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Dystopia and Transhumanism: The case of *RoboCop* (1987)

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Abstract – Dystopia and Transhumanism: The case of *RoboCop (1987)*

The present dissertation, presented within the Masters in English and American Studies, aims to explore the science fiction action film *RoboCop* and address pertinent themes which it draws attention to, namely, societal issues and philosophical dilemmas concerning humanity and technology. As such, I specifically chose to explore these themes through two suitable perspectives: dystopian fiction and transhumanism, an intellectual and philosophical movement that advocates technological enhancement. The study of the former allows for a better understanding of the film in its aspect as a work of speculative fiction, which helps to understand its setting, structure, influences and why it specifically focuses on certain problems concerning late 20th century American society, while the latter permits a more substantial comprehension of the film's philosophical themes on the ontology of humankind and its relation to the influence of technology, specifically when it comes to enhancement.

Overall, this dissertation consists of two main chapters, besides the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter will revolve around the exploration of dystopian fiction, including its ancestry, development, characteristics and overall core themes. The second chapter will focus on the exploration of transhumanism and the ontology of human beings, particularly in relation to the philosophy of the movement and its aim of technological enhancement. It will also feature the proper analysis of the film, though it will have been referenced to in the preceding chapter and subchapters. When it comes to formulation of the first chapter, I rely on the work of authors such as Tom Moylan who wrote *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000) and Gregory Claeys who edited the *Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (2010). The elaboration of the second chapter depends on key sources such as: *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (2013) edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More along with *H+/-: Transhumanism and Its Critics* (2011) edited by Gregory R. Hansell and William Grassie as well as *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment* (1996) edited by Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows.

Keywords: Transhumanism, Dystopia, enhancement, technology, *RoboCop*.

Resumo – Distopia e Transumanismo: O caso de *RoboCop* (1987)

A presente dissertação, apresentada no âmbito do Mestrado em Estudos Ingleses e Americanos, tem como objetivo explorar o filme de ficção científica e ação, *RoboCop*, e abordar temas pertinentes para os quais ele chama atenção, nomeadamente, problemas sociais e dilemas filosóficos sobre a humanidade e tecnologia. Como tal, eu escolhi especificamente abordar estes temas através de duas perspetivas consideradas adequadas: ficção distópica e transumanismo, um movimento filosófico e intelectual que advoga aprimoramento tecnológico da espécie humana.

O estudo do primeiro campo permite um melhor entendimento do filme enquanto obra de ficção especulativa, o que ajuda a entender o seu cenário, a sua estrutura, as suas influências e porque se concentra em certos problemas relativos à sociedade norte-americana no fim do século XX. Especificamente, o filme concentra-se no paradigma socioeconómico do fim de século em que problemas causados pelo capitalismo de estágio avançado e pelo neoliberalismo se manifestaram de forma proeminente. Recorrendo a uma abordagem distópica, o filme extrapola estas condições para o futuro em que elas são exageradas e são a causa de uma sociedade significativamente mais negativa e imperfeita. Esta abordagem é utilizada por inúmeras distopias de modo a realizar o objetivo principal do género na sua totalidade, que é informar os leitores e/ou espetadores sobre os problemas prevalecentes na sua sociedade e explorar o que poderá acontecer se eles não forem resolvidos. Apesar de o filme recorrer mais à sátira do que a um tom crítico desprovido de esperança exerce, de igual modo, a função de aviso e cautela inerente ao género distópico e da própria ficção especulativa.

Outro grande tema do filme que também é constantemente abordado pelo género distópico é o papel da tecnologia, não só quanto ao seu impacto na sociedade, mas no ser humano em si, pois uma possibilidade constantemente apresentada em distopias é que tecnologia suficientemente avançada poderá ser utilizada por entidades/organizações políticas, sociais e económicas para transformar a nossa espécie, algo que é representado no filme. Isto leva ao estudo do segundo campo, o movimento de transumanismo, que possibilita uma compreensão mais substancial dos temas filosóficos abordados pelo filme, particularmente quanto à ontologia da humanidade e a sua relação quanto à influência da tecnologia, especialmente no tocante à ideia de aprimoramento tecnológico. Isto pode ser, discutivelmente, considerado o tema mais

relevante do filme não só por ser algo em que o mesmo se foca especialmente, mas também porque levanta questões e ansiedades que nós enfrentamos hoje. Essencialmente, o filme concentra-se em conceções ontológicas do ser humano, sobre a natureza da nossa existência, noções que são constantemente destabilizadas pelo progressivo avanço científico e tecnológico. A ideologia de aprimoramento tecnológico que é defendida por aderentes do movimento de transumanismo expande e complica este paradigma, pois traz à tona questões sobre o que é o ser humano como também a possibilidade desse mesmo ser deixar de existir. O filme essencialmente fornece a sua própria conceção e resposta a estes dilemas filosóficos, algo que o estudo do transumanismo permite analisar melhor.

No geral, esta dissertação consiste em dois capítulos principais além da introdução e da conclusão. O primeiro capítulo explora o conceito de ficção distópica, investigando o seu desenvolvimento, características e ancestralidade, ou seja, o género literário a que pertence e de que provém, a Utopia. Foi este género literário que abriu as portas à formulação da distopia pois foi crucial no exercício do pensamento especulativo, particularmente no que toca a condições sociais. Este género foi-se desenvolvendo ao longo do tempo, algo que é brevemente explorado, até surgir o subgénero da Utopia Satírica, que critica e ridiculariza a perspetiva otimista da ficção Utópica. Foi particularmente este subgénero que permitiu a formulação da ficção distópica, os sentimentos críticos e pessimistas expressados pela utopia satírica seriam adotados e ampliados pela distopia, especialmente devido às condições do tempo em que o género foi popularizado, no início a meados do século XX. Foi nesta era em que o género distópico foi formalmente concretizado, apresentando a sua própria estrutura, características, temas e mecanismos narrativos. No entanto, como aconteceu com a Utopia, o género distópico também sofreu certos desenvolvimentos assinaláveis, especialmente no fim de século, algo que é possível notar em *RoboCop*, que apresenta características desta reformulação do género.

O segundo capítulo foca-se na exploração do transumanismo e na ontologia do ser humano, particularmente em relação à filosofia do movimento e o seu objetivo de aprimoramento tecnológico. O conceito de "natureza humana" e outras noções e ideologias filosóficas relacionadas com o ser humano são exploradas, como por exemplo a noção de dualismo cartesiano que afirma a separação entre mente e corpo, basicamente asseverando que os seres humanos possuem uma essência única que determina a sua

natureza. Outras teorias, como a de evolução apresentada por Darwin, também são abordadas neste paradigma, que tem em conta a relação destas noções que precedem e influenciam a ideologia transumanista, com a ideia de aprimoramento tecnológico. Essencialmente é ponderado se as qualidades e "natureza" do ser humano são fixas ou dinâmicas, se intervenções tecnológicas poderão ser extensas o suficiente para transformar completamente o que conhecemos como o "humano" num ser completamente diferente. Isto é seguido pelo estudo do movimento em si, incluindo a perspetiva ontológica do mesmo quanto ao ser humano e as suas facetas políticas, económicas e sociais. A filosofia do transumanismo tem a sua própria perspetiva quanto à natureza e constituição do ser humano, uma perspetiva que possibilita a ideologia de alindamento tecnológico, esta ideologia não envolve só bases filosóficas, mas também vertentes mais materiais, visto que o progresso tecnológico é inseparável dos vários componentes que permeiam a sociedade humana. O filme demonstra de forma saliente esta conexão, algo que é explorado na fase final deste trabalho. O último capítulo desta dissertação consiste, inicialmente, na exploração de uma forma de aprimoramento que é representada no filme e que está intimamente conectada ao movimento do transumanismo, o alindamento cibernético, seguido pela análise do filme em si de acordo com os temas analisados previamente.

Enfim, a exploração do filme através dessas duas perspetivas possibilita uma nova perspetivação do mesmo que vai além do seu estatuto na cultura popular como uma película simples de ação com efeitos especiais de alta qualidade. Ao revés, este trabalho essencialmente afirma que leituras muito mais aprofundadas que interrogam o espetador em assuntos pertinentes podem ser efetuadas, especialmente na atualidade em que problemas sociais, como desigualdade económica, juntamente com o avanço progressivo de ciência e tecnologia prenunciam grandes mudanças que podem ser menos que benéficas, não só quanto à sociedade humana, mas quanto à própria espécie. São as consequências destas possibilidades que o filme aborda através da sociedade ficcional representada como também na experiência do protagonista da narrativa, que sofre várias modificações tecnológicas que põem em causa a sua identidade e o seu estatuto, como pessoa e como ser humano.

No que toca à elaboração do primeiro capítulo, ele alicerça-se principalmente no trabalho de autores como Tom Moylan que escreveu *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000) e Gregory Claeys que edita a obra *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*

(2010). O segundo capítulo depende de fontes chave como: *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (2013) editado por Max More e Natasha Vita-More como também *H+/- : Transhumanism and Its Critics* (2011) editado por Gregory R. Hansell e William Grassie e *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment* (1996) editado por Mike Featherstone e Roger Burrows.

Palavras-chave: Transumanismo, Distopia, aprimoramento, tecnologia, *RoboCop*.

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List of Abbreviations

GNR - Genetics, Nanotechnology, Robotics

GRIN - Genetics, Robotics, Information Technology, Nanotechnology

NBIC - Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information Technology, Cognitive Science

OCP - Omni Consumer Products

SF - Science Fiction

1. Introduction

According to the organization "21st Century Lab", which belongs to the University of Lincoln, the current century is faced with 10 grand interrelated challenges which create an "even more unstable and uncertain future than we have seen for some time. Each works individually and together, with a mix of local and global influences shaping the particular experiences of citizens in different places" ("Ten Grand Challenges"). Overall, these challenges seem to be centered around two main areas: socioeconomic issues such as rising inequality and corporate power on one hand, and the multitudinous effects of scientific and technological progress on the other. Both these fields have often been prime targets of discussion and examination, even before the 21st century, as they give rise to fascinations, fears and most importantly questions. Questions on how society will be shaped in the future and how our species itself, the *Homo Sapiens*, will be affected. The progress that human civilization has achieved in the last century has only served to make these questions more complex which, in turn, deepens the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Pertinently, Humankind's most prevalent method to deal with these feelings seems to be centered on the act of speculation, to form theories and conjectures on what the future will hold, incidentally one of the key manners in which this speculative performance is undertaken is through the use of fiction. According to Emmanuel Nataf speculative fiction is

> an important place to explore social, political, and economic issues. The loose boundaries of the genre allow authors to address those issues and ask "what if?" — resulting in worlds different from our own in significant and specific ways, which often reflect or comment on aspects of actual society. Now, with technology progressing so quickly (and leading to rapid social and ethical changes and dilemmas), it's critical to use speculative fiction as a means of thinking about the future. ("Speculative Fiction is Needed")

One such work of speculative fiction will be the main object of study of this dissertation, the science-fiction action film *RoboCop* directed by Paul Verhoeven and released in 1987. This piece of cinema, although widely appraised for its action sequences and over-the-top violence, essentially dwells upon these profound themes, not only demonstrating how current socioeconomic practices and scientific and technological

progress may drastically change society but also tackling more philosophical themes concerning humanity and technology, specifically focusing on ontological concerns about human identity and the essence of our being and how such notions may be influenced by technological progress. The film portrays these pertinent themes, firstly, through its particular setting, a near-future society located in the United States that exhibits significant socioeconomic issues stemming from the entrenchment of late stage capitalism alongside the myriad effects of technological progress, effectively displaying the consequences of such a paradigm, namely, inequality and dehumanization. Secondly, the film displays its more existential themes through the experience of the protagonist, who is significantly and unwillingly changed through technological means and struggles to regain his identity as a human being and as person, having difficulty coming to terms with his drastically different existence.

Incidentally, these are themes that I will focus upon, with intent of this dissertation being to, firstly, through *RoboCop*, explore the particular form of speculative fiction which the film encompasses (besides Sci-Fi), Dystopia, a literary genre that dwells on the aforementioned societal issues by portraying significantly flawed fictional societies such as the one in *RoboCop*, essentially functioning as a medium for social criticism. More importantly, I will be addressing the existential themes of the film, revolving around humanity and technology, through the perspective of Transhumanism, an intellectual and philosophical movement whose core beliefs revolve around the possibility of utilizing science and technology to positively transform the human race. It is my hope that, through this work, this film can be observed in a new light as a highly pertinent piece of media which dwells on extremely important contemporary dilemmas, both material and philosophical. Furthermore, I hope to illuminate not only the prevalent connection between society and technology, particularly framing it within the thematic of the dystopia, but also to elucidate on the monumental role that technological advancement may play in the self-conception that we have of our own species. The fact that, as transhumanists hold, we may literally better ourselves by utilizing science and technology leads to numerous questions and concerns revolving around ontological issues, with the most prevalent fear being the effacement of concepts that we consider fundamental to our identity such as "human nature" and "human dignity". In essence, the notion of technological enhancement leads to the fear that we will eventually become inhuman

and/or dehumanized, consequently this fear prompts us to interrogate our very own condition and the conception that we have of our species: after all, what exactly is the human? What even makes us human? It is these philosophical matters which *RoboCop* dwells upon and, as such, I seek to address them. The methodology utilized to explore these themes essentially consists of bibliographic research on said topics and on the film, which involves the interpretation of written works along with the audiovisual interpretation of the object of study.

Since I aim to address two distinct themes – Dystopia and Transhumanism – structurally this work will be divided into two main chapters besides the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter will consist of an exploration of Dystopia, while the second chapter will focus on Transhumanism and ontology. The first chapter will commence by delving into the ancestry of the dystopia, which means delving into the origins of its progenitor, Utopia, along with the main characteristics and the major changes which this genre underwent. This will lead to the study of Satirical Utopia, a variation of the genre which stands as the more direct ancestor to Dystopia and effectively paved the path for the latter to eventually be created. Afterwards, the proper genre of Dystopia and its meteoric rise in the early to mid-20th century will be explored. This will include the prevalent themes the genre dealt with and its overall structure, including its close relationship with science-fiction; important dystopian works of this time will also be properly referred to. Lastly, an analysis will be performed of the genre's main narrative and textual mechanisms along with its eventual refashioning in the late 20th century, which gave rise to a variation of the genre, the critical dystopia. Accordingly specific works will be addressed. Important sources which aided in the research for this chapter include: Scraps *of The Untainted Sky* (2000) written by Tom Moylan and *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (2010) edited by Gregory Claeys.

The second chapter will begin with a brief introduction to the movement of Transhumanism, which will be followed by the exploration of ideologies and concepts, such as "human nature" and "human essence", which have greatly influenced the matter of ontology and transhumanism itself, furthermore the connection between these concepts to the technological enhancements which transhumanists seek will also be addressed. This will lead to the direct study of the movement of Transhumanism and its core characteristics, such as its philosophical perspective on the human and its political, economic and social facets. Finally, the film itself will be directly addressed, firstly there

will be a brief examination of a specific type of enhancement which is prominently present in its narrative, that being cybernetic augmentation, which will then be connected to the proper in-depth analysis of the film according to the themes explored throughout the dissertation. Important sources utilized for this chapter include: *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (2013) edited by Max More and Natasha Vita-More, *H+/-: Transhumanism and Its Critics* (2011) edited by Gregory R. Hansell and William Grassie and lastly, *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment* (1996) edited by Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows.

Finally, the conclusion of this work reflects on the precepts that can be taken away from this exploration of *RoboCop* and the specific themes that were tackled. Furthermore, the film's status within the area of cinema and additional themes that can be garnered from it will also be briefly considered.

2. Dystopia

2.1. The Advent of Speculative Fiction – Utopia

> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias. (Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* 1895)

Throughout the existence of human civilization, questions with a common theme have been constantly worked on and debated through history: What is the best way to organize a society that is able to provide a good life to its citizens? What can we do to improve our world and our society? How can we achieve a better way of living? Since the days of antiquity and perhaps even before, the improvement of society and the conditions in which people live have been a complex matter, since each person has his/her own subjective view on what can be done to improve the lives of individuals. Considering this, one person's opinion on the betterment of people's lives might be another's nightmare. As a result of this paradigm, an individual must think on a collective level on the ways in which society might be improved upon. Plato through his work entitled *Republic* was one of the first people to write a formal attempt at a collective thought experiment on the best way to a organize a society that provides a better life to its citizens. Nevertheless, it was an essentially theoretical proposition and Plato never actually pictured a functioning society, at least not in that particular text.

It would only be in 1516 that a lawyer and philosopher by the name of Thomas More would provide a thoroughly written text on the several issues that pervaded his society at that time, and would propose ways to correct those problems and promote society towards a more perfect state. More took note of the several predicaments that were present during the epoch in which he lived, such as the issues plaguing the entire justice system which he found to be ineffective, for example, the disproportionate punishments to crimes such as thieving. The arrogance of rulers and/or their alienation from the common people was another aspect which he criticized, such as the unfairness of the

social hierarchy, the disproportionate distribution of wealth and the concern rulers had with obtaining more land instead of governing their people properly. After vigorously criticizing the society in which he lived (*Utopia*, Book I), he would go on to construct an alternative imagined civilization on a far-off island. This imaginary civilization would have none of the issues present in More's time, and would improve on many other areas which More found wanting in his own community. This far-off alternative and imaginary island with an almost perfect society would be called Utopia. It must be underlined however that although this work is considered the first "official" Utopia, More himself did *not* create the collective experiment of Utopian thought. As was alluded, utopian thought had been present throughout civilization long before More, in works such as Plato's *Republic* and the myth of the Golden Age. Coming from Greek mythology and situated in the distant past, the Golden Age was described as a period of peace, stability and abundance which are all recurrent utopic themes. Somewhat closer to More's time was also the medieval poem, *Land of Cockaygne[1]* which was utopian in spirit, though deprived of any social reform proposal; it was elaborated before and in many ways in contrast with More's own utopia.

Firstly, an important aspect to note is that the characteristics of criticism and speculation, which are crucial to Utopia, are related to the fact that utopias and utopian thought itself evolve and change with the times. More specifically wrote about issues that affected his society during the 16th century and particularly in England. It can hardly be expected that those problems would remain constant as societies progress. As such, new challenges come to the forefront and new utopias are created to respond to those issues, as Lyman Tower Sargent writes:

> (…) Also, fashions change in Utopias; most sixteenth-century eutopias horrify today's reader even though the authors' intentions are clear. On the other hand, most twentieth-century eutopias would be considered dystopias by a sixteenth-century reader and many of them would in all likelihood be burnt as works of the devil. (5)

Thus, utopias are *always* somehow based on the historical moment in which the author lives in, regardless of whether they take place on an alternate location or in the

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[1] There are several versions of The Land of Cockaygne, here it is specifically being referred to the 13th Century French poem.

near or distant future. As mentioned beforehand, utopias are also somewhat subjective and personal, even with a collective mindset most utopias adhere to the "utopographer's" own individual views and beliefs. There are several elements such as ethnicity, gender, religion etc. that affect the manner in which a utopia is formulated. Considering these factors, it is no surprise that the Utopian format also changes as societies progress, whether in their political, economic or social organization. As new ways of organizing society appear, a utopographer has to adapt his/her own conception of utopia. Since some utopias were considered far too static and unchanging, as they did not adapt to the changing times, the utopian format since More's time has changed quite a bit.

In any event, More *is* responsible for the creation of the initial framework of the genre and its characteristics, along with the word Utopia itself. It consists of a neologism that combines the Greek words *ouk* which means *not* and was eventually changed to *u* and the word *topos* which means *place* which had the suffix *ia* added to it indicating a location; what can be deduced from this etymological construction is that Utopia is a place which is a non-place (Vieira 4). However, More created further complexity when it comes to the term by adding yet another neologism, *Eutopia*, which means "the good place". As a result, there exists a tension that has its roots in the conflation between the term Eutopia, "the good place" and the term Utopia the "non-place" (Vieira 5). What can be garnered from this is that Utopia was meant to be at the same time a good place or a good society, presumably better than our own, that is located in a non-place meaning an imaginary space that does not truly exist. It is with this deterritorialization that part of the initial framework of utopian literature occurs. This framework, created by More, was formulated by way of a travelogue or journey. Firstly, the subject and the society in which he/she resides is criticized to a relative extent. Then the subject is taken on an adventurous voyage to a far off place, usually an isolated location, such as an island in the case with More, though in this particular circumstance it is presumed that More wrote the second part of his work first, the part that describes utopia, and only after wrote the first part that criticizes his society. As Nicole Pohl writes, "Renaissance and early modern utopias displaced their ideal and other worlds by locating them in faraway, undiscovered countries and remote uncharted islands and planets" (52). An extensive panoramic description is made of the society that resides on the far-off location, where people are usually happier and healthier and in which the problems of the author's or the narrator's old society have been sorted or were never present. Afterwards, the subject returns to his

original society, so as to tell the tale of the better civilization that he encountered, which serves to reveal to his countrymen that there are better alternatives available in which to organize the community, as it happened with More's *persona*, Raphael Hythloday's report of his journey and findings.

The use of the journey to a far-off unknown place also serves the purpose of opening up the reader's mind to the way of living of the new society which was facilitated by the discoveries during More's time. The fact that the world was wider and bigger than previously known, which in turn meant that it also held numerous possibilities, allowed readers to accept speculative and strange societies with ease. J.C Davis writes that in imagining an alternative world More could draw on the "exciting and recently published accounts of the 'New World' (34). The reader must be able to detach himself/herself from their own preconceived notions and his/her ties to reality in order to be fully immersed in this imagined community. The decadent society's protagonist leaving the shores of the world he knows to experience a completely new world is symbolic of the readers severing their ties to reality and what they know in order to experience a different world with new possibilities. This technique of defamiliarization and broadening of the reader's perception is another prominent characteristic of Utopia. More's own work is one the most descriptive cases of this paradigm, as Nicole Pohl writes:

> (…) doubled-up by the dialogue between Books I and II. It offers a systematic and detailed description of Utopian society and contrasts historical reality with the alternative history/society. Through this 'cognitive estrangement' (Darko Suvin) or the imagination of strange worlds, the reader learns to see his/her own world from a new perspective. (56)

Of course the literary technique of the journey to the distant island would not remain forever, and the format would change with the creation of *euchronia,* the utopia set in the future. The creation of euchronia revolutionized the format of utopias, as well as the function utopias themselves used to fulfill. While initially utopias were meant to criticize society in addition to pointing out that there were better alternatives available to the hegemonic rule that people lived under, the euchronia made it so utopias now had additional uses in conjunction with being vehicles of criticism and/or the exploration of other ways of ruling.

As utopias were now being set in the future, the present was perceived as the moment people should work to improve in order to achieve the utopia that could be available in the future. This implied a gradual construction of utopia through presumably political and rational actions, instead of simply being an already existent and static space in some far-off location. Bearing this idea in mind, it is therefore no surprise that euchronias were created in the 17th and 18th centuries. The development of the powers of reason and science that had started with the Renaissance had precipitated a change in the genre of Utopia. As alluded, Utopia is always connected to a historical moment and evolves with it. Of course, with the development of euchronia, the function of Utopia also changed from what it was initially during More's time. Now that several utopias were set in the future, and humanity would need to work collectively in the present moment to achieve it, they were no longer just about criticism, compensation or speculation; instead, they were meant to catalyze change (Roemer 82). In addition, they were no longer meant to be fully mapped out blueprints, such as More's *Utopia*, but adopted a more dynamic strategy. Ultimately, according to Ruth Levitas, Utopia's function is meant to be the "Education of Desire" (7-8). It is meant to inform people about the conditions in which they live and that they should strive for more and better. That they should work in the present to achieve a more perfect society in the future.

Of course, before euchronia or the creation of the utopian framework by More there was already an "utopian impulse" that resulted in the creation of some other works that were utopian in spirit. These works represented the desire for a better life or a better way of being from those that were disenfranchised or alienated by society, as plenty of utopias are. Another example could be the description of Atlantis in Plato's works *Timaeus* and *Critias*, in which the eponymous continent is depicted as having a superior form of government and advanced scientific knowledge. Ultimately, the desire for a better way of being lies at the core of what Utopia is meant to be and it was Ruth Levitas that proposed this definition for Utopia, arguing that a broader definition of the concept was less restricting (Levitas 221). Nevertheless, criticism of the present, mostly by those that are disenfranchised and alienated, and the speculative exercise of searching or theorizing better possibilities both have their roots not only in the desire but also in the hope for a better way of being; they are what fuels Utopia. In sum, utopia is the construction of an alternative society or community, rooted in the author's historical moment and space, which addresses several of the problems which he/she finds most troubling according to

one's own subjective beliefs. Its purpose is not only to be better than our current society, but also to educate the reader on the conditions and the possibilities that can be achieved and to drive him or her to action, Kenneth M. Roemer summarizes this point well, writing that in his view:

> (…) a literary utopia is a fairly detailed narrative description of an imaginary culture – a fiction that invites readers to experience vicariously an alternative reality that critiques theirs by opening intellectual and emotional spaces that encourage readers to perceive the realities and potentialities of their cultures in new ways. (79)

Since utopias and utopian works are connected to hopes that people harbor for the future and, therefore, to the optimism of the times, it is only normal that when tragic events and widespread suffering occur, a significant drop in utopian literary works happens. Events such as both World Wars, and even some previous occasions such as the Industrial Revolution and the nascent force of capitalism are just some examples of certain developments that led to a diminishing of utopian writing due to the marked pessimism of the times. Utopian works became scarcer and scarcer, at least in North America and Europe, i.e. in Western Culture. This period not only witnessed the rise of dystopias but it also saw quite a lot of criticism directed against utopias and utopianism itself.

Utopias have always had detractors who either find them dangerous, impossible or a waste of time. Karl Marx, for example, found several faults in Utopia, particularly, on the process of transformation. While most utopists believed that the change towards utopia could come about peacefully, Marx believed that only through class struggle and revolution could a better society be achieved (Levitas 41). As such, Marx believed that utopian goals were impossible due to disagreements in the process of transition and due to distracting the working classes from more suitable political activity (Levitas 64). Karl R. Popper and J. L. Talmon were also two other detractors of utopianism. Popper believed that utopianism would inevitably lead to totalitarianism and violence since creating an "ideal state according to a comprehensive blueprint, cannot go forward without a strong, centralized government of the few, which will likely become a dictatorship" he further adds that "given the unavailability of rational methods, disagreements between Utopian planners and engineers will lead to the use of power instead of reason, i.e. to violence" (qtd. in Sargent 24). Talmon, in "Utopianism and Politics: A Conservative View",

indicated that he believed that utopia would inevitably give place to totalitarianism due to the imposed harmony between self-expression and social cohesion which he held to be incompatible with each other and that inevitably utopias would result in great powers being given to a few men which would turn it into an oligarchy. In fact, in our present days, utopias are synonymous with both perfectibility and impossibility. Far-fetched "perfect" societies that are impossible to achieve and thus are considered useless and frequently mocked. Common complaints about utopias include their association with totalitarianism, the futile search for perfectibility or them being pointless and distracting people from actually engaging in political activism within our own reality. The authors of these criticisms misunderstand the purpose that utopias fulfill and usually insist on labeling them as fanciful, wishful dreaming. First and foremost, most utopias do not seek the perfect society, they only seek to improve upon and make society more perfect than it currently is; that being said, there are some utopias that do claim perfection. Nevertheless, utopian authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin believe that Utopia is a never-ending process about improving our own conditions and society; it recognizes that human conditions and relations are not static but dynamic. That each culture is also an underway process and thus it is always progressing and changing in different ways.

Nonetheless, the accusations of totalitarianism are something that Utopia has to contend with, The Holocaust, Nazism and World War II were, after all, attempts at creating a utopia, as wicked as it sounds. This is because utopia often deals with a totalizing change of society and those who oppose it are seen as enemies of the more perfect state. Additionally, utopias such as More's are often extensively regulated and supervised in order to preserve the integrity of the "good society", or of the whole instead of each individual's well-being. This extensive supervision is often likened to the surveillance state of a dystopia, a theme that will be explored later. Of course, there is some merit to these accusations but as mentioned, in some way or other, all utopias are subjective, people are not perfect and as a result all Utopias are inherently flawed. This isn't necessarily a defect however, and according to one the greatest pioneers of fiction, J.R.R Tolkien, engaging in the construction of fictional worlds or societies, which he calls "sub-creation", man nevertheless achieves something truly great. In his 1947 essay entitled "On Fairy-Stories", Tolkien defends what he calls fairy-stories and fantasy itself. He explains the inner workings of the genre and what it entails for both the author and the reader. Particularly he explains the concept of sub-creation: to engage in the

construction of fantastical and/or alternative worlds is to emulate God's creation of man and universe. As Tolkien writes in his essay, "Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker" (145). According to this quote, our flawed nature and consequently our flawed creations i.e. utopias, are the natural result of our creation, our construction in the likeness and image of God. Moreover, Tolkien believes that it is through the creation of alternative worlds that God redeems the "corrupt making-creatures, men, (…)" (155); although flawed, the act of sub-creation assists in the enrichment of reality: " So great is the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation" (156). Mutatis mutandis, what can be taken from this is that although utopias are flawed due to nature of men, their creation is not without worth. The construction of fictive, alternate societies helps people not only to see their own reality from a new perspective, but it also enriches and adds to the well of ideas, meaning that new conceptions on utopia will always end up being created, thus keeping the flame of hope for a better society alive. Nevertheless, as a result of this flawed nature, it is up to the reader to ultimately decide whether what he/she is reading is a Utopia or a Dystopia. However, the utopian impulse is not inherently authoritarian or totalitarian, as it is just the desire for a better life or a better way of living. It is only when this desire is articulated through an individual's greediness for power that totalitarian characteristics may surge.

