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The Female Nature: Representations Of Motherhood And Nature In Dystopian Films

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DYSTOPIAN FILMS

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THE FEMALE NATURE: REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD AND NATURE IN

DYSTOPIAN FILMS

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This study will explore female representation and conceptualization of nature in dystopian narratives by examining dystopian films. The study is guided by film theory and ecofeminism to investigate themes of domination of both nature and women. The main goal is to examine the structure, themes, dialogue, and visuals in the films to explore the underlying essence of dystopian narratives and examine roles of reproduction and motherhood of female characters. The study contributes to previous studies on female and nature representation in media.

Key words: ecofeminism, film theory, media representation, nature, women, dystopia, climate fiction, Mad Max: Fury Road, Snowpiercer, Idiocracy, Children of Men

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the first two decades of the 2000s there has been a rising popularity of

environmental dystopian narratives. The movie sub-genre slowly shifted from presenting fears of

nuclear fallout, the technological takeover, and the zombie apocalypse to exploring the

possibilities of human survival in environmentally doomed futures. This popular trend has been

present since the 1960s embracing all types of media. In an analytical survey, 100 literary works

were identified that dealt with the theme of climate change. The examined works were published

between 1962 and 2011, and the authors noted an increase during the twenty-first century

(Trexler & Johns-Putra, 2011). The current decade has also seen successful film and television

franchises with dystopian films like *A.I.* (2001), *Terminator 3* (2003), *The Day After Tomorrow*

(2004), *The Island* (2005), *Wall-E* (2008), *District 9* (2009), *The Hunger Games* (2012), *Dawn of*

the Planet of the Apes (2014), *Divergent* (2014), *Ex-Machina* (2015), *Blade Runner 2049* (2017),

and *Annihilation* (2018). This trend has also been present in television with series like *Black*

Mirror (2011-present), *The 100* (2014), *The Man in the High Castle* (2015-present), *3%* (2016),

*C*olony (2016-2018), *Westworld* (2016-present), *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-present), *Altered*

Carbon (2018-present), *Love, Death, & Robots* (2018) and *The Rain* (2018-present). These are

only a few of the many examples from a long list of dystopian narratives.

There is a high demand for fictional apocalyptic scenarios and the entertainment media

have voraciously catered for it. Eco-dystopias have not only become increasingly popular but

also have the potential to show anxieties toward unsustainable futures. Brummet (1984) argues

that by paying attention to the messages of narrative pieces a critic can identify what the culture

it was created within is "celebrating our mourning" (p. 161). Popular media, like film and

television, may be the ideal script to know what our current society praises and disapproves of. Cinema can have another purpose besides its entertainment value, as it can also act as a historical document. Of course, climate fiction is not recording real events, but rather documenting the views that our society holds. In the case of this study, the objective is to focus on what the dystopian films are expressing about nature and women in apocalyptic scenarios.

Unquestionably, the environmental movement has been happening for more than 50 years now, but discourses of environmental concern are barely making it into mainstream spaces. These discourses are no longer contained in previously banned books like *Silent Spring* (1962) and *The Giving Tree* (1964), or in climate change summits with diplomats and scientists. The conversation about climate change is becoming more accessible and present as it now exists in some of the television series that we binge watch and in the movies that we consume. We live in a society that has slowly been realizing its impact on the environment and is now reflecting these realizations in popular media. It is important to look at what these discourses are saying — whether they are fictional or nonfictional — to examine how we are talking about the environment, whether there is any difference from earlier decades, and how much progress we have made. As previously stated, cinema carries a communicative potential to express the values of a society. These expressions can be accounted as historical documents of how we talk and think about the environment.

For many years the environment has been represented as Mother Nature and been conceptualized as a giving entity that provides life through its resources. Similarly, women are expected to be sensible, nurturing, and devoted in their roles of motherhood. The twenty-first century has also seen more acceptance towards feminist ideals that asks us to challenge these

gender stereotypes and to deal with matters of reproductive justice. Overall women have been fighting for the control of their bodies, thus expressions like "My body my choice!" chanted by demonstrators in marches against abortion bans (Chandler, 2019, para. 1). There is a parallel between the control of female bodies and the control of natural resources that I am interested in exploring. It is important to look at the representation of female figures in their roles in reproduction to examine how stereotypical female roles are perpetuated or challenged. In addition, the examination of nature in media can tell us about the possible reasoning behind its control and exploitation.

Since eco-dystopias have become more popular than ever, they deserve critical examination. Overall, cinema has the potential to reflect the values and the perspectives of the society in which it was created. Popular culture can reach a wide audience and reinforce commonly favored ideologies. Because of this, popular culture has become a significant site of study and has branched out into different fields like film studies, cultural studies, and the study of mass media. Cinema is not only a product to be consumed. It can also act as a "script" and has the ability to be formative in cultural ideas even with films that seem to be made solely to entertain (Hedges, 1991, p. 110; Geiger & Rutsky, 2005). Since dystopian films often present scenarios in which the human race is on the brink of extinction or living in dreadful worlds, they have the potential to express the anxieties of society. These narratives of environmental fallout may be referred as "eco-dystopias," "ecotopias," or "climate fiction" (Hughes & Wheeler, 2013; Klonowska, 2018; Colebrook, 2017). These narratives are unique in the way that they not only present threats to the human population and possible extinction, but also present ecologically damaged scenarios. These narratives of an environmental apocalypse often present a world that

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is no longer fruitful for humanity or one in which humans are not in control of nature. Climate fiction often can carry the assumption that human extinction is equivalent to the end of the world, and that the world will only be fixed once the crisis that afflicts humanity comes to an end.

The objective of this study is to explore how dystopian films represent the "end of the world" as an anthropocentric event and to analyze the role that female figures and nature have in these narratives. Dystopian narratives can be used to examine the potential anxieties and fears that society has in relation to an environmental apocalypse. This research asks questions like: What are dystopian films saying about society today? How do they represent nature in these apocalyptic scenarios? And what are the roles of women in these films? Although these questions may not solve the environmental crisis of today, they may be some of the many pieces for examining society's framing of nature and with that how climate change is discussed and understood. The messages that films communicate are not merely created in a vacuum. They are charged with cultural and social ideals and, in consequence, can act as historical documents that give an insight on how our current society conceptualizes nature and women today.

1.1 DYSTOPIAN FICTIONS

It can be argued that other media imagery has the potential to reflect these anxieties such as advertising and documentaries. However, fiction has the potential to present extreme scenarios of doom. According to Tuzun (2018), apocalyptic dread "is intensified by our collective anxiety about events that lie outside our individual control" and science-fiction is an appropriate genre to depict fears with "worst-case scenarios unfolding in (post-)apocalyptic settings" (pp. 188-189). Both horror and science fiction create a sense of dread, fear, and alarm in audiences. The

important difference between the two genres is that science fiction creates a fear of possible scenarios. It is the sense of "this could actually happen" that gives environmental dystopias a more effective impact on their audience. Because of this, it is important to examine what they are communicating and how they are framing it.

For example, Evans (2018) describes climate fiction as an extension of science fiction and a popular sub-genre that is a response to climate change. Also, the importance of climate fiction lies in its potential to "build scientific literacy and eco-political engagement" (p. 484). Clarke (2013), however, argues that before any science related to climate change and global warming emerged, there was climate fiction with the work of J. G. Ballard. *The Drowned World* (1962) envisioned a world after the melting of the ice-caps, and *The Crystal World* (1966) is about a crystal that can absorb all matter on Earth. As they were written in a different time, Clarke (2013) argues that they carry characteristics of their era and were more likely inspired by surrealism and fears related to World War II and Hiroshima (p. 19). Clarke notes that Ballard's work does not place responsibility for the environmental crises onto humans, but says that it encourages readers to think on how humans will be entangled in these apocalyptic scenarios. Dystopian films in particular can trace the evolution of environmental imagination. In an analysis of four dystopian films, two from the early 1970s, *Silent Running* (1972), *Soylent Green* (1973), and two from the late 1990s, *eXistenZ* (1999), and *Gattaca* (1997), Hughes (2013) argues that there is a shift in views of the environment and how humans, as a species, relate to it (p. 37). On one side, the earliest films present a lament for the loss of nature but make sure to maintain a nature/culture dichotomy that separates them. In contrast, the latest films show hesitation toward considering nature as valuable (Hughes, 2013). In this way, the films act as historical documents,

that not necessarily record true events, but rather record conceptualizations of nature through the decades.

Another prospect for the analysis of climate fiction is that these narratives have the potential to present visions of humanity in the current geological era, the "Anthropocene"[1]. For Buchholz (2019) the term Anthropocene can invoke ideas of environmental crisis, but it can also convene possibilities of collectivity in human beings. Buchholz argues that the discourse surrounding the Anthropocene is characterized by an aspiration toward solidarity and responsibility to fix the environmental crisis caused by humans (p. 365). In contrast, Evans (2018) argues that the periodization of climate change shows a hegemonic and imperialistic perspective toward unsustainable contexts. Narratives of environmental crises in climate fiction do not depict a fictional and strange world, but rather one that already exists, and that "capitalist logic ignores" (p. 485). In this way, climate fiction not only comments on the conceptualization of the environment but also can potentially examine social constructs.

Analyzing the imagination of dystopian futures is as crucial as analyzing the nonfictional representations of nature. Although environmental dystopias have been popular in recent years, they have not accomplished any actions related to fixing climate matters (Hulme, 2009). In response to this lack of action, it is important to address how literature can influence human behavior and its impact on nature (Warren, 1997). The first step to a solution is to understand the framing of environmental collapse. For example, many eco-feminist scholars have focused on the connections between the domination of nature and the passive representation of women and the female body. Other communication scholars have also discussed the anthropocentric

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[1] The Anthropocene is the current geological era distinguished by the impact of human activities on Earth (Ellis, 2018).

representation of nature, but these studies have focused on advertising or documentaries and not much is focused on fiction. Previous ecofeminist work has connected the oppression and control of women to that of nature and explored media representations of both, but has not analyzed these representations of motherhood and nature together. It is argued that the rewriting of conceptual frames of women and nature are needed, but one cannot happen without the other (Warren, 1997). Overall, these films can reveal current social values through the messages they are communicating in the stories that they tell about women and nature.

1.2 CREATING A THEORETICAL FRAME

While film theory may be the most suitable framework for understanding the messages that a film is communicating it still needs other theories to guide and focus the observations. Thus this study will use an ecofeminist theoretical approach in addition to film theory. While film theory aids in illustrating the connections of the film to reality, ecofeminism focuses on the ways in which the domination of females is connected to that of nature. To add to the understanding of film through film theory, it is important to lay out a foundation for dystopian narratives and an understanding of how nature has often been seen. For example, previous research on representation of nature has identified an anthropocentric view of nature that reduces the natural world to a tool that benefits humans (Koger & Winter, 2010; Corbett, 2002). In a similar way, work that has analyzed dystopian films focuses on a fear of the loss of control of nature and the potential to expose human condition (Hughes & Wheeler, 2013).

In order to complement ecofeminist theory, previous studies on motherhood were also explored and consulted. These studies allow researchers to recognize the foundation of placed expectations on women to be mother figures. Feminist studies have agreed on the labor that

motherhood entails for women and how this labor is unequal in contrast to that of fatherhood (Stearney, 1994; Feasey, 2012). This work has also taken into consideration the responsibility of exploring the naturalization of motherhood for women, or as defined by Adrianne Rich (1976), the "natural mother" (p. 34). Meanwhile, ecofeminism has also identified the feminization of nature and explored the recovery of nature by women (Merchant, 2013; Yates, 2017). Many views in feminism and ecofeminism clash on this topic. Early feminist scholars argued that putting an environmental responsibility on women encourages the equating of women with nature, and therefore, makes them less than culture (Ortner, 1972; Stearney, 1994). In contrast, other scholars argue that the connection of women with nature should be embraced and that the dichotomy that places culture over nature should be questioned (Merchant, 2013; Yates, 2017). Still, ecofeminist scholarship agrees on the notion that there is a simultaneous domination of nature and women.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY AND TEXTS

In order to answer the research questions, I propose using a qualitative research method to examine the emerging patterns on how women as characters and nature as a landscape are framed. To be more specific, the media analysis method proposed here is textual narrative analysis. This method seems best suited, since it focuses on the various elements of a narrative: structure, themes, dialogue, and visuals. In this methodological process, three views of each film will be required as one focuses on a combination of structure and theme, a second view focuses on dialogue, and the final one on visuals. The objective of a narrative textual analysis is to examine a work as a text that helps the reader make sense of the world (McKee, 2003). Similarly, film theory has that aim for film, but narrative analysis asks questions on why a story is told in a

particular way (Bereiss, 2015).

1.3.1 FILMS TO BE ANALYZED

Overall, this study is interested in analyzing eco-dystopian films produced after the beginning of the new millennium. The selected films for this study are *Children of Men* (2006), *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015), *Snowpiercer* (2014) and *Idiocracy* (2006). As previously mentioned, the twenty-first century saw an increasing popularity in fictional environmental apocalypses (Hughes & Wheeler, 2013). Through exploratory internet research, a list of 83 dystopian films was collected; all of those were produced between the years 2000 and 2018. From this extensive list, only films with a rating of 75% or more were considered for this research. Finally, four films were selected with a variability in genres; *Snowpiercer* as science fiction and fantasy, *Idiocracy* as comedy, *Children of Men* as drama, and *Mad Max: Fury Road* as action.

The four films selected show different environmental dystopias. In *Snowpiercer,* the cause of the climate unbalance is a chemical substance that has lowered the temperatures of Earth extremely. There is one main female character that takes on a motherhood role, but other characters also take on a parenthood role. *Mad Max: Fury Road* presents a deserted wasteland in which tribes fight for basic resources like, water, sustainable soil, and gasoline. Female characters are seen solely for their ability to produce life, and nature is seen in its ability to give back resources. *Fury Road* presents hyperboles of gender roles: females as birth-givers or food providers for infants, and males as warriors who will fight against other clans to take over resources. In this film both the Earth and women are exploited to the maximum in order to mine the very last resources that they can provide. *Children of Men* is a story that presents the end of

humanity, but not the end of the natural world. It shows an extinct human fertility in contrast with a surviving nature. Pollution is presented in the background with smog and contaminated land and rivers in the presence of human life, but it also shows a thriving nature in spaces abandoned by humans. Kee is one of the main characters and is extremely important as she is the first woman to be pregnant in more than 18 years. Her character is seen "as [a] vessel of hope for the future" (Sparling, 2014, p. 161). *Idiocracy* presents a doomed society in the year 2505 in which the average IQ has decreased exceedingly. This decrease in intelligence has caused an environmental decline as well. The film also exemplifies a society that values violence and sexuality and reduces women to sex workers and men to violent pawns.

1.4 GUIDELINE FOR STUDY

This study will seek to investigate the nature of dystopian films and representations of female figures and the environment. The representation of these will be used to examine themes of domination of nature and women and their roles in reproduction, all in order to explore the possible connections with their exploitation. To support the overall study, this thesis will be composed of the following chapters: chapter two is a review of literature that offers an overview of film theory and ecofeminism as frameworks for this study. As previously mentioned, film theory and ecofeminist theories are supported by works about media representation, dystopian narratives, and roles of motherhood. Chapter three explains in detail the method, theoretical framework, and procedures to try to answer the proposed research questions. The analyzed texts will also be described, and the rationale for their selection will be further explained. Chapter four presents the findings of the study. The themes found in the films will be explained and this analysis will be followed by a discussion on the findings. Finally, chapter five is the conclusion

of the study. It offers a summary of the thesis and addresses limitations and recommendations for future studies.

In conclusion, films have the potential to serve human communication. Even if the intent of cinema is to entertain it can also host social and cultural ideals, as these films are not created in a vacuum. They take from the culture they were created within and communicate what we celebrate and condemn what we despise. In particular, eco-dystopian narratives host the environmental anxieties of current U.S. society. Popular media have the potential to act as historical documents that record what we value. Just like archeologist look at hieroglyphics on temple walls and at god figurines to find out what an ancient culture praised, we can look at films today to asses the value that we put on nature and women. The conceptualization of nature and women starts with how we think about them, then it is followed by how we represent them, and ultimately by how we treat them.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

By paying attention to what people express a critic can discover what the culture is "celebrating or mourning" (Brummet, 1984, p. 161). Brummet argues that Burke's approach to literary criticism can be applied to mass media like television and films, because fiction carries an anecdotal characteristic. Most of the scholarly work focusing on representations of nature in media focus on advertising and documentaries, but not much has focused on fiction. This thesis aims to explore how dystopian films reflect cultural and social views on nature and climate change. Dystopian films often present scenarios of environmental fallout and humanity's extinction, and they reflect the anxieties associated with these. Most environmental films present a human-centered perspective that offers a limited view of nature and solutions for environmental collapse (Colebrook, 2017; Stark, 2013). Previous eco-feminist work has connected the oppression and control of women to that of nature and has explored media representations of both, but has not analyzed these representations of motherhood and nature together.

The following literature review aims to lay out the bases of film theory and ecofeminist theory as frameworks for this study. In addition, it will also provide an examination of previous scholarly work on dystopian films, ideologies of motherhood, and representations of nature in media, and then present the research questions that will guide this study.

2.1 REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE IN MEDIA

In order to look into how nature is represented in media it is necessary to examine how nature is understood. Worldwide views are socially constructed, thus so are views of the environment, which are deeply philosophical and psychological (Koger & Winter, 2010).

According to Koger and Winter, the philosophical contributions of key thinkers of the Enlightenment and Industrial eras were framed on four assumptions about nature. The first one is that nature is composed of inert, physical elements. Thoughts on the environment have evolved from believing that nature was an intellectual being acting on its own Godly desires, to being a mechanical nature. The second assumption is that, 2) nature can be and should be controlled. With the understanding of nature came the control of nature, and Western Judeo-Christian religions encouraged this view of nature being a resource available for men. This is followed by the third assumption that, 3) this control by individual human beings is meant for the seeking of private and economic gain, and finally, 4) the assumption that this gain will result in progress. The progress, however, is merely economic and not for the benefit of nature.

