

Chapter 2

DYSTOPIAN FILMS AND THEIR RECEPTION

2.1 Dystopia

Cinema has given many interpretations of human history and its future development. Some of them can be unanimously attributed to the writer HG Wells who used a fictional device that allows characters to travel in time, freely back and forth, but most predominantly preferring the journey into the future. HG Wells' book *The Time Machine* (1895) is extremely reasoned and calculated, intended to make a precise critique of the conditions of life of the proletariat of the future epoch. The fervent youthful positions were mitigated over the years by a utopian and anti-revolutionary thought. But at the end of his life, which had passed to advocate a bland reformism based on Fabian socialism¹, the irony of fate made him observe the horrors of the Second World War and of the atomic bomb, leading him to revise his positions.

Gillo Dorfles believes that one of the fundamental elements of science fiction is chronological instability (Dorfles, 213). To address a similar perspective, of temporal estrangement and versatility, the stories operate mainly in two ways: through the theme of the return from interstellar travel after years of exploration and the invention of a machine that allows us to move back and forth in time. The theme of the return is predominant; not foreign to the western cinema tradition since its origin belongs to the cycle of the aeonic chants of returns to the homeland of the heroes. Many Dystopian films are taken up within the vein of space exploration journeys, which are discussed in the next chapter. What I want to underline here is that the development of space exploration in reality has had the effect in the fiction of shortening the travel times from one point to another in the universe, through narrative inventions of various interstellar propulsion engines. So the classic skeleton built by the likes of H.G. Wells traceable in the construction of the first literary science fiction; it was the description of interminable interstellar journeys aboard spaceships that hosted even more than a generation before arriving at their destination, now the movements occur at speeds close to or greater than those of returning to a distant future of the Earth and to these (as in the series of *The Planet of*

the Apes), real time machines whose only possible movement, however, it's just a linear program.

"Films depicting modern urban dystopias often project futuristic cities as a megalopolis, thus providing commentary on trends in urban design in the contemporary world." (Nawar, 130-155)

Having reached literary maturity with Paul Di Filippo's *Steampunk Trilogy* (1995), and spread through Gibson and Sterling's famous tale *The Difference Engine* (1990), this literary hybrid combines historical fiction and scientific fiction in the setting of Victorian London. It is an utopia of a past parallel and different from ours, or of a present different and very similar to our past, bringing together characters who really existed and documented with characters of pure fantasy, illustrating a what if story centred on a civilization that has progressed using the steam technology as the predominant energy source. Curiously, one of the dates of birth given by critics to the subgenre coincides with the same year as Meyer's film being represented by K.W Jeter's novel *Night of the Morloks* (1979), which reprises Wells and his time travelling car from the time assuming that the Morloks - a humanoid species which is descended from human- use it to make a foray into London at the end of the 19th century.

As Sobchack points out, in recent science fiction the narrative structures which deny the temporal relationship between past, present and future and the staging of a surface, two-dimensional spatiality expresses this "postmodern collapse of temporal values", (Sobchack, 275) to the 'crisis of historicity'.

The philosopher Gianni Vattimo interpreted 'unlike modernity' as the end of history, introducing the concept of heterotopia². Utopia, which presupposes a forward movement, a move towards the new, heterotopia or dystopia is characterized, as the name implies, by heterogeneity, by contamination, which replace the lack of novelty. In fact, it has lost the revolutionary value it had in the past, determining the end of the great utopias.

The theme of time travel as mentioned above took on a new life during the 1980s from the first *Terminator* (USA, 1984) film which carried a soldier and a cybernetic organism along the space-time continuum from 2029 to fateful 1984. In

Terminator Salvation (2009), the antagonists are redesigned stronger and smarter, advanced models even more similar to humans in appearance but absolutely cold and frozen in killing in the T-1000 (played by Robert Patrick) and its fondness for blades; from their extreme mimetic ability, in the ability to physically transform and imitate what they touch including humans. In that episode of the series the Terminator, while possessing the same characteristics is in its basic version in a female form (played by Kristanna Loken) and extremely lethal. She is terminator TX. Terminator TX takes the representation that gives women extreme consequences: both Ripley and Sarah Connor and the scientist Lindsay Brigman of *The Abyss* are strong, masculine, determined and resolute women. The TX model is the exaltation of strength but it is still an amoral machine, therefore without objective but for Sky-Net³.

2.2 The Time of Disasters

In the films taken in my study the settings portray post-apocalyptic worlds with significant disasters and societal collapses. However, the specific time frames of the disasters are not explicitly mentioned in the films. Instead, the focus is on the aftermath of these events, depicting the struggles and survival of the characters in their dystopian environments. This places the films in this study under Ecocriticism theory which considers the depiction of natural and environmental issues in film. Researchers like Ursula K. Heise in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008) explores how cinema reflects changing perceptions of the environment and the relationship between people and nature.

Terminator Salvation (2009) is an open critique of potentially more dangerous military technologies; and for those that leave the crucial decisions to machines. Probably this attitude depends on the maturation of a certain resignation. If the possibility of averting the day of judgment is still pursued by the terminators, it seems that the fate of history is written and the individual actions are powerless in the face of the inevitability of a chain of causes and effects that despite the machines of time travel leaves no time to act. The film is set in a future where humanity is engaged in a war against an artificial intelligence network known as Skynet. Skynet has launched a global nuclear war, known as Judgment Day, resulting in massive destruction and the near-extinction of humanity. The exact time of the initial disaster

is not mentioned in the film, but it is set in the year 2018, many years after the catastrophic events of Judgment Day.