Before continuing on towards the origins of dystopia and its ancestry there are some concepts in need of clarification. This work follows the definitions of Darko Suvin and Lyman Tower Sargent, two prominent scholars, when it comes to the categorization of the Utopian genre. As it was previously discussed, Thomas More created a conflict that persists to this day by conflating the words eutopia or good place and utopia or no place. Both Suvin (1979) and Sargent (1994), among others such as Tom Moylan (2000), believe that the word Utopia is best served as a categorial term, simply meaning "an alternative imaginary society located in space and time with different rules, norms and institutions" (Gonnermann 27). The term does not define the society as either good or bad. That function is left to the terms that Utopia encapsulates, which are the aforementioned *eutopia* which is an alternative imaginary society with different rules, institutions and norms that is meant to be seen as *better* than our current society, while dystopia is an

alternative imaginary society meant to be seen as *worse* than our own society (Sargent 9; Suvin, *Dark Horizons* 188-189). These are terms that will be used throughout this work. Although eutopia and dystopia can be seen as opposites and antithetical to each other, they interact in a multitude of manners and can, in fact, actually complement each other. Thus, the entire continuum between dystopia and utopia is much more complex than a simply binary opposition.

2.2. The Origins of Dystopia – Satire and Critique

Despite the genre only truly flourishing in the 20th century, the word "dystopia" itself had its origins in the mid-19th century, in 1868 specifically, the etymological construction being created by John Stuart Mill, a prominent philosopher, political theorist and politician. During a political debate, Mill used "dystopia" to signify something that is too bad to practicable (Vieira 16). The creation of the term echoed the sentiment of distrust developing during the 19th century, especially in Enlightenment values such as the primacy of reason and science and their role in theory of progress and the perfectibility of man. As Adam Stock writes:

> The significance to dystopian studies of this early appearance of the term is that Mill's use reveals his wider post-Enlightenment beliefs and his Victorian values while at the same time demonstrating, albeit in simplified form, the interplay of critique and satire which would later become the hallmark of the literary dystopia. (116)

Furthermore Stock believes that the "epithet 'dys-topian' signifies both an unrealistic or unsustainable aim and a (misplaced desire to implement eu-topia" (116). This passage presents the growing seeds of distrust in the Enlightenment optimism of the 17th and 18th centuries which gave way to bleaker views of the future. As Vieira writes: "(…) it was certainly this optimism that Pope and Swift criticized at the beginning of the British eighteenth century, giving way to a whole set of satirical utopias" (11). Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift were two prominent satirists, the latter in particular critiqued and mocked eutopian aspirations, the confidence in man's abilities and better nature and the growing faith in science, technology and rationalism. As, for instance, in the narrative of the third voyage of *Gulliver's Travels*.

These satirical utopias and the sentiment of distrust that they expressed were forged by a myriad of factors such as the industrial revolution whose effects would be acutely felt in the following century, the rise of capitalism and even greater technological achievements. During Victorian times, the primacy of spirituality and religion began to be defied by scientific and technological progress which had an alarmingly large level of faith placed upon them. According to Bertrand Russell, this was a result of the development of the "mechanistic outlook", so clearly illustrated with Spinoza's metaphor of the clock, which clergymen denounced (6). Centered on this outlook was the dissolution of unscientific concepts such as superstition and religious portents as well as the precedence of unsupported authority over empirical observation (6). Certain groups of skeptics became inherently distrustful of the confidence placed upon this new outlook and the most effective means for them to communicate their disapproval was to mock eutopian aspirations. They enacted this critique by condemning their current society as proof that men are utterly incapable of creating better alternatives to it, particularly through the use of science and technology. Thus, during the Victorian age we can find the flourishing of Utopian Satire. Some of the most prominent works of this sub-genre were published in the previous century, such as *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift arguably the most influential piece of utopian satire, which was published in 1726.

As mentioned by Adam Stock, it is due to the interplay of criticism and satire belonging to the genre, that dystopia can be said to descend from utopian satire. As Claeys writes: "The flowering of the dystopian genre was preceded by a variety of satirical tropes. Francis Bacon's scientific ambitions were brought down several notches in Swift's famous parody in book three of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)" (107). Francis Bacon an English philosopher and enthusiast about the "New Science" had written a scientific eutopia called *New Atlantis* (1627), which places great emphasis on the wonders science can achieve and it is this inherent trust that Swift satirizes. This was the mindset for the time, divided between those who placed great trust in science, technology and rationalism as tools for creating a better society and those who ridiculed and doubted their aspirations. That is what defined the satirical utopia: doubt, distrust and social criticism with a pinch of humor. Doubts about the future of mankind and the way society would advance. Doubts about the optimistic outlook people shared. In order to express this doubt satirical utopias usually used the same language and narrative instruments that the main utopian genre used, such as the fantastic travel through time and/or space and the panoramic

descriptions of the imaginary society. As Chlöe Houston writes: "This self-reflexive utopianism is a feature of the text's satirical nature; the Utopian mode is satirised through use of the Utopian form and by attacks upon features common to Utopian fiction" (427). In order to reiterate, satirical utopias usually had one main objective in mind and that was to viciously criticize the contemporary society in which the author lived, something eutopias themselves did, though from another perspective, not resorting to vicious attacks on current circumstances. However, unlike regular eutopias, these works did not provide an alternative to the current conditions in which society found itself in. As Lyman Tower Sargent writes, satirical utopias can be defined as: " (…) a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of that contemporary society" (9). As Lyman indicates, a satirical utopia passes no direct judgements on whether the society or societies that it presents are good or bad; instead, they serve as a distorting mirror reflecting the contemporaneous society of the author in an estranged manner so as to criticize it, as well as the people, or some of the people, belonging to it. This is something that is clearly portrayed in *RoboCop* which prominently satirizes American society in the late 20th century in order to censure it.

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* serves as a perfect example of the aims of satirical utopia in critiquing contemporary society and mocking optimistic eutopian aspirations. According to Nicole Pohl: "*Gulliver's Travels* raises questions about the fault lines that developed during the eighteenth century on ideas of language, history, perfectibility and, indeed, utopianism itself" (67). The corruption and degeneration brought about by the developments along the century and the stain they left on humanity contributed to the bleak outlook that Swift had (67). Darko Suvin concludes that

> What is seen through both ends of Swift's spyglass in the first two voyages, in the distorted mirror of the third, and the inverted world of ethicobiological absolutes of the Fourth Voyage, is our own civilization, revealed as monstrous and inhuman, simultaneously comic and pridefully bestial. (*Metamorphoses* 112)

Other works that can arguably be considered satirical such Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871) and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) reflect the distrust and doubts of certain groups in Victorian society, though in the spirit of the utopian genre such reflection was often distorted and defamiliarized, as Thomas J. Remington writes on Butler's work: "Erewhon is not an idealized picture of Victorian

society at its best or its worst; rather it is a work which holds a mirror up to that society, presenting it recognizably as it is, but in a strangely reversed perspective" (33).

The revolutionary technological, scientific and intellectual progress achieved in the 18th and 19th centuries is arguably one the main causes for the suspicion over Enlightenment beliefs and eutopian aspirations. As B.G. Knepper writes: "Technology changed the way of life of all Europe in the nineteenth century, not the least of all in England, which led the way in the Industrial Revolution" (14). The propagation of factories and the greater attention to science were also connected to the greater development of satire, and as a result to the growing distrust of people. After all, with the industrial revolution came the promise of abundance for all. Big promises about the end of scarcity and greater material wealth to be distributed equally. However, as the gap between the rich and the poor widened, and the doctrine of scientific rationalism gained ever more traction, some people inevitably started wondering if the current trajectory western society was on was a good one and if the vainglorious promises made turned out to be false. One particular piece of literature that contributed to the feeling of skepticism was Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). This book greatly influenced the conception that humanity might one day be replaced, either due to biological, "natural" evolution, or produced by our own hand. This seeming transience of our species was a deciding factor in the anxieties of the Victorian age. The previously mentioned satirical utopia *The Coming Race* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, as well as, Samuel Butler's "Book of Machines" in *Erewhon* dealt with these ideas of transience and speculated that a more advanced species could eventually supplant humanity which again presented the lack of trust in the capabilities of man. As Knepper writes: "(…) in *The Coming Race*, Bulwer-Lytton struggled to resolve the problems, the hopes, and the reservations which occupied the minds of the thinkers and theorists of his time" (11). These fears, anxieties and doubts about civilization and human nature would eventually arise in the coming conflicts of the 20th century, specifically the two world wars. Besides the wars, the ever-greater propagation of materialism and consumerism would inspire authors to write about the consequences that this current path could incur. Taking this into account, it seems the skepticism and disbelief expressed by satirical utopias would end up being justified, as the utter upheaval of the early to mid-20th century would inspire the proper catalyzation of dystopia.

2.3. Dystopia in the 20th Century – Technology and Totalitarianism

In many accounts we emerge from the hopeful, dream-like state of Victorian optimism to pass through what H. G. Wells called the age of confusion into a nightmarish twentieth century, soon powerfully symbolized by the grotesque slaughter of the First World War. Enlightenment optimism respecting the progress of reason and science was now displaced by a sense of the incapacity of humanity to restrain its newly created destructive powers. (Gregory Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* 107)

The dystopian genre began its ascension to prominence in the early 20th century, reflecting the anxieties of an ever-shifting world of technological and political upheaval. A particular important dystopia which reflected the concerns of this time was E.M Forster's "The Machine Stops", published in 1909. The overall setting is based on an underground society that is completely controlled by the eponymous machine. This literary work touches on several important themes that would eventually become the pillars of the dystopian genre. Besides its eerily accurate predictions about how technology would develop in the 21st century, the short story deals with the ever-greater strides in technological advancement to the point that it outstrips humanity's ability to keep up with the progress being made, resulting in technology controlling mankind and not the other way around. Forster's work reflects the occurrences of this time which expand on the overall shared sentiment of the previous century. During the 20th century distrust and doubt turned into undisguised pessimism and utter disbelief on better alternatives to society and on the nature of man. As Vieira writes:

(…) the twentieth century was predominantly characterized by man's disappointment – and even incredulity – at the perception of his own nature, mostly when his terrifying deeds throughout the two World Wars were considered. In this context, utopian ideals seemed absurd. (18)

Forster's story deals with several key dystopian themes such as totalitarianism, where individuality has largely been eradicated, and people are completely and utterly obedient and dependent on the nominal machine which controls the society presented in the book; this would reflect the social environment developing in the 20th century. The advent of the factory and more efficient means of mass production and the strictly

regulated societies under overbearing totalitarian states that would emerge during this time would lead to the mechanization and uniformization of the individual. As Tom Moylan writes:

> In his portrayal of a totalizing administration that "mechanizes" every dimension of daily life (from the organization of nature and industry to the standardization of the person), he develops an abstract yet critical account of the new social spacetime of the twentieth century. (*Scraps* 111)

Forster's work was also innovative in the sense that he "also draws on the more detailed systemic accounts of utopian narratives by way of an inversion that focuses on the terrors rather than the hopes of history (…)" (111). Forster was one of the first authors to use the method of euchronia or utopia in the future, not to project the best hopes mankind had but to project its worst fears and anxieties.

As hinted by the themes that Forster's work approaches, scientific and technological advancement and strict regulation by the state or totalitarianism are the two great concerns that the flourishing dystopian genre focused on. Since much like eutopias, dystopias are almost always connected to the historical moment they are created in, it is not surprising that with the aforementioned World Wars, fought using technology provided by the strides in scientific advancement, chief among them being the atomic bomb, between several imperialistic and totalitarian states such as Nazi Germany, Soviet Union and Imperial Japan, that a shroud of utter pessimism, disappointment and fear now gripped the western world. As Vieira writes:

> Two ideas, which are intimately connected, have fed dystopian discourse: on the one hand, the idea of totalitarianism; on the other hand, the idea of scientific and technological progress which, instead of impelling humanity to prosper, has sometimes been instrumental in the establishment of dictatorships. (18)

The interplay between these two themes would be a major concern that dystopias managed in numerous ways during this time. It was previously mentioned that dystopias usually rise to prominence during times of uncertainty, or times of great strife such as wars, famines or under totalitarian rule. After the first World War and the breaking down of empires to the building up of totalitarian states, dystopias began emerging as a response to the bleak times in which the authors lived. However, the same personal characteristics that applied to eutopia also apply to dystopia, meaning that factors such as ethnicity,

gender, political views and lived experience will also affect dystopias. Nevertheless, totalitarianism and scientific and technological advancement were two key issues that 20th century authors saw as needing the greatest response, thus explaining why some of the most well-known dystopias consistently dealt with these themes.

It must be clarified that these two topics are intertwined in a very interesting way and the reason why they began gaining greater attention in the 20th century, according to Bertrand Russell, stems from the effects of the scientific technique on society. According to Russell: "The increase of organization has brought into existence new positions of power. Everybody has to have executive officials, in whom, at any moment, its power is concentrated" (34). The intensified organization brought about by scientific technique has led to certain individuals having quite a lot of power in the structure of government (36). This in turn has the consequence of some of these officials being self-serving, tyrannical and possessing a lust for power. As Russell writes: "Within any given organization, the power of officials, or of what may be called the 'government,' tends to become excessive, and to subject individuals to various forms of tyranny" (39). Herein lies the connection of science and totalitarianism, it seems that the greater organization prompted by scientific technique results in increased power to multiple individuals and that such individuals may inevitably subject the so-called populace to several forms of tyranny. Eventually, as Russell points out: "A State which is internally despotic will be externally warlike, in both respects because the men who govern the State desire the greatest attainable extent and intensity of control over the lives of other men" (39). Thus, despotic totalitarian states are born due to the intensification in organization provided by scientific technique. Zamyatin's *We* (1921) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) are some of the most renowned dystopias written during the early 20th century that elucidate this intrinsic connection between totalitarianism and scientific technique and the danger it posed. Connected with these themes and addressed in both works were the ever-greater development of industrialism, capitalism and consumerism which arguably resulted from the application of the scientific technique to the industrial and economic spheres. The effacement of individuality is another major issue which itself contained themes of control, uniformization and collectivity. Individuality and the entities that threatened to erase it came forward as a major issue for the writers of this time, but why? Individuality is connected to the two aforementioned themes of this time. Not only could the individual become uniformized through the rule of an oppressive totalitarian state which cracked

down on any dissent and used several methods of indoctrination, but people could also become uniformized through technological means such as genetic engineering and conditioning. As Claeys writes:

> (…) the 'turn' towards dystopia from the late nineteenth until the mid- twentieth century (…), its two major features, the socialist engineering of human behaviour via the reconstitution of society; and the eugenic engineering of human behaviour via biological manipulation, were viewed widely as both positive and negative developments. (108-109)

This meant that these two features had both eutopian and dystopian characteristics, though in the end it would be the dystopian side which would take center stage, as portrayed in Zamyatin's and Huxley's works. In the case of dystopias, the totalitarian and technological themes were combined in order to depict the exertion of complete control over the population. The totalitarian state, through the use of technology, would rise to completely dominate every facet of a person's life, both public and private, down to their body, their mind and finally their very conception of reality and truth. Dystopias were created in order to respond to the issues mentioned above, but what type of response was it? Much like euchronic eutopias, dystopias projected an imaginary society into the future, but whereas the eutopian society could be regarded as better than our own, the dystopian society is worse. As Sargent defines them: "Dystopia or negative Utopia - a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (9).

Dystopias much like eutopias were rooted in social criticism, something they inherited from the utopian satire but more than that they served as a warning. This was the response that dystopias provided to the times that they were reacting to: they took what the authors saw as the worst tendencies and developments within society and extrapolated them to the future where they were exaggerated, and consequently resulted in a much worse society. All of this was meant to warn people and open their eyes to the problems that pervaded the author's *civitas*. It was meant to disclose that without interference from the population these problems would only worsen, leading to the dystopian society that the author presented. As Vieira writes:

(…) the main aim of this sub-genre is didactic and moralistic: images of the future are put forward as real possibilities because the utopist wants to frighten the reader and to make him realize that things may go either right or wrong, depending on the moral, social and civic responsibility of the citizens. (17)

Both *Brave New World* and *We* present dystopian societies somewhat similar characteristics, though the methods of control vary. *Brave New World* is presented as a mindlessly hedonistic society crafted through scientific technique. Genetic tailoring — limiting or enhancing several physical traits such as intelligence and strength for example — allows for society to fabricate people according to the functions that the hegemonic regime wishes them to perform. Conditioning is also given great attention by means of mental and environmental stimuli used in order to acclimate people the function the government wishes them to serve. Through the use of science, individuals are now mass-produced and have essentially become tools in the hands of the state. Science has also created *Soma*, an anti-anxiety drug which dispels fears and concerns; besides that, there are plenty of diversions, distractions and products for the masses to enjoy and mindlessly consume. In the case of *We*, Zamyatin presents a strictly regimented society where every inhabitant receives exactly what they need, including physical "intimacy" as provided by the hegemonic regime. Technology is used to surveil and ensure that each individual performs his/her specified tasks after which they receive an allotted amount of free time. As a result, citizens can be likened to cogs in the expansive machine that is their respective society. As Gorman Beauchamp writes: "(…) Zamiatin, who at a propitious moment in history fused these elements into a fictive projection of a nightmare future when man had been transformed into a machine, an efficient, obedient, mindlessly content robot incapable of freedom" (62). Both of these dystopias engage with the theme of individuality and uniformization in somewhat different ways, but in the end both societies are tightly controlled and regulated by scientific, technological and social means. In them, man became completely subservient to the apparatus of the state and behaves like a machine. A particular sub-topic of this theme of individuality that both of these dystopias deal with is the fact that this effacement of individuality is not totally involuntary. In these societies most people willingly gave up their freedom in every sense of the way in order to obtain security and comfort. As Claeys mentions, Huxley criticizes the "human willingness to renounce a more diverse life in favour of certainty and stability, the 'primal and the ultimate need'" (116). The citizens in *Brave New World* turned into slaves who

love their chains and their masters, which begs the following question: is their free will being produced and tampered with in genetic factories?

Zamyatin's *We* also expounds this theme, through a comparison made by Beauchamp to Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879), by explaining that freedom is the absolute enemy of happiness as it places a heavy burden on people. As Beauchamp writes : "(…) man cannot cope with freedom: "Nothing has ever been more insupportable for a man and a human society" (…), "than freedom." He will willingly relinquish it for security, for contentment, for bread" (58). By taking way freedom, the population can be finally happy, by succumbing to a child-like state where people receive everything they need and do not need to take any responsibility. In the end both dystopias warn the reader "that ''perfection'' of the state entails absolute social stability, and social stability entails the effacement of personal freedom" (William Matter 96). Control in these societies is thus effectuated through a combination of science, technology and totalitarian tools such as indoctrination and surveillance. By giving people everything they need/want and dampening their ability for reflection through various means, the respective regimes in these societies achieve almost absolute control over the people. This is all done in order to preserve the status quo and prevent any dramatic transformation to the order of society. The prevention of new events and changes or challenges is thus the ultimate goal of the hegemonic dystopian regimes during the early to mid-20th century. The misplaced intention to implement an eutopia is also a theme in both these societies, as they somehow replicated the earlier strictly controlled eutopian model insofar these societies, placed great importance on every citizen putting their personal interests aside in favour of the interests of society at large. In return for experiencing a more harmonic, stable and perfect way of life, citizens of the earlier eutopias were required to forfeit certain liberties such as privacy and individuality. While most people were content with eutopias being a speculative exercise, the advancement of technological means made it even more likely that these types of highly regimented eutopias would actually be put into practice, a probability which horrified some groups. This resonates with one of the most common critiques against eutopia, i.e. to implement such a strictly regimented society would inevitably lead to an overbearing dictatorship. Zamyatin is no different, as Beauchamp writes, *We* in "formulating its warning about the future, fuses two modern fears: the fear of utopia and the fear of technology" (56).

Dystopias would continue in prominence after the Second World War, a period which witnessed the publishing of one of the most well-known dystopic literary works: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell. This is considered one of the pillars of dystopian literature alongside Huxley's *Brave New World* and Zamyatin's *We*. The themes of totalitarianism and technological progress are dealt with at length and in depth. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* differs from the other two works mentioned in a significant way however. On the one hand, *Brave New World* and *We* are dystopias of abundance, influenced by industrialism and its promise of material wealth, the promise that with new technological means everyone would be able to lead a materially plentiful life due to the ease products and food were made and distributed. This was an extension of the false promises made at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. On the other hand, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* takes a different approach to the themes of control, materialism, consumerism and freedom. Instead of providing abundance and meeting the needs of the population in order to keep them complacent, Orwell presents an economy of scarcity where people are kept harmless by poverty. As William Steinhoff writes: "Shoddiness and scarcity replace the cleanliness, novelty, comfort, and efficiency of *Brave New World*" (153). Besides totalitarian oppression and use of technology, the dystopian society in Orwell's work uses several methods to prevent reflection in order to purposefully keep people ignorant of their conditions. Linguistic and psychological tools such as "Doublethink", which brainwashes people into accepting two contradicting topics as mutually correct, and "Newspeak", a make-believe language which features a simplified and barren vocabulary, are other tools that The Party, *the* hegemonic power in this dystopian world, uses to keep the population ignorant of their surroundings and their social and individual condition. As Sofia Sampaio writes:

> The enforcement of "Newspeak" and the encouragement of such self-regulating mechanisms as crimestop and doublethink aim at making resistance not only impossible but also inconceivable – that is, they aim at preventing the emergence of new events, in the *present*. (141)

The masses are kept complacent through poverty, scarcity, illiteracy and the erasure of memory, as well as classic totalitarian tools of control, as Sampaio writes: "The discontent which one would expect to arise from material dearth (…) seems to be contained by means of surveillance, repression and propaganda" (132). These are the methods utilized by the state in order to keep dissent to a minimum, and as Sampaio

argues, prevent the emergence of new events. These characteristics would greatly influence the dystopian genre going forward, as these aspects such as scarcity, poverty, shoddiness, surveillance and brutal repression would become hallmarks in the dystopian genre's development.

Whatever the methods, the prevention of change and the exertion of absolute control over every facet of the lives of the population are some of the most prominent themes within dystopic literature. They are undoubtedly connected to the historical reality in which the authors lived, and consequently the issues which they regarded as most alarming. *Fahrenheit 451* is one of the best examples of this, since it was written at a later date than the other dystopias presented and as a result it deals with somewhat different themes, such as the effects of mass media on the population. Nevertheless, themes of control and oppression remain a constant. As Zipes elucidates: "(…) *Fahrenheit 451* is discussed in terms of the world's problems at large when it is essentially bound to the reality of the early 1950s in America, and it is the specificity of the crises endangering the fabric of American society which stamp the narrative concern" (182). As it can be gathered, the main target of all these dystopias is almost always the political power representative of the state. The state is seen as the absolute authority which uses technology and totalitarian techniques to erase individuality and reflection and seeks to promote conformity and acquiescence. Although totalitarianism has been used in a very general way throughout the paper, and while the goals and methods often coincide, it must be acknowledged that totalitarian states often differ noticeably in their ideology and inner workings. Analyzing from the examples given above, the Soviet Union, for one, was a Leftist dictatorship which involved the principles of socialism and collectivism. Imperial Japan was a form of absolutist regime which derived from the God-given right to rule from medieval times. As Russell Goldman writes in his article: "The monarchy historically maintained a divine right to rule, but it was only in recent centuries that cults around the emperor began to deify rulers as demigods" ("Japan's Emperor and Imperial Family"). Francoist Spain was a right-wing dictatorship which heavily involved fascism[2] and its assorted ideology. Nazi Germany worked somewhat differently, defying all traditional classifications of government, Otto Nathan concludes that the "Nazi system was, rather, a combination of some of the characteristics of capitalism and a highly

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[2] On fascism, consult for instance *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2005) by Robert O. Paxton.

planned economy" (3). As one can see, the theme of totalitarianism is more complex than it seems and while some aspects are often similar, it is still important to distinguish the innate characteristics of different totalitarian states.

However, the early to mid-20th century was not exclusively a time of political and technological turmoil; economic issues were also dealt with at length by dystopian authors. These issues were lightly touched upon by *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the economy of scarcity, associated with soviet socialism, as well as, *Brave New World* and *We* which were economies of abundance that paid great attention to commodification and materialism, themselves being a consequence of the steady rise of capitalism. Due to the aforementioned development and application of scientific technique to the economy and industry, new and more efficient methods of production and technological strides in machinery inevitably changed the way work was performed: now the factory reigned supreme with assembly lines to ensure mass production. This new reality is approached in both *Brave New World* and *We*. *Brave New World* specifically mentions that the story takes place "632 years after Ford" referring to Henry Ford, the American business magnate and industrialist who founded the Ford Motor Company, and more importantly Fordism. According to Bob Jessop, Fordism can refer to: "(…) (1) the system of mass production that was pioneered in the early 20th century by the Ford Motor Company or (2) the typical postwar mode of economic growth and its associated political and social order in advanced capitalism" ("Fordism"). This system of mass-production, as seen beforehand, is now applied to people in the society of *Brave New World* (Matter 95). Due to the process of mechanization resultant from scientific technique, most of the work performed under Fordism was unmeaningful, simple, monotonous and demanded the following of strict instructions. As Bertrand Russell highlights:

> In a factory containing expensive plant, and depending upon the closely coordinated labor of many people, individual impulses must be completely controlled except by the men constituting the management. There is no possibility, in working hours, of either adventure or idleness. And even outside working hours the opportunities are few for most people. (109)

This paradigm is something Chaplin would showcase in his movie, *Modern Times* in 1936. It is hard not to recognize why this concerned proponents of individuality during these times. This system of work brought about by capitalism stripped people of

meaningful labor, and also served to uniformize them by chaining their identity to the work that they performed leaving little time for personal and individual pursuits.

We dealt with a similar theme, focusing on Scientific Management as created by Frederick Winslow Taylor, a mechanical engineer. This form of management hinged on maximizing industrial efficiency by organizing the workplace according to a strict schedule As Beauchamp writes: "The best method of production, that is, is the most efficient, and the most efficient is the quickest: the clock becomes the arbiter, indeed the model, for human activity" as a result each "operation in Taylor's system is minutely calculated for the worker by management; he is to follow it step by step, without thought, without question" (61). The absence of thought and query are the key factors that dystopian authors such as Zamyatin and Huxley found to be problematic. That unmeaningful labor with strict time management would lead man to become nothing more than an extension of their machines. As Beauchamp writes: "Little in *The Principles of Scientific Management* depends on high technology, on the machine per se; rather it details the application of engineering systems to human behavior, specifies the means for converting man himself into a machine" (61). Beauchamp thus indicates that: "Taylor, the father of scientific management, plays a role in *We* analogous to that of Henry Ford in *Brave New World*: the exponent of a philosophy of industrial efficiency that reduces man to an appendage of his machines" (57-58). Therefore, it was not only the combination of science and political power that led to totalitarianism by which man could become uniformized. Whether political, social or economic, the individual being subsumed by organizations due to scientific technique seems to be a kernel issue in the 20th century fiction and essayism. As Russell writes: "(…) the increasing subordination of individuals to organizations, so far, has seemed to be an unavoidable feature of a scientific society" (109). The use of the scientific technique in industrial and economic systems would also feed the dystopian discourse for the greater part of the early to mid-20th century.

With these issues in frame, dystopia and eutopia would rise to prominence in the 20th century with the explosive expansion of Science Fiction. On account of , in large part, the scientific and technological breakthroughs of the time which were exciting and worrying in equal parts, themes commonly exclusive to the utopian genre would eventually gain the spotlight through SF. Consequently, the border between Utopia and science fiction would blur, and the narrative mechanisms and themes both genres dealt with became intertwined. As such, SF plays a vital role in the development of the utopian

genre from the mid to late-20th century. As Peter Fitting writes: "Despite some dismissals of science fiction's significance for utopian writing, it is impossible to study the utopias and dystopias of the past fifty years or more without acknowledging the central role of science fiction" (*Cambridge Companion* 135). There is much debate on the exact date in which science fiction originated with a multiplicity of arguments leaning in favor of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (*Voyage au centre de la terre*) (1864) or H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895). These works featured one constant, however, namely the amazing possibilities that were provided by science and technology whether they invoked trepidation or excitement. As Fitting writes: " (…) the growth of science fiction as seen in the pulp magazines of the 1920s and 1930s in the United States was resolutely optimistic and increasingly convinced of the role of technology in the making of a better world" (*Cambridge Companion* 140). Unlike several other nations during this time, the United States experienced a somewhat stable democratic government, and at least during the 1920s, an incredible economic boom, due in no small part to scientific technique which was applied to numerous aspects of society. This included communication technologies such as the invention of the telephone, and even before that the telegraph, which, according to Bertrand Russell, allowed for two important developments: "(…) first, messages could now travel faster than human beings; secondly, in large organizations detailed control from a center became much more possible than it had formerly been" (22). The sophistication of communication technologies and the development of modern weaponry was in large part responsible for the creation of totalitarian states, although the United States remained a democratic society. Other important developments during this time were the use of electricity, oil and the internal combustion engine which allowed for the creation of several innovative means of energy and transportation (22). Considering these developments, it is not surprising that the attitude towards science and technology in North America was far more favorable than it was in Europe which had been ravaged by the First World War where technologies were used to cause large-scale carnage and devastation. Eventually this attitude changed, as Fitting explains: "However, with the decision to use the atom bomb against civilian targets in Japan (in 1945), science fiction lost much of its optimism as the greatest invention of the twentieth century was used not to improve the world but to almost instantly kill some 200,000 people" (*Cambridge Companion* 140). As a result, the period between the 1950s and 1960s when SF began to grow in popularity was noticeably pessimistic, and as such perfectly merged with the themes of dystopia which

were still flourishing. SF brought to the forefront new narrative and structural mechanisms, the most important of these being "Cognitive Estrangement" and the "Novum", as Suvin labelled these concepts. Much like the utopian genre and the sub-genres which it encapsulates, there is a conflation of definitions when it comes to Science Fiction. However, the most generally accepted definition is the one given by the writer and critic Darko Suvin who regards it as the "literature of cognitive estrangement" (*Metamorphoses* 4). As Suvin explains, "Estrangement differentiates SF from the "realistic" literary mainstream" (*Metamorphoses* 8). Meaning that, unlike non-fiction work which involves a reproductive account of the world, where things are (mostly) the same, SF seeks to produce a disruptive and distorting account of what we already know. Suvin explains that the, "aliens-utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers-are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one" (*Metamorphoses* 5). Estrangement is the effect of transformation Suvin writes about, concepts and themes that we recognize are transformed and turned on their head, Suvin further explains: "In SF the attitude of estrangement has grown into the formal framework of the genre" (*Metamorphoses* 7).

