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The simulacrum in contemporary science fiction:

Atwood, Willis, Piercy, Collins, Cadigan

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Tese final apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais como parte dos requisitos para a obtenção do grau de Doutora.

Área de concentração: Literaturas em Língua Inglesa.

Linha de pesquisa: Poéticas da Modernidade.

Orientador: Luiz Fernando Ferreira Sá

Belo Horizonte

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

Faculdade de Letras

2020
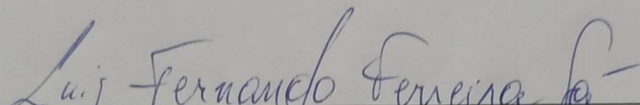
Tese intitulada *The simulacrum in contemporary science fiction: Atwood, Willis, Piercy, Collins, Cadigan*, de autoria da Doutoranda AMANDA PAVANI FERNANDES, apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras: Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da UFMG, como requisito parcial à obtenção do título de Doutor em Letras: Estudos Literários.
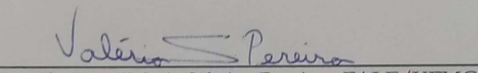
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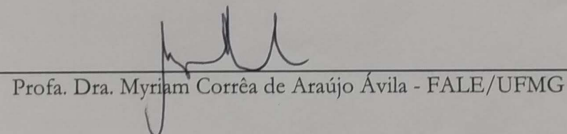
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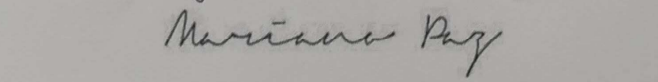
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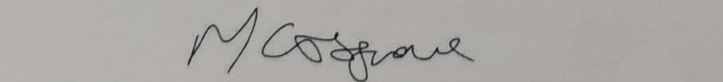
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Belo Horizonte, 11 de março de 2020.

Para o meu pai.

For my father.

Acknowledgements

It is a great joy to be able to conclude this period of my career. I had immense help in several fronts, and more opportunity than I can feel I deserved at all. First, I would like to thank Professor Luiz Fernando Ferreira Sá, who advised me throughout my master's and my doctorate. I am extremely grateful to Professor Tom Moylan, who advised me during my period at the University of Limerick, in Ireland. He provided insights into the ideas I had of utopianisms and dismantled assumptions I previously had. I also thank Professor Mariano Paz, who also advised me while I was in Limerick, reading my work and pointing out instances of my verbose phrasing. Thanks to both CAPES and CNPq for the funding provided both in Brazil and in Ireland. I also thank all the professors who agreed to compose the examination board for my VIVA, for taking the time and for providing me with further insight.

I am also grateful to Pat Cadigan, who I was able to meet both in 2018 and 2019, who showed me that meeting your heroes can be a wonderful experience.

I want to thank my closest friends, who heard so many complaints from me during all the times that I was certain that I sh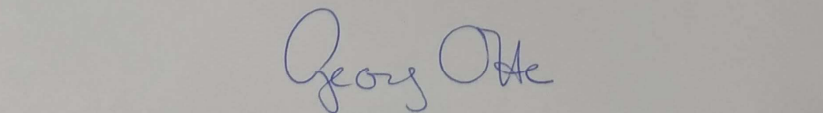ould give up: Zildinha, Melissa, Flávia, Gabi, Jejé, Clélio, Luciene, Cléber must all be so exhausted that I can only hope to retain your friendship once this is over. I thank my Irish friends for the support and for the several shots o'clock that took place in those months we were together: Martina, Darragh, Stuart and Rob, I miss you all.

I want to thank all the members of our new research group, NEUFIC, with special emphasis to Valéria, Melissa and Mariane, who are present and influential in research discussions and extremely helpful in organising events.

To Mário, for his unwavering support during his own work on his doctorate. For his support when my mother passed, in March 2019. For accepting me the way I am and still staying around.

To my father, to whom I dedicate this work, for being the family I have, for saying that I matter and that I am good the way I am.

Ao Mário, por seu apoio incondicional durante esse tempo todo, enquanto ele trabalhava em seu próprio doutorado. Por seu apoio quando minha mãe faleceu, em março de 2019. Por me aceitar do jeito que eu sou e ainda ficar aqui.

Ao meu pai, a quem dedico esse trabalho, por ser a família que eu tenho, por dizer que eu importo, e que sou boa o suficiente do jeito que sou.

'Forget Schrodinger. Yo, Pandora, how's your headache? . . . Mark knew. The door only swings one way. Once it's out of the box, it's always too big to go back in. Can't bury that technology. All we can do is get on top of it and stay the fuck on top. . . All *appropriate technology* hurt somebody. A whole lot of somebodies. Nuclear fission, fusion, the fucking Ford assembly line, the fucking airplane. Fire, for Christ's sake. Every technology has its original sin.

Pat Cadigan, *Synners*.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates five science fiction novels, published between 1991 and 2015, and their relationship with senses of reality, communication, mediation of experiences, the industry of entertainment, of political propaganda and the complex ties between humanity and technology. The analysis based on Jean Baudrillard's concept from *Simulacra and Simulation* (1992), the simulacrum, formed of "copies that depict things that either had no original, or that no longer have an original". The literary works analysed were: Connie Willis' *The Doomsday Book* (1992); Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*; Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last*; Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It* (1993); Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991); and Suzanne Collins' *Mockingjay* (2013). The research included a discussion of the critical trajectory of Baudrillard's views on copies, originals, and symbols, in relation to his political history and his connections to both Marxist and, later, Postmodernist values, after which a claim is made on the relevance of reading literature through the simulacrum as an intra-medial approach, that is, by analysing instances of novels as opposed to seeing literature as a simulacrum itself. *Oryx and Crake* is related to simulacra in the way it depicts a rupture with processes of signification, with a conquest of the arts and most forms of entertainment through the simulacrum. The concept is also studied from the perspective of Utopian Studies: based on Tom Moylan's critical work, traces in common between science fiction, utopianisms and their world-building practices are outlined and exemplified in the utopian/dystopian moving blocks of *The Doomsday Book*, which subverts stereotypes of the future as necessarily advanced in contrast to the supposedly regressive Middle Ages. *The Heart Goes Last* is structured around a dystopia within an abstract utopia, to use Ernst Bloch's terminology; it warps experiences in its reduction of art and media from company-sanctioned movies from the 1950s and other pieces deemed harmless and pleasant. *He, She, and It* includes a utopian enclave, the small town of Tikva, in a context that includes the substitution of nations for conglomerates. Their survival commodity is simulations, chimeras, programming pieces. Terry Eagleton's analysis of the role ideology plays in literature is also discussed and compared to the functioning of simulacra, and their appearances in the novels in relation to a naturalization of hegemonic discourses. That is the case in Cadigan's *Synners*, whose world deteriorates as a result of unchecked capitalism and progress for its own sake. In *Mockingjay*, by Collins, that ideology is that of war propaganda, which fabricates narratives to justify state violence and validate pre-existing powers. The narrative in contemporary science fiction is often interconnected by simulacra, whose perception can foster critical readings and a displacement of certainties, which would enrich the reading experience.

RESUMO

Esta tese investiga cinco romances de ficção científica, publicados entre 1991 e 2015, e suas relações com conceitos como realidade, comunicação, mediação de experiências, a indústria do entretenimento, a propaganda política e o relacionamento complexo que a humanidade tem estabelecido com a tecnologia, baseada no conceito de simulacro de Jean Baudrillard em *Simulacro e Simulação* (1992). As obras literárias analisadas foram: *The Doomsday Book, de* Connie Willis (1992); *Oryx and Crake*, de Margaret Atwood (2003); *The Heart Goes Last,* de Margaret Atwood (2015); *He, She, and It* (1993), de Marge Piercy; *Synners*, de Pat Cadigan (1991); e *Mockingjay*, de Suzanne Collins (2013). A pesquisa incluiu uma discussão cuidadosa da trajetória crítica do simulacro de Baudrillard, com relação à sua história política e suas ligações com conceitos do marxismo e, posteriormente, do pós-modernismo. Em seguida, argumenta-se sobre a relevância de ler literatura com o simulacro formando uma perspectiva intra-mídia, ou seja, analisando exemplos de romances ao invés de ver a literatura um simulacro em si. *Oryx and Crake* está relacionado a simulacros na forma como aborda uma ruptura com processos de significação, com uma conquista das artes e outras formas de entretenimento pelo simulacro. O conceito também é abordado pelo viés dos Estudos de Utopismos; com base no trabalho crítico de Tom Moylan, traços em comum entre ficção científica, utopismos e suas práticas de construção de mundo são descritos e exemplificados dentro das peças que compõem *The Doomsday Book*. O livro subverte estereótipos de um futuro necessariamente avançado em contraste a uma Idade Média supostamente regressiva. *The Heart Goes Last* é estruturado em torno de uma distopia dentro de uma utopia abstrata, para usar a terminologia de Ernst Bloch; a obra aborda a alienação de experiências em sua redução de arte e mídias na forma de filmes e outras peças baseadas nos anos 1950, tidos como seguros e/ou agradáveis por uma empresa. *He, She, and It* inclui um enclave utópico, a pequena cidade de Tikva, colocada em um contexto no qual nações são substituídas por conglomerados. Sua sobrevivência nessa sociedade é sustenta por sua produção de simulações, quimeras e peças de programação. A análise de Terry Eagleton sobre o papel que a ideologia exerce na literatura também é examinada e comparada com o funcionamento dos simulacros, já que estes aparecem com frequência nas obras, para mascarar ou naturalizar discursos hegemônicos. É esse também o caso em *Synners*, de Cadigan, cujo mundo se deteriora como resultado de um capitalismo descontrolado que busca o progresso como valor por si só. Em *Mockingjay*, de Collins, a ideologia exposta é a da propaganda de guerra, que fabrica narrativas para justificar a violência estatal e para validar poderes pré-existentes. A narrativa na ficção científica contemporânea é frequentemente perpassada por simulacros, cuja percepção pode incentivar leituras críticas, incentivar o deslocamento de certezas e enriquecer a experiência de leitura.

Contents

Introduction

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, themes related to science and the arts gained attention in media such as literature and film. These themes include the human expansion towards outer space, the search for inhabitable planets, humankind's wasteful treatment of Earth, the rise of mediated communications, the mixing of entertainment and information, along with the incentive to consumerism and issues of race, gender, and class differences. Not only have these explorations been spotted and approached by literary works, but they also increasingly point at a bleak near future for the planet and those inhabiting it. A hundred years ago, with the progress represented by electricity, cars, and a brief lack of wars in Europe, it seemed that the species would reach an ideal *stasis*. Instead, more recent speculations tend to consider societal collapse as a matter of time, subverting the idea that the species would be destined to a bright future.

Science fiction, elusive towards fixed definitions, is the genre from which some literary works relevant to that subversion spring. It is possible to identify, in some books considered science fiction, a combination of the lack of referential meaning and increased subjectivity from postmodern literature with other worlds and systems; those works approach contemporary issues that often question matters of reality, identity, and even the possibilities of human communication. The simulacrum, as a tool for analysing notions of reality and illusions of representation, pervades contemporary science fiction and, in particular, utopian/dystopian literature.

This dissertation aims at examining the presence of the simulacrum in contemporary science fiction novels used by some authors to deploy diverse worldviews of the world. At the same time, the presence of simulacra in these images projects future possibilities for humankind, its language and communication. The *corpus* considered for that aim consists of six novels: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (also

named *He, She, It*, published in 1991), Connie Willis's *The Doomsday Book* (1992), Suzanne Collins's *Mockingjay* (2013), Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (2001) and Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* (2015). Other authors may be mentioned when relevant, including Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, Gwyneth Jones, and Ian McEwan.

By saying that this dissertation discusses contemporary science fiction, I decided to take the subjective notion of contemporary for practical choices. All the chosen novels have been published after 1990 and the most recent novel included was published in 2015. The reason for choosing the specific year of 1990 was that it includes some important cyberpunk work, with the consolidation of a rise within speculative fiction and postmodern science fiction novels. These works tend to include among their themes senses of reality, mismatched information and truncated communication – which tend to closely relate to Jean Baudrillard's simulacrum. There are several authors publishing on science fiction, speculation, issues of mediated realities, but these include the thematic, authorial and chronologic criteria.

Jean Baudrillard's theory on simulacrum and simulation systems questions issues of representation, of originals and copies. He points at the obliteration of the direct relationship between signs and objects: the simulacrum, instead of symbolizing something else, would be a copy that is no more. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), he defends that, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (2). Signs cease to be related to the "real," questioning human perceptions of reality, in its various mediations, and the subjectivity of reality. He summarizes that process in the shifts undergone by the idea of image: "Such would be the successive phases of the image: It is the reflection of a profound reality; It masks and denatures a profound reality; It masks the *absence* of a profound reality; It has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (6, emphasis in original). The simulacrum, according to Baudrillard, is related to elusiveness of meaning and the loss of the notion of an original. This concept is

extremely relevant to literary studies, especially for understanding the relationship between literature and the narratives that interact with the world we live in; for understanding that quest for an original (an original author, an original artwork, an original idea,) for its truth value will probably be a pointless endeavour. However, identifying simulacra can be very useful in unmasking illusions of unbiased, neutral representations and for questioning hierarchies and value judgements in literature. That argument is expanded in Chapter One.

The affinity between concepts of utopian/dystopian literature and Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum, in turn, enables an investigation on the relationship between mediation, illusions of representation and projections of perfect societies and scientific advancements in literature. According to Jameson, sf is "a sub-genre with a complex and interesting formal history of its own, and with its own dynamic, which is not that of high culture, but which stands in a complementary and dialectical relationship to high culture and modernism as such" (149). The dialectics seen by Jameson in the genre can be properly investigated with an approach that considers postmodern studies, the history of science fiction, and utopia/dystopia in the construction of alternate systems and worlds.

The choices for composing the corpus for this dissertation were influenced by the previous considerations. *Oryx and Crake* is Atwood's first novel in the sequence called *MaddAddam* series, published in 2003, followed by *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013). Atwood's novels have been studied from the perspectives of storytelling, eco-feminism, and speculative fiction.[1] *Oryx and Crake*, in particular, is most often studied from three perspectives. Dunja M. Mohr is a good example of how the novel is analysed in Utopian Studies. She comments on how utopianism is less evident in *Oryx and Crake* as opposed to her classical feminist dystopia published in the 1980s, *The Handmaid's Tale*: "a

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[1] Although it is not a primary source for my master's thesis, concluded in 2016, there are some brief comments on instances of the simulacrum in the novel, as well.

utopian core is predominantly hidden within the protagonists' narrations and their use of language" (13). Mohr adds, "For Atwood language then causes reality, it restores the past and a potential future as anchors of thought for Jimmy, and it helps to create a whole new reality and new meaning for the Crakers" (18); even though, arguably, language causes reality in most instances of literature, in Atwood's work, it signals that the relationship between concepts of language as a medium of existence is a fertile investigation.

Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, or *He, She, It*, explores a world composed of "multis" with hardly any territorial boundaries, in which the protagonist, Shira, rediscovers her homeland after losing her child in a custody battle. She is brought home to an anachronistic utopian city-state that survives by selling technology and software for that technology. Their project consists of an attempt at perfecting artificial intelligence, breaking Isaac Asimov's famous laws of robotics.[2] Avram's experiments result in a sentient cyborg, Yod, whose existence blurs the line between humans and machines. Pierce's writing has been pointed out to be, according to Tom Moylan (2000), a prime example of the concept of critical dystopia, estranging familiar concepts and creating conflict on established concepts.

Regarding the society in *He, She, It*, Elyce Rae Helford notes that white people no longer control the boundaries and the commerce, arguing that this displacement does not constitute an inversion, since "white supremacy has become Japanese-European supremacy, but hierarchization has not yielded to egalitarianism just because whites no longer dominate in the U.S." (4). That criticism is visible in the ultra-capitalist structure of the multis and in the presence of people with darker skins only in slums or improvised settlements.

Connie Willis's *The Doomsday Book* initiates Willis's time-travel series. *The Doomsday Book* deals with an ambiguous reputation: despite having received Hugo and Nebula

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[2] Firstly explicated in Asimov's short story "Runaround" (1942), his laws of robotics are as follows: 1)A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm; 2) A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law; 3)A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

Awards, other reviewers are hard on the sequence for the long descriptions and for the time spent by most of her characters missing signals around them of their impending doom. In Willis's time-travel universe, the ground-breaking scientists are historians. *The Doomsday Book* presents the past, and not the future, as bad places, or places that are constantly threatening a more civilized future.

In Suzanne Collins's *Mockingjay*, the last book in the *Hunger Games* sequence, the reader is able to perceive how a large portion of the war between District 13 and the Capitol is fought through propaganda. Instead of wasting men and ammunition in frontal attacks, the protagonist Katniss is pushed to represent a fighter while refraining from any actual fight.

In Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last*, protagonists Charmaine and Stan are lured to a social experiment called Consilience. They are offered jobs and security – the appeal is only increased by the fact that they live in their car at the beginning of the novel. However, there is a catch: in Consilience, all citizens are prisoners for a month and enforcers of the prison in the next. They must switch places every thirty days, being substituted by another couple that occupies the house assigned to them while they take their cells. Atwood introduces, once again, a principle that was extended to absurd proportions, related to the panopticon and the fetishization of popular culture.

Pat Cadigan's *Synners* marks the author's fame as the dame of cyberpunk. Characters are synthesizers, manipulators of media. The videos and images they create feed the industry of entertainment at the moment that its structures are shaken by the emergence of new immersion technology. Visual Mark, one of these creators, becomes virtual and merges with an artificial intelligence as the network begins to implode on its own, becoming a simulacrum himself. All the novels share some characteristics of dystopias. They portray societies that are imagined as a near future that has, so to say, "gone awry". They are also considered science fiction: they involve, but do not revolve around, scientific advancements or facilitating devices

provided by those advancements, whether they are explained or not by the narrators.[3] They also question structures of power and explore shifting identities.

Additionally, while considering the novels as dystopian science fiction works, this dissertation does not aim at defining either concept, although the discussion will approach some complications caused by conflicts in definitions. The used labels acknowledge some of their traits, particularly the idea of exploration of alternate worlds or futures. Though neither sci-fi nor dystopia necessarily occur in the future, both may embrace that, which is the case with my *corpus* at this point. Attempting a definition of them could deviate towards the prescriptive or the descriptive: the first would defeat the purpose of considering flexible, shifting categories within postmodern literature, and the latter would send the research into an encyclopaedic endeavour that would not meet its aims.

The act of writing and storytelling, in its questioning, relates to the issues portrayed in these novels. However, these acts are not only permeated by an unreliability of narrators or by the politics behind attempts of representation. As Eagleton argues in *The English Novel: An Introduction*, "to narrate is itself a moral act" (16). Luiz Sá, based on his notion of the utopian hope that is part of any narration, takes the issue further by analysing the usage of lists, inventories, and collections in literature, arguing that they may signal Eagleton's "break-up of language, the collapse of narrative, the unreliability of reports, the clash of subjective standpoints" (19). Sá's argument for the pervasiveness of lists in postmodern literature composes some of the theoretical background for this dissertation. The symbolic presence of lists and other forms of enumeration can be used to highlight a decay in language and signals, the very relationship between the subject and the possibilities of communication for humankind. The analysis on *Oryx and Crake* in Chapter One further investigates literary lists.

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[3] By "facilitating devices", I refer to Brian Stableford's chapter on the history of science fiction, in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Facilitating devices can relate to creating the sense of feasibility in science fiction, that is, it explains "how it could all be possible".

The novels, as mentioned, can contribute to a discussion of the presence of simulacra in dystopian science fiction. This research stems from my master's thesis on the simulacrum as a tool for parody of coded discourses in *The Hunger Games* and Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2016). The simulacrum has already been studied as a postmodern trait, but its influences for science fiction have not received the same amount of attention from literary research. Considering Fredric Jameson's claim that science fiction has a dynamic that is "complementary and dialectical" in relation to postmodern high culture, the importance of a comparative approach to the instances of the simulacrum is clear.

Chapter one: the simulacrum as a mode of critical analysis: *Oryx and Crake*

1.1. Conceptualizing the simulacrum

The term simulacrum has a long history that branches into current cultural studies. It dates back to Greek philosophy, but it became more complex and, at the same time, more present in contemporary life in the late 20th century. The simulacrum, in its contemporary use in academia, can be seen as a cultural phenomenon related to the replication of models in media, such as advertising and photography, with echoes in music and literature. Defined by Jean Baudrillard in some of his works, but most notably for his research in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993) and in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994),[4] the simulacrum and its neighbouring concepts, such as hyperreality and symbolic exchange, have highly influenced cultural analyses of how culture has changed since the modern era. It often illuminates a sublimation of experiential or supposedly "direct" meanings into an exchange of models, but, more importantly, it highlights the elusiveness of any possible relationships between signifiers and signifieds.

Jean Baudrillard's criticism is often divided in two phases: one mainly Marxist, one namely postmodern. Douglas Kellner (1989) and Louis Althusser (2014) are some of the scholars associated with the view that Baudrillard, a sociologist, was at first unambiguously Marxist, a supporter of revolutionary forces, who later would turn his analysis to postmodernism, a shift that usually is marked in the publication of *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Douglas Kellner names his early career as "exercises within Neo-Marxian social theory," and his other work as a "turn" to "post-modernist positions" (1989). However, Richard D. Smith and Marcus A. Doel do not subscribe to that duality which suggests a radical break from one cultural criticism to another. In "Baudrillard unbound: the duplicity of post-Marxism

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[4] The original titles in French were published, respectively, in 1976 and 1981.

and deconstruction" (2000), they resist the "epistemological break" usually marked in his work to propose, instead, a double helix, in which Baudrillard neither conforms to Marxism completely, nor to postmodernism as such. Smith proposes that "Baudrillard's rendition of simulacra and simulation be read through the lens of his retheorisation of Marx's account of the commodity-form" (138), that is, some of Marx's tenets that are usually read as abandoned by Baudrillard still influenced his later work. The simulacrum would be, in that view, related to processes undergone by signs that are analogous to commodities in late capitalism.

Before the connection between commodities and simulacra can be made, it is necessary to first locate some appearances of the term simulacra in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, to define the concept and criticise it when adequate. His second chapter is dedicated not only to describing the simulacrum, but also to detailing a division between three orders that would be further developed in *Simulacra and Simulation*. The simulacrum is a corruption of meaning, a copy that no longer relates to an original and that replicates itself. There is, in a simulacrum, a break in the structuralist notion elaborated by Ferdinand de Saussure that a signifier (for example, a word such as "tree") would correspond to an extant object in the empirical world, the tree itself. The simulacrum, however, denounces the simplicity of an unambiguous signifier:

> The modern sign dreams of its predecessor, and would dearly love to rediscover an obligation in its reference to the real. It finds only a reason, a referential reason, a real and a "natural" on which it will feed. This designatory bond, however, is only a simulacrum of symbolic obligation, producing nothing more than neutral values which are exchanged one for the other in an objective world. Here the sign suffers the same fate as labour, for just as the 'free' worker is only free to produce equivalents, the 'free and emancipated' sign is only free to produce equivalent signifieds. (ch 2)

That "modern sign," according to Baudrillard, is a historically contextual notion resulting from the rise of the bourgeoisie, from the Industrial Revolution, that would have removed the authority of determining meanings both in art and in daily life from aristocracies. That sudden "democracy of meanings" comes under a positive light at first, changing the subjects that are able to produce meanings instead receiving it passively. The industrial era, the second order of the simulacrum, would be the era of production in art, in economics, in politics. Baudrillard emphasizes, however, that the simulacrum occurs within a dialectics of power: "simulacra do not consist only of the play of signs, they involve social relations and a social power" (ch. 2), marking a relationship between not just the progress of human history, but also between what images or signs would constitute history in the first place. This second order of the simulacrum still deals with serialized production from a model; production becomes the order of the day.

The third order is the sort of simulacrum that jumpstarts hyperreality as he would use the term in later works:

> We are dealing with third order simulacra here. There is no more counterfeiting of an original, as there was in the first order, and no more pure series as there were in the second; there are models from which all forms proceed according to modulated differences. Only affiliation to the model has any meaning, since nothing proceeds in accordance with its end anymore, but issues instead from the model, the 'signifier of reference,' functioning as a foregone, and the only credible, conclusion.

With the third order, the notion of an original to be counterfeit, or to be produced in a serial form, disappears. That happens because, to Baudrillard, third-order simulacra deal with models that are abstractions from a real that no longer guides its reproduction – a notion that is not disconnected from Walter Benjamin's work on artworks and technical reproduction (1969). The models behind industrial production and even art forms are no longer anchored in crafted, existing products: they exist as ideas, as production standards of what is desirable. The real

begins to adjust to the models, instead of the models representing what is real. As that process of substitution spreads throughout postmodern culture, the sense of reality is lost. The dealings between models, or between images, are detached from experiential or empirical notions and, thus, shape hyperreality. One might say they evidence a dystopian turn in the production of art.

