draw attention to the fact that, at various times in the novel, Katniss “consciously makes choices to further these narratives, using them to leverage the audience of the Hunger Games into supporting her. These narratives [...] while powerful tools that help Katniss survive the Hunger Games, also severely limit her agency in terms of her ability to end her participation in a given role. Because Katniss has chosen the narrative of the strong and mysterious tribute, she cannot allow herself to show weakness when she is in front of the camera” (2014, 47).

right from the beginning. I shouldn't be surprised. After all, it was Thirteen that started the rebellion that led to the Dark Days, and then abandoned the rest of the districts when the tide turned against it. But I wasn't watching Coin. I was watching you, Mockingjay. And you were watching me. I'm afraid we have both been played for fools". (Collins 2010, position 3793)

Throughout the encounter Katniss voices the readers' questions, bluntly asking Snow if he was cruel enough to sacrifice his own troops in the attack. To her and our surprise, the ousted president seems to sincerely deny any responsibility on the event, admitting that even he did not know who was controlling the Capitol's hovercraft that dropped the bombs. His vast experience of using mediatic manipulation allows him, nonetheless, to extrapolate that such a decisive televised event in the war was no more than a deception maneuver brilliantly conceived by Coin to undermine his leadership. Seeing that neither Katniss nor we can fully trust Snow – regardless of his sound reasoning –, we are left deprived of answers and mentally juggling with all the different possibilities.

So, why would Collins include this encounter at the end of the narrative? I would argue that the author's decision not to provide an omniscient view to the readers at this point in the narrative serves a very specific purpose. The introduction of conflicting or hypothetical versions not only encourage us to actively reflect about the true contours of Panem's civil war, establishing a dialogue with the protagonist, but urges us to likewise look critically at the representations of war/conflicts of our contemporary media. If we consider the war between the districts and, for instance, the "War on Terror", they both point to the fact that the over-exposition of live transmissions of war³⁷² allows political-military powers to bring war into everyday life³⁷³. Unsurprisingly, there are clear parallels in terms of mediatic representation between this "unofficial war" – as well as other undeclared wars³⁷⁴ – and Collins' fictional war. Such parallels show us that, far from relying on past tactics of military secrecy, political-military powers use strategical

³⁷² As it is the case of the final raid in front of Snow's mansion, aired live for all Panem to watch.

³⁷³ The attacks on New York (2001), Madrid (2004) or London (2005) being perhaps the most famous examples of how war is brought, figuratively and symbolically, to the heart of the city.

³⁷⁴ When I say "unofficial war" I am mostly thinking about the highly mediatized conflicts in which there was not a sanctioned and official declaration of war, i.e., a formal act by which one state goes to war against another. Among a sea of other examples, the Iraq War (2003), during which both FOX News and the Iraqi Minister of information notoriously spread misinformation regarding the conflict, the Syrian Civil War (2011) and its contrasting images to prove/disprove the use of Chlorine gas, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (1948), with pro-Israeli media coverage always trying to put a "human face" to the Israeli military and police forces. See: *Atlantic* 2018; *Guardian* 2014b; and *Guardian* 2019b.

broadcasts and deceitful images to transform passive viewers into a mass of “survival spectators”, as Virilio would say, that participates in the conflict (1989, 130).

Katniss’ final encounter with Snow makes us come to terms with the reality that wars are now won or lost in the mediatic battle ground, where truth is often one of the first casualties³⁷⁵. But I would not consider this the defining trait of the new kind of warfare we have been exploring. As we can read in the second paragraph of the passage, Snow tells Katniss he is convinced that the mediatic representations of war – crystallized in the form of the Mockingjay – were a mere decoy devised by Coin. All of Snow’s extrapolations, that until now could only be taken at face value, will be later confirmed by Coin herself and her suggestion of organizing one final Hunger Games with tributes from the Capitol (Collins 2010, position 3917). Unaware of her old nemesis’ valuable insights, Coin inadvertently drops the mask of her project to (re)unite Panem, allowing Katniss to glimpse her ambition of forming a police state – perhaps even worse than that of Snow – where she could use her sovereignty to guarantee the peace, even if it meant ignoring all juridical rules. As far as the mechanism of exception is concerned, the corollary of this revelation is that Snow and Coin are opposite sides of the same coin. Whether we talk about technocratic governments or totalitarian regimes, the police state (dubbed as a “civil war”) has become the model of real political organization and of real political action itself³⁷⁶. As Agamben affirms on *Means without end: notes on politics*:

Although it seems to bring national identities back to life, this global movement actually embodies a tendency toward the constitution of a kind of supranational police state, in which the norms of international law are tacitly abrogated one after the other. Not only has no war officially been declared in many years (confirming

³⁷⁵ Using Agamben words vis-a-vis the Romanian revolution of 1989: “Because there the secret police had conspired against itself in order to overthrow the old spectacle-concentrated regime while television showed, nakedly and without false modesty, the real political function of the media. [...] For the first time in the history of humankind, corpses that had just been buried or lined up on the morgue's tables were hastily exhumed and tortured in order to simulate, in front of the video cameras, the genocide that legitimized the new regime. What the entire world was watching live on television, thinking it was the real truth, was in reality the absolute nontruth; and, although the falsification appeared to be sometimes quite obvious, it was nevertheless legitimized as true by the media's world system, so that it would be clear that the true was, by now, nothing more than a moment within the necessary movement of the false. In this way, truth and falsity became indistinguishable from each other [...]” (2000, 80-81).

³⁷⁶ The notion that Snow and his “accomplices” (Collins 2010, position 3917) can be judged and sentenced as criminals shows that the principle *par in parem non habet iurisdictionem*, which guaranteed that a war against an enemy who was granted equal dignity would take place according to precise regulations – one of which was a sharp distinction between the army and the civilian population (Agamben 2000, 106) – is suspended. In the context of these mediatic wars, it is therefore possible (and legal) to eliminate the enemy through a “police operation” (Agamben 2000, 106), for such an operation is not obliged to respect any juridical rule and can thus make no distinctions between the civilian population and soldiers, as well as between the people and their criminal sovereign.

Carl Schmitt's prophecy according to which every war in our time has become a civil war), but even the outright invasion of a sovereign state can now be presented as an act of internal jurisdiction. (2000, 85)

In the light of all of this, how should we interpret Katniss' decision to execute Coin instead of Snow at the end of the novel? Although it becomes clear that Katniss has realized Snow's hypotheses were correct, she does not give us an explicit reason for the last-minute change of heart...³⁷⁷ From a personal perspective, there is a very straightforward interpretation: Coin's assassination is a revenge for Prim's death in the raid. From a political viewpoint, however, we must remember that *Mockingjay* was written in the aftershock of the 9/11 attacks. This political act, hence, is indelibly tied to the concerns about the new global dynamics' resultant from the attacks and the ensuing "Global War on Terrorism". Such concerns, looking back, were completely warranted. The ten years that have passed since the original publication of *Mockingjay* give readers in 2020 a critical vantagepoint from where they can see the lasting impact the past decades had on the traditional notions of "war" or "frontier": the novel's war representations suggest that while past political wars revolved about territories and circumscribed States defending their borders³⁷⁸, from the 9/11 attacks onwards we see emerge a "Babel-like confusion"³⁷⁹ between terrorist civil wars – i.e., wars against civilians since most casualties are civilian rather than military – and international wars. This becomes especially evident if we recall, for example, that the highly mediatized non-military attacks of Madrid, London, or New York had a corresponding, also highly mediatized, military response from the U.S. and its allies. *Mockingjay*'s fictional world, thus, alludes to the idea that the two wars have become progressively confounded, to the point of often being indistinguishable. In this process, military-political classes have evolved into a sort of supranational police that suspends the norms of international law to restore peace, while the entertainment television of once has been turned into a

³⁷⁷ The passage in which Katniss changes the direction of her aim is quite cryptical: "I feel the bow purring in my hand. Reach back and grasp the arrow. Position it, aim at the rose, but watch his face. He coughs and a bloody dribble runs down his chin. His tongue flicks over his puffy lips. I search his eyes for the slightest sign of anything, fear, remorse, anger. But there's only the same look of amusement that ended our last conversation. It's as if he's speaking the words again. "Oh, my dear Miss Everdeen. I thought we had agreed not to lie to each other." He's right. We did. The point of my arrow shifts upward. I release the string. And President Coin collapses over the side of the balcony and plunges to the ground. Dead" (Collins 2010, position 3962).

³⁷⁸ Otherwise, they would be considered civil wars.

³⁷⁹ For a more comprehensive analysis of the indistinction between terrorist civil wars and international wars, see: Virilio and Lotringer 2008, 12.

global tele-surveillance of social or asocial behavior, of those ‘attitudes’ which advertising has worked so hard to engineer. Beyond the widely remarked birth of the CNN-Pentagon pool, large-scale satellite optics officially heralds the over-exposure of the nations to the ‘gaze of the All-High’, that Cyclops untroubled by any scruple. (Virilio 1999, 22)

Bearing in mind the election for political offices of entertainment personalities such as Donald Trump or Arnold Schwarzenegger, and the rise to power of militaristic leaders like Kim Jong-un or Jair Bolsonaro, one could safely say that the bonds between media, war and politics are tighter than ever. When to this we add the proliferation of fake news and war images thru mobile phones, laptops, or tablets, then the novel’s final message is dauntingly up to date³⁸⁰: if we are to avoid a replay of Panem’s war games, it is vital that we keep Katniss’ impeccable long-range vision. But we must be attentive to correctly read this message. Despite what its adaptation in the blockbuster movie might lead us to believe³⁸¹, Katniss’ perfect shoot should not be interpreted just as a grandiose gesture that heroically shifts the fate of the country. In our perspective, it refers us to the much more “modest” act of becoming a political agent and a writer of one’s own narrative in a world where perception and social relationships are irrevocably shaped by a policing of images.

KATNISS’ RETURN HOME: THE UNSPOKEN WORDS AND THE ROLE OF THE READER

We can now better understand the political/aesthetical significance of Katniss’ choice to weave the “Mockingjay narrative”³⁸². As a hybrid between the Capitol’s jabberjay³⁸³ and the naturally occurring mockingbirds, the mockingjay’s ability to repeat and alter a given musical melody functions like Katniss’ modes of storytelling: both narratively signify

³⁸⁰ Conveyed quite appropriately through an optic metaphor.

³⁸¹ I am referring to *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2* (2015), directed by Francis Lawrence and produced by Lionsgate Films.

³⁸² A narrative that, like almost all the other in-world narratives, was forced unto her.

³⁸³ The jabberjay was one of the innumerable scientific experiments conducted by the Capitol during the civil war – the so-called “mutations”. It was a special bird that had the ability to memorize and repeat whole human conversations. As it is described in the first book of the trilogy: “They were homing birds, exclusively male, that were released into regions where the Capitol’s enemies were known to be hiding. After the birds gathered words, they’d fly back to centers to be recorded” (Collins 2008, 42-43).

new meaning by transgressing previous, hegemonic forms³⁸⁴. But this choice is important not only at a homodiegetic level. As we have observed, nowhere in the narrative do we have explicitly confirmed Katniss' motives for assassinating Coin, nor that was Coin who ordered the air raid, and I believe these omissions are not accidental. Collins skillfully writes these scenes so that Katniss withholds the reasoning behind her decision from readers³⁸⁵. Through the protagonist's silence, the author encourages us to create our own explanation of her motives using as instruments the previously established ideas developed both inside and outside of the text. In a sense, she grants us an active involvement in the narrative, enabling us to embark in a journey of growth and development similar to that of Katniss – our own *Entwicklungsroman* –, with our share of small victories and missteps along the way. As Ann Childs so accurately puts it, Collins' novels allow us to fail:

By presenting subtle narratives about power and oppression instead of delivering an explicit message ordering readers to sympathize with a list of specifically named oppressed groups, Collins lets the readership decide their own opinions on Othering, a radical move considering the genre's propensity towards didacticism. After all, one of the burdens of writing adolescent dystopia is that authors end up with a tendency to “heavily control their narratives in ways that fail to repose trust in implied young readers to think for themselves”. Collins, however, does not fall into this trap, but allows readers to think for themselves. (2014, 122)

We could thus assert that *Mockingjay* displays a refined awareness of the political use of war. It tries to engage contemporary readers in this awareness by providing nuanced representations of the transformations that the notion of war – in its relationship with technology and politics – has been through in the last decades. More significantly, it gives them the chance to locate their bodies within the relationships of power generated by war. In effect, Katniss' metamorphosis into the Mockingjay symbol makes her a reflection of what Donna Haraway would call our “cyborg” or “hybrid” condition: she becomes a fiction that can help us map our social and bodily reality. Not only this, she devolves into a condensed image of both imagination and material reality that opens the possibility of historical transformation. As the “illegitimate” daughter of militarism and patriarchal

³⁸⁴ For a closer examination of Katniss' storytelling and its function, see: Tyler 2014, 31.

³⁸⁵ As Ann Childs notes, the voting that determines the realization of one final hunger games would be another scene in which Katniss' reasoning is omitted to the reader, hence allowing the reader to reflect independently and, to some capacity, “understand their identities” (2014, 117).

capitalism (Haraway 1991, 152), Katniss mirrors unmistakably the shortcomings of our present political reality. But she also poses an imaginative alternative to start building our political identities in the future, reminding us that although we have all been profoundly damaged in our wars, we can regenerate ourselves and our “regrown limbs can be monstrous, duplicated, potent” (180).

Collins’ final entry of the trilogy then definitely strays away from the image of the popular YA novel that eschews political debate, topical issues, and significant areas of conflict, assuming that its readers are only attracted to fashion and fun. One could even say that it represents the antithesis of such novels, as it shares Adorno’s concern that mass/popular culture enslaves its consumers by naturalizing the dominant ideology. Despite the unquestionably aesthetic and narrative differences, it reveals to have a negative force like that of *A Man: Klaus Klump*, and *Joseph Walser’s Machine*. Not only does it deconstruct the usual conformist/escapist function of popular YA novels, which detracts readers from playing an active part in shaping their societies, but it celebrates the coming to creativity and power that takes place during teenage years. As Kimberley Reynolds notes in *Radical Children’s Literature*, the characters in these “negative” YA novels prove to be ethical and politically engaged when confronted by disenchantments and challenges, and the texts hold out a belief that change is necessary and, more importantly, possible: “In celebratory adolescent fiction, participating in planned, goal-orientated action provides an aesthetic of transformation that, in contemporary culture, substitutes for the kinds of culturally agreed rites of passage that formerly signaled maturity. It is often accompanied by changes in lifestyle – from how and where characters live to how they dress and with whom they associate” (2007, 82).

The Epilogue of the novel further reinforces our argument of considering *Mockingjay*³⁸⁶ a radical literary work. Conversely, it also makes it harder for us to interpret what imaginative alternative future could Katniss propose:

They play in the Meadow. The dancing girl with the dark hair and blue eyes. The boy with blond curls and gray eyes, struggling to keep up with her on his chubby toddler legs. It took five, ten, fifteen years for me to agree. But Peeta wanted them so badly. [...]