These assumptions have created a Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) that encourages individualistic attitudes that place economic gain above negative effects on the environment, and is the product of centuries of Western intellectualism (Koger &Winter, 2010). Corbett finds similar applications of these views on nature in advertising. She argues that there is no such thing as green advertising and that this is an oxymoron, because the only green product is one that is not produced (Corbett, 2002). There are three reasons for this: first that advertising sees nature as a commodity, and that it encourages us to see natural resources as private and "possessible" (p.143). Second, advertising sees nature as something that exists for the pleasure of humans, and its only purpose is to serve us. For example, ads to sell all-terrain trucks are an invitation to enter nature as a space that is waiting for humans to explore it, while bottled water like Fiji markets it like "untouched" water that is at the human hand's reach (p. 150). These ideas also imply that there is a disconnection between humans and nature, and that they function in

different spheres, similar to the nature/culture dichotomy. Finally, advertising has perpetuated a simplistic idea of nature being sublime, noble, and admirable, which is dangerous in the sense that it does not portray its true destructive elements or the destruction humans have caused on it (Corbett, 2002). Peterson, Essen, Hansen, and Peterson (2016) offer an explanation to wildlife crime as being a consequence of practices that are adapted to the neoliberal markets. They take on Ramutsindela's (2004) definition of post-colonialism referring to contexts in which people are not necessarily subjected to colonial ruling, but still accept western concepts of nature. Peterson et al. (2016) add to this definition by suggesting that the oppressive colonial structure is the neoliberal market hegemony that has a tendency to turn nature into "alienable property" and that creates opportunities to secure and commercialize nature (p. 402). Peterson et al. (2016) argue that wildlife crime are actions that break laws that conceptualize nature as a property to be stolen, poached, or hunted. Nature has always been closely connected to the economy with the privatization of resources for human use. Economic systems were developed under the assumption that nature is an entity that is available for human consume.

Also, images of sublime nature are often used in marketing from an anthropocentric point of view that places humanity in a position of superiority and separated from nature. Brunner and Dawson (2017) define the sublime as those discourses, images, or narratives that "demonstrate the smallness and insignificance of humans in the face of [nature's] tremendousness" (p. 390). A "fear-inspiring" perception acts as a challenge to be taken by humans to explore the risky terrains of nature in the harshest conditions (p. 388). Even when these messages have a mission of conservation, selling this practice of sustainability further creates a subjugated view of nature that can only be saved by humans. Brunner and Dawson refer to these narratives as "selling

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nature to save it" (p. 387), and similar to Corbett's ideas on green advertising, they become an oxymoron. Portrayals of humans scaling natural spaces do not produce a more ecological view, but rather conceives it as domesticated and impotent (p. 396).

Narratives of nature conservation are also presented in a contradictory manner that encourages its conservation while also justifying the exploitation of resources. Dickinson (2014) calls this contradiction ecocultural schizophrenia. It encourages a connection with nature, but at the same time a separation by limiting closeness. In a quantitative analysis, exploring the messages included in a K-12 educational program on forest conservation, Dickinson (2014) found that adults often use a "stay away-get close" discourse when teaching children about nature conservation (p. 612). This ecocultural schizophrenia oversimplifies the get close approach to nature and has in consequence unsustainable practices. Nature is conceptualized as oppositional to humanity but also connected, as it is not only presented in a culture/nature dichotomy, but also an anthropocentric-ecocentric, androcentric-gynocentric (masculinity versus femininity), and exploitation-idealism approach; this further pushes its treatment as the "other" (p. 615). The contradictory narratives of ecocultural schizophrenia encourage the audience to "appreciate, manage, and protect [trees], but remain far enough away to be comfortable with cutting them down" (Dickinson, 2014, p. 628). There is a tension between the right amount of closeness and distance from nature. Dickinson argues to reject both approaches and instead take on a co-presence with the environment as a web and not a hierarchy. Overall, images in media have a great effect on audiences. According to Dunaway (2015), media images can demonstrate environmental politics, but they can also "shape the bounds of public debate by naturalizing particular meanings of environmentalism" (p. 1). Dunaway argues that U.S. media

imagery is limited as it filters and ignores proposals for environmental change and prevents the

imagination of sustainable futures. By analyzing popular images in media such gas masks the

Daisy Girl, or the Crying Indian, Dunaway argues that media may have popularized the concept

of environmentalism in the early 1970s. Still, they masked the environmental efforts as a "moral

cleanup" and often ignore ecological inequalities (p. 46).

As previously mentioned, another binary by which nature is understood is that of an

androcentric-gynocentric approach. Milsten and Dickenson (2012) take on the critical-cultural

environmental communication framework to analyze how this approach affects practices of

sustainability. Although their arguments agree with those in the ecofeminist section, their

methods focus on the framing and dialect used to conceptualize the environment. While a

gynocentric dialect is the leading understanding of nature, as a "she" that should be respected

like an other, it is the androcentric approach that is privileged when human economic gain is

prioritized (Milsten & Dickenson, 2012). The way humanity speaks about nature contrasts with

the way it is actually treated. In a similar way, individual framing is privileged to understand

nature as separated pieces of an ecosystem, rather than seeing it as being an interconnected

whole (p. 517).

Additionally, imagining nature in an anthropocentric manner creates a limited

understanding of environmental functions. For example, an analysis of the documentary *March

of the Penguins* (2005) questions this humanistic approach. Stephen (2010) argues that the

politics of reproductive futurism are present in the documentary and that these narrow views of

animal reproduction produce a deficient analysis of animal nature. The documentary humanizes

nature by projecting human behavior onto the interactions of penguins, but the film highlights

the struggles and challenges that penguins go through in order to bring life. Stephen describes the approach of *March of the Penguins* as having a "reproductive futurism" (p. 105) agenda, referring to the belief that children are the future and an embodiment of the promise of the future. The term was coined by queer theorist Lee Edelman (2011) and places importance on the imaginary children of the future. In a way, arguments against abortion and reproductive control are based on a reproductive futuristic approach. *March of the Penguins* is about social structures and human reproduction projected onto nature. This documentary offers a conservative view by focusing on the nuclear family as monogamous heterosexual relationships and an anthropocentric frame as it humanizes nature (Stephen, 2010, p. 113).

In conclusion, Western representations of nature in media are deeply anthropocentric as they constantly place humanities' benefits over the needs of nature. An anthropocentric view also creates a limited and inaccurate understanding of nature, since it tries to conceptualize animal reproduction and ecological functions based on human values. Nature is also perceived based on a nature/culture dichotomy, meaning that it sees humanity as a separate entity. These representations are toxic since they reproduce the subjugation of nature. Because of this, it is important to question the framing of environmental issues.

2.2 FILM THEORY

Cinema is an ideological reflection of the context and society in which it exists. The narratives and discourses in film are not merely created in a vacuum but reflect the point of views of those producing them. Cinema's existence is based on the desires of the spectators, but it also performs on a need for representation (Hedges, 1991). Images and the production of narratives with imagery can act as evidence of what the fantasies, discourses, and realities of a

culture are (Kapla, 2001). Film theory aims to understand the essence of cinema by providing

frameworks to understand its relation to reality (McDonald, 2016). Early film theorist André

Bazin argued that film's defining characteristic is its bond with the social world and its capacity

to demonstrate life's complexity. Bazin's work helped to lay the foundations to question and

justify the importance of cinema (Sinnerbrink, 2012). Cinema can act as a window as it frames

what the viewer sees on the screen. Another group of thought, with theorists like Balázs and

Arnheim, focuses on cinema's ability to manipulate perception through montage and framing

(Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015). What they do have in common is that both conceptualize the

relationship between the film and the audience. The metaphor of the cinema as a window can be

explained as, "contemplating an external reality from a safe distance," but can also act as a

mirror displaying on a desiring subject and allowing the spectator to project and appropriate (p.

34).

　　Feminist theory took on the task to critique the sexism of film driven by a male point of

view (Colman, 2014) and questioned the notion of "realism" and "naturalness" in the film/

audience relationship, arguing the limitations in film analysis and examining patriarchal

ideologies (Welsh, 1987). Laura Mulvey's (1975) significant work is influenced by the

psychoanalytical theory of Freud and Lacan in order to ground arguments of the connected

association of women as an object of the male gaze; with the gaze being the main element to

understand subjectivity. The female body has been seen through a voyeuristic trip in cinema that

positions men as active and women as passive (Mulvey, 1975). Still, Mulvey suggests feminist

film theory should study beyond the male gaze and draw connections between female

sexualization and the culture of consumption in Hollywood. Women in film are presented as "stages to be passed through, or spaces to be invaded and conquered" (Hedges, 1991, p. 69).

Film theory, feminist or not, has the ability to create and understand the position that women hold in film and society (Welsh, 1987). Film narratives limited by a male gaze follow an active/passive dichotomy similar to the nature/culture dichotomy. If a critical analysis of film has the capability of identifying the subjugation and objectification of the female body, a similar assumption can be made of nature and scholarship on ecofeminism explores these similarities.

2.3 DYSTOPIAN FILMS

Within film theory, scholars imply the importance of observing the context in which media are produced. Literature regarding dystopian films agrees that these films often represent the fears and anxieties of the societies that they are produced in. The scholarly works that will be mentioned in this section comment on the individual framing that dystopian narratives often present when talking about environmental issues. For example, Klonowska (2018) analyzes the concepts of utopia and dystopia in current films and contemporary culture as having an intellectual value by acting as natural vehicles to express political and social issues, rather than just fulfilling a role of entertainment. The two futuristic views can be seen as opposite sides of the same coin, as one cannot exist without the other. If a utopia is a rendition of human desires, dystopia represents the opposite of these ideals. Klonowska (2018) mentions scholars such as Kumar, Sargent, Blaim, and Gruszewska-Blaim to define dystopia. These definitions share a negative scenario that can be reached by a failure of positive action, a worse version of current society, or by being a negative mirror of a utopia. While dystopian narratives achieved rising popularity, in contrast with utopian narratives during the post-war era, the second millennium has

seen an increase of ecological dystopian narratives, making them more likely to resonate with and attract current audiences (Kolonowksa, 2018).

In an introduction to *Critical Survey's* issue on eco-dystopias, Hughes and Wheeler (2013) argue that climate change and environmental apocalypses are dominating popular culture and mainstream screens. Sci-fi has allowed the exploration of apocalyptic disaster possibilities, as this genre has a common theme of controlling nature. The articles in *Critical Survey* not only argue the imminent presence of environmental anxieties, but also an anthropocentric point of view.

For example, Stark (2013) offers an analysis of *The Road* (2009)*,* a film that presents a complete environmental collapse in which only humans survive. The film assumes that the end of the world comes with the end of human civilization. Thus Stark argues that placing humans as the chosen witnesses of the apocalypse makes McCarthy's text anthropocentric at heart (p. 72). Stark also offers a view of dystopian films and literature, "as a repository of our already existing fears, projected into a future world" and that climate fiction is a perfect exemplar since it is based on existing suspicions made about climate change (p.78). Hughes (2013) argues that dystopian films can illustrate the changing conceptualizations of nature through the decades. He used four films to conduct an analysis: two from the early 1970s, *Silent Running* (1972) and *Soylent Green* (1973), and two from the late 1990s, *eXistenZ* (1999) and *Gattaca* (1997). The earliest films showed a "lament" for the destruction of nature, but also a nature/culture dichotomy that separated humanity from the environment (p.37). In contrast the films of the 1990s showed a doubt on the value of the environment. Hughes determines the goal of the characters to be "to restore narrative order and control over their own stories" (p 37). Hughes identifies two things:

first that the characters strive for control and look for a place in nature, and second that this placement is imagined in relation with technology. Nature, as we know it, may seem like it doesn't have an important part in dystopian narratives, but it is in its absence that it takes on an important role (Hughes, 2013)

What Kolonowska refers to as "ecotopias" and Hughes and Wheeler as "eco-dystopias," Colebrook calls "cli-fi" or climate fiction. Colebrook (2017) cites Frederic Jameson when he already attributed "someone" else with the idea that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (p. 102). For Colebrook what we understand as the world would be all of our ideas of society, hope, politics, etcetera. Narratives of the end of the world are actually the end of these ideas and "is really to say that they depict the end of abundance for us" (p. 103). These scenarios ask the audience to imagine a reality in which, while human survival is at a threshold, corporations are in fine fettle. This may seem dystopian for some, but for others, it is a current experience (Colebrook, 2017, p. 103). Stories of "the end of the world" may be received as cautionary tales, but only for the privileged audiences that see them as an improbable future. Colebrook further argues that these narratives, rather than being imaginative, are limited by a privileged perspective.

In a similar way, Patrick D. Murphy explores the underlying discourse of environmental concerns in these narratives through *The Walking Dead* (2010-present). According to Murphy (2018), zombie apocalypse narratives present a world "that has been raped and pillaged" (p. 53), and it is the job of those living in it to reclaim and recover these environments. Issues addressed in the environmental discourse of the "undead" include the conflict related to the control of natural resources, corporate excessive consumption, the decadence of the environment, and a

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collective indifference toward these. Survivalist narratives are present throughout other apocalypse scenarios, not only the zombie apocalypse, as "scarcity" in contrast with the previous over-consumption. *The Walking Dead* offers opportunities to expose human interaction and response in the case of a need to manage limited resources. The series exposes the contrast in two possibilities of the human condition: self-interest versus collective interest. In the case of *The Walking Dead,* collaboration is vital for human survival but is shown to be difficult to accomplish (Murphy, 2018). Kolonowska (2018) agrees that popular ecotopias are more likely to address the individual rather than the social and political. Fagan (2017) also comments on the human condition that is exposed in ecological apocalypse narratives. Since these narratives are often framed on an ethical debate, they are not effective in creating progressive thinking about climate change (p. 226). These narratives are not framing the ecological crisis as a political issue, but rather an ethical one. The lenses through which climate change is understood are important because these will reveal truths about the human condition (Fagan, 2017). Progress in creating a conscience for environmental issues remains slow, and the narratives at their core are very anthropocentric. Fagan makes the statement that futuristic, sci-fiction narratives offer a mirror for current society to reflect upon, but they also endorse current power structures.

The connections between the domination of women and nature through power structures have been previously explored by ecofeminist scholars. For example, Copley (2013) believes that the ecological crisis is the consequence of not only a patriarchal culture but also a Eurocentric capitalist one. Still, women are not meant to be the sole saviors of the Earth from an ecological apocalypse. In contrast with Fagan, Copley places both collective and ecological action as necessary to avoid ecological crises. An analysis of authors Margaret Atwood and

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Marge Piercy's work speculates that women's historical oppression and lesser connection with the status quo creates a more egalitarian and democratic position (Copley, 2013). Ideas regarding the domination of nature and women will be further explored in the following section on ecofeminism.

An exploration of science-fiction narratives offers a catalogue exemplifying the roles of women in dystopian settings, as well as utopian settings, and demonstrates that feminist thought has been present in the science-fiction genre since its inception. For example, Chetia (2017) explores the influence of female writers in the science fiction genre commenting on classics like *Frankenstein* (1818)*,* which is broadly accepted as the first sci-fi novel. According to Chetia, Mary Shelley's work exposes the roles of women in the 1800s as mothers, sisters, and wives. The character of Caroline Frankenstein is seen as the epitome of womanhood, displaying characteristics of "a nurturer, bearer, and selflessness," but also passiveness (Chetia, 2017, p. 20). Women's submissiveness is merely a product of the society that Shelley was part of.

Besides women's role in society, Shelley's work questions the biological aspect of reproduction with the possibility of scientific advances making it obsolete. *Mizora: A Prophecy* (1975) by Mary E. Bradley Lane and *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman are stories about all-female societies that do not need men to reproduce, and explore possibilities of alternative forms of reproduction. Other novels that Chetia mentions take on societies with no gender roles, dictatorships, or communities are based on slave labor. The literature on dystopian narratives agrees that these are vehicles that expose and explore human desires and fears. They share a view of reckless humanity and a craving for the control of nature that will result in environmental crises, but these imaginations are limited to picturing an end of abundance driven

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by a fear of scarcity. This thesis will attempt to connect these anxieties with human reproduction and nature's fertility.

2.4 ECOFEMINISM

The ecofeminist framework focuses on the connections between the domination of nature and domination of women and the female body. Ecofeminist scholars argue that these connections are conceptual, linguistic, and symbolic. This entanglement comes in the form of women becoming "naturalized," and nature "feminized" (Tong, 2018, p. 255). The feminization of nature is represented in the control of natural resources or the discovery and conquest of land, but also when nature is venerated as a female Mother Nature. Early scholars in feminism like Simone de Beauvoir and Sherry B. Ortner argued that women's liberation comes with the separation from nature, while later scholars argue for the mother-nature link to be embraced (Tong, 2018). Beauvoir's ideas urged women to be freed from their entrapment by nature in order to overcome their position as the second sex. Beauvoir (1952) saw the female body's nature of reproduction and the duties of motherhood as alienating. Early perspectives on ecofeminism regarding nature comply with the nature/culture dichotomy, and while some supported this connection others rejected it. Universal beliefs of women's association with nature come from three reasons: 1) female psychology being closer to nature since they are birth-givers and nurturers, 2) the role of women belonging to the private sphere where they are surrounded by "animal-like infants," 3) the female psyche is socialized for mothering, and because of this has more relational and concrete tendencies than men (Ortner, 1974, p. 24). Furthermore, Ortner saw women's position as "intermediate," as being below men but above nature, and this "social actuality"—the three reasons previously mentioned—must be changed in order to allow women

to be equally cultural as men and escape nature (p. 16).

Meanwhile, Stearney (1994) argues that while the mother archetype is a universal image, using it as a metaphor in ecofeminism reduces women and nature only to their reproductive abilities. The mother archetype depends on the continuous patriarchal idea of it as being, "natural, limitless, and exploitable" (p.146). Stearney's analysis consists of four stages, with one exploring the harmful appropriation of the mother figure in ecofeminism. While the mother archetype is strong by being a universal symbol, it relies on previous assumptions of making womanhood equal to motherhood and drawing the connections between women's reproductive capacities and the cycles of nature (Stearney, 1994). Ecofeminist scholars frame the approach to environmental issues in caring, compassionate, and accountable thinking, which are social female traits and the same "ethics of care" that assume women's role to bear and nurture children (p. 153). Women have the capabilities to bring in an ecological revolution and ensure human survival, but this comes as an extension of maternal roles still enforcing the ideas of thinking of women in reproductive standards and men in destructive ones. These ideas oversimplify women's identities as mothers that "provide all of our sustenance, rid us of our waste products, satisfy all of our wants and needs, and function as an exploitable, limitless, and self-sacrificing object" (p. 156) in a patriarchal society. Environment protection and restoration are also reduced to the ethics of care, rather than approaching these issues from the social, political, and economic frames they should.

