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The Dystopian Society : Between Cinema and Reality

How Movies from the 90s-00s Have Built an Era

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Introduction

The term dystopia literally means a “bad place” from the Ancient Greek words «δυσ-» (*dys-*, “bad”) and «τόπος» (*-tópos*, “place”). Dystopia is a *«prediction, description or representation of a future state of things, with which, contrary to utopia and mostly in open controversy with trends felt in the present, prefigure situations, developments, highly negative political-social and technological structures (thus equivalent to negative utopia).»¹* In other words, the concept of dystopia applied in literary and cinematographic arts is a form of *«speculative fiction»²* which offers a vision of the future based on current anxieties.

It is no coincidence that the dystopian vein in literature is discovered as a result of totalitarianism in the early 1900s. The atmosphere of terror generated in Europe by the two World Wars and the regimes of, *inter alia*, Adolph Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Francisco Franco have instilled a world of distrust and despair in the collective imagination. This futuristic representation has found fertile ground in cinema as a means of communication. It is possible to temporarily disengage from reality and enter a new story thanks to movies,

¹ Treccani Enciclopedia Online: <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/distopia2/>

²What Is Speculative Fiction? Defining and Understanding the Different Genres of Speculative Fiction, Written by Masterclass:
<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-speculative-fiction-defining-and-understanding-the-different-genres-of-speculative-fiction>

television shows, audiovisual works, and other artistic endeavours. A movie, like a TV show, can serve as a lens through which people mirror themselves and a means of interpreting reality. Sometimes, they allow us to immediately immerse ourselves in stories or characters that are similar to us and, through these, sublimate our worries, anxieties, and fears. Images and stories from actual or fictional worlds create a glimpse of the reality the viewers are living in or the events they are currently experiencing. This could help them focus on some crucial aspects of their lives or the world that surrounds them.

In most dystopias, the world is characterised by oppression, prohibitions and lack of flexibility that crushes the protagonists, depriving them of any critical and creative spirit. The protagonists, in fact, are oppressed by the context more than by physical opponent. Legislation is the instrument of power to exercise oppression and shape society, by showing a disconnection between what is right and what is legal. Like a modern *Alceste*, the main character seems to be the only one who tries to oppose the State's impositions, not only asking for obedience but also for blind ideological adhesion. The audience identifies itself in the only one who seems upset about the enslavement by the new sick paradigm of society and who is not willing to compromise his freedom. The transposition of great literary masterpieces onto the big screen (e.g., *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells, *1984* by George Orwell, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury) has accentuated the audience's identification with characters, thanks to the imaginative power of cinema.

The first chapter will discuss the evolution through the decades of the dystopian genre in the world of cinema. It will look at the main films that have contributed to the genre's fortunes and the differences found between the various eras.

In the second chapter, the concept of imaginative power will be investigated and an attempt will be made to outline the role and influence of cinema on society and vice versa.

Finally, in the third chapter, three films in particular that have marked three different generations, Blade Runner, The Matrix and V for Vendetta, will be explored.

Chapter 1

The Dystopian Cinema

As mentioned in the introduction, totalitarianism in the early '90s had a great impact on every artistic representation.

During the 1920s and 1930s, some authors used a dystopian environment to criticise contemporary society by projecting its worst traits into the future and highlighting its potential repercussions. At the time these films were classified as science fiction despite the fact that they didn't actually contain many elements of a futuristic setting. Indeed, there weren't any extraordinary technological advancements and the characters' attire and habits were frequently identical to those seen today. With the advent of sound and the first soundtracks, the cinema was finally ready to accept the suggestions of dystopian literature. During the early decades of cinema, films were categorized as science fiction despite the lack of futuristic elements. These movies often showcased characters whose attire and habits closely resembled those of the contemporary era. It was with the introduction of sound and the development of soundtracks that the medium of cinema was finally ready to embrace the dystopian themes prevalent in literature. Fritz Lang's "Metropolis," based on the 1925 novel of the same name by Thea Von Harbou and released in 1927 is a case in point. This dystopian masterpiece captivated audiences with its visionary depiction of the future and was one of the most influential films of its period.

"Metropolis" presents a power struggle between the working class and the ruling elite, delving into social, political, and philosophical themes. Its groundbreaking visual effects and impressive set design set new standards for the film industry and left a profound impact on future cinematic endeavours. Fritz Lang's fictional world in "Metropolis" features futuristic architecture and machinery, contributing to an extraordinary visual experience that was technologically innovative for its time. Beyond its visual grandeur, "Metropolis" explores profound and universal issues such as class struggle and the delicate balance between humans and machines. These themes remain relevant today, highlighting Fritz Lang's insightful understanding of social dynamics and the potential risks associated with technological advancements. Although initially under appreciated upon its release, Metropolis has since claimed a significant place in film history as a masterpiece of German expressionist cinema and the science fiction genre. In summary, Fritz Lang's Metropolis serves as a pivotal reference point for cinema spanning the 1930s to the 1960s. Its innovative vision, both visually and thematically, inspired numerous directors and shaped the language of cinema during that era. Even today, the film stands out for its remarkable imagination and its ability to convey profound social and emotional messages.

Moving forward to 1960s, Fahrenheit 451 by François Truffaut (1966) is another milestone of the dystopian genre based on a 1953 novel of the same name by Ray Bradbury. Set in a dystopian future, the story revolves around a totalitarian government that seeks to suppress individuality by banning books

and criminalising reading. The protagonist, Guy Montag, works as a fireman tasked with burning down houses containing books. However, a chance encounter with a rebel named Clarisse introduces him to the value of literature. Together, they embark on a journey, finding refuge in a forest where individuals memorise books in anticipation of the end of totalitarianism. History had a clear influence on the film: it is impossible not to think of the episodes of book burnings in 1933 Germany “*bücherverbrennungen*” in which all books not in line with Nazi ideology were thrown out of windows, piled up in the street and burned all together.

Another historical event that it is necessary to point out how in this analysis is the Cold War: the post-war period, was marked by the silent conflict and the space race between the United States and the USSR, which created an atmosphere of suspicion and fueled narratives centered around espionage and the exploration of new frontiers. Through this key of reading some topics of dystopian cinema are characterized and declined.

A clear example is Jean-Luc Godard's "Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution" (1965). In this film we witness the tale of a secret agent who embarks on a journey from Earth to Alphaville, a technologically advanced city in a parallel galaxy that strikingly resembles Paris during that time. The agent's mission is to retrieve a brilliant scientist named Nosferatu. Alphaville is governed by an artificial intelligence program named Alpha 60, which suppresses personal creativity and emotions. When the protagonist challenges the dominance of science and escapes with his daughter, he inadvertently

triggers the destruction of the city. Alphaville exemplifies Godard's exploration of the dystopian realm, combining elements of science fiction and film noir. The film serves as a critique of the dehumanising effects of technology and the totalitarian control imposed by a rationalistic society. Jean-Luc Godard's Alphaville represents a continuation of the tradition of thought-provoking science fiction films. Its narrative and themes resonate with audiences, offering a cautionary tale about the dangers of sacrificing humanity in the pursuit of progress. Through his distinctive directorial style, Godard adds to the rich tapestry of science fiction cinema, further expanding the genre's artistic and philosophical boundaries.