However, "the suspension of disbelief", borrowing Coleridge's phrase, can only hold for so long, the transforming effect caused by estrangement might be too alien for people to endure, which is where cognition enters. The concepts and themes which are transformed by the distorting mirror of estrangement are granted credibility by their contextual position within the fictional universe, as it is conceived to be methodically consistent. As Roger Luckhurst explains:

> Darko Suvin, the eminent theorist of science fiction, defined science fiction as a literature of cognitive estrangement, a genre in which the reader enters an imaginative world different or estranged from his or her empirical world, but different in a way that obeys rational causation or scientific law: thus, it is estranged cognitively. (21)

Our suspension of disbelief holds while reading or watching SF because the author of the fictional universe carefully constructs it so that certain conceptions which we would find impossible or outlandish are instead given plausibility by the alternative framework the author built. For example, although we are (mostly) aware of what nanotechnology is, we do not know exactly what the full range of uses are, which a writer of SF can use to create a world where immensely bizarre undertakings, such as a structure

the size of a sun, have been achieved using nanotechnology. As Suvin writes, SF is, then, 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" (*Metamorphoses* 7-8).

However, this whole paradigm hinges on what Suvin calls the "Novum": it is through the Novum that the interaction between estrangement and cognition works. The Novum represents the characteristic which allows the universe present within a SF work to achieve the estranging aspects of the narrative, it is the innovation that makes the events of a SF story possible. As Suvin writes: "Sf is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a "novum" (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic" (*Metamorphoses* 63). Suvin further adds, "A novum of cognitive innovation is a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" (*Metamorphoses* 64). The Novum is the literary device that separates and distinguishes our known reality from the reality of a SF narrative, as Suvin says, the Novum is validated by "cognitive logic", meaning that in the established rules and setting of a SF plot the Novum appears as a plausible development. The Novum can take several shapes and forms and differs in scale, as Suvin explains:

> (…) the postulated innovation can be of quite different degrees of magnitude, running from the minimum of one discrete "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. (*Metamorphoses* 64)

Ergo, for a SF story to be possible, the elements of estrangement, cognition and the Novum or innovation must be present. As can be expected from a genre that often merges with SF, both dystopias and eutopias use these mechanisms within their narratives and structural conventions. Our introduction to a dystopian or eutopian society will almost always include a Novum, as well as, the interaction between estrangement and cognition. For example in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, we are estranged by the reading of the ban on books and by their successive mass burnings by the "firemen". The Novum presented in the book is the societal transformation in the past that led to the outlawing and mass burning of books, this is the innovation that separates the world of *Fahrenheit 451* from our implicit norm of reality. Cognition comes into play not only through the

aforementioned backstory which presents plausible developments that led to the book burnings but also through our own conception that such an event might occur in our own society. Taking the example of book burnings, one can evoke the case of *Kristallnacht* which occurred 1938 and resulted in countless deaths, destruction of Jewish shops and the burning of books. As a film with SF elements *RoboCop* also functions according to these mechanisms, as they are what allow the reconstruction of the main character into a cyborg seem plausible.

As mentioned above, SF rose in popularity at a time of extreme technological innovation. The developments in the scientific and technological fields led to certain themes of the utopian genre to merge with SF (though as explained SF turned more toward dystopias than eutopias). Peter Fitting considers this a notable occurrence, as he explains:

> The intersection of modern science fiction and utopia begins with what I consider the foundational characteristic of science fiction, namely its ability to reflect or express our hopes and fears about the future, and more specifically to link those hopes and fears to science and technology. (*Cambridge Companion* 138)

As can be gathered, this foundational characteristic of science fiction was largely responsible for the incorporation of social themes that were dominant to the utopian genre. The merging was so seamless that Suvin considers utopias to be a sub-genre of science fiction, a perspective which has led to heated debates on the matter, considering that the utopian genre is far older than that of science fiction. Besides the ability of SF to express hopes and fears concerning technology, another element that SF brings to the utopian genre is "an awareness of the effects and importance of science and technology (…)" (Fitting, *Cambridge Companion* 139). Fitting further adds, "By this I do not mean technology as a means for transporting the visitor to the new society, but the role of technology as a tool for social transformation" (139). This is a theme of utmost importance and contention to the entire utopian genre and is a source both of eutopias and dystopias. It meant that science and technology could now be used in the social dimension utopia toils in, instead of just being a device to transport the characters of a narrative to eutopia's or dystopia's universes. Obviously, the role of science and technology in social transformation has both a great deal of eutopian and dystopian scenarios. They can be utilized to benefit people and improve their lives, but as it's been shown, they can also be used to cause unspeakable harm. One must note, however, that science and technology are not inherently evil or good, as it's been demonstrated, both have diversified fields and

applications such as weaponry, telecommunications or new types of energy sources such as nuclear power. It, nevertheless, stands that science fiction was immensely influential when it comes to the utopian genre and would lead to the greater involvement of science and technology within both eutopian and dystopian projections of the future.

In conclusion, through the overview of the late 1940s and the 1950s, dystopia truly flourished and came into its own as a genre of literature. It reigned supreme because of the anxieties, fears and nefarious implications of both totalitarianism and scientific and technological progress. The great scale of crimes and deaths perpetrated by totalitarian states, primarily by two world wars, through the usage of new technological means, such as the atomic bomb, would be reflected in the dystopian literature of this period. The usage of scientific technique led to more centralized and organized institutions where multiple individuals would have a lot of power in their hands, frequently leading to tyranny and from tyranny the need to exert complete control over the population. To resist oppression, uniformization and the intended mechanistic transformation of man perpetuated by the state as well as by the new economic and manufacturing system afforded through scientific technique, a call for enduring individuality resounded throughout the dystopias of the times. Dystopias sought to warn of the consequences that totalitarianism in conjunction with unabated scientific and technological progress would have on the fabric of society, as well as the consequences of a misplaced intention to implement an actual eutopia. Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are touted as the most influential dystopias of this time arguably the bedrock upon which the entire dystopian gerne stands upon. While Zamyatin and Huxley largely concerned themselves with the dangers of science and technology in fundamentally transforming man into an obedient machine, Orwell, focused on the classic totalitarian tools such as propaganda and surveillance. Psychological means of control were also another aspect that Orwell emphasizes, essentially countering Zamyatin and Huxley. While their societies spend much effort in keeping people complacent through various means beyond the scientific and technological, such as through hedonism, consumption and providing for their needs in full, Orwell prefers to present a society where people are kept docile through indoctrination, poverty, illiteracy and the void of familial ties. All these dystopias feature sites of resistance, rebellious individuals and organizations who seek to flee or overthrow the hegemonic regime of the dystopian society, and all their acts of resistance end in abject failure. This is a common feature

within then-current dystopias, they are meant to horrify the reader into action so as to prevent the occurrences in the dystopian work from coming to pass.

The aforementioned rebellious individuals which often feature as protagonists in dystopias often fit within the literary archetype of what is typically called the "antihero". According to the Cambridge Dictionary, an antihero can be defined as, "the central character in a play, book, or film who does not have traditionally heroic qualities, such as courage, and is admired instead for what society generally considers to be a weakness of their character (…)" ("Antihero"). Due to the characteristically unequal, oppressive and technologically advanced societies that feature in most dystopias, heroic qualities are in short supply as the hegemonic regime goes to great lengths to prevent such traits from emerging. In addition to this, more often than not the protagonists of the dystopian fiction are from the lower rungs of society and as such have (initially) little to no means of effecting heroic actions. As Northrop Frye elaborates:

> In literary fictions the plot consists of somebody doing something. The somebody, if an individual, is the hero, and the something he does or fails to do is what he can do, or could have done, on the level of the postulates made about him by the author and the consequent expectations of the audience. Fictions, therefore, may be classified, not morally, but by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same. (33)

As can be expected, most protagonists of dystopian fictions have much diminished power of action. The fact that the protagonist seeks either a collective or individual liberation from the dystopian regime does garner him/her with a heroic goal, however, the methods and reasons of their actions can vary greatly, from a selfish instinct of self-preservation to the brutal and even excessive use of violence, something which is noticeably displayed by RoboCop. Heroes are also usually meant to be incorruptible and possess great will and determination, a topic that is effectively deconstructed and subverted within dystopian texts such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *We*, where the protagonists are thwarted and made compliant by the hegemonic regime while their rebellions end in failure. In the end, antiheroes either possess glaring character flaws or are put into situations which detract from the typical "heroic" persona. While the antihero has antecedents as far as antiquity, the archetype achieved greater attention in recent years due in no small part to the genres of dystopia and science fiction.

2.4. Dystopian Characteristics and the Rise of Neoliberalism – Mechanisms and Corporations

As may be deduced, the dystopian height of the 20th century served to establish several textual and narrative mechanisms, including those of Science Fiction, which would effectively become staples of the overall dystopian genre, often being utilized in numerous dystopias. It has already been discussed that utopian literature (meaning both the dystopian and eutopian facets) is a literature of cognitive estrangement in the same vein as Science Fiction. Much like SF, utopias seek to defamiliarize us with the present in order to transport us to a markedly different world and/or society. However, the methods which dystopias and eutopias utilize to structure their narrative of estrangement and convey their message are quite different. Eutopias, as mentioned before, usually consist of traveling either in time or space (or both) to a new setting with different norms and institutions, where the traveler is guided by a certain character that presents him or her with the characteristics of this new society. The traveler, then (usually) returns to his homeland aware of new and improved ways in which to organize society. As a result of this format, eutopias are very descriptive and panoramic in scope, to the point that little to no drama or conflict exist, they are specifically tailored to provide a broad picture of the issues which the author finds personally troubling about his/her society and present certain solutions or methods which they personally believe would correct such issues and make society better.

Dystopias function in a distinctly different manner, not only in how the new setting is introduced to the reader but also on how the overall plot works, dystopian narratives are more character driven and thus possess more drama and conflict, they are much less descriptive in scope and perform a slightly different function from the eutopia. While eutopias are meant to incite action towards bettering our current society, dystopias seek to warn of certain tendencies in our society that might lead to a considerably worse one should there be no intervention, as such they both incite action but toward different objectives. In order to more effectively perform this function dystopias usually discard the panoramic and descriptive model of eutopia, being much tighter in scope and adopting a more narrative focused approach which presents us the world through the point of view of the main character(s), as it is from their perspective that a critique of society is formulated. As Baccolini and Moylan write:

As opposed to the eutopian plot of dislocation, education, and return of an informed visitor, the dystopia therefore generates its own didactic account in the critical encounter that ensues when the citizen confronts, or is confronted by, the contradictions of the society that is present on the very first page. (6)

As Baccolini and Moylan indicate, barring some exceptions, there is no dislocation or education within the dystopian narrative, instead, the society we are meant to appraise is introduced to us from the very beginning of the dystopian narration. Moylan further expands upon this, writing:

With dystopia, the text usually begins directly in the bad new world, and yet even without a dislocating move to an elsewhere, the element of textual estrangement remains in effect since "the focus is frequently on a character who questions" the dystopic society (…) Since the text opens in medias res within the "nightmarish society cognitive estrangement is at first forestalled by the immediacy, the normality"; of the location. (*Scraps* 148)

As Moylan indicates, the narrative usually begins *in medias res*, there is no great descriptive and panoramic view of the society in question or how it came to be. We are immediately immersed into the narrative's atmosphere, and in tune with the point of view of the protagonist(s), where the inner workings of the dystopian *civitas* is organically introduced to us, including the manner in which this society functions and how it is organized. This is what Baccolini and Moylan describe as the "narrative of the hegemonic order" (5). Otherwise known as the hegemonic narrative, we are presented with the dystopian world and learn of its main characteristics and aspects.

Moylan specifically mentions that the focus is frequently on a character who questions the dystopian society, and although it can be proposed that this is the "standard" type of protagonist within dystopian narratives, according to Louisa MacKay Demerjian, there are

[there are] a few different types of hero/protagonist that can occur in dystopian stories. One is the protagonist who intuitively feels something is wrong with society and sets out to change it, believing that it is possible to overthrow the dictatorship, or merely escape from the misery. (129)

This is, as Moylan indicates, the most common type of protagonist, one who is beset by doubt and suspicion directed at the dystopian society that he/she inhabits and seeks to transform it or escape it. Kuno, one the protagonists of the short story "The Machine Stops" (1909) by E.M. Forster can be considered such a character, not only is he innately different from the other members of his society but he is utterly disenchanted with the state of affairs and seeks to disrupt the status quo. Such a protagonist is usually a member of the vast number of lower-class citizens of the dystopian society, one who is marginalized, disenfranchised and oppressed. Demerjian then goes on to cite another common type of dystopian protagonist that features in certain dystopian works such as Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952). According to her, another type of protagonist is the "high-standing, accepted hero, who is part of the Utopian perception of the dystopia, but eventually discovers or comes to understand how wrong society has become and either attempts to change it or destroy it" (129). In Vonnegut's work, for example, the central plot revolves around Dr. Paul Proteus[3], the "thirty-five-year-old manager of the Ilium Works. His job is the most important and most prestigious in the entire community, but he is being seriously considered for a similar position at the larger and more important Pittsburgh Works" (Segal 164). It's established that Proteus is a very important cog in the machinery of the particular community he inhabits, and yet from the outset of the story, however, Paul "appears vaguely discontented with life in general and, (…) insufficiently eager for the promotion to Pittsburgh" (164-165). This discontent, this feeling that something is not right is thus one the most common tropes of dystopian protagonists. Of course, this feeling of disquiet is not a requirement and many dystopian heroes and anti-heroes are just as ignorant of their reality as everyone else. Nevertheless, protagonists like Paul are also common within dystopian fiction; in fact *RoboCop* arguably features this character archetype, as Alex Murphy is a respected member of the Detroit Police Force though unlike the two works cited, it can be argued that Murphy never truly comes to understand or awaken to the deplorable state of his society nor to the true nature of OCP.

As Demerjian mentions, both types of protagonists eventually take it upon themselves to rebel against the hegemonic regime and attempt to transform the society in which they live or simply seek to escape from it to somewhere else, this is usually triggered by a shocking discovery which allows the protagonist to grasp the true nature

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[3] Perhaps an allusion to the Greek mythological sea-god mentioned by Homer, for instance, who represents constant change.

of the hegemonic regime and as a result a "counter-narrative develops as the dystopian citizen moves from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance" (Baccolini and Moylan 5). This is what constitutes the core of the dystopian narrative, as the text is "built around the construction of a narrative of the hegemonic order and a counter-narrative of resistance (…)" (Baccolini and Moylan 5). This format is almost integral to dystopian literature as well as dystopian films; the protagonist of Zamyatin's *We* for example awakens from his state of contentment when he feels love for the first time after he is contacted by a cadre of rebels which marks the beginning of the counter-narrative after the hegemonic narrative has been established. As the counter-narrative emerges what follows is the conflict between the hegemonic regime and those who rebel against it, after grasping how wrong their society is, the former attempts to crush the latter while the latter attempts to either overthrow or escape the former. The outcome of this interplay defines the overall tone and categorization of the dystopian work, as it determines whether it displays a "militant" or "resigned" impulse, these are terms that were created by Søren Baggesen and further developed by Tom Moylan in order to classify the manner in which a dystopia handles its narrative pessimism. As Moylan writes, according to Baggesen there are

> [there are] two types of narrative pessimism that are potentially available to any dystopian text. Baggesen establishes the framework for his distinction with the help of Ernst Bloch's concepts of "tendency" and "latency" in human history and his accompanying categories of "resigned" and "militant" pessimism. (*Scraps* 153)

Tendencies are the propensity towards certain actions that large groups of people perform, although certain tendencies can be positive, in the dystopian sense they are overwhelmingly negative as they are the destructive and harmful actions that dystopias warn us about. Latencies, however, are positive in the sense that they are the possibilities available within the present moment that can be grasped in order to prevent the worse society depicted within a dystopian narrative from actually emerging.

Obviously, dystopias are inherently pessimistic works that project grim visions of future societies, Moylan and Baggesen believe that this pessimism is handled in different ways between dystopian works. In the dystopias which have been provided as examples, such as *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the counter-narrative normally ended in failure, the protagonist was usually "re-educated" or eliminated and the rebellion was crushed. Such

is the fate of the (anti)hero in Orwell's work, Winston, or the main character of Zamyatin's dystopia, D-503. As Baccolini and Moylan write:

> Traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with little space for hope within the story, dystopias maintain utopian hope *outside* their pages, if at all; for it is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape its pessimistic future. This option is not granted to the protagonists of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Brave New World*. Winston Smith, Julia, John the Savage, and Lenina are all crushed by the authoritarian society; there is no learning, no escape for them. (7)

That is not to say that some of these mid-20th century dystopias did not allow for the protagonist to be successful in his or her endeavors, Montag, the main character of *Fahrenheit 451* succeeds in breaking out of the torpor inflicted by and on his society and find other like-minded individuals who also wished to topple the hegemonic regime. However, several dystopias, particularly those that would come in the latter decades of the 20th century, featured scenarios in which the rebellious actions undertaken by the protagonist in the counter-narrative either succeed in dismantling the dystopian regime or the creation of an eutopian enclave that can resist the hegemonic regime is successfully achieved. The terms mentioned beforehand such as "resigned" and "militant" should now make more sense, insofar such terms categorize the final outcome of the narrative and determine whether the dystopia allows for hope within the story. If the act of resistance in the counter-narrative fails and the dystopia simply does not allow for hope within its narrative then it possesses a *resigned* pessimism. However, if the opposition in the counter-narrative is successful in overthrowing the hegemonic regime or an eutopian enclave that can resist it is created or even if some people experience a singular awakening to their societal conditions, then the dystopia possesses a *militant* pessimism. As Moylan writes:

> (…) in the face of a bad situation, which must be grasped in an honest pessimism rather than an idealist optimism, there are still two available responses: a 'resigned pessimism' that suppresses or refuses to consider the actually existing but latent possibilities of the period, and a 'militant pessimism' that stands 'with world-changing humanity in the front line of the historical process' (…). (*Scraps* 153)

Moylan, quoting Baggesen, writes that a stance of resignation implies a "response to historical situation that it regards as 'already decided,' as opposed to the militant

position, which sees the situation as 'not yet' a close matter" (*Scraps* 153). In other words, such authors believe that there are no viable ways to fight back against or escape the dystopian horizon, they are *resigned* to the fact that nothing can be done to change our situation, they are incapable or unwilling to recognize the latencies through which the dystopian future might be forestalled or eventually transformed. On the other hand, dystopias where the resistance of the counter-narrative succeeds can be said to have a militant pessimism permeating their narrative, they are capable of identifying and utilizing the existing latencies or possibilities to form an oppositional movement and counter the harmful tendencies which are present in the moment.

This categorization is closely related to the continuum that exists between Utopia and its opponent and antithesis Anti-Utopia. Anti-Utopia can be considered to be an oppositional force that works against Utopia, as Sargent defines them: "Anti-utopia - a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia" (9). In the infancy of utopian studies, dystopia and anti-utopia were often conflated as being the same thing, much to the chagrin of scholars and academics. As Moylan writes, the "clarity of terms and categories was often frustrated by a tendency to reduce dystopian and anti-utopian texts to a single "anti-utopian" category" (*Scraps* 122). Sargent clarifies that Anti-Utopias are works that are directed against a particular eutopia, implying that an eutopia would either be unrealizable or would eventually degenerate into a significantly worse society, alternatively they target utopianism itself. This means that they critique the very process of formulating alternatives to our current societal conditions or the act of imagining alternative societies radically different from our own. Thus, a key characteristic of anti-utopia is the upholding of the status quo, it regards our current conditions as the most satisfactory and believes that attempting to implement or even just imagining alternatives to it can only lead to disaster. As a result Moylan regards anti-utopia as, the "textual form that critiques and rejects not only Utopia but also the political thought and practice that is produced and motivated by Utopia as a force of societal transformation (…) (*Scraps* 129). The incitement to action that eutopias and dystopias provoke towards actualizing or preventing a certain society is consequently critiqued and negated by anti-utopias in their staunch protection of the status-quo. As a result, anti-utopias can be seen here as clearly distinct from dystopias, dystopias do not defend the status-quo, in fact they do just the

opposite they *incite* action towards *preventing* a worse society from emerging in the future thus also making them a target of anti-utopia. Ultimately, the greatest difference between dystopian and anti-utopian works comes down to how they handle the overall feeling of their narrative, if a narrative provokes cynicism and despair and features a resigned pessimism, thus being completely absent of any kind of hope, it is on the side of anti-utopia. On the other hand, if a narrative contains a militant pessimism, incites action and allows for the existence of hope, it is on the side of Utopia. As Moylan writes:

> I would argue that it is more consistent with the developing paradigm in utopian/dystopian studies to name the text that refuses all utopian hope and effort an *anti-utopia* and the one that enters the fray between Utopia and Anti-Utopia (…) a *dystopia*. (*Scraps* 139)

Just as Moylan and Baccolini explain, "the dystopian genre has always worked along a contested continuum between Utopian and anti-utopian positions (that is, between texts which are emancipatory, militant, open, indeed critical; and those which are compensatory, resigned, and anti-critical)" (8). Thus dystopia can be seen as incorporating and negotiating the positions of both Utopia and Anti-Utopia, a side who promotes political and social action and another who encourages the preservation of things as just the way they currently are, which can be seen in whether the counter-narrative succeeds or fails within the plot.

The counter-narrative itself hinges, as has been mentioned, on a shocking discovery which allows the main character(s) to grasp the true nature of the society which they inhabit moving from contentment to resistance. This discovery and subsequently the start of the counter-narrative is predicated around a set of key themes that are highly important within a dystopian work, such as "memory", "history" and "language". These are concepts that can be utilized for both control and emancipation, by both the hegemonic regime and the resistance movement. When it comes to the dystopian regime, memory, history and language are tools which allow for a very comprehensive form of control, they are used to forestall change and maintain the status quo, preventing any oppositional movements from forming. By controlling history and memory, people are incapable of searching or thinking of the past in order to reflect on their present conditions, by controlling language, dangerous concepts that exist in the vocabulary which might cause dissent and affect the status quo are either eliminated or modified. As Julie Millward writes:

Dystopian fictions invariably manipulate the conventions of language. As a narrative genre, dystopia is characterised by language which is restricted, prescribed or otherwise influenced by authoritarian or ideological governing structures, and dystopian worlds are often richly constructed and animated by means of futuristic invented language. (96)

The aforementioned "Newspeak" present within *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is one such example of the manipulation of language. Millward bases herself on the work of Benjamin Whorf, a prominent US linguist and creator of the "Sapir-Whorf" hypothesis. Whorf essentially determined that people who utilize different linguistic styles will conceptualize, interpret and perceive the world in markedly different ways (Millward 101). Ergo, a dystopian regime can implement a linguistic style of their own making which results in the population conceptualizing the world in a way that adheres to the wishes of the dystopian elite. However, the manipulation of language does not stop there; another important aspect of language is the lexicon, which names concepts that are fundamental to the essence of human existence. As Millward explains:

In essence, much that characterises the values and belief systems of the author's historical time is posited as "lost" in the dystopian future, and this is achieved largely with reference to the claim that if the language that names the concept is lost, then the concept itself is lost. (107-108)

Thus, by eliminating certain words from the vocabulary and memory of the population, the concept that the word names is itself lost. However, language is not just a tool of the hegemonic regime, the oppositional movement of the counter-narrative can also utilize language to their own advantage and emancipation. As Baccolini and Moylan write: "(…) the dystopian protagonist's resistance often begins with a verbal confrontation and the reappropriation of language, since s/he is generally prohibited from using language, and, when s/he does, it means nothing but empty propaganda" (6). The reappropriation of language, and therefore of concepts that were thought lost to the general population can be used to incite change within the dystopian society, if one recovers language, then memory can also be recovered. As Baccolini and Moylan write:

(…) the process of taking control over the means of language, representation, memory, and interpellation is a crucial weapon and strategy in moving dystopian

resistance from an initial consciousness to an action that leads to a climactic event that attempts to change the society. (6)

Reasserting control over language and memory is what allows for action to be undertaken towards truly dismantling the hegemonic regime and effecting a totalizing change within society. The interplay between history and memory is no less important than between memory and language, controlling history serves a double purpose for the hegemonic regime, firstly it allows for any other political regimes before the implementation of the current one to be safely obscured from the population. If people do not remember any other form of governing besides the present one then it is much more difficult for dissention to form or to think of alternatives. Furthermore, controlling history prevents the discovery of any historical events that might lead people to sedition; revolutions and rebellions against autocratic regimes are some examples that might lead people to act in a subversive way towards the dystopian regime. Therefore, the recovery of the past, specifically of a piece of the past before the hegemonic regime rose to power is an incredibly powerful emancipatory weapon that can awaken people from the lull in which they find themselves in. As Moylan writes: "(…) memory plays a key role in the dystopian opposition and locates at least one utopian node not in what could be but in what once was: 'journeying to the past through memory often coincides with the realization that what is gone represented a better place and time (…)" (*Scraps* 149).

Thus, the protagonist's point of view, the hegemonic narrative and counter-narrative, militant and resigned pessimism and the use of memory, history and language are all common narrative and structural mechanisms of dystopia, though they are not essential to a dystopian work. This entire paradigm is further framed within the SF mechanisms of cognitive estrangement and the *novum*, which, as it's been explored, play a major role in defamiliarizing us from the story in a familiar way. As Moylan writes:

 (…) the sf properties of cognitive estrangement and a textual novum come into play in significant dystopian texts as the narrative progresses. As the unhappy, alienated, sometimes dissident, protagonist confronts (and either breaks with or is defeated by) the totalizing mechanisms of the hegemonic system, a new understanding (…) cognitively distances the dystopian narrative and its denouement from the conditions of the author's (and readers') empirical situation. (*Scraps* 150)

As the protagonist confronts the oppressive mechanisms of the hegemonic regime the reader becomes cognitively distanced or estranged from the narrative and its conclusion by a new comprehension of the parallels between the fictional narrative and the readers' and authors' own society. Thus, the reader might become motivated to prevent these totalizing mechanisms from developing to their full potential, as they are presented in the dystopian narrative. This particular aspect of dystopias, closely connected to their functions of criticism and warning, is strengthened and expanded by the permeable boundaries of the overall Utopian genre which, as Jane Donawerth indicates, means that "these forms absorb the characteristics of other genres, such as comedy or tragedy" (29). Ergo, is it possible to encounter dystopian and eutopian comedies, tragedies and coming-of-age stories, this process of integration is commonly known as genre blurring/blending, a term created by Rafaella Baccolini. A clear example of this blending is the Polish comedy fantasy film *Kingsajz* (1987) directed by Juliusz Machulski which portrays a dystopian society made up of gnomes. By deliberately blending the genres of comedy and fantasy with the genre of dystopia Machulski effectively blurs the boundaries of the dystopian form, thus allowing for the reformulation and expansion of "its creative potential for critical expression" (Baccolini and Moylan 7). The critical function that dystopias exert is thus amplified by incorporating conventions from other genres, thus allowing dystopias to exert their criticism of society through an immense variety of approaches. *Kingsajz* for one, uses both fantasy and comedy in a dystopian setting in order to provide a creative and imaginative critique of life under the totalitarian soviet regime in the 1980s. Furthermore, this blending of genres does not only transform the dystopian genre but it also transforms the genres dystopia blends with, as Donawerth notes:

> Conservative forms are transformed by merging with dystopia, a merge that forces political reconsideration, and traditionally conservative forms can progressively transform the dystopian genre so that its pessimism shifts from being resigned to being militant. (29)

As Donawerth indicates, not only is dystopia transformed by its blending with conservative genres allowing for greater critical expression and for it to deviate toward a more militant inclination, but other genres themselves are transformed by becoming more politically conscious. Pertinently, this shift in pessimism would mark the dystopias of the latter decades of the 20th century, as they would effectively introduce eutopian elements

which would successfully permeate the narrative, thus essentially consisting of a revamping of the dystopian genre. Furthermore, these "new" *critical* dystopias would dramatically shift the focus of the genre from the state to the corporation, mainly due to the rise of neoliberalism and the entrenchment of late capitalism, something that provoked new issues which authors sought to warn about.

The term "Neoliberalism" applies to a number of ideas associated with free-market capitalism and *laissez-faire* economic practices which advocate minimal government interference in economic matters, thus giving corporations and private individuals a great amount of autonomy. As Natalie Goldstein writes: "Neoliberalism advocates the greatest degree of unrestricted free trade and open markets and the free flow of capital, while insisting on the most minimal government spending, regulation, taxation, and interference in the economy" (30). As can be inferred, neoliberalism advocates from among other things: privatization, globalization, free-trade and minimal government interference in the economy. These are all points that dystopian authors of the 1970s to the 1990s were quite concerned about, and in keeping with its traditional function, dystopias were created in order to warn people of what could happen if there was no resistance to these practices. As Baccolini and Moylan write:

> These writers confronted the devaluation of Utopia by an official, neoliberal discourse that proclaimed the end of history and celebrated simultaneously the end of radical social dreaming and the achievement of an instantaneous "utopia" of the market. (6-7)

Neoliberalism is so called due to the fact that it is basically a resurgence of 19th century ideas of classical liberalism, previously introduced by Adam Smith in his work *The Wealth of Nations* published in 1776, which much like neoliberalism, "championed economic *laissez-faire* and the freedom (or liberty) of individuals against the excessive power of government" (Nicola Smith "neoliberalism"). The factors that were responsible for the formation of neoliberalism stretch as far back as the financial disaster of The Great Depression in the 1930s and several more recent issues in the 1970s, which included economic stagnation and increasing public debt. This in turn, "(…) prompted some economists to advocate a return to classical liberalism, which in its revived form came to be known as neoliberalism" (Smith "neoliberalism"). Neoliberalist economic policies were emphatically established by many governments in order to resolve the numerous economic issues of the time, though the pressure exerted by the corporations and private

wealthy individuals no doubt contributed to its adoption. Despite the claim that neoliberal capitalism would boost the economy and benefit everyone, the only groups who benefited from its implementation were the wealthiest individuals and the corporations, for practically everyone else poverty, debt and unemployment became the norm.