Based on ecofeminist ideologies that reject female/nature bonding, Kuo (2017) draws the connections between the female body as a representation of nature and the protection of fetuses as further expressions of this exploitation. This is done by comparing Eastern and Western

thoughts towards abortion. Kuo argues that, "[i]f the Earth can be compared to a woman's body, her uterus might be perceived to be the source of life" (Kuo, 2017, p. 2). Christianity regards women as being closer to nature, and because of this, inferior and "in need of governance," with a role of domestic production and reproduction (p. 6). Eastern thought sees female nature as being cursed by five sufferings. Three of those relate to reproductive capabilities: menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. Thinking about the female body's value relying solely on its ability to give birth is similar to nature's ability to give life resources. Kuo further draws a parallel with the protection and treatment of fetuses over women's choices being similar to the treatment of natural resources as more important than the protection of nature itself. Women have been historically denied the right to decide on reproduction. Kuo borrows from Angela Davis' ideas to argue the view of the fetus as a symbol of nature. Davis (1983) offers a historical context review of the history of reproductive rights in the U.S., its intersection with race and class, and women's reproductive systems being controlled, either by encouraging forced sterilizations on minority women or depriving white women of birth control. In the beginning stages of the birth control movement, there was still no progress in the development of an effective form of birth control, but there was a decline in white birth rates. This was considered by politicians influenced by the eugenics movement as a "race suicide" (Davis, 1983). In response to arguments on the consequences of limiting the growth of the white race population, the movement took on a narrative arguing for the need for contraceptives to control the lower-income populations. It was considered a poor woman's duty to restrict the size of their families for economic and social wellness (p. 121). In other words, the women's rights movement for access to birth control is tainted by a history of racist and classist policies that protected desired white babies and

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discarded unwanted minorities. There is a parallel between the protection and rejection of fetuses and the treatment of some natural resources as economically valuable while the protection of nature is unprofitable.

Meanwhile, Merchant (2013) introduces the term "recovery narrative" when explaining two popular approaches to the Western understanding of nature. One approach is the biblical recovery in which Adam and Eve fall from the grace of God, followed by attempts to recover the Garden of Eden. This approach implies human gain in controlling Earth. The second approach implies a fall from past societies that were more equitable and ecologically productive, and that through sustainable practices these societies can be recovered. The second approach, however, does not imply human gain, but only that one for the environment (p. 11).

Interestingly, Yates (2017) explores how *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) challenges the Edenic recovery narrative. Traditionally, this narrative presents nature and women as passive objects while male figures are active subjects, but *Fury Road* allows nature and women to gain agency. Yates offers background on how other scholars have discussed the representation of nature as female, and the sense of seeing women as closer to nature referring to spiritual ecofeminism. Yates (2017) also addresses the concern of ecofeminist scholars with the nature/ culture dichotomy that equates women as being submissive and passive like nature, and men (with culture) as subjects. These fears further reinforce the dichotomy and place nature as less valuable than culture. *Fury Road* separates the nature/culture dichotomy by representing female nature as an active agent when the Edenic paradise is sought as a haven for feminist possibility, rather than an opportunity for a masculine agency (p. 358). The female characters of the film find freedom, not from the nature/passiveness binary, but from the patriarchal capitalism that kept

them captive. Ecofeminist scholars argue that we must stop thinking in these dichotomies, but that the Edenic recovery narrative should not necessarily be challenged or rejected because it encourages a passive idea of women and nature. It should rather be deconstructed to offer a space of agency and activeness that removes women and nature from a passive position.

2.5 IDEOLOGIES OF MOTHERHOOD

Sociologists and anthropologists have also theorized on the body as being part of the nature/culture dichotomy (Rich, 1976; Teman, 2003; Feasey, 2012). As previously mentioned in ecofeminist literature, sex has also been understood in this dichotomy as women have been associated with nature while men with culture. Early feminist scholars like Simone de Beauvoir considered the females as being trapped by nature and their reproductive bodies. Because of this dichotomy women's role in childbirth has also been seen as natural and encouraged an instinctive maternal bond.

Women are socialized to think that as mothers they must love selflessly and deeply. Rich (1976) argues that this assumption is social and institutional, rather than natural. Patriarchal thought has limited the possibilities of what the female body can be, and "come to view [female] physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny" (p. 39). Rich's work has been a classic, extensively quoted in the literature relating to feminist theory and motherhood. Because of this, it is essential to introduce what being a mother means with her work. The suffering of women as mothers is seen as necessary for the emotional grounding of humanity, so much that, "the mitigation, or removal, of that suffering, that identification, must be fought at every level, including the level of refusing to question it at all" (p. 30). This responsibility to bear children and nurture them to better humanity is defined by Rich as a sacred calling and can be understood

also as the institutionalization of motherhood. This institutionalization requires women to serve as the producers and nurturers of their children. As previously mentioned, women's reproductive systems have been policed by others; similarly, the definition and construction of motherhood is out of the control of women. In a way, motherhood and sexuality have been channeled to serve the interests of males, and any action that challenges this, like abortion, is considered to be a deviant (p. 34). The exploitation of women is not only limited to that of their reproductive abilities but also to their role of being nurturers.

Feminist theory has extensively analyzed female representation in media, but not much has been focused on representations of motherhood. There is a set of ideas that define the "correct" path to motherhood, and those women who do not fall into these categories are scrutinized and marginalized (Feasey, 2012). The media environment promotes and prioritizes images of mothers being "selfless and satisfied," and these conform to the ideology of "intensive mothering" (p. 3). In media, the intensive mothering ideology is constantly present, which is a mother that is devoted, and has no negative feelings towards her children, and can only give unconditional love (p 2). Rich (1976) also defined the "natural mother" as being someone with no identity outside of the gratification of being with her children and loving them with nothing but selfless love. The good mother is also that one that finds this role and devoted bonding as natural. Contemporary media environments romanticize and celebrate the intensive mothering ideology, even when the expectations are too high for current mothers. The reason this ideology has been able to remain is that motherhood is primarily a social practice that has been redefined with the change in social and economic factors (Feasey, 2012).

In another example, Teman's (2003) work has explored surrogacy and the roles of

motherhood in Israeli families who have legal and financial funds for technologically assisted

reproduction provided by the government. Teman explores the forms in which the ideas of a

natural maternal bond are challenged. Surrogacy violates social beliefs of nature, because it

eliminates the unique relationship between women's motherhood and nature: "mothers see

themselves as having failed to heed their 'natural' and national calling, whereas surrogates risk

doing something 'against their maternal nature,' that is, relinquishing the children they bear to

the custody of other" (Teman, 2003, p. 81). These ideas put in evidence Stearny's arguments on

the harmful appropriation of the mother figure in ecofeminism and views of womanhood and

motherhood as counterparts. The discourse used in the medicalized birth-giving process has

separated women from nature, as some of the testimonies of surrogates say that their "artificial"

pregnancy is disconnected from nature since they lack the natural maternal instincts (p. 84).

Reproductive technologies have allowed non-traditional mothers to shape the discourse through

which they approach their birth-giving experiences. For example, Jewish/Israeli society sees

women who reject their natural duty to reproduce (through abortion or refusing to bear children)

as deviants. Surrogate mothers take on a higher social risk since they participate in the

reproduction process and then reject custody. According to Teman, surrogate mothers juggle

these conflicting ideals by addressing their role in reproductive processes as having a mission to

help childless women reach their own "natural"/national goal" (p. 93). There is a term referring

to these actions and politics that relate to controlling and encouraging reproduction.

Reproductive governance was first coined by Morgan and Roberts and was defined as:

> [T]he mechanisms through which different historical configurations of actors – such as
>
> state, religious, and international financial institutions, NGOs, and social movements –

use legislative controls, economic inducements, moral injunctions, direct coercion, and ethical incitements to produce, monitor, and control reproductive behaviors and population practices. (Morgan & Roberts, 2012, p. 241)

Reproductive governance analyzes and offers a framework to study how the practices employed are intertwined with political and economic interests and actions (p. 241). It is important to pay attention to how laws, social movements, and economic incitements help to regulate, and to police reproduction.

Examples of reproductive governance can be found in a philosophical analysis by Gotlib (2016). She addresses the pro-natalist challenges that voluntarily childless women experience and the sources of the stigmatizing attacks: popular culture, law and policy, and medicine. Western pro-natalist practices elevate motherhood as the epitome of womanhood and have fetishized pregnancy (p. 328). For example, films and television shows often feature families with children or women in the process of marrying and forming a family. News stories encourage reproduction as well, and when they comment on the diversity of the U.S. families they often exclude the ones consisting of only two individuals with no children. Advertising as well caters and focuses on mothers by promoting products to be children friendly or perfect for the "busy mom" (p. 333).

Gotlib also comments on the economic concerns about the consequences that a shrinking population will have in the world market. For example, countries like Australia, Portugal, Russia, and the United Kingdom fund initiatives to promote childbearing through lower taxation and "baby bonuses," while the United States conservative parties use a discourse of pro-natalism to argue against birth control methods and abortion (p. 335). The definition and roles of

motherhood are not defined by women, as much as their reproductive decisions. While the mother figure is highly praised and continuously represented in media, it is also singularly exploited. Expectations of motherhood include selfless and unconditional love, which is socialized to the extent that believing in these roles must come instinctively.

Dystopian films can act as vehicles of human desires and fears, and this thesis will attempt to connect these anxieties of human reproduction with the fears of an environmental fallout. The objective of this study is to do an exploration of media (in this case dystopian films) and how they can represent the end of the world. The analysis of the films will explore the role female figures and nature have in these narratives. Thus, the following are the research questions that will guide the study:

RQ 1: What is the nature of dystopian films?

RQ 2: What do they say about the current anxieties of society?

RQ 3: What are the roles of females and nature in dystopian films?

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter took a look into film theory and ecofeminism as the needed frameworks for this study. Film theory offers a model to understand the relation between cinema and reality and places movies as a document to further study social context (McDonald, 2016). Previous work on dystopian films demonstrates that these films often show the dominant social anxieties. As for the 2000s and later, environmental fallout became the main topic for apocalyptical films. Ecofeminism, on the other side, studies the connection between the domination of nature and women (Tong, 2018). Previous research explored in the literature review agreed on the nature/culture dichotomy in which nature is seen as dominated by culture. Gender is seen through a similar lens with women being associated with nature and men with culture.

Moving on to this chapter, the goal of this study is to answer the following research questions: 1) What is the nature of dystopian films?; 2) What do they say about the current anxieties of society?; and 3)what are the roles of females and nature in dystopian films? To identify the major themes in the nature of dystopian films a qualitative approach is needed, and narrative film analysis seems to be the best suited for this study. Narrative analysis is broadly used in psychology to identify patterns and themes in patient interviews. In the case of film, I believe this method will be suitable since it focuses on thematics, the structure, dialogue, and visuals.

With regards to text selection, the reasons for choosing dystopian films are the following: 1) literature regarding dystopian films agrees that these films often represent the fears and anxieties of the societies that they are produced in; 2) the second millennium saw a rising

popularity in ecological dystopian narratives (Kolonowksa, 2018); 3) the narratives of dystopian films present scenarios in which humanity's survival is at a threshold, so the responsibility of reproduction is sharpened; and 4) these scenarios often present a nature that has ceased to give back resources. Overall, my objective is to further examine the major themes that define the nature of dystopian films and the roles that women and nature take in these films.

To achieve the goals of this thesis, I will be examining four films released in the 2000s: *Children of Men* (2006), *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015), *Idiocracy* (2006) and *Snowpiercer* (2014). First, film analysis will be discussed as a form of qualitative research. This section will be followed by different approaches to film analysis. Secondly, I will discuss textual narrative analysis as the research method to be used and the procedures for my analysis. Third, there's a description of the films that will be used as texts and the organization of data. Finally, I will revisit ecofeminism and film theory as frameworks for this study.

3.1 FILM ANALYSIS

The use of qualitative research has been relevant for understanding social relations. The specific methods may vary from interviewing, focus groups, and ethnographies to analyzing visual data like photography, film, and video. In the case of this study, the focus of analysis is film/cinema. Qualitative research can use media to study social constructs of reality in films (Metzler, 2014). This approach allows the researcher to ask questions such as, "How are people and things configured in the images, in the scenes, and sequence of scenes?" (p. 344). It also lets the researcher focus on internal structures of narrative by studying the film in relation to its external context. In contrast with other qualitative methods like interviewing, that also gives an insight into narrative, film analysis provides a non-verbal element of visuals. The objective of

film analysis is to bring awareness to the meaning of ideas and values that are conveyed in

movies (Geiger & Rutsky, 2005). Film analysis implies that a movie is read as a text, and in

order to achieve this reading one must pay attention beyond its obvious meaning.

According to Geiger and Rutsky (2005), film analysis is often accused of reading too

much into films and "inventing meanings that are 'not really there'" (p. 18-19). Martin Barker

(2000) suggests that what makes academic film analysis any different from the analysis of an

audience member, film critic, or journalist is that the researcher raises questions that leads to

looking at possible relations between "the cinematic and the extra-cinematic" (p. 3). In order to

make these connections between the world within the film and the external world, theory is

needed (Barker, p. 3). Elsaesser and Buckland (2002) and Pezzotta (2010) agree that theory

should inform and guide the analysis. Pezzotta argues that there is a need for some kind of guide

within the film to drive the interpretation into different perspectives, referring to theory (p. 12).

The following section looks at different approaches used in film analysis.

3.2 APPROACHES TO ANALYZING FILM

According to McKee (2003), the reason that we interpret texts (this includes films but

also television, magazines, advertising, an art), is "to try to obtain a sense of the ways in which,

in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them" (p. 2). A

textual analysis can see film as a "cultural document" that can reflect the time in which they

were made (Staiger, 1922, p. 156). According to Staiger, these documents have the ability to

show the social, political, and economic constructions as well as identities of race, gender, and

nationality. For example, an exploration of the character Rayon from *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013)

uses textual analysis to focus specifically on character development. With a trans studies and

body politics approach, Copier and Steinbock (2018) analyze the film to explore the narrational function of the trans-sexual character in the text. The study focuses on dialogue and mannerisms of the character.

Another way to guide the analysis of movies is by focusing on semiotics. In a study exploring the ways in which religion and spirituality are tied to the U.S. military experience during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Ann Strahle (2013) analyzes *The Messenger* (2009). She focuses on the study of symbols, signs, and dialogue. Strahle argues that film can serve as a mirror to understand complex experiences of soldiers and uses the American Civil Religion approach as a framework to guide her study. Another example of the use of semiotics in film analysis is the exploration of stereotypical representations of Dalits in Indian cinema (Viduthalai, Divakar, & Natarajan, 2017). This analysis pays attention to two meanings of signs: the signifier and the signified. Audio signs, camera angles, images, facial expression, color, and lighting are taken into account for the analysis (p. 11).

Discourse analysis also can be used to focus on the dialogue of a film. M. R. Anil (2018) uses post colonial theory as a framework to explore *Ray* (2004) and guide the analysis of this film. Anil studies colonial discourse in the film by focusing on dialogue (p.17). The ways in which the character of Ray Charles is used as a commodity, his exploitation, and his trauma are exposed through dialogue and language. According to Peter Petrucci (2012), language in a film has a multi-layered meaning, and because of this, discourse analysis is a good approach for film analysis. Petrucci analyzes characterization achieved by use of language by comparing *Talk to Me* (2007) in its original format, that uses African American English and Standard American English, in contrast with its dubbed version in Portuguese. Dialogue plays a role in character

development and is as important as other cinematic devices like gestures, costumes, and on-screen action. Because of this, discourse analysis is an essential approach (Petrucci, 2012). The following section will focus on narrative analysis which is the selected method for this research project.

3.3 NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative analysis, also know as narrative inquiry and narrative research, is a qualitative research method that explores the creation of meaning through the construction of narratives (Gilstein, 2018). Narrative analysis focuses on how and why a story is told a certain way. Through the analysis of stories with characters and plots and guided by theory, researchers are able to make conclusions about the way people live (Gilstein, p. 2). Catherine Kohler Riessman (1993), an exponent of the narrative analysis approach, places great importance on story as the object of investigation. It asks, "Why is a story is told that way?" (p. 5). Overall, narrative analysis is broadly used in many fields such as psychology, education, and social work to analyze the way participants tell a story (Gilstein, 2018). If dystopian films are the way in which we tell stories of environmental anxieties, it is important to analyze how stories are told and why they are narrated that way. Narrative analysis is based on "how a speaker or writer assembles and sequences events and uses language and/or visual images to communicate meaning, that is, to make particular points to an audience" (Riessman, 2012, p. 2).

According to Robert Burgoine (1990), narrative analysis distinguishes the different aspects of a story such as plot structures, roles played by the characters, and the way information is conveyed through the use of point of view. This analytic technique has the unique approach to study diverse voices and opposing views in the text by dividing it into different layers. Burgoine

argues that this way, "the various messages produced at each level can be described with precision" (p. 4). For Riessman (2012), there are four levels to narrative analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic-performative, and visual narrative. The thematic level deals with matters of plot and its communicative goals while the structural level addresses the way in which the story is composed in order to achieve those goals. The dialogic-performative level focuses on the verbal and non-verbal communication among speakers. Finally, the visual narrative level focuses on images and how they create a narrative.

As previously mentioned, narrative analysis is mainly used to analyze interviews and participants' storytelling in fields of psychology and social work, but some scholars have used the method in the analysis of film. Bareiss (2015) uses this method along with Kenneth Burke's dramatism to analyze self-injury in U.S. films. For Bareiss, the qualitative method of narrative analysis allows him to ask why a story is told a certain way (p. 320). In an analysis of *The Lobster* (2015), Ilíc also focuses on an analysis of narrative. It not only allows researchers to focus on what the film is exposing as being problematic, but also on how the dystopian problem is presented through the actions of the characters (Ilíc, 2017, p. 469). On a study of surrealism, Middleton (2015) analyzes *Mona Lisa* (1986) through a narrative approach, accompanied by a focus on narrative absence. By this, Middleton focuses on what is left unsaid in the film, which can be major spaces like a main character's backstory or a minor sketchily appearance. According to Middleton, these absences "operate as a pregnant pause or an elephant in the room, rendering what is left unsaid all the more powerful for its absence" (p. 181). In another example, in order to explore female representation in films of Pedro Almodóvar, Naughten (2006) takes a narrative approach on *Hable Con Ella* (2002) to study comatose women and their roles in

fairytales such as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White* and *Alice in Wonderland*. On the visual level, Naughten focuses on the character of Alicia and the references to folklore and fairytales made in the film, while the structural level focuses on how the characters carry the narrative by retelling flashbacks in the form of fairytales (p. 77). Retzinger (2011) analyzes the documentary *The Garden* (2008) to determine how previous knowledge of Hollywood cinema drives the audience's understanding of a film, whether it is fiction or non fiction. *The Garden* unfolds the fate of the largest urban farm in the United States. Retzinger's analysis is first visual by focusing on narrative strategies. He focuses on a scene by scene study of visual elements like point of view and shots that trigger recognition of other Hollywood films (pp. 338-339). Secondly, Retzinger's analysis also focuses on the characters' dialogue, like who gets more opportunities to speak and the way that their lines are used to create a more inspiring and strong ending (p. 340). In this way, the roles of the players that take place in the conservation of the urban farm are explored. On a structural level, Retzinger notes how the documentary is not edited in chronological order. For example a victory speech that took place in 2005 is followed by footage of a 2004 city council meeting. According to Retzinger, the sequence was rearranged "for greater narrative impact" (p. 340).