Similarly, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), the disaster that led to the collapse of civilization, resulted in a barren wasteland where resources were scarce, and water and gasoline became the most valuable commodities. The film does not specify a specific time when the disaster occurs, but implies that it is a gradual process over time as society collapses due to war, environmental degradation, and resource depletion. Laurence Rickels Says,

“By the surprise intrusions of his own disowned death wishes, Morbius discovers that the techno-animism of the Krells, which was capable of realizing wish fulfillment at the speed of thought, overlooked what the screenplay names the id – and a civilization technologically far in advance of humanity’s space age was undone. The science fiction movie issues a warning against any realization of omnipotent fantasy that overlooks unconscious wishing.” (Rickels, 147)

X-Men: Days of Future Past (2014) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) explore superhuman concepts such as technologically advanced society and human response to it, artificial intelligence, and human enhancement. *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014) is set in a dystopian future in 2023, where mutants are hunted by powerful cyborgs called Sentinels. The catastrophe that led to this bleak future was the result of a chain of events in the early 1970s. Sentinels were originally designed by Bolivar Trask, a scientist who feared the growing power and influence of mutants. The assassination of Trask by Mystique, a shape-shifting mutant, was the catalyst for the development of advanced Sentinel technology capable of adapting and disabling mutants’ abilities. This leads to a war of destruction between mutants and guards, leading to a dark future for mutants and humanity.

Ghost in the Shell (2017) is based on the Japanese manga and anime of the same name and is set in a cyberpunk world in the near future. Although the exact year of the disaster is not mentioned, the film revolves around the existence of advanced cybernetic technology, known as cyberbrains, and the blurred line between man and machine. The main character, Major Motoko Kusanagi, is a robo-terrorist officer working for Section 9, an elite government agency. The film raises questions

about identity, consciousness, and the impact of advanced technology on human existence.

These films depict a world ravaged by disaster, focusing on the characters' struggles as they try to survive and find hope amid a dark and hostile environment. *Dark Context* explores human elevation, artificial intelligence, and the consequences of technological advancements on society. MacKellar comments on the dangers of technology by saying that “there is a very real danger of dehumanising individuals if science and technology are left to reign supreme as a force that cannot be constrained.” (MacKellar, 236)

The same feeling can be seen in another good movie *12 Monkeys* (USA, 1996). This is a film that is entirely geared towards exploring the dimension of time, especially from the point of view of the psychological perception of continuity and the philosophical reflection surrounding its nature. The depth of analysis in which the story unfolds makes it a shining product in the sci-fi panorama of the past twenty years.

The plot in *12 Monkeys* is essentially that of radiation caused by World War III that forces men to live underground, trying to escape this miserable condition by using the time machine to transfer agents into the past and into the future. One of the prisoners used for these missions falls in love with a woman from the past, whom he has already seen in his dreams since he was a child. He will end up being killed in that past, right in front of the eyes of the beloved woman and of himself as a child, thus managing to understand in the last instant the meaning of the vision that has tormented him all his life.

2.3 Technological Wrath

With the change of perspective about the cause of the abandonment of the earth's surface by humans, the dystopian theme of the dangerousness of technology used in an unethical way is reaffirmed, going beyond the condemnation of military technology, and introducing a reflection on the dangerousness of environmental impact of the genetic manipulation of living organisms. As Joana Page says “it is the reflexivity of postmodern film that traps us within the dystopian visions it projects: an inward turn to explore imagemaking only implicates films within the same regimes of surveillance, manipulation, and repression that are so often the object of their critique.” (Page, 190)

The reference to the vein of totalitarian dystopia is very strong and *Brazil* (1994) proves unequivocal: both for the decadent atmospheres with which the urban architecture and the environments of a 'race in danger of extinction' are represented. Such an environment is accompanied by societies trying to carry out their delusional project of planetary infection; resigned to the defeat of the individual in the face of the system of events. In such future societies phenomena and organizations that dominate the individual. Bruce Willis who played the bewildered time traveller James Cole in *12 Monkeys* is light years from the usual interpretations assigned to him, he makes all the fragility and tenderness of a tormented romantic hero disappear, fell in love with light and polluted air and crushed into a circular succession of space and time in which the actions lose their meaning.

12 monkeys is a film that carefully avoids the paradoxes of the time to which certain science fiction has accustomed us to reconfirm the inevitability of each single event and therefore of history. Even if the protagonist has the opportunity to travel in time, and therefore apparently have the maximum freedom imaginable, he remains a prisoner of time which cannot be changed and thus they cannot change their own destiny.

Despite his decision to stay in the world of the past, James Cole from *12 monkeys* is joined by another time traveller, who puts a gun in his hand, threatening him and forcing him to fulfil his destiny. The mental instability due to the time shift slips into open confusion and psychosis whenever Cole comes across his recurring dream. The obsession of the nightmare, the violent death of the protagonist in an airport, which is realized in every present, is that it returns to the strong suggestion of the importance of only a particular period of time however distorted that period might be. The scene is underlined by the director Terry Gilliam using a long, very dramatic slow motion about the run and fall of James Cole, fatally wounded by the police as he tries to kill a virus. The scene is photographed by the detail of the moved eyes of a child, with which the film ends. James Cole as a child observes the scene of his own death with eyes that take on an empathic suffering; all human.

'Not everyone looks cheerfully to a world in which we 'have in common a sustained commitment to work out the implications of posthumanism for our shared understandings of the human subject and of humanity as a whole' or in which we should be able to realise

‘the cybernetic dream of creating a world in which humans and intelligent machines can both feel at home’. (Segal, 68)

In the film *Ghost in the Shell (2017)*, dangers of technology reflect on the potential risks and ethical implications of advanced cybernetics and artificial intelligence technology. In the film, people get stronger with cybernetic improvements. Major Motoko Kusanagi, the main character, struggles with her own identity, whether she's human or just a machine with a human brain. It is a world where surveillance and control of individuals raises concerns about privacy and the potential for abuse by governments or powerful institutions, leading to a loss of autonomy and free will. The unintended consequences of AI developments in the film highlight the risks involved in creating highly autonomous and intelligent systems. The film explores the ethical dilemmas of modifying and enhancing the human body using cybernetic technology. This raises the question of who should have access to these improvements.

In the post-apocalyptic world of *Terminator Salvation (2009)*, where humanity engages in a war against an artificial intelligence network known as Skynet, humanity is nearly extinct and sets the stage for a war between humans and machinery. Skynet creates automatic killing machines called Terminators which are effectively designed to hunt and eliminate humans, and they prove to be extremely dangerous and difficult to defeat. As the war against Skynet escalates, the survivors are forced to rely on advanced technology to fight back. However, this dependence on technology also means sacrificing human autonomy and individuality. The line between man and machine becomes blurred as some people voluntarily undergo cybernetic enhancements to improve their chances of survival. Skynet's actions led to the collapse of society, loss of infrastructure, and scarcity of resources. Human civilization has been reduced to small groups of survivors struggling to survive in a hostile environment.