These tendencies of the 1970s to the 1990s resulted in the shift towards the tyranny of the corporation instead of the tyranny of the state. As Moylan writes: "Given the dominance of neoliberalism in the historical conjuncture of the 1980s and especially the 1990s, the dystopian shift from representations of the state as the locus of dominant power is not surprising" (*Dark Horizons* 140). Furthermore, Moylan states that a "renewed capitalism reached toward its own dream of total exploitation and administration of workers and consumers (…)" (*Scraps* 184). The exploitation and administration of workers and consumers is one of the main factors that characterizes the tyranny of the corporation in contrast with the tyranny of the state, as Moylan writes: "Everyday life in the new dystopias is still observed, ruled, and controlled; but now it is also reified, exploited, and commodified" (*Dark Horizons* 135-136). As one can assume, dystopias of this time cautioned that through the advent of neoliberalism and the onset of late-stage capitalism, corporations could exert as much control as the state, if not greater, through the appeal to materialism, hedonism and consumerism. As James Rushing Daniel writes:

> Late capitalism, a system of commodity aggregation and loosened trade restriction on the national and supranational levels and of consumption and commodity fetishism on the personal scale, is the organizing system for both the aggregation of wealth and goods worldwide (…). (37)

As corporations gain ever more power the political landscape inevitably changes, the government loses more and more control and is less capable in controlling the private sector of the corporations. The control that governments exert is lost through the tools that the corporations use such as bribery, lobbying and blackmail. Although such cases are already present in our world, dystopias of the time use the classical dystopian method and extrapolate this situation into the future, where the state of affairs has become considerably worse. The state ultimately becomes completely impotent and unable to intervene or curtail any of the actions taken by corporations, it eventually devolves into a puppet used by the corporations so they can achieve a modicum of legitimacy. Due to the state's loss of authority and power, society under control of the population becomes vastly

unequal and the common citizens are left to fend for themselves while the rich and powerful have practically free rein to do anything they desire, without consequences. This paradigm is fairly represented in *RoboCop* by the mega-corporation Omni Consumer Products or OCP who seeks to fully control and govern the city of Detroit in a privatized manner. The paradigm just described, which is common to dystopias of the 1980s and 1990s, was a direct product of the loss of certain benefits and rights that were earned by the movement of the New Left in the 1960s.[4] Due to the implementation of neoliberal policies, among which is the reduction of government spending, social benefits that people worked hard to earn during this time were eventually eliminated, thus leading to the effacement of the welfare state. As Moylan writes:

> (…) working people steadily lost the measures of social wealth and rights that they had won through years of struggle; homelessness and the deprivations of un- and underemployment became the common lot (…) quality medical care, universal education, and safe and supportive work and living spaces were sacrificed to the draconian policies of neoconservative and neoliberal "reformers". (*Scraps* 183-184)

Privatization was another important concern during this period, as corporations sought to acquire formerly public services such as healthcare, education and public transportation so as to turn them into profit generating operations. Obviously, this leads to difficulties for those who cannot afford to pay. Privatized healthcare, for example often results either in the inability of people getting the medical treatments they require, due to lack of capital, or it leads to massive debts which chain people for the rest of their lives. With the onslaught of privatizations, citizens were obviously concerned that other services would eventually be privatized, such as the police force. Some dystopian imaginaries such as *RoboCop* picture privatized police forces which would essentially be run for profit and would also be at the beck and call of the corporations and the wealthy instead of the citizens, guaranteeing that equality before the law would become a thing of the past. The loss of the socially responsible welfare state and the privatization of formerly public services are some of the recurring themes of dystopias during the late 20th century, as Moylan writes: "Like it or not, the success of the attacks on the welfare and regulatory

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[4] For more information consult: *The New Left: A History* (2001) by William L. O'Neill.

state by the ideologues of the "free market" has legitimated a general suspicion of the state as a mechanism for delivering social justice and democratic and ecological well-being" (*Dark Horizons* 140). This whole account leads to the conclusion that vast social and economic inequality was one of the key themes of the dystopias of the late 20th century, economic social division became one the main sources of concern and anxiety for people in this time, it was imagined that the wealthy would live in their own private eutopias while the rest of the populace would live in dystopia. Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast* (1988), Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991) and William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) are some examples of dystopias that reflect these economic and social concerns and dispense with the state as the entity of authority and control and instead turn towards the corporation. Marge Piercy and her nominal work are of special importance in this climate of new dystopias. As Lyman Tower Sargent argues, her work combines both eutopian and dystopian themes, creating something markedly different from what has been seen before in the entire Utopian genre and thus defies previously used classification schemes such as "bad place" or "good place" (Sargent 7). Gibson's work is also particularly important as it is commonly seen as the progenitor of the dystopian Cyberpunk sub-genre, which normally features high-tech worlds controlled and ecologically ravaged by corporations. As Lars Schmeink writes: "Cyberpunk picks up on the aggressive rejection of authority, as reflected in its outcast heroes, the lowlifes, drifters, drug users, and petty criminals that populate the stories, as well as on the disillusionment with the established order of late capitalism" (22).

As Schmeink mentions, this disillusionment over late capitalism was one of the key themes of dystopias during the late 20th century. Unfortunately the failures of socialism and collectivism led to a complete breakdown of the ability to envision any alternatives to capitalism. Mark Fisher calls this mindset, "capitalist realism: the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it" (2). Fisher further explains that those who profit from it construe capitalism as the only viable and reasonable economic system possible; as a result, any opposition against capitalism is mostly minimal. Annika Gonnermann developed the concept of "post-pessimism" from Fisher's work, which itself means, "the understanding that neither an optimistic nor pessimistic attitude is justified due to the lack of alternatives" (27). As she writes: "This term is directly inspired by Fisher's writing on capitalist realism, and his concept

'reflexive impotence' (…), a nonchalant, almost stoic acceptance of the status quo" (27-28). This acceptance of the status quo is related to the general belief in the complete lack of alternatives. It is inherently believed that there is no other path other than capitalism, and although the glaring flaws of this economic system are recognized, little to no attempts to change are made due to the fact that we believe ourselves to be complete incapable of large-scale transformation. In order to combat this paralysis, dystopias of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *Antarctica* (1997), presented scenarios where, through alliances and teamwork, totalizing transformation and resistance could be achieved by those under the dystopic heel of the corporations and neoliberal capitalism.

These socioeconomic concerns were not the only major topic of the new dystopias, environmental fears also began to develop during this period and connected to them was the ever-present theme of scientific and technological progress which continued to be one of the key themes of the 20th century. This connection between environmental destruction and technological progress were both intricately linked to the established theme of neoliberal capitalism. After all, corporations can use their influence with the state to obtain unrestricted access to the natural resources of the planet, unconcerned by the environmental damage that may occur. Deforestation, pollution, climate change and extinction of both flora and fauna became prominent topics during this time. Overpopulation, in particular, would become a distinct anxiety, especially in the 1960s and 1970s: owing to the technological progress in the field of medicine people could live much longer than previously possible, this led to the revisitation of Thomas Robert Malthus's fears presented in his book, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, published in 1798. Other environmental concerns such as pollution, climate change and global warming were also intimately connected to concerns with overpopulation, as Brian Stableford writes:

> The notion that an increase in environmental pollution was an inevitable concomitant of increasing population was the first significant complication to be introduced into the pattern of expectation, but others followed swiftly in its train, including the possible exhaustion of fossil fuels and – eventually – global warming due to industrial carbon dioxide emissions. (272)

This unprecedented capability to harm the planet was only possible due to the leaps and bounds in scientific and technological progress which were made in the decades after the Second World War. Far from fading into the background, this theme still stood

as one of the most prominent concerns for people in the late 20th century, which only rose to greater notoriety with the immense popularity of Science Fiction. One notable development was the advancement in information and communication technologies which allowed for portable phones, as well as, the invention of the transistor allowed for the production of cheaper and smaller electronics like computers which revolutionized practically every facet of society. Contextually, the more dangerous and concerning technological achievements were the result of the political tension between the Soviet Union and United States during the period commonly known as the Cold War which led to a technological race between these two superpowers that included the exploration of spaceflight capabilities and further research into thermonuclear weapons. The fear of thermonuclear weapons in particular, such as the atomic bomb and the more recent hydrogen bomb were highly worrying. The complete devastation of the planet and extinction of the human race which the use of these weapons could enact was a major source of concern and speculation during the late 1970s and the 1980s and even before scholars such as Bertrand Russell and C.P. Snow had already explored this matter during the 1950s and 1960s. Considering the year it was released, it comes as no surprise that these technological fears are also explored in *RoboCop* where technology is portrayed as dehumanizing, unpredictable and potentially extremely dangerous, this is represented in several scenes such as the news pieces about a laser cannon misfiring, causing numerous casualties, along with other stories of incidents involving nuclear technology.

Worries also developed over several other avenues of scientific and technological progress besides mass media, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), brain scanning, robotics, genetic engineering and the creation of increasingly complex cybernetics and electronics. Although not all of these technologies were judged by their potential uses in the hands of neoliberal capitalism, it was still a common theme that featured on many dystopias. These technological developments led to the speculation of a great number of new concepts in science fiction such as the cyborg, which also influenced dystopia. Films such as *The Matrix* (1999) directed by the Wachowskis and *The Terminator* (1984) directed by James Cameron reflected the growing anxieties over technology, particularly AI and the increasing sophistication of machines. Other films such as *RoboCop* (1987) and *Blade Runner* (1982) directed by Ridley Scott deal with the interplay of corporate power, greed, as well as, capitalism and technological progress portraying the deeply dehumanizing effect all these factors have on mankind. Despite this, Susan Sontag writes

in her 1965 essay "Imagination of Disaster" that SF and dystopian films such as these serve to "reflect world-wide anxieties, and they serve to allay them. They inculcate a strange apathy concerning the processes of radiation, contamination, and destruction that I for one find haunting and depressing" (42). As can be gathered from the quote, Sontag was displeased with the way dystopian and post-apocalyptic SF films dealt with the issues facing Western society during this time. Sontag was highly critical of the way sf films, "(…) perpetuate cliches about identity, volition, power, knowledge, happiness, social consensus, guilt, responsibility which are, to say the least, not serviceable in our present extremity" (42). She argues that science fiction films are more focused with "the aesthetics of destruction, with the peculiar beauties to be found in wreaking havoc, making a mess" (44). Thus Sontag argues that SF films are shallow and superficial, less concerned with the actual important themes on which they speculate, such as the dangers of technological advancement, and more concerned with visual effects and fantastic scenes of catastrophe. She believes that this method inculcates in the audience an apathetic behavior towards the potential dangers presented in SF and dystopian narratives and prevents the audience from seriously reflecting on their contemporary issues (Sontag 48). Sontag's concern with apathy is, nevertheless, timely as it accurately labels the mindset that would develop over the 1980s and 1990s. The terms mentioned beforehand such as capitalist realism and reflexive impotence are some of the facets of this apathy, the fact that people are aware of what is wrong with the world but find themselves unmotivated to change it because they cannot envision alternatives or solutions. Whether the issues are environmental concerns, vast social and economic division or the diminishing of political power, opposition and solutions towards these difficulties were lukewarm at best.

This paradigm led to the emergence of the critical dystopia, with many of its main themes having already been mentioned above. Much like the classical dystopias of the early to mid-20th century, these dystopias meant to warn people of certain tendencies within society that might become considerably worse in the future. However they evidenced a major change: unlike most of those dystopias they presented a successful act of resistance within the fictional setting. Critical dystopias leave space for hope in their imaginary world in order to free us from this collective paralysis which we find ourselves in, meaning, as Donawerth indicates above, they have an overall "militant" impulse which is made possible by genre blending, as she further explains: "(…) it is precisely the use,

re-vision, and appropriation of generic fiction that constitute an oppositional writing practice and an opening for Utopian elements in ... dystopian fiction" (30). As previously mentioned Kim Stanley Robinson's *Antarctica* is the best example of this paradigm in which eutopian elements permeate a dystopian narrative, something that is featured in Sargent's definition of the Critical Dystopia, which he describes as:

> A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia. ("Utopian Literature")

So the most important distinction that separates critical dystopias from classical dystopias is the fact that the former allows for an eutopian impulse to exist within its narrative. As Baccolini and Moylan write: "(…) the new critical dystopias allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the Utopian impulse within the work" (7). Despite this distinction it must be understood that these dystopias are not an entirely new genre but rather a reshaping of the dystopian method, as Moylan writes:

> That the recent dystopias are strongly, and more self-reflexively, 'critical' does not suggest the appearance of an entirely new generic form but rather a significant retrieval and refunctioning of the most progressive possibilities inherent in dystopian narrative, The new texts, therefore, represent a creative move that is both a continuation of the long dystopian tradition and a distinctive new intervention. (*Scraps* 188)

The progressive possibilities that Moylan refers to critical dystopias that are, "(…) feminist but also anti-capitalist, democratically socialist, and radically ecological in its overall stance" (*Scraps* 190). Some dystopias of the 1980s and especially the 1990s structure the oppositional movements in their narrative according to these principles, inclusivity became a major concern of dystopias going forward from the 1970s especially when it comes to racial and gender issues. In Moylan's words:

> (…) the critical dystopias give voice and space to such dispossessed and denied subjects (…) they go on to explore ways to change the present system so that such culturally and economically marginalized peoples not only survive but also try to

move toward creating a social reality that is shaped by an impulse to human self-determination and ecological health rather than one constricted by the narrow and destructive logic of a system intent only on enhancing competition in order to gain more profit for a select few. (*Scraps* 189)

Another aspect particular to critical dystopias is their focus on revealing the causes behind the perceived issues in society rather simply showing its symptoms. In order to explore ways to change the present system as Moylan points out, they go directly to the crux of the problems that instigated the "narrow and destructive logic of a system inherent only on enhancing competition order to gain more profit for a select few" (*Dark Horizons* 189). In so doing, the reader becomes aware of the causes of the troubles that the society in which they both inhabit allowing for a more focused oppositional movement that stands directly at the heart of the problems. As Fitting highlights: "What is important in the critical dystopia and distinguishes it from other dystopias is to be found in the adjective critical, which implies an explanation of how the dystopian situation came about as much as what should be done about it" (*Dark Horizons* 156).

While classical dystopias sought to warn us about the power of the overbearing state, critical dystopias seek to inform us on how to combat the reality of globalized capital in which we find ourselves in. They present a successful act on resistance mostly based on cooperation and alliances in order to free us from our "reflexive impotence" and present to us a scenario in which is possible to enact a totalizing transformation of our current social, political, environmental and economic conditions. It is only possible, however, if those who are under the heel of the power players of this time, to unite and work either within or without the territory of the state in order to alter society. Through an all-inclusive movement that combines feminist, racial, socialist and democratic rhetoric's, critical dystopias maintain an eutopian horizon and, as such, perform a function that extends beyond critique or warning. They do not use terrible futures in order horrify us into action but instead provide us with inspiration and motivation, so as to incite us to change the conditions in which we live in. An important example of this characteristic is Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast*, mentioned beforehand. Within the narrative of this work no great totalizing change is made upon the dystopian society. Nevertheless, the main protagonist of the story and his friends all awake from their collective ignorance and become committed to changing the fabric of their society, thus conveying an expression of hope within the narrative. In short, these dystopias are not opponents of

eutopia but instead assist it, by identifying the obstacles which must be overcome and presenting a successful oppositional movement which engages into enacting a totalizing change within the dystopic society. This movement fruitfully manages to curtail or eliminate the abuses and exploitation of the neoliberal capitalist economic system and the impotent state which has become a slave to it, ushering in a tentative eutopia. As Moylan writes: "(…) they [critical dystopias] do not go easily toward that better world. Rather, they linger in the terrors of the present even as they exemplify what is needed to transform it (…)" (*Scraps* 199).

Altogether, the economic practices along with the failure of the welfare state and greater economic inequality were without a doubt the key themes of the late 20th century. The definite establishment of late capitalism and neoliberal policies were the main causes of the transformation of the dystopian format during the late 1970s which, as we've seen, was when neoliberalism started being implemented in order to forestall the then economic undergoing issues. Much like their classical counterparts, these dystopias still provide warnings about certain tendencies which are developing within our society, fears and anxieties when it comes to this prevalent theme in the dystopian genre continue unabated due to the increasing sophistication and immense technological leaps which have been made since the 1950s. Although, as it's been stated, science itself is not inherently good or evil and has provided us with many benefits, the possibilities of its use for spreading destruction and poverty have only increased, especially in the arms of unscrupulous corporations who would gladly bypass or outright eliminate any ethical guidelines enforced by governments. The inexorable link between neoliberal capitalism and technology was thus a pivotal characteristic within the dystopias of this time. Technology would now be used not only to control but also to exploit and commodify, and critical dystopias concerned themselves with providing warnings about what this connection could lead to which was mostly ecologically devastated and vastly unequal societies. The consequences of automatization have become especially prominent due to the effects it could have on both the economic and social spheres. The large-scale replacements of human beings with increasingly sophisticated machines have become staple of both the SF and dystopian genres, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. *RoboCop* perfectly encapsulates and depicts this entire paradigm through its representation of the degrading influence which advanced technology and neoliberal capitalism produce upon humanity, whether it can be considered a critical dystopia however, is a more complicated matter.

3. Transhumanism

3.1. The Essence of Mankind – Human Nature and Enhancement

> The emotions that we call all so human are of great value in feeling love and compassion, these characteristics are wonderful attributes—generosity, creativity, intelligence, and fearlessness. Some are not so great and cause unnecessary pain, anguish, distressing, and the indefensible sorrow of mental illness. The good and the bad together form the characteristics of what it means to be human. (Natasha Vita-More, *The Transhumanism Handbook* 64)

In this quote, Natasha Vita-More, states that being human involves experiencing both good and bad emotions. According to her, these emotions play a part in shaping the traits which make us human and thus endow mankind with their unique tendencies and behaviors. Human nature is the term often used to denote this concept, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary: "the nature of humans *especially***:** the fundamental dispositions and traits of humans" ("human nature"). The *fundamental* traits and dispositions of humans, meaning that humanity is defined and characterized by these traits which are supposedly intrinsic to the whole race. Of course, this notion of human nature is a contentious topic due to the fact that it is still a matter of debate whether mankind does possess a core nature or essence which endows us with our "humanness", which makes us behave, think and feel the way we do.

Transhumanism, a relatively recent and highly diverse philosophical and intellectual movement, holds that human nature exists but it is imperfect and not fully actualized, that it can be improved and enhanced through scientific and technological means. Max More, one of the leading proponents of enhancement and key supporter of transhumanism, writes:

> Transhumanists regard human nature not as an end in itself, not as perfect, and not as having any claim on our allegiance. Rather, it is just one point along an evolutionary pathway and we can learn to reshape our own nature in ways we deem desirable and valuable. (4)

A transhumanist is someone who advocates human enhancement and a transhuman is an individual that is "in the process of becoming posthuman (…)" (Garreau

231-232). Achieving posthumanity is the end goal of transhumanism, a posthuman being is an entity which has had its natural human characteristics enhanced to such a degree that they vastly surpass our current state, becoming something much more advanced, as Max More explains:

> By thoughtfully, carefully, and yet boldly applying technology to ourselves, we can become something no longer accurately described as human – we can become posthuman. Becoming posthuman means exceeding the limitations that define the less desirable aspects of the "human condition." Posthuman beings would no longer suffer from disease, aging, and inevitable death (but they are likely to face other challenges). (…) Posthumans would also have much greater cognitive capabilities, and more refined emotions (more joy, less anger, or whatever changes each individual prefers). (4)

According to Max More, by improving and refining our natural characteristics such as intelligence, emotion and our biological properties we would transcend our current less suitable condition and as a result experience a more desirable and fulfilling existence. Despite the advantages which we would seemingly gain there is a caveat which opponents of this movement often utilize in their arguments: with all these enhancements would the core aspects of our being, the ways in which we act, think and express ourselves remain? If an individual enhanced himself or herself would their personality or core convictions be retained? Would there be continuity between the human, transhuman and posthuman? These are questions Max More himself considers, as he writes: "Complementing these questions about the nature and identity of the self at any one time are questions about the identity of the self over time, especially for a self that undergoes major cognitive and somatic changes over an extended lifespan" (7). To better engage these queries, the philosophies and theories which influenced the concept of human nature and, by extension, transhumanism require some study.

Notions and ideas on human nature and the human self are primarily influenced by the beliefs of one of the most influential and widespread philosophies in the West, Humanism. Although it has obviously undergone changes and modifications throughout its existence, one of its core premises has remained intact, as Kate Soper writes:

> *Humanism*: appeals (positively) to the notion of a core humanity or common essential features in terms of which human beings can be defined and understood,

thus (negatively) to concepts ('alienation', 'inauthenticity', 'reification', etc.) designating, and intended to explain, the perversion or 'loss' of this common being. (11-12)

This humanistic conception of common essential qualities which constitute a universal human nature that unites mankind originated in the 15th and 16th centuries during the Renaissance era, when faith and theology began to be supplanted by a focus on the status and capabilities of the human. As Vint writes: "When humanism began to emerge in the Renaissance, what was emphasized was the common 'essence' of mankind, a shared set of capacities and tendencies that qualified one as part of the human species" (83). This line of thought would fully actualize during the Age of Enlightenment, which according to Matthew White is defined as "the period of rigorous scientific, political and philosophical discourse that characterised European society during the 'long' 18th century: from the late 17th century to the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815" ("The Enlightenment"). It cannot be understated just how influential Enlightenment Humanism was to the conception of the human in the West; Schmeink writes that for "more than 200 years of Western thought, the human as a category has been determined by Enlightenment philosophy and its legacy of humanism" (29). Max More himself notes just how influential Enlightenment Humanism is to Transhumanism: "What is the core content of this philosophy? A simple yet helpful way to grasp its nature is to think of transhumanism as "trans-humanism" plus "transhuman-ism." "Trans-humanism" emphasizes the philosophy's roots in Enlightenment humanism" (4).

While Humanism emerged in the Renaissance as an alternative to the religious Christian paradigm that prevailed at the time it was still very much influenced by theology, Enlightenment Humanism however constituted a severe point of departure because its core ideas were much more secular, the most prominent ones focusing on:

(…) rationality and scientific method, individual rights, the possibility and desirability of progress, the overcoming of superstition and authoritarianism, and the search for new forms of governance – while revising and refining them in the light of new knowledge. (Max More 10)

This secularism also applied to the conception of humanity and its essence, the religious ideas on human nature which were still held during the Renaissance were largely displaced during the Enlightenment, as James Hughes writes: "The Enlightenment

thinkers attempted to move past the idea of human nature as being defined by God-given immortal souls inhabiting flesh, to the view that we are rational minds emerging out of and transforming nature" (*Transhumanist Reader* 229). As can be garnered, reason and rationality are features which were particularly central to Enlightenment thinkers and were at the heart of the movement, as Braidotti writes:

> Faith in the unique, self-regulating and intrinsically moral powers of human reason forms an integral part of this high-humanistic creed, which was essentially predicated on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century renditions of classical Antiquity and Italian Renaissance ideals. (13)

The centrality of reason emerged with René Descartes, one of the most notable scholars of the Enlightenment, and his theory of rationalism during the 17th century, which was critical to one of the most fundamental premises of the Enlightenment movement, namely, "(…) the progress of mankind through a self-regulatory and teleological ordained use of reason and of secular scientific rationality allegedly aimed at the perfectibility of 'Man' (Braidotti 37). As Braidotti infers, one of the core beliefs of Enlightenment Humanism was the idea that through the instrumental use of reason and scientific rationality mankind would gradually transcend its limits and improve its condition, eventually progress guided by reason would enact a positive transformation of human societies into the ones envisioned by some utopians. Reason was effectively positioned as the central feature which defined and distinguished the human from the rest of creation, through the possession of reason Man was proposed to be an ordered, rational, self-contained and autonomous being, separate from nature, as Schmeink writes:

> Humanism claims that there is a unique and absolute difference that sets humans apart from the rest of creation: the difference of Cartesian reason. Neil Badmington explains Descartes's humanist philosophy quite ingeniously and defines the key argument: 'Reason belongs solely to the human and, as such, serves to unite the human race. "We" may have different types of bodies, but because reason is a property of the mind, deep down "we" are all the same' (…). (30)

This passage further demonstrates just how central this trait became and points to one of Descartes' most well-known and widespread theories regarding the human, the theory of Substance Dualism better known as Cartesian Dualism. Cartesian Dualism is a theory defended by Descartes concerning the mind-body problem, an ongoing

philosophical debate about the as-of-yet-unexplained connection between the human mind/consciousness and the human body.

Descartes defended the notion that the human was an entity constituted by, "mutually exclusive realms of matter (*res extensa*) and thought (*res cogitans*) (…)" (Doyle 49). Thus, to Descartes the mind and the body were distinct entities, as Stephen J. Lilley elaborates:

> Rene Descartes treated the mind and body as being distinct. The body, but not the mind, is of the physical world, influenced by natural laws and operating in a similar fashion as machines. Through the body's sensory receptors, information is presented for the mind's perusal. In his famous thought experiment Descartes imagines a demon manipulating the senses. He also offers ordinary examples of sensory error. The lesson to be drawn is that the body is not to be trusted as a source for certainty regarding one's existence. Only the action of the mind, or the ''I'' that is thinking, is certain. The primacy of the mind is clear in his epistemology that favors rational thought and deduction. (33)

As can be garnered, Descartes gave preeminence to the mind which he held to be constant, unitary and indivisible, while the body was subject to the natural laws of the universe the mind was utterly independent from them. This paradigm also applied to the brain which, Descartes acknowledged, served an important role in the bond between mind and body but was nevertheless part of the realm of matter:

> The brain serves, in part, as a connection between the mind and the body, but because it is a physical, changeable thing, it is not the actual mind. Man's mind is whole and indivisible, whereas his body can be changed. You can cut your hair, remove your appendix, or even lose a limb, but that loss in no way reduces your mind. ("Cartesian Dualism")

To Descartes the human is the mind, while the human is a composite of body and mind it is the mind that holds the human self, the "essence" of Man. Even Descartes' most famous philosophical statement *Cogito, Ergo Sum* i.e. "I think, therefore I am" reiterated the belief that although "we could doubt everything about the physical world including the existence of our bodies, one thing we could not doubt was the existence of our mind because doubting is itself a thought process." ("Cartesian Dualism"). As such, Descartes recognized that, "regardless of what the changeable physical world was really like, his

mind was still whole and unchanged, and therefore somehow separate from that physical world" ("Cartesian Dualism"). Much like the religious belief that we are immaterial immortal souls occupying bodies that prevailed during the Christian Middle Ages and lingered during the Renaissance, Descartes believed that we were non-physical minds in a mysterious link with our bodies, evaluating them as physical instruments or containers which we use to interact with the world. As Nayar writes:

> The essence of the human lies in the rational mind, or soul – which is entirely distinct from the body. (…) Rationality is also this 'essence' of the human – his ability to think about himself, be sure of himself – that distinguishes him (supposedly) from all other forms of life, and aliens. (16)

The Cartesian and humanistic view of mankind conceived during the Enlightenment essentially proposed that humans were unique, ordered and self-contained beings entirely distinct from other creatures in nature. Humans were believed to be endowed with a constant, fixed and uniform nature which granted them their special characteristics such as reason, autonomy and emotion. Regardless of the changes which occurred in the physical world, the human mind, our essence, would remain a unitary and immutable entity, separate from the material realm in which our bodies are present. This belief, that our minds, our consciousness, is unaffected by and can be separated from our bodies is still very influential and has deeply affected Western philosophies including transhumanism, as Ted Peters claims: "Curiously, the assumption at work in transhumanism is that human intelligence and human personhood can become *disembodied*" (qtd. in Gary Elkins 17). The substantial influence of this ideology is palpable, having been conveyed in numerous films and works of literature especially within the cyberpunk genre such as *Neuromancer* by William Gibson published in 1984. *RoboCop* is no exception as the titular character, despite having his body almost completely replaced and augmented by cybernetics, including his brain which has been reprogrammed, still retains some sort of human will or impulse to resist the influence of his directives, such as when he tries to arrest one of the main villains of the narrative, as Samantha Holland points out:

> However, the (Cartesian) point *is* that although he is limited by his programming, he nevertheless retains the *will* to arrest Jones: the sequence in fact ultimately restores the dualistic position, as it is RoboCop's *body* that is actually disabled by

the 'product violation', while his mental desire to resist appears to be unaffected. (158)

Although the Cartesian conception of the human is still very significant and widespread in modern times, it is challenged and even eclipsed in importance by one of the most renowned and remarkable works of scientific literature of all time, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859. This work would have and still has monumental consequences and implications on the social, scientific, cultural, anthropological and religious spheres. The theory which Darwin espouses in his *magnum opus* fundamentally transformed not only the scientific field of biology (human and animal) but completely changed the way in which humanity perceived itself.