3.4 PROCEDURES

As previously mentioned, this study has two goals: 1) identify the nature of environmental dystopian films; and 2) analyze the roles of female characters and nature to examine views of domination. According to Riessman (1993), there is not a set way to get started on narrative analysis. However, the process often entails first the telling of the story, followed by the transcription, and then the analysis (p. 54). In order to achieve the first, I will blend the

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thematic and structural levels suggested by Riessman for the first viewing of the films. I will take

each scene as the unit of analysis to examine the narrative and take notes considering the

following questions on plot and structure: What happened in this scene? What is the purpose of

this scene? How is that purpose accomplished? From which point of view is the story told?

For the second goal of this study, I will perform a second and third viewing of the films.

For the second viewing I will focus on the dialogic-performative level of narrative analysis to go

over the dialogue of female characters. Again, the unit of analysis will be the scene. I will focus

on what the characters are saying, contrasting female characters with male characters. I will take

notes to answer the following questions: What is a summary of what the male/female characters

are saying? Who is passive? Who is active? Finally, a third view of the films will require a visual

approach to study the role of nature as the backdrop of the stories. For Riessman (2012) the

visual approach focuses on how images create a narrative, so it is important to ask what is the

connection of the images of nature and the plot and dialogue? The notes taken from the third and

final viewing of each film will focus on setting, asking questions such as: what is the setting?

What does the inside/outside looks like? How is a natural setting presented in contrast with a

man-made setting? The following films to be analyzed were selected based on their dystopian

narrative, variation in genre, and popularity among critics and the public.

3.5 THE FILMS

By analyzing the following films I will examine common themes and patterns of

dystopian cinema of the twenty-first century. The films vary in the time that they were released

from 2006 to 2015, and have moderate to high praise by critics with mixed commercial

reception. The website *Rotten Tomatoes* was used to put together a list of films classified as

dystopian in narrative, since the website uses a ranking system that takes into account audience

opinion but also reviews of certified film critics. From a list of 83 films, only 18 were considered

"Certified Fresh,"[2] and the four selected films for this study were taken from this shorter list for

their variation in rating, commercial success, and genre. All of the four selected movies share a

dystopian narrative, which means that the plot consists of a community living in a future in

which human civilization is in decline, and are considered "Certified Fresh" by the *Rotten*

Tomatoes website.

Four films were selected based on the aforementioned criteria: *Mad Max: Fury Road*

(2014)*, Snowpiercer* (2013)*, Children of Men* (2006)*,* and *Idiocracy* (2006). *Mad Max: Fury*

Road had the highest rating of 97% and was also a commercial success with box office earnings

of $129,483,877 (Mad Max: Fury Road, n.d.). *Snowpiercer* was the second best rated film with a

95%, but did not have great commercial success, raising only $2,786,828 at the box office

(Snowpiercer, n.d.). *Children of Men* also had a high rating with 92%, but moderate commercial

success earning approximately $35,100,000 at the box office (Children of Men, n.d.). Finally,

Idiocracy had a lower critical rating of 76% and low commercial support by earning

approximately $313,505 at the box office (Idiocracy, n.d.). The four films are also categorized as

four different genres: *Mad Max:Fury Road* as action, *Children of Men* as drama, *Snowpiercer* as

science-fiction and fantasy, and *Idiocracy* as a comedy.

Mad Max: Fury Road is the fourth installment of the *Mad Max* franchise that first came

to theaters in 1979, staring Mel Gibson. The 2015 film *Mad Max: Fury Road,* starring Charlize

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[2] According to Vox, the website Rotten Tomatoes calculates scores by measuring the percentage of
positive reviews. In order to have the "Fresh" certification, the film must have at least 40 reviews and
from those over 75 percent must be positive reviews from 'top' critics (Wilkinson, 2018, pa. 12).

Theron and Tom Hardy, is set in a post-apocalyptic civilization that collapsed after an energy crisis. Set on a deserted wasteland, tribes are caught between fights for fuel, and resources like water and food are scarce. During the 88th Academy Awards, the film won six awards out of its 10 nominations. *Mad Max: Fury Road* was named the best film of 2015 by many critics including the editors for *rogerebert.com* (2015) while *The New York Times* and *BBC* polls put it on the list of the best 21st century films (Dargis & Scott, 2017; BBC, 2016). A review from *Entertainment Weekly* mentions that the original film of 1979 came out "when the world was squeezed in the viselike grip of a global oil crisis," but the prospect of a civilization of scavengers racing for fuel seemed cartoonish and unreal (Nashawaty, 2015, pa. 2). In contrast, the environmental reality of 2010 affected the shooting of *Mad Max: Fury Road* when director George Miller had to change the shooting location. The previous *Mad Max* films were shot in the Australian outback, but for *Fury Road* unprecedented rains, caused by climate change, had flooded the setting (Sperling, 2014).

  Children of Men is a drama based on the P.D. James book *The Children of Men* (1992). It was after September 11, 2001 that director Alfonso Cuarón was inspired to take on the project of turning the book into a story with an immigrant crisis theme in mind (Riesman, 2016). The story is set in 2027 United Kingdom which is the last nations with a functioning government, after 18 years of human infertility. Theo, an ex-activist and now bureaucrat, has been contacted by his ex-wife Julian to help her get transit papers for Kee, a refugee. After a sequence of events, Theo finds out that Kee is pregnant, and Julian's plan is to take her to a secret humanitarian organization that tries to find a cure for infertility. The film received three nominations for the 78th Academy Awards including best editing, adapted script, and cinematography. It received

two awards from the British Film Academy and won The Saturn Award for "Best Science Fiction Film."

Most reviews and critical analyses done on *Children of Men* have focused on its themes of hope, religion, imagery of war, and refugee and immigrant crises. On July 7, 2005, Islamist extremist detonated four bombs in London. This occurred a few weeks before shooting the very first scene of the film — Theo walking out of a coffee shop and moments after, a bomb is detonated inside (Riesman, 2016). Scholars note that the political themes of the film set in 2027 inadvertently mimics the 2000s reality. For Stratton (2009), the film exposes the consequences of a neoliberal government that is pressured by a fear of immigrants (p. 635). Amago (2010) notes that the opening dialogue of the film focuses on Homeland Security presenting the current reality of immigration policies in the United States (p. 213). Here, the sociopolitical themes of the film are complemented by an ecological background (Amago, 2010). Sparling (2014), describes *Children of Men* as being set in a world without a "conceivable future" and points out the theme of eugenics as Kee's character is an undesirable mother for the British government (p. 160).

Snowpiercer is a film by South Korean director Bong Joon-ho set in a 2031 ice age caused by human attempts to counteract global warming. The only survivors on Earth are the passengers of a massive train called "Snowpiercer" that perpetually travels on a circumnavigational track. The most privileged habitants live on the cars closer to the front of the train while the lowest class and most marginalized groups live in the back. Curtis Everett, played by Chris Evans, leads a revolution against the privileged groups at the front. The film received critical acclaim and was nominated for more than 50 awards and appeared on more than 40 lists of best films of 2014. The film is about an engineering experiment that affects the world's

climate and has an obvious ecological background, but it also focuses on the social issues of inequality (Baum, 2014). Andersen and Nielsen (2018) comment on the bio-politics of the film and question the consequences that further human action can have on ecological problems. *Snowpiercer* along with *Interstellar* (2014) and *Elysium* (2013)*,* "represent contemporary worries about overpopulation, resource scarcity, and ecological limits" (Andersen &Nielsen, 2018, p. 616).

Finally, *Idiocracy* is a 2006 comedy film starring Luke Wilson, who plays Joe Bauers, a man selected to take part in an experiment about suspended animation led by the army. The project is forgotten when the officer leading the experiment is arrested on charges of prostitution. Bauers wakes up in the year 2505 and is now the smartest man on Earth. After 500 years, the most intelligent people on Earth failed to have children, and humanity has become extremely stupid. The setting of the film shows a highly contaminated planet led by corporations. The film received overall positive criticism and is considered a cult film for its satirical comedy. A review from *Los Angeles Times* called it, "a bleakly hilarious vision of an American future" (Chocano, 2006, para. 3). A critic from *The Guardian* said that the film may not be a masterpiece, "but it's endlessly funny," and has multiple dialogue lines that fans repeat and perform which is "a sure sign of a cult hit" (Patterson, 2006, para. 7).

3.6 COLLECTING THE DATA

Not all of the elements on a film can be directly transcribed like dialogue. For example there are the audiovisual and metaphorical elements too. In order to gather the data in some form of transcription, I will use a set of code sheets to organize the different information gathered. Qualitative textual analyses can determine meanings of content in a text, and to identify this

meaning it is necessary to find dominant themes by looking for repetitions, patterns, and commonalities (Babbie, 1992). Altheide and Schneider (2013) define themes as, "the recurring typical theses that run throughout a report" (p. 53). Altheide and Schneider use themes in order to analyze television news reports and designed a protocol to organize the data of several news tapes. Each film will have three different code sheets — one per viewing — and each code sheet will include a segment for each scene. The code sheets, similar to Altheide and Schneider (2013, p. 97), have been adjusted to fit the needs of film. The number of scenes of each film was identified using the Amazon Prime "X Ray" feature. This feature lists the number of scenes in the film and allows to fast forward directly to each of them. According to the X Ray feature, there are 19 scenes in *Mad Max: Fury Road.* The 15 blank code sheets used for this film are on Appendix A as an illustration of the ones used for the other three films.

After taking these notes, the objective will be to find the repetitions, commonalities, and common themes. By viewing the commonalities, an effective description of dystopian films will be developed and the roles of female characters and nature will be examined to identify their positions in imagined unsustainable futures.

3.7 FILM THEORY AND ECOFEMINISM AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In the previous chapter, I presented an overview of film theory and ecofeminism. I will expand on its importance to study cultural and social views in this section. As previously mentioned in this chapter, film and narrative analysis is often accompanied by theory to guide the observations. In the case of this study, film theory and ecofeminism will be used for this purpose. While film theory aims to understand the essence of cinema by providing frameworks to understand its relation to reality (McDonald, 2016), ecofeminism focuses on the intersection

of patriarchal domination of women and nature (Hurley, 2008; Tong, 2018). Because of this, film theory and ecofeminism can help us make sense of images put on screen and how they relate to the reality of the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of women. For example, Hanich (2014) argues that diverse film theories suggest that watching a movie is not a passive action but rather an active one, as the spectator "decodes and interprets the film, consciously builds hypotheses and draws inferences, fills blanks and omissions, and visually imagines what is suggested but not shown" (p. 338). Garland Thomson (2009) argues that the modern world is ocular-centric as our understanding of reality comes from observations. Also, vision can be liberating, dominative, and gendered. The way in which the spectator looks can either stigmatize or celebrate the object of sight (p. 26). Although Thomson applies this concept to historic spectacles such as the World Fair, drag shows, museums and freak shows, this can also be applied to what is shown on a screen. In a similar way, early feminist scholars studied gaze and the dominant male point of view in film production. Laura Mulvey (2001) suggested that feminist film theory can study the male gaze but also can draw connections between female sexualization and the culture of consumption. According to Kaplan (2004), the basis of feminist film theory in the 1970s was not only the theory of gaze but also to understand the oppression of women.

Because of this, I believe that ecofeminism is another well suited framework for this study. In linguistic form, nature has been often regarded as female, and women have been considered as part of nature (Tong, 2018). Related to this, the feminization of nature is represented in the control of natural resources or the discovery and conquest of land, but also when nature is venerated as a female Mother Nature. According to Hatfield and Dionne (2014),

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living in an age that showcases violence against humans and nature makes it important to understand the intersection of theory and the treatment of the environment. Ecofeminism can provide alternative ways to envision the future of sustainability. Analyzing and critiquing film can help to understand the impact that dominant images of the future potentially have on our ability to visualize ecologically and socially sustainable futures (Hurley, 2008). In order to identify the dominative structure of patriarchy reflected in films, Hurley suggests that we must look at what Karen Warren (2000) calls "Up-Down" thinking in which greater value is assigned to one half of a duality (p. 46). For example, men, mind, and culture are all categorized as up, while women, body, and nature as down. While nature is seen as female and culture as male, these opposing ideas are seen as one being above the other with nature and females being passive and males and culture active (Yates, 2017).

In summary, film is not only a product to be consumed, but it also can act as a "script" and has the ability to be formative in cultural ideas (Hedges, 1991, p. 110). The objective of film analysis is to explore narratives, themes, and style, and to treat a motion picture as a text (Geiger & Rutsky, 2005). Film theory as a framework will allow this study to focus on messages that the analyzed films express as entertainment can host, subconsciously, social and cultural ideas (Geiger & Rutsky, 2005). Even if a text is not intended to have a feminist or environmental agenda it can be analyzed based on an ecofeminist framework.

This chapter examined narrative film analysis as the method to conduct the analysis with the guide of ecofeminism and film theory as theoretical frameworks. The procedures were discussed and there was an in-depth description of the selected texts with their plots, critical reviews, and previous explored themes by other scholars. The next chapter will present the

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results of the film analysis resulting from the three viewings of each movie. An examination of

the characteristics of dystopian films and the roles that female characters and nature take on the

narratives will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the study, explaining how the analyzed dystopian films represent the end of the world and the roles female characters and nature take on these scenarios. The findings are divided into four sections: 1) natural and human spaces: in this section, I outlined themes related to nature: a) the actual representation of natural spaces in contrast with human spaces, and b) human understanding of natural spaces; 2) culture over nature: this section focuses on instances in which human culture is valued over nature and highlights the human need and reasons to create art; 3) control of resources: this section examines the importance given to the control of resources — natural and human. Three subsections here look closely at how a) male characters are used for violent purposes, b) females for reproduction, and c) offspring as tools; and finally 4) reproductive futurism and hope: this section examines how the actions of the characters are motivated by a need to protect their offspring or to create a better future for them. Then, human and natural elements are examined as symbols of hope. The findings are followed by the discussion of the findings and how these answer the research questions: what is the nature of dystopian films? What do they say about the current anxieties of society? And what are the roles of females and nature in dystopian films?

4.1 FINDINGS

4.1.1 NATURAL AND HUMAN SPACES

The films show different interactions between human and natural spaces. Overall, the films demonstrate a separation between humans and nature. Dickinson (2014) calls this separation ecocultural schizophrenia. Although environmental narratives may encourage its conservation, there is still a clear separation from humans. This separation also turns nature into

the "other" and makes it more comfortable for humans to exploit (p. 165). Rather than thinking that nature is where humans live and develop, this is presented as a separate space humans stay away from but occasionally visit. Ecocultural schizophrenia also distinguishes nature from culture. These two become oppositional creating a nature/culture dichotomy (Dickinson, 2014). While examining the thematic structure, dialogue, and visuals of the films various references of nature were found. First, nature representation in the films and how natural spaces are presented in contrast with human spaces followed by the understanding the characters have of natural spaces and how they make sense of the natural world.

REPRESENTATION OF NATURAL AND HUMAN SPACES

Children of Men (2006) is the only film that presents nature in a form that is not that different from our present reality. In one scene, Theo and Jasper drive on a road in the countryside near London, and this is the first time in the film that the setting is not the city. The setting is that of a green field, but smoke is peeking into frame revealing seconds later that it's coming from burning livestock. Jasper's home is in the middle of the forest and as the film develops, the forest continues to be a primary background. Later in the film, Theo drives further into the countryside but is now accompanied by Kee and Miriam. This scene offers a view of a more contaminated nature with dry grass, a ditch with filthy water coming out of the sewage, an abandoned rusty car, and in the distance smoke from factories. A couple of shots show the outside of Jasper's place. The house is surrounded by trees, it has solar panels, a rainwater collection system, a home garden, and firewood for their chimney so the house seems to be self-sustainable. A particular scene presents a wide shot of Jasper's house followed by a shot of the London cityscape from Theo's window in his apartment. There is a notable contrast from these

two settings as the London landscape has a heavily contaminated sky and gray buildings in the distance.

Later in the film, a human space that has been taken over by nature is presented. Theo, Miriam, and Kee wait for Jasper's friend, Syd, at an abandoned primary school. The outside has overgrown weeds covering the asphalt, there are tall bushes, and tree branches start to cover the sign of the school. Inside, the windows are covered with vines and the branch of a tree on the outside starts to peek into the building and to take over a pillar. Theo hears a loud noise which was a fleeing deer running to the outside of the school. *Children of Men* presents a society afflicted by a crisis of human infertility, so with no children present spaces like this have become useless and abandoned. This scene shows how nature takes over and thrives in the spaces that humans have left behind.

In *Snowpiercer*, the train has become the only world for the passengers and is the dominant human space in the film. Curtis follows Timmy around trying to get him to give him his protein block. Curtis tells him that he will exchange it for anything Timmy asks for. Timmy says, "in the whole wide train?" (Tae-sung et al., 2014, scene 5). The train is all Timmy has known for the entirety of his life. The walls keep them safe from the cold and harsh temperatures, and separate them from nature. By the end of the film, Wilford tells Curtis that the wagons of the train will always be "there" one after the other where humanity now lives, adding that, "the train is the world. We, the humanity" (scene 28). In *Snowpiercer,* the natural world exists separate from the human world. *Snowpiercer* and *Children of Men* show an explicit separation from the human characters and the natural setting.