Although Smith and Kellner disagree on Baudrillard's "epistemological break," they agree on the difficulty that his philosophical journey poses on the matter of labels. Because the French sociologist grew critical of Marxist criticism, but did not fully abandon it, there remains the issue of considering him postmodern, neo-Marxist, or none of the above. Smith describes that divide, which happened after the events of May 1968 in France, as seen both from the right and the left. "You are either a vulgar Marxist (the criticism from post-modernists and poststructuralists) or a turncoat who has abandoned the project of the Left (the criticism from Marxists)" (140). I tend to agree with Smith in that debate. He both suggests that Baudrillard's previous writings already contained indications that he had problems with his first theoretical framework, and, more importantly, that his postmodern discussion of symbolic exchange, in fact, is influenced by the economy of the commodity in Marx. He moves from investigating the commodification of daily life, in his earlier studies of semiotics, to the level of the symbolic that would lurk behind production. As Smith phrases it, "Baudrillard has [extended] Marx's description of the commodity: *by noting that it is structurally homologous with the Saussurian sign* and by developing all of the consequences of this insight" (143, emphasis in original). With that perspective, it is possible to see Baudrillard's work as impacted with Marxist criticism. At the same time, he does not seem to shift entirely towards Postmodernism as others (Smith uses Lyotard as an example) did. Lyotard, Smith claims, turned entirely from Marxist thought, claiming it to be inescapably totalitarian. Shifting his focus from commodity to the sign aligns Baudrillard's thought with Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan, who would have, like him, understood that "to grasp technology as a medium rather than a 'productive

force' (at which point the Marxian analysis retreats)" (ch 2) was the key to understanding simulation processes in society.

1.2. The simulacrum in society

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard draws his conclusions on simulacra by describing a fetishism that would grow around the idea of real, after the dissemination of simulating practices: "a fetishism of the lost object which is no longer the object of representation" (ch 2). His argument then includes a self-crafted, if brief, definition of "real": "the real is that *of which it is possible to provide an equivalent reproduction*" (ch 2, emphasis in original).[5] Representations, then, correspond to attempts at imitating a model, straying from a "real." If real, by his own words, is what can spark a reproduction, by differentiation a model will never have an *equivalent* representation. In the disappearance of real, then, representation will always be partial or illusory. Attempts at representing the real will always fall short of the model. The main issue I have with Baudrillard's conclusions on the effects of simulation on society and art is his presumption that simulation is exclusively a contemporary issue, and that in previous times, to cite his own examples, during the Renaissance, the real had equivalent representations. While other postmodern or poststructuralists question whether the real even exists, or if it can be grasped firmly enough to be analysed, Baudrillard always has a "real" in his horizon, even if in a desert out of reach. Surely, had he no projection of the real, he would be unable to trace the trajectory of simulacra across history. However, his theories of art's death might benefit from questioning his perspective of the real. A perspective in criticism that questions an underlying dichotomy in his work, that is, real = good, simulation = bad is

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[5] The use of "real" in this discussion is based on Baudrillard's statements available both in *Simulacra and Simulation* and *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Even though Jacques Lacan also developed a concept of Real in the tripartite structure it shares with the Symbolic and the Immagination, Baudrillard does not operate from a psychoanalytical framework or from the idea of big Other. For a comparison between Baudrillard's "real" – that is, something outside or unreachable by representation and entirely absent in reproductive practices – and Žižek's and Lacan's cultural criticism on the Real, I recommend Louis-Paul Willis's article, ""'Hey! What Did You Do to the World?': Conceptualizing the Real with Baudrillard and Žižek" (2016).

necessary, as either of those absolute conclusions disregards subtleties in production and reception, not to mention that they do not invite further action to improve or to combat simulations. Recognising their workings in context, tracing their mechanisms and effects allows for more nuanced criticism and resulting action.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, he elaborates his thoughts with fewer terms from Marxist criticism, even though the ideas of commodification and fetishism still underlie his views on history, entertainment, and media in general. This next work uses more examples of simulation and hyperreality, while in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* noteworthy examples are scarce (graffiti and public opinion polls being two of those). In the first page, he states, "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it" (1), once again highlighting how the materiality of the territory is no longer what directs the creation of maps; instead, territories must fit previously existing maps, previously existing models, and their existence in the real erased or bent so the model of territoriality, the map, remains unscathed. He proceeds to define the simulacrum more concisely, setting it apart from parody or imitation. "It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (2), which he claims would prevent the real of producing itself. If all reproduction is only failed attempts at models, then producing the real, by that logic, is impossible. He goes further in his point to claim that the simulacrum masks the absence of the real and hinders its production. Simulation would be, to him, opposed to representation. He differentiates one from the other by saying that "representation stems from the principle of equivalence of the sign and of the real," while simulation "stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*" (6, emphasis in original). Hyperreality, as the sphere in which there is no real, only models, incapacitates representation, substituting it for reproduction. Although Baudrillard does not explicitly set a

conceptual difference between reproduction and representation, the comparison between his concept of the real from *Symbolic Exchange* and his distinction between representation and simulation makes that possible. Reproduction is the result of the replication of simulacra, while representation would be rooted in a real, in something that can have an "equivalent" portrayal. The fabricated "real" that results from the establishment of hyperreality perpetuates its own creation, in a "strategy of deterrence" (7) that prevents escape from itself. Although his concept of the real is questionable, as other poststructuralist critics might suggest, it still enabled him to pinpoint a substitution in a "source" of ideas that would constitute artworks and media products in general. They begin to reproduce models instead of seeking to represent alternatives to them.

The era of simulation also increases relativism in political spheres. Baudrillard claims that multiple interpretations of facts coexist regardless of their absurdity or concreteness. "The facts no longer have a specific trajectory, they are born at the intersection of models, a single fact can be engendered by all the models at once" (16-17), arguing for an exposition of the framing processes around facts; one of the results from that process is that events are interpreted at the same time they are described, causing changes in the event itself. The real, then, bends to the models. He exemplifies that process with conflicts in the left between socialists and communists, but more a contemporary example, I would argue, is the practice of clickbaiting.

Clickbaiting is to produce a news piece, or an entertainment piece, with a misleading title that does not fulfil its promise. Merriam-Webster dictionary adds that it is "designed to make readers want to click on a hyperlink especially when the link leads to content of dubious value or interest." *Wired* Magazine differs clickbaiting from the common creation of catchy titles for news pieces as follows: "you're often aware of this manipulation, and yet helpless to resist it." Titles such as "You will not believe what Donald Trump said about immigrants" both frames whatever statement the U.S. president would have given and manufactures outrage. The

reader responds to the framed event as opposed to the event on its own, and this sort of effacing of fact through simulation fosters an environment in which multiple framings are possible and are always intertwined. Even after acknowledging the problems of using Baudrillard's "fact" and "real," hyperreality is recognizable in contrast as unmistakably construed.

It is difficult not to peruse Baudrillard's comments on hyperreality and the impossibility of representation without seeing it as a highly pessimistic philosophy, bordering on nihilism. If hyperreality prevents the production of the real, by extension there is no escape from it. Regarding *Symbolic Exchange*, Smith highlights a somewhat hopeful articulation Baudrillard used to escape this mechanics of sign as a commodity: the symbolic exchange, which had been previously addressed by Bordieu and even Marx. He says Baudrillard's notion of symbolic exchange "is what opposes the authority of the code, resisting integration into the capitalist system of exchange and the field of value" (143). Transferring terms from Marxist studies, the shift in the sign he sees occurs from its use value and exchange value towards symbolic exchange, proposing, then, an escape from capitalist means of transformation of signs into commodities. The process of emptying the sign for its reproduction, instead of for representation, is intimately related to capitalism. Smith adds that Baudrillard's notion of symbolic exchange, in a sort of reclamation of signs from alienation, would be utopian and therefore it should not be used in critical debate (144), but I would counter that by stating that it is precisely because the idea of reclaiming signs is utopian that it merits further investigation.[6]

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, however, there are even fewer spaces for imagining an escape from hyperreality, described by Baudrillard clearly as a negative and deteriorating process for society. When he describes Watergate as a simulated crisis, he claims that political and economic crises are fabricated in the media only to "conceal that there is none" (15). He

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[6] That further investigation into the utopian hope of reclaiming signs is exemplified in some of the critical readings in this dissertation. It also constitutes one of the results of simulacra in literary works, as I discuss in the next subsection and, focusing more on utopianisms, in Chapter two.

proposes, then, that it is in the sphere of the symbolic that this capitalist sequestering of the systems of reference must happen:

> Capital, in fact, was never linked by a contract to the society that it dominates. It is a sorcery of social relations, it is a *challenge to society*, and it must be responded to as such. It is not a scandal to be denounced according to moral or economic rationality, but a challenge to take up according to symbolic law. (15, emphasis in original)

Implications from this excerpt could be that Baudrillard postulates an overarching symbolic law, which somehow exists beyond simulations and capitalist appropriations of reproduction. Another implication would be that recognizing systems of simulation is directly related to a reaction, as he states in "must be responded to as such." However, the problematic lies in the mode of responding to these manipulations. It is not to be done, he states, by a Marxist revolution, that would shift systems but maintain the mode of reproduction,[7] but by a radical change in the dealings with symbols. However, he never goes into detail as to how that is to be done, instead dedicating his work to exposing the ongoing state of hyperreality.

1.3. Two approaches to cultural studies with the simulacrum

By discussing the pessimism in Baudrillard's postulation of the simulacrum, I do not mean to diminish its relevance, but to contextualise it according to the critic's political background and professional movement between critical trends. His analysis on the relationship between copy and original, nature and fabrication, experience and mediation remains valid in diverse fields of research within the humanities. After researching academic and critical production on how Baudrillard's simulacrum becomes a framework for analysing cultural objects (movies, games, books, to name a few), I came to notice two complementary uses of the concept, that I will conversely call supra-media and intra-media approaches.

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[7] A similar process of substitution without symbolic adjustment occurs in the critical reading for Suzanne Collins's *Mockingjay*, in Chapter three.

Supra-media approaches, when outlining cultural criticism via Baudrillard's simulacrum, are mostly commentaries on how one medium or art has changed according to the commodification of the sign. They identify simulation practices in the design, production and reproduction of, for instance, literature, to demonstrate that the medium itself is becoming a simulacrum. To exemplify this, I would suggest Fernando Fábio Fiorese Furtado's article, titled in Brazilian Portuguese "A Literatura e o Fim do Real" ("Literature and the End of the Real"). He traces some processes of literary production as leading to a commodification of literature itself. To him, literature has become a product to be consumed and discarded. As a result, that art would be "subjected to the movements of contemporary culture, whose development occurs around recycling, including programmed obsolescence and fashion oscillations, the return of the same to itself" (72). That is not an uncommon conclusion stemming from a social critic on the simulacrum when faced with cultural contemporary production. The rise of importance of the means of publishing would have diminished the content of a literary work; the technology that enabled cheaper books to be printed would have cheapened the contents of the actual books. Literature would become a simulacrum in the sense that it would only reproduce models of books according to the expectations of the market; whatever imaginative or creative capabilities a given writer has would inevitably disappear and work towards the replication of those models. Critics that take similar stances to the previous example tend to see the simulacrum as an infection in the medium of literature itself. The simulacrum comes with the technological practices of reproduction of books – and then the technical reproduction in these books overcomes their content, which becomes endlessly replicable as well. In short, it is a statement about a possible or probable decay in the literary quality of publications at the same time that the number of books written, published and sold is larger than ever before. Baudrillard indicates a sublimation of every system of signification in endless replication of models, and

that criticism comes with the argument that the result for literature is that it becomes another product to be consumed, part of the cultural industry, as Adorno might say.

These supra-media approaches are not limited to literature, of course. Jenaro Talens, in 1995, saw hyperreality establish itself against representation in music, especially in the processes that followed the advent of recording technologies.

Things changed radically with the introduction of electronics (the third stage) into the world of rock and roll. The rapid evolution of this kind of music during the sixties contributed to the fact that records started to be produced *essentially* to be listened to at home on the record player. Their execution as a phenomenon of the real world existed only through their reproduction. "Copies" without "live" originals, particularly Revolver (The Beatles, 1966), but above all, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (The Beatles, 1967) or We're In It Only for Money (The Mothers of Invention, 1967), meant the simulacrum of a representation, because they referred to a nonexistent performance. It is curious that the progressive handling of electronics made it more and more difficult to "reproduce" live what was created in the laboratory. ("Writing against Simulacrum: The Place of Literature and Literary Theory in the Electronic Age," 8)

That "third stage" mentioned by Talens is Baudrillard's previously discussed third stage of the simulacrum, that marks the absence of the real by reproducing models. Records would at first try to represent the experience of the concert, of live music; gradually, producing records in studios resulted in concerts trying to reproduce those recordings and, eventually, studio records

came to simulate live performances. Similar conclusions have been reached in the areas of advertising[8] and cinema.[9][10]

Analyses such as these, looking at the medium of literature as a whole through the perspective of Baudrillard's simulacrum, while using categories from postmodern criticism, often fall prey to concepts that postmodern criticism itself claims to have surpassed: the notion that literary quality is not to be ascertained by the critic. That is, categories of high and lowbrow literature do not result in fruitful cultural analyses because they are often relative and bound to a closed definition of what literature is. It is not that these processes identified by the critics do not occur. Surely, replication of formulaic books is a problem for literature, but that claim can be supported without arguing that the only result of these processes is a decay in quality or the ultimate substitution of a writer's "creativity" for the models that sell books.

However, in my academic work I have dealt with the other sort of approach to cultural objects via Baudrillard's simulacrum, the intra-media perspective. I use that term to refer not to how the simulacrum as a cultural process affects literature itself, but how it often appears in the inner structure of a work. As the simulacrum is present in works of literature, it dialogues with the world outside the book or the movie, with people's lives. Because authors respond to and are inserted in the world around them, it is no surprise that contemporary works include questions of mediation, of replication. In my master's thesis, for instance, I analysed Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* and Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, to conclude that

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[8] Jordan Kinder, in "The Spectres of Simulacra: Hyperreality, Consumption as Ideology, and the (Im)Possible Future of Radical Politics" (2012), analyses simulacra in advertising to support the thesis that propaganda often reinforces hegemonical ideologies by transforming resistance practices into commodities.

[9] Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*, identifies fabrications of histories and a displacement of the sense of past as simulations in nostalgia films, formal apparatus of the nostalgia film, which, according to him, "has trained us to consume the past in the form of glossy images that new and more complex "postnostalgia" statements and forms become possible" (1991, 287).

[10] Notably, the argument for "pure" exposure to art as a superior experience to a "mediated" one is a surpassed issue both in literary theory. The replication of works of art, in that regard, is more related to Walter Benjamin's classic considerations on the disruption of an aura around not only the media of art, but around the pieces that result from it. Although the conclusions of his seminal work affect this thesis, as artworks are not seen with an "aura" of sorts, his analysis of technical reproductibility is tangential to my point.

the simulacra I was able to identify in world building, in the alienation of experiences and national history often led to an exposure of illusions of unambiguous reality. In other words, identifying simulacra inside fictional works can facilitate the identification of simulations in the reader's context. Although this dissertation is not focused on the reception by readers, but in their inner structure, postulating a result or artistic effect of some narrative strategies can shed light on possible interpretations of literary works.

It is important to note that, this intra-media simulacrum, in science fiction, was used as a methodological approach to critical analysis. In each work analysed in this dissertation, I attempted to contextually identify displacements of meanings when construing alternative worlds and tracing their consequences, which may include the alienation of experiences, a spectacularization of media products, and a naturalization of a society's *status quo*. After reading this *corpus* through that lens, it was possible to conclude that:

1. The cultural process of hyperreality postulated by Baudrillard is reflected in the worlds postulated, particularly regarding contemporary science fiction. As simulation shifts the relationships between meanings in cultural processes, it also appears in cultural objects, that is, in movies, books and games.

2. The identification of literary simulacra in a novel, short story or novella does not mean that, necessarily, there will be a restoration of meanings, or a hybrid resolution. These simulacra can be used to reach diverse conclusions and their presence does not directly imply a return to a state of fixed relations between copy and original, or signifier and signified.

3. For contemporary science fiction, simulacra often occurred in world-building. A novel's conclusions were contingent on a character or group of characters learning to identify these displaced or alienated meanings. That often results in increased agency, but not necessarily in a rebirth of signs, even though that does occur on a significant portion of those works.

This perspective, focused on the simulacrum as a tool for cultural analysis, aids in discussions that do not prescribe value judgements to cultural objects. The conclusions listed above have come from criticism presented in all three chapters. Even though the first statement could be seen as a roundabout way to say that "art mirrors life," to say that simulations enter literature through society is to say that the very idea of one aspect mirroring the other is in question. There is no equivalent relationship between the simulacra in a novel and the external reality of the author or the reader. That is, a novel that represents a dystopian society, in which a sublimation of the subject in models and signs is valued, does not necessarily represent an irrevocable tendency of society, but an imaginative speculation into the effects of hyperreality in society. This particular point is addressed in more detail in the next subsection.

The second statement explores an attempt at predicting the effects of simulacra in literature that was not entirely fulfilled. Of course, it would be surprising if this analysis led to a closed, predictive system of how simulacra occur in literature, and to what effects. However, regarding the *corpus* of this dissertation, the novels were often resolved with similar mechanisms. Exemplified best in Pat Cadigan's *Synners* and Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It*, that mechanism was a tendency towards hybridization, that is, instead of banishing all forms of simulation, their resolutions featured a hybrid perspective of the relationships between mediation and experience. These novels seem to propose a synthesis of technological mediation and subjective experiences as a sort of utopian hope to reach a more aware cultural paradigm towards hyperreality. Although common, however, that sort of resolution is often exposed as problematic or idealistic – as in Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* – or as something that does not happen at all – in Suzanne Collins's *Mockingjay*. That idea bleeds into the third statement: another common occurrence in the analysed novels is that, being exposed to spectacles, simulations and mediations, characters identify simulacra in development, leading

them to act in a more aware way. In some cases, a rebirth of signs can be identified, that is: after a crisis, the world is restructured around modified systems of signification.

1.4 Science fiction and the simulacrum

This dissertation analyses complications that arise in representing a sense of reality in literature, with Baudrillard's simulacrum as methodological aid. That analysis, however, was not carried out for fiction as a general category but, rather, the *corpus* was limited to contemporary science fiction, published between 1990 and the completion of this research, in early 2020. This thirty-year period is marked by cultural trends and by the history of the genre itself, allowing for a plethora of explorations of alternative worlds that deal with mediation and hyperreality; that combination provided the environment for a more rounded more depth in discussion. In order to show that contemporary science fiction is a relevant genre for exploring the simulacrum in literature, this section will briefly address a working concept of science fiction[11] and its relationship with science (which is not as celebratory or univocal as it is commonly thought). Secondly, I consider the genre's recent history, which questions the subjects that are represented in it and the loss of stable systems of meanings.

Darko Suvin's "Science Fiction and the *Novum*," a classic chapter in his larger work *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1977), is considered the obligatory reading for any scholar entering the field and looking for a definition of sf. The author released an updated version, rephrasing or improving his own discussion in *Defined by a Hollow* (2001), which will be the basis for my discussion on his classical definition of science fiction as "cognitive estrangement" and on his defence of the *novum* as a necessity for a work to be sf. Suvin argues that sf is "*distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional "*novum*" (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic*" (67, italics in original). The *novum* is still a

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[11] On occasion, to avoid repetition, I will use "sf" as the chosen abbreviation in the field. Sci-fi, the popular term, is mostly used to refer to its cinematic expressions, while "sf" is used as an umbrella term for most media.

concept used in cultural studies of sf, but often its use is oversimplified, taken to mean any technological development that is portrayed in a book.

It is important to note, however, that the *novum* proposed by Suvin is not merely a technological trinket or a new law in physics that inspires interplanetary adventures. Suvin's *novum* is directly related to Ernst Bloch's attempt to conciliate Marxist criticism and utopia in his work *The Principle of Hope* (1954-59). In analysing Suvin's theoretical trajectory in his definitions of science fiction and the *novum*, Tom Moylan sees that distinction between the pseudo-*novum* and the *novum* proper: "in SF the *novum* is the formal element that generates and validates all elements of the text, from alternative reality to plot, characters and style" ("'Look into the dark,'" 57). From a Marxist standpoint in response to contemporary poststructuralist claims, Moylan states that, "Suvin does not argue that the *novum* should be made redundant in an end-of-history implosion but rather that extreme care must be taken to distinguish between the *novum* of opposition and the pseudo-*novum* of commodification that has come to dominate the terrain of the 'new'" (56); additionally, the concrete *novum* (under the same logic as the one that guides Bloch's concrete and abstract utopias) is to be seen from varying standpoints, that is, from what is developed, by whom and for what. The *novum*, therefore, is not simply a technological invention, but a radical intervention on the conditions of reality in the narrative universe.

For Suvin, the *novum* is this postulated universe of science fiction, because it is rooted in what he terms "cognitive logic;" it will cause a sense of displacement in the reader that defamiliarises the familiar. The idea of cognitive estrangement is, therefore, directly derived from Bertold Brecht's estrangement in theatre, while defamiliarization was first coined in 1917 by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky. In sf, then, the "reality," or the alternative world, is radically different from the writer's and the reader's due to the radical change imposed by the development of the *novum*, which is, in turn, developed from a science-based extrapolation on

the writer's empirical context. Science, which seems almost an autonomous entity when spoken of in these terms, is not restricted to the hard sciences, as Suvin himself claims. In fact, he states that sf sprouting from thought experiments in the soft sciences would make for, in his opinion, the best sf ("Science fiction and the *Novum*," 72). The science that composes *nova* in sf, however, is not that closely related to the science behind actual articles and methodologies.

1.5. Science, fiction, and the simulacrum

In *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, Istvan Csicery-Ronay, Jr. dedicates a chapter to the role of science in the genre, especially to how something supposedly grounded in reality as science could benefit from mechanisms of imagination. Sf works do not presume to be seen as scientific postulations in the same way articles and experiments are. Csicery-Ronay, Jr. highlights the imaginative aspect of the science that enters literature, stating that science in fiction is always figurative, "an image of science, a poetic illusion disguising its illusionary status" (111). It could be argued, even, that the imagined science in the genre is a simulacrum of the practices in academic fields, since that version of science obeys not the rules of empirical realities, but standards and imagetic constructions that have become the norm since the genre's birth. Csicery-Ronay, Jr. adds that sf writers

> use the language and history of technoscience to evoke the coherence and correspondence of the scientific worldview—but always with the freedom to violate, stretch, ironize, and problematize it. If actual science intends to increase human beings' freedom by augmenting their power over matter, sf makes both freedom and power the subject of play. (111)

The simulations of science that drive science fiction forward, then, do not present themselves as science itself, but they seek to test limits or verisimilitude for scientific value and the use of language that is usually associated with its practice. Through that emulation, science itself is put in the mirror, questioned – and often parodied. As pulp magazines were enthusiastic in their

use of jargon to simulate scientific practices in their stories, Brian Stableford notes that, in that stage of the genre, "you accepted what was on the page as if seeing through clear glass" (2003, 62). However, that gradually ceased to be the case, and sf works began using that scientific discourse to expose its simulation through parody. That exposure as parody occurred with several simulacra in world-building and in character perception. In my master's thesis, as mentioned previously, I identified a certain parody of the scientific discourse in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009).

Csicery-Ronay, Jr. is also the main researcher that provided the link between Baudrillard's simulacrum and science fiction. Arguably, all literature is capable of questioning the relationships between and among signs, or between the ideas of copy and original, but I chose to focus that analysis on sf because of the way it inhabits a gap between grounding, sober discourses such as science and the radical imaginations of the future. Csicery-Ronay, Jr., in his article for *Science Fiction Studies* (1991), claims that "SF names not a generic effects engine of literature and simulation arts (the usual sense of the phrase 'science fiction'), so much as a mode of awareness, characterized by two linked forms of hesitation, a pair of gaps" (1). Because science fiction would itself be an art of simulation, it becomes the most striking instance of literature to be analysed through the perspective of the simulacrum. As a matter of fact, the rest of the article is dedicated to a comparison between Baudrillard's simulacrum and Haraway's theories of the cyborg, anchored in Csicery-Ronay, Jr.'s proposal of sf working between two gaps that involve the plausibility of the *novum* and the ethical consequences that such a *novum* would unleash in that construed reality. To him, these two gaps "compose the black box in which scientific-technological conceptions, ostensibly unmediated by social and ethical contingencies, are transformed into a rational, 'realistic' recognition of their possible materialization and their implications" (1). However, it should not be argued that, even in the isolated environment of a fictional work, any contingency would be unmediated. In

contemporaneity, in fact, the opposite has happened: thought experiments from science fiction affect political movements and become slogans for social action by readers. That does not defeat Csicery-Ronay, Jr.'s point that science fiction's constructions inhabit an interstitial space of simulation and mediation of said simulation's consequences.