As Darwin established in his seminal work, humanity like every other creature on the planet is subject to the process of natural selection, it can be inferred that through a vast period of time this process resulted in the progressive evolution of lower lifeforms to our species, the *Homo Sapiens*, as Heather Scoville explains:

Sometimes called "survival of the fittest," natural selection was most famously explained by Charles Darwin in his book *On the Origin of Species*. In the book, Darwin proposed that individuals with traits most suitable to their environments lived long enough to reproduce and passed down those desirable traits to their offspring. If an individual had less than favorable traits, they would die and not pass on those traits. Over time, only the "fittest" traits of the species survived. Eventually, after enough time passed, these small adaptations would add up to create new species. These changes are precisely what makes us human. ("Explanation of Evolution")

From Darwin's evolutionist theory it becomes logical to deduce that the characteristics which supposedly constitute human nature, meaning those that are regarded as fundamental to mankind, are not inherent to the species nor are they a gift from God, they are simply traits that helped the lower lifeforms which preceded humanity to adapt to their environment and survive, in turn being passed down to their descendants through the genes. In John Messerly's words: "Darwin suggested that not only had human bodies evolved from lower forms but so too had our intelligence, language, emotions, morality, and religion" ("Summary of Darwinism"). As such, the previous notions of Enlightenment humanism which held that humankind was somehow unique and separate

from nature due to their supposedly singular characteristics such as reason and rationality were displaced, such traits do not differentiate mankind from nature because they are themselves products of nature, as Corliss Lamont writes:

> What Darwin and his fellow biologists did, through marshaling incontestable evidence of the evolution of humans from lower forms of life, was to demonstrate that no wide and impassable gulf exists between *Homo sapiens* and the rest of Nature. This undermined some of the most powerful arguments of religious supernaturalism and of the traditional philosophies associated with it, giving most convincing support to the major naturalist thesis that human beings and all of their experience are in every respect a part of Nature. (39)

Thus, the debate on human nature was fundamentally changed, Darwin's work effectively disputed the notion of humankind possessing a special, constant and immutable essence or of being separate from the natural world, as Joel Garreau writes:

> By placing humans in a history of millions of years in which all living things are connected and nothing is constant, it transformed the way people thought about God and themselves. Human nature is not etched in stone. This insight became the dominant metaphor of our age. (108)

The self-conception that humanity had of itself due to the legacy of the Enlightenment period, that we as a species were unique and fixed in nature was effectively superseded by an "understanding that we are part of a spectrum of biological organisms and possible non-biological species of the future" (Max More 10). Darwin effectively proposed that human nature was not fixed but dynamic and malleable, it can be hazarded that if cumulative years of evolution by natural selection led to humanity as it is today then in a few more centuries or millennia we might become something else entirely. Garreau quotes Filipe Fernandez-Armesto, who opines that, "Human nature, if it is proper to speak of such a thing, is not fixed: it has changed in the past and could change again" (237-238). Despite the immense impact this notion had, Fernandez notes that Darwinism did not resolve the issues nor settle the debates concerning human nature, writing: "That humans are uniquely rational, intellectual, spiritual, self-aware, creative, conscientious, moral, or godlike seems to be a myth—an article of faith to which we cling in defiance of the evidence" (237-238).

As Fernandez states, despite the knowledge provided by Darwinism a vast margin of humanity still clings to the supposed "myth" that we are unique and in possession of a static human essence which will remain constant regardless of external and internal conditions, that no matter what events transpire the human self will endure, a myth that has mentioned beforehand is perpetuated by films such as *RoboCop* which work to "(re)assert the Cartesian superiority of the 'mind' over the body" (Holland 160). However, the Cartesian perspective is not the only stance which still holds that human nature is fixed and immutable, the idea of genetic determinism for example even draws on Darwinism to prove its central point, that if "human nature was shaped by evolution, then it's fixed and so we're simply stuck with it — there's nothing we can do about it" (Cronin). According to this stance human nature is biologically fixed through our genes which hold the traits passed down through the pressures of natural selection and evolution thus fundamentally determining the ways in which we act, think and feel. Francis Fukuyama, an ardent opponent of human enhancement defines human nature as "the sum of the behavior and characteristics that are typical of the human species, arising from genetic rather than environmental factors" (130).

These environmental factors which Fukuyama mentions are the collective influence of culture, social interaction and other external agents such as technology, some argue that these external pressures play an equal or even greater part than biology in shaping mankind and human nature, something Darwin himself noted, as Messerly reports: "(…) He (Darwin) also realized that culture, as well as biology, influenced ethical values and religious beliefs. Darwin believed that human sympathy and compassion were noble" ("Summary of Darwinism"). In effect, nowadays many scholars and scientists hold that both biology and the environment have a hand in shaping the core ways in which humans think, act and feel. As Andy Clark puts it, humans are, by nature

> products of a complex and heterogeneous developmental matrix in which culture, technology, and biology are pretty well intermingled. It is a mistake to posit a biologically fixed 'human nature' with a simple wrap-around of tools and culture; the tools and culture are indeed as much determinants of our nature as products of it. (*Transhumanist Reader* 86)

As Clark indicates, cultural and scientific advancement also have a perceptible effect on human nature, obviously most of the values and principles which we hold today are vastly different from those held by our ancestors, technology in particular is

noteworthy for the effect it has had on mankind, so much so that Andrew Pilsch identifies an entire rhetorical mode called "evolutionary futurism" which is described by him as a line of argumentation which, "situates technology as exerting mutational, evolutionary pressures on the human organism" (3). This idea has been quite prominently represented in E. M. Forster's short story "The Machine Stops", where dependency on technology has led to markedly different humans, both physically and psychologically.

This would seem to be yet another indication that human nature is malleable, yet Fukuyama holds that the essence of mankind goes beyond external influences:

(…) when you strip away all of a person's accidents of birth—skin color, looks, social class, gender, culture and even talents—there is still some essential human quality underneath that is worthy of respect. That is the source of human dignity, he argues. That essence, whatever it is, he calls "Factor X." He wrestles with what that might mean. He does not, for example, insist that "Factor X" means a soul. (Garreau 160)

As Garreau states, Fukuyama believes that there is something within humanity that is deserving of respect and dignity, a core part of ourselves which makes us who we are, yet Fukuyama does not *insist* that it is something akin to a soul or some other immaterial substance separate from physicality. Fukuyama is uncertain what this essential human quality might be but he ascertains its value and believes that enhancement will lead to the corruption, perversion or loss of this core essence, echoing Soper's description on the core premises of humanism, Fukuyama writes that "human nature exists, is a meaningful concept, and has provided a stable continuity to our experience as a species. It is, conjointly with religion, what defines our most basic values" (7). According to Garreau Fukuyama believes that "Messing with our minds, memories, psyches and souls, (…) risks "leading to a brave new world" (155).

Alluding to Aldous Huxley's dystopian opus, Fukuyama believes that enhancing human characteristics might result in the loss of this "Factor X", he is very concerned about "the attempt to modify on a large scale some basic characteristics of human behavior in ways that will make us scarcely recognizable" (Garreau 159). Fukuyama thus points to a connection between the goals of transhumanism and the dystopian genre, meaning he specifically draws attention to the possibility that enhancement may be used in a less than beneficial manner, something that is displayed in *RoboCop*. Characteristics

such as emotion, empathy and intelligence are a few areas which Darwin mentioned as arising from evolution and which transhumanists seek to enhance, as such they are traits which Fukuyama and others who share his line of thought believe should remain unspoiled and intact lest they change our entire species in an unconceivable and irreversible way thereby resulting in bringing the fears expressed in numerous dystopias to life, as he writes:

(…) the people in *Brave New World* may be healthy and happy, but they have ceased to be *human beings*. They no longer struggle, aspire, love, feel pain, make difficult moral choices, have families, or do any of the things that we traditionally associate with being human. They no longer have the characteristics that give us human dignity. (6)

In essence, Fukuyama believes that enhancement will result in the dehumanization of humanity, by interfering with the concept of human nature which has provided a stable continuity to our existence as a species and defines our most basic values, he fears that this continuity will be ruptured, that although technically we would be improving ourselves, we would at the same time end up becoming lesser beings, hollow shells of our former selves. This is a sentiment shared by William S. Haney II who is a detractor of enhancement because he believes that it will negatively affect consciousness, which he holds to be the most essential and basic aspect of human nature; much like Fukuyama he holds that enhancement will come with an irretrievable loss as we cease to be human beings and forgo what defines us. First and foremost Haney suggests that,

human nature like subjectivity is bimodal: one aspect is associated with consciousness-as-such, and the other with the mind or the content of consciousness. In terms of the mind, human nature never stops evolving through a continuous interaction with the environment. (6)

Haney holds that consciousness and the mind are two different entities which together constitute human nature, and while the mind is constantly adapting and changing due to interactions with the environment, consciousness remains static and immutable, which indicates that, to Haney, human nature is both fixed and dynamic. However, Haney believes that at its core, "human nature involves ultimately the innate capacity for the experience of true Being, the ground of all phenomenal consciousness (…)" (7). To

Haney, the mind, what is believed to be our true essence is only the reflection of the consciousness which lies in all human beings, for him "the true basis of human nature is not an ordinary phenomenal experience, not a quality of conscious content that changes over time, but the innate capacity for a non-changing level of awareness-as-such that underlies all phenomenal experience" (9). However, Haney fears that with the onset of enhancement this fundamental quality will inevitability be altered or eliminated due to technological interference, as it will preclude one from experiencing this non-changing level of awareness. He draws particular attention to the effects that cybernetic augmentation might have on what the considers to be the most fundamental aspect of human nature, as he writes:

> The imminent merger of electronic circuitry and flesh will not only increase metabolic activity, but also have the potential to strain physiological functioning at its subtlest levels. Psychophysiological stress accruing from artificial overloads may block or even subvert our capacity for knowing by being through the hypo aroused states of self-transformation. (13)

Thus he contends that as the continual intrusion of technological enhancements becomes ever greater, "the mind's capacity to manifest subjectivity or have phenomenal awareness may gradually diminish" which means that "the mind becomes vulnerable to losing its clarity of understanding and to giving rise to a false sense of identity" (32). In other words, Haney fears that technological interference will result in the attenuation of human identity and the awareness we possess of our own feelings and sensations, our ability to formulate a sense of self and express personal judgements, sentiments and opinions will be deeply affected. Furthermore, the ability to know ourselves and enact self-transformation through practices such as meditation and introspection will be highly hampered if not completely lost. It can also be postulated that this will result in our species losing comprehension of certain spiritual and mystical notions and values which we hold in high esteem and consider to be important to us, such as seeking meaning and purpose in life or experiencing feelings of connection with others.

In a completely diametrical position to Haney, Raymond Kurzweil, a prominent inventor and diehard advocate of enhancement believes positively that with the aid of technology human intelligence and consciousness will advance to such a degree that it will be liberated from our physical forms and essentially become disembodied, meaning

humanity will achieve a sort of cosmic or universal consciousness. As Maria Aline Ferreira writes:

> For futurist Ray Kurzweil being human 'means being part of a civilization that seeks to extend its boundaries', eventually transcending biology. According to him, the paradigm shift brought about by technological revolutions in computer science, biotechnology, and nanotechnology will virtually eliminate biological death and foster the impetus towards a nonbiological existence (…). ("Mechanized" 155)

This theory is similar to that of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's notion of the noosphere and the Omega point[5], in fact Stephen J. Lilley points out the similarities between both theories though there is a particular difference in that Kurzweil envisions such a point will be reached artificially through enhancement while Chardin believed it would happen naturally, as Lilley writes:

> There are significant similarities between Kurzweil's vision of the future and Teilhard's eschatology including an emphasis on consciousness, an evolutionary theory that provides for superorganisms (emergence of complexity from more basic forms), an exceptional role for humanity but also its superannuation, and the culmination in universe consciousness. (19)

As Lilley mentions, this cosmic transcendence would lead to the departure of humanity as we know it, it is very hard to believe that individuality and human nature would remain intact in this scenario. In fact Kurzweil claims that "there will be as little in common between posthumans with evolved intelligence and standard humans as there is between bacteria and Homo sapiens" (Lilley 15). This statement seems to confirm Fukuyama's fears that posthumans will be so advanced that they will act, think and feel in a completely different way to humanity today. If, as Kurzweil claims, such a vast difference will exist between humans and posthumans it stands to reason that they would lose all connection to human nature or human identity. It can also be argued that perhaps these incredibly advanced beings would still recall their former lives as less advanced humans and perhaps still feel some semblance kinship or even connection to humanity,

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[5] For more information consult: *The Phenomenon of Man* (2008) by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

though this is only speculation as we cannot truly know how such incredibly intelligent beings will act.

Emotion is another area which is held to be constitutive of human nature and thus fundamental to the human, much like intelligence and consciousness it is another feature which transhumanists seek to enhance and refine. Enhancement of emotions, as mentioned by Max More, mostly revolves around the elimination or attenuation of negative dispositions such as anger, hatred, sadness and despair while accentuating positive ones such as joy, gratitude, serenity and compassion. However, as with consciousness and intelligence, some believe that altering or modifying these attributes will result in the irreversible corruption of human nature. Fukuyama argues that suffering and anger are catalysts which help shape our nature as it is and although they often lead to unnecessary violence and death they also promote positive attitudes, as he informs Garreau:

> Certainly no one would say that we want more hatred. But if you think about things like anger and the kind of violence and pride and the responses that lie behind a lot of acts of violence, it actually is all in the service of defending norms of communities. So the question is whether you can actually intervene to dampen that emotional response in ways that won't undercut your ability to actually defend your community. (162)

As Fukuyama notes, anger and pride often contribute to the defense of our communities as well as their rules and customs, it can be ventured that if we generally reduce or eliminate such emotions it might lead to us becoming much more passive beings, perhaps resulting in us becoming unwilling to protect our civilization or even defend ourselves. Additionally, the elimination of emotional pain and suffering is, to Fukuyama, completely irresponsible and might be quite damaging to our common self-understanding as human beings, he believes dampening such feelings would naturally impact other more positive qualities which humans possess such as fearlessness and compassion, as he tells Garreau:

> Even something like the elimination of pain and suffering, you know. This is the argument that's the most difficult to make. But I think it's ultimately the most critical one. There's something about the experience of pain and longing and anxiety and all of these things that our therapeutic society is trying to get rid of. It

is somehow necessary to our self-understanding of what we are as human beings. I mean, you can't have courage without risk. You can't have real compassion or sympathy without the personal experience of pain. (166)

Fukuyama provides an interesting and compelling argument, although the elimination or attenuation of emotional anguish or negative emotions might seem to be well-intentioned, it is fact that such emotions have shaped humanity as it is today, Vita-More's quote also supports this idea that negative emotions are crucial to our nature as they influence the more positive aspects of our species such as empathy and valor. It can be assumed that if human beings did not feel pain, sadness or despair they would be unable to express compassion or empathy for others, perhaps they might not even be able to comprehend such feelings. Furthermore, the ability to overcome emotional pain contributes toward the personal growth of individuals and it is common belief that it helps build character, it can be suggested that should the experience of negative emotions be made optional and minimized, our mindsets' and attitudes which are supposed to mature and change as we undergo painful experiences in life would perhaps become ossified or underdeveloped.

The mention of sympathy and compassion are particularly relevant as they are often singled out as traits which separate us from all other beings, although many creatures might possess extensive cognitive and emotional capabilities, humanity often regard empathy as their domain, one of the core features which supposedly makes us unique. In Philip K. Dick's science fiction novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* published in 1968, empathy and compassion are central themes within the narrative, as they are supposedly traits which separate human beings from the titular androids, as Rick Deckard, the protagonist of the narrative ponders:

He had wondered as had most people at one time or another precisely why an android bounced helplessly about when confronted by an empathy-measuring test. Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order including the arachnids. (14)

However, Dick goes to great lengths to deconstruct this notion that empathy is somehow a quality which characterizes and defines humanity or is in some way inherent and unique to the human species. Although humans are supposed to be empathetic and

look out for each other while androids are meant to be deviously intelligent, cold and calculating, feeling no allegiance to their fellow androids, several characters throughout the narrative, such as the human Phil Resch and android Roy Baty, display behaviors that undermine this notion. What is especially noteworthy in Dick's narrative is how empathy is ostensibly contrasted with intelligence, the implication being that by possessing greater intelligence the ability to feel and express empathy and perhaps other emotions is hampered. This is one of the particular ways in which enhancement might negatively affect human nature, much like how Fukuyama believes that modifying and attenuating some emotions will causally affect other emotions and attitudes, it can be hazarded that the enhancement of certain characteristics might causally affect other traits we possess, such as the prominent suggestion that more intelligence might mean less emotional capability. This premise in particular is quite widespread having been frequently depicted in numerous forms, of note is the 2014 film *Lucy* directed by Luc Besson. In the narrative, as the titular protagonist gains greater intelligence, brain capacity and her consciousness evolves due to the effects of a particular drug, she begins displaying less and less emotion and empathy slowly becoming colder and more calculating. This premise is also present in *RoboCop*, the main character after being enhanced behaves in a cold and mechanical manner and ruthlessly hunts down criminals inflicting great collateral damage in an entirely technical and unemotional manner. This of course raises some fears, for example, that by improving our intelligence our species will end up becoming emotionless beings of pure logic and reason such as the Vulcan from *Star Trek* (1965) or the Houyhnhnms from *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

Even the augmentation of biological features which seem benevolent and desirable are still scrutinized and criticized by opponents of technological enhancement as they fear this will result in drastic changes toward human nature. Detractors of enhancement view some goals of this particular form of enhancement such as the drastically increasing the lifespan of humans, boosting our natural immune defenses to such a degree that we are basically impervious to disease and enhancing our physical abilities such as strength and endurance as folly due to their opinion that our current physical and biological limits define us and provide meaning to our lives. As Damien Broderick writes:

For doubters like McKibben, the pursuit of indefinite healthy longevity would be the slippery slope to the final erosion of meaning from our (formerly) mortal lives.

That meaning, allegedly, derives from our transience and continuity with the rest of the natural world. (436)

As Broderick indicates, detractors of enhancement such as Bill McKibben hold that it is the finality and transience of our lives which gives us meaning and joy, to him humanity is defined by its limitations and should we, in his view, transgress and increase our lifespans or improve our physical attributes through artificial means, our lives will lose all previous meaning as key human qualities would be effaced and human perspective would inevitably change.

To these individuals the current human form is sacred or at least worthy of defense, they hold that our current natural state of existence is worthy and respectable, while they recognize that we could be stronger and smarter, they believe it would cost us our dignity and our identity, which they find far too steep a price for what we would gain. Much like Fukuyama they associate our biological integrity with human dignity and some unspoken essence which is exclusive to our species and as such technologies which infringe upon it or reproduce it through artificial means such as cloning and genetic engineering are vehemently opposed, as Maria Aline Ferreira writes:

> Appearance, then, is valorized in relation to the notion of some immanent essence that is intrinsically constitutive of human beings, which might be called the soul or the spirit and which opponents of human cloning controversially claim might be destroyed by cloning and absent in clones. (*Human Cloning* 30)

Advocates of enhancement completely dispute the claims that augmenting certain human characteristics will somehow negatively affect other core parts of our being. For example Broderick criticizes the notion that increased intelligence will have negative consequences on emotion derisively stating that when one thinks of cognitive enhancement: "Images of *Star Trek*'s emotionless, half-alien Mr. Spock recur, with no explanation why enhanced and perhaps superintelligent people should be less, rather than *more richly*, emotional and benevolent" (432). Likewise, Ronald Bailey argues that there is no credible basis for the case that enhancement will somehow result in the effacement of key human characteristics or behaviors, asking on what grounds do opponents of enhancement,

> suggest that smarter, stronger, healthier, longer-lived people will care less about human goods like friendship, art, and the pursuit of virtue? As Elizabeth Fenton

notes, "[N]one of these capabilities (bodily health, imagination, emotion, practical reason, friendship, etc.) are in fact threatened by, for example, enhanced intelligence or athleticism" (…). Being stronger, healthier, and smarter would more likely aid a person in her pursuit of virtue and moral excellence. (329)

Both Broderick and Bailey make pertinent points as there is no evidence, scientific or otherwise, to support the claim that enhanced intelligence would negatively affect our ability to feel emotions and feelings such as joy, anger or empathy. Intelligence itself is a multifaceted quality which is not exclusive to logic and reason, it can also be associated with creativity, understanding and emotional knowledge. Likewise, although Fukuyama puts forward a compelling case that attenuating emotions and mental states we consider negative or cause us suffering might be result in the loss of positive attitudes, it might also lead to us experiencing greater feelings of connection with each other and may also foster a greater degree of understanding which current levels of emotional capability do not permit. A greater lifespan might not necessarily mean the loss of meaning from our lives, it might instead provide a wider timeframe for people to *find* meaning in their lives and experience all that life has to offer, perhaps even gathering great wisdom over the years which might lead to the betterment of society.

Ultimately the main concern around human enhancement is whether it will result in such drastic changes to those who undergo enhancement that any continuity between them and normal unenhanced humans is ruptured, meaning the transhumans and posthumans no longer see themselves as human or exhibit core human characteristics and behaviors. Fukuyama and others who share his views maintain that there cannot be any continuity between humans, transhumans and posthumans, instead he holds that there will be clear dividing lines between those who are enhanced and those who are not. As Garreau reports Fukuyama is "terrified that The Enhanced, in time, 'will look, think, act, and perhaps even feel differently from those who were not similarly chosen, and may come in time to think of themselves as different kinds of creatures'" (162). This is part of a common criticism leveled at transhumanism and the prospect of enhancement in general, that those who are enhanced will perhaps end up seeing us as lesser beings, lose all sense of kinship to us and will possibly attempt to eliminate or subjugate us. As Bostrom writes some detractors of enhancement have argue that "we should view human cloning and all inheritable genetic modifications as "crimes against humanity" in order to reduce the probability that posthuman species will arise, on grounds that such a species

would pose an existential threat to the old human species" (*Transhumanism and Its Critics* 59). This criticism essentially assumes that a rupture between the enhanced and unenhanced is likely to occur as they clearly regard the posthumans as a completely different species. On the other end, Bostrom postulates that there will be a continuum between humans and transhumans but adds that it all hinges on the enhancement technologies themselves which are still in their infancy, as he tells Garreau:

> The reason we don't have tall people conspiring against little people, or vice versa, is that there is no obvious cutoff point, and it's just one continuum living in the same world. I guess it depends partly on whether enhancement technology should result in totally separated groups with radically different levels and nothing in between or whether it's more like a continuum. (245)

Bostrom makes a pertinent observation, *there is no obvious cutoff point*, which indicates that the changes that these technologies will bring about won't be immediate and drastic, most likely any enhancements that take place will be gradual, allowing for periods acclimatization and thus permitting a steady continuum where humans and transhumans will still generally regard themselves as members of the same species, in fact transhumans will almost certainly still remember their former unenhanced lives and as such will most likely still retain the core ways in which we behave, think and feel. Fukuyama also specifies that those who are enhanced will only regard themselves as different from those unenhanced *in time* which most likely means that he believes that continuity will be upheld until the level of enhancement crosses a certain threshold whereupon the continuity between humans and transhumans/posthumans will be broken. Perhaps this threshold will be when the level of enhancement as increased to such a point that we have become posthumans as it is much more uncertain whether core human behaviors and traits would still persist despite the drastic enhancement which they have undergone. These would be beings who would not only live for an unquantifiable amount of time in peak physical condition but they would also possess such vast intelligence that they would be able to establish connections which we are completely incapable of, furthermore, they would be able to experience emotions and dispositions which would be completely alien to us as we are now. As Bostrom holds that "there might also be entirely new psychological states and emotions that our species has not evolved the neurological machinery to experience" (*Transhumanist Reader* 37).

The main factor upon which the answer to this conundrum truly hinges, is on whether human nature actually exists and if so whether it is fixed or malleable, the implications of which Elkins ponders,

> Indeed, this is the crux of the matter. On the one hand, if humans have an unchanging essence that is irrevocably part of what it means to be a human, then no amount of technology will alter this. On the other hand, if the body is merely a container of information that has been constructed and deconstructed over time by external forces, then what is to prevent this process to continue into the future? (17)

As Elkins claims if human nature is fixed then no matter the amount of technological upgrades will ever change the core ways in which we behave, think and feel, which means that continuity between those enhanced and unenhanced is assured, regardless of the level of modifications which they undergo. On the other hand if our nature is malleable and dynamic then nothing is really lost, if we act the way we do because we evolved into our particular species then enhancement is simply taking control, continuing and improving the process. As Elkins states: "The assumption is that if it is possible for humans to be radically transformed, so much so that there remains little resemblance to current humans, then it stands to reason that human nature itself is not fixed, but can be subject to technological transformation" (18). Thus, there is no definite or "locked-in" nature which humans possess, meaning any notion of continuity is improbable as this position essentially proposes that we as a species are constantly changing or at least open to change. Perhaps human nature cannot be defined or regarded in simplistic terms such as fixed or malleable, which is why Elkins also gives credence to a third option, the one also held by Haney, that human nature might be both fixed and malleable, writing:

> In response to the question of whether human nature is fixed or malleable, one possible rejoinder is both. In other words, could it be that some psychological and experiential features of human nature are subject to change while personal identity is kept intact? It is common to shift from one emotion to another or to change one's mind about something. This does not mean that a person has changed into another identity. Peters writes, "…changes in the body, even if resulting in changes in the mind, do not risk a loss of identity. Beyond the therapy and even beyond the enhancement, our transformed self will still be our self". (19)

This is the perspective most advocates of enhancement seem to hold and the one that can be argued to be represented in *RoboCop*. In spite of the near-totalizing and unprecedented transformation that was inflicted upon Alex Murphy, there is a strong indication that his human self is still extant within him, despite the deep reprogramming and the replacement of almost his entire organic body with synthetic material, a case can still be made that Murphy is seemingly still alive. As demonstrated by the film, the deeply modified and augmented Murphy is still subject to emotions and dispositions we consider human such as joy, anger and sadness. Furthermore, several of Murphy's mannerisms, such as flamboyantly spinning and holstering his gun, are still performed by his augmented self while he still has no recollection of his former life. Although they may be viewed as mere details, they are actually evidences or signs of the convergence of his former and present being.

In the end there is no clear-cut answer to the question of whether there will be continuity between those who are enhanced, the trans- and posthumans, and those unenhanced, meaning those who have not undergone any artificial modification to improve their natural attributes such as intelligence or strength. It has become increasingly clear that our species is incredibly complex due to the multifaceted nature of our bodies and minds and thus we have to account for myriad factors and components which might influence and affect us on a large scale. The knowledge provided by Darwinism points out that our identity and unique features are the result of a long process of evolution by natural selection which deeply affected our biology. Furthermore, the advancement of neuroscience and the information it has delivered on the human mind has only made the issue increasingly more complicated. This whole paradigm still includes external factors such as culture, social interaction and technology which are also argued to play a significant role in shaping our nature. Despite this, the Cartesian notion of the human seems to be largely upheld in modern civilization which explains its frequent representation in media, such as *RoboCop*, the belief that our human identity and nature will remain constant regardless of changes our bodies undergo seemingly still prevails. Transhumanists themselves believe that humanity has already been changed by the substantial influence technology has on our lives, as it progressively becomes more advanced they hold that our transformation into enhanced beings will be inevitable so we might as well embrace it. Opponents of enhancement fear that it will cost us our dignity and our identity that we will be reduced to shells of our former selves, the behaviors and

traits which these detractors deem valuable and unique about us will be lost. Who is correct? Only time will tell.

3.2. Transhumanism – Origins and Ideals

Mother Nature, truly we are grateful for what you have made us. No doubt you did the best you could. However, with all due respect, we must say that you have in many ways done a poor job with the human constitution. You have made us vulnerable to disease and damage. You compel us to age and die – just as we're beginning to attain wisdom. (…) What you have made us is glorious, yet deeply flawed. You seem to have lost interest in our further evolution some 100,000 years ago. Or perhaps you have been biding your time, waiting for us to take the next step ourselves. Either way, we have reached our childhood's end. We have decided that it is time to amend the human constitution. We do not do this lightly, carelessly, or disrespectfully, but cautiously, intelligently, and in pursuit of excellence. We intend to make you proud of us. (Max More, *The Transhumanist Reader* 449)

In this passage, Max More provides insight into the impulse and core motives which drive the cultural and intellectual movement of transhumanism and its philosophy of human enhancement. As was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the movement of transhumanism seeks to enhance the natural attributes of humanity through technological and scientific means to the point where we become posthuman, highly advanced beings with much greater lifespans and robust physiologies, incredibly advanced cognitive capabilities and highly refined emotions. This is aptly transmitted in the *de facto* official definition of transhumanism present in the website of the mainstream transhumanist organization "Humanity+", which bases itself on Max More's original definition, as is written, transhumanism is the

intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities. ("Philosophy of Transhumanism")

A second definition is also provided which focuses on the activities of transhumanism instead of the substance, as is stated, transhumanism also consists of

The study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations, and the related study of the ethical matters involved in developing and using such technologies. ("Philosophy of Transhumanism")

These are the core values and aims the movement is guided and organized, yet by no means should transhumanism be considered monolithic or indivisible, as mentioned beforehand, this is a movement and philosophy that is marked by a great measure of multiplicity and diversity, there is an array of varied ideas, values and principles around several areas which are a point of great contention within the movement. As Max More points out, "beyond these shared and rather general views, transhumanists vary widely in their assumptions, values, expectations, strategies, and attitudes" (13). From disagreements on political, social and economic measures, to disputes on the technologies and enhancements themselves, to divergences in metaphysical, philosophical and religious beliefs. As More writes the growth of transhumanism as a "movement and philosophy means that differing perspectives on it have formed" (3). Indeed, although a "mainstream" current of transhumanism can be somewhat identified when it comes to certain core values and ideas, different perspectives still abound and it is not uncommon to find beliefs and arguments which directly oppose and contradict each other. The cause of this diversity, as Max More claims, is attributed to the growth which transhumanism as experienced since its inception in the 20th century, numerous and explosive breakthroughs in science and technology have allowed it to expand and grow into the rich and diversified philosophy and intellectual movement that it is today.

Despite transhumanism only truly coalescing into a concrete ideology in the 20th century, some adherents believe that transhumanist thinking, meaning the impetus to transcend and improve upon the human condition has a much longer history, perhaps extending all the way to the 14th century where, according to Natasha Vita-More, the word "transhuman" was first used as "an Italian verb "transumanare" or "transumanar", as written by Dante Alighieri in *Divina Commedia*[6]. In this reference, transhuman means "go outside the human condition and perception". The English translation is "to

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[6] For more information consult *Dante: A Brief History* (2006) by Peter S. Hawkins.

transhumanate" or "to transhumanize" (50). To "go outside the human condition and perception" does establish an essential connection to the core impulse of transhumanism. Other precursors to contemporary transhumanism include the European alchemists[7] from the 14th to the 18th centuries which, among other things, sought for the Philosopher's Stone in order to distill the Elixir of Life, which would make one immortal. This is a clear attempt at transcending human limitations, so much so that Max More even considers these alchemists as "proto-transhumanists" (9). The scholars of the Enlightenment period that sought the perfectibility of Man through the use of reason and scientific rationality are also considered precursors to contemporary transhumanist thinking, especially considering the ever-central role of technology during this time. Although disputed by some founding members of transhumanism such as Bostrom, it is nevertheless argued by some adherents of the movement such as Stefan Lorenz Sorgner that Friederich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*[8] featured in his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, published between 1883 and 1892, is also a precursor to contemporary transhumanism. According to Sorgner, Nietzsche's "higher humans are based upon a special nature that they have by chance. Their nature enables them to develop into higher humans, if they realise their potential by working hard at enhancing themselves" (38).