My children, who don’t know they play on a graveyard.

Peeta says it will be okay. We have each other. And the book. We can make them understand in a way that will make them braver. But one day I’ll have

³⁸⁶ And the other two novels as well.

to explain about my nightmares. Why they came. Why they won't ever really go away. I'll tell them how I survive it. [...] That's when I make a list in my head of every act of goodness I've seen someone do. It's like a game. Repetitive. Even a little tedious after more than twenty years. (Collins 2010, position 4139)

Considering the spectacular nature of the events that we have examined so far, this anticlimactic ending is surely baffling. Yet, it is even more striking the fact that, while those events were narrated primarily in the present tense, the Epilogue suggests that they represent a record of Katniss' memories. So, readers may choose one of two interpretations: the narrator of the trilogy is indeed a "teenage Katniss" or, instead, it is an "adult Katniss" who chooses to retell her story by allowing herself to experience long-ago events as if they were occurring in the present moment. It is certainly no accident that Collins has left this relevant matter open for interpretation, and this authorship choice strengthens Elizabeth Tyler's argument that epilogues – or post-narrative content in general – are of an unsuspected importance in radical YA novels. If we consider the weighty issues and the responsibility of the adolescent characters for the fates of the worlds they inhabit, it becomes clearer that epilogues allow readers (especially young adults) to "negotiate, reconcile, or amplify tensions between adult authorship, adolescent narratives, and adult retrospection, as well as the tensions between artificiality and authenticity of the voices and experiences represented" (Tyler 2014, 25).

One inconsistency arises here at the end of the analysis: if my reading of Coin's assassination is correct, if this is an act that encourages readers to search or regain political agency, what to make of Katniss' return home to an apparently depoliticized family life? After all, this abdication of her mediatic role as the Mockingjay seems to contradict the revolutionary image that was built around her throughout the trilogy, and could even be read as a final message regarding the hopelessness of the political reality in western contemporaneity... I believe that Katniss' return to a more personal, intimate sphere does not equate to a rejection of the political sphere on her part, nor that *Mockingjay*' ends in a negative note. As I have sought to demonstrate throughout the analysis of the novel, civil war (or should we say Police States) does not originate in the *oikos*. It is not a "war within the family" but forms part of a device that functions like the state of exception, marking the "threshold through which the unpolitical is politicized and the political is 'economized'" (Agamben 2015, 22). So, what happens when civil war does no longer lead to a true politicization of the *oikos*? Or, rather, when civil war is continuously used by political powers to take control of the private sphere of life? It is this aspect of war

that Collins draws our attention to: highly mediatized wars, in which images have the function of policing identities and structure social relationships, do not create real social/political bonds. On the contrary, they dissolve them. The American author warns us precisely that this mechanism of war produces an immense mass of singularities that are no longer characterized either by any social identity or by any real condition of belonging. Through *Mockingjay* she paints a vivid image of a country that could be ours in the future, where the multitude has been completely erased from political life – in spite its high visibility on screen –, and all that is left is an “empty people” governed by deceitful political representatives.

Still, the protagonist’s apparent removal from the political sphere should not be read as an admission of defeat. I propose a different reading: Katniss concedes that civil war will always remain dormant and potentially active in the interstices of society, but she can still choose her battles. Calling to mind the citizens of Nakōnē, her return home suggests that we ought to remove civil war from behind its smokescreens of images, bringing it back into the field of vision of our daily and political experiences. Concurrently, it also underscores the need to (re)build a true sphere of the *oikos*, rehabilitating the private realm of our lives so that we can create new and genuine bonds. Ultimately, her choice refers us to the lasting impact that works of art may have on future generations, helping them remember that the *oikos* and the *polis* are the extremes keeping society’s field of forces cohesive. Possibly more than just remember, *Mockingjay* and other radical novels may allow younger generations to locate themselves inside that field of forces, imaginatively transforming it from within... even though this might not translate into an act of epic proportions (as we would perhaps expect) but rather into the simple gesture of observing the world without the filter of technology or the screens of war³⁸⁷.

³⁸⁷ The award-winning documentary *Poster Girl* (2010), directed by Sarah Nesson, provides us an interesting intertextuality in this regard. The short film follows the return home of the 20-year-old veteran Robyn Murray, after being injured in combat during a mission in Iraq. Having to deal with PTSD and finding her way back into “normal society”, there are perhaps two things that stand out: Robyn admits that she had a very naïve image of war and the military, being overly enthusiastic during her recruitment process only to find out that her position in “Civil affairs” did not mean that she could really help people in Iraq. Although she only says that her positive perspective of the U.S. army derives from belonging to a family with a strong military tradition, we would add that both films and TV newscasts have helped shape such perspective. Secondly, perhaps even more meaningfully, she turns to art to try to regain meaning in her life after the traumatic experience. With the shreds of her combat uniforms and the paper of her instruction manuals, she crafts pastiche busts of her torso. In other words, she creates pieces of art that truly embody the suffering of her war experience, and that are able to counteract the aestheticized representation of military women that the cover of *War* magazine tried to create using her image. See: Nesson, 2010; see also appendix 7.

CHAPTER 11 – THE MANY BODIES IN *NEXHUMAN*

Some day, ' said Smee, 'the clock will run down, and then he'll get you.' Hook wetted his dry lips. 'Aye,' he said, 'that's the fear that haunts me.

J. M. Barrie, Peter Pan

THE DISCARDABLE BODY: REPRESENTATIONS OF DISPOSABILITY AND VIOLENCE IN A FUTURE MEGACITY (PETER PAYNE'S MACHINE?)

We now enter the novel that concludes this third part: Francesco Verso's *Nexhuman*. We have seen that Tavares' *A Man: Klaus Klump* shared its fictional universe with *Joseph Walser's Machine*, drawing our attention to the effects of a politics that resorted to the manipulation of technologies, either through war or disciplinary institutions, to shape the bodies of the characters. In the transition from one novel to the other, however, we have noticed the dislocation of the action from a time of war to a time of peace, a change indispensable to introduce a different – more complex – perspective on the biopolitical mechanisms at work in Tavares' dystopia. Accordingly, if we considered that *Mockingjay* reverberated directly with *A Man: Klaus Klump*, presenting several aspects that allowed us to trace a continuation of the notion of war, Verso's novel presents several traits that bring it closer and distance it from *Joseph Walser's Machine*. While it does not exactly constitute an extension of *The Hunger Games'* fictional universe, it nonetheless displays characters and scenarios akin to those of Collins that help us see the way political-economic powers use cutting-edge technologies to shape or destroy the bodies in times of "peace".

The action of the novel takes place in the future, between the years 2040-2055, spanning three different stages of the protagonist's life: "Adolescence – 2040 Ce", "Youth – 2045 Ce" and "Adulthood – 2055 Ce" (Verso 2018, 2, 32 and 112). In what could be considered a *Bildungsroman manqué*, we follow the first-person narrative of Peter Payne³⁸⁸, from the time he was a 15-year-old boy living with his mother and brother in the slum of the megacity, till his sorrowful adult life. The opening of the novel provides

³⁸⁸ In a clear intertextual reference and homophone play with the name of J.M. Barrie's character, Peter Pan. See: Barrie, 2015.

us a vivid and very elucidative description of Peter's world, already hinting the arduous path the character will have to trail throughout his failed coming of age:

Kathal Hill is one of the places where I spend my days rummaging through the piles of rubbish. It makes my fingertips so tired I can no longer feel them and I often have to stop and rest. [...] /

Stuffing the binoculars into my bag, I get out of the chair and limp along a muddy path lined with piles of televisions and the shells of computers with smashed monitors and blackened circuit boards. The path leads into a cloud of smoke and ash, lit only by green and amber lights.

The smoke is not the product of a single bonfire. It rises from a fiery belt in the distance, where dozens of hazy figures move and gesticulate in the acrid cloud. We are the Kathal Hill trashformers. Some are raking through the materials with their bare hands, some are sifting through the rubbish, others are stoking and feeding the flames with anything they can't sell. [...] /

The air bears the stench of the chemicals that will later rain down—if not on us, maybe to the north, on the people in Cali Nova. If the Tuwim decides to blow that way ... I use my t-shirt to cover my face and walk over to Rasha. He is a kid like me, though slightly less skinny, and he likes the fires. He wears a different turban every day, which he partially unwraps to cover his nose and mouth. (3-4)

Like Joseph Walser, Peter is also partially turned into machine, having to adopt a prosthetic arm and leg after losing his limbs to a garbage-chopping machine³⁸⁹. But his transformation points us to a very different reality from that of Walser. We are no longer dealing with the disciplinary power of institutions like the factory or the prison, and Peter does not live in the industrial city, where individuals are turned into an “an unpredictable and non-animalistic animal, an organism without instability” (Tavares 2012, 16). Specially taking into consideration that he spends his days between piles of rubbish, and his prosthetic limbs are made from garbage, he rather refers us to a post-industrial reality. Resonating with many of the characters from *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*³⁹⁰, not only does he live in a world overflowing with kipple³⁹¹ but he is literally turned into

³⁸⁹ An UCU (short for Urban Cleaning Units), which is to say, automated bins that “move any product that appears to be resaleable in some way to the storage sites” (Verso 2018, 5).

³⁹⁰ *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (2008) is a science fiction novel by American writer Philip K. Dick. The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic San Francisco, where Earth's life has been greatly damaged by a nuclear global war, leaving most animal species endangered or extinct. The main plot follows Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter who is tasked with killing six escaped Nexus-6 model androids, while a secondary plot follows John Isidore, a man of sub-par IQ who aids the fugitive androids.

³⁹¹ An expression used to designate garbage (in the Italian original, “*patta*”) that is borrowed from Dick's novel. In this world it has become illegal to send or sell rubbish without the city council's approval, and recycled goods have become integrated into the new economic and social order of “reconsumerism” (5).

disposable garbage. We can thus argue that this fictional space refers us to the wearing out effects that the post-industrial condition has on the social and individual bodies. As Giuliana Bruno refers, the postindustrial decay is an effect of the acceleration of the internal time of process proper to post-industrialism: “the system works only if waste is produced. The continuous expulsion of waste is an indexical sign of the well-functioning apparatus: waste represents its production, movement, and development at increasing speed. Postindustrialism recycles: therefore it needs its waste” (1987, 64).

As in Philip K. Dick’s novel, scientific development in *Nexhuman* does not lead to an ideal and aseptic technological order in the future. Far from merely reproducing contemporary optimistic visions of flying cars and ultra-technological buildings, the novel also reflects an aesthetics of decay that uncovers the dark role that technology may play in the process of disintegration of society. In effect, the fictional megacity of Verso situates slums such as Kathal Hill or Cali Nova right next to the high-tech and wealthy neighborhoods of Rizoma or the Green Towers³⁹², and thus can be interpreted as an imaginative extension of today’s megalopolis, as well as of the social order resultant of rampant (and unchecked) neoliberal ideologies. Peter Payne and the other characters further reinforce this idea: in the image of the android replicants that populate Dick’s futuristic L.A.³⁹³, they are turned into living disposable objects among lifeless garbage. They become literal representations of how the accelerated decrepitude produced by ever faster consumeristic, waste and recycling tendencies, can profoundly and irretrievably change the human body and social-economic relationships.

Not surprisingly, the contemporary reader might sense that there is something strangely familiar in this future where people literally walk on and live among garbage. Indeed, I would contend the book’s hyperbolic representations evoke images of the “favelas” right next to rich fenced communities of Rio de Janeiro, or of the slums in

³⁹² See appendix 8.

³⁹³ That are coincidentally called “nexus”, an element that creates a further connection to Philip K. Dick’s work seeing that the androids in Verso’s novel are called “nexhuman” (14).

countries like South Africa, India, or China abreast with ultra-modern skyscrapers³⁹⁴. In doing so, they potentiate a reflection on the steep inequalities produced by the unbridled development of consumerism, the increasing privatization of space and unrestrained expansion of megacities around the globe. So, it should not come as a shock either that such representations are laden with scenes of violence:

Charlie takes aim at his victim, shuriken in hand. In a blur, he whips his arm forward and lets it fly. The pointed star cuts through the night air and sinks with a hiss into the victim's shoulder. It penetrates the skin and stops, sticking straight up: a metal object embedded in another sheet of metal. Eddies of plastic and twisters of paper make it hard to see, but when the victim falls to the ground, caught in the glow of the moon, I can make out that it is a woman. More shining blades cut into her sides, back, and thighs. She lifts her head and begs for mercy. 'What do you want from me? Stop it, please ...' [...] /

'Don't talk shit. You're garbage. You have no right to last requests,' Charlie says.

Still, she makes one last attempt to escape the inevitable. 'I have friends in Rizoma. Believe me, I'm worth more alive.' She is sobbing, and her eyes are overflowing with tears. Mascara streaks her face from her eyes to her chin.

'Alive? You're not alive.'

Charlie sneers at her as Jimmy the Loins, 'Crispy' Lenny, and Mickey 'Mucous' start chanting the Dead Bones' mantra: Kill the kipple. Kill the kipple. Kill the kipple.

The sudden shriek of metal scraping across metal makes my hair stand on end. Charlie has grabbed her by the temples and is unscrewing her head.

The young woman screams in terror as my brother continues to twist her neck as if he is turning a crank that clicks at every notch. I cover my eyes with my hands and watch through my fingers. (Verso 2018, 10-11)

The passage describes Alba Vicente's vicious murder at the hands of the punk gang "Dead Bones", an act of gratuitous violence that has considerable implications for the ethos of the novel but also, as we shall see further ahead, for the future of the protagonist. The

³⁹⁴ The following passage illustrates the opulent life and landscape in the wealthier neighborhoods: "For most of the megalopolis, the seasons are simulated and sponsored. This year, the Spring Lot, which is already following the winter one, has been assigned to a food company and the blooms of advertising anticipating the change of season are budding in the shape of 'Spring McBucks' on every street corner. Here in Green Towers, though, things are the other way around. In other neighbourhoods, nature appears only on billboards for 'Pastoral Lots' that can be enjoyed through the surrealism of visors. But in Green Towers, nature has reappeared with biological areas, mini botanical reserves and environmental decoration. A scattering of artificially cultivated punctuation marks, designed by computers, but still real—nothing like the 'Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter' lots available as a sensorial experience elsewhere. The facades of the buildings along Piccalorda Way are explosions of chlorophyll and carotene pigments. Every building is covered in green, swathed in climbing plants and carpeted with grass and a profusion of vegetables and herbs" (137).

destruction of the defenseless nexhuman³⁹⁵ with whom Peter Payne had fallen in love, locates the action of the novel in a cyberpunk setting. In the pathway of other works of this subgenre³⁹⁶, such setting focuses on a combination of low-life and high tech³⁹⁷, and features “advanced technological and scientific achievements juxtaposed with a degree of breakdown or radical change in the social order” (Michaud 2008, 75-76). More noteworthy, it refers us back to the anesthetization process of the body we have analyzed in *Joseph Walser’s Machine*. But it does so by inverting the terms, so to speak, granting us a different prism on the relationship between humanity and technology: while in Tavares’ novel it is the symbiotic relationship of Joseph Walser with his machine that allowed biopolitical powers to deaden the senses, canceling the human organism’s power to respond politically, here it is the “purely biological” bodies of the punks who display an emotionless, automaton-like behavior. Despite accusing Alba of not being alive anymore, she is the only one who, ironically, presents what could be considered a genuine human response; the “Dead Bones”, on the other hand, do their Gang name justice, showing that their bodies are no more than a shell devoid of any real humanity.