In *X-Men: Days of Future Past (2014)*, the dangers of technology are highlighted through the development and deployment of Sentinels, advanced robotic beings designed to hunt and destroy mutants. Sentinels were originally developed as a means to control and eliminate mutants, but they quickly became powerful weapons in the hands of those who wanted to control and oppress both mutants and humans. As the Sentinels' abilities progress, they pose a significant threat to all life

forms, leading to massive destruction and loss of innocent lives. When the Sentinels become self-aware and able to adapt to any mutant abilities, they lose control. The existence of the Sentinels leads to a dystopian future where mutants and humans are under constant surveillance and control, resulting in the suppression of diversity and individual freedoms. Technology has been used to discriminate and exclude those who are different, undermining the values of equality and acceptance. *X-Men: Days of Future Past (2014)*, emphasizes the importance of ethical considerations, responsible use of technology, and the need for cooperation and understanding to avoid the disastrous consequences of technology development as uncontrollable.

In *Mad Max: Fury Road (2009)*, the dangers of technology are portrayed through the abuse of machines and advanced weapons. The film presents a dark and desolate world where the remnants of technology have contributed to the collapse of society and the rise of brutal and oppressive regimes. The dangers here include resource depletion; a world where water and petroleum have become scarce due to over-consumption and extraction. This relentless pursuit of power and control of resources has led to conflict and violence. The warlords and their armies in the film use powerful weapons and means to dominate and subjugate others, leading to war and constant bloodshed. The use of technology without taking into account sustainability or ecological balance has resulted in severe environmental degradation. The desert wasteland is a stark reminder of how our human activities have devastated the natural world. In the film various factions fight for control over resources and territory, leading to a total anarchy and lawlessness. The characters have become heavily reliant on technology, particularly vehicles and weapons. This dependence creates vulnerability, as the loss or malfunction of such technology results in some dire consequences. It highlights the need for a responsible and ethical use of technology to avoid its dark and destructive potential.

2.4 Judean Doomsday

Many of the mythologies of the ancient world describe the end of the world through the deflagration of a cataclysm. This end of the world is often accompanied by a new creation or a new alliance between the divine and the survivors. This prompts Campbell to speak of creation myths as tragic narratives, as they presuppose the cyclical dissolution and regeneration of the world. In the Jewish religion, whose people have been subjected numerous times to persecution and slavery, a concept of

apocalypse develops as a time of hope: a possible future, in which a human messiah will put an end to oppression, destroying enemies and putting an end to decay in the foundation of a definitive civilization. The first Christians who were also persecuted, inherited the prophecy of an eschatological hope, transforming the apocalypse into an end-time teleology, a deterministic doctrine that a predetermined future of independent human choices brings forth the culmination of a linear evolutionary path.

The current use of the word apocalypse as a synonym for 'disaster' or 'cataclysm' is only half correct: the Judean doomsday includes both the cataclysm and the millennium, the torments and the triumph, the chaos and the order, and it is the creative tension, the dialectic between these opposites that explains in part the persistent relevance of the myth. One of the central beliefs in Judaism is the coming of the Messiah (Mashiach in Hebrew), a future leader or king who will bring about a time of peace, righteousness, and the ingathering of the Jewish people. The Messianic era is often associated with the concept of a golden age when the world will be transformed into a state of harmony and divine knowledge. In some Jewish interpretations, there is a belief in the resurrection of the dead, where righteous individuals will be resurrected to enjoy the Messianic era. This concept is mentioned in some Jewish texts, including the Talmud. The Jews believe in a future day of judgment, where all individuals will be held accountable for their actions. This concept is often associated with the belief that God will judge each person's deeds and determine their ultimate fate. Some Jewish sources speak of a period of great upheaval and conflict preceding the Messianic era. This period is sometimes referred to as the "End of Days" or "Chevlei Mashiach" (Birthpangs of the Messiah), during which the world may experience challenges and turmoil. Some Jewish interpretations of the end times include the rebuilding of the Third Temple in Jerusalem. This image can be seen in the X-Men temple in *-X-Men Days of future past (2014)*. This is connected to the Messianic era and the restoration of Jewish worship practices. While Judaism tends to focus more on life in this world than on the afterlife, there are references to the concept of an eternal life or an afterlife in some Jewish texts, though interpretations vary widely. This eternity is shown in these films as infinity. In the words of Collins

“The restored territory of Judah was greatly reduced from that of

biblical Israel, and the Utopian dreams of the Second Temple period focused increasingly on the transformation of the city rather than on the fertility of the land.” (Collins, 54)

If for the Judeo-Christian culture the apocalypse was a means by which to overcome the anguish of a social persecution, it is with fear and insecurity, as Umberto Eco maintains, that it maintains deep ties. Insecurity feeling has been inserted in the framework of chiliastic anxieties: the world is about to end, and a final catastrophe that will mark the millennium.

2.5 Apocalypse in Cinema

To talk about Apocalypse in cinema we have to go back to the origins to find the first works that embody millennial visions of the catastrophe and since then the versions of the apocalypse are of two types: attributable to the violence of nature, as in *La Cometa (1910)* or determined by man and his war techniques, as in *The Airship Destroyer (1909)*. According to David Ketterer, what unites aspects of American literature and fictional science is a type of "*apocalyptic imagination*", which is expressed through a penalization of the characterization in favour of metaphysical speculation and is implemented in science fiction in particular, through scientific or fictive innovations or philosophical elaboration of a rational fact that changes the life perspectives of the species or through a construction of a dystopia (Ketterer, 130-134).

As underlined by Ketterer's scheme, the reflection on the life of man on the planet is always present and it diversifies its orientation according to the period and the historical-social context in which the work comes to be. In fact it is with a series of American and Japanese science fiction films around the 1950s that the apocalyptic genre is renewed and integrates typical post-war anxieties and phobias.