As was stated, it would be in the 20th century when contemporary transhumanist thinking would arise, most likely due to extraordinary scientific and technological progress that was made in the 19th century, an impetus that would continue and increase in the next century. The fields of genetics, engineering and medicine in particular had immense breakthroughs due to the advancements made in the preceding century such as the aforementioned work of Charles Darwin. The birth of modern transhumanist thinking was a direct cause of these incredible advancements and its beginnings can be attributed to three scientists in particular, Julian Sorell Huxley, John Burdon Sanderson Haldane and John Desmond Bernal. As Hava Tirosh-Samuelson writes:

> Julian Huxley was a close friend of John Burdon Sanderson Haldane (1892-1964) and John Desmond Bernal (1901-1971), and these three could be considered the "prophets of transhumanism." During the 1920s, they articulated views that will become prominent in the contemporary transhumanist movement. (20-21)

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[7] For more information consult: *Alchemy & Mysticism* (2014) by Alexander Roob.

[8] The concept can be translated to "Superman", "Overman" or "Overhuman".

J. B. S. Haldane was a British biochemist and the person primarily responsible for pioneering modern transhumanistic thinking. In 1923 he published the essay *Daedalus; or, Science and the Future*:

> he argued that great benefits would come from controlling our own genetics and from science in general. He predicted a wealthier society, with abundant clean energy, where genetics would be employed to make people taller, healthier, and smarter and where ectogenesis (gestating fetuses in artificial wombs) would be commonplace. (Bostrom, "History of Transhumanist Thought" 4)

This in turn influenced J.D Bernal to publish his own essay in 1929 titled *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* which "speculated about space colonization and bionic implants as well as mental improvements arising through advanced social science and psychology; (…)" (Bostrom, "History of Transhumanist Thought" 4). Both genetic engineering and bionic implantation have become technologies which are a core part of the transhumanist project of human enhancement. This impetus would culminate in 1957, when Julian Huxley, brother of Aldous Huxley, coined and utilized the term "transhumanism" in its contemporary significance, as he writes:

> The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps *transhumanism* will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature. I believe in transhumanism: once there are enough people who can truly say that, the human species will be on the threshold of a new kind of existence, as different from ours as ours is from that of Peking man[9]. It will at last be consciously fulfilling its real destiny. (17)

While the precursors to contemporary transhumanist thinking mostly dealt with transcension on a small scale, Julian Huxley was the first to cement the belief that humankind in its entirety could eventually transcend its current condition. It is also noteworthy how Huxley claims that man will remain man and yet affirms that our enhanced existence will be as different to our current one as ours is to a distant ancestor

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[9] A human ancestor, specifically a subspecies of the *Homo Erectus* which inhabited Northern China 770,000 to 230,000 years ago. Source: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Peking-man

of our species, it seems that Huxley himself believed that despite drastic changes to our condition, core human traits and attitudes would still be preserved.

It was also during the early to mid-20th century when one of transhumanism's greatest allies began emerging and gaining popularity, the genre of science fiction, which explored extensively the effects that technology could have on the human condition. As Max More mentions the "beginnings of modern science fiction, (…) has helped expand our sense of the possible" (11). Notable early science fiction authors and works such as H. G. Wells and his work *The Time Machine* (1895), E.M. Forster and his short story "The Machine Stops" (1909) as well as Olaf Stapledon and his novel *Last and First Men* (1930) all explore in numerous forms how humankind might be transformed by the influence of technology, science fiction provided great momentum for transhumanist ideas to begin slowly coalescing into a concrete and formal ideology. During the postwar decades in the mid-20th century, science fiction was at the zenith of its popularity due to in no small part the breathtaking pace of scientific and technological development, as other mediums such as television and film emerged, transhumanist ideas expanded along with science fiction, as Bostrom writes:

> Transhumanist themes during this period were discussed and analyzed chiefly in the science fiction literature. Authors such as Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and Stanislaw Lem explored how technological development could come to profoundly alter the human condition. ("History of Transhumanist Thought" 6)

Of particular note is Arthur C. Clarke who in 1968 published his science fiction novel *2001: A Space Odyssey* which was concurrently developed with the film version, directed by Stanley Kubrick and released in the same year which featured overt transhumanist themes of human transcension. The work of Isaac Asimov is also of paramount importance as he published numerous works of science fiction which thoroughly explored the many effects of technology, perhaps the most noteworthy is his short story called *Runaround*, which was gathered into a collection of Asimov's short stories named *I, Robot* and published in 1950, where he famously codified the Three Laws of Robotics, which are:

> One, a robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. Two, (…) a robot must obey the orders given it by human

beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. And three, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws. (37)

The prime directives under which RoboCop is restricted to operate bear some resemblance to these laws. It would be during the latter decades of the 20th century when formal ideologies and organizations centered around transhumanism began emerging, particularly with the creation of the Extropy Institute by Max More and Tom Morrow in 1992, as Bostrom writes:

> The Institute served as a catalyst that brought together disparate groups of people with futuristic ideas and facilitated the formation of novel memetic compounds. The Institute ran a series of conferences, but perhaps most important was the extropians mailing list, an online discussion forum where new ideas were shared and debated. In the mid-nineties, many got first exposure to transhumanist views from the Extropy Institute's listserve. ("History of Transhumanist Thought" 11-12)

Max More himself writes that the Extropy Institute was the "first fully, explicitly, and exclusively transhumanist organization" and that it "shaped the intellectual and cultural movement of transhumanism starting in the late 1980s" (9). The 1980s are particularly noteworthy for the number of films involving the theme of technology and its consequences upon humankind, films such as *The Terminator*, *Blade Runner* and of course *Robocop*. This institute was based around Max More's own perspective of transhumanist values and philosophy, named Extropianism, which originated around a set of principles created by him,

> first fully developed transhumanist philosophy was defined by the Principles of Extropy, the first version of which was published in 1990. The concept of "extropy" was used to encapsulate the core values and goals of transhumanism. (…) extropy was defined as "the extent of a living or organizational system's intelligence, functional order, vitality, and capacity and drive for improvement. (5)

These principles of extropy were and still are very influential to the overall transhumanist movement and as such have been incorporated into most extant forms of transhumanism, they consist of "perpetual progress, self-transformation, practical optimism, intelligent technology, open society, self-direction, and rational thinking"

(Max More 5). Perpetual progress in particular encapsulates the core ideal of transhumanism to continuously break limitations and barriers that stifle the advancement of our species. The creation of the extropy institute and the principles of extropy paved the way towards the definitive establishment of a formalized, all-encompassing and concrete transhumanist organization and ideology in 1998 with the creation of the World Transhumanist Association by Nick Bostrom and David Pearce which was meant to provide a "general organizational basis for all transhumanist groups and interests, across the political spectrum. The aim was also to develop a more mature and academically respectable form of transhumanism (…)" ("History of Transhumanist Thought" 12). A few years after its founding the WTA adopted two previously extant documents, the Transhumanist Declaration[10] and the Transhumanist FAQ both of which have since been updated and revised several times throughout the years. The WTA would eventually change its name to Humanity+ or literally "Humanityplus" which remains to this day as the premier organization concerning human enhancement and whose website features an entire section dedicated to the goals and philosophy of the transhumanist movement.

Max More goes to great lengths to explain that transhumanism is a "life philosophy, an intellectual and cultural movement, and an area of study" (4). When referring to it as a life philosophy he means that transhumanism is placed among the "company of complex worldviews such as secular humanism and Confucianism that have practical implications for our lives without basing themselves on any supernatural or physically transcendent belief" (4). Indeed, transhumanism mostly rejects supernaturalism, spiritualism and theology, considering its roots in Enlightenment Humanism it comes as no surprise that it embraces a mostly secular worldview, though as mentioned before the movement is very diverse and this is not universal. As Max More explains:

> Transhumanism could be described by the term "eupraxsophy," coined by secular humanist Paul Kurtz, as a type of nonreligious philosophy of life that rejects faith, worship, and the supernatural, instead emphasizing a meaningful and ethical approach to living informed by reason, science, progress, and the value of existence in our current life. (4)

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[10] For more information consult: https://www.humanityplus.org/the-transhumanist-declaration

Thus it is not uncommon for transhumanism to not only mean to go beyond the human but also to go beyond humanism, in fact many authors regard its core values as reinforcing those of Enlightenment Humanism. The secularism that marks the transhumanist movement naturally extends to its metaphysical and philosophical views of the world, especially when it comes to humankind, therefore transhumanists mostly regard humanity in a strictly materialist manner, as Max More writes:

> With few exceptions, transhumanists describe themselves as materialists, physicalists, or functionalists. As such, they believe that our thinking, feeling selves are essentially physical processes. While a few transhumanists believe that the self is tied to the current, human physical form, most accept some form of functionalism, meaning that the self has to be instantiated in some physical medium but not necessarily one that is biologically human – or biological at all. (7)

True to form, transhumanists reject any notion of a unique permanent essence which defines and constitutes humanity and endures after death, in their view humans are purely physical and material beings which evolved into their current status from lower lifeforms. As they perceive it, the human mind is not immaterial and separate from our bodies nor is it capable of existing independently from a physical form, it is simply the byproduct of the physical processes of the human body. The body is itself effectively regarded as a substrate, a physical medium or prosthetic that humans can modify or, as Max More states, eventually replace with a possibly non biological form. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, More states that transhumanists *do* believe that our mental processes can be disembodied and instantiated into another physical medium, regardless of whether it is biological or not. The overall reason transhumanists hold that our minds can be transferred to another substrate beyond the biological is due to their belief that

> it is only the brain's information that becomes "disembodied" and subsequently transferred into a machine. In any case, transhumanists start with the assumption that the human body consists of matter and information, information that can be transferred into something perhaps more durable than the physical body. (Elkins 17)

Elkins expands upon More's statement, indicating that not only do transhumanists perceive the human body as an assemblage of matter, but they essentially view the human mind as information, this information, as can be inferred from More, is the product of purely physical processes, with the main component responsible for this paradigm being the brain. As Doyle explains this information consists of "our longitudinal memories, as well as our hopes, our dreams and countless other mental events" (117). According to Doyle, this information includes the myriad other mental events of an individual such as thoughts and feelings, effectively encompassing human nature which is also essentially construed as information. Samuelson further adds that for "(…) transhumanists, humans are no more than a sum of their physiological processes, which are entirely mechanistic, knowable, and controllable" (40-41). This means that not only do many transhumanists regard the human in this thoroughly materialistic manner but they perceive our species in a mechanistic way as well; in other words, adherents of the movement hold that due to the aforementioned paradigm we are essentially "biological machines" akin to computers. As Sean Carroll states:

> The neurons in our brains, as well as the bodies through which they interact with the world, function as both hardware and software. Roboticists have found that human-seeming behavior is much easier to model in machines when cognition is embodied. Give that computer some arms, legs, and a face, and it starts acting much more like a person. ("We Are All Machines")

In this paradigm, our minds are the software and our material bodies are essentially hardware with the brain in particular being likened to a CPU, the central processing unit of a computer and a hard drive, it is where information is processed and stored. If another type of substrate beyond the biological can replicate the manner in which the human brain processes and stores information then transhumanists hold it is possible to transfer ourselves into other physical forms. Considering this outlook, it becomes clear how a major number of transhumanists perceive human enhancement, if we are truly biological machines, then certain enhancements such as genetic engineering essentially consist of optimizing and improving upon our internal components, much like getting a new and improved processor for a computer or installing better circuitry into electrical equipment. This is part of the reason transhumanists do not believe that our nature is deserving of any allegiance and why they advocate the possibility and desirability of changing it, we are just information and matter, no different from

machines. As N. Katherine Hayles writes: "The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (3).

Taking into consideration the belief that our minds are merely information, most transhumanists hold that the human self is essentially a particular pattern of this information that can be transferred to another substrate. This view of the self is commonly known as the "Psychological Continuity Theory", though Kurzweil calls it "Patternism", this theory suggests that "you are essentially your memories and ability to reflect on yourself (Locke)[11] and more generally, your overall psychological configuration; what Kurzweil referred to as your pattern" (Susan Schneider 5). As can be inferred from Schneider, if the mind is essentially information, then the self is the particular psychological outline of this information. Michael LaTorra expands upon this viewpoint, writing:

> The self is a pattern, not an entity or an irreducible object that merely changes. The pattern that we call a self at any instant is merely the successor state of previous instances of that pattern. It maintains continuity by displaying a high degree of similarity to previous pattern states. (209)

This pattern not only consists of one's memories but also the general manner in which a person behaves, thinks and feels as well as the way they react and respond to the world, as Martine Rothblatt writes: "In other words, the self is a characteristic visualization of the world and pattern of responding to it, including emotions" (317). Thus, you remain yourself as long as the integrity of this pattern is preserved and its continuation to the present mental state one has remains unbroken. This whole outlook which perceives the mind and the self as information and the body as an assemblage of material components similar to a machine is the reason why transhumanists believe they are not transgressing any boundaries or perverting humanity through their goals of enhancement, through this viewpoint, human beings are perceived as "open to deep and transformative restructuring, in which new physical and cognitive equipment can become

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[11] For more information consult: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1998), authored by John Locke and edited by Roger Woolhouse.

literally incorporated into the thinking and acting systems that we identify as minds and persons" (Max More and Natasha Vita-More 111).

Since transhumanists regard the human in this manner, that we are material beings open to change and perhaps even *meant* to transform, it follows that we *should* change ourselves due to a myriad of reasons, among them are, the ability to experience a much more desirable and blissful existence and to ensure our survival from current and future existential threats which might harm our species. These justifications which transhumanists provide to defend and promote human enhancement, grant transhumanism, as a movement and philosophy, a distinctly eutopian nuance, in other words transhumanism seeks to achieve a better way of being through enhancement. Max More acknowledges this, as he notes that a distinctly "optimistic flavor necessarily permeates transhumanism. Someone cannot believe that radical transformations of the human condition are both possible and desirable while also believing that we are doomed to failure or disaster" (13). Due to its focus on science and technology, transhumanism is specifically perceived as techno-utopian, which means that technology is regarded as the main instrument through which to provide better conditions for mankind. As Nayar writes:

> This version of posthumanism is (…) techno-utopian, in its faith in technology's ability to ensure a certain kind of future. To cite Bostrom once more: 'the wisest approach to such prospects [indefinite health-spans, greater intellectual abilities] is to embrace technological progress'. (18)

This eutopian impulse within transhumanism is made even more evident by the concept of the Singularity, a theory which has proven highly contentious within the transhumanist movement and has drawn no small amount of criticism. It consists of a hypothetical point in time where accelerated technological change will cause a "rapid transition to a state where the current human condition would be challenged." (Sandberg, *Transhumanism and Its Critics* 376). While the mention of a singularity in a technological context was first provided by John Von Neumann, computer scientist Vernor Vinge is regarded as the person mainly responsible for articulating the theory which has since been popularized by others such as Hans Moravec and Ray Kurzweil. This theory involves numerous premises focused around concepts such as exponential growth, accelerating

returns and the so-called Moore's Law[12] which are centered around the notion that technological growth and computational power progressively increase as time passes eventually reaching an end point, as Max More writes those who expect a technological singularity "anticipate a drastic acceleration in the rate of change, either as a one-time jump caused by the advent of super-intelligence, or as a continuous acceleration driven by exponential trends in computing power" (13). The Singularity marks the point where humankind truly becomes posthuman, where the technology which transhumanists believe will aid them in achieving their goals is truly attained, it will be the start of a more eutopian world where the blissful and desirable existence promised by supporters of the movement will be realized. However, the path to the Singularity and by extension to posthumanity specifically depends on technological development being unimpeded, particularly in several emerging technological fields which are crucial to the project of human enhancement. These technologies are identified by several acronyms which classify overlapping technological fields such as, NBIC which refers to the fields of Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information technology and Cognitive science, GRIN which refers to Genetic, Robotic, Information, and Nano technologies and GNR which refers to Genetics, Nanotechnology and Robotics.

Unfortunately for transhumanists, not only are these technologies exceptionally expensive to the develop and invest in, but there is also a widespread concern over the dangers and unforeseen consequences they might bring, which is why there is a strong possibility that a great degree of government oversight will be established in order to enforce ethical and precautionary measures, as is the norm in cases where there is a high degree of risk. To transhumanists, governmental interference means that any significant progress into developing these technological fields is hindered, not only that but the personal right of enhancement is put in jeopardy by possible state regulations. Due to this paradigm, many transhumanists advocate for libertarian, capitalist and neoliberal policies which guarantee the greatest degree of personal freedom, investment in these technological fields and minimum interference from governments, as Max More writes:

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[12] For more information consult Raymond Kurzweil's *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (1999), *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005) and *The Law of Accelerating Returns* at https://www.kurzweilai.net/the-law-of-accelerating-returns.

From the late 1980s and through the 1990s, many and perhaps most transhumanists evinced a broadly libertarian politics. This perspective continues to receive far more support among transhumanists than in the general population, but over the previous decade or so, liberal democrats have become just as well recognized, some adopting the term "techno progressive". (13)

As can be surmised this libertarian stance advocates for minimal government involvement concerning the project of enhancement, meaning that there should be little to no state oversight when it comes to the research, organization and distribution of enhancement technologies, it should all be decided by the free-market which is seen as the best source of investment and is considered as "the best guarantor of the right to human enhancement" (Ferrando Francesca 27). Since governmental involvement must account for numerous conditions such as ethical concerns and democratic procedures, including the possibility of a vote to ban these technologies, which would just hinder or outright stop development in these fields, neoliberal and capitalist policies which support private investment are regarded as preferable since they guarantee a steady supply of capital and minimal impediment to progress.

Considering this libertarian stance it should come as no surprise that many transhumanists fervently support the principles of autonomy, liberty and self-ownership, bearing in mind their advocation for the right to enhancement, it is natural that they do not wish for any impediment that might be brought about by government oversight and regulation. As such transhumanists advocate for both cognitive and morphological freedom, in other words, they strongly encourage freedom to enhance and alter their bodies and their minds as they see fit instead of being impeded, coerced or forced into doing so. Wrye Sententia writes that cognitive liberty "a term coined in the year 2000, asserts the foundational principle of the legal and ethical right to brain privacy, autonomy, and choice in relation to existing pharmacology, as well as anticipated applications of techno-human advances vectored on the brain" (356). Anders Sandberg writes on morphological freedom, viewing it as the "extension of one's right to one's body, not just self-ownership but also the right to modify oneself according to one's desires" (*Transhumanist Reader* 56). These two concepts are also incredibly important across all extant forms of transhumanism because its doctrines highlight the belief that enhancement should be a *choice*, despite advocating the possibility and desirability of

using technology to enhance ourselves they maintain that an individual who wishes to remain unenhanced has every right to do so.

As mentioned by Max More, this libertarian stance is rivaled by a democratic faction which has earned great recognition within the transhumanist movement, supporters of this stance advocate for a greater degree of state action and regulation in order to promote greater equality and accessibility when it comes to enhancement technologies and prevent possibly catastrophic consequences. This stance is named "Democratic Transhumanism" a term coined by James Hughes who, as Lilley writes, "distrusts the free market, opposes unchecked individualism, and believes that a safe passage to a transhuman civilization requires ethical standards, public oversight, and some regulation" (16). As Hughes himself argues:

> Setting aside libertarian blinkers, the only way to reassure skittish publics about the consequences of new technology is publicly accountable state regulation. Rather than uncritically defending every new corporate-sponsored technology, while dismissing concerns about safety and equity with Panglossian[13] assurances that all will work itself out in the Singularity, a democratic transhumanism could embrace the need for government action to ensure that transhuman technologies are safe, effective and equitably distributed. ("Politics of Transhumanism")

In order to address the concerns over safety and equity which are often levied at transhumanism and which they dismiss with unduly optimistic answers, Hughes believes that government regulation and public accountability is the best path for the project of human enhancement. As can be inferred, Democratic Transhumanism seems to be focused on addressing the issues of equity and safety, making sure transhuman technologies are widely accessible, equitably distributed and secure, especially due to the potential danger they might pose in the hands of someone with harmful intentions. Uncoincidentally criticisms concerning safety and equity are the most common censures levied at transhumanism by opponents of the movement and human enhancement in general. These groups and/or individuals are dubbed by transhumanists as Neo-Luddites or Bioconservatives, terms signifying their stance against technologies that might be used for enhancement, and their defense of our current condition and bodily integrity.

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[13] Excessively Optimistic.

The socioeconomic consequences that might be instigated by the advent of enhancement technologies is a major source of consternation for these opponents of transhumanism. Bioconservatives argue that without any form of regulation the rich and powerful will benefit disproportionally from enhancements, due to their financial resources and social connections they will have greater accessibility to these technologies and as such will have an easier time bettering both themselves and their offspring thus guaranteeing a distinct and tangible advantage over the rest of society. As Fukuyama writes, if "wealthy parents suddenly have open to them the opportunity to increase the intelligence of their children as well as that of all their subsequent descendents, then we have the makings not just of a moral dilemma but of a full-scale class war" (16). As Fukuyama infers, enhancements will inevitably exacerbate the socioeconomic disparities already present in our world, creating an even more unequal and further divided society between those who are enhanced and those who are not, which as Fukuyama states, might lead to conflicts between the two groups. Transhumanists counter this criticism by providing past examples of technologies which were exclusively available to the rich but went on to become cheaper and thus widely available to the rest of society such as the mobile phone and the automobile, as Doyle writes:

> First, many technologies become vastly cheaper over time, and there is no reason to believe that this would not also be the case for at least some future human enhancement technologies. Using the automobile as an historical example, would an earlier Fukuyama have banned automobiles in the era before Ford introduced mass production for the same reasons? (137-138)

This criticism is also addressed by the aforementioned policies of democratic transhumanism which invite governmental regulation and methods which address equity. Whether the social divide between the wealthy and everyone else will widen truly depends on the ability of our social and cultural institutions to establish some form of regulation.

Safety is another prominent issue for bioconservatives, many argue that some of the technologies which would make enhancement possible could be used to cause unprecedented harm to both the environment and the human race itself. Genetics, Robotics and Nanotechnology are particularly dangerous due to several aspects which exacerbate their potential for harm. These concerns over safety were made apparent by Bill Joy in his Wired article published in 2000 titled "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us".

Joy provides several possible dangerous scenarios which would be made possible by transhuman technologies, such as the dangers posed by intelligent machines which humans might become completely dependent on. However, this possibility is not Joy's main fear, what he is most worried about is that these technologies allow for self-replication, a danger that is exacerbated by the fact that they are relatively accessible to the public. As Joy writes:

> (…) robots, engineered organisms, and nanobots share a dangerous amplifying factor: They can self-replicate. A bomb is blown up only once—but one bot can become many, and quickly get out of control (…) they can spawn whole new classes of accidents and abuses. Most dangerously, for the first time, these accidents and abuses are widely within the reach of individuals or small groups. ("Why the Future")

This potential for unprecedented danger is what might provoke governments to impose restrictions and precautionary measures on certain emerging technologies, however, to many bioconservatives precautionary measures are not enough, they advocate total relinquishment of these technological fields so as to assure that they will never cause harm.

The issue of safety is something transhumanists take very seriously but they vehemently criticize the stance of relinquishment, as they believe that these technologies might in fact be the best hope to prevent the extinction of civilization and guarantee the survival of the human race. As Mark Walker writes: "(…) the reason I oppose a moratorium for the next thousand years is precisely because there is no guarantee for our safety" (99). As Walker indicates, there is no assurance that our species will endure if we do indeed relinquish these technologies just as there is no certainty that these technologies will lead to the extinction of our species. By advocating relinquishment, bioconservatives "must explicitly or implicitly hold that the chances of survival in a non-transhumanist future are greater. This is what transhumanists deny" (Walker 108-109). Transhumanists are generally in favor of measured and sensible restrictions on emerging technologies in order to alleviate possible threats. Bostrom, for example, advocates for what he calls "differential technological development" meaning we should try to "retard the implementation of dangerous technologies and accelerate implementation of beneficial technologies, especially those that ameliorate the hazards posed by other technologies" ("Existential Risks"). In other words, research must first be performed on

defensive mechanisms and countermeasures that might mitigate the risk posed by emerging technologies before we focus fully on them.

Besides criticism toward safety and equity, many bioconservatives also target transhumanist ethics and the worldview which many in the movement espouse, this includes the view of our species as material biological machines and the reduction of the mind to information and the self to a pattern. Samuelson writes that "Viewing the human body as a "resilient machine" that requires long-term care is problematic because human beings are not just machines, although some aspects of human somatic operation bear some resemblance to it" (40). The mechanistic and materialistic perspective of transhumanism does merit some concern as it is a somewhat reductionist view of the human condition, our bodies and our minds are incredibly complex and there is much that we do not yet know about. Samuelson argues that the

> human brain is much more than a computational machine; it is part of a highly complex and integrated organism that requires to take into account not only the nervous system but also the immune system, as well as the sociocultural context in which we are embedded. (38)

Samuelson further argues against the transhumanist conception of the mind and the self, believing it is problematic to

> talk about humans as "software-based" entities. While Kurzweil and others think about humans in terms of patterns, human identity and idiosyncratically unique personality cannot be reduced to these patterns of information, because each one of us is distinctive and unique, an Other than cannot be reduced to sameness. (43-44)

Not only are these perspectives criticized for being far too simplistic and reductionistic they are also regarded as deeply dehumanizing and exhibit a lack of appreciation for human dignity, which is argued by bioconservatives to be endangered by the project of human enhancement. As Bostrom writes:

> One of the central concerns of the bioconservatives is that human enhancement technologies might be "dehumanizing." The worry, which has been variously expressed, is that these technologies might undermine our human dignity or inadvertently erode something that is deeply valuable about being human, but that

is difficult to put into words or to factor into a cost-benefit analysis. (*Transhumanism and Its Critics* 56)

Fukuyama, as seen in the previous chapter, is one the main detractors of enhancement and he consistently espouses this critique, believing that enhancement will lead to the conditions portrayed in *Brave New World*, meaning that posthuman beings will be thoroughly dehumanized without even realizing it, that they will possess no dignity of their own. Bostrom, however, argues against this analogy writing that it is "not a tale of human enhancement gone amok, but a tragedy of technology and social engineering being used to deliberately cripple moral and intellectual capacities—the exact antithesis of the transhumanist proposal" (*Transhumanism and Its Critics* 58). Bostrom's argument is evidenced by the aforementioned support of both morphological and cognitive freedom, which deliberately defend the right to modify or not modify our bodies and minds, thus preventing any large scale social engineering project to take place. This would also prevent the scenario portrayed in *RoboCop* where Murphy is enhanced without explicitly giving his consent and made into a tool. Bostrom counters the overall argument that our dignity and humanity will be effaced by enhancement, proposing that posthuman beings will possess dignity of their own, he acknowledges that

> some ways of modifying human nature could be debasing, but rightly points out that obtaining technical mastery over our own nature does not inevitably lead to dehumanization. He emphasizes that when one examines what one means by the term "dignity" (the quality of being worthy or honorable; the right to be treated with respect), dignity is indeed something that a posthuman could possess. (Doyle 139)

There is no reason to think that posthumans would not possess their own worth or nobility, Bostrom argues that they "may even be able to attain higher levels of moral and other excellence than any of us humans may"(*Transhumanism and Its Critics* 62). When it comes to the right to be treated with respect transhumanists believe it stands to reason that posthumans should be accorded a moral status equivalent to our own and we should work to create "social structures that accord appropriate moral recognition and legal rights to all who need them, be they male or female, black or white, flesh or silicon" (Bostrom, *Transhumanism and Its Critics* 62). This demonstrates that future enhanced humans which have undergone great morphological changes such as Murphy in *RoboCop* would,

as transhumanists intend, be afforded the moral recognition, respect and legal rights that are attributed to humans.

In conclusion, transhumanism comes across as a movement defined by multiplicity in which members often share incredibly disparate views, it encompasses so many approaches and ideas that it is quite complicated to identify common themes due to the often contradictory views espoused by adherents of the movement. Nevertheless, all transhumanists argue that it is possible and desirable for mankind to enhance and improve itself through technological and scientific means. As such, transhumanist philosophy and the worldview many supporters of the movement share is fundamentally secular, materialistic and mechanistic, to them there is no special essence that constitutes mankind. The human is a purely physical being whose mental capacities and self, consist of information that arises from the body's physical processes, itself shaped by the forces of evolution. This view of the human as a purely physical being shaped by evolution complements the transhumanist belief that human nature is not fixed and can be changed. This impetus for changing our nature is justified through utopian nuances, which hold that humanity would experience a much more blissful existence, this utopian character is further evidenced by the theory of the singularity which has caused great controversy within the movement.