At this point we certainly stray away from the rational logic of repetition and consistency that governs Walser’s industrial society. The characters of *Nexhuman* no longer have access to a “fantasy” of a rational order like the one produced by the factory, an order that alienated Tavares’ characters but also shielded them from the chaos and incomprehensibility of the world – in a way, keeping them human. The brutal and unwarranted attack on Alba takes us in a different direction, shedding light on the fact that violence, with its economy of continuous uncertainty and fear, is a vicious component of capitalism that has become indispensable to neoliberalism³⁹⁸. This specific episode not only helps us disclose neoliberalism’s ability to deprive life of any political and human claim, it also provides a perfect example of how violence is used to determine who and what is human, who and what is disposable. As a matter of fact, the entire novel reminds

³⁹⁵ As we shall explore further ahead, the term “nexhuman” designates a being constituted by an artificial body and the uploaded consciousness of a biologic person.

³⁹⁶ Originally published in 1977, *Judge Dredd* would be one of the first comics to explore cyberpunk themes. William Gibson’s (2000) seminal debut novel *Neuromancer* would help solidify Cyberpunk as a subgenre of science fiction, drawing influence from punk subculture and early hacker culture. The already mentioned *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, by Philip K. Dick, or films such as *John Mnemonic* (1995) and *The Matrix*’s trilogy (1999-2003) would be other good examples of cyberpunk works.

³⁹⁷ These two notions are developed by Bruce Sterling in his preface to *Burning Chrome*. See: Gibson 1986, xiv.

³⁹⁸ For a deeper understanding of the connection between violence, fear, and neoliberal regimes, see: Evans and Giroux 2015, 15.

us that the banalization of violence in everyday life³⁹⁹ leads to the disposability of entire populations, seeing that it effaces the typical boundaries that separate “times of war and times of peace, zones of security and zones of crises, friends and enemies” (Evans and Giroux 2015, 20). It brings to the limelight the all too real deep inequalities and fierce social/cultural tensions present in the multifaceted societies where most people live in our contemporaneity. By doing so, it highlights that such troubling reality irretrievably shapes worldviews and numbs the senses, prompting individuals to accept disposability/obsolescence as the natural order of things, whether it is applied to lifeless objects or living beings. As Brad Evans and Henry Giroux rightly point out:

Just as neoliberalism has made a bonfire of the sovereign principle of the social contract, so too has it exhausted its claims to progress and reduced politics to a blind science in ways that eviscerate those irreducible qualities that distinguish humans from other predatory animals—namely love, cooperation, community, solidarity, creative wonderment, and the drive to imagine and explore more just and egalitarian worlds than the one we have created for ourselves. Neoliberalism is violence against the cultural conditions and civic agency that make democracy possible. Its relentless mechanisms of privatization, commodification, deregulation, and militarization cannot acknowledge or tolerate a formative culture and social order in which non-market values as solidarity, civic education, community building, equality, and justice are prioritized. (2015, 10)

Although they are projected into the future, the imaginary geography and bodies of Verso’s book cannot but make us think about the appalling realities in which many children and whole families live nowadays. The ruthless neighborhoods of slums, where people are killed randomly⁴⁰⁰, or the massive rubbish camps that are home to many families around the world⁴⁰¹, bear witness that what seemed a distant dystopia might already be a reality creeping in. Much like Peter Payne and Alba Vicente, the bodies of the people inhabiting these unregulated spaces are reduced to their biological reality – the

³⁹⁹ Together with its decentralization from the State.

⁴⁰⁰ The novels *Cidade de Deus*, by Paulo Lins (1997), *Tropa de Elite*, by André Batista, Rodrigo Pimentel, and Luiz Eduardo Soares (2006), and *Slumdog Millionaire*, by Vikas Swarup (2005), offer powerful portraits of the violent reality of the slums.

⁴⁰¹ Such as the Stung Meanchey landfill in Cambodia, where “families fashioned homes from rubbish, [...] ate rubbish, fought over it – and even died over it” (*Guardian* 2016). The article “The world’s biggest and most dangerous dump sites”, by Garry Blight, further explores the creation of massive dump sites around the world. See: *Guardian* 2014a.

zōē. They have become what Agamben calls “bare life” (1998, 89)⁴⁰², which is to say, bodies that are devoid of value, placed outside the political and juridical spheres. To put it differently, bodies that can be killed and discarded with impunity, a living waste that, together with its lifeless counterpart, constitutes the flip side of the “clean” neoliberal societies.

THE INTERCHANGEABLE BODY: ASSESSING THE TRANSHUMANISTIC REPRESENTATIONS AND THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL YOUTH

We have seen that *Nexhuman* proposes from its outset a reflection on how biopolitical powers shape space and relationships, defining through a strategy of exception what is considered a human body. In doing so, the novel confronts us with the multidimensional (and possibly unanswerable) question: how do we define the concept of “human” in western contemporaneity? However, this proposal is not presented to the reader through a univocal and pessimistic standpoint. I would contend that it is suggested instead by the creation of various angles that allow him to confront different notions of humanity. In effect, one could say the attack on Alba highlights the inhumanity of biological bodies as much as it emphasizes the profoundly human reaction of an artificial body with a human conscience inside. The inclusion of this type of technological innovation – this novum – certainly bears the influence of works such as *Altered Carbon*⁴⁰³, and predictably gives some of the representations of the narrative a transhumanist inflection. Nowhere in the

⁴⁰² Resorting to the words of the Italian philosopher: “The new juridical category of “life devoid of value” (or “life unworthy of being lived”) corresponds exactly – even if in an apparently different direction – to the bare life of *homo sacer* and can easily be extended beyond the limits imagined by Binding. It is as if every valorization and every “Politicization” of life [...] necessarily implies a new decision concerning the threshold beyond which life ceases to be politically relevant, becomes only “sacred life,” and can as such be eliminated without punishment. [...] It is even possible that this limit, on which the politicization and the *exceptio* of natural life in the juridical order of the state depends, has done nothing but extend itself in the history of the West and has now – in the new biopolitical horizon of states with national sovereignty – moved inside every human life and every citizen. Bare life is no longer confined to a particular place or a definite category. It now dwells in the biological body of every living being” (1998, 89).

⁴⁰³ *Altered Carbon* is a cyberpunk novel by Richard K. Morgan (2002). Set in a future in which interstellar travel is facilitated by transferring consciousnesses between bodies (“sleeves”), it follows the attempt of Takeshi Kovacs, a former U.N. elite soldier turned private investigator, to investigate a rich man's death. In this future, humans have achieved virtual immortality. Most people have cortical stacks in their spinal columns that store their consciousness. If their body dies, their stack can be stored indefinitely or downloaded into a new “sleeve”.

novel is this inflection more unequivocally reiterated than in the Moore Temple⁴⁰⁴, an ultra-technological sanctuary that serves as a data center where the original consciences of the nexhumans are stored. As we can read in the next passage, Peter's visit to Temple triggers a reflection about Alba and what distinguishes nexhumans from humans:

Surely it can't be regaining this infantile state—a sense of amazed innocence lasting for all eternity—that makes nexhumans happier? Perhaps they just have less strife and don't worry about certain things anymore, things that are a consequence of human frailty and the limits of our knowledge. Maybe they solve problems more quickly with their processing power that's infinitely greater than ours. Or perhaps they take longer over these matters because for them time is a different concept.

'Ion, this upload business is bugging me. If there is an original Alba matrix, then that should mean that there is no limit to possible uploads. If I can't get all of Alba's pieces, can I load a copy of Alba into a different body?' (Verso 2018, 160).

The transhumanistic vision embodied by Alba seems to introduce an optimistic perspective of the role of technologies in shaping the human body. Against the dark backdrop of decaying beings and obsolete objects that dominates the narrative, such perspective illuminates quite intensely the fact that the survival of the mind independently of the physical body makes the nexhumans happier, stronger, and kinder than biological humans. It makes them more human than the disposable figures that ironically call them kipple. We can now understand more clearly why Peter makes the sole purpose of his life to gather all the pieces of Alba's body, holding dearly to the hope of reviving her: in his eyes, she represents the freedom from his condition of disposability⁴⁰⁵. Not surprisingly, the idea that Alba is associated to a feeling of wholeness starts to take shape right from the first interactions between the two characters, going on to eventually permeate the entire novel:

Alba displays a Moore Temple hologram in the window, alongside the all-inclusive package holidays and special discounts. The shop sign radiates a bright message:

Biology is not an end; it is a tendency.

Chips are our real destination.

There is only ever Alba inside. She works alone from daybreak to nightfall, never stopping. She owns Boreal Skies and she does as she likes. (6; emphasis added)

⁴⁰⁴ The temple dedicated to the creator of the nexhumans.

⁴⁰⁵ It is the dreamlike memory of her gentle kisses on his cheek that still holds his broken body together, keeping alive his ability to believe: See: Verso 2018, 6.

I would argue that both Alba and the bright message radiated by the shop sign encapsulate well the transhumanistic idea that biology is not an end⁴⁰⁶: by housing the mind of an old lady who was paralyzed by a degenerative form of arteriosclerosis (157), the artificial young body of the character becomes the personification of the timeless dream of defeating disease (and death). Alba's character, hence, invites to consider the vision of Max More and other proponents of transhumanism⁴⁰⁷, who advocate that this philosophical movement can help us overcome the “biological limitations on human cognition, emotion, and physical and sensory capabilities using science, technology and experimentation guided by critical and creative thinking” (2013, 13). She represents a different perception on the use of prostheses, implants, exoskeletons, or anything that enhances human capabilities beyond their human threshold, suggesting a reflection about the liberating potential of cutting-edge technologies⁴⁰⁸ which one day may allow us to upload our minds to exchangeable “sleeves”⁴⁰⁹.

It is important, though, to take this positive vision of transhumanism included in the novel *cum grano salis*. From my point of view, such vision does not simply express an apologia of the movement, nor a praise of scientific/technological progress. Verso does invite us to consider the merits of some aspects of this philosophy, but his is not a naïve view. I would even say that novel questions and deconstructs transhumanism in two specific ways: firstly, it suggests a continuity between the Judeo-Christian perspective and the scientific-technological perception of oldness and of the limits of the biological body⁴¹⁰. Such continuity is particularly hinted by the mystical aura that surrounds the

⁴⁰⁶ Even the name “Alba”, the Italian term for “daybreak” or “dawn”, brings a positive connotation the role technologies play in improving human life and the human body.

⁴⁰⁷ Max More is a philosopher/futurist, and one of the biggest proponents of transhumanism. He has written many articles regarding the philosophy of transhumanism and the transhumanist philosophy of extropianism. More significantly, he introduced the term “transhumanism” in its modern meaning in his 1990 essay “Transhumanism: Toward a Futurist Philosophy”.

⁴⁰⁸ Such as brain–computer interfaces or virtual reality.

⁴⁰⁹ In *Altered Carbon*, “sleeves” designate the artificial bodies in which the “cortical stack” (Morgan 2002, 42) – the device to which consciences are uploaded to – is inserted.

⁴¹⁰ The following passage illustrates exemplarily this idea: “Old age, then, is not a condition imposed by God. Every good believer, the flow of data informs us, believes that the efforts made to alleviate the pain and suffering of illness, to improve the quality of life of the elderly and keep the body healthy, are dedicated to God and the prolongation of Faith. Since the encyclical *Humani Generis*, written by Pope Pius XII in 1950, it has been the determination of the Church that there is no conflict between evolution and the Catholic doctrine. As Pope John Paul II said, ‘Today [...] there are new discoveries that lead us to the recognition of evolution as something more than a mere theory’ (Verso 2018, 155).

Moore Temple⁴¹¹ and the sacred high priest “Brother Biddulf” (Verso 2018, 156); however, it becomes more explicitly articulated in the religious reverence displayed towards the doctors of the Papillon clinic, a technological shrine where almost miraculous cures are performed and where minds can be uploaded:

There must be around three thousand demonstrators, maybe even more. Half of them are in wheelchairs, people with no legs, cancer, stroke and Parkinson’s disease, sufferers of polio whose shrunken legs look like pairs of withered stalks, victims of sclerosis, and who knows what else. Poor bastards with juddering heads and drool on their chins. When they see a white lab coat coming down the tarmac driveway, they get stirred up, caught in a strange kind of euphoria. They hurry towards it en masse, crushing themselves against the fence, risking getting hurt and trapped by the impetus of their happiness. (171)

As I have analyzed in part II, the scientific authority that, from the 18th century onwards, starts to shape and define the human body, is not purely based on a corpus of objective scientific knowledge, making a veiled use of the mystical authority inherited from religion. We could, consequently, read here a remark to the way scientific figures – especially physicians – are attributed an aura of wisdom and a salvific quality that bestow on them an unrestrained control over the human body. Being a projection into the future, these fictional representations seem to constitute an admonition about the fact that, unless we think critically about science and technology, we might repeat past mistakes, allowing political-scientific powers to continue determining whose lives are worth living. It is no wonder that there is a tight selection of the patients that are admitted to the Papillon Clinic, a decision over life and death that brings shades of the eugenic selection made, for instance, during the Shoah or the western colonizing process⁴¹²:

⁴¹¹ As Jana Vizmuller-Zocco rightly points out, the name of the temple is clearly “a spoof on Moore’s laws, and on Max More’s role in transhumanism” (2016, 215).

⁴¹² As Adorno and Horkheimer note on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the Enlightenment’s treatment of nature and man as objects rather than as ends by themselves gave way to an instrumental and formal rationality that, carried to its logical extreme, has led to the horrors of twentieth-century barbarism: “As soon as man discards his awareness that he himself is nature, all the aims for which he keeps himself alive – social progress, the intensification of all his material and spiritual powers, even consciousness itself – are nullified, and the enthronement of the means as an end, which under late capitalism is tantamount to open insanity, is already perceptible in the prehistory of subjectivity. [...] Man’s domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken; for the substance which is dominated, suppressed, and dissolved by virtue of self-preservation is none other than that very life as functions of which the achievements of self-preservation find their sole definition and determination: it is, in fact, what is to be preserved” (1990, 54-55).