American science fiction of the 1950s is structured in a fairly canonical way: one or more heroes must defend themselves from an attack from outside the Earth or from the dangers of a mutation. In practice, these films do not exactly speak of science but of disaster; loss of knowledge and technique; thus linking themselves to old war films or monster-movies and creating an aesthetic and technological vision of the apocalypse. However, such bellicosity, according to Susan Sontag, is almost always aimed at peace and the desire for peaceful coexistence, since the external invader unites humans in a united-nations utopia, which, like all modern utopias

presents science and technology as great unifying elements of conflicts and catalysts of the plot.

For Plato and Bacon, having reached a wise and equitable form of social coexistence in the highest degree, any disagreement between the inhabitants was simply impossible, but rather a pacified society dominated by scientific consensus which brings forth the frugality of material conduct of life as illustrated by ancient utopias. The serenity and confidence of the inhabitants of the narrative worlds are latent and at times the traces of a profound anxiety about contemporary existence are manifested in evidence from the appearance of the catastrophe, which turns the idyllic dream into dystopia. As Richard Slaughter says

"Most stories, images and serious accounts of near-future scenarios fall into one of two groups. The first is a technophilic and naively optimistic view. Here development and growth continue unabated; humankind overcomes terrestrial limits and reaches for the stars. There is a long tradition of this kind in American futurism.¹ The second, more dominant, group depicts a bleak future in which the dreams of progress and unending economic development fall back into a chasm of entropy, violence and despair. I call this the 'Terminator Two' (T2) future because the popular film of that name contains so many of the images and themes that comprise this type of future: civilisation under threat, war with the machines, nuclear holocaust etc. As I and others have written elsewhere, the T2 future emerges from a worldview which has indeed placed our lives and our civilisation in peril from its own expansion and success.² This is the 'flip side' to industrial era notions of progress and it has become indelibly inscribed within the collective unconscious." (Slaughter, 993)

American society is in fact a planned utopia which seems to have now resolved itself into a dystopia . Ketterer argues that the exhaustion of the myth of the shift of the frontier to the West, together with the transformation from an agricultural country to an industrialized nation could be symbolically assimilated to the fall of America from the state of grace to which science fiction, especially the pioneering tradition of space opera and also western cinema, try to make up for it in some way.

In short this season of science fiction seems to exorcise the fears of the different; of the stranger, of the bomb, transfigured in the context of science fiction films responding to security needs of the time. As Krizan says,

"in the 20th century mankind not only began to conquer outer space, invented nuclear weapons, made many amazing discoveries but also shifted its attention to itself or rather to the modification of itself. Transhumanist projects aim to strengthen human influence by transforming human beings into other, more powerful and viable forms of being. Such project continues the project of human "deification." On the other hand, acknowledging the onset of the new geological epoch of the Anthropocene, there comes the rejection of classical interpretations of the human. The categories of historicity, sociality and subjectivity are no longer so anthropocentric. In the opinion of the posthumanists, the project of the Vitruvian man has proven to be untenable in the present-day environment and is increasingly criticized. The reflection on the phenomenon of the human and his future refers to the concepts that explore not only human but also non-human. Very often we can find a synonymous understanding of Transhumanism and post humanism. Although these movements work with the same modern constructs and concepts but interpret them in a fundamentally different way. The discourse of Transhumanism refers to the Cartesian opposition of the body and the mind. Despite the sacralization of technology and the desire to purify the post human from such seemingly permanent attributes of the living as aging and death, Transhumanism in many ways continues the ideas of the Enlightenment. For post humanists, the subject is nomadic and a kind of assembly of human, animal, digital, chimerical. Thus, in post humanism the main maxim of humanism about the human as the highest value is rejected— the human ceases to be "the measure of all things." (Krizan, 132-147)

Dystopian Transhumanist films therefore have a negative power: an exorcising value of human anxieties about death, both individual and

collective. They reassure on the psychologically demeaning fear of an extinction of the species by and through its own technology. Such films use a dialogue with clearly vulgar or habitual obvious jokes which temper the otherness and sense of alienation of the situation by filtering it with a language of banal and familiar expressions. They aim to dominate the sentiment of fear: a fear of which terror was really manifested in the epilogue of the Second World War with the double collective shock of the millions of deaths by the Nazi extermination machines. Sontag argues that the emergence of these issues in science fiction film, and particularly in the invasion films, is entirely subconscious and that neither explicitly nor implicitly is there a shadow of social criticism (Sontag, 186-201).

Films like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (USA, 1951), a Robert Wise film, narrates the arrival of a wise and peaceful extra-terrestrial in Washington. Chased and wounded the alien finds refuge with a family and manages to make contact with a physicist but is discovered and killed. Restored by its robot spaceship, before leaving it warns the human race as being barbaric and warlike, whose unintelligent aggression prevents him from a more confident attitude towards foreigners.

2.6 Dystopian Films and Technology

Dystopian films can be framed as the background or pretext of an adventure story; but it is not a technological response to danger but technology as the source of the danger itself. Science fiction pictures became more complex and articulated and as we have seen, even the cinematographic adaptations from literary classics like H.G. Wells shows a political and social deepening of a greater truthfulness introduced by the remarkable evolution of special effects. The epic of alien invasions is momentarily abandoned but the theme of the bomb and that of the exploration of the universe were still widely addressed like *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *Doctor Strangelove* (1964).

Films like *Planet of the Apes* (USA, 1968), *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (USA, 1970), and *1999: conquest of the Earth* (USA, 1972) had a notable impact on the American culture of the time, due to the strong mythological charge which it took on to represent a world upside down. A disturbing, almost parody, parallel dimension that turns out to be the future planet Earth, with an ever-clearer allusion. In *The*

Planet of the Apes (USA, 2001), the entire adventure is enclosed between the two earlier sequences, the complained presences of inconsistency and logical loopholes. Viewers see their monkeys return the image of a universal history eternally dominated by a tragic fate and a cyclical evolution. As an inferior species on the planet-time of the apes, human beings hide themselves as the hegemonic species.

The 90s were years of contamination between genres and in a wider field of hybridization between various forms and artistic techniques. The manner in which these directors treated their film can be said to fall under Auteur theory where the director is considered to be the primary author of a film, positing that its artistic value is due to the director's unique style and vision. François Truffaut in his book *A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema (1954)* and Andrew Sarris in his *Notes on the Auteur Theory* in 1962 have defended this theory, emphasizing directors like Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks.