Transhumanist politics are usually centered around libertarian and democratic policies with the former espousing, neoliberalist and capitalist views which advocate for minimal government interference and maximum autonomy and individual liberties including cognitive and morphological ones. While the latter advocates for state oversight and regulation in order to assure equity and safety concerning these transhuman technologies ensuring that social inequality is not exacerbated and possibly catastrophic damage does not occur. Social fairness and safety are in fact two prevalent criticisms made by detractors of human enhancement, which transhumanists call Neo-Luddites or Bioconservatives. Transhumanists normally counter these arguments by providing examples of the trickle-down process of technological innovations, where some new technologies became cheaper and widely accessible over time. Safety concerns are addressed by transhumanist arguments which posit that there is no guarantee that our species will survive if these emerging technologies are relinquished in fact they may be our best hope for survival. The secular, mechanistic and materialistic view of humanity by transhumanism is also a target of frequent criticism, as it is seen as too simplistic,

reductionist and dehumanizing, resulting in enhancements also being regarded as such to the point where it is believed they will erode human dignity. Transhumanists however believe that posthuman beings will possess dignity of their own and should be afforded the same legal and civil rights, moral status and respect which humans possess.~

3.3. *RoboCop*: Cybernetics – De/Rehumanization

> When I say *cyborgs,* I of course mean us. (…) Some seem unaccepting in this transformation, and it indeed has been gradual. In a sense it began when the first simple machines were invented. But now, to deny the change requires a willful ignorance since, if you observe bodies clothed in steel flowing over highways, or how we've outsourced half our memory to these devices, these exobrains we carry around, and if you note how even our most intimate relationships occur remotely, at great distances from one another, if you see all this, well, it isn't such an original observation, dear cyborgs, to say that human and machine long ago merged inextricably. (Eugene Lim, *Dear Cyborgs: A Novel* 2017)

Transhumanism, as seen in the previous chapter, believes that the project of human enhancement hinges on numerous emerging technologies which will make the goal of posthumanity achievable. Some forms of enhancement which are supported include the transference of our minds to synthetic substrates or simply to servers where we can enjoy a virtual existence. Other forms of enhancement involve manipulating our genetic material in order to improve our biological characteristics or even injecting microscopic machines called nanites into our bodies which would then fight against diseases and other ailments. There is, however, one form of enhancement that is not overtly addressed and which merits special focus, cybernetic enhancement. This particular type of augmentation is perhaps the most widely recognized besides genetic engineering. It has become effectively synonymous with transhumanism, much to the chagrin of adherents of the movement. No other form of enhancement represents the ever closer relationship between man and technology more than cybernetic enhancement, as it has been widely portrayed in popular culture in the form of the cyborg which is a mixture of the words *cyb*ernetic *org*anism. According to Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows

a cyborg can be described as a "self-regulating human-machine system. It is in effect a human-machine hybrid in which the machine parts become replacements, which are integrated or act as supplements to the organism to enhance the body's power potential" (2). Thus, cybernetic enhancements consist of integrating mechanical and electronic components into the human body which grant greater abilities, effectively turning one into a human-machine hybrid, a type of transhuman being. This is the manner of enhancement that is portrayed in *RoboCop* where Alex Murphy, after being brutally killed is reborn as the eponymous cyborg, and the film puts into center frame his existence in this new form. Both the notion of cybernetic enhancement and the concept of the cyborg point to the field of cybernetics, a wide-ranging area of study that originated in the mid-20th century. The theories and premises that originated from this field were fundamentally grounded in a transhumanist impulse and had widespread consequences by offering a completely new view of the human, which consequently allowed for the conception of the cyborg as a discursive and technological being that destabilizes common notions of human self-understanding, thus provoking existential anxieties which are explored in *RoboCop*.

The area of cybernetics is primarily concerned with the study of "purposive systems, both animate and inanimate, and the way they regulate themselves." ("Guide to Cybernetics"). These systems can be incredibly varied, as cybernetics is a transdisciplinary field, as Dan C. Marinescu writes:

> Cybernetics is concerned with concepts at the core of understanding complex systems such as learning, cognition, adaptation, emergence, communication, and efficiency. Cybernetics has been influenced by and, in turn, has applications in fields as diverse as psychology and control theory, philosophy and mechanical engineering, architecture and evolutionary biology, or social sciences and electrical engineering. (24)

Therefore, cybernetics focuses upon certain core concepts with the intent of understanding how systems regulate and adapt themselves in order to maintain their functioning, which is usually geared toward a specific purpose. The essential concepts which are at very core of cybernetic theory are control, communication, information and feedback. It is affirmed that is through the unison of these notions that a variety of systems operate and adjust themselves. This is best portrayed by the etymology of the word "cybernetics" which was coined by Norbert Wiener and is adopted from the Greek word

Kybernetes meaning steersman, the manner in which these steersmen piloted ships functioned according to the aforementioned concepts. Since the sea is always in motion and fraught with potential dangers, these steersmen had to constantly adjust their navigation which caused changes in their immediate environment, such as the motion of the water, leading the steersmen to respond in turn. In effect, they are in *control* of the ship, they receive signals or messages from the exterior which are *communicated* to them and they undertake maneuvers based on that communication which influence future actions thus involving *feedback*, with the ultimate purpose of guaranteeing the integrity of the vessel and ensuring its proper course is maintained. In other words, undertaking a certain action will lead to the transformation of the immediate environment in which a system is embedded in. These transformations lead such a system to also change, effectively comprising a feedback loop through which a system adjusts and adapts. This process of control, communication and feedback is defined by the flow of information which exists within the system itself as well as between the system and its environment, where it receives information, processes it and effectuates changes based upon it, meaning that to cybernetics the core focus is "the flow of information through a system and how the system uses the information to help control itself" ("Guide to Cybernetics"). It is this flow of information which essentially determines the functioning of both intelligent machines and living organisms, such as human beings, indeed one of the main premises of cybernetics is the notion that humans and machines can be considered equivalent because they essentially operate in the same manner, by processing information.

This equivalence is mostly based around the concept of homeostasis in which the artificial system of control present in machines and the natural autonomic nervous system of living organisms automatically respond to "deviations from a baseline (the norm, stasis, equilibrium) in ways that drag them back toward that original setting—the full cistern, the preset ambient temperature, and the like" (Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs* 15). Both humans and machines maintain steady equilibrated states through the flow of information that exists between the system and its immediate environment, a thermostat for example automatically effectuates changes in temperature with the express purpose of maintaining the norm that is set by humans. Likewise the human body functions homeostatically, for example when the "temperature soars, sweat pours out of the human body so that its internal temperature can remain relatively stable" (Hayles 8). Ultimately, both humans and machines are defined by the patterns of information that permeate them

through this operational method involving control, communication and feedback, this paradigm does not only encompass the human body but the human *mind*, as well. As Nayar writes:

> (…) cybernetic theory (…) took the radical step of declaring consciousness, cognition and perception (integral components of human subjectivity) to be constructed: cognition as the effect of an information flow from the environment, and contingent upon the feedback mechanism, upon a *process* rather than material or structural elements. (54-55)

Indeed, to cybernetics the human mind and traits which it encompasses such as cognition and consciousness are not contingent upon the specific materiality of the human body nor upon any structural components such as the brain, they are patterns which arise from the flow of information between the human and the environment. Both humans and machines display cognition and intelligence by their ability to accomplish particular tasks in the presence of uncertainty and erraticism in their immediate environment, as a result of this paradigm, information, "messages and feedback which facilitate control and communication become seen as the key aspects of both organisms and machines" (Featherstone and Burrows 2). Furthermore, as can be inferred, information is effectively considered immaterial, meaning it is conceived as an abstract incorporeal substance that flows without losing meaning or form, it is independent from the material in which it instantiated. This is why the functional analogy that regards humans and machines as equivalent works, because other factors such as structural components or the type of matter which constitutes an information processing entity are considered irrelevant, the focus is on the "*flow* of information and its patterns rather than the materiality of any entity (Nayar 54). As a result, through the lens of this field an automaton conceived by Wiener was considered to be equal to a human because it was "*operationally* active, that is, it was 'effectively coupled to the external world, not merely by [its] energy flow, [its] metabolism, but also by a flow of impressions, of incoming messages, and of the actions of outgoing messages'" (Tomas 26). In sum, to the field of cybernetics, both humans and intelligent machines can be regarded as equal based on the manner in which they operate, which is essentially through a system of control, communication and feedback where the flow of information allows them to adjust and regulate themselves. Materiality and embodiment are considered irrelevant as information is conceived as an immaterial substance which can flow between substrates unchanged and unimpeded, thus,

henceforward "humans were to be seen primarily as information-processing entities who are essentially similar to intelligent machines" (Hayles 7).

As can be deduced, cybernetics possesses many similarities to transhumanist thinking, both establish a paradigm where information is prioritized as a substance which is not dependent on a specific type of materiality and whose organizational pattern fundamentally determines the nature of human beings and machines. Though there is a key difference between transhumanism and cybernetics, the latter exclusively finds the *operation* of the machine comparable to that of the human, while transhumanists directly perceive the somatic processes of the human body as mechanistically equivalent to that of a machine. Nevertheless, the functional equivalence that is established between humans and machines based on their operational logic has a core "impetus in a profound motivation for improving "the human"—to the point that the price to pay (i.e., its identification with a device that one can tinker with, fix, and enhance) turned out to be a bargain. That impulse is what drives transhumanism" (Alcibiades Malapi-Nelson, "Classical Cybernetics" 2). Nelson further expands upon this, stating that

> both transhumanism and cybernetics represent two sides of the same coin— perhaps transhumanism being the thickest part of the coin. In fact, I advanced that the best way to understand cybernetics—its drive, eccentricity, and its luring aura—is best couched within the broader framework of transhumanism. The latter, understood as an immemorial longing for improving the human condition, indeed found in cybernetics its most radical expression. ("Classical Cybernetics" 2)

As Nelson affirms, cybernetics can be considered to be the most radical concretization and expression of the drive toward improving the human that defines transhumanism, conceiving the human as equivalent to a machine meant that much like one our species could be tinkered with, fixed and *enhanced*. As Nelson further explains: "Such was one of the very useful outcomes of successfully identifying man with machine: Once man could be tinkered with using the same scientific laws that we apply to the mechanizable, the enhancement of man follows" (*Nature of the Machine* 227). Yet, this core notion was also one of the most distressing insinuations made by cybernetics, conceiving the human as a being which is fundamentally determined by flows of information which loop between itself and the environment, much like a machine, signified that the "boundaries of the human subject are constructed rather than given. Conceptualizing control, communication, and information as an integrated system,

cybernetics radically changed how boundaries were conceived" (Dale Bradley "Cybersubjectivity in *RoboCop*"). Since boundaries are so important to human self-understanding, this notion was obviously the root of prevalent fears and anxieties which came to be represented by the figure of the cyborg. The cyborg was conceived by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in their article "Cyborgs and Space" published on the *Astronautics* journal in 1960, it was fundamentally based upon the main premises of cybernetics such as the notion of homeostasis and the conception of information as independent of materiality, as Hayles writes:

> Central to the construction of the cyborg are informational pathways connecting the organic body to its prosthetic extensions. This presumes a conception of information as a (disembodied) entity that can flow between carbon-based organic components and silicon-based electronic components to make protein and silicon operate as a single system. (2)

Clynes and Klyne specifically utilized this logic to conceive the cyborg as a being which would facilitate space exploration through the incorporation of "integral exogenous devices to bring about the biological changes which might be necessary in man's homeostatic mechanisms to allow him to live in space *qua natura*" (27). A clear transhumanist impulse it at the heart of this conception of the cyborg, in order to surpass boundaries that stifle us Clynes and Klyne, as transhumanists intend, "produced a stage of evolution that was participatory" (D.S. Halacy, qtd. in Tomas 36).

Eventually however, the cyborg was no longer exclusively associated with scientific or technological endeavors but became a prominent staple in popular films and academic circles as a figure and a metaphor representing the effacement of boundaries crucial to human self-understanding. The cyborg destabilizes dualisms which are at the root of common notions of human identity and human nature, highlighting contemporary concerns about the ever more dominant role of technology in our lives and its possible effects on our species, much like the monsters of the 19th century they are "a reflection of material and ontological cultural anxieties of their time" (Estefanía Tocado Orviz "Cyborgs, the monsters of the 21st Century"). *RoboCop*, as a popular SF movie of the late 20th century reflects these concerns, emphasizing the greater interpenetration of technology into our lives which raises questions about how the human self will be affected by this exponential process. The most obvious anxiety portrayed is the disruption of the binary opposition between human and machine which is "one of the familiar conceptual

frames people use to think about themselves. Throughout most of history it was easy to distinguish between people and the tools, machines, or devices that they used and produced" (Maartje Schermer 57). However, with the progressive improvement of machinery and the advent of the cybernetic conception of the human this distinction has become blurred, dichotomies such as natural/artificial, man/technology and subject/object have become consistently eroded. As Donna Haraway writes:

Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert. (11)

These dualisms have been fundamental toward human self-understanding, as it is a time tested tradition to assert our inherent humanity by simply differentiating ourselves from a myriad of entities and concepts; this is due to the fact that "human identity, rooted in Cartesian separation of mind and body, needs to distinguish self from other and to maintain boundaries between the human and not-human, (…)" (Vint 39). However, as man and technology become ever more closely coupled, common self-understanding becomes less precise and humanity is forced to reevaluate itself and reestablish its identity once all shared emblems are gone, as Featherstone and Burrows write:

This means that the key analytical categories we have long used to structure our world, which derive from the fundamental division between technology and nature, are in danger of dissolving; the categories of the biological, the technological, the natural, the artificial and the human - are now beginning to blur. (2)

The film's depiction of cybernetics and by extension human enhancement is thus centered around these themes of dualistic disruption, the effacement of the self and the dehumanization of persons through the mechanization of the body. These matters are very clearly framed within the subject of the mind-body problem where the effacement of boundaries between human and machine lead to questions about whether the human self can endure after the unprecedented transformation of the body through cybernetic technologies. Thus the central dilemma of *RoboCop* is the case of the "technologically rebuilt human body, in which the residues of the human self struggle to assert themselves

against the 'product violation' programming designed into the cyborg (…)" (Featherstone and Burrows 4).

The film frames its central themes concerning the aforementioned existential issues in a clearly dystopian scenario meant to satirize American society in the late 20th century: the narrative takes place in the city of Detroit which has become significantly dilapidated and is afflicted with a great degree of crime and unemployment due to neoliberal and capitalist policies, effectively serving to hold up a mirror to American society during the time period in which the film was made. As Steve Best writes: "Capitalism is no missing referent in *RoboCop*, rather it is foregrounded as the determining force behind labor conflicts, crime and corruption, social distress, cutthroat individualism, and the impoverishment of subjective life" (46). It is in this context that the subsequent enhancement of Alex Murphy occurs, he is rebuilt as RoboCop, after his death, by an amoral and profit-driven corporation who significantly contributes to the present dystopian conditions in Detroit, as can be expected, OCP, represented by overarching antagonist Dick Jones are invariably associated with a purely materialist position that is connected to the views of science, cybernetics and transhumanism. During the first part of the film where the narrative is established, we are introduced to the fictional world and cognitive estrangement is immediately ascertained, the world presented in the screen is familiar yet also unfamiliar at the same time. It is in this first half when the events that lead to the creation of RoboCop occur, when Murphy is killed by criminals which are connected to the corporation that will eventually rebuild him into a cyborg, it is hinted that Murphy's death was intentional, being orchestrated so that the OCP could purposefully reconstruct him into a human/machine hybrid. Thus, Murphy's corpse is reappropriated and rebuilt through cybernetic implantation, with only a handful of organs, primarily the brain and his face, still being present in his highly enhanced mechanical body. His memories are wiped clean and cybernetic implants in his head are, presumably, what drive his now computerized programming that contains his main directives which are to uphold the law, protect the innocent and serve the public trust with a fourth unknown directive being obscured. Once again there is a prominent connection with Asimov's laws of robotics and furthermore to HAL 9000 the artificial intelligence of Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It is in this section of the film where the dehumanizing effects of technology and neoliberalism are most prevalent, as RoboCop is referred to as a product and a machine and he certainly acts like one, being entirely robotic

and rational in his actions, with the exception of the previously mentioned penchant for holstering his gun much like Murphy did. As J.P Telotte writes: "Reconstituted as a "product," driven by software, he seems devoid of any emotion, as we see in his cold, seemingly programmed response to the woman he saves from a rape attempt by two thugs" (173). This scene is particularly evocative of the dehumanization and subsequent mechanization which initially characterizes RoboCop, as the woman clings to him and profusely thanks him for saving her, he can only awkwardly stand and inform her in a purely robotic tone that she is in shock and that he will notify a rape crisis center. Eventually, the dystopian counter-narrative and subsequent rehumanization of RoboCop begins occurring while he is undergoing maintenance, when he dreams about his death or rather Murphy's death at the hands of Clarence Boddicker and his gang. The fact that RoboCop can dream, something machines ostensibly cannot do, ironically reminding us of Philip K. Dick's question on whether androids dream of electric sheep, seems to indicate that the human self, his former human mind is beginning to reemerge within his mechanical shell and is opposing his programming. This is perhaps one of the most important parts of the film, as this occurrence is not brought about by any external stimuli and seemingly simply happens automatically, RoboCop begins acting beyond his programming. One of the engineers who worked on his construction remarks that RoboCop's system was "never designed to experience detailed somatic response" after Bob Morton, the man entirely responsible for the RoboCop program, asks her if it was just a glitch. It would seem the organic and human parts of this creature are beginning to resist the computerized and mechanized aspects which also comprise him.

His interactions with his former police partner who addresses him as Murphy and his encounter with one of the gang members responsible for his death lead him to investigate who Murphy was. As RoboCop begins to investigate the man he used to be, he commences to overtly display more and more emotion, one of the clearest examples being his return to his former home which is now uninhabited due to his wife and son having left. It is here where memories begin flooding back in, and emotions, which OCP through their use of technology attempted to suppress, begin reemerging, as RoboCop inspects his house and is reminded of his former life and of what has been taken from him. The clearest statement of his returning "humanity" and how it is contrasted with the dehumanization of technology comes from a scene where he angrily punches through an

electronic monitor containing the video of a realtor advertising the house. As Oliver Tumbo writes:

> For instance, there is the scene where the metaphysically estranged and lonely robot cop smashes the television's screen with his fist in defiance to the reified world in which he has to fulfill the assigned duties. Apart from dramatizing the dehumanization of unlimited technological advancement, Robocop resists postmodern fatalism. (3)

Indeed, it is in this scene where clearest statement toward the dehumanizing use of technology is made, through the act of violence against the monitor that the film frames the willingness of RoboCop to resist submitting to the onslaught of a technologized, mechanized and rationally controlled world, something that is depicted through the film's portrayal of Detroit which has been artificialized to the extreme, to the point where the presence of nature cannot be accounted for. The clearest moment of struggle arises when RoboCop attempts to arrest Dick Jones the overarching main villain, a higher-up at OCP and the man connected to the leader of the gang who killed Murphy, who RoboCop interrogated in order to learn of Jones's involvement in the rampant crime that occurs in Detroit. However, when RoboCop attempts to arrest him he begins to experience difficulties as the 4th prime directive is revealed: any attempt to arrest a senior officer of OCP results in shutdown, seemingly entailing a distortion of the laws of robotics created by Asimov, as Daniel Mullin writes: "Directive 4 is a very literal way of illustrating the point that corporations manipulate the law to their advantage" ("Robocop and Transhumanism"). In this scene, RoboCop tries with all his might to resist the programming and the cybernetical interfaces which allow him to control his body, a clear struggle between the noble and emotional human and the alien and inimical machine. Jones even prefaces it by saying that RoboCop is a product and that they cannot have their products turning against them, though as he attempts to resist the shutdown Jones remarks that there is still a little fight in him.

As RoboCop escapes to an abandoned steel mill with his former partner after becoming an enemy of OCP, he is allowed a moment of respite where he can contemplate upon his new existence, as he removes his visor which obscures the top half of his face and looks upon his reflection he begins coming to grips with what he has become, as Chad Andrews writes:

Amidst his fully technologized body and the steel and wire workings that stretch to the top of his head and over his ears, Murphy's ordinary, dull face is a jarring disparity, with the viewer forced to reconcile contrasting organic and synthetic parts. The full impact of Murphy's unnatural embodiment is forcefully articulated, and his uncanny imbrication within a truly mediated existence comes to light as nothing less than grotesque. ("*RoboCop*'s Horrific Visage")

The contrast between organic and synthetic is especially evocative to the aforementioned disruption of dualisms as it represents the protagonist's "double existence—as natural and unnatural, organic and synthetic, self and other, flesh and metal, ordinary and extraordinary (…)" (Andrews "*RoboCop*'s Horrific Visage"). When his partner calls him Murphy and tells him it's good to see him again, he seemingly displays hesitation as if doubting whether he truly is Murphy, nevertheless the role of emotion continues to be central as he "fixates on his family, inquires about them, and confesses to his partner Anne, "I can *feel* them, but I can't remember them" (Telotte 172). This indicates that RoboCop is susceptible to affectivity, the ability to be receptive and to respond to emotional inducements, directly contradicting Haney's position that the onset of cybernetics would lead to effacement of phenomenal awareness, the ability of being aware of our own feelings and sensations. Presumably, it is largely these feelings which produce the somatic responses that seem to interfere with his programming, thus juxtaposing cold and calculating computation and machinery with irrational feelings and emotion. This particular section of the movie also points to one of the most important parts of being human beyond affectivity or emotion, that is the relationships we have with others, something Murphy may feel he is no longer capable of developing. While he asks about his family, he outwardly provides no hints or intentions that he will attempt to find them, this seems to indicate that Murphy finds himself distant from other humans, it might be presumed that due to his physical appearance he assumes that his feelings may not obtain reciprocity either with his family or with other human beings, effectively making him a mostly synthetic Frankenstein's monster. Yet his relationship and interactions with his partner also imply that such an assumption may not be completely correct, their affiliation is clearly not purely based on professionality due to their shared vocations nor is it completely based on their shared plan of action but is instead built around genuine companionship. Despite the transformation which he has undergone, Lewis still treats him as a person, especially evocative of this is the scene where she helps Murphy fix his

targeting system, as she stands close behind him and gently aids him in aiming at some bottles, its clearly observable that his transformed body does not prevent the reestablishment of a genuine relationship based on friendship. Humans are after all *social* beings who ostensibly develop a sense of camaraderie and empathy/sympathy through social interactions, which according to Nayar

> involve partners who are not 'agent' and 'observer' respectively, but both agents and observers simultaneously, suggesting a reciprocity of emotions and actions, further implying that the observation of other people's distress or pain 'activates regions [in the brain] involved in experiencing similar emotions'. (61)

After defeating the gangsters who had killed him, alongside his partner, even screaming in pain when he is stabbed during the fight, another indication of humanness, RoboCop directs himself to OCP headquarters in order to arrest Jones who takes the head of the corporation hostage in an attempt to escape. RoboCop is still partially restricted by his programming and thus the 4th directive, preventing him from taking any hostile action against Jones, this obstacle is overcome when the president of OCP fires Jones thus making the 4th directive moot and allowing him to be defeated. Therefore the climax of the film possesses a triumphant note, unlike the resolution in Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where HAL is dismantled, *RoboCop* allows for the ability and capacity for resistance, consequently indicating its status as a critical dystopia. Furthermore, the fact that Robocop still possesses the intent to arrest Jones despite no longer being completely bound by his programming indicates that he possesses another trait often associated to humanity, a sense of ethics, morality and/or principles, meaning he is no longer acting according to his prime directives but from his own sense of what is right and what is wrong, which means he can effectuate moral judgements and act upon them independently from his programming, he is in effect a *moral agent* which according to Nayar qualifies him as a *person*: "Personhood may be defined here as *an individual who is a moral agent*. A moral agent is *a being who is able to make moral judgements about moral matters and is able to act on those judgements*" (151). In the conclusion of the film, RoboCop's humanity is seemingly firmly established after the head of OCP approaches him not as a machine or a product but as a man, addressing him as "son" and asking for his name. RoboCop turns around, smiles and says "Murphy" thus implying that he has fully regained his identity and all that comes with it, the smile is especially telling and

transmits feelings of serenity and acceptance that despite his immense transformation he is at heart still a human being.

Overall, *RoboCop* is a film where the allure and the fear associated with cybernetics is displayed in equal measure, cybernetics effectively attempts to rationalize the human condition through a purely mechanistic approach as this is a framework which allows for the idea of enhancement. Our minds and our bodies are not self-contained or "locked-in" which means that human beings technically have no boundaries, thus we can interface with mechanical components which will allows us to be augmented beyond normal conditions. This is one of the greatest attractions of cybernetic enhancement and something the film portrays by its demonstration of RoboCop's enhanced abilities, not only is he impervious to gunfire but his reflexes, visual acuity and strength are far beyond that of regular humans. The idea that the perishable, fragile and unpredictable nature of the human body can be supplanted by the certainty and robustness of the machine is without a doubt one of the main lures of cybernetic enhancement, synthetic and mechanical components "seem to allow an escape from the messiness of the human body. The more machine-like the human body becomes, the more it can be controlled and the more we make it our own by aligning the working of our bodies with our purposes" (Hauskeller 58). Yet the film most prominently reflects the fears and anxieties that arise from the notion of cybernetic enhancement, especially concerning human self-understanding. Literally incorporating mechanical and artificial components into our bodies although attractive on one side also generates fear and aversion, this despite the fact that some would consider humans cyborgs already, as Lim indicates. Cochlear implants, pacemakers and even more mundane nonbiological components such as eyeglasses are artifacts which we integrate in our bodies and correct flaws in our biology, as Robert Rawdon Wilson writes:

> Even glasses modify consciousness. It is not merely that I can now see better, but also that an aspect of my being has been put behind me, but never out of mind as well. My ocular prosthesis elevates me to a higher plane of fulfilment, towards a more ideal conception of myself, but it also reminds me of how I have slipped from the plane that I had always occupied. (239)

Indeed, despite the fact that human identity is rooted in Christian and/or Cartesian dualism of spirit and body, or mind and body, which dismisses the latter as a mere vessel, it nevertheless still plays a significant role in our self-understanding, our bodies are one

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of the main markers by which we can define ourselves. This understanding is directly challenged by the idea that we can integrate artificial and mechanical components into our unblemished organic bodies, which of course leads to the question of what "happens within the mind once an exotic mechanical part, reflecting an unseen technological system entirely alien to all your previous bodily processes, has been joined (whether integrated or merely appended) to your body?" (Wilson 242). Thus, cybernetic enhancement is difficult to accept due to a myriad of reasons, it is not only associated with machines which are regarded as cold, purely rational and antithetical to the human experience, but more than that they signify that the integrity of our bodies and minds, the boundaries which we have taken as natural, are in fact constructed, we are not unique, our bodies and minds are nothing special and the human can be effectively reproduced and simulated endlessly, in sum cybernetic enhancement ultimately means dehumanization. As Wilson writes:

Boundaries turn liquid in horror. The ego's 'fortified castle', (…) always with gossamer battlements built upon sand, crumbles and begins to flow abjectly (…). Human persons are de-integrated, dissolved or broken down into distinct parts. The integrity of the individual, normally so secure behind its defences of being and identity, slips into self-loss and abjection. (247)

Thus, human beings lose their point of reference concerning their own identity, if humans truly are no more than the sum of their parts, much like machines, then conceptions of human nature and human identity are effectively rendered moot, in other words, the framework which cybernetics establishes, in which the human is a being fundamentally determined by flows of information that relegates materiality as irrelevant, effectively deconstructs commonly understood notions related to what we consider to be human. As Hayles writes:

It implies that personal identity and autonomous will are merely illusions that mask the cybernetic reality. If our body surfaces are membranes through which information flows, who are we? Are we the cells that respond to the stimuli? Are we the larger collectives whose actions are the resultant of the individual members? (109)

The notion of individual agency, a will that is distinct from the body *and* from the wills of others is something that cybernetics implicitly precludes, after all our cognition

is conceived as distributed. This, in turn, implies that "subjectivity is *always* artificial in the sense that it is a dynamic construct rather than a universal given" (Bradley). This means that there is no such thing as a natural and intrinsic human *self*, in fact the self is conceived as a *construct* born from the processing of information, which means that subjectivity is not something unique or inherent to humanity, thus cybernetics forecloses upon any aspects we construe as fundamental to the human, any notions of virtue, nobility, dignity; of our own conception as unified rational selves or of individuality are effectively dissolved by the rationalization and mechanization of our condition. This entire paradigm is effectively explored in *RoboCop*, through its initial depiction of the eponymous protagonist who functions much like an automaton following his pre-programmed directives, it displays how artificial and inhuman technology corrupts and dissolves the human being. Thus, *RoboCop* "articulates the fear of a completely alienated, rationalized, mechanical world where human beings and their body parts are technologically processed, where emotions are lacking, where the ego is in ruins, where personal identity is absent, and where simulation approaches perfection" (Best 51). Furthermore, as the chosen designation clarifies, it focuses solely on this Being's professional activity and objectives – in this case of a policeman, only robotically enhanced.

In truth, this paradigm does not only concern the view of cybernetics (and by extension transhumanism), but also the combined materialist, mechanistic and reductionistic propositions and perspectives of science, technology and reason, which effectively establish a framework where human beings can be endlessly manipulated and transformed. This a framework that *RoboCop* seemingly rejects, as the film effectively attempts to demonstrate that not all aspects of the human can be rationalized, controlled or be made analogous to machines. In order to effectuate its criticism of these materialist views which deconstruct the human into nothing more than the culmination of its parts, the film positions and aligns them with the antagonists of the film's dystopian narrative, OCP, who initially fully believe that RoboCop is nothing more than an obedient machine and dismiss the possibility that he is anything more than a product and/or a tool whose subsequent self-determination is the result of a glitch or a malfunction. This is especially noticeable when RoboCop first dreams of his death, which Morton dismisses as a "glitch" in the system. The intentions of the film seem to be explicit, insofar it seeks to put into question the desires which accompany the rationalization of the human, those of

enhancement, and provides a "warning about the consequences of following through on those desires, particularly of tracing the trajectory that the reason–science–technology triad seems to be staking out for remaking and effectively transforming the self" (Telotte 177). In other words, through its depiction of Murphy's cybernetic enhancement, the film seeks to reprimand the impulse of remaking or transforming the human through these materialist, mechanistic and reductionist approaches, without taking into account that human beings are much more complex and diverse, meaning that there are aspects which cannot be abridged. This is exemplified by RoboCop's narrative arc where the control which has been afforded by scientific and technological measures fails to contain the apparent resurgence of Murphy and his humanity, it reminds us how "much our scientific planning fails to account for, how much of the human still falls outside of its purview, how much can never be programmed or explained" (Telotte 168-169). *RoboCop* ostensibly transmits this sentiment by contrasting *feelings* with *rationality*, perhaps a person's memories and cognizant experience can be controlled to a certain degree by cybernetics and technology but the film seems to indicate that feelings, including the dermic/physical contact between humans, are a core component of humanity that cannot be reduced, mechanized or rationalized, as the touch seems lost in the process, they are a vital and unpredictable force that cannot be controlled by the aforementioned perspectives of science and technology. In sum, the film seems to vehemently oppose the scientific and cybernetical discourse which seeks to break down the human species, nature and the world itself into fragmented components that can be controlled and transformed at will, humans *cannot* be reduced to no more than the sum of their parts, seems to be one of the core messages of the film. In the words of Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *RoboCop* can be argued to aid in the task of those who oppose the "reductive interpretations of scientific advance" and seek to "defend the values proper to the human person, or, to put it more bluntly, to defend humanism against the excesses of science and technology" (229).