Although he claims that Baudrillard's and Haraway's theories clash on a number of affirmations, Csicery-Ronay, Jr. manages to find three major trends in common for their criticism, which incidentally link science fiction and simulation:

> They both begin with the axiom that science is a practice within the field of representations, not the explication of extradiscursive phenomena; they both hold that the development of communications-technologies and the culture surrounding them has transformed every conceivable aspect of human and terrestrial life into an aspect of a cybernetic control model; and they both deal with the all-assimilating/all-eroding power of the information-paradigm with radical irony – specifically the irony of SF.

They will diverge, of course, in the ways the culture of simulation will shift relations; while to Baudrillard that has led to a disappearance of the real through an eternal and cyclical flow of images, Haraway argues for a trajectory towards hybridity that destabilizes notions of humanity until they lose their meaning. Although it would seem that those two stances could be interchangeable, they differ in an underlying sense of hope or lack thereof, phrased by the author as "apocalyptic-dystopian-idealist axis and a utopian-pragmatic 'open ended' one" (4). Because Baudrillard saw simulation (and science fiction as an example of third-order simulacra) as reproduction of models, Csicery-Ronay, Jr. claims that it would leave "no room for fictional anticipations, nor for any sort of transcendence" (5), that is, the imagined futures and worlds would only come from clashes between models instead of from the "real" world. Haraway's project, he argues, includes the idea of hyperreality, but "hyperrealization is still fluid, occurring where contestation and disruption are possible once one has accepted the

inexorability, the validity, and even the desirability of the categorical breakdowns" (10), that is, the demotion of meaning to the realm of images that relate to one another enables a repositioning of the subject in relation to systems of signification.

Given that science fiction presents itself as a genre that is born from a conflict between rationality and imagination, that it questions the categories it emulates in simulation and parody, its choice for object of analysis becomes clearer. However, from the entire body of science fiction since its development from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), there was also a need to narrow the scope of works to be considered in this dissertation. Some factors resulted in the choice to read sf novels published since 1990, such as the history of the genre and its recent developments.

John Clute, in his chapter on contemporary science fiction, identifies a break of expectations in the development of science fiction as a genre, from a biological paradigm – in the sense that science fiction had, until then, evolved as a person, with a birth, development, golden age, and subsequent downfall – to something more complex. He marks the 1990s as the historical moment when science fiction had such a long, multifaceted and disputed history that the person metaphor no longer worked ("Science Fiction from 1980 to the present," 65). He adds, "The genre which differed from the world in order to advocate a better one . . . had become by 2000, in triumph or defeat or both, an institution for the telling of story" (65-66). The period is marked, then, by the consolidation of a science fiction discourse, or mode of narrating that resulted from that multitude of histories in pulp magazines, gothic influences, technological conflicts and wars. Additionally, the end of the 20th century and this beginning of 21st in sf have seen an unprecedented approximation between this same science fiction discourse and its public, as the questions and debates from cyberpunk novels, or the shifting paradigms from new wave sf, or even the proposals for utopian enclaves from the 1970s become contemporary concerns. To exemplify the concreteness of contemporary sf themes in

society, cyberpunk author Pat Cadigan it is worth noting, whose novel *Synners* is analysed in Chapter two, stated in an interview in 2018 that, when she wrote that book, "there was a lot more science fiction in it than there is today," to which her friend inquires, "Did they supress it?" to hear as a response "No, honey, it just caught up with me".[12]

Clute adds that another characteristic of science fiction from the 1990s on was the failure of the progressionist notion that science was the tool for humankind to ultimately dominate – colonise, even – nature. That failure of the American Dream model of science fiction began to appear in the 1980s, with cyberpunk works, but the emergence of the internet and the increasing hyperspace of online experiences also rose in science fiction works that questioned grand narratives at their plot levels. As sf became a multimodal way of telling stories, its expression in literature turned to the novel form over former magazines and short story anthologies, even though these forms still survive, although on a smaller scale. Contemporary science fiction novels, then, were chosen because they thematize aspects of modernity, because they expose the contemporaneity of science fiction conflicts, and these often occur, as I demonstrate in my critical analyses, with simulacra to construe these alternative worlds.

Even though the relationship between the simulacrum and science fiction has been widely recognized by scholars, often the simulacrum occurs in what I previously called a supra-media perspective. In other words, the simulacrum is used to reach a conclusion over the state of art, while this dissertation seeks to demonstrate the value of the simulacrum's other facet, intra-media analysis. This chapter will proceed to analyse Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) in order to set the parameters for other, more focused literary analyses of simulacra regarding world building and media relations in contemporary sf.

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[12] Octocon, the event in which this interview took place, is a recurring, yearly meeting, focused mostly on Irish science fiction. I attended Cadigan's interview and thus was able to personally record the statement mentioned in this paragraph. For more information on the event, <https://2018.octocon.com/>.

1.6. Introduction to *Oryx and Crake*

Oryx and Crake is the first instalment in the trilogy that came to be known as the *MaddAddam* series (named after the third volume, *MaddAddam*, published in 2013). The novel is narrated from the perspective of Jimmy/Snowman: although these names refer to the same person, there is a significant break that occurs in Jimmy's personality after an apocalyptic event that kills nearly all humans on the planet. Believing himself to be forever isolated from his species and the sole survivor, he begins to call himself Snowman. The narration goes back and forth between Jimmy's formative years and Snowman's fight to survive on scraps from the collapsed civilization, whose remains are scattered around him, much like his memories of his previous life. The use of one name or the other denotes the context of the action, either before or after the apocalyptic event.

In the portion about Jimmy's formative years, the reader learns about his family, his academic training and eventual adult professional life. He comes from a rich family, which means he grows up not only safe from the violence and misery depicted in *The Year of the Flood* (published in 2009, the book is the second instalment of the series, focused on two women, Toby and Ren, as they navigate poverty and their strategies to survive the near apocalypse), but also that he has complete access to mass entertainment, to simulated entertainment, and these experiences shape his perception of his surroundings to a great extent. Additionally, Jimmy is not successful in school in the standards of his society. He is described in the narration as not being a "numbers person," but a "words person" – denoting, both in the fictional world and, arguably, in our contemporary context, that the skill with communication and words would be a negative trait.

The action includes his developing relationship with his best friend, Crake, who is the opposite of him: a "numbers person," who excels at academic activities and quickly becomes rich working for a pharmaceutical company as a young adult. He is the eventual designer and

enforcer of the apocalyptic event. He manufactures a deadly virus inserted in a pill that had been widely distributed and marketed, the BlyssPluss:

> Which had led to the concept of the BlyssPluss. The aim was to produce a single pill, that, at one and the same time:
>
> a) would protect the user against all known sexually transmitted diseases, fatal, inconvenient, or merely unsightly;
>
> b) would provide an unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess, coupled with a generalized sense of energy and well-being, thus reducing the frustration and blocked testosterone that led to jealousy and violence, and eliminating feelings of low self-worth;
>
> c) would prolong youth. . . .
>
> The BlyssPluss pill would also act as a sure-fire onetime-does-it-all birth-control pill, for male and female alike. (346-347)

Jimmy is employed as a marketer for the product. During the phase of distribution, he meets Oryx, an attractive and elusive woman who has a relationship with both Crake and Jimmy. Her role is to participate in marketing campaigns to help sell BlyssPluss. In parallel, Jimmy discovers another project taken on by both Oryx and Crake: the Crakers. They are post-human creatures, bioengineered to have a harmonious relationship with the environment. Their skin varies in colours such as blue, green or red, they have no need for clothes, and they do not eat meat. Other traits of the species include a courtship ritual with waving blue penises, a natural release of mosquito repellent, and, most importantly, they have no capacity for metaphors, or for using language above the direct relationships between words and objects.

Crake immunised Jimmy from his manufactured plague before the protagonist could understand what was happening. Both Crake and Oryx die in the end of the novel, and Crake reveals that he planned for Jimmy to survive, alone, so he could guide the post-humans in the

world that would now belong to them. As the Crakers are set free from the laboratory where they were created, Jimmy becomes Snowman and reluctantly helps them discern between useful and useless items in the wild. He survives on scraps and on fish he convinced the Crakers to catch for him. They request stories about their creators, and Snowmen invents stories as they come to mind. The character retells his entire life to himself as a way to keep sane, or to merely spend time. The stories from his part are mixed with his present in the world after humanity in such a manner that separating one from the other would be a disservice to literary criticism.

The novel has been successful both in sales and in cultural impact. It was awarded the Man Booker Prize in 2003; its adaptation rights had been purchased by HBO, which dropped the project in 2016. *Oryx and Crake* was the primary reading in several critical articles, books and book chapters, constituting a critical legacy to which I myself contributed some.

Katherine V. Snyder, in "'Time to go': The Post-apocalyptic and The Post-traumatic in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*" (2011) provides a fruitful discussion of the identity split that causes Jimmy to break into his past self and Snowman. She identifies the structure of a before and after an apocalyptic event in the pandemic caused by Crake, noting how the novel opens with Snowman's stopped wristwatch (471). She suggests that Snowman's telling of Jimmy's life to himself is more than just a way to pass the time. She goes further to add that the trauma Jimmy has to overcome is not even the destruction of humankind, as his relationship with his own species and its collective history is not a positive one. Instead, what he has a hard time processing is the deaths of both Oryx and Crake. Their voices are constantly interposed in his narrative – they are figuratively alive, and the idea of them mediates his present-day experiences with the Crakers.

Maria Manuel Lisboa dedicates a chapter to the analysis of novels dealing with man-made apocalypses in *The End of the World: Apocalypse and its Aftermath in Western Culture* (2011). Among them, she cites *Oryx and Crake* as "a more fully achieved nightmare" (141)

because Crake succeeds in creating a humanoid species capable of living in harmony with the planet, but he does not manage to wipe out humanity entirely; as the reader discovers in the sequels *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013), there is a small, but significant numbers of surviving humans, who find their way towards the beach where the Crakers have established their new village. Lisboa also suggests that Crake's death was a type of sacrifice for a happiness of which he did not believe to be worthy. That interpretation is a bit too positive regarding a character that engineers the death of millions, but the reader accompanies his development and his disgust for his own species. In *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood reveals that Crake had secret ties to a group that sought to live responsibly with its environment, but that received cult or even terrorist status by the existing ultra-capitalist structure. In a way, it is possible to say that Crake had murderous tendencies towards his species, a misogynistic perspective of gender relations (to be discussed further in this chapter), but he was also "radicalised" by a series of values in this cult, called the Gardeners.

Michael Spiegel, in "Character in a post-national world: neomedievalism in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*" (2010), discusses the overarching societal structure that Atwood creates in Jimmy's early life. He identifies the structures that separate the rich from the poor in urban organization, highlighting the duality formed by the Compounds, gated and walled clusters of high-end buildings equipped with constant surveillance for scientists, entrepreneurs and other capital holders, and the Pleeblands, the latter described as exposed, badly built structures for middle class and poor citizens, those who might end up resorting to selling a range of bodily functions to survive – as does Toby in the first half of *The Year of the Flood*. Spiegel argues that the ultracapitalism rampant in Atwood's postulated future society resembled medieval organization of spaces, as national states cease to have any relevance and are substituted for areas of influence by large corporations. To him, nationality loses its value as an identification factor, and "Instead, loyalty would disperse among various local groups or transnational" (120).

There is a dissolution of the logic that established periphery and core in urban organization, and the periphery becomes pulverized in the interstitial spaces between Compounds.

Lara Dodds contributes to criticism on *Oryx and Crake* significantly by analysing closely the intertextual relations between Atwood's novel and Milton's *Paradise Lost* in "Death and the 'Paradice within' in *Paradise Lost* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2015). She identifies in the book "an extensive engagement with the Fall myth" (115) to argue that Crake seeks to reverse what he sees as a Fall in humankind. Dodds adds, "Crake's utopian dream aims to reverse the Fall and, more specifically, to reverse the stages by which Milton's Adam and Eve come to know Death" (116). In Atwood's book, Oryx takes on the role of this new Eve, while Crake takes an all-encompassing role of Adam, Lucifer and God: he tries to undo the corruption of his kind, but he also rebels against creation and sparks a new reality. A strong intertextual bond between *Paradise Lost* and *Oryx and Crake* is found, Dodds argues, in Oryx's voice inside Snowman's head: "Paradice is lost, but you have a Paradice within you, happier far" (*Oryx and Crake,* 308), in a reference/pun on the Paradise from Milton's work and the laboratory where the Crakers were created, named Paradice by Crake himself. In Milton's work, that verse comes from Michael's advice to Adam following the Fall, seen by criticism as "fortunate Fall, as Milton's post-Restoration withdrawal from politics, or as a model for an interior spiritual discipline available to the poem's readers in a fallen world" (120). The author uses these literary approximations to discuss death and the notion of immortality in *Oryx and Crake*, suggesting that Milton's work continues to influence contemporary works that approach the subject of system-wide catastrophe.

Suparna Banerjee looks at representations of motherhood in the novel, in "Towards 'feminist mothering': oppositional maternal practice in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*" (2013). Her analysis covers Crake's tampering with gender relations, revealing how blind to gender inequality the engineer had been. He maintains a sex-based division of labour, he

programs males to unequivocally seek out females (even though he removes the aspect that affects him, the competition), but he also assigns the task of caring for infants to males as well. Banerjee also analyses the conflict between Jimmy and his mother, who leaves him as a child to fight against what she perceived as a perversion of life in bioengineering practices. She indicates how the narrative voice, that is, Snowman's, portrays Sharon under a negative light but even that is displaced by Atwood's narrative, revealing his bias. The author concludes that Sharon's subversive acts result in a more complex role model for Jimmy/Snowman, who suffers with abandonment but learns she left to follow her own ideas.

Sławomir Kozioł, in "Crake's aesthetic: Genetically modified humans as a form of art in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*" (2018) analyses the role of art in *Oryx and Crake*, focusing on the sense of aesthetic that Crake occasionally lets on. To him, the design that causes the Crakers, the bioengineered post-humans that inherit the planet, is not merely turned at practical characteristics, but it also carries an aesthetic sense of beauty and sublime. Kozioł demonstrates that "Crake ostensibly despises art" (493) by highlighting an except in which Crake compares human production of art to frogs that use empty drainpipes to amplify their voice and seem bigger, to attract better mates. In other words, Crake believes art to be a mere steppingstone for unsuitable men to lure women into sleeping with them.

Melissa Cristina Silva de Sá construes a dual analysis, reading *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* as complementary counterparts, in "Retelling apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*" (2014). She contrasts the perspectives of the apocalypse from the series through gender, concluding that the narrative moves forward through the actions of "the non-elects" (65) and reaching the conclusion that Crake's engineered catastrophe does not contribute to equate gender relations, but instead it further exposes women to exploration – a *status* that is revisited and restructured, I would argue, in *MaddAddam*.

I have contributed to the critical analysis of *Oryx and Crake* in 2017, in a chapter for Miriam Vieira and Jørgen Bruhn's *Intermedial Mediations of the Anthropocene*, titled "Margaret Atwood's Crakers as an answer to the matter of the Anthropocene." My discussion centres on a perspective of contemporaneity as a period marked by the effects of humankind's actions on the planet, a process that has been proven in the field of Geology. In parallel, ecology and global warming have become increasingly relevant in fiction in general, but also in science fiction, and the form Crake engineers his post-humans is heavily influenced by these values, in traits like their vegetarianism, their natural repellent and even, I argue, in their initial lack of symbolic thought. Of course, that species, as it happens with most of Atwood's fictional creations, is not without its grain of salt, that is, the concerns expressed in their composition are highly ironic and often speak more of Crake's individual stances than of a supposed natural harmony with the planet.

This introduction to *Oryx and Crake* aimed at presenting the basic plot structure of the novel, the differentiation between Jimmy and Snowman, with some relevant critical work on the novel. Surely, it would not be feasible to present all critical work on Atwood's novel, but I demonstrated perspectives from ecology, feminism, postmodern criticism and from comparative literature, showing the variety of influences the book has cast in contemporary science and speculative fiction. That variety contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the novel and to trace connections between previously researched themes and their relationship with simulation in the narrative.

1.7. *Oryx and Crake* and the simulacrum

The first instalment of the *MaddAddam* series, Oryx *and Crake,* was chosen to be analysed in this dissertation because it depicts the process of designing the apocalypse and the moment it comes to fruition as construed over several simulacra. They occur in a narrative style that approaches a decay in language itself, and they occur in world building and character

descriptions, with a naturalization of the industry of entertainment. *The Year of the Flood* was already analysed in that perspective in my master's thesis (2016): it portrays similar processes, encompassing the before and after of the apocalyptic event, but it does not include the design of the disaster. *MaddAddam* is focused on the post-apocalypse, the reconstitution of a very basic and hybrid society, the fragmented weaving of a new mythology, including Zeb's backstory, a character of importance in the second book.

Simulacra in *Oryx and Crake* are identifiable at three main levels: in the narrative, they provide an effect of the dismantling of language itself, which occurs both in Snowman's incessant list-making and in his frustrating attempts to communicate with the Crakers; in character development, they are present in the values behind the very creation of the posthuman species and in Oryx's characterization; finally, the entertainment industry in *Oryx and Crake* exacerbates simulation practices, with ironic commentary from the narrative voice, allowing for a critique on the disappearance of art itself from Atwood's postulated universe. I will address each level separately, tracing connections among them when pertinent.

1.7.1. Lists and the dissolution of language

The study of lists in literature is a comprehensive approach that has included analyses of *The Odyssey*, *Paradise Lost*, *Frankenstein*, and contemporary works such as *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. In other words, lists have been present in literature across periods, with different effects and aims. In postmodern works, this literary device makes a detour from the usual appeal to order and organization, towards a displacement of categories that are usually taken for granted in rationalist thought. Umberto Eco published on the relevance and permanence, if not survival, of lists in literature. The list as a narrative device is not limited to a literary period, genre, or linguistic expression: lists compose classics such as *Paradise Lost* (the list of fallen angels, for instance) and the *Iliad* (the Greek troops), and they can cause various effects, including immensity, order, or even chaos, as is the case with postmodern

authors, such as Borges, in his "Library of Babel." In an interview, Eco argues for the list to be seen not as a restraining form, but as part of human culture: "The list doesn't destroy culture; it creates it. Wherever you look in cultural history, you will find lists. In fact, there is a dizzying array: lists of saints, armies and medicinal plants, or of treasures and book titles".[13]

Additionally, in *The Infinity of Lists* (2009), he traces parallels between the literary list and what he terms a pragmatic list, "because they confer unity on a set of objects that, no matter how dissimilar among themselves, comply with a contextual pressure, in other words they are related for their being" (113-116). Michael Duszat contextualizes the literary use of lists in postmodern and contemporary works, focusing on Borges. He emphasizes heterogeneous lists, "lists that transgress certain rules of systematic organization and logical order, and as a result appear as discordant, surprising, chaotic, jumbled, nonsensical, hybrid, disjunctive, and so on" (194). *Oryx and Crake* abounds in heterogenous lists and even homogenous enumerations, as I exemplify in the next paragraphs, and they contribute to an effect of decay in language and the system of signs. As Snowman ponders on the loss of meaning and he exchanges words merely as they refer to each other, Baudrillard's simulacrum is narratively employed as a means to a literary end. As a matter of fact, the novel opens with Snowman waking up, outside of time as Howells and Snyder have already indicated, and with a list.

> He's stashed some mangoes there, knotted in a plastic bag, and a can of Sveltana No-Meat Cocktail Sausages, and a precious half-bottle of Scotch – no, more like a third – and a chocolate-flavoured energy bar scrounged from a trailer park, limp and sticky inside its foil. He can't bring himself to eat it yet: it might be the last one he'll ever find. He keeps a can opener there too, and for no particular reason an ice pick; and six empty

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beer bottles, for sentimental reasons and for storing fresh water. Also his sunglasses; he

puts them on. One lens is missing but they're better than nothing. (4)

This sort of list, an inventory, occurs frequently not just in *Oryx and Crake*, but also in *The Year of the Flood*. Despite the assumption that a post-apocalyptic inventory would strongly resemble a practical list, Snowman's first list reveals that practicality only has some bearing in his choice of items: he does keep food around him (as with the mangoes, the energy bar, the sausages), but he also maintains utterly useless items for reasons that he deems "sentimental:" the ice pick and the beer bottles. Ironically, the "sentimental" items immediately afterwards are indicated as objects with practical reasons, the ice pick being a potential weapon and the bottles, useful for storing water. Additionally, there is an underlying heterogeneity to the list: the food items include food that occurs in nature and food that is manufactured, not to mention processed meat. Already in this first list, these items are ordered for that function, but they also have the effect of letting the reader know that the setting of the novel includes food in brands (Sveltana No-Meat) foreign to the reader's context. Finally, these items are treasured the same, despite whatever ethical consequences there would have been to their production before the apocalyptic event. The referents are already mashed together behind a veil of pragmatism.

That literary usage is more evident in what happens next: some Crakers find objects in the sea, remains of the civilization that has crumbled under Crake's virus: "A plastic BlyssPluss container, empty; a Chickie Nobs Bucket O'Nubbins, ditto. A computer mouse, or the busted remains of one, with a long wiry tail. Snowman feels like weeping. What can he tell them? There's no way of explaining to them what these curious items are, or were" (7). Snowman cannot possibly explain what a BlyssPluss pill is, because the Crackers have no concept of pills, or medicine, or illness even, due to their genetic programming. Faced with that impasse, as he often does in his interactions with them, he claims, "These are things from before" (7). That reference, to a before, really is to before Oryx and Crake died. Snowman, exasperated by

the Crakers' childish innocence, is more than satisfied to give vague answers, in a futile resistance to Crake's parting and cryptic request, "I'm counting on you" (385).

Enumerations in *Oryx and Crake* serve diverse purposes, but most commonly they evince the absence of the objects being listed. When Snowman describes his difficulty in passing the time, the narration presents the reader with an enumeration of animals and his impressions of them: "Sometimes he laughs like a hyena or roars like a lion – his idea of a hyena, his idea of a lion. He used to watch old DVDs of such creatures when he was a child . . . Or he grunts and sequeals like a pigoon, or howls like a wolvog: *Aroo! Aroo!*" (11). Ironically, Snowman notes not the absence of lions and hyenas, but the mediated notion he has of those animals. The same does not occur to genetically altered versions of pigs and wolves; both are species he meets in the wild after humanity's destruction, and he has also encountered both. He is more familiar, then, with the hybrid versions of supposedly pure animals. If the Crakers are to be seen as a simulacrum of humankind, animal species have their versions of the same warped alteration.

In an attempt to distract himself from his reality, Snowman delves in Jimmy's high school gaming habits. That leads to the part of the novel makes explicit the narrative use of lists and its relevance to construing the sense of waste and chaos in Atwood's universe.

They might play Extinctathon, or one of the others. Three-Dimensional Waco, Barbarian Stomp, Kwiktime Osama. They all used parallel strategies . . . Jimmy could sometimes win at Kwiktime Osama though, as long as Crake played the Infidel side. No hope of whittling that kind of game, however. It would have to be chess.

Or he could keep a diary. Set down his impressions. . . . He could emulate the captains of ships, in olden times . . . Or castaways on desert islands, keeping their journals day by tedious day. . . .

He too is a castaway of sorts. He could make lists. It could give his life some structure.

(45)

The names Atwood gives the games she invents all have characteristic of the hyperreality that mediates Jimmy's (and most children of his generation) education and formation of character. While Extinctathon transforms appalling results of climate change and human exploration of biomes in a trivia game, Three-Dimensional Waco adds to the common whack-a-mole the pseudo-scientific notion of three dimensions and Kwiktime Osama references Afghan terrorist Osama Bin Laden, who then died in 2010. In the three games, serious political crises are diluted into entertainment and casual pastime activities, with terms like "infidel" losing their cultural sense and inhabiting the sphere of simulacra, empty referents. Infidel could be switched for any other current-charged cultural term that, for Jimmy, it would not make a difference; on the other hand, the fact that it is the word "infidel" that is used trivializes it at the same time. As the enumeration of games brings Snowman back to ideas for passing the time and he remembers diaries, he promptly associates them with models from old movies, such as captains who keep their ship log as it sinks, or castaways who leave their journals to be read by nobody. The idea of emulating these tropes from pop culture has, once again, the bitter and ironic effect of reminding Snowman that he is, in a very real sense, a castaway himself. He concludes, "He could make lists" even as he lists things. The idea being considered is already his automatic response to dealing with his surroundings.