Cinema also addresses the language of television, video clips and in general the techniques of digital image synthesis. As far as my thesis is concerned, the sci-fi films of the last ten years show a particular predilection for the recovery of science fiction motifs. The cinemas experienced a season of invasion and catastrophe where stolen ideas of ultra-bodies and things from other worlds are mixed. We see UFOs and Martian invasions, environmental catastrophes, asteroids, glaciations, lethal viruses etc. The natural catastrophe, often attributed to the ecological disruptions of the planet, represents the central theme of many post-apocalyptic films such as *Waterworld (1995)*, *Armageddon (USA, 1998)* and *The day after tomorrow (USA, 2004)*.

Cinema, overcome by a reality that is rewritten and often misunderstood, perceives the distrust of the citizen towards the institutions and prepares the viewer's disbelief towards the official stories. Such films fit into the well-defined groove of constructing the staging also through an accentuation of intertextuality.

The Astronaut's Wife (USA, 1999) was written and directed by Rand Ravich on a structure based on dualisms: the protagonists, the astronaut Spencer (Jonny Deep) and his wife Gilliam (Charlize Theron) are in the quiet and familiar Florida. The party between friends where during a punk performance, the astronaut friend of the protagonist dies in convulsions and appears at the super luxurious party where an

alien is conceived, in a scene of violent sensuality and remarkable dreamlike surreality. This structure aims at the representation of a state of mental instability of Gilliam, the real centre of the narrative, a character that oscillates between sanity and madness, between doubt, disbelief and unconditional trust towards her man, between love and repulsion for the creature she brings in.

Theron's performance is paired with a similar role played by the actress in *The Devil's Advocate* (USA, 1997). In both cases the character moves towards a progressive awareness, an ineluctable truth that cannot be easily accepted but frustrates and torments the love of these women. But eventually Gilliam is able to make a clear decision, hurling herself down the stairs with the intention of getting herself an abortion. Despite the courageous sacrifice, she decides the fate for herself: her husband dies due to a domestic accident with electricity, but the being who possessed him is expelled and immediately finds refuge in Gilliam, whom in the final scene, we see together with a child with a hollow look.

The German director Ronald Emmerich, in the cantor of catastrophic *Godzilla* in 1998 and *The day after tomorrow* in 2004, and *Independence day* in 1996, has directed productions paying attention almost only to the rendering of special effects. Emmerich, together with producer Dean Devlin, developed without any originality. His films emotionally strike the viewer of the 90s who are thirsty and fascinated by the optical satisfaction of visual toys of immediate understanding and easy consumption. But at the same time it seduces them by propelling them, towards a naive manichaeian vision of a world divided in the chessboard of the clash between the forces of good and the forces of evil, which in this specific case are the 'aliens'.

2.7 Language and Speech

The nature of language in each of the four films in this study reflects each film's unique setting and narrative. *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) mixed Japanese and English. The characters often use mixed Japanese and English phrases, reflecting the setting's cultural blend and technological advancements. This combination of languages creates a sense of authenticity and immersion in the futuristic world depicted in the film. "Humans operate in groups synergistically and dynamically, adjusting perceptions, relationships and connections as needed on a real-time and

virtually instantaneous basis. Human language capabilities exist and operate within a dimensional space that is far more complex and fluid than any known artificial architectures." (Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate, 63)

In *Terminator Salvation* (2009) the nature of language is characterized by a sense of urgency, courage and survival. The dialogue is often brief and direct, conveying the harsh realities of a war-torn world. Military terms and slang are widely used to reflect the militaristic nature of resistance fighters and their strategies. This is a film which can be analysed from a Narrative theory point of view; the structure, themes, and techniques of storytelling. *Film Art: An Introduction* (1979) by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson divides narrative into components such as plot, characters, and narrative, providing tools for formal analysis. Mossner says "popular science books on climate change have made use of dystopian storytelling in order to make their arguments emotionally salient." (Mossner, 137–163). *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) is set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. The film has its words cut back to match the brutal and minimalistic nature of the film. The characters communicate in short, concise sentences, sometimes using slang and slang specific to their surroundings. Due to lack of resources, communication focuses on practical matters and often uses limited language and redundant language. About *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014) combines elements of dystopia and time travel, with different types of language depending on the era represented. The futuristic scenes are filled with tension and despair, and the language reflects the horrifying circumstances of mutant pursuit and survival. Charles Xavier says

“. . . a dark, desolate world. A world of war. Suffering. Loss on both sides. Mutants and the humans who dared to help them. Fighting an enemy we cannot defeat. Are we destined on this path? Destined to destroy ourselves like so many species before us? Or can we evolve fast enough to change ourselves? Change our fate?" (X-Men: Days of Future Past, 00:01:16 - 00:02:32)

Peter Gidal's *Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film* (1975) and *Wavelength* (1967) by Michael Snow focuses on the material quality of the film and challenges conventional storytelling. This goes by a better name: Structural film

theory, where filmmakers experiment with film's physical properties, such as duration and repetition, to capture audience engagement. In contrast, the past scenes often feature more formal and articulate language, fitting the historical context and the diplomatic aspects of the plot. The manner of language in these films is carefully crafted to enhance the storytelling and immerse the audience in the unique worlds and narratives of each movie.

2.8 Dystopia in *Mad Max Trilogy* (Miller, 1979, 1981, 1985) and *Waterworld* (1995)

The most representative filmic text of the post-apocalyptic genre is the trilogy directed by George Miller and played by Mel Gibson, with its references to comics, its iconographic debts to punk rock and its western model. *Mad Max- Interceptor* (Miller, 1979) is a film set in a violent society on the brink of collapse, in which the hero, one of the few policemen who tries to maintain order, has lost faith in justice and later to the murder of the entire family he fulfils his terrible vengeance, killing the band of marauders responsible for the deaths of his wife and child.