These excesses most likely figure the aim of transhumanism to enhance the human species, which as mentioned is a motivation that *RoboCop* questions and warns about, not only due to the framework in which such an impetus is embedded but also due to the larger context in which such an enhancement is performed. In *RoboCop*, the technological resurrection of Murphy and his enhancement cannot be divorced from the context in which it occurs, after all the fundamental *right* to choose is taken away from Murphy, he cannot object to his resurrection or subsequent transformation and his free will is

effectively taken away so that he can be developed into an obedient tool for his corporate masters. As Telotte writes, in the face of "**s**cientific possibility, ethical questions such as those about free will or the soul are usually elided, a point made over and over in the many *Frankenstein* films" (167). Contrary to Bergson's notion of élan vital, all that he eventually becomes is effectively decided by another party who does not have his best interests in mind and could not care less about concepts such as the soul or free will, so the film may also seek to address the question of legitimacy when it comes to enhancement: who can actually decide which human capacities can be enhanced or not and even then in what context? RoboCop was created to fulfill the role of a police officer, so obviously he was specifically engineered for combat situations and other high-risk circumstances, as mentioned his metal body is impervious to gunfire and he possesses many other abilities which aid in his job. Yet there is more to human life than exercising a profession, a very prominent part of humanity which has already been mentioned is our relationship with others, as we are social beings, but beyond that there is our relationship with ourselves, with the world and with nature, yet due to the specific circumstances of his transformation RoboCop is now a deeply transmuted creature whose enhancements are highly suited for his professional life but less so for other fulfilling aspects which are part of the human experience. As Brooks Landon indicates: "RoboCop does not restore Murphy's life, nor does it provide him enough of a semblance of human life for him to have any hope of rejoining his wife and son" (22). In effect, RoboCop has become both greater and lesser through his enhancement, he has both gained and lost, it would seem that the film implicitly rejects the belief that enhancement will come at no cost to the human. As Landon states, *RoboCop*'s depiction of the cyborg presents the "artificial life form not as better or worse or essentially the same as human, but as *different* challenging audiences to consider the strangeness of this new life form rather than its familiarity" (22). Ultimately, this indicates that enhancement does not only consist of a personal choice but always involves another faction which may have goals or views that differ from the individuals who seek technological improvement, in this case OCP performs the technological resurrection and enhancement of RoboCop with clear nefarious aims in mind, seeking to obtain greater control of Detroit and therefore greater profit.

As mentioned by Moylan, *RoboCop* features the impetus of capitalism to completely exploit and administer workers and consumers, after all the only reason the RoboCop project even happens is due to the fact that the police force is threatening to

strike for better pay, and through technology such problems which hinder corporations can be made extinct. *RoboCop* thus represents one of the ultimate goals of the dystopian corporation, to create a completely dominated and compliant work force, one which practically does not require basic human rights, RoboCop barely needs to rest, does not require payment and, at first, is a completely subservient product which follows instructions to the letter and seemingly possesses no ethical dilemmas or principles which may disrupt the operations of the corporation. In essence, the aforementioned fears and anxieties depicted in 20th century dystopias, concerning the mechanization and uniformization of individuals through economic and technological methods are clearly reflected in the narrative of the film, as Best writes, the fear in *RoboCop* is "two-fold: that human beings will be *replaced* by machines (automation), and that human beings are *becoming* machines (alienation), spiritually and emotionally lifeless rationalists, technologically processed and simulated beings" (51). Furthermore, the specific setting of the film can be construed as a vindication of the concerns of bioconservatives toward the more libertarian strain of transhumanism, which espouses capitalist and neoliberal policies while effectively dismissing social concerns. In the film, unabashed capitalism, in conjunction with technological progress, does not lead to optimistic scenarios envisioned by the supporters of this strain of transhumanism but instead leads to the loss of free will as well as to exploitation and dehumanization.

This dehumanization, of which RoboCop is the most prevalent target is, as mentioned, seemingly reversed through the film, in which the eponymous protagonist begins to display more overt signs of key human characteristics, most prominently through the recovery of memories, he displays affectivity and emotion, a sense of sociality, self-consciousness and the ability to effectuate moral judgements beyond that of his programming, all traits which Nayar indicates are interrelated and qualify RoboCop as a person, as he writes:

> An individual who can take moral responsibility for her/his action is a moral agent and a person. (…) One important clue to this shift toward the moral agent end of the spectrum is the increasing emotionalism of the robots/cyborgs. From being unfeeling machines, we see these evolving into creatures who think (according to their programming) and feel (beyond their programming). They become moral agents when, like Frankenstein's monster, they emote and their engagements with the world and community are also determined by their emotions. (152-153)

Invariably, this process of rehumanization places into center frame numerous ontological concerns centered around the material and immaterial aspects which supposedly comprise the human, the most relevant themes: whether embodiment is truly relevant and important toward being human or whether it is some immaterial essence such as the mind or the soul which truly defines the human, and if so what is its connection to the body, especially when it is subject to very deep transformations where materials completely alien to the natural organic system which we possess are incorporated into it. As Matthew E. Johnson writes, in essence *RoboCop* "sets up a thought experiment where Alex Murphy is not much more than a human brain placed in the body of a robot. The question it raises is one of the extent to which a person is their brain, their body, or something else non-physical, like a mind or soul" ("Philosophy of Mind"). As can be garnered, the most conspicuous angle from which this rehumanization can be understood is in the frame of the Cartesian perspective of the human, which, as mentioned previously, seems to be depicted in the film, especially when RoboCop begins to dream of his previous existence as Murphy and the latter's demise. In the Cartesian reading, this event can be understood as the reawakening of Murphy's immaterial mind or "spirit", which begins to reestablish the as-of-yet unknown mystical connection with his extensively transformed physical form. It has been emphasized that *RoboCop* seems to vehemently reject materialist conceptions of the human, meaning that our "natural" attributes and selfhood are fundamentally more than just physical processes which can be made equivalent to machines. As such, in this reading, the film effectively proposes that there is a non-physical essence which defines the human and that is separate from the physical form which we possess, it is from this essence that core human characteristics such as our autonomy and emotions emanate. As Johnson writes:

> The human person, the film seems to say, is more than just a brain and more than just a body. There is something like a soul or a mind that cannot be accounted for just by looking at the physical components. And above all, this means that the human person has a special kind of free will and autonomy. ("Philosophy of Mind")

The film thus signifies in a very eutopian manner that there is a "ghost in the machine", that our very own identity and humanness is separate from our physical forms, which may be transformed extensively by technology, even by something as alien as cybernetic implants, but that some immaterial core human essence such as the soul, the

mind or consciousness will remain intact and untarnished. As Bradley writes: "The message, then, is that an indomitable human spirit will always survive being assailed by dehumanizing and/or inimical technologies". Through this perspective, *RoboCop* implicitly establishes that our current embodiment is not essential nor relevant to being human, Murphy's body may have been transformed at an incredibly deep level but his particular consciousness seems to have remained intact, eventually completely reemerging by the end of film where he confidently states his name. As Holland writes:

> An implication of the cyborg film is that being human is anything but *simply* a matter of appearance. In most cases a 'genuine' human mind is identified as the essential element of a human person: and a mind is precisely what we are told RoboCop and the Universal Soldiers have retained, and what the Terminators and Cherry 2000 never had and cannot acquire. (160)

Through this logic, it can be presumed that our particular bodies are not integral to this consciousness or "soul" which is ostensibly present in each and every one of us, as it is construed to be an essence which makes us all unique, as Martine Rothblatt writes, consciousness "is not an objective quantity like a sheep. Consciousness is subjective, or personal, to its possessor. This means there is only one of each consciousness, by definition of it being a subjective quantity" (115). Considering this, it would seem Murphy's subjective consciousness, that which holds his identity and everything that comprises it such as his "mannerisms, personality traits, recollections, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and values" (Rothblatt 115), has been effectively retained despite his death and subsequent resurrection in a very changed physical form. In sum, through this reading the film establishes that a human body is not required for one to *be* human and that the body does not play a part in our sense of self nor in our subjective consciousness which is depicted as an immaterial essence that holds our identity and our "humanness". Yet despite this position, the body, as mentioned beforehand, plays a significant role in the human experience as it is through our bodies that we constantly define ourselves and interact with our environment.

The main character of *Ghost in the Shell*, an animated film released in 1995, that also deals with ontological questions surrounding humanity and technology, effectively focuses upon this issue concerning the body and consciousness. As she can freely exchange body parts and replace her physical form at will she has trouble defining herself,

which leads her to philosophize upon what exactly constitutes an individual, as she claims:

> Just as there are many parts needed to make a human a human, there's a remarkable number of things needed to make an individual what they are. A face to distinguish yourself from others. A voice you aren't aware of yourself. The hand you see when you awaken. The memories of childhood, the feelings for the future. That's not all. There's the expanse of the data net my cyber-brain can access. All of that goes into making me what l am. Giving rise to a consciousness that I call "me". And simultaneously confining "me" within set limits. (Motoko Kusanagi, qtd. in Mengqian Chen 2)

As can be garnered from this passage, Kusanagi provides both material and conceptual factors that serve to make an individual or person what they are, meaning all these components are part of our subjective consciousness which effectively confines each and every one of us in set limits or boundaries that serve to determine our place and sense of self in relation to the world and with others, to put it another way, they are fundamental toward defining us as individuals and as persons. This means that if our bodies are subject to continuous changes, especially in the context of technological enhancement, then it becomes increasingly difficult to define ourselves as our boundaries effectively become more permeable, which subsequently results in our very Being changing as well, as Sky Marsen writes:

> (…) technological developments can change drastically the human experience of life and the personal meanings and subjectivities that go with this, both by modifying the material world (not many would dispute that living in a modern house is more comfortable than living in a cave) and by adapting human faculties for better performance and resilience in living in this world. (87)

As can be garnered from this passage, due to the bodily transformation which he has undergone, RoboCop's experience of life along with the connotations and subjectivities which are connected to it have been drastically altered. After all, our bodies and the image that we have of them are directly related to the manner in which we experience the world and to our sense of self, as well as, the way in which develop relationships with others and display affectivity, for example, through physical gestures such as handshakes and hugs. This demonstrates that our very Being is deeply rooted in

our current physical instantiation, which, if disrupted and altered by technological developments, such as RoboCop's cybernetic enhancement, will arguably result in the "creation of different metaphors, discourses, and representations, and change the ways in which identities and relationships are perceived and enacted" (Marsen 87). Hayles elucidates on this notion through the writings of Mark Johnson and Antonio Damasio, these individuals respectively demonstrate how our bodies essentially determine prevalent metaphors and discourses which we use habitually and how the body is crucial to our cognitive performance. Mark Johnson argues that the fact that we are bipedal and carry ourselves in an erect stance has effectively shaped our experience of life which includes our use of language and the metaphors encoded within it, as Hayles explains:

> We speak of someone being "upright" in a moral or ethical sense, of people "at the top," and of "upscale" lifestyles. Depressing events are a "downer," in a recession people are "down on their luck," and entry-level people start at the "bottom of the ladder." The hierarchical structures expressed and constituted through these metaphors, Johnson argues, have a basis in bodily experience that reinforces and reinscribes their social and linguistic implications. (205)

This infers that if human beings possessed a different physical shape such as, for example, possessing an exoskeleton instead of an endoskeleton, then our very own identities, as well as, the way in which relationships are established, perceived and enacted would have been markedly different, thus leading to fundamentally different metaphors and discourses which would in turn instigate completely different sociocultural environments. Damasio on the other hand postulates that feelings are not the singular responsibility of an immaterial essence nor of the brain, but that the *entire body* is accountable and crucial for them, as Hayles writes, Damasio argues that "feelings constitute a window through which the mind looks into the body. Feelings are how the body communicates to the mind information about its structure and continuously varying states" (245). This ostensibly means that the body is an integral part of our cognitive functioning, further marking it as a key component of the human organism, by changing the body, our cognizant performance would inevitably change as well.

In essence, it seems that our particular bodies play a very significant part when it comes to our sense of self and our experience of the world, as they are effectively responsible for providing context to the information we obtain from our environment, as such they fundamentally influence the sociocultural and phenomenal aspects of the

human experience. Not only does this counter the assumptions made by the cybernetical perspective of the human which argues that materiality is irrelevant, but it is something that leads Hayles to conclude that a "Human mind without human body is not human mind" (246). This entire paradigm leads one to surmise that RoboCop, a resurrected creature constituted of mostly synthetic material, has effectively become a different person and a very different being, disparate from the human species, as the alterations which his body has undergone have effectively altered his physical, cognizant and sociocultural experience into something that is markedly different from what we understand as human. As explained by Andrew Pickering:

> Different technologies, different material setups indeed elicit different inner states. And I'm willing to bet that cybernetic immortality would entail some sort of technologies of the self, and that the selves they elicit would be very different from the selves we have today. (190)

This means that RoboCop's particular material setup, which is now quite different from regular humans, has effectively elicited his own identity and his very being to change, something that is further compounded by Matthew Johnson through the work of Hubert Dreyfus. As Johnson explains, according to Dreyfus "things in the world impress themselves upon us as already meaningful to us because of our embodied experience and our embeddedness in a community of other human beings" ("Philosophy of Mind"). As can be garnered, Dreyfus reinforces the argument that our bodies are effectively responsible for providing context toward the information that we receive from our immediate environment. Considering the radical alterations which RoboCop has undergone, the manner in which "things" in the environment impress upon him and the meaning which he extracts from them has been fundamentally changed, as his specific embodiment not only offers a different manner of phenomenal experience but also challenges his embeddedness is a community of other human beings, as Johnson argues:

> While Dreyfus might agree that Alex Murphy is more than just the firing of neurons, there is no getting around the fact that who he is depends just as much on the way his body is able to interact with the world (i.e. his "being-in-the-world") as it does on his brain chemistry. ("Philosophy of Mind")

As such, this ultimately means that although RoboCop may acknowledge himself as Murphy and although the film foregrounds his returning humanity, the unprecedented

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transformations which his body has gone through have fundamentally altered his identity and his very existence, because he "inhabits an entirely different way of being in the world" (Johnson "Philosophy of Mind"). This does not mean that RoboCop cannot be considered an individual or a person, far from it, as established by Nayar although RoboCop can be argued to be a completely different being and a completely different person he *still is* a person, who still merits moral worth. Nevertheless, through these viewpoints and arguments it can be posited that, RoboCop, due to the extensive changes which have been made to his body, is *not* Murphy and he is *not* human but someone and something different. In the end, despite the fact that the body is relegated as unessential, it is in effect what contextualizes our phenomenal experience and thus what determines our inner sense of self. As RoboCop's new physical form allows him to do some things that humans cannot do and prevents him from doings things that humans can do, his sense of self which is primarily built out of "our own and others' conceptions of our projects, capacities, possibilities, and potentials" (Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs* 132), has been irrevocably and extensively transformed.

Perhaps then, a different reading or sentiment can be extracted from the subsequent rehumanization which RoboCop undergoes, maybe the significance that can be obtained from this process does not necessarily entail that there is an immaterial human essence that will remain unchanged by any transformations, technological or otherwise, but that extensive alterations to the human form *will not* preclude a connection to the human *spirit* and thus allow for the ability to act *humanely*. Human spirit in this instance does not refer to the Cartesian/Christian conception as cited by Bradley and Johnson but refers to a more impersonal and universal concept which stands in contrast with the notion of a soul. Whilst the soul can be posited to be responsible for key characteristics which humans possess, the human spirit is regarded as the source of several qualities which we find to be fundamental to our species, something that also plays an important part in shaping our personality. Yervant H. Krikorian, for example, in the preface to the work *Naturalism and the Human Spirit* writes on the aspirations of the latter, specifically, its "love of freedom, its sense of beauty, its hope of creating a better civilization". Love, freedom, beauty and hope all seem to be concepts which Krikorian implicitly attaches to the notion of the human spirit, three of these "spiritual values" are quite clearly displayed by RoboCop who evidently demonstrates love, through his longing for his family and his relationship with his partner, desire for freedom, particularly from his programming, and

an enduring sense of hope, that he is still human, that he is still Murphy. Olaf Stapledon further expands upon this notion of the human spirit, as he writes:

> It was "spiritual," I should say, because it was a case of behaviour on a relatively high level of psychological development; high for me, anyway. It involved a kind of apprehension or sensitivity which discovers values not revealed on lower planes of development, values connected with self-awareness and awareness of other selves. In another sense also, I should say, it was spiritual. It was a reaction of this most developed and awake level of my personality to the universe *as a whole*, or rather to *my* experienced universe as a whole. ("Spiritual Values")

Stapledon effectively regards the human spirit as something related to a higher plane of human experience, unconnected and distinct from the more personal and "lower" plane of development linked with the human self, what we could call our consciousness or soul. It seems to be construed as a more abstract and detached component of human nature, an implicit upper realm of development which falls outside the purview concerning the apparent interplay between matter and soul. As a higher component of humanity it is, to a certain degree, supposedly related to and/or accountable for "personality, community, intellectual integrity, the aesthetic aspect of all experience, and (so to say) the need to establish some sort of adjustment to, or accord with, the whole of one's experienced universe" (Stapledon "Spiritual Values"). In essence, the human spirit seems to be construed as a preeminent constituent of the human, communal in nature, and connected to features such as insight, understanding, intelligence, creativity, compassion and a sense of beauty and significance toward one's subjective experience of the universe in its totality. Furthermore, the human spirit can also be held responsible for the ability to develop a sense of principles and ethics, as Stapledon explains, human beings have learnt that "there really are some values which are in some important sense sacred, some ways of experiencing and behaving which are better than others in some fundamental manner, and other ways of behaving which are utterly wrong" ("Spiritual Values"). Stapledon holds that this awareness of the significance of certain actions which signify moral agency, "can be made only at a relatively high level of development, and about behaviour on relatively high levels" ("Spiritual Values").

The human spirit is thus parsed as an entity that plays a part in endowing us with certain capacities, such as love and insight, which shape our personality and allow us to extract meaning and establish connections in our experience of the universe. More

importantly it is something that ostensibly provides us with the ability to act *humanely*, a behavior RoboCop certainly exhibits despite his transformation, which arguably means that he maintains a tangible connection to this higher realm of development. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, to be humane may mean to be marked by "compassion, sympathy, or consideration for humans or animals" ("Humane"). In other words, to be humane means having the ability to treat others with kindness, respect and/or decency, it is to esteem the value of other living beings. This capacity to treat others with kindness and consideration has long been regarded as noble and worthy of praise, as noted by Darwin himself, yet it is perceived as extending beyond biological factors and Nayar's accounting of social interaction and its role in emotional reciprocity. It is in part associated with the aforementioned higher realm of development and bound to characteristics such as insightfulness and understanding. As Stapledon explains, being humane fundamentally involves a "much higher degree of insight into, the other's actual nature as a conscious being *other* than oneself" ("Spiritual Values"). This, in turn, leads to a "sense of universal significance, of insight *through* the particular symbol Into the universal plight of personalities in this formidable universe ("Spiritual Values"). This is a fundamental premise of the human spirit, a universal sense of connection and understanding which is independent from one's individual condition, meaning that the capability to be humane is not inextricably connected to our current bodies or minds. This is something that transhumanists themselves note in their FAQ, the question asked being "Will transhuman technologies make us inhuman?", to which they answer:

> The important thing is not to be human but to be *humane*. (…) The attributes of our species are not exempt from ethical examination in virtue of being "natural" or "human". (…) If there is value in being human, it does not come from being "normal" or "natural", but from having within us the raw material for being humane: compassion, a sense of humor, curiosity, the wish to be a better person (emphasis mine). ("Transhumanist FAQ")

RoboCop has the capacity for humane action because he has within him the raw material which allows for it, the enduring connection to the human spirit, something which unites us all but is not indissolubly linked to our current forms, it defines us and plays a tangible role in our experience, which in Murphy's case has been dramatically altered but still characterizes him extensively, effectively contradicting Haney, who believes that this spiritual facet would be effaced by cybernetical enhancement. In fact,

the aforementioned notion of a bimodal human nature might be interpreted through this paradigm, meaning that the human spirit might be considered the component of humankind which endures regardless of the level of alterations that an individual undergoes. In any event, this whole paradigm undeniably constitutes the eutopian nuance of the film, that which makes it a critical dystopia, as it is here where the presence of hope in this dystopian story is most prevalent, that despite the extreme dehumanization which RoboCop undergoes his connection to this higher component of humanity has not been disrupted. Considering this, Bradley's mention of the film's message as being about the triumph of an indomitable human spirit may instead be interpreted as being less about the soul and more about this component of humanity. In the end, despite his transformation, RoboCop is still deserving of moral worth and thus moral deliberation, he is susceptible to affectivity, can perform moral judgements and act upon them, displays a social spirit and perhaps most importantly he is capable of humane action.

In conclusion, *RoboCop* is a film that fundamentally dwells upon both existential and material concerns of the time period where it was produced and released, it mainly deals with the greater interpenetration of technology into our lives and how such a process destabilizes common self-understanding, as well as, the potentially dehumanizing effects of such a paradigm in conjunction with neoliberal and capitalist economic policies that remove safety-nets and allow corporations greater autonomy. The film seeks to allay some of these fears, as it implicitly rejects the materialist, mechanistic and reductionist perspectives of cybernetics, transhumanism and science concerning the human, as these viewpoints are perceived as dehumanizing, something that is furthered by the impetus of remaking and transforming our current condition through the use of technology. The film essentially demonstrates the exploitative and dehumanized nature of RoboCop's resurrection and initial functioning in order to admonish such desires, effectively questioning and warning about the overall impetus for enhancement, as well as, drawing attention to the issue of legitimacy. In order to effectuate this, the film aligns the aforementioned materialist mentalities concerning the human, with the cold, rational and callous antagonists of the dystopian narrative of the film. OCP, who avowedly represent the hegemonic regime of this particular dystopia, rebuild Murphy into RoboCop and place him exclusively under their control, robbing him of his free will and irrevocably transforming both his identity and his very being. RoboCop is now a highly enhanced creature made up of mostly synthetic material, while this new physical form is incredibly

effective when it comes to his job performance, it precludes him from partaking in other essential aspects of human life. Despite this, RoboCop undergoes a process of rehumanization as he begins displaying key human characteristics such as emotion, a sense of sociality, as well as, morality that goes beyond his prime directives.

This process of rehumanization can be understood in clear Cartesian overtones, as the film essentially showcases that technology may alter our physical forms, but an immaterial human essence which contains our identity and humanness will remain unblemished. However, as demonstrated, our bodies cannot be dismissed out of hand as unessential, they are effectively one of the main markers by which we define ourselves and are deeply ingrained into the relationship that we possess toward the world, others and ourselves. Different bodies, especially in the purview of technological enhancement, will most likely result in different selves and different sociocultural environments, as the significance of the information that we receive our immediate environment will possess a markedly different context. Thus, RoboCop can be argued to no longer be Murphy and/or a human being, though he can still be considered a person and an individual who possesses moral worth and dignity, effectively being worthy of moral deliberation. The process of rehumanization can alternatively be understood as a statement that no amount of technological transformation, no matter how extensive, will ever disrupt the connection to the human spirit and preclude the ability to act humanely. The human spirit stands as a more impersonal and higher component of human nature which stands in contrast to the notion of an immaterial essence, it is conceived to be largely responsible for certain key traits of humankind, first and foremost being, love and compassion, which then allows for a sense of morality and humane ethics. All these ontological themes are framed in a neoliberal dystopian setting which targets the prominent economic and social issues of the late 20th century. Like most dystopias created during this period, *RoboCop* is clearly a critical dystopia as it allows for the existence of hope within the narrative, as the eponymous protagonist succeeds in avenging his death, bringing the perpetrators to justice and seemingly recovering his identity and humanity.

Despite this, the film's outcome is somewhat ambiguous when analyzed through a dystopian lens, although the protagonist outwardly succeeds in recovering his individuality from the hegemonic regime, it is debatable whether or not he has truly awakened toward the conditions of his society. Considering the friendly terms in which he parts ways with the head of OCP it would seem that RoboCop does not recognize that

the corporation in its totality is still actively contributing toward the dehumanization of Detroit's populace and the worsening of conditions within the city. Furthermore, the film's obsession with spectacle and violence, as well as, it's role in allaying the fears and anxieties by providing a simplistic and banal conclusion also leads, taking Sontag's view, to the inability of the audience to truly reflect on the issues which were addressed in the film's narrative.

4. Conclusion

As was stated in the introduction of this dissertation, one of the main objectives of this work was to shed some light on the film *RoboCop*, particularly exploring certain topics which this piece of cinema dwells upon through perspectives thought to be pertinent for such an appraisal. Therefore, I specifically focused on two core themes which were extensively depicted in the film, namely, societal problems, and philosophical dilemmas centered around humanity and technology. Considering the fact that the film is a work of speculative fiction that addresses such themes by portraying a dystopian society and displaying technological enhancement, I specifically chose to explore them through the spheres of dystopian fiction and transhumanism. It is my express belief that exploring the film through these two areas allows for a more comprehensive awareness of this piece of cinema as highly pertinent and multilayered, as they permit for a more sweeping understanding of the film as a satirical and critical work of speculative fiction while also granting greater insight into the existential dilemmas it draws attention to, especially in relation to technology.

It should be noted that, concerning the area of cinema itself, the film was a critical and commercial[14] success despite the fact that it incorporated genres that were not dominant at the time, i.e. dystopian fiction and science fiction. Although such genres are much more popular in this day and age with numerous series revolving around them, during the 1980s they were much less favored[15]. This success allowed the film to have a great cultural impact which effectively enshrined it in popular culture, most likely due to

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[14] According to the website, The Numbers.com, *RoboCop* grossed a total of 54.1 million dollars against a 13 million dollar budget, source: https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/RoboCop-(1987)#tab=summary.

[15] According to the blog post "Box Office Trends: The 1980s", the most popular genres of the highest grossing movies in the United States during the 1980s were Comedy and Drama, source: https://observealot.wordpress.com/2013/07/07/box-office-trends-the-1980s/.

its special effects and action sequences. However, as stated earlier, one of the chief aims of this work was to address the deeper themes that the film broaches, allowing it to be seen as more than a simple pop culture action picture, doing so specifically by exploring the two aforementioned perspectives in relation to the film.

Firstly, through the study of dystopian fiction, a genre that seeks to reflect, satirize and criticize societal conditions with the express intention of cautioning the audience and inciting them to action, superior insight is granted on several of the film's aspects. Firstly, it allows for a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the film's setting and its motivation for focusing on specific societal issues. Considering the fact that this picture was released in the late 20th century United States and knowing the political, economic and social conditions of that era, it is apparent that it essentially consists of a critical dystopia, most of which focused on socioeconomic issues brought about capitalism and neoliberalism which were prevalent at the time. This is further transmitted by the fact that the main antagonist of the narrative is an amoral corporation, which were the main targets of criticism in such dystopias. Furthermore, the study of dystopia also allows for greater apprehension of the film's narrative and structural mechanisms, such as the presence of a hegemonic narrative and counter-narrative, it's militant pessimism along with discernment of the SF mechanisms which are also present, such as cognitive estrangement. Parenthetically, this exploration of dystopian fiction not only illuminates the immense influence of science fiction but also allows one to understand the film's preoccupation with technology, which has always been a core subject of dystopias, as it is a tool that is inextricably connected to society in all its facets. Technological progress undoubtedly provides incredible benefits but, as surveyed, it also provides means through which human beings can be replaced, exploited, harmed, oppressed, surveilled and ultimately controlled and dehumanized. This potential for destruction, exploitation and especially dehumanization is something the film foregrounds through the transformation of its protagonist, Alex Murphy, into a cyborg. Thus, the study of dystopia ultimately informs and contextualizes the existential themes of the film, as if it was not for the particular societal conditions that are portrayed in the narrative, then Alex Murphy would not have been transformed and turned into a creature of metal and flesh. Incidentally, it is this transformation and the subsequent struggle that the protagonist undergoes in which the philosophical questions the film raises come to the fore which is where the study of transhumanism plays its part, as due to the particular goals of the movement metaphysical

matters are inevitably prominent. It is due to the exploration of transhumanism and the specific technologies, enhancements, and philosophical viewpoints that it advocates that we can better comprehend the magnitude of the transformation which RoboCop undergoes and particularly what it *means*.

Through the study of transhumanism one can tell that the film makes its stance on the idea of technological enhancement and on the metaphysics of humankind outwardly clear, as it seems to favor a cartesian conception of humanity, invariably criticizing and denying the positions of transhumanism and cybernetics. However, when put into perspective just how extensive and profound the enhancement which Murphy undergoes is, the cartesian position is less tenable. Therefore, an alternative interpretation is undertaken in which the rehumanization of the protagonist does not signify the existence of an immaterial essence, but instead the permanence of the human spirit which is what allows for RoboCop to recover some human traits, foremost among them the ability to act humanely. It is through this particular exploration of the human condition that the narrative of the film essentially interrogates the spectator on philosophy, ethics, human identity and our relationship with others. However, other themes can be garnered from the film beyond what was focused upon, for example its representation of masculinity and gender and it's religious undertones, especially concerning Christianity and particularly the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ which in the film is arguably allegorized by Murphy's death and "rebirth". As one can tell, this film allows for an immense variety of profound readings and fundamentally questions the audience on numerous dilemmas, both material and spiritual, which are especially timely as mankind in the 21st century stands on the precipice of great change.

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