Another process of exposing the near lack of the real in *Oryx and Crake* is identifiable in excerpts that include a progression of questions about a certain term or practice that results in a *reducto ad absurdum* perspective on language itself. In other words, Snowman, when confronted with questions about the world around them from the Crakers, has a hard time finding common language – that is, common signs – to communicate effectively. Although the Crakers had learned English in the laboratory, before the apocalyptic event, with Oryx, they

lack several lexical terms for objects that no longer exist or matter in the event's aftermath. Their shared lack of references in common hinders communication between Snowman and the Crakers is best exemplified in the excerpt about toast:

> What is toast?" says Snowman to himself, once they've run off. *Toast is when you take a piece of bread – What is bread? Bread is when you take some flour – What is flour? We'll skip that part, it's too complicated. Bread is something you can eat, made from a ground-up plant and shaped like a stone. You cook it . . . Please, why do you cook it? Why don't you just eat the plant? Never mind that part – Pay attention. You cook it, and then you cut it into slices, and you put a slice into a toaster, which is a metal box that heats up with electricity – What is electricity? Don't worry about that. While the slice is in the toaster, you get out the butter – butter is a yellow grease, made from the mammary glands of – skip the butter. So, the toaster turns the slice of bread black on both sides with smoke coming out, and then this "toaster" . . ..* (112)

In postmodern fashion, in this excerpt Atwood's narrator deconstructs, in the Derridean sense, the concept of toast, questioning meanings behind the term until the word seems to lose its sense or usability. Even though Snowman is talking to himself – as he effectively is during most of the novel –, instead of achieving a simple definition of toast both in the figurative and the practical meanings, he seems to arrive at the conclusion that toast does not mean anything any longer. With the total loss of the object, its previously corresponding sign is lost. After the decimation of referents to objects that no longer exist, their corresponding signs no longer have any value. An additional conclusion can be drawn from this excerpt in contrast to the previous ones: listing, in *Oryx and Crake*, is often more effective in capturing a scenario than defining it.

Additionally, there is a cyclical turn to Snowman's frustration in communicating with the Crakers when the previous excerpt is contrasted with another one, from earlier in the novel,

when Jimmy asks his father questions about animals. Snowman remembers a large bonfire of animal carcasses; he remembers the smell and the shoes he wore. As he tries to understand why the animals had to be burned, his father has a similarly frustrating interaction with him:

> "They had to be burned," he said, "to keep it from spreading." . . .
>
> "What from spreading?"
>
> "The disease."
>
> "What's a disease?"
>
> "A disease is like when you have a cough" . . .
>
> "If I have a cough, will I be burned up?"
>
> "Most likely," said his father, turning over the page. (22)

Although the sequence of questions echoes the structure to Snowman's digression on toast, some differences are notable, and they enrich the interpretation. When Jimmy is the subject in the position of innocence (in the stage of understanding the world around him), much the same way the Crakers are, his father also oversimplifies his explanations – "a disease is like when you have a cough" standing for "*Bread is something you can eat*" –, but while Snowman is frustrated from trying and failing to communicate, his father fails to be clear from lack of effort. That is, unlike Snowman and the Crakers, Jimmy and his father do share context and experiences, but his father is disinterested in communicating effectively. Surely, Snowman is not always dedicated to explaining the world, shifting from "these are safe" to "piss off" quite quickly; on the other hand, the reader only has access to his father's behaviour through Snowman's memories, which limits his portrayal. Regardless, contrasting the two attempts at communication highlights the process of using language to mediate experiences and the difficulties found when one party cannot describe referents to which the other has never been exposed before. While in Jimmy's childhood the effect is mostly of parental alienation, in Snowman's experience, the Crakers merely dismiss him – he, once again, becomes the *locus*

of conflict and proceeds to ponder on the role of language now that he, theoretically, would be the last man alive.

While definitions send characters in circles, the literary list provides a way around them. Thus, simulacra are all around Snowman, in the lists, in the interactions he has with the Crakers and, finally, in his own way to think about language. However, I would offer an alternative proposal. As Snowman carries his imaginary conversation to describe toast to a creature who sees no reason to cook plants, he fails to communicate because he insists in sharing his logic, his chain of signifiers, without establishing a middle ground. It is possible that Toby succeeds in that communication, in *MaddAddam*, because she acknowledges that communicational gap. From that interpretation, it is not language that is crumbling down, but a system of association that binds language together. Snowman does not share the Crakers' references, but that does not mean that they do not have their own system. Snowman's (and ours) system of referentiality has to adapt or disappear. To emphasize that, Atwood's literature proceeds to simulate, with the example of "toast," the process of emptying it, before it either disappears or is resignified.

In *MaddAddam*, Toby occupies the role that had been Snowman's, explaining and collaborating with the Crakers. In the chapter that opens the final novel, Atwood's narrator takes on her voice and omits the Crakers' questions, arguably because they can be implied from context. Nonetheless, there is a different attitude in the way he communicates with them. For instance, Toby finds a way around explaining cooking (with meat) to them by learning her cosmology: "Yes, there was a bone in the soup. Yes, it was a smelly bone. I know you do not eat a smelly bone. But many of the Children of Oryx like to eat such bones. Bobkittens eat them, and rakunks, and pigoons, and liobams. They all eat smelly bones. And bears eat them. I'll tell you what a bear is later." (*MaddAddam*, 13). "Children of Oryx" is an expression used to refer to animals other than Crakers and humans; although that category had been invented by Snowman, it gains truth value in Craker cosmology, which Toby learns to use to build upon

in order to communicate. In *MaddAddam*, as opposed to *Oryx and Crake*, interactions are less interfered with by simulacra; instead, humans and posthumans use hybrid approaches to resignify terms. While conversations in the first novel fail because language has been reset along with any sense of real, in the third instalment the emptiness that resulted from the crisis in representation becomes the site for a rebirth of language.

Snowman's role, unbeknownst to Crake, supersedes the original plan. As a "words person," after the apocalyptic event, lists of words pervade his traumatic flashbacks. Eventually, he elaborates and reflects upon that practice: "'Hang on to the words,' he tells himself. The odd words, the old words, the rare ones. *Valance. Norm. Serendipity. Pibroch. Lubricious.* When they're gone out of his head, these words, they'll be gone, everywhere, forever. As if they had never been" (78). Snowman's concern about the disappearance of words occurs across the novel, from the moment he chooses to leave the name Jimmy behind ("He'd kept the *abominable* to himself" [8]), always marked with italics, as much of his inner voice. The italics also mark a sort of inner dialogue – not polyphony, but a recurring second voice, disagreeing with Snowman's main narration, subjecting it to satire, inversion, even emptying it. Once again, Snowman clings to a system of referents that he firmly believes is on its way to extinction.

His relationship with these disappearing words is, once again, affected by the idea of the simulacrum. There is a mystique in collecting, itemizing words, but Snowman gradually forgets their meaning, clinging, he says, to the emptied word, its sounds, its composing letters. "From nowhere, a word appears. *Mesozoic*. He can see the word, he can hear the word, but he can't reach the word. He can't attach anything to it. This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning" (43). After the catastrophe that destroyed the society, Snowman is burdened with caring for it, imagining words had a value of their own, but as they escape him, he clings more and more to the signs. "He wishes he had something to read. To read, to view,

to hear, to study, to compile. Rag ends of language are floating in his head: *mephitic, metronome, mastitis, metatarsal, maudlin*" (175). Snowman's attachment to words without meaning evidences two things: his starvation for entertainment, which had been more than available during his formative years; and their lack of meaning becomes explicit in his organization of lists by similar sounds. The only characteristic shared by the items on a list is that many of his word lists are organized around sounds, in alphabetical order, resembling entries in a dictionary or encyclopaedia. In Atwood's post-catastrophe scenario, the collapse of society is mirrored in the collapse of the ontology that ruled it. The structures that organized science and other forms of knowledge begin to disappear with humankind, forming a parallel between their obsolescence: to encyclopaedias stands science, the way it had been valued before.

Of course, the italics serve more than just his lists of words. Guy Debord, in *Society of the Spectacle*, reaches a similar conclusion regarding the collapse of institutions, language among them: "In the case of representations, the critical self-destruction of society's former *common language* confronts its artificial recomposition in the commodity spectacle, the illusory representation of the non-lived" (paragraph 185). Using the concept of spectacle, one that shares some characteristics with Baudrillard's simulacrum (the emptying of referents, the shiny quality involved in masking that absence, the commodification towards profit of that practice), Debord imagines that a confrontation of those crumbling concepts emphasizes the artificial quality of their forging, which would result in a myriad of communication systems. For *Oryx and Crake*, the presence of simulacra evidenced in the literary lists exposes the spectacle that had existed in the society from the before, of Compounds and Pleeblands. The reader can access, through Snowman's inventories of items, characteristics, voices, and, more importantly, words, the way this perception was built, that is, how Jimmy had been raised on a hyperreal society of simulation, "reproductive furniture" (30), resulting in the sense that such

an organization of knowledge should survive even after his species. Surely, his role as maintainer of language is a half self-imposed illusion, half forced by Crake, as Snowman takes his new name and his new cosmology to entertain himself and to sustain his sanity amid the destruction. His narrative encompasses the before and the after to the decimation of humankind, points in which signs were empty and that perception, awakened by storytelling, caused conflict in the narrator's identity. More studies could be carried out on the way there is a progression towards a rebirth of signs and their relationship with communication and mythmaking in the following novels, *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, especially the latter.

1.7.2. The simulacrum in character development

The Crakers are an ironic solution to the problem of humankind and its toxic relationship with its home planet, devised by a young scientist. Despite the fact that Crake does not betray concerns with the environment during all his years with Jimmy, his design for a more harmonious species addresses some issues that are distinctly environmental. Some examples of this concern include: their disinterest in building and producing (they do not require clothes or shelter); they exude a citric smell to repel mosquitoes; they delimit territory with urine; their bodies are similar, but of different colours. The defining feature, however, according to Crake, which would ensure their harmonious survival with each other and the planet, was their lack of symbolic thinking. When Jimmy sees them for the first time, he asks Crake whether they are curious about their origin, and who made them. "'You don't get it,' said Crake, in his you-are-a-moron voice. 'That stuff's been edited out.'" (366). In Crake's thinking, if they could find everything they needed in their immediate surroundings, and if he removed competition for sex, Crakers would simply live and reproduce with the least amount of suffering and conflict possible. In a book chapter released in 2017, I commented on the irony present in the constitution of these posthumans: "Crake is not only concerned with the planet, with the senseless destruction to the point that he ensures that the Crakers only need to feed on

leaves; he is also worried with the Crakers' feelings, avoiding notions of rejection, anxiety and ambition" ("Crakers as an answer to the matter of the Anthropocene," 43). This simulacrum of humankind reflects Crake's limited perspective of requirements for harmony: an availability of survival products and lack of rejection or illness.

The simulacrum also seems to orient reality, paradoxically, when Snowman talks to the Crakers about the before, or what they call "the Chaos:" "They'd struggled with pictures, at first – flowers on beach-trash lotion bottles, fruits on juice cans. *Is it real? No, it is not real. What is this for real? Not real can tell us about real.* And so forth" (118). The Crakers, even though theoretically deprived of symbolic thought, also apprehend their world through a system of differentiation, that is, dichotomies such as real *versus* not real, the Chaos *versus* now. Snowman, however, is a much-compromised guide to their newly born, object-based system of communication, as he fails to share their logic. Snowman never discovers for sure why he was immunized and chosen to care for the Crakers instead of Oryx, often framed by the narrative as their Eve, who did not seem to have trouble explaining the world to them in ways they understood.

However, Oryx is presented in the narration almost as a simulacrum of herself. Snyder describes that process clearly, highlighting Oryx's first appearance and her supposedly three-dimensionality for teenager Jimmy: "None of those little girls [his classmates] had ever seemed real to Jimmy—they'd always struck him as digital clones—but for some reason Oryx was three-dimensional from the start" (103). As teenagers, Jimmy and Crake spent afternoons watching pornography streams online; during one of those sessions, a young girl turns to the camera during the action and looks at it intently, causing in both boys a lasting effect. Jimmy remembers it as if the girl – young Oryx – had actually seen him, in a way no other woman had in his entire life. Neither boy says a word, but Crake's silent, yet purposeful reaction is to take a screenshot and save the moment young sex-slave Oryx looks intently at the camera. Perhaps

because of Jimmy's early warped concepts of intimacy and reality, as Snyder remarks, "he wants to believe that he has glimpsed the real Oryx in this image of her contemptuous gaze, in his fantasy what he sees is only her seeing the 'secret person inside him.' That is to say, he sees primarily a reflection of himself" (483). Even after Jimmy meets her as an adult and becomes her lover, it could hardly be said that he comes close to knowing any instance of a "real" Oryx, exemplified in his wondering: "Was there only one Oryx, or was she legion?" (307-8). After her death, after the apocalyptic event, she goes back to being a voice in his head, laughing at him, making suggestions.

Oryx enters the boys' life as a commodity and finds a reasonable degree of agency. Both Crake and Jimmy are interested in her sexually (perhaps emotionally). Oryx is seen as a magnetic, mysterious woman, who caters to Jimmy's emotional needs but, even as she tells him her backstory, her way of making sense of her life seems alien to him, and foreign, quite literally. Even in Atwood's imagined world of blurred national boundaries, Oryx, as portrayed by Snowman in his narration, seems at times an orientalist caricature – evidencing the narrator's limitations, once again: "There was Crake's story about her, and Jimmy's story about her as well, a more romantic version; and then there was her own story about herself, which was very different from both, and not very romantic at all" (133). After her death, she is compacted and mediated through Jimmy's memories and Snowman's speculations. As Dodds summarizes, "In a world without time and without history, however, Oryx's imagined words cannot offer consolation. They are an expression not only of what Snowman lacks but also of what he, as a product of his culture, never knew to value" (116), suggesting Jimmy, being a subject of his hyper-mediated context, was unable to relate to the "real" Oryx when she had been in front of him.

I would argue that Oryx's characterization, in Snowman's flashbacks from when he met the woman, does not constitute a simulacrum within the novel; her casual indifference

towards her past was mysterious to Jimmy, whose focus on one's past history was used as a tool to understand people, but that does not constitute yet a simulation. Even in the chapters dedicated to Oryx's narration of her past for Jimmy, when the narrator's voice is hers, it is possible to sense some manipulation and a lot of elision; whether that was because she actively refused closure to Jimmy or because that configured one of ser survival mechanisms remains unclear. Oryx, however, is reduced and simulated as a voice in his head after her death, and this simulacrum of her is actively fabricated to entertain his mind; later, the idea of Oryx is further detached from the character Oryx, until she is no more than an Eve-like figure for the Crakers. This dissolution of experience into simulation, which is in turn sublimated into hyperreal myth is one of the mechanisms of intra-medial simulacra in *Oryx and Crake*.

1.7.3. Entertainment industry and simulation

As more than sufficiently mentioned previously in this chapter, the universe in Atwood's *MaddAddam* series has imploded after the collapse of an ultracapitalist society. The intense separation between wealthy and impoverished populations, with the poor becoming test subjects, egg, hair and tissue donors (exemplified in Toby's narrative early in *The Year of the Flood*), and the rich accessing universities and engaging in marketing, bioengineering and, more importantly, corporate espionage, results in a uniquely unequal society that Crake resets with the Blyss-Pluss pill. Atwood's narrator uses several tools to build such a divided and yet mediated world;[14] in *Oryx and Crake*, world building occurs largely around simulacra, especially in the dimension of entertainment industry, whose commodities shape young minds and fabricate wishes whose fulfilment perpetuates the system itself.

That ultra-capitalist organization is depicted, as a foreshadowing, in Jimmy and Crake's formative years, immersed in various mediated forms of entertainment. That mediation

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[14] For an analysis on this issue regarding *The Year of the Flood*, see my master's dissertation, "*The Simulacrum in Coded Discourse Parody:* The Hunger Games *and* The Year of the Flood" (2016).

distances the objects from images presented in the media to such an extent that violent spectacles become commonplace, its consumers devoid of empathy. As discussed previously, Oryx's presentation is one of the most striking examples of that. She appears for the first time on a porn website that Jimmy and Crake thoroughly enjoy. For Jimmy, however, she stands out from the start as "three-dimensional," or as "more real," in a sense, than other forms of entertainment they consumed.

The narration describes the assortment of options in their walled-in culture in what can nearly be described as an illustration of Debord's commentary on the commodification of experiences via the spectacle: "The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation* of social life. Not only is the relation to the commodity visible but it is all one sees: the world one sees is its world" (paragraph 42). Snowman's narration describes Jimmy and Crake's long afternoons, in which they would sit and consume entertainment products. There is, then, as a result, an alienation of other forms of experiences for them, marking what Debord terms as the "world at once present and absent which the spectacle *makes visible*" (paragraph 37). Their world, construed, fed and multiplied by the numerous small variations of the same form of entertainment, exists in their websites and, for them, overcomes their sense of real. That process is exemplified in the chapter "Brainfrizz," when Snowman narrates their entertainment options:

> They'd watch open-heart surgery in live time, or else the Noodie News, which was good for a few minutes …
>
> Or they'd watch animal snuff sites, Felicia's Frog Squash and the like … Or they'd watch dirtysockpuppets.com, a current-affairs show about world political leaders. … Or they might watch hedsoff.com, which played live coverage of executions in Asia. … Or they could watch alibooboo.com, with various supposed thieves having their hands cut off … Shortcircuit.com, brainfrizz.com, and deathrowlive.com were the best;

they showed electrocutions and lethal injections. … There was an assisted-suicide site too – nitee-nite.com, … Or they would watch At Home With Anna K. Anna K. was a self-styled installation artist with big boobs who'd wired up her apartment so that every moment of her life was sent out live to millions of voyeurs. (93-96)

Some traits about the way entertainment works in the novel are striking: the characters "watch" "websites," an unusual collocation for 2003, when broadband services were not capable of streaming recorded video, let alone live content, even though that is common-place at the time this dissertation is written. The repetition of the suffix ".com" highlights a centralization of content around the web, and the names of websites, on the other hand, display a sense of how desensitized and unfiltered entertainment has become in the society imagined by Atwood.

The spectacle, that is, the warped mediation of entertainment in its commodification via simulacrum, desensitizes viewers and prevents them from relating to human experiences. They watch the gore of human life, that is, suicides and electrocutions, with the same attitude they watch satire about current affairs or an attractive woman living in front of the cameras. Because all that content is available at the same platform, they are consumed as if they were interchangeable; because Jimmy grew up with two-dimensional entertainment, Oryx is intensely compelling for him in her denial to explain herself in his terms.

That is the intersection between Debord and Baudrillard: the spectacle is one of the foremost ways the simulacrum can be perceived in contemporary society. As Debord defines it in the first paragraph of his book, "all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation" (paragraph 1), as opposed to Baudrillard, who might argue that this displacement has distanced itself to such an extent from actual experiences that any representation became impossible. For example, in his thorough analysis of simulacra in supposedly green advertising, Jordan B. Kinder demonstrated that, despite some criticism around the theory of the simulacrum,

Baudrillard's work was far from apolitical. Kinder summarizes the relationship between the simulacrum and political and ideological relations as the same underlying structure that I have been evidencing, by stating, "*[W]ithin that simulation* are the mechanisms of ideology that exert itself throughout the spheres of contemporary socio-cultural and socio-political life. Before challenging hegemony, those mechanisms must be destabilized and deconstructed" (20-21, my emphasis). The simulacrum can be seen, on the one hand, as a symptom of the unrestricted replication of systems of mediation and their portrayal, in advertising, television, film and other media as an aspiration. On the other hand, I am arguing that the literary simulacrum can be read and even employed to expose those relationships of false naturality that contour ideology.[15]

Deriving his sense from orthodox Marxism, Debord focuses his use of the term "ideology" on the meaning of "false consciousness." To him, "ideological facts were never a simple chimera, but rather a *deformed consciousness* of realities" (paragraph 212, my emphasis). Possibly, this theoretical difference accounts for the divergence in looking at the world as mere representation – in Debord – and the end of representation itself – in Baudrillard. If ideology is necessarily corruption and falsehood, by extension there must be a truth to be recovered. If, however, the concept of representation itself, the breakage between reference and referent, ceases to exist, then ideology as a set of effects within discourse is exposed and the reader – or the philosopher, or the critic – is left to wonder what to do next, assuming there is a "next." The problem of ideology and the possibility of representation becomes a symbolic apocalyptic event in literature, creating a before and an after.

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[15] I do not elaborate on the meaning or the academic history of the term "ideology" at this point, because that issue is examined in detail in Chapter Three, based on Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: an Introduction*. For the moment, however, I advance that my analysis considers the notions of "false consciouness" associated with ideology with caution; ideology as a set of values and discourses that are naturalized in society through hegemonic discourse would be a more accurate overarching concept. When I consider some of its other meanings in academia, I note that diversion.

For Snowman, that crisis had resulted in the ultimate separation between body, mind, and soul. The body "had dumped the other two back there somewhere, leaving them stranded in some damp sanctuary or stuffy lecture hall while it made a beeline for the topless bars." If entertainment cheapens, devalues life at the expense of satisfying bodily functions to abandon all other spheres of experience, Snowman can only conclude that "it had dumped culture along with them: music and painting and poetry and plays. Sublimation, all of it." That emptiness, as he sees it from the "after," brings its desensitized correspondences: "Executions were its tragedies, pornography was its romance" (98). *Oryx and Crake*, then, sets the scene for the death of representation as an unambiguous system of references, exposing the ideologies behind it through literary simulacra in language and in the spectacle of entertainment.

In this chapter, I sought to emphasize the relevance of literary criticism with the simulacrum as a framing tool for analysis of Atwood's novel. The term, which has been the centre of debate since Antiquity, has morphed into the sphere of postmodernist criticism. In addition to Baudrillard's work, Giles Deleuze revisits the differences between a copy and a simulacrum, in his 1983 article, "Plato and the simulacrum;" his analysis provides insight into a distinction that Baudrillard does not investigate as much. While Baudrillard notes the pervasive invasion of simulacra into systems of signification, Deleuze's perspective still sees a division between replicated copies and simulacra.

> If we say of the simulacrum that it is a copy of a copy, an endlessly degraded icon, an infinitely slackened resemblance, we miss the essential point: the difference in nature between simulacrum and copy, the aspect through which they form two halves of a division. The copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance. . . . Having lost a moral existence in order to enter into an aesthetic one, we have become simulacra. (48)

Deleuze uses the idea of resemblance to refer to whatever relationship to an "original" there still might be: people have become simulacra in their mythologic distancing from a god, the supposed original; Baudrillard identifies the simulacrum similarly, as an empty model. Deleuze also notes the pejorative tone often attributed to simulacra, as inferior imitation (49), an acknowledgement Baudrillard does not put forth. While Deleuze traces his rationale from Plato and Aristotle, Baudrillard centres both his analysis and his concepts on 20th century scenarios. His conceptualization is also affected by Marxist tenets of production, reproduction, and commodities; as the philosopher traces the relationship between originals and copies across history, the emergence of hyperreality as a result of exacerbated mediation reveals itself a contemporary challenge. Despite common notions that the simulacrum is necessarily negative, as it happens with media-wide analyses of production (with conclusions such as "art is dead" coming in its wake), the presence of simulacra in literary works can unlock interpretations about what constitutes alienated experiences or warped nostalgia. Additionally, science fictional works through the lens of the simulacrum provide unfamiliar visions of the familiar, exposing ideas that had been naturalized before: examples include the reliable rationality of science, the idea that our system of language and references is an end in itself. This analysis sought to orient a hybrid, critical perspective on the simulacrum through its identification within novels and other forms of stories. In the following chapter, I turn to the intersection between science fiction and utopian fiction, looking at how the simulacrum can contribute to criticism on notions of better and worse worlds.

Chapter Two: Utopianism and hyperreality of science fiction

In literary criticism, several scholars have announced the "death" of something or another. Be it the death of representation, or a stalemate in utopianism, these deaths do not come as news. As Roger Luckhurst has remarked (1994), science fiction is the genre of many deaths, undergoing transformations that result in a modified survival. Literary utopias, likewise, were reborn in the 1960s, in a phase described by Tom Moylan (1986: 41) as "the ferment of opposition" to individual, consumerist utopian values. Both science fiction and utopia literature have, in their ways, died and been reborn. Despite Bruce Sterling's description of science fiction production of the 1970s, undermining several critical utopias as "confused, self-involved and stale" (Wolmark, *Aliens*, 110), those works provided multifaceted views of utopias. In contemporaneity, critical dystopias flourish in science and speculative fiction, conversing with historical, existential and societal anxieties.

The intersection between utopian literature and science fiction is a form of exposing structures. These works, in their extrapolation and structure, expose anxieties, conflicts and crises in representation in their postulated universes. Indeed, this intersection is identifiable in several works, for instance, in Joana Russ' *The Female Man* (1971), William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1982), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1984), Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), among several other relevant works published before 1990. Sensing the demand for a more specific discussion on that branch of literature, scholars in Utopian Studies have analysed in detail the literary presence and effect of critical utopias and, more recently, critical dystopias, in their dealings with the anxieties mentioned previously. In this chapter, I first trace some threads shared by literary utopianisms and science fiction, intersected by Baudrillard's simulacrum as a tool for intra-media analysis of the genre. The next subsections proceed to reveal patterns of simulacra in *The Doomsday Book* (1991), by Connie Willis, *The Heart Goes Last*, by Margaret Atwood

(2015), and *He, She, and It* (1991), by Marge Piercy. These novels demonstrate, in their constructions of utopian impulse permeated by simulacra, the emptying of signs as posited by the French philosopher. However, they also display varying degrees of how signs are constructed and, as such, can be taken over by the subject, be that subject a protagonist, a narrator, or the readers themselves.