Nevertheless, we have to wait until the 1970s to see a meaningful growth in number of dystopian movies, due to the great youth movements to assert individual freedom and social care. The concerns regarding the rising power of multinational companies and the perceived rigid restrictions by the institutions, including religion, found interpretation and rein in cinema.

In 1971, the notable filmmaker Stanley Kubrick directed “A Clockwork Orange” a political science fiction film set in a totalitarian society. Initially, social deviance is brutally suppressed, only to be later exploited by those in power. The film delves into themes of control, free will, and the consequences of a society driven by oppressive systems.

In 1975, Norman Jewison directed “Rollerball” portraying a future where multinational corporations have assumed governance and employ a violent sport, also called Rollerball, as a means of controlling the masses. The

protagonist, a renowned player, becomes a threat to the corporations as he fights for freedom, highlighting the film's metaphorical commentary on the role of sports in contemporary society.

In George Lucas' 1975 debut film, "The Man Fleeing the Future" (known as "THX 1138"), he envisions a tightly controlled society where an esoteric religion provides an outlet for citizens devoid of free will. The government administers a mind-controlling drug, but two rebels rediscover the importance of personal freedom and sexual expression, leading to their banishment from society.

These films, stand as notable examples of thought-provoking science fiction cinema. Each explores the dangers of totalitarianism, the suppression of individuality, and the importance of personal freedom. Through their distinct directorial styles, filmmakers like Lang, Godard, Truffaut, Lucas, Jewison, and Kubrick contributed to the expansion of the science fiction genre's artistic and philosophical boundaries, leaving lasting impressions on audiences and continuing to spark critical discussions about societal issues.

However, there were not enough dystopian films in the sixties and seventies to create a genre. It is only since the second half of the 2000s that we can talk about dystopian genre because many films and television series have come out. The pessimistic climate of the historical phase that began in the 2000s finds expression in some genres such as doomsday and apocalyptic horror. Only since the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008 with its social consequences, has some interest developed in films which describe a negative society such as

modern day one. Thus, the dystopian genre has taken shape slowly. These films are set in the near future, but they do not emphasise technological achievements, instead they focus on totalitarian oppression which is often seen as a metaphor for the present situation.

As mentioned before, the dystopian narrative plays a key role in contemporary cultural production and is typically characterised by stories that focus on locations which are worse than the ones we live in³. The dystopian future world, according to Sargent, is a «*non-existent society described in substantial detail and typically placed in time and location that the author meant a contemporaneous reader to perceive as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived*»⁴.

From “young adult fiction”⁵ to film production⁶, dystopian topic dissemination declines across a wide variety of fictional universes: «*from the a-human (asteroid collisions, climate change, Mayan prophesy, robotics, etc.) to the in-human (zombies, vampires, etc.) to the human (the modern world as way accountable for causing [...] all these various alternatives)*»⁷. In fact, these

³ R. Baccolini, T. Moylan, *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, New York-London, Routledge, 2003, p. 1. : https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305488001_Dark_Horizons_Science_Fiction_and_the_Dystopian_Imagination

⁴ L.T. Sargent, *The three faces of utopianism revisited*, «*Utopian Studies*», V, 1994, 1, pp. 1-37: 9.: <https://badspaceusao.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/Sargent-Three-Faces-of-Utopianism-Reconsidered.pdf>

⁵ *Literary trilogies like Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games, Veronica Ross' Divergent, James Dasher's Maze Runner, and Lauren Oliver's Delirium, which have inspired film adaptations.*

⁶ E.C. Williams, *An End Without End: Catastrophe Cinema in the Age of Crisis*, «*Mute*», 25 febbraio 2010; T. Mirrlees, I. Pedersen, *Elysium as a critical dystopia*, «*International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*», XII, 2016, 3, pp. 305-322; : <https://griseldaonline.unibo.it/article/view/10616>

⁷ E.C. Williams, *An End Without End: Catastrophe Cinema in the Age of Crisis*: <https://griseldaonline.unibo.it/article/view/10616>

stories depict a variety of worlds, states, and societies that, depending on the topics they cover, exhibit different types of narratives, such as, ecological, economic, political, religious, and technological paradigms.⁸ Therefore, utopian and dystopian fantasy worlds comprise positive or negative images that represent a society that is fundamentally different from the author's own.⁹ Sometimes it is thought that they are connected by an antagonistic relationship, in which the dystopia represents the negative and inverted form of the utopia.¹⁰ However, it is important to note how the dystopia can get people's attention by focusing on human iniquities and suffering. This is often due to a deep sense of unease and strife that particular social groups experience depending on the situation and historical circumstances in which they find themselves.

Despite this, dystopia, unlike the utopia, does not envision events occurring because it exists in the future and contains «*the unavoidable request for the announced disaster to be modified*»¹¹.

⁸ G. Muradian, A. Karapetyan, *On Some Properties of Science Fiction Dystopian Narrative*, «Armenian folia anglistika», VII, 2018, pp. 7-18.: https://journals.yasu.am/index.php/arm-fol-angl/article/view/Vol.13_No.1-2_2017_pp.007-018

⁹ G. Claeys, L.T. Sargent, *The Utopia Reader*, New York, New York University Press, 1999, p. 1. : <https://nyupress.org/9781479837076/the-utopia-reader-second-edition/>

¹⁰ C. Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare*, New York, Harper & Row, 1962; M.R. Hillegas, *The Future as Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1967; M.K. Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, Westport, Greenwood, 1994; T. Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Boulder, Westview, 2000. : https://www.unicatt.it/uc/atlanteditopiemediali-ebookPalano_Polidemos5_2022.pdf

¹¹ F. Muzzoli, *Scritture della catastrofe*, cit., p. 18. : <https://www.meltemieditore.it/catalogo/scritture-della-catastrofe/>

According to Laurence Davis, a Professor at Cork University, dystopia is the result of «*a unique moment and lighting*».¹² In other words, the dystopia «*places the social problems and suffering at the center of the story*».¹³

When considering the proliferation of narratives which focus on dystopian themes in contemporary audiovisual offerings, it is impossible to imagine or portray a different reality from the dystopian one. These stories, which frequently take the shape of a literary metrics, are typically built on dramatic images and are characterised by overtly apocalyptic tones that arise from angst and ancestral tribulations, which are amplified by the challenges that every society must face.

The dystopian story isn't meant to provide a complete picture of the world; instead, it is meant to highlight certain historical characteristics and portray them as those of a fictional society. Today's society, and especially young people, are aware of the complexity of the world. Dystopia only further exacerbates these concerns. Through dystopian works of fiction, anyone can observe a part of reality in the future, a bit like a premonition. The fear generated by terrorism, societal degeneration and technological evolution are

¹² L. Davis, *Dystopia, Utopia and Sancho Panza*, cit., p. 24.: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348520381_Utopia_and_dystopia_in_the_age_of_the_Anthropocene

¹³ A. Abdelbaky, *A Perfect World or an Oppressive World. A Critical Study of Utopia and Dystopia as Subgenres of Science Fiction*, «*International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*», IV, 2016, 3, pp. 17-33.: https://www.academia.edu/33313454/A_Perfect_World_or_an_Oppressive_World_A_Critical_Study_of_Utopia_and_Dystopia_as_Subgenres_of_Science_Fiction

the three factors that allow counter-utopia to become “the sequel”. Due to this, the correlation between what is real and what is unreal suddenly fades. The more society progresses in time, the less it satisfies its citizens (for example because of taxes, unemployment, insecurity, various laws, regression of rights, censorship). Dystopia therefore allows people, to either prepare for a future that seems darker and darker, or to show that there can be light even if there is chaos. Therefore, counter-utopia offers a possibility to react. Teenagers are extremely fond of counter-utopia books, video games, TV series or films. This way they learn to understand violence, and to accept it, but above all, they learn to stand up for themselves.