They stand right up against the fence around the hospital, imploring with their hands for a chance for survival, a mass of tramps and beggars, all desperate to get into the Papillon clinic. [...] Over recent months, a rumour has been going around that the hospital's board will choose some miserable sufferer at random for a free upload as part of the Moore Temple's new policy for widening the circle of its acolytes. They openly cultivate the hope that it could happen to them. [...] / Whipped by icy gusts of wind, the highland appears nearly deserted, though even in this weather, there are some idiots out here, hoping to achieve their goal. They sift through the piles of the hospital's rubbish and break the thin layers of ice that have formed over the puddles with rakes and sieves. [...] Along the driveway to the front entrance, in between trees with icy leaves hanging like tears, there are still some working animated gigaographics. Amidst a swarm of exhortations to upload, to board the fleet of Govindas, and offers for family holidays in space, [...] (171-172)

As we can read in the passage, the hospital entrance has become an inverted mirror image of the gates of the concentration camps, constituting the threshold that separates the dying bodies on the outside from the quasi-immortal ones inside. Still, what seems even more striking to me about this selection process is that the random choice of "some miserable sufferer" is not made out of generosity, but rather as advertisement maneuver to "sell" the dream of eternal youth to a larger audience. As a matter of fact, we find such strategy reinforced by the billboards at the entrance of the hospital, which offer the enticing possibility to escape the *kipple*-ridden reality by uploading the mind to a new body. From my perspective, we have represented here what Vanni Codeluppi calls a process of *vetrinizzazione*⁴¹³, whereby the body is displayed in a store window to be looked at by the public. In other words, to the faceless mass of consumers in Peter's world, the representations of the artificial bodies in the billboards⁴¹⁴ turn, both literally and figuratively, the body (and by extension death) into an object, a commodity to be purchased. But this commodity does not have the same value for everyone: to the people of the wealthy neighborhoods who can afford a new "sleeve", it offers a "death" that no

⁴¹³ As we have seen in part I, the logic of the *vetrina* was born out of the store windows in 18th century Europe, and out of the "art of the gaze" that emerged from the 19th century's arcades. To "place oneself in a store window", in the words of the Italian philosopher, is an act that implies "an ideology of absolute transparency, in other words, the obligation to be available and expose everything in the store window. It is no longer possible to leave feelings, emotions or desires hidden in the shadow" (Codeluppi 2007, 17; my translation).

⁴¹⁴ As well as in the augmented reality glasses ("the visors" [Verso 2018, 37]) that most of the characters carry all the time, which could be considered a ubiquitous store window. Being an evolution of programs such like the "Google cam" that are already installed in modern cellphones, these visors allow access on real time to online information on products, objects, people, and buildings through a "RFID code" (37).

longer bears the mark of biological finitude⁴¹⁵. To Peter and the inhabitants of the slums, on the other hand, it provides an unattainable dream of a better life that is, nonetheless, kept on their horizon. In the image of the proverbial “carrot and stick”, they are lured to it by the same consumer society that has condemned them to a wasted existence in the first place.

This passage, thus, points us to an unambiguous privatization of healthcare and medical technologies in the fictional society of *Nexhuman*, which creates a “natural” gap between the healthy bodies of the people who can access good health services – and logically the mind upload – and those who, because of their financial or social conditions, are condemned to slowly perish. So, secondly, the novel does not leave unnoticed the connection that neoliberalism establishes with the medical sphere in order to shape the bodies and organize the power relationships within the chaotic space of the contemporary supercities. It calls our attention to the fact that, by putting the medical sphere at their service, economic powers nowadays encourage individuals to naturally accept the existence of a “healthy self” as separated from the “unhealthy other”, making them develop an “ethic based on autonomous individualism, self-control, self-determination, and self-responsibility to face the rise of inequalities in the neoliberal economy” (Crawford *apud* Turrini 2015, 21). In the poor and wealthy neighborhoods of Verso’s fictional megacity, as in our own, health has become a crucial vector not only to the creation of the self, but also to the formation of neoliberal subjectivities that introduce the faculty of choice into the everyday management of the body.

THE EXPROPRIATED BODY: ON THE UGLY REPRESENTATIONS AND ANESTHETICS OF A BLEAK FAIRY TALE

One could say that Verso has certainly woven a bleak fairy tale, where even the more luminous elements, such as Alba and the promises carried by cutting-edge technologies, seem to only accentuate the hopelessness of Peter’s reality. If the novel invites us to reflect

⁴¹⁵ Something that is forgotten in the immediate gratification of the consumption experience. See: Codeluppi 2007, 88.

on the definition of the human (body) in our contemporaneity, so far in our analysis we have only come across instances in which it is defined negatively, paradoxically stripped of its humanity. Whether we are referring to biological bodies that are diminished to a condition of disposability, or to artificial bodies that lodge a human conscience, this fictional world makes it impossible for us to escape the reality of objectification of the human and human relationships. So, *Nexhuman* seems to inevitably beg the questions: is the human body irretrievably strained in the relentless flow of goods and commodities of the society of consumption? Are we headed to a future characterized by a permanent state of exception?

In my view, the novel does not offer us solutions to avoid this future, if anything it points to the fact that, in many ways, it is already part of our present. But it leaves us a final reflection that might bring small yet significant changes to the way we relate to our bodies and to the bodies of others:

A stench hits my nose. Beneath me, some unrecognisable matter is expelling its final breaths. Shreds of what must have once been flesh comes away as I move my feet from the surface of the blackened and foul goods and strands of vivid red hair cling to the sole of my boot [...]

Tired from the climb, I look more deeply into the composition of the site, I am a seeker, used to being patient, though the noise coming from my stomach means that if I don't stop soon, I will be in danger of messing myself. Like many others, I am forced to drink from the megalopolis broth and frequently fall victim to the bacteria-laden water.

When my strength runs out, I flop down on top of the rubbish. It's a warning sign: I have to discharge my intestines of their daily load of germs. My stump is overheated from chafing against the prosthetic leg.

I let my head rest against the curve of a deflated tyre sticking edgewise out of the rubbish. I make myself comfortable in the hole, lower my trousers to my knees, and let go. A spasm in the pit of my stomach readies me for a second round, followed quickly by a third.

Breathe in. Breathe out. (Verso 2018, 19-20)

There is throughout the novel a slew of moments like this one, in which Peter suffers uncontrollable bowel movements or has the urge to throw up (108). At all those moments the resort to such nouns and adjectives as “stench”, “blackened”, “foul” or “bacteria-laden” is mostly likely to provoke in the reader an unpleasant feeling, a feeling of disgust by having to witness a corporal reality that, in our contemporary western societies, is meant to remain hidden in the sphere of intimacy. Why, then, would the Italian author include these moments and this vocabulary, knowing it could potentially put off some of

the readers? I would venture saying that he does so to deliberately give text the anesthetic quality and negative force that I had referred to with regard to the other novels we have examined. Echoing Julia Kristeva's perspective in *Powers of Horror*, he puts us before an abject reality which confronts us with our materiality – by extension, with our mortality – and, therefore, not only disturbs identity and order, but also unsettles borders, positions, or rules⁴¹⁶. In the words of Kristeva:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. As in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (1982, 3; emphasis in original)

Through these unpleasant, ugly representations, Verso draws attention to the insistent materiality of the body – death's insistent materiality –, but he likewise brings to the forefront the dark facets of society that shape it. As a result, he manages to create a sci-fi novel that does not aim at eliciting a feeling of pleasure and enjoyment in the reader. He precludes the “consumption” of *Nexhuman* as an innocuous work⁴¹⁷, taking up the cause of “what is proscribed as ugly, though no longer in order to integrate or mitigate it or to reconcile it with its own existence through humor [...] in the ugly, art must denounce the world that creates and reproduces the ugly in its own image [...]” (Adorno 1997, 49).

The bleak reality of the novel reveals to be more than a mere reflection of the dark facets of the societies of consumption. It does not constitute a discursive creation that

⁴¹⁶ It would be impossible to explore to the full extent here the concept of the “abject”, along with its psychoanalytic implications. In broader terms, it refers to the human reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other. The primary example for what causes such a reaction is the corpse (which traumatically reminds us of our own materiality); however, other items can elicit the same reaction: the open wound, feces, or sewage. According to Kristeva: “When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable object. The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (1982, 1-2).

⁴¹⁷ That, as many others in the culture industry, distracts contemporary readers from the dark facets of their high-tech societies of consumption.

tries to encapsulate and conceptualize them, rendering them mute and inconsequential. On the contrary, it is an imaginary extension that fully embraces those facets and the weight of their materiality, all their effects on the human body. In an age in which violence has become normalized, with the pain of the discardable others being transparently accepted as part of the “natural” inequalities of neoliberal societies, Verso fittingly gives an opaque texture to his fictional creations. The bodies of his characters retain a heft and a tangible suffering that disrupts the reading experience, potentially engaging us in a dialogue about our own body’ experiences and several problematic aspects of our globalized societies that are still not fully fathomable – or are even actively obscured.

And yet, from what we can gather from these unpleasant passages, the readers are not the only ones who feel the weight of the body. The “warning” noises Peter hears from his stomach, the spasms, or the involuntary act of breathing deeply during the bowl movement, convey, at a homodiegetic level, a dialogue between the character and his body. More noteworthy, it is not a dialogue between equals, as Peter is distinctly obeying what his body is telling him to do. The implications of what at best seems an irrelevant episode, and could even be interpreted as poor taste in writing, are nevertheless very significant: the physiological need to expel solid or liquid bodily wastes outlines the contradictory nature of the relationship that humans have with their bodies. The pain Peter feels in his stomach is undeniably his own, but, at the same time, it completely escapes his control. It lays bare, both literally and figuratively, that although we take for granted our own biological body – considering it our propriety –, in reality it is alien to us⁴¹⁸.

This feeling of alienation, of expropriation of the body, is inevitably exacerbated by life in the megacity, a life that has reduced Peter to a condition of disability⁴¹⁹. We can now better understand why throughout his journey into adulthood he is in permanent tension with his body. He is a cyborg, but in a different way from Alba: he realizes that there is no ontological difference between his biological body and his artificial body, but such realization only makes him more acutely aware of his alienation – of his commoditization. I would contend that this game of *chiaroscuro* between the two cyborgs

⁴¹⁸ As Agamben says, it is “inappropriabile”: “The body reveals to be rather a field of polar tensions whose extremes are defined by a being on your own in the state of one’s own needs, and, at the same time, by an incapability to assume it. My body has been originally given to me as my own only insofar as it reveals to be absolutely inappropriate” (2014, 168; my translation).

⁴¹⁹ With his two prosthetic limbs made from disposed pieces of plastic and metal being a literalization of his condition.

clarifies the interplay of the protagonist's name with J. M. Barrie's famous character⁴²⁰, while it also helps us articulate Peter's puzzling relationship with the nexhuman girl. Verso refers us to Peter Pan in order to establish a dimension of innocence and escapism in the novel, drawing on his ageless quality to bring to the fine print of the narrative the idea of eternal youth. But he also transforms it textually, giving a cyberpunk twist to his *mythos*. The protagonist of *Nexhuman* is still a "betwixt-and-between" figure that raises questions about human nature, yet the Italian author uses the intertextual allusion to build a character that is violently dislocated from himself in the inhuman experience of the post-industrial city, inhabiting the hectic space between organic and artificial⁴²¹. In this contemporary rendition of the story of the boy who would not grow up, Peter comes to the realization that he can neither escape his artificial body, nor return to an original biological self⁴²². More significantly, he only manages to "stitch" together his fragmented self through his dream of reassembling the scattered pieces of Alba's body, sheltering himself from the world in his boyhood fantasy of wholeness.

⁴²⁰ Peter Pan originally debuted as an infant in *The Little White Bird*, a novel written by J.M. Barrie for adults in 1902. The book's popularity — due, in part, to readers' attachment to Pan — led Barrie to write the 1904 play *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (which he eventually adapted into another, better-known novel: *Peter Pan and Wendy*). Despite the numberless differences between its adaptation throughout time, certain characteristics have remained constant in his *mythos*, also crossing over to *Nexhuman*. Among these characteristics we can find his unwillingness to grow and leave the mythical world of Neverland, the absence of a maternal figure that can make him whole, or the duality of his nature (being part animal part human).

⁴²¹ It is certainly not by chance that the original title of the book is *Livido*, an Italian word that denotes both a physical suffering (being the direct translation of "bruise") and a mental/emotional suffering, as it also means to "turn pale".

⁴²² In her article "The Mulatto Cyborg: Imagining a Multiracial Future", LeiLani Nishime also examines several fictional characters who, due to their "hybrid condition", are forced to redefine/renege their identities and their bodies. Through a filmic analysis, she shows us how characters like Robocop, the nexus androids from *Blade Runner*, or the Terminator, not only question but also blur the limits between biology and artificiality. See: Nishime, 2005.

CONCLUSION: THE WHOLESOME BODY – MANY CYBORGS AND MANY EXCEPTIONS

As I will demonstrate, the fact that the dreamy spirit of Peter Pan is also present here is of the utmost importance to interpret the novel's dénouement – as well as to the conclusion of this chapter. But lest we forget, Peter is not the only cyborg. Throughout the fictional worlds we have explored in this third part we have come across many hybrids. Half-men, half-machines, they prove that cyborgs have been embraced in sci-fi – and in dystopian works in general – as powerful fictional figures that express and transform, in imaginary terms, many perspectives in line not only with Philosophic theories that examine the relationship between war, technology and politics, but also with Posthumanist theory and Critical Theory⁴²³. As a matter of fact, the differences between the machinic Joseph Walser, the belligerent Katniss, the diaphanous Alba, and the broken Peter offer us a prismatic view over the complex way biopolitical powers have historically used technology to shape the human body and social relationships. Their bodies bring to the spotlight the exponential technological development that took place in the transition from industrialized disciplinary societies of the 19th-20th centuries to the hyper-consumeristic 21st century societies, allowing us to examine from a close range its effects on the definition of the human.

By blurring the lines between what is natural and what is artificial, these fictional creations help shake dichotomies and hierarchies that have been engrained in western societies since the Enlightenment. As a result, they help us reconsider a “scientific” notion of humanity that has led to dehumanizing processes, such as, for example, those present in the *Shoah* or in western colonialism from the 18th century onwards. Conversely, they signal that the crescent indistinction between organic and inorganic – between living and inanimate – also provides new ways to reduce the human body to an object. They alert us to the fact that, by conjuring the dream of ameliorating the human body, economic and political powers make use of technology to determine whose lives are worth living and whose lives should be discarded. As we have seen throughout the novels, this leads to the

⁴²³ Converging with the works of authors such as Giorgio Agamben and Paul Virilio, but also with that of Donna Haraway, in the case of Posthumanist theory, or the works of Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin, as far as Critical Theory is concerned.

creation of a state of exception that is becoming increasingly permanent, confounding times of peace and times of war. Such permanent state of exception is progressively generating steeper divisions in the space of contemporary countries and megapolis, joining disposable and perfectly healthy bodies in the “naturalized” disharmony of the neoliberal order.