Despite the common-sense meaning of utopia as a "good place," the critical concept encompasses more complex issues. There is debate on how utopianisms are near the tradition of science fiction, which inevitably leads to disagreement on the foundational novels for each sub-genre; additionally, definitions of science fiction negate one another. They may be based on scientific elaboration, scientific "fidelity" or even on a duty to educate its readership (as Gernsback defended in the years of pulp magazines). Different categories within utopianisms also present pessimistic, optimistic or even anarchic visions of state, questioning the concept of humanity and whether we, as a species, are capable of imagining other worlds at all; finally, there is the issue of representation in these utopianisms and their relationship with literary illusions constructed by means of simulacra, which is the major focus of this volume.

Among the various existing definitions of science fiction, some of which mentioned in chapter one regarding their contributions and limitations, the perspective used for analysis here is based on three of those perspectives. Firstly, because sf has carried different meanings in its trajectory, Adam Roberts' (2016) historical view contributes to a diachronic view of the genre, as sf was turned to scientific education, to space adventure tales, to questions on the pervasiveness of technology or the misgivings that result from an exaggerated worship of scientific rationalism; a historical view supports context over closed definitions. As Fredric Jameson has already remarked, "SF is a sub-genre with a complex and interesting formal history of its own, and with its own dynamic, which is not that of high culture" ("Progress *versus* Utopia," 283). Secondly, Samuel Delaney's idea that sf is a play with "codic

conventions" (Roberts, 2016, 2) and that sf is a mode of reading a text contributes to the critical awareness that no text, sf or not, has immanent meanings. To read a text as sf is an exercise in suspending previously fixed meanings and metaphors. Thirdly, Darko Suvin's (1979) classical definition involving "cognitive estrangement" and the crucial concept of the *novum* also direct my reading, both signalling a process of de-familiarizing the familiar by introducing a narrative device that is not simply "something new", as a technological invention, but something that brings about a radically different reality.

Utopian literature, on the other hand, has a history that begins centuries before sf. As Fátima Vieira (2010) claims, it is nowadays often confused with sf:

> Still, in recent decades, science fiction has been permeated by social concerns, displaying a clear commitment to politics; this situation has given rise to endless debates on the links that bind the two literary genres: researchers in the field of Utopian Studies have claimed that science fiction is subordinate to utopia, as the latter was born first, whereas those who have devoted their study time to science fiction maintain that utopia is but a socio-political sub-genre. (7)

On the one hand, it is not that social concerns were not present in earlier works of sf; for instance, Huxley's *Brave New World* can be read as a preoccupation with an exaggeration in detachment from human "nature." Its drug, soma, indicates a societal trend towards an anesthetization of experiences, leading to infantile adults. On the other hand, in contemporary sf novels, that socio-political concern might be in the overt display of inequalities of power and in the tools used for that situation to be maintained. Science fiction, in its extrapolation of reality based on *nova* that radically alter the narrative world, collaborates with utopianisms in their continued contrast between better and worse places across history and literature.

It would not be accurate to imply that all sf would be a branch of utopianisms simply because they share traits and the former was established later than the latter. A novel may be a

utopia but not sf, and vice-versa: that argument could be made, for instance, for Connie Willis'
Crosstalk (2016). Its *novum*, which suggests a surgery-activated part of the brain that would
trigger telepathy, may suggest a utopian wish for unmediated communication, but the novel is
not a utopia *per se*. One simple reason could be its clear setting in the United States, the
recognizably familiar society (which would go against Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of
"a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space"
("Three Faces", 9)), even though a future or alternative United States is still a non-existent one.
However, as Levitas suggests, Sargent's literary definitions can be too closed. Her
interdisciplinary definition of utopia, "the expression of desire for a better way of living" ("The
Imaginary Reconstruction," 53), is applicable to other arts and to fields connected to the
Humanities, including Architecture, Anthropology and such; on the other hand, it is broader
and serves a methodological standpoint that argues for utopia as, incidentally, a methodological
hermeneutic more than a fixed taxonomy. That is my approach in this chapter: even if a certain
novel is not utopian in the strictest sense, I still analyse its utopian impulses in certain
directions, seeking to highlight certain literary traits, effects, or strategies.

Still, other definitions for utopia should be considered, such as Fátima Vieira's list of
common associations made with the term:

> (1) … the identification of that society with the idea of 'good place', a notion that should
> be discarded since it is based on a subjective conception of what is or is not desirable
> … (2) the literary form into which the utopian imagination has been crystallized … (3)
> … the impact that it causes on its reader, urging him to take action … (takes into account
> political utopia only); (4) the desire for a better life, caused by a feeling of
> discontentment towards the society one lives in (utopia is then seen as a matter of
> attitude). (6)

Those same historical concepts related to utopia, while they should not be discarded entirely, must be considered in association with newer texts that seek to understand the complexities of an adapting form of fiction (especially because utopias are not limited to literature).[16]

Jean Baudrillard, in *Utopia Deferred: Writings from Utopie*, provides another view of utopianisms: "[u]topia is the phase of theoretical construction, but … can only exist as part of dialectical utopia. It is only through dialectical utopia that we can elaborate, outside and within the present system, an urban thought" (32). If utopia initiates a conversation about society by postulating a different and better one, not only utopia is impossible, but the conclusion would be that it is an unattainable mental exercise. To Jameson, likewise, the limits of utopia are the limits of imagination itself:

> Thus the imagination of Utopia is bound to be a stereotypic (sic) affair, which places
> the Utopian fantasist in two distinct worlds at the same time and generates a unique
> kind of discomfort by the seemingly irreconcilable demands it makes to disengage
> absolutely from what is at the same time that one leaves absolutely to the being of the
> world as some ultimate limit. (61)

Not only utopia would be limited to human imagination, but it involves another paradox: being the ultimate ideal society, it could not be subject to change. To them, that would either involve oppressive governments or, as Jameson also states in *Archaeologies of the Future*, a docile version of humankind that would be perfectly satisfied with the end of history and a mundane existence, "leaving only that daily life to which Barthes claimed the Utopian form was reduced in the first place" (188). That portrayal is found in the sf classic *The Time Machine* (1895), by H. G. Wells, in the description by the protagonist of docile, inane human-like creatures, opposed by morlocks, creatures who lived underground.

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[16] By adapting, I mean that sf and utopia as modes have spread to other emerging media that became popular in the late 20th and early 21st century: sf now is present in film, videogame and music.

However, Lucy Sargisson counteracts this argument by stating that even though idealist perfection is one of the notions commonly associated with utopias (strongly related to Engels' duality of utopian socialism *versus* scientific socialism), the idea is not related to what constitutes a utopia:

And the fact is that some utopias are supposed to be pictures of perfection. Some utopias clearly are suggestions for social blueprints. But not all are and perfection cannot be taken as a defining feature of utopia. This has long been argued by scholars of utopia. Perfection is a final condition, it is static and it does not change. But utopias are rarely static. Thomas More's *Utopia*, for example, is not. Utopia is, among other things, a thought experiment, a polemic and an exploration of alternatives. Moreover, many utopias are self-consciously flawed. In *Utopia*, More plays with puns and jokes, which run throughout the text, undermining it even as the story unfolds. Some suggest that More wrote a deliberately flawed utopia. (*Fool's Gold?*, 24)

Sargisson's argument for the utopia as an imperfect, albeit better place than the author's empirical context serves as a conciliation with Jameson's claim of the limits of imagination. The same idea is inherent in Moylan's stand that the study of utopia has to be aware of the limitations in its tradition, with critical utopias rejecting the form "as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream" (*Demand*, 10). His choice of word, "dream," is not accidental, but related both to Sargisson's term of "social dreaming" and to Bloch's distinction, described in the previous chapter, between abstract and concrete utopia.

The previous considerations of complexities within Utopian Studies may be summarized as a conflict in representation when it comes to contemporary literature. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Baudrillard indicated a process of emptying of signifiers in most spheres of society, entertainment and art. In *Utopia Deferred*, he addresses the relationship between utopias and the simulacrum explicitly, saying, "Utopia is not only the

denunciation of the simulacra of Revolution, it is also the analysis of the Revolution as a political model of simulation of a rational deadline for man which opposes itself to utopia's radicality" (61). To him, utopia exposes the illusions associated with a dream of revolution towards a logic that would not be guided by capitalism. It also illuminates other systems as imaginations and constructions that serve the purpose of maintaining social order instead of instigating change. Baudrillard's description of this strategy for undermining struggles for societal change suggests a tendency to relegate these ideas to the imaginary realm of dystopias or utopias, emphasizing their impracticality – if utopia exposes change as a simulacrum, an empty referent for an inexistent alternative system, the subversion of the current system would be seen as a tool for maintaining *status quo* and not for challenging it. In other words, the alienation that results from the pervasiveness of the simulacrum in society benefits Bloch's abstract utopia, relegating the good places to the private spheres of consumerism and domesticity.

Critical dystopias, as called by Tom Moylan and Rafaella Baccolini in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, establish a relation of critical negation to classical dystopias, exemplified by *1984*, *Brave New World* and *Swastika Night*. Baccolini situates critical dystopias within the history of science fiction:

> By the end of the 1980s — moving beyond the engaged utopianism of the 1970s and the fashionable temptation to despair in the early 1980s — several sf writers confronted the decade's simultaneous silencing and cooptation of Utopia by turning to dystopian strategies as a way to come to terms with the changing social reality. Works by Octavia E. Butler, Cadigan, Charnas, Robinson, Piercy, and Le Guin refunctioned dystopia as a critical narrative form that worked against the grain of the grim economic, political, and cultural climate. (3)

Critical dystopias, Baccolini adds, offer less "desperate" resolutions in their open endings. While Winston simply could not escape Big Brother, the reader is unable to tell for certain whether Offred, from *The Handmaid's Tale*, escaped her oppressive system or not. Critical dystopias are marked by an underlying utopian hope, as Baccolini comments in another paper, or by the utopian wish, a phrase used by Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future*. I choose to use the term "utopian impulse" in reference to a sort of drive that critical dystopias trigger in readers and the very drive that propels artists to imagine better worlds. Jameson argues: "The desire called Utopia must be concrete and ongoing, without being defeatist or incapacitating; it might therefore be better to follow an aesthetic paradigm" (84). Critical dystopias deal with the ambiguity of portraying a downfall for humankind, but their open endings reveal an impulse towards a reconfiguration of society, a wish to simply "make things better," or, in the case of post-apocalyptic fiction, to begin anew. Another *locus* of hope in critical dystopias can be found in their utopian enclaves, emerging societies seeking the common good, as in Piercy's Tikva, from *He, She, and It*. I use the term impulse over hope or wish to refer to the drive towards analysing, describing and turning into narrative different societies and the ideas they propose for humanity.

Not all novels in the *corpus* for this dissertation are critical dystopias or utopias, but they are all works of science fiction. Science fiction studies share with utopian literature the relevance and pervasiveness of the simulacrum in recent works. As utopian narratives may expose simulacra in notions of revolution, for instance, contemporary science fictional works expose illusions of reliable representations and mediation of discourses, as I argued in my master's thesis. In my article on Cadigan's *Synners* and Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It* (2018), I proposed a critical view of all systems of representation that bypasses the disappearance of signs, arguing that the analysis of literary simulacra may expose several illusions latent in the reader's society, but that such a dismantling of representation allows for a reconstruction of

fiction and of human life that is more aware of how symbols interact and how representation, although complex, is possible.

As a result, utopian and science fiction can hardly be said to have died; as Vieira indicates, "[n]either utopia as a concept nor as a literary genre is moribund; on the contrary, it is alive and well. We may have some difficulty in recognizing it because, once more, it has given proof of its extraordinary capacity to survive by reinventing itself" (21-22). That reinvention is one of the reasons for definitions to be more methodologically useful if they are adaptable to changes through time. Based on these ideas, this chapter analyses some novels from the *corpus* particularly in relation to disenchantment with the illusion of the original and technological advances as indication of a future utopia provided by science. The effects on the reader of that exposure may, as in my thesis statement from the introduction, empower subjects towards a more aware use of signs and images.

In the next section, Connie Willis' *The Doomsday Book* (1991) is discussed in its utopian portrayal of the future and in the way it deals with notions of the urbane as a science-based, utopian society opposed to the representation of the Middle Ages as inherently bad. After that, Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) becomes the focus, as the deterioration of the utopian impulse takes over. The author herself has claimed that defining a state as utopia or dystopia is a matter of perspective, and this notion is extrapolated in the alternation between prisoners and guards (2017). In the section after that, I discuss the utopian enclave of Tikva in Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991) and the proposal of coexistence with hybrid subjects as a way to pave an alternative to a corporation-based world. In this chapter, the simulacrum is revealed as a useful marker of exposed illusions and even of contemporary anxieties that transpire in world building and utopian impulses.

2.1. The utopian impulse exposed: the country and the modern city in *The Doomsday Book*

Connie Willis's *The Doomsday Book* (1991) is, by far, her most successful novel, both in terms of mainstream sales and genre prizes: it was awarded both the Nebula and the Hugo awards. However, there is surprisingly scarce academic literature on this novel or, for that matter, about any of her major novels, which include *To Say Nothing of the Dog, Blackout*, *All Clear*, *The Passage* and, more recently, *Crosstalk.*[17]

With the exception of the two latter titles, the others form what is known in the science fiction community as "Oxford time-travel series," a reference to both the setting and the main *novum* explored by the author. Set in the 2050s, the series is based on the premise that time-travel has been discovered and that it is a highly technical business, involving technicians and weeks of calculation – History, then, becomes a hard science. Once Time Theory is developed, it is established that time travellers cannot change anything in the past, take objects or bring them from other eras. As a result, all marketing interest is lost, with the only possibility being to travel to the past and silently watch events unfolding; before long, History becomes the only field interested in exploring the possibilities of time-travel. Centuries receive a risk rating from 1 to 10 (10 being attributed to the Middle Ages); time is represented as a nearly sentient being, preventing historians from entering crucial moments, like World War II bombings in certain parts of London or the rescue of soldiers in Dunkirk. The relationship between *The Doomsday Book* and the simulacrum as an intra-media instrument related to a contingency involving a character or group of characters as they learn to identify displaced or alienated meanings.

In *The Doomsday Book*, Professor Dunworthy wants more than anything to prevent Kivrin, an undergraduate historian, from being the first graduate student to venture into the 1300s. Ignoring his several alerts, Kivrin learns ancient languages and undergoes surgery for enhancing her immune system; she studies manners, rituals, and conventions from the era and

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[17] Upon research, no academic articles on her works were found; only interviews and reviews appeared, which support the introduction to the novel in this section.

tries to replicate the clothes worn in the Middle Ages. Despite his best efforts, Dunworthy does not convince Kivrin to stay. After she is sent to the past, their technician, Badri, falls mysteriously ill, only managing to communicate that something had gone wrong with the "drop," as they call time-travel procedures. In fact, Kivrin does not land in 1320, as planned, but in 1348, the year when the Black Plague reaches the countryside of England. As the plague starts to decimate all the villagers around Kivrin, who is unable to return, a serious flu outbreak sets the university in quarantine. In A. M. Dellamonica's review for *Science Fiction Weekly*, the parallel between the two scenarios of widespread disease is explicated:

> Both epidemics play out in detail, showing how far medical technology has developed in the centuries between 1348 and the present ... and how little human nature has changed over the same period. The helplessness of the medieval villagers against the plague is contrasted with a frantic modern effort to fight the influenza. The results are humbling. (2)

Willis's ironic juxtaposition of the flu and the plague contributes to a view of humankind as capable of little change and, yet, of decent acts of empathy and collective collaboration. Natalie Luhrs remarks on how petty characters are contrasted by selfless ones: "Everyone rallies to help Dunworthy when it becomes clear that Kivrin is in trouble …— just as the people of the manor rally to help Kivrin in her illness, despite being suspicious of her. And Kivrin … stays and does what she can to help these people she's become attached to" (3).

In an interview given in 2001, promoting *The Passage*, Willis gives an opinion on science fiction that is somewhat detached from the "scientific accuracy" credited to hard sf. Both in her time-travel series and in *The Passage,* she did extensive research to render the setting in the Titanic, in 1348 Oxford and in the London Blitz as believable and detailed as possible. As a result, she is often asked why not leave sf entirely to write historical novels, to which she responds that, by writing sf with time travel, she is able to discuss different eras

through multiple perspectives. That is, the reader gets a glimpse of the past, but also of how the future might look: "from the viewpoint of the people who lived in that past; from our contemporary perspective; and from the future as it would appear in the light of the past" (136). Wilda Williams, her interviewer, unintentionally corroborates Csicery-Ronay, Jr.'s comment on imaginative science in Connie Willis's books, saying, "science fiction is not about science but about the relationship between science and humanity, which she finds fascinating" (136). Humanity, in Willis's novels, is an unstable category, often impatient and petty and, at times, selfless or, ironically, virtually unchanged across time.

The interaction between history and the future as they are construed in the novel is relevant to its analysis through the simulacrum. As mentioned earlier, Willis's time-travel novels were written with a high level of historical detail. The narrator provides information on influenza outbreaks in the 1320s, the structure of manors of the time and the differences, when there were any, in clothing between servants and ladies of the house. That provides a sense of immersion in that time frame on the part of the reader, but not a stable one. Since the novel is not only fiction, but science fiction, the corrections noted by Kivrin during her research are speculation. As a result, for the average reader, the sense of veracity of both narration and historical fact becomes the same.

As fiction and history merge, one is reminded of Baudrillard's commentary on the warped sense of history in the contemporary culture of entertainment. To him, "History is our lost referential, that is to say our myth" (*Simulacra*, 43), meaning that, with the distancing from world wars and generalized conflicts that threaten human life, it is as if nothing ever happens and life is no more than a succession of empty notions of historical moments. According to him, that is due to several reasons, but I focus on the collective nostalgia that inflicts an overly positive view of the Middle Ages, which in turn becomes associated to simpler, more "natural" times and seems somewhat utopian.

In Baudrillard's discussion, the figuration of history in fiction is focalized in cinema. Surely, his arguments cannot simply be transferred to literature, as the two media operate in different forms; however, they share structural traits such as the use of narrative. For those reasons, I carefully consider his claims and attempt to relate them to literature when applicable. In particular, the following excerpt is relevant for debating History in *The Doomsday Book*:

> Today, the history that is "given back" to us (precisely because it was taken from us) has no more of a relation to a "historical real" than neofiguration in painting does to the classical figuration of the real. Neofiguration is an *invocation* of resemblance, but at the same time the flagrant proof of the disappearance of objects in their very representation: *hyperreal*. Therein objects shine in a sort of hyperresemblance (like history in contemporary cinema) that makes it so that fundamentally they no longer resemble anything, except the empty figure of resemblance, the empty form of representation. (*Simulacra*, 45)

In the novel, history receives the treatment of hard sciences, which is one of the major ironies in her series: historians are experts in facts and they rely on findings by archaeologists and their time-travels rely on lengthy calculations done by technicians who deal with several variables that must be inserted in the consoles. While History is a science in the story, the Middle Ages had remained a field of speculation until Kivrin was sent there. Time travels are carried out in an attempt to wipe that "historical real" from History books, filling that gap with expedition protocols from the biological sciences (e.g. as Kivrin's recorder, used for logging as much information as she can gather during her stay). The Middle Ages, throughout the book, are mentioned with fear and with a distrust that Kivrin and another professor, Gilchrist, deem unreasonable and exaggerated.

After discovering that a problem occurred with Kivrin's drop, Mr. Dunworthy dedicates himself to trying to ascertain the issue, when the influenza outbreak forces a quarantine in the

college. As he looks up information on the spread of the Black Plague, the reader realizes that history is used as a tool for foreshadowing, that is, Mr. Dunworthy reads, in 2054, about what would happen towards the end of the novel. The historical past becomes the narrative future:

> Fitzwiller gave the date of the plague's arrival in England in St. Peter's day, the twenty-ninth of June, 1348. It had reached Oxford in December, London in October of 1349. … Where it had gone, it had swept through the countryside like the Angel of Death, devastating entire villages, leaving no one alive to administer the last rites or bury the putrefying bodies. (282)

That excerpt, of historical tone and resembling a traditional info dump from classical sf novels, is revealed as a summary of Kivrin's ordeals as the plot progresses. She identifies a bishop's clerk as the first patient on Christmas day in a village between Bath and Oxford (384); the entire village succumbs to the disease except for her (543); and the last rites are abolished as there were no remaining priests or bishops to attend to the infirm (458). However, there is a grave displacement from the historical narration of the facts read by Mr. Dunworthy and Kivrin's experience of them. Her decision to travel to the Christmas of 1320 and her constant logs indicate a desire to recover history from that realm of disappearance. That desire would be consistent with Baudrillard's anxieties towards that disappearance. She also tries to bring History back to the field of direct experience; however, that results in an overly personal perspective. As a scientist historian, she was supposed to be a cool, detached researcher, present in the era to observe and attest to numerical exaggerations and customs in manor houses.

As it has become evident at this point, that is not what happens. Kivrin becomes intimately involved in the relationships between the village inhabitants. As the death toll progresses and the youngest child in the family, Agnes, dies, Kivrin's log breaks entirely with the scholarly tone. "You bastard! I will not let you take her. She's only a child. But that's your specialty, isn't it? Slaughtering the innocents? … I won't let you kill her too, you son of a bitch!

I won't let you!" (493). After addressing all log entries to Mr. Dunworthy, it is possible to infer from context that, at that point, Kivrin is referring to God. After experiencing History, Kivrin discovers a difference between reading that the plague reached Oxford in the Christmas of 1348 and the experience of tending to the ill, giving them last rites and proceeding with the burial. Connie Willis's reconstruction of the past, then, lacks the shiny quality seen by Baudrillard in neofigurations of history. Instead of narrating grand events, the narrative focus is a village that is wiped out by sickness. Subverting reader expectations, Mr. Dunworthy's view of the Middle Ages is more similar to the hyperreality of history. On multiple occasions, he describes the era as ignorant, violent and dismissible: "The 1300s are full of cutthroats and thieves. And worse" (23), "They were filthy and disease-ridden, the muck hole of history, and the sooner you get rid of any fairy tale notions you have of them, the better" (40). His insistence that Kivrin should not go study the Middle Ages is based on a warped, mediated view of the historical period.

The idea of the Middle Ages as a fairy tale land is a recurring image in the novel. Mr. Dunworthy is sarcastic towards it, as seen in the previous excerpt, but Kivrin displays a shifting stance. Some days after her drop, Kivrin comments, in her log: "Everywhere I look I see things from fairy tales: Agnes's red cape and hood, and the rat's cage, and bowls of porridge, and the village's huts of straw and sticks that a wolf could blow down without even trying" (184). The references to fairy tales signal a partiality towards so-called "natural" environments, before science, technology and modern communications alienated human experiences. In his chapter "The Great Schism", Jameson indicates the contrasts between utopian ideas in magical fairylands set in medieval-like scenarios. However, his analysis, albeit relevant, is to be read carefully as it also betrays prejudices against fantasy as opposed to science fiction. He relates fantasy to scenarios such as the following: "[I]t is in the culture of the peasantry that we find the most original features of medieval life, particularly when compared with the exhaustion and alienated lives of modern factory workers, to whom socialism (and later on, mass culture)

must first bring culture from the outside" (60). Novel settings in fantastic novels often resort to medieval-like imagery, allegorical constructions of good *versus* bad, providing morally explicit resolutions and punishments.

Fantasy, still according to Jameson, "remains generically wedded to nature" (64), which might explain that, even amongst sf novels dealing with time travel, the Middle Ages are among the least common destinations.[18] Surely, Jameson's determination of fantasy as a bucolic or escapist fictional territory is limited by resistances to fantasy that are alive even today. In the "time travel" entry in *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, the era of dinosaurs, WWII or the life period of various famous scientists are described as the most popular settings.[19] I offer here a hypothesis that the Middle Ages have been little used in time travel sf novels because they are seen as belonging to the realm of fantasy fiction. In the same page, time travel into the past is claimed to have generated a dissociation from sf: "time travel into the past really belonged to the realms of fantasy because of the Time Paradoxes thus generated," but others, Willis included, show "an increasing willingness to become involved with the intimate details of real history, and hence with its presumed dynamic" ("Time travel entry", 2).

As the Middle Ages are more associated with fantasy novels, a setting that is indicative of a naturalist utopianism, Willis' choice for *The Doomsday Book* is revealed as a complex one. Mr. Dunworthy preaches a representation of the Middle Ages as ignorant and filthy, "the muck hole of History," revealing his endorsement of a one-sided narrative of the period, a rather dystopian one. To him, the Middle Ages are the ultimate bad place, irrational, violent, while, for Kivrin, its distance from her reality is the most appealing. Although she does not claim that her expedition will reveal a perfect, naturalistic society, she believes that her preparation, done in the 21st century, would be protection enough. They both stand for different

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[18] Despite the rare use of the Middle Ages as setting in science fiction, it is worth mentioning *Hard to be a God* (1964), by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky.
[19] Available at: <http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/time_travel>. Last accessed on: 23 Apr. 2018.

simulacra of the Middle Ages, both divorced from the real at different levels. Her motivation is partly a researcher's and partly a result of a naïve view of a utopian lost past. She explains that she wants to go by saying, "Nobody knows anything. There are scarcely any records, except for parish registers and tax rolls, and nobody knows what their lives were like at all. That's why I want to go. I want to find out about them, how they lived, what they were like" (8). Her researcher self is motivated by a personal utopian impulse for human connection and understanding.