Chapter 2

The Imaginative Power of Movies

Whether perception and imagination actually play a crucial role in how we interact with fiction films, if debatable, let alone what function they might conceivably play. A fiction movie directly shows events on the screen, however, because it is fiction, it invites us to make up our own versions of the events. Hence the idea that our human reality is interwoven with imagination. Daydreams, ghosts, fantasies, desires, novels, films, television series and entertainment make up human reality. Imagination collaborates with the real world where the birth of a phantom universe seems real.

The mission of cinematography is to face this dual nature of reality. It forces viewers to ask themselves fundamental questions about their life, their society, and about man himself. It is a versatile space in which artificial and natural objects, country and city settings, spontaneity and artifice are combined in ever-changing and unstable representations. In Hollywood's vast cinematic production, the scheme of genres summarily sorts these representations into canonical typologies, without fixing them in strict formulations. For example, the Western film landscape focuses on the great plains, the red deserts and the picturesque rocky peaks. In the Road Movies, the landscape winds along endless highways lined with fields or expanses of rocks that are lost on the horizon, dotted with lonely motels, bars and gas stations. Sophisticated comedies take place between Californian villas and elegant Manhattan

backgrounds, while thrillers immerse themselves in the dark urban and metropolitan architecture.

However, the boundaries are not clear: in practice, every landscape representation is always ready to turn into its counterpart. For example, the urban landscape is still present in the natural landscape, and in the large purely landscape backgrounds, nature often emerges as a pure cultural value, symbolic detail or ideological figure. The sense of the landscape, of the movement and of the continuous passage is inherent in American culture, which by definition is mobile. The landscape, whether artificial or natural, thus becomes a witness of this mobility, presenting itself unchanged in the constant diversity of situations.

However, it is precisely in this fluidity that the landscape images spread into a series of elementary figures, such as autumn forests, urban skylines, grandiose mountain panoramas and vast agricultural expanses. In auteur films are presented as stylistic elements, but in the production of series they are fixed in standardised frames, approved lexicons and tested backgrounds, which respect the rules of the genre and confirm them.

This relationship between fiction and reality, fundamental in the cinematographic experience, is complicated, giving rise to a “non-truth” that finds legitimacy not only through the technical possibilities of the medium, but also through the cultural models that define its vision. This invented landscape, which belongs more to culture than to nature, but which in turn becomes nature through the proliferation of cinema, reveals unexpected mythical aspects. The term “myths” here refers to the increase of forms that can be traced back to a

unique and immutable matrix. It is the genre itself that triggers this mechanism is exalted in the cinematographic version, developing and producing other spaces and points of view.

Interestingly, it was the famous popular writer Stephen King who recognised this potential of filmmaking, observing that in Sergio Leone's Italian westerns the false American landscape, "almost absurdly majestic" takes on "apocalyptic" dimensions-giving the story a sense of "grand displacement" and introducing an "epic element". The mythical dimension, in any situation, is manifested in the details, exalting them to the point of releasing all its power. It is significant that a popular writer like King expressed this opinion, valid for all other American landscapes, metropolitan or vernacular, set in the context of the genre, but inexhaustible in their variations. Cinema, as a mass art form, reveals itself more sensitive than other artistic forms to the intrinsic ritual of the great collective myths, which modernity sums up in increasingly global visual models.

A further notable development is the increasing digitalisation of preferred film scenarios in science fiction or fantasy genres, which has pushed the process of creating landscapes to the point of transforming fiction into a reality in its own right. The "non-truth" typical of traditional cinema is presented here as a "neo-truth" whose laws have yet to be defined, but which seems already verifiable and oriented to select from nature only the elements able to make it consistent with its narrative function. We are not sure to what extent this development can affect the entire film production, but what matters most is that the system of

creating these landscapes responds to technical rules that bind formal solutions to the logic of hardware and are therefore subject to the principle of reuse and interchangeability. In this sense, this could give rise to new visual canons and new codes of interpretation of the landscape, much more invasive than those of traditional cinema.¹⁴

2.1 The role of the cinema in the construction of the society

The role of cinema in shaping society is diverse and significant. It serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a potent means of communication, expression, and cultural impact. Cinema possesses the capacity to mirror societal values, beliefs, and ideologies. It captures and portrays societal issues, conflicts, and aspirations, offering insights into prevailing attitudes, norms, and values. Through storytelling and visual representation, cinema provides understanding and empathy among diverse communities, shedding light on different cultures, traditions, and perspectives. Sociology approaches cinema in various ways, as highlighted by scholars such as Casetti (2000) and Gallino (2004, vol. 1, pp. 183-184). Firstly, cinema is examined as a document, a testament, and a representation of society and its transformations. In this regard, it serves as a valuable tool for sociological investigation. Secondly, cinema is viewed as a medium for conveying ideology, shaped by the ruling elites, social classes, political class, and sometimes the State, particularly evident in cases of propaganda under totalitarian regimes. Thirdly, cinema is recognised as a

¹⁴Martino Feyles, *Riflessioni Davanti allo Schermo, Immagine Cinematografica e Fenomenologia della Percezione* : <https://romatrepress.uniroma3.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Riflessioni-davanti-allo-schermo.-Immagine-cinematografica-e-fenomenologia-della-percezione.pdf>

powerful influencer on values, customs, language, opinions, collective taste, and behaviour. Fourthly, cinema is analysed as an industrial activity characterised by a specific division of labor involving producers, authors, actors, technicians, and workers. Finally, cinema is understood as a form of artistic expression situated within a particular historical and social context. Cinema serves as a platform for addressing social issues and stimulating critical thinking. Filmmakers enjoy the freedom to explore and question societal norms, taboos, and injustices, shedding light on important topics such as discrimination, inequality, human rights, gender roles, and environmental concerns. Movies can ignite conversations, raise awareness, and inspire social change by bringing attention to pressing issues. It has a profound impact on the collective imagination of society. Iconic films, characters, and narratives become woven into the cultural fabric, influencing shared references, symbols, and archetypes. Cinematic experiences evoke emotions, stir imagination, and shape people's perceptions of the world. They contribute to the construction of shared myths, dreams, and aspirations, fostering a sense of belonging and identity.

Cinema plays a crucial role in transmitting cultural heritage, traditions, and historical events. Historical dramas, biopics, and period films help preserve and disseminate knowledge about the past, ensuring the preservation of cultural legacies. Additionally, cinema enables the exploration of diverse cultural identities, providing marginalised communities with a platform to express their experiences and perspectives.

Cinema offers entertainment and serves as an escape from everyday life. It

transports audiences to different worlds, ignites imagination, and provides moments of joy, laughter, and emotional release. Movies have the power to bring people together, fostering a sense of community through shared cinematic experiences¹⁵.