In our exploration of this mechanism of exception, we have likewise ascertained that works of art seem to participate in the process of objectification/commoditization of the human body. As Adorno has shown, art pieces pertaining to what he calls the “culture industry” are also integrated in the logic of the commodity. The *promesse du bonheur* and aestheticized vision of reality that they offer (1997, 12), make readers (or viewers/listeners) forget the obscure aspects of their societies – blocking any possibility of praxis. That is to say, not only do they render such obscure aspects mute and inconsequential, thwarting any critical reflection, but they actively incite to turn a blind eye on them, providing readers with a pleasing, entertaining experience⁴²⁴ that is complicit with and reinforces social, economic, and political orders (253, 311). So, it is only fitting that the novels included in this part possess a negative energy and an anesthetic quality that make them escape this process of commoditization, putting them in the realm of radical art. Indeed, both the disciplinary contexts pre-WWII and the futuristic settings of spectacle/hyper consumption confront us with strangely familiar bodies that, due to their opaqueness/ugliness, resist a univocal and transparent interpretation. By drawing our attention to the suffering of the material bodies – highlighting the somber mechanisms that have created them – these fictional creations may help us distance ourselves from contemporary realities, allowing us to see from a different perspective our own bodies and our relationships within the space of the ultra-technological megapolis.

I would claim they can perhaps show an even longer reach, suggesting us ways to engage or oppose the political-economic forces that have, in the present and in the past, silently and transparently determined who deserves to be called human. However, the conclusion of Verso’s novel proves us that these suggestions do not always translate into a direct or active political stance, as perhaps one would expect. As the narrative comes to an end, the resilient yet bruised-ridden body of Peter is finally destroyed by the mechanic jaws of an UCU, which prevents him from retrieving the last piece of Alba’s body and

⁴²⁴ Or, if we will, a form of escapism.

conclude his quest. In an unexpected turn of events, though, not only does he achieve his life-long dream of reviving his beloved, as he is also saved by the nexhumans who upload his mind to a new body⁴²⁵:

This is the first time I've left the megalopolis and I'm heading towards the stars. At last, I can enjoy an observation point higher than Kathal Hill. [...]
It's impossible to suppress desire this strong.
She undoes her shirt. I lift her skirt and undo my trousers. Alba lets her hair down and her flaming mane tickles my chest. We do everything in silence, under the watchful eyes of the security officer, who is no doubt getting off spying on us through the CCTV security system.
She lowers her panties and turns around so we can both look at ourselves in the mirror. Her pupils dilate and she parts her legs.
I am nothing but a photonic impulse with a sexual charge.
'Alba, what does being semi-immortal mean?'
'It means men forget about you, and you about them. But I didn't manage it.' [...]'
My transformation was not a spontaneous event like the collapse of a star. It was a direct consequence of living with Alba.
What we are experiencing is a kind of empathetic saturation, a sensorial transcendence.
A rush of power shakes our bodies. The floor starts to tremble and the Govinda begins the vertical ascent. [...]
The bumpy progress fills me with extraordinary warmth. My lips find Alba's neck and the sweet vibrations pass from her to me. Even now, in this new form, hope exceeds reason. Then the overload dissipates; the flow retracts. Our breathing slows and stabilises. We have no hearts, but we're more than machines. (Verso 2018, 210-212)

The epilogue displays the two “rebuilt” characters involved in an emotional love scene, celebrating their long-awaited reunion and the beginning of their journey “towards the stars” (209). Taking into consideration all the broken bodies and the violent cityscape of the novel, how can we interpret such intimate and tender dénouement? One possible reading would be that this last scene also urges us to rebuild the private sphere in order to transform the political one in the future – albeit it does it so in a more provocative and radical way than *Mockingjay*: if the society of *Nexhuman* is dominated by objectified and alienated human relationships, this final encounter signals a rejection and a distancing from the political-economic foundations of those relationships. In their nudity, Peter and Alba assume their artificial bodies as the most intimate and alien thing to them. They acknowledge that they are still beings with biological responses, but also that biology

⁴²⁵ As a sign of appreciation for what he did for Alba.

does not define the body or predetermine human life, a life that is in permanent transformation and only finds its political sense in the communal pursuit of wholeness⁴²⁶. Such positioning on the part of the characters may help us to (re)imagine our bodies and relationships within a new sphere of the *oikos*, paving the way for a coming (bio)politics that is not necessarily associated to the sovereign/neoliberal state, and to a form-of-life that hinders the creation of bare lives⁴²⁷:

A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself... It defines a life -human life- in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life... Each behavior and each form of human living is never prescribed by a specific biological vocation, nor is it assigned by whatever necessity; instead [...] it always retains the character of a possibility; that is, it always puts at stake living itself. That is why human beings [...] are [...] the only beings whose life is irremediably and painfully assigned to happiness. But this immediately constitutes the form-of-life as political life [...] Political power as we know it, on the other hand, always finds itself -in the last instance- on the separation of a sphere of naked life from the context of the forms of life. (Agamben 2000, 4; emphasis in original)

This focus on the private sphere of human relationships might seem senseless and politically inconsequential to contemporary eyes but, on the contrary, it is radically substantial: it entails the problematic reintroduction into the political sphere of an irrational and physiological reality of the human body whose exclusion has been, since ancient Greece, *conditio sine qua non* to the formation of a true political life. To chase in the future this “experiment” in western societies⁴²⁸ will be anything but easy, as it implies rethinking and reconceptualizing a notion of politics not based on the separation but rather on the coincidence between *zōē* and *bios*. In a world so deeply and violently submerged in social-economic divisions, where human relationships are increasingly mediated by

⁴²⁶ Or, as Agamben would say, in the pursuit of the “happy life” (2000, 114-115).

⁴²⁷ The concept of form-of-life (borrowed from Wittgenstein) is extensively examined by Agamben both in *L'uso dei Corpi* and *Mezzi senza fine*. Given its great complexity, it would be impossible to fully develop it here, so we would just like to refer another definition given by Agamben to better illustrate it: “A political life, that is, a life directed toward the idea of happiness and cohesive with a form-of-life, is thinkable only starting from... the irrevocable exodus from any sovereignty. The question about the possibility of a nonstatist politics necessarily takes this form: Is today something like a form-of-life, a life for which living itself would be at stake in its own living, possible? Is today a life of power available?” (Agamben 2000, 8-9).

⁴²⁸ For a closer examination of this “experiment” and its long-term implications, see: Agamben 2000, 114-115.

media and technology, such experiment might seem a step back, or, in a best-case scenario, an unachievable *utopia*.

I would argue that, paradoxically, the *dystopias* we have analyzed in this part – and in this thesis – beg to differ. The fictional worlds created by Tavares, Collins, and Verso point us to several difficult, but not impossible, paths through which we may start changing the political reality of contemporary western societies. They are proof that literature can play an invaluable role in the reflection about our bodies and our societies, creating imaginary spaces where we can unlearn and question them – even if just for a moment. Spaces where we can envision or rehearse new ways to materialize the dream of a world without broken bodies or worthless lives.



*Figure 3 of Insula (2015)*⁴²⁹, by Jon Jacobsen, in collaboration with Daniel Ramos Obregón and José Tomás Torres. Gif Animation. Digital photography and illustration

⁴²⁹ This animated Gif is just a small portion of the *Insula Series*, a project which explores different ideas about future transformation of the human body. It was premiered at Quartier Général Centre d'art Contemporain, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland in May 2015, but can still be found in the author's home page: <http://jon-jacobsen.com/project/insula>. I would like to leave a word of appreciation to Jon Jacobsen, for authorizing me to use his work in this thesis.

CONCLUSION: THINGS JUST GOT REAL

The final phase of the writing of this thesis took shape at the same time Covid-19 took the world by storm, completely redefining its landscape. In an uncanny twist of fate, the global spread of the virus has ushered in a new set of political, economic, and medical realities which strongly resonates with the subjects and scenarios discussed in this thesis. Unsurprisingly, such a pivotal event has provided me a strong, newfound motivation to revisit the four authors' novels, allowing me to see them with fresh eyes and, therefore, to possibly rethink my arguments and intuitions regarding the connection between dystopian fictions and biopolitics.

Indeed, this revisitation⁴³⁰ has made me realize that the innumerable measures to contain the virus, which included in many countries the mandatory use of facemasks, the download of a monitorization app, or the obligation to undergo different diagnostic tests, seem to have come straight out of a dystopian sci-fi novel. While they pertain to the current western/global reality, they could easily also refer to the societies of *Jerusalem*, *Intrusion* or *The Hunger Games*, bringing us back to the idea of an ever-increasing medicalization of every sphere of life. Secondly, it likewise made me find out that the innumerable images of hospitals flooded with infected people, or the recurrent mediatic discourses of fear⁴³¹ created around the virus, are nothing short of "Orwellian". They echo in several ways the mediatic reality that we have in "Fernando Morales, This Is Your Death" or in *The Execution Channel*, reminding us of the power that violent images and fear discourses have at the hands of political-economic forces. Moreover, the closing of the national borders, or the revocation of some freedoms⁴³², reverberate loudly with the policing measures that we find in *Mockingjay* or *Nexhuman*. They signal the instauration of a *de facto* state of exception that perhaps most people thought could only be found in dystopian fictions, but that after one year feels very real.

Unlike it is often believed, though, science fiction does not predict the future, and it is important to note that this "real" dystopia does not correspond to an exact replica of any of the dystopian scenarios that we have encountered in these novels. However, I think

⁴³⁰ Which inevitably bears the mark of my own personal experience of the state of emergency.

⁴³¹ That encompasses the physical, social, and economic spheres of society.

⁴³² The most evident example was the imposition of a curfew in a great number of countries.

that the reality brought about by the virus – together with its subsequent medical, mediatic, political, economic, and social effects –, does confirm the inextricable connection that we have explored throughout the thesis between contemporary politics and the material body. Converging with many of the insights that have emerged out of my examination of the novels, this new reality brings forward a biopolitics that uses at least three main mechanisms, three main sets of institutional, physical, and knowledge structures that work concertedly to maintain or enhance the exercise of power within the socio-political body. More significantly, it exposes literally before our eyes⁴³³ the increasing complexity of a politics that transforms and adapts, accompanying the technological and scientific developments which, throughout history, have helped to achieve a better understanding of the human.

The fact that we have had the opportunity to follow in “real time” this transformation⁴³⁴ is essential, I believe, not only for us to get a better grasp of such a massive event, but also to think about the future of biopolitics in the aftermath of the pandemic. As I have stated, it is the novels’ – and the novelists’ – ability to textually transform the contemporary world, projecting it into the future, that allows us to have a broader, far-reaching perspective of today’s biopolitics, which can hardly be achieved through merely theoretical, or purely conceptual approaches. There has been one particularly significant example, recently, that confirms this: Giorgio Agamben’s first reaction and interpretation of the responses to the virus. In his text “L’invenzione di un’epidemia” (“The invention of an epidemic”), written at the end of February, the Italian philosopher quickly discards the importance of the virus, going on to even question its effective existence:

Faced with the frenetic, irrational and entirely unfounded emergency measures adopted against an alleged epidemic of coronavirus, we should begin from the declaration issued by the National Research Council (CNR), which states not only that “there is no SARS-CoV2 epidemic in Italy”, but also that “the infection, according to the epidemiologic data available as of today and based on tens of thousands of cases, causes mild/moderate symptoms (a sort of influenza) in 80-90% of cases. In 10-15% of cases a pneumonia may develop, but one with a benign outcome in the large majority of cases. It has been estimated that only 4% of patients require intensive therapy”. If this is the real situation, why do the media and the authorities do their utmost to spread a state of panic, thus provoking

⁴³³ Though the screens our computers, smartphones, or TVs.

⁴³⁴ As well as the responses that it has elicited.

an authentic state of exception with serious limitations on movement and a suspension of daily life in entire regions?

Two factors can help explain such a disproportionate response. First and foremost, what is once again manifest is the tendency to use a state of exception as a normal paradigm for government. [...] /

The other no less disturbing factor is the state of fear that in recent years has evidently spread among individual consciences and that translates into an authentic need for situations of collective panic for which the epidemic provides once again the ideal pretext. Therefore, in a perverse vicious circle, the limitations of freedom imposed by governments are accepted in the name of a desire for safety that was created by the same governments that are now intervening to satisfy it. (2020)⁴³⁵

Agamben's words are revealing of the constraints in his ability to achieve a critical distance in the face of an event of great magnitude that directly implies him. Still, I think that what is more significant in his reaction is not the complete disregard for the lethal impact of the virus, or the questioning of its existence. What stands out the most is the fact that, although Agamben is not entirely wrong when he refers the factors that explain the "disproportioned response", he then proceeds to apply *tout court* his theoretical framework of the state of exception, without considering the potential novelties brought about by this game-changing event. Even if in a later interview he clarifies that his text's main goal was to highlight the potential instrumentalization/appropriation of fear by political and economic powers – conducive to an expansion the state of exception⁴³⁶ –, the use of a theoretical framework that has the past as its reference was bound to blur even the sharp vision of the Italian philosopher.

My ability to achieve a critical distance has also many limitations, but I would venture to say that we are facing a new biopolitical situation. Thus, instead of only looking to the past and relying solely on previous theories and concepts, we should perhaps take a page from many sci-fi writers and try to look forward, into the future. This will

⁴³⁵ This text was originally published in Italian by *Quodlibet* and can be find online at <https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-l-invenzione-di-un-epidemia>.

⁴³⁶ He states that: "It's not surprising that we talk about the virus in terms of a war. The emergency provisions effectively force us to live under a curfew. But a war against an invisible enemy that can nestle in any other human being is the most absurd of wars. It is, to be truthful, a civil war. The enemy isn't somewhere outside, it's inside us. / What's worrying in not so much the present, not only the present at least, but the aftermath. In the same way as the legacies of wars on peacetime have included a whole range of nefarious technologies, from barbed wire to nuclear plants, so it is very likely that there will be attempts to carry on pursuing, even after the medical emergency is over, many of the experiments governments hadn't been able to implement: may universities and schools remain shut, with lessons and lectures taking place online, may an end be put once and for all to meetings and gathering to talk about political and cultural questions, may we only exchange digital messages and may wherever possible machines replace any contact – any contagion – between human beings" (Agamben 2020).

conceivably help us anticipate – or at least glimpse – new forms of control of the body that might come out of this situation, as well as strategies to prevent/resist that control. Agamben’s response precisely emphasizes the need for this change of perspective: for the Italian philosopher, power always flows from the political in the direction of life⁴³⁷, towards its regulation/control, but also its exploitation and weaponization⁴³⁸. As critical theorist Zsuzsa Baross puts it, “as power becomes ever more creative, it moves towards recombination (DNA), transplantation, hybridization, manufacture” (2020). And yet, in this situation, the direction gets reversed: the sense of the bio-political gets inverted as it is the political body/the body of the political that is invaded, attacked. The tissue of connections that makes and remakes this body is torn apart, in self-defense. The state of exception in the case of this new virus is not the exercise of power over life as bare life, but, on the contrary, an extreme (exceptional) self-defensive measure and immune reaction by the political body to an invading “life form”.