At this point, it is necessary to separate medievalist nostalgia from medievalist utopianism. Baudrillard stresses that the first order of simulacra belongs to the imaginary of utopia, in "simulacra that are natural, naturalist, founded on the image … that are harmonious, optimistic and that aim for the restitution or ideal institution of nature made in God's image" (121). Medievalist nostalgia is the result of warped historical narratives, in which both notions feed each other in cultural products and in the collective imagination. Medievalist nostalgia is characterized by a fetishization of medieval life – and that is what Mr. Dunworthy sees in Kivrin's impulse: she would be so affected by fairy tales, that is, by allegories of medievalist nostalgia, that she idealized the Middle Ages as an unexplored utopia. It is in this process, in which history is fetichized, that the simulacrum is essential: hollowing the historical narrative, reducing it to the shell of a fairy tale, transforming it into a utopia and, more importantly, implicating the future as a dystopia due to its radical distance from naturalist ideals.

That conflict exposed on the first pages of the novel is further displaced as the plot progresses. Kivrin falls ill immediately after arriving in the 1300s; she is found and rescued by D'Iverie's family, who assume that she is of noble birth from her clothes and her ability to speak Latin. As the family and the village priest tend to her, she ironically notes, "There are nice people in the Middle Ages, Mr. Dunworthy" (153). When the plague spreads, Kivrin compares the historical record of people to her experience:

The history vids say the contemps were panic-stricken and cowardly during the Black Death, that they ran away and wouldn't tend the sick, and the priests were the worst of all, but it isn't like that at all.

Everyone's frightened, but they're doing the best they can, and Roche is wonderful. (451)

Kivrin's experience of the village causes her to conclude that people in the Middle Ages were essentially the same as those in the future. When the disease starts killing character after character, Kivrin's narration no longer refers to fairy tale tropes; her log becomes broken and focused on individual deaths and the horrific descriptions of symptoms. "The steward's baby is dead" (466), "Which one of them is it? The bishop's envoy?" (466), "Ulf the Reeve is dead. Also Sibbe, daughter of the steward. Joan, daughter of the steward" (467) are some excerpts that contribute to the breakage in the historic log genre. While the Middle Ages diverged from historical accounts in customs and the simulacra attached to them, Kivrin's close-up experience nearly destroys her. When she is found by Mr. Dunworthy in the novel's coda, she is so consumed by grief and pain that she does not recognize him (563).

The Middle Ages are displaced in the novel from a violent dystopic setting of cutthroats and thieves to a place of good, hard-working people, but in a complex way, displaying people who try to maintain their values despite horrific circumstances. Kivrin personally blames higher forces and individuals for the catastrophe. To her, humans in the Middle Ages were generally kind. The only reason people had such a negative idea of the "contemps"[20] was because those who survived were the cowardly ones: "Perhaps that's what's wrong with our time, Mr. Dunworthy, it was founded by Maisry and the bishop's envoy and Sir Bloet. And all the people who stayed and tried to help, like Roche, caught the plague and died" (480). The written history, then, as the version of the survivors, would be more negative than her view.

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[20] Term from the novel used to refer to people who are contemporary to a certain time period.

Even though *The Doomsday Book* provides a semi-closed ending, some traits of the utopian hope described by Raffaela Baccolini are identifiable in it: "A sense of sadness accompanies the awareness and knowledge that the protagonist has attained. Instead of providing some compensatory and comforting conclusion, the critical dystopia's open ending leaves its characters to deal with their choices and responsibilities" ("The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction" 123). Kivrin is rescued, but her trauma is so massive that she never returns to being a historian: in the first half of Willis's *Blackout* (2010), a character remembers "every horror story he'd ever heard — the medieval historian they'd sent through to the wrong year who'd ended up smack in the middle of the Black Death" (p. 58). She does not appear again, leading the audience to believe that her trauma prevented her from working as a historian, even though that is not clearly stated. Moreover, the fact that she is rescued does little to comfort the readership: there is no compensation, but only the awareness that History can be seen from a variety of perspectives and that people change, but they do not change in their core.

Another utopian hope that might result from a critical dystopian reading of *The Doomsday Book* lies in the relationship between memory and nostalgia. Although Kivrin at first is charged with medievalist nostalgia, on the narrative level she does reclaim History as experience, bypassing, to a certain degree, the mediation of historical texts. Although that has tragic consequences for herself, her account affects readers and characters in Willis's fictional universe, in a way rescuing the Middle Ages from obscurantism and into charted historical territory. Although mediated versions of History led her to tragedy, her return symbolizes an era more knowledgeable of the past though her account – Kivrin, then, brings the Middle Ages from the site of nostalgia to that of memory, or, to use Baccolini's notion, critical nostalgia. As she describes,

Through memory and nostalgia, it is possible to refuse to forget the past and find traces of Utopia in dystopia, or moments of possibilities. It is possible to look at the past critically and to yearn for a different past, now, and to desire a different future. … It is in the acceptance of our responsibility and accountability, but accompanied by that sense of slight suffering, often worked through memory, and even nostalgia, that we can bring the past into a living relationship with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for a utopian change. ("Finding Utopia in Dystopia," 186).

By noting where signs had been emptied and by filling those with experiential knowledge, Kivrin undergoes the suffering that Baccolini sees as unavoidable in these processes, but the effect of revisited memory, brought to her present in the 2050s, represents a utopian hope of history through memory and critical nostalgia.

Like the Middle Ages are moved from bad, to good, to a complex place, the Oxford of 2054 is unsettled as it deals with an influenza outbreak. Dr. Mary Ahrens, Dunworthy's friend, is exasperated at how the university is taken by mysticism after entering quarantine. A rumour spreads about a virus that could have come through the net when Kivrin was sent: "[Mary] said, frowning as if the idea were ridiculous. 'In the first place, diseases can't come through the net. It would violate the paradoxes. In second place, if it had, *which it hasn't,* Badri would have caught it less than an hour after it came through" (96). She tries to use scientific arguments to justify the impossibility of a disease coming from the past, but her arguments are doubted by fellow doctors and even expert historians. There is a recognizable deafness regarding scientific explanations that is portrayed in several characters, but more importantly in the figure that epitomizes mystic views of diseases as punishment: Mrs. Gaddson. The character is the mother of a graduate student, who complains about the treatment given to herself and to her son. She blames the influenza outbreak on the cold, drafty walls of the university. In the narration set in the Middle Ages, her parallel is Lady Imeyne, who blames the plague on Father

Roche's broken Latin, on her daughter-in-law, and on Kivrin. As the plague spreads, she entirely shuts down, praying as others attempt to treat her grandchildren, Rosamund and Agnes, until Imeyne herself dies of the disease. Despite the massive availability of medical resources, Dr. Ahrens and her team also lose several patients; the doctor is one of the casualties.

It is important not to confuse Willis's somewhat humorous depiction of mysticism with a critique of religion itself. Although religion is represented as inferior in comparison to the supposedly "clear" scientific method, religion in *The Doomsday Book* is not in itself a negative concept. In my paper on faith and empathy in contemporary science fiction, I discuss Farah Mendlesohn's indication that even this negativity in portrayals of religion in sf only came about after pulp magazines:

> The scientific quest aimed at bringing humanity closer to the transcendental. However, the image that remains about the relationship between sf and religion is one of derision. The sense of the transcendental was separated from the habits and practices of religion, that is, religion was then represented as a group of practices and not a search for eternal life.[21] (2016, 199)

In *The Doomsday Book,* religious practices are part of people's lives: the Christmas mass, for instance, was a social event that caused merriment and celebration. Two religious figures stand in contrast to that divide between habit and transcendental belief described by Mendlesohn: Father Roche, with his faulty Latin and his small mistakes in ritual, provides comfort for the ill and embodies the search for eternal life through a life of virtue; Lady Imeyne stands on the side of punishment-based, empty practice, as she is concerned about her social standing being diminished by living in Father Roche's parish.

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[21] In the original, "a busca científica mirava em trazer a humanidade mais perto do transcendental. Contudo, a imagem que ficou até hoje sobre o relacionamento de sci-fi e religião é uma de descaso. O senso do transcendental foi separado dos hábitos e rituais da prática religiosa, ou seja, a religião começou a ser representada como um conjunto de práticas, e não uma busca pela vida eterna."

Jameson posits a similar perspective to the negative portrayal of religion in the genre: "[t]he denunciation of religion (or medieval fantasy) as sheer mystification and obfuscation to be eliminated has as its dialectical consequence the limits of Enlightenment radicalism and its shallow affinities with rationalism and liberalism" (*Archaeologies*, 65), indicating that the criticism of religion is often substituted by a mystical view of the scientific method in sf. That dichotomy can be identified in Kivrin's narrative in two instances, the first being,

> God was supposed to be very real to the contemps in the 1300s, more vivid than the physical world they inhabited. "You do but go home again," Father Roche told me when I was dying . . . but I haven't seen much evidence of it. Eliwys dutifully murmurs her *aves* at vespers … as if her prayers had nothing to do with her worries over her husband … And Imeyne, for all her reliquary and her Book of Hours, is concerned only about her social standing. I'd seen no evidence that God was real at all to them till I stood here in the damp church, listening to Father Roche. (298)

At that point, the contemps are not sick yet. Kivrin is still observing their manners, believing it to be the Christmas of 1320. Once she starts handling the ill with Father Roche, however, her repetition of supposedly historical fact – science – shows that her faith existed, but was placed on the truths of method:

> "You must not dig any more graves," she said. "I forbid it."
>
> He went on digging, as if he had not noticed her either.
>
> "They're not going to die," she said. "The Black Death only killed one third to one half of the contemps. We've already had out quota." (503)

As seen from these two excerpts, Kivrin at first dismisses religious practices, believing they were devoid of intent and meaning – she might see Eliwys's *aves* as empty forms, as simulacra, while her memorized historical accounts would be the ones holding the truth. Willis's narrative exposes the notion that scientists and those adhering to scientific truth are subject to habits very

similar to religious practices. That is not the first time Kivrin mentions their "quota" of death; she mentions it constantly to assure herself that no one she cared about would die once the quota had been met.

Jameson adds, referring to Hegel's dialectics, that a synthesis between religion and rationality would "combine them with an Enlightenment impulse no longer menaced by reduction to instrumental reason and the narrower forms of bourgeois positivism" (65). In *The Doomsday Book*, however, that synthesis is not achieved, or even proposed, because that would mean that the novel would have a closed ending – which it does not, since it would eliminate the sense of hope that follows Kivrin's rescue. Although the representation of religion in the novel is not the traditional one in sf, that is, it does not belittle its practice, it does not present an alternative, but exposes both sides as partial and, quite often, as similar.

Finally, a passage from the novel is relevant for its relationship between displaced utopias and the simulacrum's role in that representation and it requires a more detailed analysis. In the first half of the novel, Kivrin escapes the family manor, trying to ascertain her space-time location even though she was not entirely healed at the time. In the cold, she finds a hut so bleak she has a hard time believing it to be inhabitable. In a cage, she sees an imprisoned rat, triggering once again her "fairy tale notions." The trap was "elaborately out of place in the filthy corner with its smooth curved metal band" (177), like she had just found a transformed prince or a magical lamp. The sight of the rat itself is surprising to the historian, who had never seen one (the reader is left to assume they have been eradicated from cities in the 2050s). Her perception of the animal is ambiguous:

> She had seen a rat before, of course, in History of Psych and when they tested her for
> phobias during her first year … It was a very pretty rat, actually, with silky black fur,
> not much bigger than History of Psych's white laboratory rats … It looked much cleaner

than the brown rat, too. … Certainly cleaner than Maisry [a housemaid], and probably more intelligent. Harmless-looking. (177-178)

There is at first a comparison to be made between the laboratory rat and this brown rat in the bronze cage: the white one had grown in an artificial environment, in the 2050s, his species is only relegated to the role of scientific tools, while the brown rat is humanized in Kivrin's eyes, because it somehow seems cleaner and its eyes capture her attention. There is an underlying hint that Middle Ages animals are not savages, but pure beings, while the laboratory ones were mere instruments.

After that lapse, however, Kivrin is reminded that the appealing-looking rat is not harmless. "'You're the scourge of the Middle Ages'" (178), she tells it. The rat grabs the bars and stares at her, as though intent to convince her to free it. Kivrin feels involved in the somewhat magical atmosphere, but resists, once again reminding herself of the historical facts: "'I'd like to let you out, but I can't. The Black Death was bad enough as it was. It killed half of Europe. If I let you out, your descendants might make it even worse'" (178). The reader later, and ironically, discovers that, since all contemps die, letting that particular rat out would most likely be of little consequence.

The most important feature of this excerpt, however, is that it demonstrates how *The Doomsday Book* playfully approaches allegories that are common in the fantasy genre, all the while from the perspective of science fiction. It goes back and forth: there is the impulse to discover a natural utopia for Kivrin that, for Mr. Dunworthy, would only result in a violent death by criminals. She is pleasantly surprised by the presence of icons associated with fairy tales set in medieval times, such as red capes, bowls of porridge and the rat, but it is important to remember that these associations are all made by her. The Middle Ages in *The Doomsday Book* are not trying to imitate fairy tales; instead, Kivrin's gaze looks for them and traces their presence. The allegories and the formulaic meanings are projected by the subject, in this case,

by the historian. That suggests, once again, that meanings are not inherent, but dependent on a subject's association; those associations, in turn, are not made individually, but they pre-exist in a collective imagination.

Willis's ambiguous portrayal of 2050 Oxford, on the other hand, is hardly utopian – it is only so, occasionally, in Kivrin's eyes ("I wonder if he sees God and heaven as clearly as I can see you and Oxford" (298)), much like the Middle Ages only have dystopian traits in Mr. Dunworthy's eyes. The utopianisms regarding either the future or the past in the novel are, therefore, relative and unstable, shifting as it progresses. The neutrality and relativism that can be extracted from *The Doomsday Book*, thus, can be seen as positive (it does not propose a closed view of either time frame) or negative (it does not firmly establish an alternative). Either way, the novel's merit lies in the complex portrayal of relationships in the Middle Ages through a science fiction perspective.

The simulacra often multiplied in the genre of good and bad places are distributed amongst different characters, whose conflict propels the narrative onwards. Additionally, by attributing the endorsement of those simulacra to certain characters, Willis's novel emphasizes how meaning is attributed by the subject, that is, how individuals can access that previously mentioned collective imaginary, a set of pre-conceived notions and empty referents. However, an individual's choice of constructing meaning is not determined by that collective, which demonstrates the growth of a certain level of agency in dealing with signs – that agency can come from actively looking at the past through the lens of memory or critical nostalgia and by becoming aware of the constructiveness of meanings. The relationship between *The Doomsday Book* and the simulacrum as an intra-media tool for critical analysis fits, then, the third conclusion: that novel resolutions, in this context, are often contingent on a character or group of characters learning to identify displaced or alienated meanings; in this case, that bad and

good places are not simplistic notions, and that humanity, in its agency, has a direct role in shaping utopian ideas.

This section investigated perspectives on utopian impulses in Connie Willis's *The Doomsday Book*, focusing on views of fantasy, religion, historical "fact" and on the shifting roles played by both the projected future and the past of humanity. While the future, secularized and methodological as imagined, is still fraught with diseases and rationality, the past is not the irrational violent free-for-all that is usually associated with the Middle Ages. Both portrayals are not only nuanced, but they change according to points in narrative and character perspectives, indicating a degree of agency in handling meaning and simulacra between utopian and dystopian traits from each setting. In the following section, I discuss Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) and the waning of the utopian drive.

2.2. The deterioration of the utopian simulacrum: *The Heart Goes Last*

The Heart Goes Last was published in 2015, one of the most recent science fictional dystopias written by Margaret Atwood. It follows the three volumes that compose the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003, 2009, 2013). Analysing this novel pertains to this research because the work can be seen through the lens of critical dystopia and intra-medial simulacra, as it depicts an isolated society with warped nostalgic values, in which citizens alternate prisoners and vice-versa in their daily routines. World building in the novel occurs over several instances of simulacra, causing levels of dystopia as results from utopian promises, as I discuss in the following.

The story begins with couple Stan and Charmaine, who had been living in their car since they lost their home mortgage and were unable to find jobs suited to their education after an economic crisis. This crisis mirros an actual one that took place in 2008, as mentioned by Ann Coral Howells in her article (2017, 305). Charmaine works the day shift in a bar called PixieDust, while Stan spends his day unsuccessfully going to job interviews. One day,

Charmaine sees a commercial for a new project that offered not only housing, but jobs, the Consilience Project: "Work with like-minded others! Help solve the nation's problem of joblessness and crime while solving your own! Accentuate the positive!" (31), the man in the commercial exclaims. Although Stan does not entirely trust a proposal that seems far too good to be true, Charmaine convinces him to give it a try.

At first, everything seems perfect, indeed: the Consilience Project is a small, isolated society that revolves around Positron prison:

> So many jobs could be spawned by them [prisons]: construction jobs, jobs in agriculture, if there was a farm attached: an ever-flowing cornucopia of jobs. Medium-size towns with large penitentiaries could maintain themselves, and the people inside such towns could live in middle-class comfort. And if every citizen were either a guard or a prisoner, the result would be full employment ...
>
> And since it was unrealistic to expect certified criminality from 50 percent of the population, the fair thing would be for everyone to take turns: one month in, one month out. (49)

After Stan and Charmaine agree that they will never leave the Consilience walls, they receive a small house fully furnished and some credits that they can use to purchase items from the Consilience catalogue. They are each assigned jobs both during their periods inside and outside Positron prison that are related to their previous experience – at that point, Charmaine is exceedingly happy, and they lead regular lives for a few years inside the system.

Sex, however, is a pervading drive in the novel, and it is the reason their experience in the supposed experiment starts to go awry. On a certain switchover day, Stan finds a note in his fridge, for a man named Max, that says "I'm starved for you," signed "Jasmine." Assuming it was a note between the alternates, who used their house when himself and Charmaine were in prison, Stan starts fantasising about Jasmine, imagining her as everything boring, pastel-

flower-wearing Charmaine was not. Later, the reader discovers that Jasmine is, in fact, Charmaine, who had met Stan's alternate by accident and who had instantly began an affair with him, in empty houses throughout Consilience, every switchover day. With Max, whose real name is later revealed to be Phil, Charmaine discovers a sexual self that she sees as separate from her "wife self." While Stan tries to ambush and discover Jasmine on switchover days, he is eventually ambushed by Jocelyn, the alternate and Phil's wife. Howells compares the novel's sarcastic switch in couples with the dynamics between Helen, Demetrius, Hermia and Lisander in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595). More importantly, Atwood also subverts that comedic dynamic from the play in another parallel: as Titania is put under a spell to fall in love with the first thing she sees upon waking up, which causes her to fall in love with Bottom, so does Atwood in proposing a surgery that caused the same effect on her characters. For the couples in *The Heart Goes Last*, the switch seems to operate through a duality of pure x dirty. Victims of the Bottom surgery, so to say, become, on the other hand, blindly albeit blissfully happy – much like Titania during the first half of Shakespeare's play.

Although that moment in the novel is described as funny by Howells, in "[h]e is trapped, often quite hilariously, in Jocelyn's sadistic games of kinky sex" (307), Stan is also described as terrified and powerless: "The source of his panic: Jocelyn, the walking Vise-Grip. She's got him shacked to her ankle. He's on her invisible leash" (113). At last, Jocelyn reveals to him that everything had been a farce, an elaborate plot to fake Stan's death. That way, Jocelyn would be able to send him outside, so he could blow the whistle on illegal practices happening inside the Project.

Such practices included, but were not limited to, individuals seen as undesirables being killed in prison, their organs trafficked for profit, along with a market for baby blood and the surgeries that could make a person devoted eternally to whomever one saw immediately after waking up. Meanwhile, Charmaine is kept at Positron until her loyalties are tested to their limit:

she has to perform a Special Procedure (namely, euthanasia) on her husband, strapped to her table. The second half of the novel involves Stan waking up in a warehouse with a new identity. He is shipped outside Consilience disguised as an Elvis Presley-themed sex robot (a "prostibot") to Las Vegas, where he eventually manages to smuggle a flash drive with information on the inside, before Ed, the Consilience manager, can coerce Charmaine into emotional reassignment surgery.

Critical works on the novel are not numerous due to its relatively recent release; as it happened with *The Doomsday Book*, some sources are research projects and reviews, noted as relevant. For instance, Natalya Machnaigh Barker's master's project (2016) dedicates a chapter to a detailed analysis of the Consilience-Positron project in its dystopian portrayal of punitory justice, comparing it to the political campaign on the so-called "war on drugs" implemented as political propaganda in the United States in the 1980s. According to the author, the process of enframing in *The Heart Goes Last* shares a displacement of framing societal problems with that government propaganda from the 1980s. As she states, "This [Ed's] statement positions the town of Consilience and the Project itself as representative of civilization. Strong word choices in *festering*, *starving*, and *scavenging* imply that those who opt to stay outside of the walls are reduced to an animalistic existence" (18), emphasizing the social consequences of an economic fallout and hinting that the solution to economic problems would be in social correction. Additionally, Anna de Vaul addressed the dystopian traits in Atwood's novel, in her 2016 essay. Focusing on Atwood's own discussion about the differences between utopia and a dystopia as a matter of perspective in discourse (in her non-fiction book *In Other Worlds*), she compares *The Heart Goes Last* to *The Handmaid's Tale* in the way characters with power manipulate discourse in regard to history and social realities to convey a narrative that might prevent communal revolt and instil a sense of security. For instance, she takes a close look at

the moment Charmaine undergoes her "loyalty test," that is, when she is told to euthanize her own husband:

> When she is forced to repurpose Stan, her husband, she is manipulated into a form of Orwellian Doublethink as a form of reality control and constantly reminded that he died while heroically saving his co-workers and a bunch of chickens from an electrical fire — until she starts to think in those terms. (257)

De Vaul concludes that the vocabulary is turned from words with negative meanings to positive ones: Stan is going to be "repurposed", not "killed", and Charmaine purposely tries to avoid thinking the negative words in other to cope with what she did. This shift in meanings of words does not constitute a process of simulation necessarily, but the overt manipulation of meanings certainly served to expose some other simulacra analysed here.

More importantly, de Vaul (and Howells) suggests that the novel is not concluded with a happy ending that subverts that system. Although the Consilience Project is exposed, politicians and investors are protected and "darker Positron activities are being continued and replicated elsewhere, just as it is implied that the events of the novel have already begun in the real world" (262). In *The Heart Goes Last*, Stan and Charmaine sign a consent document prior to entering the Consilience Project. One could argue that their consent is hardly law-abiding, since they do not have all the information before accepting – they only learn that they will be imprisoned every other month after signing consent, not to mention that they only accidentally discover the organ harvesting and the "love lobotomies." There is accidental agency, facilitated by external factors – mostly Jocelyn –, and even after exposing the illegal activities, the overarching system does not cease to exist.

In her article, Ann Coral Howells (2017) produces an in-depth analysis of Atwood's approach to several genre fictions. For Howells, Atwood's playful stretch on formulaic genre fiction comes "[w]hile she references the idioms and new technologies of contemporary

culture, she seeks as always to engage readers with her seriously held ethical values, which are embedded in the texts themselves" (298). In the second chapter of my master's thesis, I make a similar point to Howells's, arguing that Atwood's discourse in *The Year of the Flood* often produces a sort of parody of coded discourses (2016). Howells indicates some differences between the published novel, *The Heart Goes Last*, and her "Positron" e-series, with "more background information reminding readers of earlier episodes, and some events are arranged differently, but these are differences that relate not to online publication but to presentation format (serial *versus* novel)" (304-305), not to mention that the e-series ends with Stan being shipped out of the Consilience Project.[22] The published novel includes his incursion in Las Vegas, Charmaine's act to reel Ed in to spy on classified information and the final exposure of the project as a sham.