2.2 How movies/tv series inspired the society and vice versa

First of all, cinema (as well as society) is a “difficult” object of study, complex, contradictory and elusive (both to those who intend to observe it from a scientific point of view, and over time), which has not allowed a sedimentation of approaches, shared theories and methods of investigation. An object that *«activates a framework of seemingly contradictory social relations, suspended between ritual and technology, art and mass consumption, processes of individualization and conformity. Taken in this gap, the sociology of cinema has sedimented a rich and disorganic history, in which we can see the reverberation of the conflicts that have acted in the sphere of general sociology but also the levels of friction [...] between sociology and communication sciences»*¹⁶.

Sociology places significant emphasis on cinema as a medium that represents society. According to Bettetini¹⁷, the popularity of cinema implies that it has the ability to capture and reflect widespread moods, interests, and values.

¹⁵ *Film and Cinema as a subject of sociological study. Between tradition and present: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347358695_Film_and_cinema_as_a_subject_of_sociological_study_Between_tradition_and_the_present*

¹⁶ *Introduzione alla sociologia del cinema, Brancato 2001, p. 118*

¹⁷*La simulazione visiva, Bettetini 1991, p. 754*

Moreover, successful films can be seen as exemplary symptoms of social situations. This line of reasoning is commonly employed in the sociological analysis of mass media, where cultural objects are believed to be poetically faithful reflections of the reality they depict. This assumption finds particular resonance in the case of cinema, distinguishing it from other mass media forms¹⁸.

Films are «*the product of a social negotiation*»¹⁹ and require adequate knowledge and skills to decipher. The concept of representation, therefore, introduces a series of complications, expanding the scope of analysis²⁰. Indeed, a representation is a social process in which images, sounds, and signs symbolise something else, interconnected with a network of other representations conveyed through different media²¹. Thus, while cinema may appear to function as a historical document, especially in the case of documentary films, the traditional notion of reflection is more complex than it seems. Cinema is increasingly recognised as a "necessary" historical source, a privileged space where historical signs condense, distribute, and persist in a

¹⁸ *The issue has long been discussed outside the sociological field. Bazin, for example, conceives the cinematographic image as an analogy of reality. Indeed, in Montage Forbidden, he argues that the film illusion must be born from reality itself. He opposes filmmakers who believe in the image (which he calls manipulators) and those who believe in reality. According to Bazin, nothing must be added to reality; on the contrary, it is necessary to free its deep structures, to make pre-existing relationships appear, because the image counts not for what it adds to reality but for what it reveals of reality [cf. Costa, 1978]. This reasoning is taken to the extreme by Pasolini [1972, p. 228], who states: «If the cinema is not other than the written language of reality, [...] means that it is neither arbitrary nor symbolic: and therefore represents reality through reality».*

¹⁹ *Sociologie du cinéma, Sorlin 1977, pp. 118-120*

²⁰ *Ombre e Nebbia. La difficile vicenda della sociologia del cinema e il posto del fantastico : <https://books.openedition.org/edizionikaplan/554?lang=en>*

²¹ *Ibidem*

more representative manner than in other contexts²². Regardless of the authors' intentions, it is precisely this type of cinema that emerges from studies and fortuitously intersects with reality, facilitating the free and often involuntary circulation of collective historical signs. Over time, these signs accumulate and solidify, giving rise to a “historical added value” composed of elements that aggregate and form coherent and interconnected sets²³. This historical added value contributes to the overall understanding of the past, providing coherence and cohesion to various historical elements. Therefore, in order to consider cinema as a document, it is essential to focus on the broader context in which the films are situated, rather than solely on their individual characteristics²⁴. Furthermore, cinema does not primarily testify to the society it portrays but rather to the institution that produces it. The responsibility for cinema's documentary nature and its role as a mirror of society lies with the social machinery of cinema itself²⁵. The institution of cinema is reflected in its texts, and through this reflection, the complex processes that shape those texts are framed²⁶.

Lastly, cinema reflects reality, but the reflection on the screen also impacts society, expanding its boundaries and transforming the traditional concept of reality with a new one that includes cinema and cannot disregard its influence²⁷.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Introduzione alla sociologia del cinema, Brancato 2001, p. 39*

²⁵ *Ibidem*

²⁶ *Ombre e Nebbia. La difficile vicenda della sociologia del cinema e il posto del fantastico* : <https://books.openedition.org/edizionikaplan/554?lang=en>

²⁷ *Introduzione alla sociologia del cinema, Brancato 2001, p. 108*

It is important to note another theoretical perspective rooted in Marxism that criticizes the concept of the “impression of reality” in cinema. This perspective, argues that the above mentioned “impression of reality” serves only an ideological purpose by detracting from the productive labor involved in filmmaking²⁸. This productive labor encompasses various gatekeepers who often aim to “normalise” the content conveyed through films. However, cinema has the power to transform reality by presenting it in alternative forms and replacing it with what he terms an "idealistic illusion"²⁹.

Within the realm of methodology, approaching cinema as a representation of reality also entails recognizing it as an investigative tool that can be integrated into the extensive range of data collection techniques in social research. Surprisingly, this integration has occurred with some difficulty and sporadically, despite notable precedents in the field of anthropology³⁰. This missed opportunity is particularly regrettable, given the non-intrusive potential of cinema as a research instrument, which can offer valuable insights while minimizing intrusion into the lives of subjects being studied³¹.

²⁸ *Ombre e Nebbia. La difficile vicenda della sociologia del cinema e il posto del fantastico* : <https://books.openedition.org/edizionikaplan/554?lang=en>

²⁹ *Cinéma et idéologie*, Lebel 1971, p. 471

³⁰ *Ombre e Nebbia. La difficile vicenda della sociologia del cinema e il posto del fantastico* : <https://books.openedition.org/edizionikaplan/554?lang=en>

³¹*Ibid.*

3. Case studies: in-depth analysis of the main dystopian movies

Dystopian movies often provide thought-provoking narratives that explore the dark consequences of various societal, political, or technological issues. In fact, cinema reaches its peak when we see an individual engaged in the fight against external forces. The main character fighting against the world around him is the most suitable choice for a film production.

Here, I will provide in-depth analyses of three popular dystopian movies: "Blade Runner" (1982), "The Matrix" (1999), and "V for Vendetta" (2006).

3.1 Blade Runner

"Blade Runner" (1982), directed by Ridley Scott, has had a profound and enduring impact on both the science fiction genre and popular culture as a whole. Its unique vision of a dystopian future and its exploration of themes such as identity, memory, and humanity continue to resonate with audiences. One of the most significant contributions of Blade Runner is its visual aesthetic. The film's portrayal of a decaying, overcrowded Los Angeles with its striking blend of futuristic and gritty elements has become iconic. The neon-lit cityscape, the rain-soaked streets, and the towering buildings have influenced countless films, television shows, and video games that depict futuristic settings. The film's visual style, often referred to as "cyberpunk", has become a staple of the genre and has had a lasting impact on the way we imagine and represent the future.