In addition to the separation of human spaces and nature, *Snowpiercer* also expresses anthropocentric conceptualizations of nature. It is in the second quarter of the film that the outside world is presented for the first time. White, gray, and blue tones dominate the outside world that is completely frozen. It is through a window that the characters see a frozen cityscape, and Gillian describes it as being "still cold" and "all dead" (Tae-sung, Nam, Chan-wook, Tae-hun, & Joon-ho, 2014, scene 15). Dialogue and imagery like this show that the natural spaces have become unsuitable and undesirable. Those that are undesirable are and example of what I will call dead nature. However, in the final scene of the film, Yona and Timmy see a polar bear in a distant mountain. Gillian may consider the world to be dead, but the film shows us that nature has allowed other species to survive. Corbett (2002) has previously examined how advertisement present nature as "possessible" (p. 143). This means that nature is seen as something that exists for the pleasure of humans, and its conceptualization is based on its purpose to serve us. Saying that nature is dead, as Gillian did, comes from a human perspective as it is only dead for us but not for other species like the polar bear.

In a similar way, *Mad Max: Fury Road* presents a dead nature. The first scene presents the first view of the Wasteland as a deserted landscape and shows Max standing next to his car. In the bottom of the frame, a two-headed lizard appears and then quickly crawls towards Max who steps on it, grabs it from the sole of his shoe and eats it. In the opening dialogue of the film, a news report states that there was a "nuclear skirmish" (Mitchell, Miller, & Lathouris, 2015, opening scene). The two-headed lizard gives more context about the environmental state of the Wasteland that has high levels of radiation, but also shows a sign of life in the deserted setting. As Furiosa and the five wives continue with their mission, now accompanied by Max and Nux,

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they encounter a swamp with dead tree trunks and plagued by crows. The Dag calls it that "creepy place with the crows" (scene 13). This scene shows another type of dead nature as it is uninhabitable for humans. Still, this space shows animals surviving in that environment.

In a later scene, Immortan Joe's militia follows the fleeing Furiosa, but the persecution leads into a dust storm. This natural phenomenon is caused by the dryness of the Wasteland, and it is presented as destructive. As Furiosa drives the war rig into the storm, some of the war boys follow her through thunderstorms and multiple tornados. This scene shows a natural phenomenon represented as extreme and unsuitable for humans. In a later scene, Splendid gets shot in the leg by Max. The bullet barely touches her skin and causes little damage but enough to make her bleed. Furiosa asks how she feels, and Splendid replies by saying it hurts. Furiosa tells her that "out here everything hurts" (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 7). Nature in *Mad Max: Fury Road* is represented as cruel and uneasy on humans.

In contrast, in *Idiocracy* the human spaces have sprawled and taken over nature. The story takes place in a city but still offers a view of an unsustainable future. The narrator explains that with the decline of intelligence, humans could not solve simple problems like waste management (Judge, Koplovitz, & Nelson, 2006, Scene 8). Immense mountains of garbage pile up and the streets are covered in trash. The city shows a destroyed infrastructure, unfinished highways with cars driving off the edge, buildings are falling, corporation logos cover almost every surface, and smoke from factories is seen in the distant. Later in the film, Bauers's get appointed as the Secretary of Interior because of his high IQ. He is now in charge of fixing the problems of the United States, like figuring out why they cannot harvest any crops. He is taken to the crop fields and sees dry and dusty fields. Like in *Mad Max: Fury Road,* the dryness of the

soil has caused dust storms around the country. The problem in *Idiocracy* is that the world has become too unsustainable for humans and the goal is to fix it. Again, the environment is conceptualized as useless since it doesn't serve human purposes.

Instances were found in the films of how the placing of natural elements is contrasted with human elements. In *Mad Max: Fury Road,* the following conversation happens between The Dag, one of Immortan Joe's five wives, and The Seed Keeper, one of the Vuvalini Mothers, referring to the guns and bullets she's holding:

The Dag: You kill people with that, do ya?

Seed Keeper: Killed everyone I ever met out there. Headshots, all of 'em. Snap. Right in the medulla.

The Dag: Thought somehow you girls were above all that. (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 14).

The Seed Keeper then shows her a stack of seeds and tells her that she often plants them to see if the soil allows them to grow. She then tells her that in the past every Mothers used to have her own stack, "back then everyone had their fill. Back then there was no need to snap anybody" (scene 14). Two elements are contrasted in this scene: the seeds and the bullets. Similarly, The Dag says that Splendid used to call bullets "antiseeds" as they can be "planted" and cause death rather than life (scene 11). Another instance is when Max first approaches the war rig as Furiosa is doing repairs and the wives cleanse themselves with water that comes from a hose. Max points a gun at Furiosa and demands for Splendid, who is already holding the hose, to come closer so that he can drink the water. As she walks, the camera makes a closeup shot of her pregnant belly and her hand holding the hose, with water overflowing. These two images of

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life are contrasted with Max's gun. A similar comparison is done in *Snowpiercer* as a man pushes a cart with boiled eggs. A teacher explains to the kids that these are a New Years Eve treats. Immediately after, the man and the teacher take out automatic guns that have been hidden in the cart and the egg baskets. These two elements are contrasting as the guns symbolize and cause death while the eggs symbolize life. These contrasting images show again an ecocultural schizophrenia that separates natural and human elements and presents them as oppositional. While the water, the seeeds, and the eggs symbolize life, the bullets and the guns symbolize death.

In *Snowpiercer* (2014)*,* there is a physical separation between the outside world and the inside of the train. *Idiocracy* (2006) simply eliminates natural spaces as human spaces have taken over. *Children of Men* (2006) shows a nature that takes over spaces that have been abandoned by humans and thrives once these are removed. In contrast, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) presents a nature that is harsh and uninhabitable for human beings showing that we hardly thrive in an infertile environment. Is important to examine how the films represent natural and human spaces. The contrast between the two spaces shows the separation between nature and culture. The over-exaggerated landscapes of environmental doom show how media has allowed us to imagine and fear a terrible and unsustainable future. Colebrook comments on this fear of unsustainability and how narratives of the end of the world are not about the end of the natural world but rather "the end of abundance for us" (p. 103).

HUMAN UNDERSTANDING OF NATURE

The separation of humans and nature is not only shown in the contrast of how the two spaces are represented but also in the way that the characters understand their worlds. The focus

of this subsection is on how the characters create, use, and talk about natural spaces and elements. Some of them express themselves in ways that show poor knowledge of nature and rich understanding of culture — car culture, corporation presence, or their everyday lives — but this lack of understanding is a consequence of the separation caused by ecocultural schizophrenia (Dickinson, 2014).

Snowpiercer offers an example of humans creating natural spaces inside the train they inhabit. The train was designed by Wilford with tourism purposes in mind as a "luxury locomotive cruise line" that travels in a closed railway around the world and was, since the beginning, self-sustainable (Tae-sung et al., 2014, scene 24). The film shows some of the sections that host the agricultural, fishing, and livestock activities needed to produce the food for the passengers. The greenhouse has different types of trees and vertical farms where they grow vegetables and fruits. This section is followed by an aquarium that also has a sushi bar. Mason explains to Curtis and the rest that they are lucky to be there at that time of year because sushi can only be served in June and January. Tanya asks, sarcastically, if it's because they don't have enough to last all year. Mason replies, "Enough is not the problem. Balance. You see, this aquarium is a closed ecological system and the number of individual units must be very closely, precisely controlled in order to maintain the proper sustainable balance" (scene 23). Later in the film, Wilford says to Curtis "Air, water, food supply, must always be kept in balance" (Tae-sung et al., 2014, scene 28). The way humanity speaks about nature contrasts with the way it is actually treated. Milsten and Dickinson (2012) argue that most discourse related to nature is anthropocentric as it prioritizes human gain. Wilford and Mason may show how they understand the needed balance of the natural ecosystem and apply it to the space created inside the train.

Still, this understanding comes from the need to produce food for the passengers. The greenhouse and the aquarium are still treated as products for human consumption. Another example is in *Children of Men* when Kee explains to Theo how the milking machines work and that they have to cut one nipple of the cow so it can fit. Kee then says, "It's *wacko*. Why not make machines that suck eight titties?" (Shor, Smith, Smith, Abraham, Newman, & Cuaron, 2006, scene 21). In this dialogue, Kee shows a comprehension of how often nature has to be modified to fit a human purpose.

In *Snowpiercer*, right after the meat freezer section is the school section. In this wagon, the children of the front sectioners attend classes. The classroom is colorful and has different posters, maps, illustrations and hand made crafts from the students. When Curtis, Mason, Andrew, Tanya, Yona, and Namgoong enter the classroom the kids are wearing hand made masks. Some of them are animals like a tiger, a bear, a cat, a lizard, but also other natural elements like the sun. On the walls hang pictures of birds, figurines of farm animals stand on the window panes, a mobile of clouds and stars hang from the ceiling, and there are frames with dissected butterflies. Besides the aquarium and the greenhouse, this is the only contact the children born in the train have with nature. Dickinson (2014) explained that ecocultural schizophrenic narratives oppose nature to culture, but they also encourage a "stay away-get close" approach (p. 612). There is a push to be connected with nature but at the same time stay separated from it to be comfortable. The teacher makes sure to tell the kids that going out of the train will be fatal for them. She and the kids recite in unison, "If we all go outside the train we'd all freeze and die. If the Engine stops running? We'd all die" (Tae-sung et al., 2014, scene 24). In an earlier scene, Curtis and Gillian tell Mason that they now have control of the water section,

thus they have the upper hand for negotiation with Wilford. Mason laughs and tells them that's

not how it works,

> "Turn off the water? You'll only be condemning your own people. The water comes from
>
> the front. The nose of the train, it breaks up the snow and ice and turns it into water. It's
>
> like an elephant's trunk. The water comes in the mouth. Not in the bum, Curtis" (Tae-
>
> sung et al., 2014, scene 21).

The water source of the train is the result of an engineered process rather than a natural way and

still, Mason uses a metaphor referencing nature to explain the water system. These instances

exemplify how the characters understand nature as serving human purposes.

In *Children of Men,* there are small references to how the conceptualization of birth is

connected with nature. A closeup of the window in Jasper's home shows newspaper articles,

posters, and other artifacts. Storks are a repetitive motif in Jasper's character. There is a wooden

figurine of a stork and a political cartoon of a flock of storks flying through the blue sky. In the

next strip the flock is targeted by a war tank shooting them down like planes. Another example of

this is a joke that Jasper tells Theo:

> Okay. The Human Project gives this great dinner for all the scientists and sages in the
>
> world. They're tossing around theories about the ultimate mystery, why are women
>
> infertile? Why can't we make babies anymore? Some of them say is genetic experiments,
>
> gamma rays, pollution. Same old, same old. Anyway, in the corner, this Englishman's
>
> sitting. He hasn't said a word. He's just tucking into his dinner. So they decide to ask
>
> him. They say, 'Well why do you think we can't make babies anymore?' And he looks up
>
> at them, and he's chewing on this great big wing, and he says, 'I haven't the faintest idea,'

he said. 'But this stork is quite tasty, isn't it?' (Shor, et al., 2006, scene 8)

These references contrast with images of pollution and mistreatment of nature that evidences the ecocultural schizophrenic narrative. While the characters connect nature to human fertility and value it, the film also shows a poor conservation of the environment. Is a constant push and pull that goes from getting close to nature to staying away from it.

Similarly, *Mad Max: Fury Road* shows instances in which language shows how the understanding of the world comes from nature. At the war rig, Furiosa tells the five wives that they need to do an inventory of all the bullets they have for each gun and The Dag says, "Anghard used to call them anti-seeds. Plant one and watch something die" (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 11). This is an example of the use of "nature talk." The wives are in a way privileged as they lived all of their lives constrained in a safe space and were educated about natural elements. In contrast, Nux who has been raised as a battle fodder has no vocabulary to recognize nature. When the war rig is stuck in the mud, Nux suggests tying the rig with a chain to that "thing," then Capable explains that he means the tree (scene 12). The film exhibits in the dialogue how for the war boys the understanding of the world, in contrast, comes from cars. Most of their dialogue includes references to automobile elements. This will be further explained in the culture over nature section. In *Snowpiercer* a similar instance happens with Yona, Namgoong's daughter, who was born in the train. She has no vocabulary or understanding of what dirt is. At the greenhouse section, Namgoong puts a pile of dirt in her hands with moving worms in it. Yona is disgusted by it and asks Namgoong why it is moving. He replies that it is moving because it is alive. Nux and Yona show a limited exposure and understanding of nature since they have not been exposed to it. As previously mentioned, this lack of understanding

comes from their separation from nature. Limited knowledge of nature and a subjugated view of the environment can create and encourage unsustainable practices (Dickinson, 2014; Brunner & Dawson, 2017). The films exemplify a fear to be so disconnected from the environment that it becomes unrecognizable.

4.1.2 CULTURE OVER NATURE

In the previous section I mentioned on how human discourse shows an understanding for balance in nature but at the same time it also treats in an exploitable way. Overall, Western culture prioritizes individualistic attitudes that place economic gain above negative effects on the environment (Koger &Winter, 2010). Brunner and Dawson (2017) also comment on how sometimes nature may be presented as "sublime" and "fear-inspiring" in documentaries and advertising (p. 388). These representations of nature can be perceived as a challenge for humans to explore or dominate, and in consequence humanity is placed in a position of superiority. This section examines instances in the films that show how culture is valued over nature and life. First, I examined instances in which culture is protected and the reasons behind the conservation of human culture. This will be followed by a section that looks closer at how the characters create art and their motivations to do so.

CONSERVATION OF HUMAN CULTURE

In *Children of Men,* Julian has asked Theo to contact his cousin Nigel, who is the minster of the Ark of the Arts[3], and ask him to get him transit papers for a refugee. As a person in a high position, Nigel has a lot of influence and will be able to get the papers. Theo is escorted in a luxurious car to the headquarters of the ministry at Battersea Power Station. Multiple works of

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[3] As the countries around the world become unstable and have lost their governmental structure, the Ark of the Arts is a ministry that took on the task to protect the fine arts.

art can be seen inside the facility, the most recognizable are "Policemen Kissing" by Banksy, Michelangelo's "David," Picasso's "Guernica," and a pig air balloon floating next to the two power station towers. This scene recreates the cover art for Pink Floyd's album *Animals* (1977). Nigel tells Theo about a bombing in Madrid that destroyed the Museo del Prado.

> Nigel: We got to keep "Las Meninas" and a few other Velásquezes, but we only got a
>
> hold of two Goyas. That thing in Madrid was a real blow to the art.
>
> Theo: Not to mention people. (Shor et al., 2006, scene 12).

In this scene, the value of art is put over the value of life. Theo then questions Nigel's intentions to preserve the arts, and he tells him "a hundred years from now, there won't be one sad fuck to look at any of these" (scene 12). Nigel is motivated to conserve human culture even if it is senseless, but there seems to be no motivation to conserve the natural world.

The other films don't show explicit care for the fine arts like Nigel, but they do show the conservation of human culture in other ways. The *Mad Max* franchise was built with a focus on cars, and *Mad Max: Fury Road* is not the exception. The opening scene of the film shows Max next to the Pursuit Special. Max gets in the car and drives away as he hears that war boys are following him. The camera makes close up shots of the engine and the wheels of the car. Throughout the film the elements of the automobiles are highlighted and featured prominently. Even the title design of the film alludes to car culture as the words "Mad Max" are in its original font but now in chrome. Then "Fury Road" appears in a handwritten style as if it was done with a hot branding iron.

The previous section comments on the language in the films that was inspired by nature. In contrast, Immortan Joe's militia uses language related to car culture. In one scene Rictus tells

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the Wrenched[4] to "rev it for the Immortan Joe" (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 3). "Rev" is used in this case to make people cheer for Immortan Joe, rather than its literal meaning of motors being revved. Another example is the name of Organic Mechanic. He is in some way a medic that connects the war boys to their blood bags and assists when Splendid is in labor. In a culture that values cars over everything, a medic is seen as a mechanic but for living things. In another example, Organic uses a metaphor when Nux needs a blood transplant. Organic says that he has "a war boy running on empty" (scene 4). In this way, Nux is understood as a car running on an empty tank.

The cult of Immortan Joe has in its symbolism the use of car-related language as well. When the war boys are getting ready to go into battle they approach a stand with steering wheels and in the top Immortan Joe's coat of armor. Slint says in prayer, "by my deed, I honor him, V8"[5] (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 5). Immortan Joe's cult requires the war boys to sacrifice themselves in battle. When this ritual is taking place the war boys scream "witness me" and spray chrome paint on their mouths that is also used to paint the cars. A heaven-like place called Valhalla is constantly referred to as a place they aspire to be after death and is described as a highway or a place they can ride to. When Nux is told he is too weak to go into battle, he says that he wants to die "historic on the Fury Road" (scene 5). Natural elements are unknown for the war boys and in contrast, they are surrounded by vehicles. Their understanding of the world and religion is based on the resources that Immortan Joe has in abundance: gasoline and artillery. Still, elements of

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[4] The Wrenched are the lower class people living under the Citadel. They depend on the reserve of water that Immortan Joe owns.

[5] V8 refers to an eight-cylinder V configuration engine.

water and plants are not factored into their culture and religion even if they are essential for survival.

Just like in *Mad Max: Fury Road* the cars are the dominant culture, in *Idiocracy* the culture is dominated by corporations. Logos dominate the landscape while natural elements like trees and animals are missing. The clothes that the characters wear are covered in logos, and the job of the Secretary of State is sponsored by Carl's Jr (Judge et al., 2006, Scene 31). The hospitals are sponsored by pharmaceutical companies as the wallpaper has the logos of medicines and vitamins. Corporations have taken over to the extent that Brawndo, a sports drink, has replaced water. It is used for everything; from feeding babies, washing cars, and watering the crops. In *Idiocracy* nature is completely absent as they don't even know how to grow plants, but corporate culture is present literally in every surface of their environment. Colebrook (2017) argues that Frederic Jameson was right when he said it was easier to imagine the end of the world rather than the end of capitalism. While we have the ability to envision an environmental crisis, it is hard to envision a society with no corporations. *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Idiocracy* exemplify in a very particular way how we envision human culture surviving above nature. In our understanding, what constitutes the world are our ideas of society, hope, and politics, so when we envision the end of the world it is actually the end of these ideas (p. 103).