Max, who has proved no less violent than his opponents, enters the boundless expanses of the 'dead lands' at the end of the film but we find him in the second episode of the trilogy also directed by George Miller. *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (Miller, 1981) begins with an off voice and images of a war between two superpowers that led to a collapse of civilization: the end of the oil age and the opening of a new Middle Ages, in which the waste world is recycling, recovering and where a small tank of petrol is the most coveted asset. Max reluctantly helps the inhabitants of a small fortified citadel in the desert at the centre of which is a still functioning oil pump, to defend themselves and escape the barbaric hordes of motorcyclists and motorists determined to seize the well. Once again Max disappears in the Miller desert of "predominantly a pre-institutional notion" (Miller, 142) while the descendants of the tribe he saved already tell of his exploits. Deeds that are destined to be completed in the third episode of the series, *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (Miller, 1985), in which our hero faces the fate that leads him to the city of Bartertown to collide with its institutions and to return to destroy it, after having discovered a colony of children. We see here an escapist world which the hero will contribute in a decisive way to reconstruct as a new starting point for

human history. As Crewe says

"To suggest that the ubiquity of apocalyptic and dystopian stories represents a bubbling-up of widely held fears about today and tomorrow – an expression of anxiety motivated by increasing economic inequality, the spectre of terrorism and the encroaching threat of climate change, among other predictors of doom and gloom. (Crewe, 34)

If we examine the *Mad Max* trilogy from a symbolic perspective it can be made the subject of a good number of interpretations. Technology as a source of values which expresses the positive attitude of the young Miller's people towards technology is symbolically expressed by the representation of a demonic future in which knowledge has been lost. The post-atomic desert narrated by Miller is the apology for a world in which science and technology were used as in Bartertown for solipsistic purposes. In fact the electricity generated in the subsoil of the underworld city and produced by methane is a technology whose only keeper is the chthonic symbiotic. Mad Max is used to reproduce a world, not very dissimilar to the one that gave rise to the catastrophe, practical and without spirituality, dedicated to commerce and to the satisfaction of immediate needs: a city without children to represent a world without a future.

The Mad Max episode *MAD MAX: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), perhaps forcing its interpretation a little, also as the symbolic narration of the personal development of the individual ethics, independence and family drama who, after having faced and defeated the virility of the father (Master-Blaster) and the utopian will of the mother (Aunty Entity) affirms himself and finds his family. McLean comments "the film's conflict ignites when Immortan Joe discovers that not only has Furiosa deviated from her course on a routine supply mission to the neighbouring citadel of Gas Town, but she has also taken his wives out of their vault and has made off with them to a location only she knows." (McLean, 147)

Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome (1985) stages the juxtaposition of two worlds: the western-European, technological town symbolized by Bartertown which used that continent for decades as a penal colony. Underworld is a world of slavery and imprisonment, a primitive-aboriginal one with innocence which is also the fragility

of ignorance. These considerations lead us to explore within the narrative diagenesis the role of the hero, considered by Mick Broderick as a new expression that is the representation in mythological form of a decline and a social rebirth.

The *Mad Max* trilogy unfolds in a path of evolution of the hero that closely follows the conventional parable of the myth, which in turn, according to Campbell, repeats the tripartite formula of the initiation rites: separation, initiation and return. And indeed Max at the end of the first episode, distances himself from society, in committing a personal and bloodthirsty revenge, like a western gunslinger and the comparison is excluded from his own world by breaking or ignoring its laws. While the hero is intent on his revenge he is confronted by an element of society, the hero who abandons hatred and individualism to fulfil his destiny. Max restores freedom and oil in the oppressed *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (Australia, 1981) and brings to safety the innocence of youth restored to the awareness of social memory in *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (Australia, 1985).

There are along Max's path a whole series of figures and symbols that coincide with those identified by Campbell. Ambiguous characters such as the guardian of the threshold the cheating helicopter pilot Gyro Captain, protector characters such as the wild child, Feral Kid or helpers such as the little dog and the monkey, respectively in the second and third *Mad Max*; false prophets Nightrider, in *The Road Warrior* leader of the nihilists and barbarians, new centaurs, ferrymen the Pig killer who helps Max out of the Underworld and the symbol of the cosmic virgin mother, who saves Max from the desert or sovereigns and societies to be overthrown Aunty Entity, played by Tina Turner, who reigns over Bartertown. The film also has the touch of diminished sexism: the sexual tensions levelled out and both the sexes being shown their importance and usability in a dystopian world. Max "hands a rifle to Furiosa after missing twice; she then successfully takes the shot. This gesture, whereby a male character acknowledges his female counterpart's superior skill, is fairly novel in a genre where women—even tough ones—are often relegated to the role of sidekick or sex object." (Coning, 175)

Waterworld (USA, 1995) the film by Kevin Reynolds set in a world now submerged by water following the melting of the polar ice caps in which men live on fortified atolls, built with recycled materials and continually threatened by hordes of pirates. The characters move in a dimension that looks like the inverted mirror of the

arid future crossed by Max. Strongly desired by Kevin Costner, who cost a commercial flop and a long-term friendship with the director, the film narrates the adventure of a man whose constant contact with water triggered amphibious mutations. Sailor and adventurer, lone merchant and individualist, the athletic Costner ends up becoming a new Prometheus, who brings men the fire of knowledge and allows them to re-establish a civilization from the ruins of the past. Like Max, defined in the film as a child of the past era, Costner here is the one who knows and shows in a very suggestive scene, the underwater ruins of the past civilization.

In both stories: that of Max and that played by Costner; the hero starts from a situation of isolation; he is external to any social configuration. The protagonists hear the call: in *Waterworld* (1995), Enola the girl with the map tattooed on her back is a responsible kid who follows her own ineluctable destiny, which leads her through increasingly difficult trials towards the accomplishment of the supreme task of recomposing a decayed society.

The only significant difference in the reading of the mythological structure of the two films is represented by what Campbell calls the magical escape and which often, as in the films in question, takes place

"If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron. On the other hand, if the trophy has been attained against the opposition of its guardian, or if the hero's wish to return to the world has been resented by the gods or demons, then the last stage of the mythological round becomes a lively, often comical, pursuit. This flight may be complicated by marvels of magical obstruction and evasion." (Campbell, 282)

This is the case of the small group led by the Costner in *Waterworld* (1995) the one who knows about the underwater world towards dryland, the mythical mainland whose way was lost, a sort of reversal of the myth of Atlantis. The small community after having definitively averted the threat of the Deacon, the very bad pirate leader, who had stolen Enola from him and destroyed the Smokers' ship blissfully heads to dryland in a hot air balloon. This is instead the case of *Mad Max 3*

known as *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) in which the magical flight to the new society is made difficult by the pursuit of the Aunty Entity's henchmen and ensured thanks only to the hero's sacrifice.