Blade Runner also introduced complex and morally ambiguous characters into the realm of science fiction. The protagonist, Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), is a “blade runner” tasked with hunting down rogue replicants, humanoid androids designed for dangerous work in space and considered illegal on Earth. In the film, Nexus-6 replicants, a series of advanced models, were illegally sent to Earth and are expiring after four years. The replicants, particularly Roy Batty, are not simply mindless machines but beings capable of profound emotion and introspection. Their struggle for extended life and their existential questioning of their own humanity raise thought-provoking ethical dilemmas. This exploration of what it means to be human and the blurred line between humans and artificial intelligence has influenced subsequent works in the genre and has become a recurring theme in science fiction storytelling. Furthermore, Blade Runner's exploration of memory and identity has had a lasting impact on the philosophical and cultural discourse. The film raises questions about the nature of memory and how it shapes our sense of self. The replicants' reliance on photographs as a means of preserving their memories reflects our own contemporary reliance on digital media and social networks to document and construct our identities. Blade Runner's exploration of memory and identity resonates with the ongoing discussions surrounding the impact of technology on our personal and collective lives. Overall, Blade Runner's enduring impact can be seen in its influence on visual aesthetics, storytelling, and the exploration of philosophical themes.

The film's vision of a dystopian future and its complex characters have left a lasting impression on the science fiction genre and continue to inspire and provoke audiences to contemplate the nature of humanity in a world increasingly dominated by technology³². It is evident that the film has bestowed upon us its remarkable capacity to visually and narratively depict the intricacies of contemporary society and the various relationships that unfold within it, be it social, interpersonal, professional, or emotional. The future envisioned by Blade Runner in 1982 has undeniably become our present reality³³.

3.2 Matrix

“The Matrix” (1999) is a widely acclaimed film directed by the Wachowski sisters that portrays a dystopian future where advanced machines have enslaved humanity within a simulated reality known as the Matrix.

This influential science fiction masterpiece explores profound themes of reality, manipulation, and resistance against oppressive systems. The film revolves around Thomas A. Anderson, played by Keanu Reeves, an anonymous employee at a computer company who spends his nights immersed in the digital realm and gains fame among hackers under the alias Neo. As Neo interacts with other hackers, he gradually learns that our perceived reality is nothing more

³²*Blade Runner nella versione originale del 1982. La globalizzazione come categoria dell'estetica cinematografica post-moderna*, http://www.formacinema.it/attachments/article/180/BLADE%20RUNNER%20E%20LA%20GLOBALIZZAZIONE%20NELL'ESTETICA%20POSTMODERNA_MSTUDER.pdf

³³*Ibid.*

than a simulation created by machines, opening up a vast array of philosophical inquiries.

The film skill-fully weaves together thrilling action sequences with existential concepts, compelling viewers to reflect on the nature of reality and the significance of individual agency. By challenging a society driven by consumerism and conformity, The Matrix raises profound questions about the choices people make when trading their freedom for the comfort of an illusory existence. It encourages audiences to critically examine their perception of reality, contemplate the impact of technology on society, and recognise the crucial role of personal choice in the face of systemic control³⁴. In today's world, it has become commonplace to view social networks as an integral part of our daily lives. It feels natural to reach out to acquaintances through social networks. However, numerous studies have highlighted the negative consequences of prolonged exposure to social media, and with the advent of the metaverse, these consequences could become even more significant³⁵.

«The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. [...] You are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Into a prison that you cannot taste or see or touch. A prison for your mind»³⁶. With

³⁴ *Mondo vero e mondo fittizio : analisi psicologica e filosofica di Matrix film del 1999 di Lana e Lilly Wachowski*, <https://www.redhotcyber.com/post/mondo-vero-e-mondo-fittizio-analisi-psicologica-e-filosofica-di-matrix-film-del-1999-di-lana-e-lilly-wachowski/>

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Lana Wachowski , The Matrix: The Shooting Script: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/3861325-morpheus-the-matrix-is-everywhere-it-is-all-around-us>*

these words, Morpheus introduces to a bewildered Neo the foundations of the deception in which he lives.

The Matrix cleverly employs the metaphor of Alice, the iconic character from Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". In the beginning of the novel, Alice inadvertently falls into the Rabbit's hole and finds herself in a strange world filled with peculiarities. These adventures serve as a transformative journey for Alice, symbolising her transition into adulthood.

Similarly in The Matrix Neo assumes the role of Alice and follows a "white rabbit" in its hole embarking on a journey of self-discovery. Tormented by existential questions and a nagging feeling that something is amiss in his reality, Neo experiences parallel Alice's transformative voyage, undergoing a profound metamorphosis, shedding his former identity and fully embracing his new persona³⁷. Just as Alice transitions into a different version of herself, Neo emerges as a changed individual: the use of the Alice metaphor in The Matrix emphasises the theme of personal evolution and the quest for truth within a complex and illusory world³⁸.

Therefore, The Matrix can be assessed as a cinematic manifesto of postmodernism and post-humanism. Neo's dystopian adventure overcomes the rigid dichotomy between real and virtual to embrace a new way of conceiving

³⁷ *Mondo vero e mondo fittizio : analisi psicologica e filosofica di Matrix film del 1999 di Lana e Lilly Wachowski*, <https://www.redhotcyber.com/post/mondo-vero-e-mondo-fittizio-analisi-psicologica-e-filosofica-di-matrix-film-del-1999-di-lana-e-lilly-wachowski/>

³⁸ *Exploring The Matrix's Alice in Wonderland Motifs & Their Significance*: <https://gamerant.com/the-matrix-alice-in-wonderland-motifs-significance/>
#:~:text=In%20the%20original%20Matrix%20films,in%20Wonderland%20comparisons%20were%20Ostrewn

our digital lives³⁹. The Matrix represents a ubiquitous virtual reality that envelops our existence. The protagonist grapples with a perpetual sense of uncertainty, never certain whether he is truly awake or trapped within a dream. In order to unravel the enigma of the Matrix and comprehend his unsettling experiences, Neo is faced with a pivotal choice, to confront a harsh truth or remain ignorant. This decision is presented to him in the form of the red pill and the blue pill, representing two diverging paths⁴⁰. «*You take the blue pill, the story ends [...]. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes*». Thomas Anderson chooses the red pill and assumes the identity of Neo, beginning a dichotomy journey between reality and fiction that refers to the allegory of Plato's cave, focusing on the Neo embodies the prisoner who ventures out of the cave, abandoning illusions and the fabricated reality they create⁴¹. Upon embracing the harsh truth, he returns to the cave (symbolised by the Matrix) to liberate others, emulating Morpheus' actions⁴².

This interplay between the Matrix (the sensory and perceived world) and the desolate real world echoes Arthur Schopenhauer's concept of the veil of Maya, a

³⁹*Matrix: da 20 anni nella Tana del Bianconiglio*, https://movieplayer.it/articoli/matrix-film-20-anni_20588/

⁴⁰ *Mondo vero e mondo fittizio : analisi psicologica e filosofica di Matrix film del 1999 di Lana e Lilly Wachowski*, <https://www.redhotcyber.com/post/mondo-vero-e-mondo-fittizio-analisi-psicologica-e-filosofica-di-matrix-film-del-1999-di-lana-e-lilly-wachowski/>

⁴¹ *The Matrix is The Real World*, <https://medium.com/cinemaniam/the-matrix-is-the-real-world-8250ebdc5df>

⁴² *"The Republic" by Plato - This work contains the allegory of the cave, which serves as the foundation for the narrative in "The Matrix." It explores the nature of reality, the role of perception, and the journey towards enlightenment.*

deceptive reality that conceals the truth⁴³. The artificial intelligences that cultivate and exploit humans as a source of energy parallel Schopenhauer's notion of the Will, the blind impulse of life that deceives humanity⁴⁴. Schopenhauer believed that to free oneself from suffering, exceptional individuals, geniuses, saints, art, and piety were necessary. In the Matrix, Neo assumes the role of this exceptional person: a man, a friend, a lover, a hero, and a saviour who ultimately achieves extraordinary feats because of his profound self-awareness.