Like de Vaul and Parker, Howells comments on the 1950s aesthetic in the Consilience Project, which had been chosen because it was the most associated one with the feeling of happiness. She also discusses the emergence of sexual fantasies that are ironically inverted, as Stan discovers the lustful Jasmine was Charmaine. On the other hand, Howells advances the discussion on sex robots, indicating the hint of gothic horror they cause in characters, since "[t]he fetishized female body returns here, shadowed by its robotic double, where fantasies become more macabre and melodramatic" (307). This double, this ongoing simulacrum, is very present in Charmaine's response to the sex robot Ed orders for himself. That robot is commissioned to be as close to the "original" as feasible, so much so that Jocelyn refers to the robot as Charmaine herself: "'He was fairly mad at you, though,' Jocelyn continues in her

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[22] The novel is published from the compiled serial chapters in the "Positron" narrative, previously published online. Although the novel remains coherent despite its fragmented origins, there are some "easter eggs" for attentive readers that reinforce certain images. For instance, when Charmaine is worried that Stan might have discovered her affair, she makes a mistake in a knitted blue teddy bear: "Should she unravel the row, knit it over? No. The bear will just have to wear a little ridge around its neck" (121). Later, when Stan is considering the mistake that had been Consilience, he is watching the news, "on which a toddler in the Positron preschool is playing with a blue knitted teddy bear, a ribbon around its neck" (148). The adapted serial element is occasionally identifiable in the novel and it allows for a cohesive polyphony.

detached voice. 'He sent you back to the shop. He ordered you to be destroyed,'" to which Charmaine exclaims, "'Not actually me!'" (294-295). Regarding these events, Howells comments that,

> In Atwood's parodic treatment, there is a continual slippage between horror and comedy, where Ed's project is subverted (thanks to a secret act of sabotage by Jocelyn) and the passive body of Charmaine's robotic double assumes a malevolent agency, threatening to castrate Ed the first time he indulges in his fantastic copulation. (308)

From her arguments and from the textual excerpts, it is possible to conclude that Atwood not only blurs genre fiction standards but also breaks expectations regarding characters, removing both Charmaine and Stan from the role of the heroic protagonist.

In fact, Atwood herself comments on the character of Charmaine in an interview. She relates the sense of nostalgia associated with the 1950s to a "longing for childhood," although this sort of attachment to a sense of past is complicated in Charmaine's past, only hinted at through the polyphonic mention of Grandma Win. Atwood elaborates on the impulse towards nostalgia, saying, "[w]e are all susceptible to these feelings, just as we are all susceptible to a longing for a better 'future' world – the myth of inevitable progress. We have to constantly check our feelings against reality – or whatever semblance of it we can actually grasp with any certainty" (9). Even though Atwood's remarks on her own oeuvre are not always a reliable starting point for analysis, in this case her premise of future myths and notions of reality is an adequate starting point for a more comprehensive analysis of the waning of the utopian impulse in *The Heart Goes Last*.

There is hardly any disagreement on whether *The Heart Goes Last* is a dystopian novel or not. The initial promise in Ed's propaganda, of a protected, middle-class existence, enchants Charmaine more than Stan, who follows her into the project because he had no better option. Amidst the variety of definitions on dystopia and utopia, Lyman Tower Sargent provides

working concepts, mentioned in the previous chapter. On dystopia, he emphasizes that "the imperfect society[,] occurs primarily in the twentieth century because the imperfect perfection is most often brought about by technology" (2005, 157), and that dystopia and utopia share two defining traits: "First, the society described must not exist; second, the author must in some way evaluate that society" (*idem*). This working definition is already a complicated one in *The Heart Goes Last*, since the narrator makes no effort to disguise that the society in the book is the United States, albeit a future version of it – although the location is rather explicit, the vagueness of the expression "near future" uproots that very concrete society, echoing Moylan's comments on how critical dystopias are often closer to the readership (2003). Secondly, to say that the "author must in some way evaluate that society" entails two problematic concepts – it might be more adequate to say that the narrator, not the author, evaluates the described society in order to avoid the complications and impracticalities of discussing authorial values or opinions. This takes the argument to the second issue: how can a critic identify narratorial criticism? In *The Heart Goes Last*, as I claim, criticism towards the Consilience Project is severely diluted in characters' perspectives, be it Stan's, Jocelyn's or Aurora's. Although *The Heart Goes Last*, then, stretches some genre or conceptual boundaries, it can still be read as a contemporary sf dystopia.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, the images related to the Consilience Project are heavily influenced by simulacra. Baudrillard discusses how the history "that is given back to us" is not in any way "real" history, but a sewed-on narrative, "our lost referential, that is to say our myth" (*Simulation*, 43). Not only that: this myth fed back to individuals is filtered by an attempt of representation that establishes in collective memory images that are identified as belonging to a certain era regardless of whether that is true. The hyperreality of History, in *The Heart Goes Last*, is most markedly present in Ed's aesthetic choice for the town design. "Then they'd brought in some top designers to consult on an overall look and feel. The fifties was

chosen for the visual and audio aspects, because it was the decade in which the most people had self-identified as being happy" (50). Implied in Ed's speech was the inference that a survey was conducted on the amount of happiness these near-future people associated with each historical period. In turn, that leads to the inference that the subjects of that survey would return to a shiny, hyperreal version of History from a time when the United States had just profited wildly from a World War and established very conservative social values and a sentiment of anti-communism. Not a single character sees as anti-capitalist the fact that all citizens receive equal houses, equal credits, equal transportation, and so on. A hypothesis could be that citizens are, at the same time, desperate for any sort of accommodation and that their notion of the fifties does not include economic and political awareness, but mostly jazz and early rock music, pleated skirts and Marylin Monroe movies.

The overt extrapolation of this very reduced and censored sense of culture within the Consilience Project in *The Heart Goes Last* is also related to what I called, in my master's thesis, parody of coded discourses. Analysing these extrapolations on science fiction, religious and mass media discourses in Suzanne Collins and Margaret Atwood herself, I suggested that these extrapolations carry within themselves a strong sense of irony: "[s]uch an exaggeration, along with the occasional deliberate usage of tropes from those registers, may cause the reader to notice their pervasiveness in 'real life,' a consequence of the satiric element in parody" (70). This more recent publication shares with *The Year of the Flood* the ironic reflection on discourse patterns, mainly regarding sexual fantasies and in the way culture and art appear throughout the novel.

Even before entering the Consilience Project, Charmaine watches movies from the 1950s and 1960s during her diner shift: "She can watch TV on the flatscreens, old Elvis Presley movies from the sixties, so consoling; or daytime sitcoms, though they aren't funny and anyway comedy is so cold and heartless" (20). The notion that Charmaine seeks consolation

from television programming indicates, other than the rather obvious bleakness in her life, that she has a very specific demand from media: entertainment and escapism from her reality. Her attachment to models from "television happiness" frames her entire perception of the Consilience Project, that is, the models from the coded discourse of entertainment frame and direct her perception of events happening around her. It is possible to note this when she enters the project for the first time: "she can hardly believe her eyes: everything is so spruced up, it's like a picture. Like a town in a movie, a movie of years ago. Like the olden days, before anyone was born" (38). The takeover of media and their signs is evidenced in how Charmaine perceives her view of Consilience in such a way that it fits previous mediatic notions of happiness, safety and organization. As the narrator continues to point out Charmaine's romanticized view not only of the American past, but of the project, a possible effect on the reader is the realization of these existing models in current society, stressing the parody (through exaggeration and repetition) of the coded discourse of entertainment.

As mentioned previously, art is also very limited within the project walls:

Music and movies are available on the same network, although, to avoid overexcitement, there is no pornography or undue violence, and no rock or hip-hop. However, there is not limitation on string quartets, Bing Crosby, Doris Day, the Mills Brothers, or show tunes from vintage Hollywood musicals. (53)

Stan, upon examining the selection, decides that it is "granny junk," but his exasperation at the limited options in art occurs because he misses sports, that is, the entertainment provided was not enough for him. Additionally, it should be noted that all art within Consilience is multimedia: no novels or books, paintings and so on of any kind are mentioned throughout the novel. Some inferences can be made in that sense regarding the following: the choice of media, the absence of "violence" in the chosen possibilities, and the possible conclusion for dystopias.

In the first place, the absence of non-multimedia forms of art in the dystopian setting indicates a potential view of multimedia artforms as mere entertainment. On a step to elaborating a "bad place," only multimedia entertainment exists, in the form of movies and old television shows. This usually leads to preconceived notions of hierarchical relations between media and art. I do not subscribe to any hierarchies between media, drawing from Linda Hutcheon's arguments in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), and from her general comments on postmodern criticism: "Videogames, theme park rides, Web sites, graphic novels, song covers, operas, musicals, ballets, and radio and stage plays are thus as important to this theorizing as are the more commonly discussed movies and novels" (xiv). However, the lack of novels or paintings in Consilience is not simply an indication of a narrative deference towards multimedia forms: these media are not missed by the characters. They do not long for Charles Dickens, Chaucer or Picasso, a characteristic that can be read as a sign that these media have exited the daily life of citizens completely even before Consilience, which can, in turn, suggest that this disappearance is a contemporary ongoing process.

In the second place, the lack of violence in the presented options marks other inferences, namely that violence in art and media in general spark violence in "real life."[23] Therefore, by abolishing representations of violence, violence itself would be removed from society. Utopias are often marked by the absence of violence or by controlled expressions of it. However, violence is not absent at all from the media choices in the Consilience network. A striking example is *Niagara*, the 1953 film directed by Henry Hathaway, which features murder, jealousy and adultery, mentioned both by Charmaine (234), as she dresses for Stan's fake funeral, and Budge (250), as he lists clothing options for Marilyn prostibots. The black suit and scarf from the movie are related both to danger ("women in danger of being strangled should avoid any fashion accessories that tie around the neck" (233)) and to sexuality, once she sees

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[23] That assumption is often attributed to videogames, particularly the first-person shooter genre.

herself in the mirror and compares her image to Monroe's: "Of course, she thinks, Marilyn's mouth was fuller than her own, and you could use very thick red lipstick then" (233). So, it is not really a matter of wiping out representations of violence, but of making sure that the representations that did make the cut were coherent with an aesthetic of veiled sexual fantasy. The removal of sports, pornography and hip hop was not a choice turned to societal improvement, but to fit a set of values from a very repressed and stiff noir aesthetics from the 1950s.

As a dystopia, *The Heart Goes Last* impresses readers in the eagerness shown by characters to become voluntary prisoners. Atwood's narrative exposes what is, in fact, a very common phenomenon during economic crises: security trumps freedom. Jameson discusses the issue at length, in his chapter "Journey into Fear":

> At any rate it seems clear enough that the earlier or more traditional Utopias are far more concerned with happiness than with freedom: unless, to be sure, one replaces this last in the context of the specific unfreedoms of feudalism as such, without anachronistically attributing to them the anxieties of dictatorship and bureaucracy that haunt the bourgeois world. (194)

As Jameson comments, earlier utopias present centralized, homogenous structures; these representations are met with suspicion nowadays, after decades of individualist, anti-left (usually the only political view associated with totalitarianism) propaganda. That fear of totalization can be identified in the construction of contemporary dystopias, as closed systems, individual leaders, the absence of personalized commodities are all associated with communism and viewed with fear. These notions are strongest in the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the 1950s. Moreover, it is necessary to understand the contextual nature of freedom in contemporary dystopias: freedom as a value and as a marker of happiness is a fairly recent theme. Jameson adds:

[I]n modern industrial times, in which the state has itself become a character or individual, freedom is redefined as release from the oppression of state power itself, a release that can take the form of existential pathos, as with the dilemmas of the individual rebel or anti-hero, but which now, after the end of individualism, seems to take the form of identification with small groups. (206)

Contemporary dystopias often portray totalitarian states as the source of oppression, as systems that must be destroyed for citizens to live full and free lives. Surely, these values come with western assumptions that the state is an archaic institution and freedom dictates (somewhat ironically) a self-regulation of societies. While one could expect the next step in that rationale to spark a multitude of anarchic utopias or anti-utopias (as Jameson, in fact, believes *1984* is and as Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* is), these dystopias are often solved by the survival of a protagonist or subversion towards democratic representative governments.

The Consilience Project envisioned in Atwood's narrative, however, subverts these expectations. It only emerged in North America because of an economic crisis caused by financial speculation: "Then everything went to rat shit. Overnight, it felt like. . . . Someone had lied, someone had cheated, someone had shorted the market, someone had inflated the currency. Not enough jobs, too many people" (9). Needless to say, the crisis in the narrative set in the late 21st century is strikingly similar to the 1929 crash, one of the main factors that contributed to North American foreign policies, including the fear of communism and reactionary moral values. This highlights, once again, an ironic representation of a cyclic history: regardless of technological developments, Atwood's humans also have not changed and they are, as a result, stuck in a loop.

The project, then, emerges as a utopia of safety, of financial and professional security. It is sold as a collective struggle; Ed constantly emphasises how Consilience/Positron is an experiment, "An ultra, ultra important experiment . . . If it succeeds – and it *has* to succeed,

and it *can* succeed if they all work together" (44), socializing the effort to make it work and presenting it as the salvation from the "savages" outside. The dystopia, in *The Heart Goes Last*, is, then, set in a historical loop of neoliberal policies that spark collective fear, leading to voluntary surrender to a totalitarian, albeit capitalist, regime, in which the effort is socialized, but power and profits are centralized in Ed, who is revealed as a greedy developer: he is behind the sale of human organs, baby blood and the prostibots.

Stan and Charmaine, faced with economically drastic problems, give up their "freedom" to attain safety, as Jameson mentions in the chapter on fear mentioned previously. Once they become part of the totality of Consilience/Positron, however, they discover rather dystopian practices inside their secure walls. The trajectory traced by them, however, does not validate the idea of individualistic heroism. In fact, one could argue that both characters display very little agency in the events they take part in, and even that little agency is questionable.

Charmaine, like all Consilience citizens, applies for some jobs based on her previous experience (but her employment would not be decided by herself). She decides to give in to the affair with Max mere seconds upon meeting him, instilling in her a sense of rebellion and impulsivity: "The next minute – how did it happen? – her pinafore apron was on the floor, her hair had come loose – had he done that? – and they were kissing" (68). As the plot unfolds, the reader discovers that Jocelyn had somewhat predicted that Charmaine and Max would be attracted to each other by claiming to know his nature (105). Later, as Charmaine believes to have killed Stan, the act of grieving widow she puts on was not created by her, but by Jocelyn, using her to infiltrate Ed's defences to get proof of his wrongdoings. She has hardly any agency throughout the story; the only incident in which she seems to have an actual choice in her life is in the very end of the novel.

Restored to her husband, in a nice, comfortable house, Charmaine believes she underwent the "Bottom surgery" to become sexually obsessed to whichever was the first thing

she would see upon waking up (Stan, in her case). The narrator describes her joyful, domestic life, until she is visited by Jocelyn and she gives the wife a choice: to "be free but less secure. If you don't hear it, you'll be more secure, but less free" (378). After hearing that she had never undergone the surgery, Charmaine is angry for having lost the stable part of her life – she had felt happy knowing she could only love Stan forever: "She wants the helplessness, she wants…" (379), inserts the narrator. Charmaine wants to be removed of her choices; she wants the security of only being able to love one man and live one life over dealing with the various possibilities and responsibilities of making her own decisions. Not only is that hardly compliant with ideas of individualistic heroism in contemporary dystopias, but it indicates an exhaustion of the concept of freedom as a utopia, sending the character into the previously discussed abstract, individual utopia of the private sphere. Of course, though, that exhaustion can resonate with the reader in a sense of pity or superiority for her character, so an alternative reading might be of Charmaine as a cautionary tale. The final exchange renders Charmaine's new-found responsibility for her life rather explicit: Atwood places in Jocelyn's speech a reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, emphasising that she is done manipulating or making choices for the other woman; this ending marks the beginning of Charmaine's burden to free will.

> "Take it or leave it," says Jocelyn. "I'm only the messenger. As they say in court, you're free to go. The world is all before you, where to choose."
>
> "How do you mean?" says Charmaine. (380)

The implications in Atwood's choice of ending indicate Charmaine's incapability of accounting for her own life. There is a waning of the ideal that was her life as she discovers that her devoted love was not fabricated – now, she would be aware of the weight of her choices. Her incapability of doing so may have been a result from her childhood, which, as Atwood said in her interview to Fiona Tolan, "had some very dark corners" (9), but it is also aligned with an exhaustion of the individual as the heroic measure of subjectivity. In *The Heart*

Goes Last, therefore, this exhaustion of the individual seen in Charmaine is not replaced by affinities in small groups – she is merely paralyzed and doubtful of her feelings, instead of rejoicing in her freedom. This portrayal exists outside of the general tenets of critical dystopias.

Stan, on the other hand, is completely transformed into a tool for Jocelyn's aims, not to mention his sexual submission to her. After having found the note from Charmaine to Max, his imagination creates an entire story on the lives the alternates were supposed to live; their life, incidentally, would be much better than his with Charmaine, filled with the sexual alacrity that he longed for. As a matter of fact, Stan's imagination worsens his experience of his actual life in more than one occasion: the depth of his projections about Jasmine and Max is foreshadowed by the long, imaginary conversations he sustains with his brother. For instance, when he meets Connor before entering Consilience, he puts several imaginary phrases on his brother's mouth that the sibling might use to humiliate or diminish him: "[H]e's in a weak position and he can hear what Con would say: 'You were crap with the Nerf gun, you'd shoot your face off.' Or worse: 'What'll you trade me? Time in the sack with the wife? She'd enjoy it. Hey! Joke!' . . . So he doesn't try" (29). What does happen on the plot level is that Connor gives him some money and offers him a job; later, he tries to dissuade Stan from entering Consilience because he had heard about dangerous things going on inside. Stan, however, is so isolated in his own imaginary humiliation that he does not see the events as they unfold.

The same applies to his fantasy of Jasmine: "Stan rearranges Jasmine and Max in his head, this way and that, lace bra ripped asunder . . even though he has no idea what either of them looks like" (58), he begins. As time passes, he imagines entire personalities for Max and Jasmine – unaware of how his imagination runs with him, he is caught in Jocelyn's trap, sure as he was that he would be the one to ambush her with a sexual encounter. Ironically, like Charmaine, Stan's fantasies force him into a vulnerable position, from which Jocelyn controls him; he does not regain agency.

This digression into character agency, state representation and even art values in *The Heart Goes Last* is useful for a closer and final view on how simulacra are present in the narrative construction of Consilience/Positron and how the novel brings the reader to an unsettling position of distrust of signs in general. Baudrillard foresees that return to common-place situations in science fiction, not because "the space is all mapped out," as some have argued,[24] but because

> [f]rom then onward, something must change: the projection, the extrapolation, the sort of pantographic excess that constituted the charm of science fiction are all impossible. It is no longer possible to fabricate the unreal from the real, the imaginary from the givens of the real. The process will, rather, be the opposite: it will be to put decentered situations, models of simulation in place and to contrive to give them the feeling of the real, of the banal, of lived experience, to reinvent the real as fiction, precisely because it has disappeared from our life. (*Simulation*, 124)

Baudrillard's proverbial "predictions" on the future of sf take shape in *The Heart Goes Last*: the projection, as it happens with speculative fiction within sf, is rather mundane: an economic crisis with a walled-in, protected town, within which nefarious deals involve the selling of blood, body parts and robots for sexual pleasure. The real, in the novel, is fabricated from a hyperreal version of 1950s aesthetics and moral values, with grotesque twists on the sexual tension, never resolved in the old movies, but potentialized in Stan and Jocelyn's warped imitation of Max and Charmaine's sexual encounters.[25] A town is built and sold as a project revolving around recovering banal routines from the past, based on a sense of nostalgia for

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[24] Atwood herself discusses the exhaustion of cartographies of space in sf, in her book *In Other Worlds* (2011). She uses the proximity of the setting chosen for her novels to argue for a distancing from sf, but, as Ursula Le Guin notes, her work is distinguishingly science fictional in the *MaddAddam* series, for instance. Adam Roberts also claims, in a view that I endorse, that her term of choice, "speculative fiction" is, indeed, a contemporary expression of sf (2016).

[25] The sexual dimension of the grotesque in *The Heart Goes Last*, albeit promising, is not discussed in this dissertation, to avoid critical digressions.

what was not lived. Art is either in a process of disappearance or has already disappeared, as postulated after analysing Stan's reactions to the entertainment system, not to mention the willing imprisonment. Positron prison also employs panoptic strategies of peer surveillance, which, as I argued, may cause a lasting sense of being watched. Charmaine believes, but is not sure, that she is watched as she performs every Special Procedure. The dystopian setting of the novel is construed on simulacra of history, of art, and of vigilance.

Since these instances of simulacra support the systems of interpretation of one's surroundings in *The Heart Goes Last*, what are the implications for literary utopianisms? To view Atwood's novel as a critical dystopia would be problematic, to say the least: its protagonists are not driven by personal defiance, individual trajectories filled with self-discovery and resistance, nor are there utopian enclaves or places to escape. They are used as pawns and left in an economically comfortable situation, and the ending leaves them empty-handed to deal with the demise of the Consilience Project. Baccolini, however, notes the variety within critical dystopias, arguing, "the new dystopias not only critique the present triumphal system but also explore ways to transform it that go beyond compromised left-centrist solutions" (*Dark Horizons*, 8); in the case of *The Heart Goes Last*, a convoluted plot exposes a false utopia from within, which can lead to the conclusion that an attempt at the utopian project has failed, that a reconstruction of society would not lie in that direction.

Baudrillard makes a similar claim about dialectical utopias, as mentioned previously: "[t]he realized utopia is a new *topos*, which will provoke a new critique, then a new utopia. The installation of utopia passes through a (total) urbanism. And that is the complete process" (*Utopia Deferred*, 32). In the bleakness of Charmaine's helplessness, as she faces the responsibility and multiplicity of her own choices, there is room for the dystopian hope of a new awareness: a future after exposing Ed, after discovering that she is not bound to Stan for the rest of her life. The simulacra imbued in the representation of Consilience/Positron are

exposed, but not entirely destroyed; they remain both in the characters' minds and in the investors who managed to escape unscathed after the scandal. That exposal, thus, holds a dystopian potential, but not a certainty, for an improved awareness, for different avenues of experience.

2.3. Resistance and hybridism in utopian struggles: *He, She, and It*

Contemporary works of science fiction, in particular those authored by women writers, are known to include more and more often a dialogical interchange of utopia and dystopia in their narratives. Regardless of that practice being named by Atwood as "ustopia" or as "critical dystopia" by Tom Moylan and Rafaella Baccolini, that disruption of traditional utopian form (by traditional, I refer to More's *Utopia* itself) can be found in Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It*.

The novel, published in 1991, appeared overseas with the title of *Body of Glass*; as a result, criticism on it tends to be as dissonant and scattered as the novel itself, since there is no unified choice of title to be cited in articles and reviews. Tom Moylan refers to it as *He, She, and It*, along with most North American publications; however, it is also found in articles published in Great Britain, including the journal *Foundation*. *Body of Glass* is used in Europe, but with less frequency, and even in papers published in Brazil: in annals of conferences, it seems more common than the North American title.[26] Piercy was awarded the Arthur C. Clarke prize for the novel and it has been extensively analysed as a feminist cyberpunk text and as a dystopia – her name is commonly cited in surveys of science fiction written by women, alongside Joanna Russ and Ursula Le Guin.

Set in the year 2069, Piercy projects a world configured by the total erosion of the ozone layer and global warming. Human civilization has broken into one of three community

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[26] I was able to observe the use of *He, She, and It* in the journals *Science Fiction Studies* and, partially, in *Foundation*; it is also cited thus in Tom Moylan, in Ildney Cavalcanti's criticism, and throughout *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. References to the novel as *Body of Glass* seemed to occur in the second half of *Foundation* occurrences and in papers presented in the Federal University of Santa Catarina, suggesting a variety in local choices.

configurations: a) the corporate, homogenous, capitalist enclaves that control the majority of the territory, the multis; b) smaller cities that trade technological commodities, such as encryption software, with the multis and that are, for that reason, tolerated by bigger powers, the free towns; and c) the interspaces of misery, hunger and street violence filled with the undesirables of either place, the Glop. The plot focuses on the free town of Tikva ("hope" in Hebrew), where the scientist Avram and the programmer Malkah, alarmed by attempts of data theft from the corporations, endeavour to develop a cyborg that would be able to protect them from such attacks. However, artificial intelligences are banned by multi legislature, so they must create a cyborg that could pass as human to avoid detection.

That is the point at which human protagonist, Shira Shipman, becomes relevant to the story. After years working in the multi Y-S and being passed for promotions, stuck in a custody battle with her former husband for her son, she returns to her hometown and is reunited with her grandmother, Malkah. Now unemployed, Avram and Malkah set her to work on making a cyborg, named Yod, behave as human. Shira, then, spends a long time with Yod, teaching him how humans behave in certain situations, but she is as taken aback by his behaviour, as he is unprepared to live amongst humans. Before Shira can complete the training, however, Malkah is attacked, online, by the multis. She is saved by Yod and Shira's incursion in the net (as it is called in the novel) and is bedbound for a long time. Meanwhile, Yod and Shira become a couple, after some reluctance from Shira. She also meets her mother, Riva – considered a terrorist by the multis, Riva is known to travel the world stealing information and selling it from one multi to another. She arrives with her companion, Nili, a born-human woman who has undergone several enhancements; her subjectivity, incidentally, is related to the pervasiveness of simulacra in the novel.

The climax of the novel resides in Shira and Yod's actual invasion of the Y-S multi – to get her son – and in a virtual incursion, to attain information on what they knew about Tikva

and how they intended to attack. In order to preserve Shira and the net hardware at Tikva, Yod self-destructs, taking with him the top executives of the multi and giving the free town a period of relief to rebuild its defences. During that time, Shira is conflicted about building another Yod to overcome her heartbreak, but ultimately decides against it, arguing, "[s]he could not manufacture a being to serve her, even in love" (428). While my discussion about *He, She, and It* relies more on the simulacrum in constructions of humanity, subjectivity, and hybridity as a utopian proposal, it is important to base this analysis on the relevant contemporary criticism.