The films also feature some elements of nostalgia for the products and objects that the characters miss or remember from their past lives before the dystopian present. In the previous section, it was discussed how in *Snowpiercer* the classroom section of the train features different natural elements like astronomy mobiles, figurines and drawings of animals, and nature inspired crafts. There is a given importance to nature as it is conserved but only as knowledge when it is

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taught in school to the children. Rather than conserving physical nature by taking care of the environment the knowledge humans have of nature is conserved as culture. In a way, this natural knowledge is passed over as nostalgic objects. Human elements from the past are showcased as well like a globe and world map, flags, an air balloon, ships, trains, planes, and a drawing mannequin. In *Mad Max: Fury Road* one of the wives sees a passing satellite in the night sky. She knows that they used to "bounce messages" and "carry shows" (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 14). In *Snowpiercer,* Edgar talks with Curtis about steaks and ask him if he remembers what they taste like. The mention of the steak comes out at least three more times. These objects have been taught to the five wives, the kids in the train, and Edgar. The wives learned about it from Miss Giddy's lessons and as Edgar was a train baby, he has never tasted steak. The characters yearn for a past that they never got to experience through the nostalgia other characters show for human objects. The knowledge of human culture is preserved and passed through generations that will lament that these objects have disappeared. Feminist scholars have discussed the nature/ culture dichotomy that equates women to nature and men to culture. This dichotomy also places more value on culture and conceptualizes nature as less valuable and submissive (Yates, 2017). The films exemplify how conservation of culture is put over conservation of nature, but also how economic gain and human progress is prioritized.

CREATING ART

There is a character in *Snowpiercer* credited as "Painter." His first appearance shows him sketching the moment when Andrew's arm is put through a hole in the train. The front sectioners are testing the temperature to see how long it will take for his arm to get frostbite. A closeup shot of his bunk bed shows the sketches he has made through the 18 years that they've been on the

train. One drawing shows a multitude trying to get through a gate into the train. Another sketch shows a moment that Curtis describes by the end of the film: Gillian cutting off his arm to offer it as food for the starving tail sectioners and people starting to follow his example. This moment is represented by Gillian holding up his cut-off arm and people in the back raising their hands as a sign of volunteering. Meanwhile, other drawings have a focus on military forces. For example, a drawing shows a soldier holding a gun and handing one single protein block to a crowd that reaches out their hands, other drawings show more soldiers holding guns and a scene of decapitated bodies laying on the ground. The Painter acts as some type of historian. This doesn't seem like an assigned task but rather something he chooses to do. The Painter has also sketched multiple portraits of the tail sectioners. When he's looking for a portrait of Andy, his large collection of drawings is seen. In a later scene, Curtis, Tanya, Andrew, Grey, Mason, Yona, and Namgoong prepare to go forward through the train. As Namgoong handles the electrical cables to open the locked door the rest stand posing for a picture that is sketched by the Painter. In some way, they are commemorating the moment. The Painter is a character that has taken the job of a historian and an artist, but his motives are not expressed in the film. The topics he chooses to depict are those that surround him as he portrays life in the iron train that they inhabit.

The warlords and war boys in *Mad Max: Fury Road* also create art in the modifications that they make on their cars to showcase their personalities. The People Eater's car is a modified limousine reflecting on his past occupation as a banker. Nux's car is a 1934 Chevrolet and some of his modifications are seen throughout the film, like his name engraved on the gas pedal and a bird's skull bobblehead on the dashboard. Each steering wheel is also unique for each war boy. Nux has added features like a baby doll head with a metallic addition as teeth making it look like

the skull from Immortan Joe's coat of armor. In contrast, Furiosa's steering wheel is a skull carved in wood and has a more natural essence.

Idiocracy presents few instances of the media that the people in the film value and create. The narrator explains that "the number one movie in the country was called *Ass,"* and features the buttocks of a man and farting for 90 minutes. Bauers sits in the movie theatre surrounded by an audience that laughs throughout the movie (Judge et al., 2006, Scene 20). The show that Frito is watching when Bauers crashes into his apartment is called *Ow! My Balls* and is about a man that gets hit on the testicles repeatedly. The two most popular channels are *The Violence Network* and *The Masturbation Network*. The world in which Bauers has woken up 500 years later is in crisis, not only economically and ecologically but also in culture. The film brings attention to how deficiency in intelligence has also decreased the quality of media produced in society and reflects their fascination with violence and sex.

In one of the first scenes in *Children of Men* resistance art can be seen in the form of graffiti. As Theo sits by the train's window, on the outside there's a billboard that has been covered with layers of graffiti. The upper layer shows the following phrase "Last one to die, please turn out the light" (Shor et al., 2006, scene 4). Graffiti and street art continue to be a recurring image in the film. Theo walks along a wall on his way to work. A man paints the wall to cover various pieces: a child's face peeks through the frame of a window that has been blocked with bricks, a stencil mark that says "The Human Project Lives,"[6] and more illustrations of baby faces (scene 8). As Theo continues to walk, refugees are being locked inside of large

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[6] According to a conversation between Jasper and Theo, The Human Project is a supposed organization with the mission of finding the cure for human infertility (Shor et al., 2006, scene 8). Throughout the film, the existence of the organization is doubted.

cages. In the background, an apartment complex is being seized and suitcases, clothes and mattresses are thrown out from the balconies. This is followed by Theo walking in front of the Argentinian embassy. Next to the fence of the building, there's a memorial for Baby Diego that has flowers, cards, a poster of Diego's picture inside a heart, and a sign that says "TE AMO" (scene 8). These pieces show how art is used as an expression of resistance to the current state of the world. Baby Diego's death is honored, but only because he was the youngest man on Earth and the altar done for him contrasts with the treatment that the refugees suffer in the previous scene. The street art shows the yearning for the presence of children.

In the last scene of the film, Marichka has managed to get Theo and Kee into a boat in an underground canal that is used for smuggling. The walls of the canal have images painted on them like airplanes, hands, human-like figures and faces, and drawings of animals like a dog and a cow. The close up of the paintings are shot in a way that it first resembles a cave and making it look like the art in the Lascaux cave, a prominent example of prehistoric art. The art in *Children of Men* not only shows political and social resistance but a constant effort to create art that reflects human culture even if it is about to become extinct. The car modifications in *Mad Max: Fury Road* shows a need for creativity even in harshest life that the war boys experience. Their art and religion reflect their admiration for Joe and interconnectivity with the automobiles. In a similar way, the Painter in *Snowpiercer* is only representing his surroundings, and nature is an essential element that is missing in his environment.

The creation of art by many of the characters is a form of resistance. Stark (2013) argues that narratives of the end of the world are "human centered at heart" (p.72). Stark analyses *The Road* (2009) to make the argument that placing humans as the final witnesses of the end of the

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world is very self-centered. I argue that the creation of this art is a way to leave behind evidence

of their presence on Earth and is very human centered as well. The other purpose that art serves

for the characters is that to express themselves and their values. In *Mad Max: Fury Road* it's

cars, for *Idiocracy* it's sex and violence, in *Snowpiercer* is life in the back section, and in

Children of Men it's babies and fertility. Their art reflects separation from nature as none of their

forms of art represent the environment. The characters will create art based on what they value

and again human culture comes before nature.

4.1.3 CONTROL OF RESOURCES

The examination of the films also demonstrates a recurring theme of control over natural

resources, but also the use of humans as resources. Peterson, Essen, Hansen, and Peterson (2016)

argue that neoliberal markets have turned nature into an "alienable property" (p. 402). Similarly,

Western thought has assumed that nature can and should be controlled to seek private and

economic gain, and advertising encourage us to see natural resources as a commodity we can

possess (Koger & Winter, 2013; Corbett, 2002). Ecofeminism has also taken on the task to

examine how women and nature are dominated and exploited. Tong (2018) argues that the way

in which natural resources are controlled, for example the discovery and conquest of land, is

similar to the abuse of women (p. 255). This section examines instances in which the characters

recognize the power dynamics that come from the domination of both humans and nature.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Immortan Joe is the villain in *Mad Max: Fury Road,* a tyrant that controls the water and

the food supplies. He places great importance in the control of gasoline and bullets as he sends

Furiosa and the warlords to Gas Town and The Bullet Farm. This puts in motion the plot of the

film as this is Furiosa's opportunity to run away with the war rig. In a later scene, the automobile assets are carefully counted by The People Eater (the mayor of Gas Town) as he says "we are down 30,000 units of guzzoline[7], 19 canisters of nitro, 12 assault bikes, seven pursuit vehicles. The deficit mounts. And now, sir, you have us stuck in quagmire[8]" (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 12). Although Joe sits on a large reserve of gasoline it is an asset to take care of as it is finite. The persecution scenes also show the type of assets that other tribes possess like smaller pursuit vehicles and motorcycles. Although one tribe owns an excavator, the amount and size of vehicles Joe owns is incomparable. The constant persecution and confrontation between the Wasteland tribes shows the constant fight for the control of resources. The control of gasoline, water, and artillery is what gives Immortan Joe his power. During a conversation with the Vulvalini Mothers Toast explains that he controls the water resources of the Citadel and that "because he owns it he owns all of us" (scene 15). The final scene shows a switch in power dynamics when Furiosa gives back the water to the Wrenched and they no longer depend on anyone for survival.

Children of Men does not portray a tyrant but it showcases the imperialist domination from Great Britain as the last standing country with a stable government. Still, for Great Britain resources are limited. Theo stands in line to pass through security at his work in the Department of Energy. A poster is shown in the background that says, "38% of Britain's water supply is contaminated by nuclear radiation… SAVE WATER TO SAVE LIVES" (Shor, et al., 2006, scene 3). It is understood in the film that immigrants are fleeing to Great Britain escaping civil wars in their countries but also escaping famine and water shortages.

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[7] Gasoline.

[8] Mud

In *Snowpiercer*, Curtis and Gilliam know that once they have control over the water section they can control the whole train. The following exchange occurs between Gilliam and Curtis referring to the water section:

Gilliam: It's one of the most crucial sections of the train.

Curtis: If we take it we have the upper hand?

Gilliam: We don't even have to go to the very front. We control the water… we control the negotiation. (Tae-sung et al., 2014, scene 16)

Later in the film, Gilliam and Curtis reaffirm this to Mason as they have threatened to turn off the water for the front sectioners, to which Mason replies, "Turn off the water? You'll only be condemning your own people. The water comes from the front" (scene 21). Mason explains how the system works and how the front controls all resources. The resources are not only closely controlled and balanced to suppress the tail section, but also to maintain the environmental equilibrium. As mentioned in the previous section, Wilford knew that the balance of the resources was essential as he said, "air, water, food supply, must always be kept in balance" (scene 28).

In *Idiocracy,* there is a corporate control in all economic activities including agriculture. The narrator states that Brawndo had replaced the water in every aspect. Water fountains contain the energy drink, babies drink Brawndo rather than formula, it is used to wash cars, and the crop fields are watered with it. The use of water was affecting the profit margin of the company so they bought the F.D.A. and F.C.C. to market it as essential instead of water. Though the company doesn't control water resources, it controls what people consider indispensable. Bauers makes them switch the Brawndo drink for water, but this has a direct effect on the economy. The

narrator says that "the Brawndo stock suddenly dropped to zero, leaving half of the population unemployed" (Judge et al., 2006, Scene 24). In a similar way to *Snowpiercer,* the close control of resources by Brawndo kept the economic and social balance which is as fragile as the environmental. The previous section showed how the characters understand the needed balance in nature, but the examples examined in this section show that they are aware that those who have a hold on the resources have control over the system.

HUMAN RESOURCES

In the previous section I examined how the films present natural resources as alienable property and commodities to be use for private and economic gain (Peterson et al., 2017; Corbett, 2002). Overall, the films show how the labor of humans is exploited in a similar way. Women are often assumed to be closer to nature and males as the opposite. The enforcing of these ideas has reduced women to be used for their reproductive abilities and men for destruction (Stearney, 1994, p. 153). The films also expose two types of resources — valuable and disposable. This section explores the different roles that females, males, and offspring take on the films and identified which labor is considered valuable or disposable. Kuo (2017) argues that there is a parallel between the protection and treatment of fetuses over women's choices being similar to the treatment of natural resources as more important than the protection of nature itself.

In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Max is seen by the war boys as a tool as he is captured to serve as a living blood bag. The citizens of the Citadel have been exposed to radiation and one of the various consequences is cancer. Nux, like many of other war boys, suffers from a blood

deficiency. Later in one of the persecution scenes, Max hangs from the Lancer percher[9] on Nux's

car and sees that his car is being driven by another group of war boys. Max exclaims, "how much

can they take from me? Got my blood, now it's my car" (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 5). Max's is

being drained like a resource valued for his universal blood type. The following sections examine

closely how male characters are used as violent pawns and female characters are used for

reproduction.

Males as agents of violence

The premise in *Idiocracy* starts with Joe Bauers being selected to take part in an army

experiment to preserve the best soldiers and officers for battle. Officer Collins is doing a

presentation for upper officials and says,

> Many of our best pilots, soldiers and military leaders often go their entire careers without
>
> ever seeing battle. With the Human Hibernation Project, we will be able to save our best
>
> men, frozen in their prime for use when they are needed most. (Judge et al., 2006, Scene
>
> 6).

From the beginning, the soldiers are seen only as a resource that can be preserved for later. The

society presented in *Idiocracy* values sexuality and violence over everything. The highest ranked

show in the country is called *Ow! My Balls* and the best film of the year is called *Ass.* The two

most popular media networks are called *The Masturbation Network* and *The Violence Network*.

The entertainment the people in *Idiocracy* enjoy reflects a fascination for violence and sex.

Bauers is sent to a "rehabilitation" mandated by a court judge as punishment for ruining the

country's economy. First Bauers thinks it is not that bad of punishment, but later finds out that

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[9] The war boys' vehicles feature a percher were a lancer stands and throws arrows with bombs to their opponent's vehicles.

Rehabilitation is a reality TV show that features a gladiator-like fight with monster trucks. The opponents' trucks are represented as phallic symbols not only because of their size and power but also because the weapons that these trucks have literally resemble penises. In contrast, Joe's car is small and has a flaccid dildo placed on its front end. This is one way in which Bauers is emasculated. In previous scenes, he was also mocked for his "faggy" way of speaking (Judge et al., 2006, scene 10). Although the society in *Idiocracy* values sexuality in both males and females, feminine traits are often looked down while masculine stereotypes of aggressiveness are celebrated. The people in upper leadership positions are not in there because of their intelligence, but rather for having sexual and violent attributes. The president of the United States, Dwayne Elizondo Camacho, is a "five-time Ultimate Smackdown Champion, porn superstar" (Judge et al., 2006, Scene 18).

In other examples of how violence is valued, the advertising in the film is highly aggressive and predominant in the film. The Carl's Jr's logo is an angry star and its slogan has been modified to be, "Fuck you. I'm eating!" (Judge et al., 2006, scene 10). A cigarette advertisement is shown on a billboard with a picture of a muscular man and the slogan, "If you don't smoke Tarrlytons, fuck you!" In the bottom, a small Surgeon General's warning says "Warning: The Surgeon General has one lung and a voice box, but he could still kick your sorry ass" (scene 20). Whenever the characters feel excitement they show the emotion in violent ways. For example, the representatives in congress and the Secretary of Education randomly shoot automatic guns when they are excited. In a previous scene, Frito's car has been blocked by the police so they have to leave it behind and run away. A block away they see the police seizing the car and it quickly elevates to shooting and bombing it. As the car is in flames people approach

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the scene and start to shoot guns and cheer with joy. Frito exclaims, "Oh, hell yeah! He's on

fire!" While Bauers has to remind him that it is his car (scene 16).

In *Children of Men* violence is present in the abuse of immigrants by the military forces.

That violence is also replicated on the contra-movement of refugee activists. At one point during

the armed conflict, Luke tells Theo, "Julian was wrong! She thought it would be peaceful. But

how can it be peaceful when they try to take away your dignity?" (Shor, et al., scene 47). Julian

was planning to simply protect Kee and her baby and possibly find a cure of human infertility,

but Luke's approach required an aggressive uprising.

Perhaps *Mad Max: Fury Road* is the film that best exemplifies the use of men as a violent

resource for war. The war boys are Immortan Joe's army and their labor is essential for him as

they are the ones that obtain and protect the resources, still, they are presented as disposable.

Indoctrinated by a religion that places Immortan Joe as a god, the war boys willfully go to war

for him. Splendid describes Nux as nothing more but "battle fodder" (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene

8). When Immortan Joe calls on the war boys to follow Furiosa and retrieve his wives, Nux is too

weak to fight and is told by Organic and Slint that he can't go. Nux says that he does not want to

die "soft" and "if [he's] gonna die, [he's] gonna die historic in the Fury Road" (scene 5). The

film shows not only Nux, but all of the war boys celebrating their missions religiously. When the

war boys are called to the Fury Road, war drums can be seen and heard to hype them up. Later,

during the first persecution scene, the "Doof Wagon" is introduced. This is a supercharged truck

with a wall of speakers that carries the drummers in the back and an electric guitar player in the

front. The only purpose of the vehicle is to rally Immortan Joe's troops. These instances of

hyper-masculinity are almost cartoonish, but the culture presented in the *Mad Max* franchise is

packed with cars and violence that celebrates these stereotypes of hyper-masculinity.

Ecofeminism work has connected women with nature not only in the way that both are

dominated and exploited, but also in the feminization of the environment — for example

referring to it as Mother Nature (Tong, 2018). Early feminist scholars argued that women's

reproductive and nurturing abilities made them closer to nature (Beavoir, 1952; Ortner, 1974).

Ting, Geng, Ye, and Zhou (2019) agree that more women are associated with nature than men

and that those who are more strongly connected are less likely to harm the environment (p. 43).

The equalization of women with nature has in consequence conceptualized men as the opposite.

While women are conceptualized as passive and caring, men are expected to be aggressive and

destructive toward the environment (Stearney, 1994). Characters like Nux, Frito, and Luke are

represented as being further from nature but also more violent and destructive to the

environment.

Mothers and agents of reproduction

In *Mad Max: Fury Road* a scene shows large women with their breasts connected to

milking machines. Some of them are breastfeeding babies and others are just holding them. Their

role is to produce mother's milk, a proper sustenance for war boys to fight Immortan Joe's

battles. The five wives have a similar role in reproduction. During the extent of the film, they are

constantly referred to as property of Immortan Joe but the wives show a resistance to be seen as

mere objects. When Joe walks into the "biodome" where the wives are kept behind a locked gate,

protest messages are written on the wall. There are some that say, "Our babies will not be

warlords" and "We are not things" (Mitchell, et al., scene 5). Miss Giddy, who is in charge of

educating and taking care of the wives, is in the biodome and tells Joe "they are not your property. You cannot own a human being. Sooner or later someone pushes back!" (scene 5). Even the wives recognize that their status is that of a form of property. For example, when Max aims a gun at Toast she tells him to not "damage the goods," and Splendid refers to herself and the others as "breeding stock" (scene 8).