Furthermore, the film draws inspiration from René Descartes and his famous maxim, *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). Similar to Descartes, Neo questions everything, including his own existence, pondering whether he is awake or trapped in a dream⁴⁵. Prior to his liberation, Neo's thoughts exist solely within the Matrix, an interpretation that aligns with metaphysical doubt⁴⁶.

⁴³ *Mondo vero e mondo fittizio : analisi psicologica e filosofica di Matrix film del 1999 di Lana e Lilly Wachowski*, <https://www.redhotcyber.com/post/mondo-vero-e-mondo-fittizio-analisi-psicologica-e-filosofica-di-matrix-film-del-1999-di-lana-e-lilly-wachowski/>

⁴⁴ *"The World as Will and Representation" by Arthur Schopenhauer - In this philosophical treatise, Schopenhauer delves into the concept of the "veil of Maya," which refers to the illusory nature of the world that obscures the underlying truth. It discusses the Will as a blind impulse that drives human behavior and its relationship to suffering and liberation.*

⁴⁵ *L'ontologia del reale, tra Cartesio e Matrix*, <http://www.lachiavedisophia.com/blog/lontologia-del-reale-cartesio-the-matrix/>

⁴⁶ *Mondo vero e mondo fittizio : analisi psicologica e filosofica di Matrix film del 1999 di Lana e Lilly Wachowski*, <https://www.redhotcyber.com/post/mondo-vero-e-mondo-fittizio-analisi-psicologica-e-filosofica-di-matrix-film-del-1999-di-lana-e-lilly-wachowski/>

Neo embodies a thinking subject, transcending mere existence, just as Descartes' cogito represents more than a simple existence⁴⁷.

By breaking free from the chains that bind him, Neo represents the capacity for individual agency and the ability to transcend societal norms. The state of sleep that Neo and others are initially trapped in can be seen as a metaphor for the common condition of humanity, an existence divided between the constraints of reality and the seductive allure of the virtual world⁴⁸.

The core message remains singular: the decision is consistently and exclusively ours, the incidence of fate is not accepted. As Neo said, «*I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my life*»⁴⁹.

The process of realisation can be incredibly challenging, but it is the first fundamental step towards freedom. Distinguishing reality from illusion is essential to maintaining a constant state of self-awareness⁵⁰. This continuous process of self-reflection is transformative and prompts individuals to question their own behaviour, aligning with the notion of consciousness. Carefulness in our choices and actions is essential in order not to surrender, even

⁴⁷ "Meditations on First Philosophy" by René Descartes - Descartes' famous phrase "Cogito, ergo sum" is a central theme in his philosophical work. It explores the foundations of knowledge, skepticism, and the existence of the self.

⁴⁸ "The Philosophy of The Matrix" edited by Irwin, William - This collection of essays includes discussions on Kierkegaard's ideas and their connections to "The Matrix" film series. It provides analysis and interpretations of various philosophical themes, including choice, freedom, and the nature of reality.

⁴⁹ Laurence Fishburne: Morpheus : <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0133093/characters/nm0000401>

⁵⁰ Mondo vero e mondo fittizio : analisi psicologica e filosofica di Matrix film del 1999 di Lana e Lilly Wachowski, <https://www.redhotcyber.com/post/mondo-vero-e-mondo-fittizio-analisi-psicologica-e-filosofica-di-matrix-film-del-1999-di-lana-e-lilly-wachowski/>

unconsciously, our individual freedoms and fall victim to a subjugating system⁵¹.

3.3 V for Vendetta

"V for Vendetta" is a remarkable comic created by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd. The series was first published in black and white between 1982 and 1985 by English publisher Quality Comics, in Warrior magazine. After the magazine's closure, in 1988 the work was reprinted and published in colour by DC Comics, finally getting a proper conclusion. The story was also adapted into a film of the same name in 2005, directed by James McTeigue.

The plot takes place in a repressive and racist UK, where the population is controlled, censored and manipulated by a fascist government linked to the Norsefire party. This regime imposed itself after a devastating nuclear war, taking advantage of the climate of fear and uncertainty that followed. The monotony and darkness of this dystopia is interrupted by a character called V, a disfigured anarchist who hides behind the mask of Guy Fawkes, a British revolutionary involved in the Dust Conspiracy of 1605. The objective of this failed attempt was to blow up the English Parliament during the opening ceremony, killing King James I, the royal family and the entire political body. Catholic conspirators, including Chief Robert Catesby, are discovered, tortured, and executed, thus avoiding disaster. V resumed their plan and completed it on 5 November 1997, exploding the building symbol of a declining system. This

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

marks the beginning of an armed, violent and spectacular struggle to shake the country and start a revolution. After surviving the cruel Larkhill⁵² concentration camp, V begins his revenge to punish those responsible for his internment and suffering. He begins by psychologically destroying Lewis Prothero, the camp commander who has now become the spokesman for the regime known as the "Voice of London". He later kills pedophile bishop Anthony Lilliman, medical examiner Delia Surridge, and chief secret police officer Derek Almond. Next to this dark hero is Evey Hammond, a 16-year-old girl. Being the daughter of two dissidents, she is presented as a frightened young woman, forced into prostitution because of poverty. On her first day of this new activity, she is discovered by undercover intelligence agents known as Dito. While they are about to rape and kill her, V intervenes and saves her, offering her refuge in the Shadow Gallery, her hideout located under Victoria Station. Initially reluctant to be involved in the crimes of her savior, Evey eventually embraces the mission of V. Progressively, V plasma Evey as her heir in the resistance: teaching her to fight, act, dance, and instruct her in literature, film, and music. Finally, posing as a member of the police, V kidnaps Evey and subjects her to horrible torture. At a point where Evey has nothing to lose and chooses death over confession and abjuration, when she stops being afraid, she is freed from her captivity and transformed, ready to fight.

Evey: You...tortured me. Oh God, why?

⁵² Tobias Ebbrecht, "Migrating images: iconic images of the Holocaust and the representation of war in popular film" in *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol.28, n.4, 2010, pp. 86-103.

V: Because I love you. Because I want to set you free. [...] You were already in prison. You've been in prison all your life.

Evey: Shut up! I don't want to hear from you! I wasn't in prison! I was happy! I was happy here until you threw me out.

V: Happiness is a prison, Evey. Happiness is the most devious prison of all⁵³.

The story of V for Vendetta develops with a passage to violence and revolt, which could represent a liberating ritual before the creation of a new order or could indicate a decay destined to nullify any revolutionary effort. However, there is a new vigilante guarding the city: Evey, who wears the V mask and assumes his identity, bringing to life the ideal for which his mentor sacrificed his last breath. The nuclear nightmare and subsequent political involution described in the series fit in perfectly with 1980s Britain, led by conservative Margaret Thatcher's "Iron Lady" and troubled by pro-fascist groups such as the National Front or the British National Party⁵⁴. The Norsefire is a bigoted, violent and elitist far-right party that draws, both ideologically and aesthetically, the NSDAP of Hitler. The fanatical pro-Aryan tendencies of the "Norse Fire" is clearly expressed by the "England prevails" greeting and the motto similar to that used by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, «*Force through Purity. Purity through Faith*». In this context, the concept of "diversity" becomes a threat: those who do not correspond to the preferred racial, religious or sexual canons (white, Christian, heterosexual) are considered a threat and are

⁵³ Alan Moore, David Lloyd, *V per Vendetta*, Roma, Magic Press, 2006, pp.169-171.