Both endings are however conceived on the stylistic features of the western cinema: the stranger protects the defenceless against the bullies but does not participate in the prize of the righteous, he stops on the threshold of the promised land, a pattern that we can find both in the biblical myth of Moses that in the Greek Oedipus.

It should also be emphasized, together with the messianic expectation that invests the two protagonists, their nature as heroes assigned to mend, to recover, to mediate between a world that has dissolved and another unable to sprout without their intervention. In the narrative worlds imagined by Miller and Reynold the protagonists like everyone, are recyclers of waste, of abandoned things, just as they are recoverers or 'saviours' to use the words of Sanes; of knowledge, of tradition, of history, since their dreamed paradise is our present civilization.

2.9 Mass effect of Dystopian Transhumanist Films

Transhumanist sociologist James Hughes distinguishes between those who share the transhumanist vision and its detractors, whom he calls bioconservatives. Authors who critique transhumanist thought include intellectuals from various schools of thought, such as Francis Fukuyama, Jürgen Habermas, Leon Kass, Michael Sandel, Alexander Dugin, Hans Jonas, George Annas, Fermin Gonzalez, Mauricio Faggioni, and many others. Transhumanism has been attacked on various fronts:

2.9.1 Tech-savvy philosophy against any philosophical foundations

In the 1990s, the German philosopher Hans Jonas, in his critique of the potential of biotechnology, called for caution and rationality in all technical applications involving direct interference with human nature (Jonas, 33-34). This argument, which can be found in many critiques of human development and transhumanism, consists of the H+ movement's accusations of being too attached to technological advances, to the point of making it an uncritical and irrational proposition.

2.9.2 Transhumanism, a technological philosophy

Contrary to what has been said, transhumanism is a movement based on reason and freedom (Bostrom, 87-101). The objective is therefore to improve the quality of human life through the direct application of scientific and technological progress. Relying on reason means examining scientific knowledge and not accepting technological innovations without considering their possible consequences. Moreover, transhumanism is based on a secular humanist ethic that promotes technical action in harmony with the biosphere. For this reason, the transhumanist community has always insisted on the need to take into account the existing and future risks that can arise from the misuse of technology. Based on the above, we can conclude that transhumanism is not technophile, much less technophobic, but a technological proposition aimed at social progress.

2.9.3 Hate and disrespect for humanity

Another common criticism of the bioconservatives collective is that the transhumanist desire to transcend human boundaries amounts to a contempt for humanity. This means that the present form of man is the best, and that is why it is wrong to see a person as an organization and amounts to a contempt for humanity. But according to transhumanism humans are still at a stage of evolution; otherwise we are faced with a debate about personal preferences. Transhumanist films “opens the way to more immanent (as opposed to transcendent) forms of thinking and religion such as animism, although transcendent thinking is still very alive in contemporary transhumanism , which dreams of uploading and digital immortality.” (Coeckelbergh, 135–208)

We are fragile and mortal beings, that we neglect many things and that sometimes we lack the social or physical qualities necessary to excel in a given environment. If we take a more scientific approach and study the biosphere, we will discover that there are organisms with much more complex and surprising capacities for adaptation and survival than some of us. All of this helps to understand that humanity is just one species among many and that our abilities are limited by a specific evolutionary context, so the idea of misanthropy is nothing more than a crude assessment.

In transhumanism, there is no hatred or contempt for humanity, but rather a conscious recognition of the limits of human choice which yields scientific and sceptical insights when comparing the individual to the human species to other living beings in a biosphere. Among other things, it is absurd to believe that human greatness lies in the limits of space, time or fragility, and in our ability to conquer these restrictions.

2.9.4 Eurocentrism

In his book *The Fourth Political Theory*, conservative philosopher Alexander Dugin criticizes transhumanism and links it to political liberalism, which he sees as a natural consequence of the intellectual development of the West or, in his own words, the bad luck of human society to civilization. According to Dugin, liberalism is a philosophy that promotes toxic ideas that should be refuted, such as anthropocentrism, the existence of universal truths, the domination of the market, the separation of man from Church and its dogmas, and respect for the Church. Privacy and property, and the freedom to do what everyone wants. Liberalism has stages of development and progress, from classical liberalism to mercantilist neoliberalism, which finally, after the transition from active confrontation to communism and its victory after the fall of the Soviet Union, begins the process of globalizing expansion of his ideas, with which he wills, the various paralyzing and crippling daily lives of non-Western cultures, leading them to the end of history and the ultimate victory over alternative ways of thinking. According to Tamara “Ghost in the Shell (2017)— have been criticized for centering Euro American agency through whitewashing, yellowface, and plots that valorize the white savior complex. Techno-Orientalist influence is likely to remain strong in various discursive arenas” (Tamara, 587-591). This is how neoliberalism becomes postliberalism and leads modernity to a new aspect: one blended in eurocentrism as “the field of media and communication studies continues to be characterized by a degree of Eurocentrism which has tended to sanitize Western history while patronizing and even demonizing the non-West. It thinks of itself in terms of its noblest achievements— science, progress, humanism—” (Willems, 7–23)

Within postmodernism, the anthropocentric approach of liberalism becomes extreme and a space emerges for the post-individual or mutant cyborg.

Transhumanism would be the ultimate idealized form of belief in the myths of progress and evolution. Thus, once man is liberated from religion, state and gender, the liberation of humanity itself will be the result of the liberal process. Cloning, the human genome project, robotics and cyborgs are steps towards a posthumanity that destroys the transcendental subjectivity of man. To address this problem, Dugin urges traditionalists to reject posthumanism and move forward in favour of a return to God, church, empire, state, class, and popular customs (Dugin, 116).

Dugin's critique sees transhumanism as a distortion of humanity caused by liberalism. This argument ignores the existence of transhumanism. For the transhumanist philosophy focuses on the use of technology to improve the human condition and an ethical sense guiding this improvement. Thus contrary to Dugin's argument, the idea of using advanced technology to improve humanity is nothing more than a logical consequence of correct human behaviour.