The role of the wives is to produce healthy war lords that will be heirs of Joe's empire, and Joe only values and sees them as reproductive agents. Beavoir (1952) had argued that women's natural reproductiveness alienated women and put them in a lower position than men. Stearney (1994) argued that the use of the mother archetype reduced women and nature to their reproductive abilities and encouraged the patriarchal idea of mothers being "natural, limitless, and exploitable" (p.146). In *Mad Max: Fury Road,* the wives are reduced to that archetype, had become a property, and are highly valued for their fertility. In one scene they are referred as "Joe's priced breeders" (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 5). The fertile bodies of the wives are a valuable resource for Joe to generate heirs.

In contrast, the sex labor of the women in *Idiocracy* is not considered high-cost, but rather disposable. One scene has Frito, Joe, and Rita walking through a Costco. The store not only features immense racks of products, but also individual stores making it resemble a mall. Some of the stores inside of Costco include a Starbucks with the slogan "Exotic coffee for men" (Judge et al., 2006, Scene 17). A latte is $200, a hot latte is $2,000, and a full-body latte is $50,000. The decorations of the outside of the shop show silhouettes of exotic dancers, and men stand in line to get in. Previously, Bauers had said that he wanted a Starbucks and Frito says to him, "Yeah, well, I really don't think we have time for a hand job, Joe" (scene 17). The other

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stores at Costco are H&R Block Adult Tax Return with the slogan "home of the gentleman's

rebate," with a woman that stands next to the door and a sign that reads "15 minute tax returns or

as fast as you can," and a place called Pollo Borracho: Adult Chicken with the slogan, "buckets

of wings with 'full release'" (scene 17). What the stores are selling is sex disguised as products

like coffee and chicken buckets. Rather than using sex to sell, sex is the actual product to be sold.

The shops in *Idiocracy* only show a sexual product targeted toward men that uses the labor of

women. By the end of the film, Rita decides to stay in the future, since she has now been offered

a job at Starbucks as a CEO. Rita's occupation didn't evolve much from being a prostitute in the

past to being the CEO of a prostitution shop. The average intelligence of Bauers is used in the

plot of the film to solve the problems of this society, and it even grants him a position as the

president of the United States (when in the past he was only a librarian). Frito then becomes the

vice president rather than naming Rita, the second smartest person. Instead, she takes on the role

of the first lady, and she and Bauers have "the three smartest kids in the world." (scene 32).

Rita's intelligence, which is also high, is never used or acknowledged in the way Bauers's is. Her

intelligence is only applied to her occupation as a prostitute.

In *Children of Men,* the fertility crisis is mentioned and referenced constantly. As Theo is

riding the train to visit his friend Jasper, a billboard is shown on the outside. The billboard has a

government announcement saying, "Avoiding fertility test is a crime" (Shor et al., 2006, scene

4). The announcement can be seen in at least three more scenes. This instance can be considered

an example of reproductive governance (Morgan and Roberts, 2012). The women in the film are

not only encouraged legally to reproduce but also socially. At Jasper's house, the camera makes a

close up of a desk next to a window. Photographs, news articles, and posters are displayed on the

window and give more context about the fertility crisis. Headlines show the decreasing fertility rates through the years and a bumper sticker reads, "childless women" (scene 6). The bumper sticker along with the previous joke told by Jasper state that it is women who are infertile. Another headline says "No babies, no hope, say scientists" (scene 6). Gotlib (2016) comments on pro-natalist ideals that pressure voluntarily childless women to be mothers, for example, arguments that shrinking populations may have negative effects on the economy (p.335). The headlines presented in the film passively demand for women's fertility in order to save humanity. This places an expectation of motherhood on women, but also a responsibility to save the world.

Perhaps Kee has the most essential role in the film as she is a soon to be mother. The activist group, The Fishes, only see her as a woman carrying a baby that is a potential political flag. Theo agrees to help Julian by escorting Kee, but it isn't until he finds out that she's pregnant that he is completely invested in the mission. As Luke mentions to him, "now [he knows] what's at stake" (scene 23). In one scene Kee tells Theo that she considered suicide when she found out she was pregnant, "I thought about the Quietus thing. Supposed to be *suave*. Pretty music and all that. Then the baby kicked. I [felt] it. Little bastard was alive. And I [felt] it. And me too. I am alive" (scene 27). Kee's dialogue shows that she initially rejected motherhood for her own safety but then is motivated to go on when she felt her baby kicking. Kee's decision is self-motivated but exposes an expectation to be a natural mother. In a way, Kee instantly takes on the role of motherhood to bear and protect her child, and the film places a responsibility on her to save humanity. Rich (1976) calls this the sacred calling, an institutionalized motherhood that requires women to serve as the producers and nurturers of their children with the responsibility to better society (p. 34).

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In *Snowpiercer* Tanya takes on a similar role of motherhood. The first encounter with her in the film is with Timmy as Curtis tries to convince him to give his protein block. In a later scene, Wilford soldiers request for all kids to be taken to the front for a medical examination. As a woman takes measurements of the children, Tanya hides Timmy under her skirt but he and Andrew's child, Andy, are taken away. Tanya and Andrew fight desperately to keep their children showing a protective instinct. Later, the Painter hands Tanya a sketch of Timmy and this is what gives Tanya the motivation to join the rebellion. Feasey (2012) had previously explored this archetype of motherhood that expects women to be devoted and selfless and adds to Rich's concept of the natural mother.

The problem with characters like Kee and Tanya is not that they are mothers, but rather that they don't get an opportunity to show strengths outside of that archetype. While Curtis's character is motivated by the goal of gaining control of the engine, Tanya's goal is to find Timmy. The film presents Tanya as a strong character, but it doesn't show her motivations outside of motherhood and is expected to fight relentlessly for her son.

Valuable offspring

In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Splendid dies after being run over by Immortan Joe's vehicle when she falls from the war rig. Immortan Joe tells Organic, the medic, to take the child out of her uterus. Organic says that the baby is dead and it could have been Joe's "viable human" (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 12). Organic means that Joe has lost a viable heir for his empire. Previously, Joe's first two sons were presented: Rictus who is strong but has an intellectual disability, and Corpus who is intelligent but suffers from brittle bone disease. Neither of them possess the characteristics that Immortan Joe requires for an heir. The reason the wives

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have been selected as the prized breeders is that they do not show any signs of cancer or physical

deformities like most of the Wrenched. When the Many Mothers see them for the first time they

say, "Where did you find such creatures? So soft. This one has all her teeth!" (scene 13). As the

five wives don't show any signs of weak or morbid conditions they are chosen to produce the

best and healthier heirs for Immortan Joe. At one moment of the film the Bullet Farmer says, "all

this for a family squabble," recognizing that they are waisting too many resources and energy in

the mission to recover Joe's wives (scene 9). The People Eater corrects him by saying that it is

"healthy babies," what they're fighting for (scene 9). There is a parallel between the protection of

offspring over women's safety and the treatment of natural resources as more important than the

protection of nature itself (Kuo, 2017). In this similar way, Immortan Joe protects his babies,

fuel, and water, but disregards the safety of the wives and the conservation on nature in the

Wasteland.

In *Children of Men,* Kee's baby is seen as a political tool and resource for the activist

groups. When they're at the cottage deciding whether Kee should go forward with the plan or

stay, the following conversation occurs:

Emily: Listen, listen! She belongs here. And this baby is the flag that could unite us all!

Miriam: We said we'd never use this baby for political purposes.

Kee: My baby is not a flag. (Shor et al., 2006, scene 22)

Kee's baby has become an essential and alienable property for the activist groups. In *Children of

Men* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, offspring represent highly valued resources that serve a private

and economic gain.

At the beginning of *Snowpiercer,* two children, Timmy and Andy, are taken away from their parents at the tail section. By the end of the film, Wilford explains why he has been requesting small children. Timmy and Andy have been used to replace an extinct piece of the engine. Since they are small enough to fit inside the machinery, Timmy and Andy are forced to operate as the missing piece. Wilford says that, "the tail section manufactures a steady supply of kids" (Tae-sung et al., 2014, scene 28). For Wilford, the manual labor of the tail sectioners is just another commodity and like natural resources have become objects for human use (Corbett, 2002).

The main theme in *Idiocracy* reflects ideologies of eugenics as the plot consists of the human intellect gradually decreasing when only the people with the lowest IQ's are reproducing. The film opens with a monologue from the narrator,

> Most science fiction of the day predicted a future that was more civilized and more intelligent. But as time went on things seemed to be heading in the opposite direction. A 'dumbing down.' How did this happen? Evolution does not necessarily reward intelligence. With no natural predators to thin the herd, it began to simply reward those who reproduced the most and left the intelligent an endangered species. (Judge, et al. 2006, opening scene)

The film does not explicitly blame the lower class on the "dumbing down," but the first scenes show an upper-class couple, Trevon and Carol, in contrast with a lower-class couple, Clevon and Trish. While Trevon and Carol are formally interviewed in their large and affluent home, Trish and Clevon are presented in a documentary-style scene without interacting with them. Their home is disorganized, children laugh and scream in the background, and an outside shot of the

home shows an impoverished neighborhood. At first, the film is communicating that stupid people, that are also poor, have caused a deficient human race. *Idiocracy* evidences ideals of eugenics as not all reproduction is desired equally. The film places a higher value on children born from couples with higher IQs.

Humans in the presented dystopian societies are seen as either disposable objects and labor or valued for their reproductive abilities. The films also explore scarce resources like water and gasoline, but also healthy and promising offspring. The labor of tail sectioners, milkers, and sex workers from *Idiocracy,* is seen as disposable. In contrast, offspring are highly valued for Immortan Joe, as possible heirs. Kee's baby is priceless as the firstborn child in many years, the wives are praised for their fertility, and children are valued by Wilford for their unique characteristics to replace extinct parts.

4.1.4 REPRODUCTIVE FUTURISM AND HOPE

The previous section examined how male and female characters are used as tools for different purposes and how the characters put a value on children. This section explores the character arcs and motives for acting the way that they do in the film. These are motivated to act thinking in terms of the "greater good." Dystopian narratives offer an opportunity to expose human interaction and responses in the case of having to manage limited resources (Murphy, 2018). The characters on the film often act in protective ways towards children and babies. I argue that the following instances show ideals of reproductive futurism. This means that children and babies are often seen as an embodiment of the promise of the future (Stephen, 2010). This section also examines how nature is used as a symbol of hope. Merchant's (2013) concept of the recovery of nature is used in this section to analyze how the ultimate goal of the characters is to

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return or reach sustainable spaces. Still, Merchant argues that nature recovery means that humans retain the control of the environment (p. 11).

THE GREATER GOOD

In one of the final scenes in *Snowpiercer,* Curtis is telling Namgoong about the first months on the train with no water and food. They began to eat the weak ones and later follow with the babies. Curtis recalls killing a woman to get to her baby, but then Gillian stopped them and cut off his arm saying, "eat this if you're so hungry. Eat this, just leave the baby" (Tae-sung et al., 2014, scene 27). Later, people follow his example by offering their own limbs rather than eating the babies. The actions of Gillian and the tail sectioners show a priority for the protection of babies — even in a broken society that has resorted to cannibalism. It is also this act of protection that shows the integrity and benevolence of humanity.

At the end of *Children of Men,* Theo makes sure that Kee keeps her baby close to her and protects her at all costs. He says "Keep her close, Kee. Whatever happens, whatever they say, you keep her close" (Shor, et al., 2006, last scene). The event that sets in motion the conflict of the film is Theo's mission to protect Kee and her baby. Throughout the film, many of the characters willfully sacrifice themselves knowing that it is for the greater good of humanity. Jasper and Janice stay behind in their home knowing that The Fishes will soon arrive looking for Theo, Miriam, and Kee. Marichka and Sirdjan are two characters that aid Theo and Kee at the Bexhill refugee camp. They guide them to reach the sea knowing the risks of the war zone taking place on the outside. Sirdjan gets killed by Patric, and Marichka refuses to get on the boat with them and gets left behind at the camp. The two characters are motivated to help Theo and Kee only when they see that they have a baby.

Theo, Curtis, Bauers, and Max start as characters that are reluctant to take on leadership roles or become involved in the situations they are put in. By the end of the films, we see these character's arcs evolving into taking a responsibility in the futures of the societies they live in. At the beginning of *Children of Men*, Theo is depressed, apathetic, and uninterested in the political and social context, but by the end, he has come through the mission assigned to him by Julian and protects Kee and her baby to death. Max has been a lone character for the past years and resists forming meaningful relationships. Max decides to help her and the wives even when he gets a chance to go his own way and transfuses his blood to save Furiosa when she gets hurt. Bauers starts as a mediocre man that refuses to take on any initiative in his job in the army. An official tells him that he has to either "lead, follow, or get out of the way," and Bauers admits that he always chooses to get out of the way (Judge et al., 2006, Scene 5). Even though he has been antagonized, he takes on the responsibility to solve the problems of the United States. He tells the people at the monster truck arena,

> I just wanted to help you. That's all. So you can try and shoot me. You can try and run me over, whatever. But I just want you to ask yourselves one question first. Do you really want to live in a world where you try to blow up the one person that's tryin to help you? (Judge et al., 2006, scene 29)

Meanwhile in *Snowpiercer*, Curtis does not want to be recognized as the leader of the revolution despite Edgar and Gilliam telling him he is. Curtis feels he cannot be a leader since he never offered one of his limbs as a symbol of sacrifice. By the end of *Snowpiercer,* he fulfills his role as a leader when he puts his arm between the engine's wheels to stop the machinery and let Timmy go out. The film concludes with Namgoong and Yona setting up a bomb to open a gate to the

outside world. When Namgoon realizes he won't be able to close the gate to protect themselves from the explosion he and Curtis run to embrace and protect both Timmy and Yona. The sacrifices these characters make communicate themes of reproductive futurism and a responsibility to protect the succeeding generations. While Theo, Curtis and Namgoong give their lives for the future generations, Bauers and Max take on the responsibility to make a better and more sustainable world.

SYMBOLS OF HOPE

Children of Men shows elements of hope, but first shows hopelessness in a world without children. Theo is apathetic towards the situation of the world and shows signs of depression in a conversation with Jasper.

Jasper: What did you do on your birthday?

Theo: Nothing.

Jasper: Come on. You must've done something.

Theo: No. Same as every other day. Woke up, felt like shit, went to work, felt like shit.

Jasper: That's called a hangover, amigo.

Theo: At least with the hangover I feel something. Honestly Jasper, sometimes…" (Shor et al., 2006, scene 5).

Theo doesn't complete the sentence but it is implied that he has considered suicide. Theo is not the only one to be depressed and lacking hope. Throughout the film, the advertising of a product called Quietus is shown. At Jasper's house, Theo reads and mocks the instructions as Jasper tells him he uses it to kill mice as "they go quite peacefully" (Shor, et al., scene 25). The product is a suicide kit, but other medications are also offered to the public. Jasper comments that, "Daddy

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government hands out suicide kits and antidepressants in the rations, but ganja is still illegal" (scene 7). A later scene shows Nigel's son taking antidepressants and a headline of an article in Jasper's desk says, "No babies, no hope, say scientists" (scene 6). In a later scene, Miriam tells Theo about her past job as a midwife and how she noticed that less and less women were getting pregnant. Miriam tells Theo, "As the sound of the playgrounds faded the despair set in. Very odd what happens in a world without children's voices" (scene 33). In contrast, when Kee is introduced to Jasper and he sees that she is pregnant he tells her "Kee, your baby is the miracle the whole world was waiting for" (scene 26). In *Children of Men,* children are the source of hope and without them, the world becomes hostile and senseless.

In *Mad Max: Fury Road* the Green place is mentioned as a place of hope. The wives and Furiosa constantly mention it. In one scene, Max and Furiosa talk about the Green Place. Max asks how does she know that it exists and what the place means for her. Furiosa says that she was born there, and that for her it is a chance for redemption while for the wives it represents hope (Mitchell et al., 2015, scene 13). In a way, Splendid had acted as a leader for the wives. When she dies the wives cry but Toast says with hope, "Whatever happens we're going to the green place." Fragile replies, "The stupid Green Place! We don't even know where to find it" (scene 10). With Splendid gone, Fragile has lost some of her hope. When they find the Many Mothers, Furiosa also discovers that the Green Place doesn't exist anymore. At this point, Furiosa breaks down and loses all hope. Another element of hope in *Mad Max: Fury Road* is the seeds that the Seed Keeper has in her bag. She plants them every time that she gets an opportunity to test on the soil, hoping that one will grow. Once she passes away The Dag makes sure to take them. Later on, Max tells Furiosa, the wives, and the Mothers that instead of crossing the desert trying to find

a new home, they should recover the one they already have back at the Citadel. Here, Max suggests that they have to fix the Citadel rather than running to a new green place.

In *Snowpiercer* there are a couple of elements that give hope to Namgoong of a better future. First, there's the airplane that Namgoong has noticed that every year gets more uncovered. He tells Curtis that first, he was only able to see the tail, but as years went by he was able to see more and more. Namgoong explains to Curtis that "less ice and snow means it's melting" (Tae-sung et al., 2014, scene 27). Namgoong sees hope through the plane, but it is a hope for a natural space where he can live. In the final scene, Yona and Timmy go out of the train and in the distance they can see a polar bear. The presence of the bear can be considered a sign of nature being revived. The outside world was uninhabitable for humans, but while they were isolated from it, nature continued with its course and still made life possible. In this case, the polar bear is seen as a sign of salvation.

In *Idiocracy,* it is the image of a sprout that gives Joe a sense of hope that humanity can be saved. He waits for days hoping the plants will begin to grow. Rita sees that a rose has started to grow at the White House's garden and later sees that the crop fields show the early sprouts of plants peeking out. Rita then has to figure out a way to show everyone that Joe was right. It is the image of the sprout on the screen that symbolizes salvation for Joe as he will now be pardoned, but also for humanity as nature has been recovered through agriculture.