⁵⁴ Luis Silveiro, *9 into 7. Considerations on V for Vendetta: Book and Film*, Università di Lisbona, Facoltà di Lettere, Dipartimento di Anglistica, 2010, p.8.

eliminated to preserve the balance of the state, interpreted as an autonomous organism. At the top of the government is the Head, represented by Adam Susan, a ruthless chancellor devoted to his purifying cause. On it depend the Ear and the Eye, departments engaged in monitoring the population through continuous audio-visual surveillance, the Nose, ie the Investigative Police, the Finger, the Secret Police, and the Voice, official organ of propaganda, which, through the mass-media media, indoctrinates its users.⁵⁵

The society described in *V for Vendetta* is based on a concept of rigid repression of civil rights and the judicial system, the physical elimination of minorities and opponents, the widespread use of fear, extreme surveillance and force, and the censorship of knowledge. Historically and culturally, this society has forgotten its past: all elements capable of threatening order, such as art, literature, cinema, theatre and music, are subjected to censorship or even destroyed. Most of these elements are relegated to the oblivion of MOM (Ministry of Unpleasant Materials), a government body responsible for the management of undesirable materials. However, V has as its mission to save humanity from oblivion, recognising the importance of education and knowledge for healthy and democratic social development. His Shadow Gallery is an underground museum in which paintings, musical instruments, furniture, books, records, photographs and prints are preserved. There is a vast library with hundreds of works, including Shakespeare's tragedies, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Goethe's *Faust*, *I am Legend* of Matheson and Cervantes' *Don Quijote*.

⁵⁵ *L. Silveiro, op. cit., p.5.*

There is also a jukebox playing *Dancing in the Streets* by Martha and The Vandellas. The walls are adorned with paintings and posters of films and theatrical performances. The repetitive use of images, words and meanings and the resulting ideal and practical simplification of concepts and actions, along with persuasive tones that alternate between alarming themes and carefree entertainment, lead to a complete mental submission of free thought, which culminates in a kind of trivialisation of reality. V for Vendetta clearly explains how television, radio or press are able to create or destroy the truth and how the imprinting that the mass media, with a unilateral dialogue by definition, are able to generate on a weakened community and deprived of its possibilities of criticism and dissent both of a "parental" type⁵⁶.

The ultimate goal is the renewal of society and the collapse of the political system that has allowed the condemnation of V. Despite some studies highlight the sociopathic and criminal tendencies⁵⁷, describing him as a sadistic terrorist, we can't call him a villain. His motivation for justice, freedom and awareness, coupled with his urgent desire for revenge, makes him a "negative" hero, damned and idealistic. He represents a modern reinterpretation of a character of

⁵⁶ L. Silveiro, *op. cit.*, pp.40-46.

⁵⁷ William Norman Grigg, *The trouble with V: compelling and affecting in its depiction of life under totalitarianism - V for Vendetta ultimately endorses the lawlessness on which totalitarianism depends in "The New American", 1 Maggio 2006, p.30: "V embodies the idea of power, rather than freedom. Created by the lawless state, V employs lawless violence to destroy the vestiges of institutions intended to restrain the state's power. His first target is Old Bailey, which symbolizes - albeit in degraded form - the due process guarantees distinctive to Anglo-Saxon law. By blowing up Parliament, V symbolically accomplishes what all totalitarians seek - the destruction of legislative institutions intended to make government power subordinate to law and accountable to the people."*

classical or renaissance tragedy⁵⁸, who chooses a violent path to restore order in a context dominated by chaos and oppression.

From ancient times to the present day, many characters have been driven by the thirst for revenge: from the famous and traditional Ulysses, Achilles, Electra and Orestes, to Hamlet or Edmond Dantès de Il Conte di Monte Cristo, up to cult protagonists of recent decades such as Robocop, Kill Bill's Bride, Eric Draven of The Raven and Sweeney Todd in the film of the same name by Tim Burton⁵⁹. It is indisputable that V has a dark side and that his choice to resort to murder as a means of resolution hides a serious trauma, but we must consider the context of reality that led him to be what he is. To free himself from the manipulative power, V must detach himself from the surrounding reality and transform. Barbarian society imposes on him the role of avenger: the mask he wears not only hides the scars on his face, but represents a new almost superhero essence, similar to the costume of Spiderman or the mantle of Batman. His disguise also adds a romantically disturbing vision to his fight⁶⁰. The terrorism of V, an actor thirsting for applause, is "artistic" it is theatre and theatricality. Tchaikovsky's Overture 1812, composed by the Russian master to celebrate Napoleon's defeat in Russia, resounds when the Old Bailey is destroyed; the explosions; the same mask of Guy Fawkes: all part of a plan to

⁵⁸ L. Silveiro, *op. cit.*, p.66; M. D. Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp.117-133.

⁵⁹ *A Perfect World or an Oppressive World: A Critical Study of Utopia and Dystopia as Subgenres of Science Fiction* https://www.academia.edu/33313454/A_Perfect_World_or_an_Oppressive_World_A_Critical_Study_of_Utopia_and_Dystopia_as_Subgenres_of_Science_Fiction

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

make perfect and aesthetically worthy the scenic representation of the revolution.⁶¹ The dehumanisation of victims, both conceptual and physical, by the perpetrators and in the imagination of the oppressed people themselves, represents a crucial element in the totalitarian repressive processes: those who commit evil do not feel remorse and do not perceive sin because they do not consider the victims as their fellow human beings, while those who suffer such violence can no longer see themselves as a "human being" as devastatingly destroyed deep down. The film adaptation of Moore and Lloyd's work, with Hugo Weaving and Natalie Portman as the protagonists, while not maintaining a complete fidelity to the graphic novel, has an undeniable artistic and social significance. The numerous differences from the paper version include significant changes: the explosion of Parliament closes the film as the culmination of the revolution, instead of being the beginning; the Norsefire reaches power in a sneaky way, by means of acts of state terrorism. In Britain reinterpreted by James McTeigue and the Wachowski brothers, we can read, more than a clash between fascism and anarchism, a battle between neoliberalism and neo-conservatism. From Thatcherism to the Bush era. Although the plot remains set in the UK, it refers clearly and critically to

⁶¹ *T. Williams, op. cit., pp.16-23.*

American society⁶². In addition to adding a romantic touch to the plot, which makes vague references to Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Beauty and the Beast*⁶³, also the ending is more positive: the dictatorship is definitely defeated and thousands of people, wearing the costume of V/Guy Fawkes, take to the streets and watch Parliament crumble together with the authority it represents. And when, slowly, the citizens take off their masks, that simple gesture becomes the central point of the film and of the revolution: showing their face, they implicitly admit that they have become aware of the world around them, ceasing to be pawns of power. The uniqueness of "V for Vendetta" both in its comic book version and in the film, lies in its innate ability to captivate the audience, through cognitive-emotional inputs ranging from repression and fear to rebellion and liberation, through endurance and excitement⁶⁴. The work invites resistance and the defence of rights and freedoms. In fact, democracy is precisely this: the assent to public dissent. In recent years, the protagonist has become a real symbol of struggle: in street demonstrations, more and more often many participants in protest movements such as Occupy Wall Street, wearing the iconic mask of V. In addition,

⁶² L. Silveiro, *op. cit.* p.3. In reference to the USA, the film says: "Did you like it? The USA? [...] Here is a country that had everything, absolutely everything, and now [...] is what? The largest leper colony in the world. Why? Atheism. It wasn't the plague they created. It was judgment. No one escapes their past. No one escapes judgment. You think I'm not up there? Do you think I'm not watching over this country? How else can you explain this? He's testing us, but we've done it. We did what we had to do in Islington, Enfield. I was there. Muslims. Homosexuals. Terrorists. Sick degenerates. They had to leave! Strength through unity, unity through faith! I am a God-fearing Englishman and I am damn proud of it!"