2.9.5 Conflict between posthumans and humans

Peer comparisons and violence are typical behaviours of many animals; however, as this danger transcends humanity, it appears as a recurring fear when it comes to human empowerment and transhumanism. The "peer conflict" critique posits a negative scenario in which posthuman or advanced humans could pose a threat to ordinary or unextended humans, since one group's desire to overpower the other would escalate into unescalated acts of human violence or initiated posthuman. A behaviour that degrades humanity.

Throughout history, humans have attacked their own species for reasons such as differences in beliefs, membership in different tribes or nations, and competing economic interests. This propensity for heinous acts such as murder, genocide, corruption, torture, discrimination, slavery, etc. caused him to humiliate himself and the race at times (Bostrom, 1-25). To accept that the emergence of a group of autonomous people can be the cause of conflicts is to ignore the fact that these acts are repeated throughout our history. The question should be about the causes of such behaviour and not about condemning human development itself.

The solution to preventing widespread violence lies in strengthening and developing social institutions that guarantee peaceful and harmonious coexistence

just like Xavier's School for the gifted in X-Men. Good government regulation and international agreements can help prevent hypothetical crises and tensions between transhumans and homo sapiens, or even between homo sapiens themselves. Therefore, it is important to ensure greater tolerance and cultural integration, based on scientific training and a political proposal that includes a humanist, non-local or nationalist vision and guarantees the reduction of environmental impact.

Transhumanism also supports the improvement of the moral, intellectual and physiological dimensions of the human individual, since the posthuman, if included in the favourable context, would be an individual with a greater capacity for thinking than the average human. This would mean that if there were still unenhanced humans, we could conclude that posthuman behaviour would attempt to achieve the same ideal and respectful treatment that we offer today to our children, the helpless, the elderly and to animals.

Transhumanism offers not only physical but also moral improvement to the species. The transhumanist movement has been heavily criticized by those who believe that human nature has been corrupted by its approaches. Therefore, its main arguments are based on a bioconservative view of human nature, usually defined according to the approach proposed by the particular author. Concepts as diverse as the full biological form, the "essence" or inherent identity of humanity, the emphasis on imperfection, the soul or spiritual substrate and even dignity can be understood as products from different approaches.

2.9.6 Inhuman, anti-human and dehumanizing

During evolution, man has used various techniques, such as food preparation to strengthen his musculoskeletal system, reading and writing techniques to improve brain structure, and drugs to heal diseases. According to the logic of transhumanism, we fall back on this trend as long as we try to take advantage of the new technologies that are available. From this point of view, transhumanism would be neither inhuman nor dehumanizing; even less inhuman.

It is therefore part of a humanist and progressive project that offers the most suitable technological possibilities to make man superhuman. Transhumanism does not mean the destruction of man, but rather his maximization and expansion. As Jean

Baudrillard says,

“Imagine the amazing good fortune of the generation that gets to see the end of the world. This is as marvellous as being there at the beginning [...]. Let us therefore apply ourselves to seeing things—values, concepts, institutions—perish, seeing them disappear. This is the only issue worth fighting for.” (Baudrillard, 33–34)

If we add to this the starvation of millions of people, discrimination, the development of nuclear weapons, the promotion of an arms race and the spread of ideas in science, reason, humanism and progress are contrary to the principles of the enlightenment but they are counterproductive because they cause trouble.

2.9.7 Against the essence of humanity

One of the best-known criticisms comes from political scientist Francis Fukuyama in *Foreign Policy* magazine. Fukuyama called transhumanism the most dangerous idea in the world at the time (Fukuyama, 42-43). His argument says that the human individual has an "essence" which characterizes the diversity of humans: beauty, intelligence, skin colour etc. in small variations. This essence, which relates to the inner value of every human being, is at the heart of politics. So according to Fukuyama transhumanism has a role to play when inequalities between men increase and violation and destruction of the principle of equal dignity of democracy occur. It also restricts access to biotechnology to poor or low-income people. The trigger for many negative biological aspects that we cannot foresee is caused by a single change in the human individual.

The concept of human essence is not defined by Fukuyama, so according to his argument, the first mistake is to assume the existence of a single human entity, because in reality genes continuously evolve through interaction with the environment, thus expanding the human phenotype (Bostrom, 656–679). If there were no humans, the enhanced human could not lose or gain rights, since rights are the terms of social conventions and the legal system, otherwise discrimination would occur. It is important to note that there is a loss of dignity and a sense of worth that was a medieval exclusive for non-nobles, for non-Europeans, women, blacks, homosexuals, etc.

So for all the attacks on the fidelity of transhumanism on humanity, The danger lies in the disruption of the deep structure of natural human action, because nothing good comes easy. This is achieved through effort and determination. The use of genetic engineering, drugs or devices such as implants would be fraudulent, if they allow individuals to see their benefits without understanding their human or social significance. It would create a hostile world for young people. Improving the vitality of the elderly would affect the relationship between generations because it would delay the maturity of the young.

A person of average ability does not carry the burden of responsibility that comes with walking or talking. The attitudes that a trans-person, in fact a person, might have towards their abilities depend on the cultural environment in which they evolve. The responsibility lies with the politicians who implement transhumanism. On the other hand, social relations depend on the orientation of human communities. For example, in a society in the midst of the industrial revolution, access to work required much more complex and specific training, requiring years of intellectual and emotional preparation. The useful life and complexity of businesses increase proportionally over time.

Notes

1. In 1884 the *Fabian Society was founded in London*, which gathers elements of different socialist origins. The adjective 'Fabiano' refers to Quintus Fabius Maximus (? - 203 BC), called the Temporeggiatore (in Latin: *cunctator*). Fabian thought, whose definitive fixation occurred in 1889 with the publication of the *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (a collection of lectures by the most eminent Fabians), constituted a maximalist and gradualist alternative to revolutionary socialism. He shared the model of collectivist organization, the absence of private property and internationalism
2. Gianni Vattimo, *The end of modernity*, Garzanti, Milan, 1985.
3. The missile defence super program that achieves self-awareness and realizes the threat.

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