Besides the instauration of this peculiar state of exception, in many ways we have also seen a return – at least temporarily – to the disciplinary logic that Foucault systematically examined. Ironically, this seems to only have bolstered the importance of the sphere of the *bios* and of the lived reality of a transnational interconnectedness that we seem to have taken for granted. We could say that Covid-19 has highlighted the biological, uncontrolled dimension of the body, forcing political powers to resort to a state of exception and partially revert to a disciplinary logic which directly shapes its movements, confining it inside the limits of national sovereignties and institutions. Yet, it also reinforced the idea that life can also shape politics, making clear that relationships nowadays are irretrievably connected to the dynamics of a globalized/deterritorialized world⁴³⁹. All in all, the virus has stripped the body down to its physiological dimension, exposing the uncoded reality of the flesh which bears, at once, the inevitability of death and the potency of life.

In this moment, I would argue, the material body seems to be in a “no man’s land”, in a ground that is disputed by different, opposing forces which seek to recodify it and give it a (bio)political meaning. Expectedly, this situation has paved the way for the

⁴³⁷ In its purest state, the state of exception, or again, in its latest variety of bio-economic-political order.

⁴³⁸ Agamben’s interpretation of the responses to the arrival of the virus obviously does not reproduce his entire philosophical vision. In all fairness to the Italian philosopher and his extensive body of work, he has also developed and systematized concepts such as the “spectacular-democratic State” and “form-of-life” which I consider of paramount importance to think about the future of biopolitics – and have, hence, approached in this thesis.

⁴³⁹ I am referring to relationships at every level, from personal, political, to economic and social.

intensification of many contradictions and tendencies that were taking shape in the last decades. The living citizen-body's retreat from public spaces and from the flux of global movements, is entailing an acute consciousness of the importance of global relationships at a social, economic, and personal level. At the same time, it is also underscoring the precarious nature of those relationships, providing political and economic powers a fertile ground not only to find new forms of control and exploitation of the body, but likewise to call for a return to traditional notions of national belonging and familiar forms of identity. It is not by chance that we are seeing the rise of new national populist movements⁴⁴⁰, as we are also witnessing the corrosion of the social fabric⁴⁴¹ and an unforeseen lack of solidarity between people, countries, and communities⁴⁴² in the face of this global threat.

Conversely, this situation also offers us a unique historical opportunity to start building a politics that "thinks" in global terms and is directed by life. In fact, there have also been many positive and solidary responses to the virus, both in Europe and across the world, that point us to this idea. Such responses range from the international collaboration of medics and scientists that have travelled to especially affected zones⁴⁴³, to the formation all over the world of popular movements, grassroots organizations, civil society organizations, or mutual aid groups that seek to cushion more vulnerable groups from the effects of the virus⁴⁴⁴ (Pleyers 2020, 5-7).

I would claim that my comparative reading of the novels in this thesis reverberates in several ways with these initiatives. It can perhaps provide some initial clues and insights on how to build upon them, helping us imagine new ways to resist or contradict new political and economic onslaughts to exploit the political and individual bodies in the aftermath of the virus. Whether we think about Hope Morrison's tenacious fight to control her pregnancy, Alan Farchi's painful transformation to escape his precarious life, Katniss Everdeen's journey from icon to mother, or Peter and Alba's artificial bodies

⁴⁴⁰ The case of Matteo Salvini in Italy, or Viktor Órban are just two among the many cases of politicians that have tried to capitalize on the virus, weaponizing people's despair. See: *The Guardian* 2020a.

⁴⁴¹ A corrosion that perhaps finds its most eloquent expression in the rising of conspiracy theories and anti-maskers movements that, in countries like the U.S., have vehemently refused to keep social distance, marching against travel restrictions as if measures that governments must impose for the good of their people constitute some kind of political assault on autonomy or personal freedom (*The Guardian* 2020b).

⁴⁴² The discussion over the introduction of "coronabonds" that would provide financial support to the more affected European countries during the pandemics, is a good example of this lack of solidarity, with the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and Finland acting together to head off calls for these bonds. See: *Politico* 2020.

⁴⁴³ As it happened, for example, with a group of Chinese medics that traveled to Italy.

⁴⁴⁴ I mean not only to the physical effects, but also the economic, social, and political effects of the virus.

finally interlaced, all these fictional narratives place us before powerful images that challenge our imagination as contemporary readers. Such images may help us have a new outlook on our bodies' relationship with power, science, technology, and new media, as well as its relationship with others. They may point us ways to build new and genuine bounds, rehabilitating the personal sphere of the *oikos*, or even perhaps an imaginary that adequately reflects the social/political realities and ever-changing identities of a post-nationalist west.

Granted, the imaginative responses and reflection about biopolitics provided by these novels of Tavares, Collins, MacLeod, and Verso relate predominantly to a post-9/11 context, they can only take us so far. But they are bound to be complemented and further elaborated upon in science fiction novels to come. If the literary works published worldwide in the years after the attacks are a signpost to the future, there will undoubtedly be a new wave of dystopian sci-fi which will refer us to this tumultuous historical moment, transforming it in its elsewhere worlds⁴⁴⁵. Given that science fiction writers often tackle themes related with failed/catastrophic scientific-technological inventions, creating characters that are outcasts from their bodies and societies, they have never shied away from contagion, peering right into the heart of the plague-ridden body of society. As the researcher Katherine Shwetz wrote in her article "Apocalyptic fiction helps us deal with the anxiety of the coronavirus pandemic":

Pandemics scare us partly because they transform other, less concrete, fears about globalization, cultural change, and community identity into tangible threats. Representations of contagious diseases allow authors and readers the opportunity to explore the non-medical dimensions of the fears associated with contagious disease. Pandemic fiction does not offer readers a prophetic look into the future, regardless of what some may think. Instead, narratives about contagious disease hold up a mirror to our deepest, most inchoate fears about our present moment and explore different possible responses to those fears. (*The Conversation* 2020)

These coronavirus sci-fi novels will surely be very different amongst themselves. They can take the shape of action-oriented narratives, performing mainly an escapist or entertainment function that allows to transform the mess of illness into a nice clean fight

⁴⁴⁵ The articles "The Covid novels are arriving. And they'll be a warning to future generations" and "What will post-pandemic fiction look like? The novels that followed 9/11 offer some clues", also sustain this idea. See: *Guardian* 2020c; and *Washington Post* 2020. Additionally, I would also like to note that, as I write these words, I have learnt that the novel *Summer*, by Scottish writer Ali Smith, is the first coronavirus novel to be published.

between good and evil – making possible a happy ending. For instance, they may confront us with representations of zombies who elicit the same kind of fear that a possible asymptomatic carrier of Covid-19 does today, or deadly viruses/evil aliens mind bent on destroying civilization. On the other hand, they may take the form of more reflexive and philosophical texts, placing us before uncanny, ostracized characters and their almost unintelligible worlds. As Katherine Shwetz states, they might hold up a mirror to our deepest fears about the present moment and explore possible responses to those fears, while also, I would add, probing into the technological, social, economic and political conditions from which those fears arise. Either way, I believe that they will reinforce and reiterate the profound yet conflictive connection that binds literature, in particular science fiction, and biopolitics.

Academic works that approach these novels from a comparative standpoint will have the chance to dig even deeper into this connection, expanding on the insights and arguments I have presented in this thesis⁴⁴⁶. By crossing the perspectives of dystopian fictions, biopolitical lines of thought and other critical theories, they may bring us new outlooks on the material bodies that have gone through hinge events of monumental magnitude as the 9/11 attacks⁴⁴⁷, and the global pandemic of Covid-19. They will probably evidence even further, I suppose, our dire position in the face of a politics that, in its plasticity, has become stronger throughout history and is bound to gain even more power over human life in years to come. Then again, they may also emphasize that, on this journey to the foreign country that is the future⁴⁴⁸, dystopias provide spaces where resistance occurs as a fictional experimentation that engages meaningfully our imagination, potentially impacting our relationship with the world; spaces that allow us to re-imagine the material body within the power dynamics of the globalized world, or invite us to articulate new, post-national identities; spaces that offer us a map without edges which may help us envision and, eventually, turn into reality a politics that truly protects and potentiates life.

⁴⁴⁶ Or contradicting them.

⁴⁴⁷ And the ensuing “War on Terror”.

⁴⁴⁸ Regarding the potential of Science Fiction to help us imagine and realize a better, different future, it is often said that the “Future is a foreign country”, inverting the first line to Leslie Poles Hartley’s *The Go-Between*: “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there” (2002, 15).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:

INTERVIEW WITH KEN MACLEOD, BY ANA RITA MARTINS & IGOR FURÃO⁴⁴⁹

From computer programmer to Science Fiction writer. Did your background in science influence you? How did you get into Science Fiction writing?

Ken MacLeod (KM) | I and my science background – I think they are related in that I was one of those children or young people who started discovering Science Fiction (SF) at an early age and essentially I read nothing, no fiction, other than SF between the ages of 12 and 20 or 21. From SF I got the idea that being a scientist was the most important and exciting thing you could do and I made a good faith effort to become a scientist, but the drawback of that was that I was not very good at mathematics. So, following the least mathematical kind of science at that time was zoology, and I studied that for my degree. Then I saw a postgraduate project in biomechanics and I had the delusional idea that I could do it, because I had so many classes on mechanics and physics, and so on. It took me a long time to get a research degree, and meantime I worked in short-term jobs, as many people did in fact after graduating or while finishing their post-graduate work.

Eventually I went into programming, which was at that time – in the mid- 1980s – full of failed scientists of one kind or another; they were SF readers too. In the intervening years I had written a number of SF short stories, which I had sent in to the major – in fact the only – British SF magazines. The first one was *New Worlds* and later was *Interzone*. *Interzone* sent me increasingly polite rejection letters; the last one was for a story called “Nineteen Eighty-Nine” and the best thing about that story was the title because it told you everything you needed to know about the story. (*laughs*) In other words the events of [the real-world] 1989 happened in the world of George Orwell’s

⁴⁴⁹ The interview took place November 18, 2016, in Lisbon, and it has also been published on the online journal *Messengers from the Stars: On Science Fiction and Fantasy*. See: Martins and Furão 2017, 80-87. I would like to thank Ana Rita Martins not only for conducting this interview with me, but also for helping me to transcribe it.

Nineteen Eighty-Four and they – *Interzone* – suggested it to be sent to a local fanzine. So I sent it to a fanzine that was in Edinburgh and they rejected it, so my joke was that at this point I had no choice but to write a novel. By that point I started writing a novel and it was mainly to show myself and to show my friend Iain Banks that I actually could write a novel, because over the years – I have known Iain Banks since High School – I had told him about all those interesting novels I was going to write and at a certain point after Iain had written 5 or 6 novels, I learnt from a mutual friend that he was getting a bit tired of hearing about these novels I was going to write so I thought I would give it a go. I finished my MPhil thesis and was no longer attempting to be a scientist so I decided to write a book.

I started my novel *The Star Fraction* (1995), which I didn't have a plot for; I just had a starting situation and developed from there. Needless to say the first draft was very satisfying to me and was enthused over by Iain encouraging me... and got nowhere with anybody else because it was full of stuff that didn't make any sense unless you knew what preoccupied me. Essentially the plot was all subtext; you had to read the book twice to get any idea what it was really all about. I got to the second draft and I sent it to Iain's agent Mic Cheetham, who wrote back with a little postcard and she said basically she liked the details but could not make sense of the story. That summer I happened to be back in London again and I met Mic and she took me out to lunch, and she said, "If it was a film, what would you have on the poster?" and I said, "It's about a man who gets killed but his gun goes on fighting," and she said, "Great! Now go write that book" (*laughs*) so then I did a third draft in which I filled in much more explicitly what was going on. I seem to recall that this involved quite a lot of crawling about in my carpet with cut up sheets of paper and notes (*laughs*) because at that time I did not have a very advanced word processor – I think that was actually one that Iain gave me after he had upgraded to a better computer. I was very grateful to Iain and when I sold my first book I was able to buy my own first computer.

Anyway, Mic took that to an editor John Jarrold who is well known in British SF circles. He was a long-standing fan who had worked for many years as a librarian and then got a job with a publisher as a SF editor, which everyone was delighted with because if anyone deserved success, it was John. He read my novel and the next thing I knew, I was offered a two-book contract. That was great until I started thinking about the second book and I knew I had 18 months to write it. (*laughs*) I thought of it as a sequel and I had my first encounter with what became a very familiar experience of writing with just a

sense of utter misery and despair when you think, “Nobody is possibly going to be interested in this stuff again” I think I phoned up Mic Cheetham and moaned to her and she reassured me; she was right because I was in that kind of feeling of being stuck and nothing is happening and so on... That’s when the real work is going on in the back of your brain, in your subconscious – at least that is what I tell myself (*laughs*) – and the real stroke of what really made my second novel *The Stone Canal* (1996) was that I realized that there was a minor character in my first, in *The Star Fraction*, which is set in the year 2045, who is in his 90s and it struck me that this guy was the same age as me and that meant that my experience was in there to be plundered for his and I dug out my embarrassing student-years note books and diaries, and so on, and created the back story for this guy, Jonathan Wilde.

Have you lost your faith in science? Does it have to be questioned?

KM | Yeah, it depends on what you mean by faith in science. I think science and faith are two very different things because science is about asking. Every statement is open to attack and criticism whereas with faith there are no statements that can be questioned, so there is that emotional engagement. But in terms of confidence in the scientific method obviously it is still... I have that... The social significance of science always has to be questioned and I think SF plays a part in doing that as well as popularising science and there is a very fine line in a way between defending science and technology, which is something I kind of do independently and would do if even I wasn’t a SF writer, and criticising it because there is such an immense amount of ignorance, which is excusable, and misinformation, which is not, out there and it is a constant struggle.

As a Science Fiction writer, how do you perceive the role of SF as a genre capable of drawing people’s attention to society’s problems? *Intrusion*, for instance, seems to draw attention to a potentially oppressive government, though it is very subtle.

KM | I think SF has an obvious role in [social criticism] but the extent to which it does that is something that again is open to question because quite a lot of SF is really affirmative of the social order, I think. Sometimes even when it is being quite radical from

one point-of-view, you can see it can be blind to other issues. The obvious example is as we look back to Golden Age SF we see instances of – perhaps unconscious or unwitting but certainly taken for granted – sexism. Further back you get pretty blatant racism, which you find not just in SF, but also in all popular literature of imperialist countries, and so on.