Different elements and objects give back hope to the characters, but these symbols often come with the recovery of natural and human fertility. For Jasper and Miriam, salvation is the recovery of human fertility in Kee's baby, and for Namgoong, Bauers, and Furiosa is the recovery of nature's fertility. Just like natural spaces exist for the benefit of humans, their

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recovery represent salvation for humanity. In this way, nature continues to be conceptualized as a tool used to serve human purposes.

4.2 DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to answer the following research questions: 1) What is the nature of dystopian films?; 2) What do they say about the current anxieties of U.S. society?; And 3) what are the roles of females and nature in dystopian films? Dystopian films serve as a reflection of human anxieties of the future and offer a unique opportunity to analyze how we as humans imagine our response to unsustainable and hopeless settings. The narrative film analysis found that, 1) dystopian films are human centered and show a separation from nature; 2) the films show fears of unsustainable futures and losing control of resources; and 3) that nature takes on a role that reduces it to a commodity that can be recovered by humans, while female characters have been assigned the roles of reproductive agents and mothers. These expectations also place a responsibility to be the saviors of humanity because of their assumed closeness to nature.

As supported by other research, dystopian narratives are deeply anthropocentric (Klonowska, 2018; Colebrook 2017; Stark, 2013). However, it would be very difficult for human stories not to be anthropocentric. In addition to the extensive work done in dystopian narratives, this study found that the films show a separation of humans from nature. This separation is represented in the contrast between natural and human spaces but also in the limited knowledge the characters show of their environment. The films also demonstrate a constant resistance to becoming extinct as human culture is preserved but show no interest in the conservation of the environment. These instances again show a separation of nature that makes humanity value it

less and feel more comfortable to exploiting it (Dickinson, 2013). The films also show the anthropocentric essence of dystopian narratives in the endings of the films. The goals of the characters are to preserve humanity through the protection of offspring, demonstrating ideals of reproductive futurism, and that they also aim to recover natural spaces. However, this recovery comes at the expense of nature and is for the benefit of humanity.

This study was also focused in identifying the fears and anxieties of society reflected in dystopian films. The narratives demonstrate a fear of unsustainable spaces and the loss of control of natural resources. The fear of unsustainability is shown through the representation of dead nature. In the case of *Mad Max: Fury Road,* it is a fear of a dry and deserted future, while in *Snowpiercer* it is for a perpetual winter that has also prevented any life from sprouting. In *Idiocracy,* the presented fear is that of a culture that continues to contaminate and damage the environment to the point that crops are dead and the soil has become too dry. These three films present a nature that has become unsustainable. In contrast, *Children of Men* presents a more tame version of unsustainable nature, but offers an anxious response to human extinction. The other anxiety that dystopian narratives present is the fear of losing control over natural resources and the scarcity of these. According to Hughes and Wheeler (2013), dystopian narratives have shown a common theme of control of nature. The films show a close grip on important resources like gasoline and water and a constant hustle to keep control of them. As previously mentioned, Colebrook (2017) argues that it is difficult to imagine a world without capitalism. The films envision worlds with economic markets that are controlled by Immortan Joe, front sections, Brawndo, and Great Britain. Currently natural resources like water and fuel are, as Peterson et al. (2016) calls them, alienable property. The films have presented exaggerated settings that are

scarce in resources and unsustainable. However, these stories of unsustainable futures may be perceived as fictional futures that are unlikely to happen, but are actually present realities that privileged perspectives may ignore (Colebrook, 2017, p. 103).

Finally, this study aimed to identify the role of female characters and nature in climate fiction. The films often showed that nature serves as a backdrop in which the human stories take place but also that natural fertility is the final prize that the characters want to earn. In *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Idiocracy,* the recovery of nature was the final goal. Furiosa and the wives take control of the Citadel, and Bauers rediscovers agriculture. In *Snowpiercer,* Yona and Timmy exit the human space of the train and enter the natural world that has now become more suitable for them. *Children of Men* in contrast, shows a recovery of human fertility. Nature is reduced to a goal that the characters want to reach, rather than striving to become more sustainable. Hulme (2009) argues that dystopian narratives have not been effective in creating an impact to fix climate matters. I argue that the reason is that nature has been reduced to a sustainable property that we can acquire, rather than pushing to enforce sustainable practices.

The roles of female characters are to act as reproductive agents like the wives of Immortan Joe, and to act as mother figures like Tanya, Rita as a first lady, and Kee. By being reproductive agents and mothers, the female characters also have to take on the responsibility of saving human race. Kee is told that her baby is the miracle that humanity has been waiting for, women in *Children of Men* are required to take a fertility test, and Furiosa and the Many Mothers are expected to control the Citadel to recover nature. This responsibility is placed on females instead of male characters, because they are seen as closer to nature and thus more likely to regain and protect it (Stearney, 1994). This closeness to nature also requires female characters to

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act as the opposite to violent male characters. The role of women in dystopian films is, because of their closeness to nature, to create life and be the saviors of human kind. The films may also express themes of conservation, but the few instances that show the value for nature are motivated by a purpose to serve humanity. Overall, the most important theme that all films have in common is the value of fertility in nature and humanity.

In summary, the analysis section organized the data in four sections: natural spaces in contrast with human spaces, culture over nature, control of natural and human resources, and reproductive futurism and symbols of hope. The discussion section addressed the research question and concluded that dystopian films show a separation from nature, fears of unsustainable futures and losing control of resources. The discussion also identifies the roles of nature, a commodity that can be controlled by humans, and female characters as agents of reproduction, mothers, and saviors of the human race. The next and final chapter summarizes the entire study. It also addresses the limitations of this study and suggests directions for further research of dystopian narratives and discourses in media.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The way we envision apocalyptic dread may be as a deserted wasteland, a frozen landscape, mountains beyond mountains of trash, or a world without children or hope. According to the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change, by 2030 we will reach a limit for the planet's temperature that will cause irreversible damages if we continue with our current fossil fuel consumption (Miller & Croft, 2018). These dire threats don't seem that different from the warnings in the fictional scenarios of eco-dystopian films. These narratives act as cautionary tales that alert us of a possibly haunting future. We've seen other environmental images like the starving polar bear, photographs of marine life trapped in plastic, and blazing fires that engulf the Amazon forest. Eco-dystopian films have been present since the beginning of the environmental movement only that they had not caught the same attention as they do today. However, popularity does not necessarily mean action. We are currently facing a climate debate that on one side encourages immediate action and on the other an administration that quits international climate agreements and rejects scientific data. We're at the cusp of the "Anthropocene," an era characterized by the impact that humans have on the environment.

The four analyzed films reflect our fears related to environmental doom, but they also demonstrate a desire to control natural resources and female bodies. There have been various challenges to make abortions more accessible. Only in 2018, there was the Human Life Protection Act in Alabama and the Trump administration's implemented "gag rule" in *Title X*, a regulation that prevents government-funded health providers from referring patients to abortion services. Outside of the U.S. approaches like China's one-child policy was changed to a two-child policy in 2015. It can be argued that bills that limit access to abortion are about control and

encourage to treat female reproduction as resources that can be open and closed like a tap. As previously mentioned by Colebrook (2017), climate fiction often reflects realities of the present and not only future possibilities of doom. Dystopian narratives present exaggerations of current events, and the control of female reproduction in the films is not so far from the current forms of reproductive governance in our world today. Dystopian films carry a very particular message in their realistic possibilities of environmental fallout, but also in the promise that humanity will eventually come through. Climate fiction encourages us to grapple with our not so fictional environmental fears, but this confrontation should go beyond the running time of the films.

The objective of this research was to investigate the nature of dystopian films, in order to identify the fears and anxieties that they reflect of U.S. society, and to examine the roles that women and nature take in these narratives. In order to do this, the themes, structure, dialogue and imagery of the four selected films were closely examined. They reflected the separation of humans from nature, an anthropocentric perspective that places culture over nature, and fear of unsustainable futures. The analysis in the previous chapter also identified the roles of nature and women in dystopian narratives. Nature often takes on the role of being a backdrop and an object. As a backdrop it is used to reflect environmental decadence, and as an object, it is used as a final reward for the characters to recover. Finally, female characters often take on the role of reproductive agents and saviors. Their roles as mothers or means of reproduction often put a responsibility on women to save humanity.

In chapter one, I explained the importance of examining dystopian films. In the past several years, successful television and film series share dystopian narratives showing that apocalyptic scenarios are increasingly popular among audiences. These various television and

film productions may fall under different genres, but they all share a fascination with scenarios of impending doom. These do not only project the values of society but also the main anxieties of the period. The decades of the 1950s and 60s may have seen dystopias concerned with nuclear skirmish, while the 1980s and 90s may have been preoccupied with the effects of technology. The twenty-first century shows an acute awareness of current environmental decadence.

Chapter two went over the two theoretical frameworks that guided this study: film theory and ecofeminism. I addition to film theory, this chapter presented an overview of research on dystopian films and work that has examined how nature is represented in media. The media representations of nature show that the environment is often seen as private property and a commodity, and that Western thought encourages us to see the environment as a resource available for men (Corbett, 2002; Koger & Winter, 2010). Nature is also conceptualized as being oppositional to human culture and is placed as inferior in a nature/culture dichotomy. This generates a separation from nature that, while it may encourage conservation of the environment, it also keeps us distant from nature and comfortable enough to exploit it (Dickinson, 2014). Another thing discussed in this chapter is that most research about media and nature often focuses on documentaries and advertising, leaving a gap in the academic work exploring nature in fiction. This study attempts to show that these anthropocentric views are also reflected in fiction.

Overall, ecofeminist theory guided this study in order to identify the connections between the domination of female characters and nature. Ecofeminist scholars have studied how nature has been feminized and women have been naturalized (Tong, 2018). In this way, nature has taken on a Mother Nature archetype that requires it to be forever sustainable and giving. Similarly,

research related to ideologies of motherhood shows that women are often expected to be mothers and that this role is considered to be natural (Rich, 1976). Other scholars also explore the representations of motherhood in media and identified that these roles often have high and unattainable expectations of intensive mothering (Feasey, 2012). This study supports the connections between women's motherly labor and nature's domination as both inferior to culture. Most research on the representations of mother figures and nature has been conducted, but not simultaneously. In contrast, the present study examines representation in media of nature and women at the same time, evidencing the connections that ecofeminism has previously explored.

Meanwhile, chapter three focused on the applied method to do the analysis and reasoning for the selection of the films. The films were selected from a list of dystopian films and were chosen based on their high ratings in an open internet forum. While this rationale allowed me to use texts that are popular among critics and audiences, it also made it possible to select different genres — comedy, drama, action, and science fiction. Narrative textual analysis was used to conduct the study and answer the research questions. This method facilitated an in-depth analysis that focused on various elements of the films — structure, themes, dialogue, and imagery. Overall, narrative analysis focuses on answering the question of why a story is told a certain way (Riessman, 1993). Although narrative analysis has been broadly used to analyze interviews, it has also been used in film analysis by focusing on dialogue, story structure, and symbolism of images (Retzinger, 2011; Naughten, 2006). Narrative textual analysis allows for the researcher to question the use of the various elements of the film and treats it as a text to be read. In the case of this study, narrative analysis allowed me to focus first on mayor themes and the structure of each scene. This first viewing was followed by one that focused on dialogue in order to examine the

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characters' roles in the films. Finally the third view focused on imagery to explore nature's role

as a backdrop. Of course, other components of the films were noted in the multiple viewings but

the different approaches allowed a more organized process of data collection.

Chapter four presents and discusses the findings. As previously mentioned, the films

often demonstrated how human culture is separated from nature. This separation is evident in the

contrast between human spaces and natural spaces in the films. The separation also has the

consequence of the limited knowledge that characters have of their surrounding environment.

There is a constant anthropocentric point of view that places human culture over nature and

consequently, the conservation of human culture over the environment. As supported by previous

research on dystopian narratives, these films reflect fears of unsustainable futures. In this study I

identified these settings as "dead nature," which are spaces that have become useless and

unsuitable for humans, since they do not support human survival. However, the films show that

the natural spaces are, in fact, sustainable for other species, just no longer sufficient for careless

human consumption. The anthropocentric focus of the films also shows a resistance towards

human extinction that in general promotes the conservation of culture but not the conservation of

the environment.

Overall, the goal of the characters in the films is to recover fertility, whether it is human

or natural. The films demonstrate narratives in which nature has been lost and then frame the

salvation of the environment as a recovery achieved by humans. Significantly, the previously

mentioned separation from nature and this ideal of nature recovery encourage unsustainable

practices that affect the environment, because nature is still framed as a commodity to be

exploited by humans. The discussion also identifies the roles of nature, a commodity that can be

controlled by humans, and female characters as agents of reproduction, mothers, and saviors of the human race. These roles place expectations on both nature and women. For the environment, the expectations are to remain fertile and accommodating to human necessities. However, these expectations may not be aligned with the capabilities of our planet that soon may not be able to sustain the rapid consumption of resources. The responsibility of women in dystopian narratives is to continue with the reproduction of humanity, and thus save it from extinction. The films evidence that in extreme scenarios of doom, we often envision a heightened need for survival, and this comes at the expense of female reproduction and of nature as a place to be recovered.

5.1 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The four texts used for the analysis were selected from a list of top rated films with dystopian narratives. A strength of this study is that the films had positive reception from critics and audiences, and this is a good criterion for identifying influential films. The selection also had a diverse lineup of directors — Alfonso Cuarón is Mexican, Bong Joon-Ho is South Korean, George Miller is Australian, and Mike Judge is from the U.S. Still, a limitation existed in this selection. The list was already lacking in female directors and writers, and this is most likely a reflection of the gender inequality in the film industry. The study lacks a female perspective that could have been brought from a female director. A potential future study may consist of the comparison between eco-dystopian films written, directed, or produced by women and the films produced by men. The technology surrounding media consumption has also changed rapidly in the last years. The four films were selected because of their positive audience reception and this was only based on box office earnings, thus success in streaming services was not considered. Perhaps this consideration would have required including other films such as *The Lobster* (2015),

A Quiet Place (2018), and *District 9* (2009) that were the most streamed dystopian films in streaming platforms like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime.

Of course, another limitation is the variety of possible interpretations of the dialogue, themes, and imagery of the films. The inclusion of an audience's perspective would have added the direct interpretations and responses to the environmental thematics. This study was focused on examining how dystopian films reflect cultural ideas about the environment by imagining scenarios of crisis, but a prospective study may be the examination of responses that audiences may have toward these narratives. As previously mentioned, a recurring theme found in the films was the use of natural resources and human labor. The roles of the characters as alienable property and the exploitation of natural resources show dynamics that are similar to the current world market. This study was also set to focus on gender and the analysis of female representation. What it did not seek was to address how the films present a "universal" experience of environmental risk that typically only includes caucasian characters. A post-colonialist framework can also aid a prospective research to study the social inequalities presented on the films based on race and/or class. Finally, the most evident limitation of this study is that it only uses four films for the analysis. Although they encompass different genres, they cannot define the entirety of climate fiction. However, the selected films cover the first two decades of the twenty-first century when eco-dystopias began to become more popular. Therefore, a quantitative research prospect may be more successful in assessing the overall complexion of the climate fiction genre.

This study showed that dystopian narratives are worthy of critical analysis. The examination of the roles of nature and female characters in this study can contribute to

ecofeminist scholarly work and media representation of women as mother figures and nature. Examining climate fiction can also allow us to identify the conceptualization of nature as a commodity and how that leads to unsustainable practices. Eco-dystopian films are our imagination of the environmental apocalypse and consequently how we imagine humanity will react. Film theory tells us that cinema reflects the desires, fears, and realities of a culture. In a way, dystopian films reflect realities regarding nature and women — how they're treated and positioned in society. I found it important to analyze their roles in dystopian narratives since both have been historically marginalized; women as a minority considered to be the second sex and nature as inferior to culture. Some of the findings may be evident, for example, that women continue to be represented in passive ways and reduced to archetypes. Still, this study also addressed that female characters are represented as commodities valued for their fertility and points out the connection with the regulation of natural resources. Perhaps in understanding this conceptualization of both marginalized entities, we can understand how we excuse our exploitation of nature and seek to control and regulate female reproduction.

Ideas of treating women as inferior and expectations of motherhood may seem antiquated in the twenty-first century. However, the films show how these examples of reproductive governance are transferred into the ideas that the the analyzed films communicate. After more of 50 years of an ongoing environmental movement and efforts to promote sustainability, we might think that we know we have to take care of the environment. The films reflect that our general underlying understanding of nature is to see it as a commodity that serves humanity. Not everyone is listening to the discourse going on in climate summits, and most people are not listening to the debates taking place in legislative halls that affect women's health. However,

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most people are watching films and receiving the messages that cinema is communicating, so

perhaps, these messages may be saying more about us as a culture.

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Code-sheets used in the narrative textual analysis

Viewing 1. Thematic and structural. *Mad Max: Fury Road.*	
Description of the scene	Observations
Scene 1:	
Scene 2:	
Scene 3:	

Scene 4:	
Scene 5:	
Scene 6:	
Scene 7:	

Scene 8:	
Scene 9:	
Scene 10:	
Scene 11:	

Scene 12:	
Scene 13:	
Scene 14	
Scene 15:	

Scene 16:	
Scene 17:	
Scene 18:	
Scene 19:	

Viewing 2. Dialogic-performative. *Mad Max: Fury Road*	
Description of the scene	Observations
Scene 1:	
Scene 2:	
Scene 3:	
Scene 4:	

Scene 5:	
Scene 6:	
Scene 7:	
Scene 8:	

Scene 9:	
Scene 10:	
Scene 11:	
Scene 12:	

Scene 13:	
Scene 14	
Scene 15:	
Scene 16:	

Scene 17:	
Scene 18:	
Scene 19:	

Viewing 3. Visual. *Mad Max: Fury Road*	
Description of the scene	Observations
Scene 1:	
Scene 2:	
Scene 3:	
Scene 4:	

Scene 5:	
Scene 6:	
Scene 7:	
Scene 8:	

Scene 9:	
Scene 10:	
Scene 11:	
Scene 12:	

Scene 13:	
Scene 14	
Scene 15:	
Scene 16:	

Scene 17:	
Scene 18:	
Scene 19:	

VITA

Veronica Martinez Jacobo was born in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. She graduated from high school at Universidad TecMilenio in 2012. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Women and Gender Studies with a minor in Creative Writing at The University of Texas at El Paso in December 2016. In the spring of 2018, Veronica began her graduate work in Communication studies and is expected to graduate in December 2019.