⁶³ M. Carretero-González, *op. cit.*, p.210.

⁶⁴ Brian L. Ott, "The Visceral Politics of *V for Vendetta*: On Political Affect in Cinema" in *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol.27, n.1, 2010, p.44.

Anonymous, the dreaded international group of *hacktivists*, chose its effigy as a logo. The current scenario is so worn that a part of the citizens has recognised a political significance to a fictional character. V represents hope, opposition to tyranny. It reminds us that the need to fight for a better world never dies, but only changes form and method: citizens also need ideals to live and seek models and reference figures to guide them⁶⁵. It is not important who hides behind the mask, but what that mask represents, beyond the object itself. What matters little is that V is not real, as long as it inspires change.

“The people should not be afraid of their own governments, they should be afraid of the people⁶⁶.”

⁶⁵ *Mondo vero e mondo fittizio : analisi psicologica e filosofica di Matrix film del 1999 di Lana e Lilly Wachowski*, <https://www.redhotcyber.com/post/mondo-vero-e-mondo-fittizio-analisi-psicologica-e-filosofica-di-matrix-film-del-1999-di-lana-e-lilly-wachowski/>

⁶⁶ *V for Vendetta (V per Vendetta, James McTeigue, 2005)*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is seen how dystopia serves as a lens for current problems, but above all how it projects human concerns into the future in order to exorcise them and give a key to our present. These films, which often take the form of literary metrics, are typically built on dramatic imagery and are characterised by overtly apocalyptic tones that stem from ancestral anxieties and tribulations, amplified by the challenges facing every society.

Throughout the years, numerous historical events have influenced the films. As seen above, Blade Runner's exploration of memory and identity resonates with current discussions about the impact of technology on our personal and collective lives. Matrix encourages audiences to critically examine their perception of reality and recognise the crucial role of personal choices with the metaphor of the White Rabbit. V per Vendetta's mission is to save humanity from oblivion by recognising the importance of education and knowledge for healthy and democratic social development.

In looking at our society today, we can draw inspiration from these dystopian stories. Fiction can reveal profound truths about the reality around us. We must embrace the responsibility to shape our future and fight the injustices that threaten to turn our dreams into nightmares.

As Albert Camus once wrote, “The only way to face a world without freedom is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.” Therefore, what matters is not only to look critically at the past and present, but also to imagine and work for a future that embodies the values of justice, equality and hope.

In conclusion, the aim of the analysis will be to narrate dystopia as the product of present and past anxieties through the medium we most favour nowadays, cinema, which is able to give the audience a strong visual impact. Just as yesterday's dystopian cinema explored the dark depths of humanity, today we must look up and ask ourselves: what future do we want to paint on the canvas of our existence?

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Abstract

Il concetto di distopia applicato alle arti letterarie e cinematografiche è una forma di “finzione speculativa” che offre una visione del futuro basata sulle preoccupazioni attuali.

Non è un caso che la vena distopica in letteratura sia stata riscoperta a seguito dei totalitarismi dei primi del '900 e che questa rappresentazione futuristica abbia trovato terreno fertile nel cinema come mezzo di comunicazione. Un film può servire come lente attraverso cui le persone si specchiano e come mezzo per interpretare la realtà. L'immaginazione collabora con il mondo reale, dove la nascita di un universo fantasma sembra reale. La missione della cinematografia è quella di affrontare questa duplice natura della realtà. Costringe gli spettatori a porsi domande fondamentali sulla loro vita, sulla loro società e sull'uomo stesso. Il cinema, in quanto forma d'arte di massa, si rivela più sensibile di altre forme artistiche al rituale intrinseco dei grandi miti collettivi, che la modernità riassume in modelli visivi sempre più globali. In altre parole, il cinema ci permette di immergerci immediatamente in storie o personaggi che ci assomigliano e, attraverso questi, sublimare le nostre preoccupazioni, ansie e paure.

In questo senso, la maggior parte delle distopie è caratterizzata da oppressione, divieti e mancanza di flessibilità che schiacciano i protagonisti, privandoli di qualsiasi spirito critico e creativo. I protagonisti sono oppressi e sono vittime del contesto che li circonda più che di un avversario fisico. Come un moderno Alceste, il protagonista sembra essere l'unico a cercare di opporsi alle

imposizioni dello Stato che non solo chiede obbedienza ma anche una cieca adesione ideologica.

Il primo capitolo tratterà l'evoluzione del genere distopico nel mondo del cinema, instaurando una forte correlazione con gli eventi storici che si sono susseguiti attraverso i decenni. Si analizzeranno i principali film che hanno contribuito alla fortuna del genere e le differenze riscontrate tra le diverse epoche. A partire dagli anni Venti del Novecento si sono avuti notevoli esempi di cinema di fantascienza che hanno fatto riflettere, esplorando i pericoli del totalitarismo, la soppressione dell'individualità e, nel contesto del movimento giovanile degli anni Settanta, l'importanza della libertà personale. Tuttavia, vedremo che fino ai primi anni Duemila non c'erano abbastanza film distopici per creare un genere.

Nel secondo capitolo si indagherà sul concetto di potere immaginativo e si cercherà di delineare il ruolo e l'influenza del cinema sulla società e viceversa: il cinema infatti, non serve solo come fonte di intrattenimento, ma anche come potente mezzo di comunicazione, espressione e impatto culturale. Esso funge da piattaforma per affrontare le questioni sociali e stimolare il pensiero critico. I film possono accendere conversazioni, sensibilizzare e ispirare cambiamenti sociali portando l'attenzione su questioni urgenti. Ha un profondo impatto sull'immaginario collettivo della società.

Infine, nel terzo capitolo, verranno esplorati tre film in particolare che hanno segnato tre generazioni diverse: Blade Runner, Matrix e V per Vendetta.

Lo scopo dell'analisi sarà quello di raccontare la distopia come il prodotto delle ansie presenti e passate, un contenitore utile a riflettere sui problemi sociali e sulle loro possibili conseguenze.

Se si considera la proliferazione di narrazioni incentrate su temi distopici nell'offerta audiovisiva contemporanea, è impossibile immaginare o rappresentare una realtà diversa da quella distopica. In un certo senso, la distopia permette quindi alle persone di prepararsi al futuro, di risvegliare le coscienze offrendo gli strumenti e la possibilità di reagire.