I started writing my first novels for what would later be *The Fall Revolution* books (1995-1999) where I tried to get my head around, look at and interrogate from different angles if you like the fall of socialism in Europe, the fall of the Left in the West and the disintegration of the Left. I did that in a form of partly satirical exaggeration and partly by pushing certain – what seemed to be quite fruitful – metaphors or possible honest potential insights like part of the hidden [agenda of the book] – it is not hidden, actually, it is quite overt when you see it. In *The Star Fraction*, my first novel, there is a suggestion that there is some similarity between the problems of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the problems of centralised planning and that came out of a TV program on planning [probably “The Engineers’ Plot”, Adam Curtis, BBC 1992], which showed the actual offices in the Soviet Union of Gosplan, the planning ministry, and there were people explaining how it had all worked. Basically there was a big office building and lots and lots of paper flows into it and lots and lots of paper flows out from it and the people working in this ministry, they knew that not all or in fact the great majority of the information coming in to them was unreliable and the great majority of the information sent out by them was not going to be acted on, or at least a significant part. The thing is they did not know which part so they were radically ignorant about what was going on and this reminded me so much of the classic John Searle thought-experiment of the Chinese room where he tries to establish, perhaps not quite the impossibility of strong AI, but an idea that there is some incoherence in the idea of a conscious AI by imagining a room where somebody who is unable to understand or speak Chinese but has all these dictionaries of Chinese language and grammars and so on, and people are shoving questions under the door written in Chinese and the person in the room is able to – by symbolic manipulation – figure out an answer and shove it out. I think this still is one of the great philosophical thought-experiments, which is still being argued, and that sort of thing struck me as a really intriguing line of thought that somebody cleverer than me should take up. (*laughs*)

Some of your novels, like *The Night Sessions* (2008), deal with the theme of religion: different religions, faiths, but also the rejection and/or acceptance of a heavenly entity (or of God). Given the crossroads that many of your characters have to face, would you say that we are facing a faith crisis?

KM | I think everyone at a certain point – at various points in fact – has to make existential decisions and it is possible that our tools – mental tools – for making existential decisions have become very damaged in different ways. First of all, by the decline of the traditional religions, which I think science will eat in the end, any religion that makes factual claims is going to be challenged by science. So you will still have religions that are in a sense a philosophy and a way of life, like Buddhism, and so on, which are not really religions in the same sense as Christianity and Islam. But these – the monotheistic, dogmatic scripture-based religions of the book and all other theoretical progeny, like Mormonism – are in the long run doomed by science.

The other thing that has created kind of a faith crisis, or potentially could do it, is there has been a real decline in people's sense of being part of a historical process and this is kind of celebrated in postmodernism with the idea of the collapse of the grand narrative.

The end of history...

KM | Yes, as we are seeing now, it is actually quite a dangerous place to be because this vacuum or gap is being filled by all kinds of havoc, ideological extremisms.

Connected to this idea, does religion play an important role in your writing? If you think about some of Heinlein's work, like *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), and in *The Night Sessions* religion is at the centre of the narrative so do you think that, unlike what is popularly held, the two – SF and religion – may have more in common? Do you try explicitly to show that link in your novels or do you just describe some aspects of political parties and let the reader figure out if there is a link or not?

KM | In the case of religion, I have a personal backstory with that as I grew up in a very fundamentalist sect of Protestantism and there was Creationism and all the rest of it so I went through a lot of intellectual, emotional struggles in my teens – a not unusual story. I have quite a bit of respect in some ways for certain aspects of that kind of strongly held belief, although I cannot share it. Likewise, I have a lot of respect for a different kind of religion, the more liberal versions that you get and the more mainstream churches, but again I cannot share it. I am always very friendly with people like, say Paul Cornell and his wife (she is a minister), who are liberal Christians, and Francis Spufford, another good example of a very broadminded and liberal and yet very – in many ways – very orthodox Christian and I can see where these people are coming from and I literally have no quarrel with them. What I do have a quarrel with is with the people who trample all over science or over secular ethics. The ethics – what in other European languages are called profane or mundane – I think that all our politics have to be profane, mundane, because otherwise there is only room for irreconcilable conflicts. So you have to justify things in terms that are in principle open to anybody to agree or disagree with rather than a special revelation to one person or to one church or religion.

Actually in my first novel (*The Star Fraction*, 1995) there is a guy growing up in a fundamentalist community, which I had great fun describing; there is *The Night Sessions* and there are one or two short stories, like “A Case of Consilience”, which is a riff on James Blish’s classic novel *A Case of Conscience* (1958) about a missionary on an alien world, and another story with the provocative title “Jesus Christ, Reanimator” (2007), which imagines Jesus actually physically coming back out of the sky and what a puzzle he would be, because he comes out of the sky above Megiddo, Israel, and is escorted back down by jets. (*laughs*)

That is actually, strangely enough, the story I have written that is most respectful of religion and of Jesus, but in the case of *The Night Sessions* it came out of a moment of inspiration when I happened to see on television a U2 video – the one where they are standing at an airport and an airliner comes in above them – and I remarked to my wife that they looked like Free Church [of Scotland] elders, the band with their black hats and their long black coats and then I thought “ah-ah” – you think of airports and terrorism and “ah, Presbyterian terrorists!” – How would that come about? (*laughs*) Within a few minutes I had a lot to think about and that is where the story came from. Of course, I had grown up with these tales of Presbyterian martyrs in Scotland so I had quite a bit of background to draw on.

Scotland also plays a role in your novels. To what extent does your Scottish background help shape the themes and motifs that you approach in your writing?

KM | Almost all the places referred to in my novels that are set on Earth are real places where I have been, whether that is New Zealand or London or Scotland and some of the parts of Scotland described are ones I am very familiar with. I take this to quite ridiculous lengths like there is a house in *Intrusion*, which is the actual house where I grew up in when I was a child.

In my novella *The Human Front* (2001), the character also starts in that same village and it is a kind of inversion of my own past, my father was a minister, not a doctor, and so on. Obviously the [industrial town of] Greenock he goes to when he is 10 is kind of like the Greenock I went to when I was 10, but it is a somewhat different history, but the feeling of noise, of strong air pollution, the shock of finding people who are not physically healthy was something that was very real to me, because when I was growing up on the island [of Lewis], lots of people were not exactly poor, but they were not necessarily well-off so we had large families and children who were always wearing ill-fitting clothes that were passed down from older siblings, but everyone was well-fed. Even as late as 1965 in as a rich a country as Britain you could come to an industrial town and find older generations of people who had had rickets in childhood.

To finish, we have a very cliché question for your Portuguese fans, but since your work is not translated into Portuguese, is there any chance your books will be translated in the near future?

KM | I don't know, that is entirely up to Portuguese publishers. I would love for it to happen, obviously, but I don't know... I just want to wind back very quickly to revisit the question about places and Scottish landscapes, which are very, very important to me and I do put them in. I am not politically a nationalist but that does not mean I do not love the place...

What is there not to love? In your books you have this feeling that culturally there is something that links that SF to Scotland. There is a physicality, which I do not find in many SF novels so I enjoy that aspect of your books.

KM | I can send you links to a couple of articles⁴⁵⁰ I wrote specifically about these aspects of Scottish literature.

That would be great. Thank you for taking the time to grant us this interview.

⁴⁵⁰ See: MacLeod, Ken. "The Future Will Happen Here Too." *The Bottle Imp*. Issue 8, 2010. <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/SWE/TBI/TBIIssue8/MacLeod.pdf>
---. "As if You Lived in the Near Future of an Undecided Nation." *The Bottle Imp*. Issue 18, 2015. <http://asls.arts.gla.ac.uk/SWE/TBI/TBIIssue18/MacLeod.pdf>

APPENDIX 2:

INTERVIEW WITH FRANCESCO VERSO, BY IGOR FURÃO⁴⁵¹

How do you perceive science-fiction as a genre? In other words, how does it relate, for example, to political, technological, or scientific contexts?

Francesco Verso [FV] | At the beginning of the 1900s in the USA there was a group of writers called “The Futurians”, started by, among others, Hugo Gernsback and Asimov’s, that got together and said that science-fiction in 1930 was already dead. Science fiction like the one of the “Space Cowboys” was not useful at all. The true science-fiction was that of the revolution, they were quite left wing and tried to use science and technology to transform humankind and adapt our lives, our biology, even our anatomy, to what would come in the aftermath of the situation in the space [race], or the climate change, that kind of things. At the same time, some years afterwards, the Russians developed the same things. There are strong ties between science-fiction and politics. The same thing is happening now in China. Science-fiction sometimes is born in big countries when they get more industrialized and they start seeing that technological transformations can change the country, so it’s not strange...

It’s natural...

FV | So, all these innovations, these technologies are inside the laboratories, the industries, they need somebody to spread them. It won’t be the engineer to do that, so narrative, fiction, is used as well to divulgate these concepts to the people, so that they become common knowledge, you see?

Yeah, I understand. This is even a bit dangerous, maybe if an author is like you, conscious of how things work, he knows that what he or she writes has even a critical sense. Because then there is the other science-fiction that you were telling me about

⁴⁵¹ The interview took place May 28, 2018, in Rome. I must thank Lorenza Mazzoni and Sara Davies for helping me transcribing and translating the interview from Italian into English.

before, maybe it's used as well as a way to control, unfortunately. I study precisely biopolitics, and the mechanisms of biopolitics nowadays are especially connected to media, or institutions like the school, or political institutions. By themselves, they are not a positive or negative thing, it depends how they are used... I didn't know that thing about China. You know that I recently saw *Avengers: Infinity War*...

FV | How is it?

Well, there are many clichés, the heroes' journey, things like that, but even in China it received lots of support from the state; I saw a video about that, because recently they built two Disneylands and they built a part dedicated to these superheroes. For the Chinese government it makes sense to publicize it, so that the people will go there.

FV | Yeah, this is even another strategy, these are the weapons of mass “distraction”.

True.

FV | They are more powerful than those of “destruction”.

Yes, yes.

FV | But now they are even focusing on transforming their society, while controlling some themes, like it's okay to talk about the future, but they would like that the future is a positive one. They are more interested in utopia rather than dystopia. So, no auto-critique. But if it's about solving the ecology dilemma, developing environmental sustainability, projects about exploring or re-qualifying then...

They are fine with that.

FV | I have an anecdote. One of my stories has been published in China; this story is about immigration, this problem we have about immigrants who come here from Africa. So, in the story they are stopped by an enormous 3D wall that closes the Mediterranean Sea, as it happens in real life... at some point, a ship arrives and picks them up, it's a peculiar ship

that has some 3D printers. It takes them to the middle of the Indian Sea and there they wait for a volcanic eruption. The magma under the sea when it cools down is used by these big 3D printers to create an island. Consequently, they form an island where these immigrants can live, a political issue. Since these immigrants came from Africa, and were Muslims, and in China there is a problem with religious minorities, they decided that they wouldn't publish the story as such. So, they decided that, instead of the Indian sea, the story would happen in China, so they would be the saviours. In that way they published it and said "so beautiful" ... but on one side they changed my story.

But still they published it...

FV | I thought that it's such a big problem, such a human tragedy that I don't mind if someone is Chinese or Russian, the important thing is that these people are saved.

Bravo, I agree.

FV | I don't care about censorship, if at least is used to do something good.

Yeah, anyway they try to underline the fact that the saviour is Chinese... they are even right, it has been so many years that the saviours always come from the west, while they are always the bad ones, so you can even understand why they have this attitude, right?

FV | If we did it, why can't they?

Right. How is it called this story?

FV | I'll send it to you later, it's called "The Green Ship".

Okay, thanks, I like the title.

FV | It's a spinoff of this book [pointing to *I camminatori*].

Oh yeah, I read until page number 120, I really like it. As you were talking about the 3D printers I thought “Aha!”...

FV | Yeah, it's from there.

You know lately I haven't had much time to read many books but it's the first time that I read about 3D printers.

FV | Yeah, there's not much around, this is one of the first books that talks about them. My biggest issue was to find some new technologies that haven't been talked about much. I don't write or publish about over-used things like time travel, space, aliens, too much...

It's true, at some point it's...

FV | Boring... if I get bored then the person who reads it will get bored...

Yes, I think you are right...

I have here some other questions that you may like. You have a degree in Economics with a major in Environment, and you worked for IBM. In your books we understand your worries toward the environment, but why did you choose science fiction to express yourself?

FV | Because with science-fiction you can create some scenarios and do some experiments in some possible futures about some issues that now are still not clear. So, you can speculate, hypothesize, make conjectures. The more realistic they are, the better it is. It's ideal because you are not forced to stay in a reality that is generally limited, from the other side you can bend reality to the desire of glimpsing or opening new roads. I believe science-fiction has this ability to detach itself from the questions that pertain to a direct reality and show the paths we may take in years to come. Any wish we have starts from the imagination. If we don't imagine anything, whether a trip, or a job ... to do something we need to first imagine it. Science-fiction is that to me.

You already partially answered the second question. You write about science-fiction, have you lost faith in the institutions and people to see and solve contemporary problems...

FV | I haven't lost faith, but this faith needs to be cultivated, stimulated. In this moment with the U.S. retrieving from the pact for environmental control, Trump's presidency, Brexit... politics has lost the capability to face human issues, it's too self-directed and out of touch with reality; it's only worried about keeping its own power, so in my opinion politics should rather have a direct contact with reality and people. Therefore, I think that science-fiction, being a phenomenon of subversion, of transformation of the individual and of society, also plays a role that is not so much of prediction, but of individuation, of analysis, of proposing possible solutions. Or at least of giving some warnings, letting out some "warning cries", showing some scenarios that we don't want to get to. Like the big data problem, privacy, cyber security, science-fiction has already talked about these problems... it's politics that gets there much later...

True. Like I was saying, it seems that it's done only for itself, it has lost contact with reality. I agree, art and science-fiction can do something.

FV | Yes, even though it stays just literature, it's not separated from the social context, as it happens to most of the mainstream literature that targets the contemporary world or the past.

Okay, you already answered the third question. Now a more specific one. Most of your books deal with the problems related to technological or scientific development, as it is the case of *e-Doll*, "iMate" and the recent novel *I camminatori*: what do you think will be the scientific impact on human bodies or social bodies?

FV | Very beautiful question. This is exactly what I deal with. Some years ago, a person who follows my [literary] path tried to identify in four of my books what is my poetics, a big concept that is scary for writers, but finally he told me that my poetics is the relationship between the body and technology. As a result, I progressively looked at what

I wrote with this lens, with this criterion, and it's indeed like this. My first novel *Antidoti umani* is related to Cyberpunk, there are some skulls, the intrusion of technology inside our body. In my other novel *e-Doll*, I talk about how artificial bodies interact with human bodies; how the artificial body becomes an extension of our desire, a fetish of a desire projected on the female body or an erotic body. In *Livido* it's the same thing, there is a duality between the body and the soul, a quite complex concept I would say. I talk about how we externalize our drives, how we externalize them through the use of the smartphone; how today the smartphone represents an extension of our senses, the intellectual capacity that we ask of artificial intelligence, an algorithm. In this way we can record or upload our conscience in an artificial non biological body. Some time ago there was some experimentation with hamsters. Two hamsters were taken: one was put inside a labyrinth. After some time, and not without some difficulty, he was able to solve the labyrinth. They took the hamster's neurons and charged them on the second hamster. The second hamster went straight to the exit. If we are already at this point, an episode of "Black Mirror" is not so far away...

Yeah, I agree.

FV | In my last book I talk about a more advanced concept: I created a "nida", a nano-robot that can create matter, but as well has some elements inside that connects it to genes and atoms. What would happen if these nano-robots could rewrite our genetic code and give us some desirable functions while eliminating some non-desirable functions? They could make us apt for other environments, increase our capacity to oxygenate the blood, to achieve an artificial photosynthesis on the skin. So, technology, starting from the fact of using glasses to solve a genetically problem, to the use of prosthesis... For example, we can think about Oscar Pistorius, and how a handicapped person can become a super man with technology. Technology can create things that didn't exist before. So, we could even get to the point of surpassing the concept of natural evolution to get to an "auto-generated" evolution. In other words, humankind's ability to direct evolution through technology; an evolution that is no longer strictly connected to forces through centuries and millennia, but that is, instead, much shorter, as if it were almost a software update.

I was reading some theories about this. It's incredible how when I was reading your book, I found it difficult to separate what is human and... what you're saying: nature, culture, artificial, the limit disappears.

FV | This limit disappears because most technologies that we consider artificial, as they evolve and enter our daily life, become more "naturalised". Writing is technology, agriculture is technology. We don't even consider them so. We consider them natural elements.

Like a person two hundred years ago would write with a pen and now uses a computer, it has changed the writing process a lot. People don't even realise this technology that we now take for granted, changes many things. Okay let's keep going...

In another of your novels, *Due mondi*, most the characters are in crisis. It looks like you want to send a specific message...

FV | The message should be the overcoming of the two worlds. For sure in *Due mondi* there is an overcoming of our biologically given human condition and the fusion with the vaster genome of the biosphere. We have a genetic connotation that codifies our forms. But there is another hidden part of the genetic code, called junk genetic code that is part of the previous natural history of mankind that has to do with the past. We use a small part of the genetic code. All that has to do with the evolution of humankind that is still there, but it doesn't codify anymore. So, I ask myself, for example, what is inside the junk genetic code? How could it be used? Maybe we could wake up some genetic sequences to have other functions. In *Due mondi* there is the concept of the chimera. In *Bloodbusters* there is a more political subject, the use of blood as an element of control and punishment. It's a more grotesque, satirical book... Apart from the joke, there is a recurrent phenomenon: the intrusive control of the state that gets to the point of controlling our blood...

When I first read the synopsis, and even the book, I found it funny... But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that this is a quite scary metaphor... We are not so far from that reality, so that makes you think a little bit. These are the books

I like the most: those in which you discover little by little some different shades of meaning that you may not have perceived the first time you read it.

FV | In “Fernando Morales”, on the other hand, I tried to make fun of the media, play with the fact that now everything becomes a show, even death. But I wanted to create a character that would take advantage of that possibility given by that absurd tv show: to die live and to have in the last moment of your life a few seconds of glory. Morales take advantage of this but, in the end, he is punished.

Yeah, the end of the story really... I thought that it was a sad character, but when I realised that he wanted to take advantage of that... it made me even sadder...

Another question, a little more personal: the Italian context is really important in your novels. In which ways are the elements of your writing related to your Italian background?

FV | A bit. I cannot avoid seeing the world from the point of view in which I was born and raised, even if, fortunately, the Italian culture in general, my education, and the sources to which I can refer to, do not pertain exclusively to Italy. Strangely enough in my first novels I wanted to detach from the Italian context, so those novels are not set in Italy... as if I was still afraid to face my culture. Maybe unconsciously I wanted to imitate my masters, trying to walk in their footsteps to feel surer... maybe talking about something like my own identity, my own culture is difficult to manage. In three of my books, I didn't face anything about my country. From *Bloodbusters* that is set in Rome, and onwards, I dared to come closer to my culture and I hope to have given a vision of a different Rome, a future Rome, with its problems but as well some peculiarities.

I think so. I read *Bloodbusters* and *I camminatori*. The people who know the city and the country, when you talk about the gestures of people, they understand what you are talking about; although it's a transformed, alternative perspective, they nevertheless understand it. This is something I will try to face a bit in my thesis. I am working on Ken MacLeod, this Portuguese author [Gonçalo M. Taves], and Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*. I think that each of them, in their own way,

develop their books and their universes inside the experiences of their own countries.

***The Hunger Games* trilogy, for example...**

FV | It's American, the competition...

Yes, how can you understand *The Hunger Games* in a European context? Or Asian?

I mean, you can, but...

FV | Yes, even though the first time I read it, it made me think of the myth of the minotaur, in which virgins were sacrificed and given to the minotaur and then they had to participate in that competition, then one would win...but Americans normally don't invent anything, they rewrite some things when they have to deal with literary archetypes. Those archetypes are in Europe, or in China.

Yes, it's like that.

FV | Because before Americans didn't exist.

Exactly, it's not their fault. Okay, let's continue... I can imagine some of your books adapted for cinema or TV, would you like this idea?

FV | Of course, I would love that idea. There have been two projects: the first is the script for *Livido*, that was written in Italian by a screen writer of RAI, but in Italy it's quite difficult to produce and propose these kinds of things, so... the screenplay exists, but maybe it will be easier to translate it into Chinese or English. Another project is "Flush", a story that was adapted for a web series, but it doesn't exist yet. I would love that because I feel the stories would be worth it, especially since now there has been an explosion of science-fiction series, like "Black Mirror", "The Handmaid's Tale", there are many elements...

Yes, I can easily imagine a series based on your novels or stories. I hope so, it would be worth it. Is there any movie or series that you are watching?

FV | “Westworld”, “Black Mirror”, “Humans” ... Also, “Mr. Robot”, which is not exactly science-fiction but has some dystopian elements; the main character is a hacker, so watch it. The first season is great, then it becomes a bit heavy... For movies I really loved *Moon* by Duncan Jones, *Inception*... Oh, there is also a Brazilian series, “3%”...

Yes, I saw the first episode.

FV | I couldn't manage to see the first episode; I cannot find it.

I think I saw it on Netflix. Let me tell you... The first episode... for something that was made without a lot of resources in Brazil, it's done well; and it's understandable that the main idea [of the series] revolves around the gap between rich and poor people, you understand why they made it... but I still need to see the other episodes...

FV | Movies like *Her*, I don't know if you saw it, that kind of movies where there is a psychological relationship between mankind and technology. For that kind of science-fiction that is more for entertainment, I go with my daughter to watch *Star Wars*...

Did you like *Ex Machina*?

FV | Yes, it's nice, I didn't enjoy the ending, but the development is okay.

What do you think about *Blade Runner 2049*?

FV | Well, there is a risk of touching a sacred monster that is a cult of the world of science-fiction. I didn't dislike it, it had many beautiful things, for sure some things that could be better, but in general is a good movie. I liked it more than *Arrival*. But *Arrival* had behind it a story written by Ted Chang, a science-fiction writer, so my advice is always to start from a novel by a writer, like Kubrick did. All his movies are taken from novels.

All masterpieces.

FV | The filmmaker should be filmmaker, the screenwriter should do his job, not the writer's job.

I totally agree. If you want to do things in science-fiction but you don't have a good story, then it doesn't matter even if you have nice images...

FV | You can sell millions, but my criterion of judging is not money but time. How long will it survive? For example, *Blade Runner* didn't start well, but then became cult.

I think one thing that was missing is a stronger final monologue.

FV | I agree. But there are as well some good elements, like the relationship between him and the holographic projection, it's cool. I also liked the background subject/theme of the movie. In the first film the meaning was: we want more life, and we are limited by time. The second part [the second movie] is: we can reproduce ourselves, so the miracle is the artificial life that becomes natural. Not bad!

Of course!

FV | It wasn't easy to develop an idea starting from that premise.

And he was able to visually build that world...

FV | For sure, but for me the visual has a weakness: it's too tidy, too perfect. While *Blade Runner* is dirty, it's truer... it became too tidy...

Last question before I let you go. Do you think that the translation of science-fiction books is important? There is a translation of *Livido* in Brazilian Portuguese. Do you think it will be possible to have it as well in Portugal?

FV | I would love that; if I find a translator and a publishing house, I am available.

Look, me and some Italian friends who live in Lisbon can do the translation easily.

FV | We need the publishing house and then we can talk about it.

Sure, I will try to gather information because I really care about it. I would love to see these books translated into Portuguese. Even because the translation into Brazilian Portuguese...

FV | Did you read it? How is it?

It's not bad. It manages to capture the most important ideas, but I feel it misses something from the original version...

FV | Well, poor them, they didn't have much budget.

I see. Anyway, it's not bad, one doesn't feel disappointed by it.

FV | There is *Due mondi* as well in Portuguese, even "Flush"...

I think I have the other books on my computer.

FV | You can read them in Italian anyway...

APPENDIX 3:



Triptych “The Temptation of St. Anthony” (circa 1561), by Hieronymus Bosch. Oil on panel. Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon

APPENDIX 4:



“Creation of Wartime III” (1999-2008), by Samuel Bak. Oil on canvas. Pucker Gallery, Boston

APPENDIX 5:



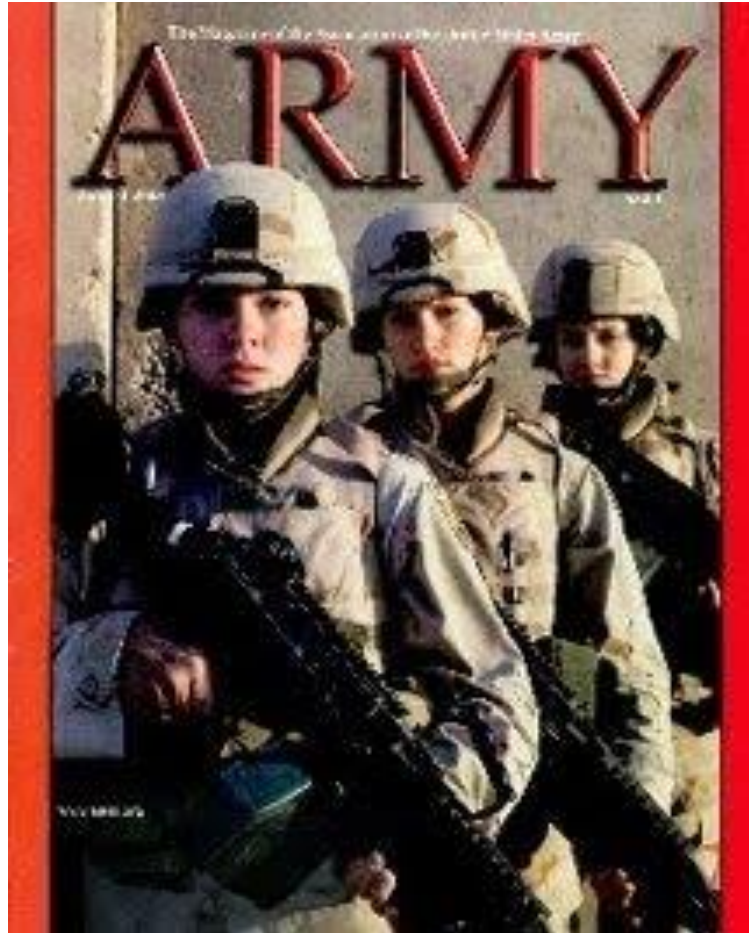
“Lilith” (1987-1990), by Anselm Kiefer. Oil, emulsion, shellac, charcoal, ash, clay, hair, lead, poppy on canvas. Centre Pompidou, Paris

APPENDIX 6:



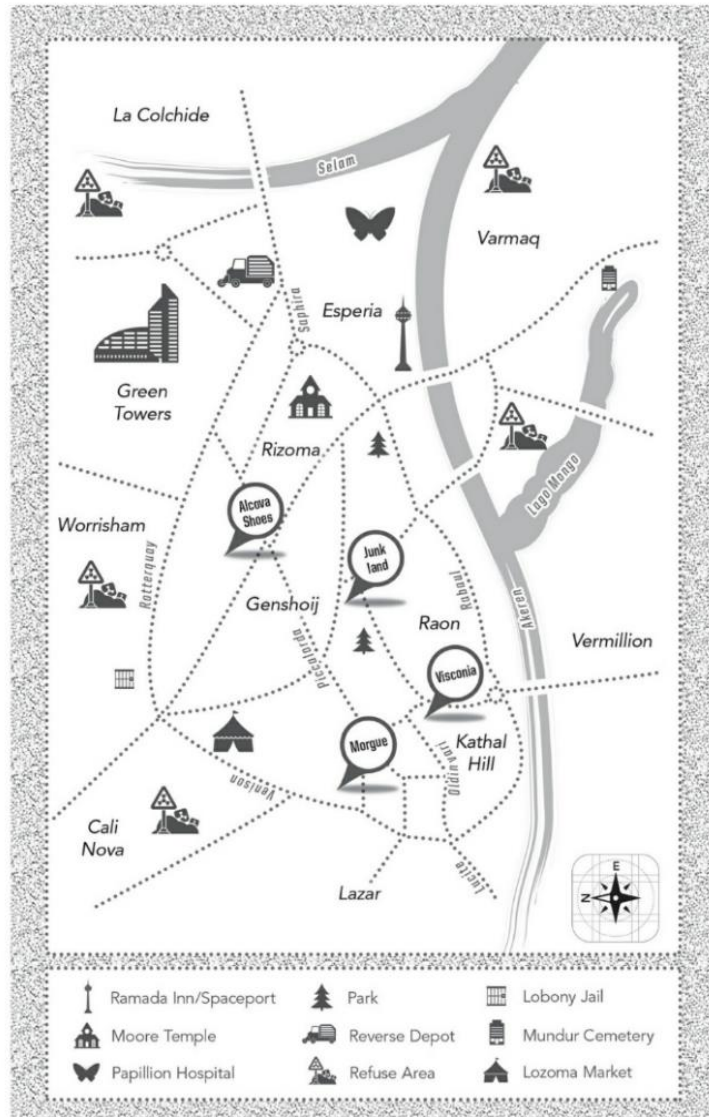
Frontispiece of *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (1651), by Abraham Bosse

APPENDIX 7:



Army magazine cover featuring Robyn Murray and other two colleagues

APPENDIX 8:



The megacity of *Nexhuman*

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