Tom Moylan (2000) dedicates a chapter to analysing *He, She, and It* as a critical dystopia, indicating that it "explore[s] ways of moving forward that activists and theoreticians – perhaps caught in the limitations of nostalgic agendas or the pressures of immediate disputes – may not be ready or able to acknowledge or imagine" (249). As a matter of fact, Marge Piercy is somewhat disinterested of academia, indicating how it seems to exist in a different sphere from "real life". In an interview she kindly conceded to myself and my colleagues, editors at *Em Tese* in 2017, she claimed, "[w]hen the women's movement was young and many academics were people with organizing experience, activists, I related and read what they wrote, but as the jargon has grown thicker, I have stopped" (295). The author's concern with "actual" problems transpires in her writing; Moylan adds,

> the double narrative in *He, She and It* moves tectonically between the past, in the Jewish ghetto of Prague in 1600, and the future, in the second half of the twenty-first century Only the reader stands in the present, to reflect upon these alternative social paradigms and hopefully to be challenged and inspired by doing so. The dystopian temptation to anti-utopian resignation is therefore resisted formally by a text that pulls at the enclosure of the present moment from two chronotopic perspectives – and then from a third once the political imagination of the reader begins to challenge the common sense of her or his own time. (249)

These narrative levels, the one in 2069 and the imagined present reader (one that also changes as time progresses), contribute to a complexity in views of humanity and its relationship with technology. While the myth of Joseph the Golem,[27] interspersed with the more technological part of the novel, sets Yod in the Hebrew tradition beyond the mere mention of his name, the reader learns more about Malkah's motivations when programming the cyborg. The myth portions are, as a matter of fact, told to Yod by Malkah; after reflecting on the limitations of the programming inserted by her so he would be driven to please humans, she interrupts herself, saying, "Dear Yod, our tale recommences" (341), turning back to the ghetto in Prague and taking the reader's focus with her.

Moylan proceeds to illuminate the values implied in the construction of Piercy's dystopian setting: for instance, "the names of corporations reveal the history of their mergers and to some extent their economic interests" (250-251); nations are barely identifiable, reduced to remains in corporation names, such as the one that appears the most in the story, Yakamura-Steichen. Since natural resources have been used up and global warming has rendered the planet virtually infertile, the main commodity is information, which has singular repercussions in the cyberpunk genre: firstly, it is a depiction of a dematerialization of the subject, that is, value is no longer in money or in concrete objects, but it is virtual and elusive; secondly, in addition to a lack of materiality, the notion of information as commodity relativizes the idea of commodity itself. Because information is difficult to measure, to control, or even to define (and easy to manipulate), the very idea of commodity becomes increasingly elusive until it becomes – unsurprisingly – a simulacrum. This view can be further supported by the name given to the security systems developed and sold by Tikva, the chimeras. As Moylan remarks,

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[27] Although this critical analysis is not based on the Hebrew myth of the Golem, it is worth noting that the creature would be an antropomorphic being made of mud or clay that would be stronger than the strongest human and who could serve as protection, but who struggles with the designs for his creation.

they offer "chimeras" that protect bases by means of misdirection through subsystems that generate "misinformation, pseudoprograms, falsified data"; on the other hand, they can deliver aggressive defense machines that are driven by new forms of artificial intelligence (47). (254)

Tikva survives, then, by selling simulacra. This manipulation of signs and repurposing of those into security pitfalls presents a more optimistic view of the simulacrum as the one proposed by Baudrillard in his original theory. It is possible to postulate that, instead of simulacra being a symptom of total decay of meaning systems and human experience, they can be repurposed to defend some structures, while rendering others vulnerable. The chimeras eventually become instruments for infiltration into Y-S network, allowing for Tikva to defend itself while profiting from protecting Y-S from invasion by other multis. This hopeful view of the simulacrum in Piercy's work is parallel to her optimistic depiction of technology: "she is quite open to the positive possibilities of an appropriate use of science and technology on an everyday, human scale" (*Scraps*, 267), as seen in Yod's complex programming, in Nili's enhancements, and in the chimeras themselves.

He, She, and It carries with it several perspectives on utopianism. Moylan concludes that

As a work of dystopian fiction, it refuses the anti-utopian path and articulates utopian traces within a social order that is still the reserve of corporate powers . . . as a critical dystopia, it further provides a self-reflexive meditation on the formal capacity of dystopian narrative to make room for utopian hope, and its most telling self-reflexive gesture occurs in the foregrounding of the formative power of storytelling itself. (268)

Tikva, as one of the free towns, is a partial utopia, surrounded by the corporate dystopia of the multis and the wasteland dystopia of the Glop, with a possible parallel in the new Hebrew community where Nili was born. The self-reflexion mentioned by Moylan is identifiable in the

long, elaborate discussions in town meetings; so even the utopia within the dystopian world order is not perfect, but it is still presented as the best option. These layers of utopianisms are, in fact, shaped by Malkah's narrative of the Golem and its several parallels with Yod's trajectory, leading up to his self-destruction. It could be argued, indeed, that Malkah does not only weave the Golem's story, but Yod's, as she establishes parallels in her narrative that could trigger his reactions to the events that unfold. She does not actively micromanage Yod's reactions, but she is behind his programming and his sense of self as a guardian and a person. Moylan adds that storytelling in *He, She, and It* is not a value within itself: "Several stories are exposed as 'false' and are overturned as the major narrative unfolds. Precisely because of its formation by a variety of alternative stories, Yod dispenses with the traditional male valence of fairy tales" (269). The effect caused by the novel, seen as a critical dystopia, is to unsettle narrative, signs and utopianisms without discarding them completely, but to offer a multifaceted view that enables future improvements.

Frances Bonner, in her paper on feminist science fiction, approaches the variety of forms that sf novels written by women have taken in the last sixty years. She indicates three main strands in the field:

> The first has been a continuation of the feminised space opera; the second, which is most evident in the short story and is where formal aspects continue to be worked with, has seen a shift to fabulation; the third which is probably the most significant and the one I will deal with at greatest length is the shift to the machine. (3)

While Octavia Butler and her *Xenogenesis* series is a complex depiction of the first strand and her *Parable* series a good example of the second, Bonner focuses her paper on the third strand, the shift to the machine, which includes feminist sf pioneer Joanna Russ, but, more importantly, looks at Piercy's *He, She, and It*. The author identifies the trope of mechanical women in previous sf written by men and their servitude towards their creators. She adds that Piercy's

narrative turn happens because "[t]he humanising of the machine is conducted, contrary to that in cyberpunk narratives, including Cadigan's *Synners*, by reference to his feminine traits" (5), that is, Yod becomes more human as he learns behaviours typically seen as "feminine". The characterization of Yod's emotional responses as feminine does, in fact, border on essentialism, Bonner acknowledges, but "the fact that these arise out of programming decisions and that they are debated ensures that their constructedness is stressed" (5). Like in Moylan's previous citation, storytelling and the characters' values are not univocal, but often exposed in their bias or even falsehood.

Although criticism on *He, She, and It* is almost overwhelmingly positive, Elyce Rae Halford compares Piercy's manipulation of gender roles based on the opening of the novel, which describes toned back muscles as the standard of beauty in the Y-S multi. While both men and women are subject to that pressure in the uniform shaped as a "backless suit", Shira and her resistance to alter her body and face to conform start out as a positive image of resistance. However, Helford adds, "[t]he images of the text, however, betray a strong ethnocentrism in an equation of Japanese culture with corporate culture and the limitation of race to the purely visual" (3): to the author, the narration by Piercy betrays a "biased white perspective" (3), in the sense that the ethnic replacement in economic power by Asian-like bodies indicates a step further into alteration and un-naturalness. Helford comments that another reading might "generously characterize this ethnocentric depiction as an attempt to exemplify white bias, … [there is] no alternate perspective (say that of a Japanese character) through which to contrast that of the protagonist" (3). Helford concludes that, while the novel richly depicts oppressions of class and gender, race is often masked or not discussed at all. I would add that, while race is not, in fact, an important variable in the struggles present in the story, Piercy turns to ethnicity over race, in her inclusion of Jewish mythology, the Hebrew language, and the image of utopia in the village where Malkah goes after the novel's story.

Rob Latham, in his article "A Tendentious Tendency in SF Criticism" (2002), also lists "failings" in Piercy's novel, namely "its derivative mock-cyberpunk milieu, its superficially self-reflexive narrative, and its sickly romance plot featuring a hunky male cyborg" (12). That supposed "hunkiness" in Yod has already been contraposed by Bonner, mentioned previously, who argues that his appeal lies more in his feminine traits than in his "arm candy" qualities. Latham, however, sets aside these hindrances by agreeing with Moylan's words that the novel "'look[s] at current conditions and explore[s] ways of moving forward that activists and theoreticians—perhaps caught in the limitations of nostalgic agendas or the pressures of immediate disputes—may not be ready to acknowledge or imagine'" (249), later arguing for a partial separation between political and aesthetic differences in literary appreciation.

Other literary criticism on Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It* includes some of my own work. "The Man-Machine and the Machine-Man: *Frankenstein*, *Synners*, and *He, She and It*" (2018) compares Pat Cadigan's novel to Piercy's, analysing their intertextual relations with Frankenstein's Creature and argues for a spectrum of humanities based on the contrast between Yod and Visual Mark, Cadigan's character who leaves his body behind to become one with the internet and the media. By standing on the opposite end of that spectrum, Yod is a cyborg that seeks to emulate humanity to achieve the *status* of citizen. In another paper by me, "The Subject and the Body Between Human and Cyborg: *He, She, and It*, by Marge Piercy, and *Synners*, by Pat Cadigan" (2019),[28] I expand the discussion by contrasting levels of body expression and sexuality, focusing on the hybridism of bodies and on Yod's sexual habits, opposed by Visual Mark's increasingly asexual behaviour during his sublimation into the virtual world. These two articles are closely related to the discussion of Piercy's novel from this section; however, while one focused on relations between creator and creature and on cyborg and terminal bodies,

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[28] This paper is available, in Brazilian Portuguese under the title "O Sujeito e o Corpo entre o Humano e o Ciborgue: *He, She, and It*, de Marge Piercy, e *Synners*, de Pat Cadigan", as part of the minutes to the conference Minuto I, in Maceió, 2018. Available at: < https://www.literaturaeutopia.net/anaismin1>.

issues of utopianisms and displays of hybridity are analysed, as per my thesis statement, through the lens of Baudrillard's simulacrum.

Baudrillard provided, most famously in *Simulation and Simulacra*, but also in *Why hasn't everything already disappeared?* and in *Utopia Deferred: Writings on Utopie*, the groundwork for a process of emptying of signs, without reference to reality or to meaningful relations, that applies to human language, processes of representation and mediation of information. His arguments are remarkably relevant regarding dealings between images and simulacra – the latter being a rather common term in science fiction from the 1960s on. Another relevant theorist for the discussion in that front is Istvan Csicery-Ronay, Jr., author of *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*. His book, differently from other collections about sf, divides his argument into several themes and characteristics of the genre, instead of writing about it historically, that is, starting with pulp magazines, New Wave, Cyberpunk, and speculative fiction. Jenny Wolmark's fifth chapter from *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (1993) and Nicola Nixon's "Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?" (1992) contributed to this analysis, especially regarding feminism within sf studies. Finally, on images and representation, I consider the conclusions from my master's thesis, which include the claim that simulacra in contemporary dystopias might contribute to expose illusions of unmediated information in contemporary lives. I argue that *He, She, and It*'s representation of humanity and its relationship with the internet and the figurations it invokes for scenes involving computer programming can also benefit from that perspective.

Previously, I have discussed the way literary spaces in the novel can be partially utopian or blatantly dystopian, based on Moylan's analysis. As Bonner, Moylan, and Wolmark have already analysed the hybrid nature of both Yod and Nili and their dealings with simulated humanity, now I turn to focus on the narrative employment of the internet, with Malkah's

influence both as a narrator and in conversation with the stereotype of a cyberpunk hero. While Wolmark indicates in her introduction to *Aliens and Others* that Piercy's work brings the "human-machine interface … as the site at which the oppositional relations between self and other can be configured" (5), her figurations in the net also dialogue with a collective perception of virtuality or cyberspace as a sort of utopia in its fluidity and adaptability. At its first appearance in Shira's narration, the net is a teasing, elusive space: "Malkah also engaged in elaborate group correspondences and played games inside the Net. … Shira would see Malkah sitting in the filtered sun … eyes closed or half-closed, and she would think the old woman was dozing … Malkah was accessing the Net, was plugged in and roaming: or working on the Base, constructing the elaborate chimeras" (74). In that first depiction from the 1991 novel, Malkah's immersion on the Net does not seem that different from VR technology used nowadays. Shira even described the net in such a way to suggest that its images surpass reality: "[p]eople fully interfaced saw nothing except in their own mind. The computer-generated images assumed far greater reality than the stimulation of the optical nerves by actual sight" (141-2). In a classic example of Baudrillard's claim that the simulacrum would implode signs from the inside, the net's artificially generated images are more detailed and life-like than life itself, even better than the limited capabilities of human sight.

The net, in *He, She, and It*, serves as this interstitial zone for battle figurations and for experiences beyond the physical. In that sense, it resembles utopian values, but mastery in dealing with the virtual exists in an analogous system of privilege:

> Moving in and out of large AI data bases was something taught all children in Tikva but an ability possessed by only the more educated in the Glop. The ability to access the world's information and resculpt it was the equivalent of the difference between the propertied and the landless in the past of lords and serfs (143).

Now in the field of community education, Piercy's narrator traces how Tikva operates, as a utopia surrounded by dystopias. Common cyberpunk motifs, such as the wasteland with survivalist hackers, exist outside Shira's protected hometown, in which equality dictates high levels of programming and code manipulation since childhood. On the one hand, Tikva is not different from most current metropoles, in which children are taught to use technology from infancy – or, rather, they instinctively learn it from overexposure –, which gives them a substantial advantage later in life over other individuals whose access to virtual environments and their code systems were only later presented, if at all.

The final note, comparing "resculpting" of information to the "past" or lords and servants holds a very ironic tone. Firstly, there is the indication that coding, manipulating information, is viewed by the narrator (focused on Shira) as a sort of art, as notable from the use of "resculpt" – pre-existing information is a piece of art, which the coder manipulates into something else (as in parody). If manipulating code is a form of art, Baudrillard's prediction of the implosion of signs would not be inaccurate; the creation of chimeras as dead ends for virtual code or information would be the ultimate hyperreality. Secondly, the notion that lords and servants, the landless and the propertied, were things of "the past," as the narrator also indicates, can be instantly discredited from the very first chapters in the novel, when Shira loses custody of her child because her former husband had more influence on the company. That is, while power is not so reliant on land, the dynamics has not changed: as a tecchie, or a lower-caste employee, Shira has no say in the destiny of her child for the majority of the novel, until she disrupts the constitution of Y-S from within with a virtual attack.

This virtual attack happens as retaliation for a previous one that almost killed Malkah while she was immersed in the Net – or jacked in, as William Gibson might phrase it. The figuration of virtual warfare reinforces previous information on how the virtual bleeds into the real in the novel. "[P]lugged in, a person was vulnerable to mental warfare. The very neural

pathways that the impulses from the machine travelled to the brain could be burned out, the brain rendered passive as a sponge" (144). To immerse oneself in the virtual, or in the hyperreally that sparks from the "shiny" images produced within, in Piercy's narrative, incurs great risk: Malkah only survives because Yod intercepts the "neural" attack and because Malkah had planted false medical records of herself, in case of persecution.

Bed-bound and borderline depressed, Malkah longs to return to the virtual realm, in which she feels more like herself and more able to stretch her mind – she longs for the virtual as an escape from her aging, flesh and blood body: "In the image world, I am the power of my thought, of my capacity to create. … Now I am reduced to my aging body in my room, which is luxurious but insufficient as a world. At seventy-two, I knock against my limits constantly in the flesh" (161). Curiously, Malkah at the same time shares characteristics with the cowboy-like view of cyberpunk protagonists and she shifts them. The character resembles the characteristics listed by Wolmark in her description of the cyberpunk hacker:

> The main characters in cyberpunk narratives are hackers, transformed into street-wise rock n' roll heroes who wear mirrorshades and do 'biz' in the urban sprawl, dealing in designer drugs, stolen data, jacking into the matrix of cyberspace by means of implanted cranial sockets. (114)

As Wolmark's description is ironic, so is Malkah's position as a cyberpunk hacker: she does "jack in" with implants, she deals in false information and stolen data to protect her town – her "biz" –, but the so-called masculine traits of Gibson's Case from *Neuromancer* are gone: his detachment is opposed to Malkah's complex and diverse emotions towards other characters. Case's trajectory of going through the motions until a self-aware virtual reality presents itself to him is starkly different from Malkah's fully engaged political views regarding her town, culture and religion. They do, however, share a taste for the virtual existence in the sense that

reality is limited and insufficient. They are both fascinated by the new possibilities in the intersection with the virtual, with the machine.

As June Deery remarks, in her chapter for *Future Females: the Next Generation* (2000), "[b]oth literary fiction and cyberspace are simulated worlds generated by code. Cyberspace is located somewhere between fiction and reality (in a position closer to enacted drama than the novel)" (88), it is possible to note that fiction is the result of code – language and its signs – and that often anxieties about the cyberspace (coined by, once again, Gibson) transpire through language. Of course, that anxiety is also the *locus* for the escapism of the flesh found in several cyberpunk characters: Piercy's Malkah, Gibson's Case, or Cadigan's Visual Mark, to name a few. However, while studies of Piercy's novel often turn their gaze to the cyborgs and the post-humans (as Moylan, N. Katherine Hayles and even I have done), another pervasive literary resource from cyberpunk narratives is usually overlooked: the figurations in the virtual, as opposed to the real. That is, virtual worlds are built around code, programming language, something that is likely unknown to those writing cyberpunk works. As it would not be feasible – or appealing to their readership, perhaps – to write about a virtual world, a hyperreality, in terms of code, almost every writer describing a form of cyberspace uses the resource of figuration. By figuration, in the discussion that follows, I mean that the characters do not experience the virtuality as a series of cold-harsh green lines of code that they read in a screen, but they project full-body avatars in fluid, almost fabulational spaces that have no commitment to the laws of physics or corporeality in the real world. In other words, literary approaches to cyberspace are vastly populated by imagetic simulacra.

In *He, She, and It*, the Net is a non-space. After several mentions of self-projection, and after Malkah herself somewhat describes her attack with words like "bombings" and "projectiles" (159), it is when they are immersed in the Net that Shira and Yod finally connect

as a couple, before they go to bed together. First, Shira projects her consciousness, and the narrator decides to describe the images that compose the virtual world:

> The conventional imagery the Base used was a room with many doors, labelled with the names of sub-bases. … The imagery here was of herself as hovering outside the three-dimensional sketch of a building, its plan which she could fly over, alongside, into, which she could examine floor by floor. Coming towards her was a figure shuffling along. It was Frankenstein's monster, in the form and makeup used by Boris Karloff in the flat film from the twentieth century. (165)

In the Net, then, the reader is led to believe that Tikva's programmers choose a particular set of images, and, although that set may diverge from one base to another, it is always a certain collection of images nonetheless. Laws from the physical world are abolished, that is, she is perfectly capable to fly and see the structures in the Net from any perspective she wishes. Maintaining the notion that these images are simulacra in the Net, it is no surprise that Shira, an experienced programmer, is able to shift and bend these images at her will. After Yod comes to her in the shape of Frankenstein's creature, however, he presents her with a complete melding of minds, and their interposed interaction is displayed graphically on the page of the book:

… This isn't possible at the base. How can this be a representation of information, how is this embrace worked out in binary code? I want to, a rose as big as a bed, but it doesn't really work, we can't do more than imagine it.	I have done what I was created to do, I have defended. But you are what I want. This isn't crazy but good. … I want us to join as we join right now but in the real world.

Figure 1. Approximate reproduction of parallel graphic representation of Shira and Yod's merging in the Net in *He, She, and It* (166-167).

The dynamics of the Net in the novel are consistent with Baudrillard's initial depiction of the hyperreal: "produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (*Simulacra*, 2). The images, supposedly organized in their core by binary code (as Shira wonders in the excerpt), obey the logic of simulation, in that it "stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as a value*, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference" (*Simulacra*, 6, emphasis in the original). Although the images constructing virtual scenarios in the Net resemble the reality of the outer world, they do not bear the weight of any equivalence to those, that is, the buildings in the Net are not representations of buildings in Tikva or anywhere else; rather, those buildings are a stand-alone metaphor for how Tikva programmers choose to organize their information, proved by how these images can be subjected to distortion or manipulation by those fluent in that code. So, the net is hyperreality in its acumen, but Piercy's novel takes a multifaceted view of virtual and empirical experiences, countering Baudrillard's "utopia of equivalence," which would have governed representation and its images prior to the emergence of the simulacrum.

Firstly, the fluidity of the images in the Net is often exposed by the narrative. Later, when Shira, Malkah and Yod project themselves into the Net to attack the Y-S multi, Shira is oddly surprised by their changing avatars: "It was uncanny, even though she tried to remain aware at all times in the Net that the images they presented of themselves were merely that" (266). Secondly, as Deery indicates, in addition to pointing out the constructiveness of the images composing the hyperreality, Piercy "does not let us forget that, although one might temporarily construct different virtual identities online, the corporeal body remains at the computer terminal and remains part of one's identity" (101). At some point, her narrator even refers to the Net as a "spatial metaphor" (388). These anxieties of the virtual, in the novel, are always anchored in the corporeal, as Deery remarks: Malkah lives a full life inside the Net, but she is liable to attacks on her aging, fragile body; Yod presents Shira with a mind-melding

experience in the Net, but he longs to go to her in "the real world," as bonding online was insufficient even for him, a cyborg; Shira herself fluctuates between the strangeness of those images and wondering how the binary code inspired by programming manages to encode an embrace, something so anchored in her carnal, "real life" experience.

Piercy's Net, then, is not the site of disappearance of referential, but in the fluid interplay between images and signs, characters become aware of values in their empirical experiences and, even more so, they are led to complex understandings on what might be gained from each reality. The question of "how" that constructiveness is achieved in terms of programming is not answered, and the reader is guided to embark on the "spatial metaphor" with the characters, as the Net is the site of adventurous scenes – their invasion of the Y-S base being the most striking example. In that sense, Piercy's literary use of simulacra in creating her cyberspace also relates to Moylan's critical dystopia: the Net can be violent and it can intrude in empirical life, but it is also the site for resistance and for collaboration – Tikva's programmers, saved by Yod's final sacrifice, are given some time – hope – to prepare for future attacks, and Shira learns the consequences of fabricating self-aware weapons.

Literary uses of the simulacrum do not only occur in the description of Piercy's cyberspace; some characters glorify the emptying of signs, whereas others react negatively to it, as it happens in Gadi and Nili's complex relationship. Gadi, son of the scientist Avram, is described by his father as a disappointment. He produces a futuristic version of pornographic movies that is called "stimmie" in the novel, something to appeal to all the senses as opposed to the "flat films of the twentieth century" (165). He offers Shira, in the beginning, a simulated reality in which they never broke up, a "spike." Shira is appalled at the idea: "It was in her mouth to say that spikes were illegal, when she realized that in Gadi's world, nothing was truly illegal. They manufactured and exported sensations for money. Nothing was out of bounds" (250). Gadi explains further, "You're a computer simulation. But it doesn't work … unless

there's a nervous system for it to inhabit. In stimmies, it's the recorded sensations of the actor you experience. In spikes, it's you yourself" (250). Like Baudrillard's value judgment of simulations, Shira is repelled by the notion of denying the existence of the world around her to enter a simulated version of her past, erased of its imperfections, but Shira herself has to enter the net, a hyperreal space, in order to protect their city and gather information on her lost son. While simulations are, on occasion, seen as negative, as a childish distancing from the "true", "real" life, they are also necessary to maintain that same life.

Gadi and his somewhat childish approach to simulacra are contrasted by Nili, described by Wolmark as a "genetically engineered and technologically enhanced body which both parodies and undermines the masculine definition of cyborg" (133). Being a delegate from a community with no men, in which reproduction was a community practice and whose culture revolved around a hybrid view of nature, Wolmarks adds that Nili is "a key metaphor for the kinds of positive changes that cybernetic systems have the potential to produce" (134). Despite being highly enhanced, Nili is grounded in the empirical world as well and, as Moylan highlights, "she rejects the mass entertainment culture (along with Gadi's invitation to become a stimmie star), enjoys the organic pleasures of Tikva" (261). Nili's effect is magnified by the contrast with Gadi – she represents an envisioned future of more stable and less moralistic-based assumptions of nature, that is, a hybrid utopia.

In the case of Piercy's cyborg, Yod has an underlying emotional programming inserted by Malkah that Shira only discovers much later. In Yod's early stages (and in the cyborgs that preceded him in Avram's project), she inserted emotional learning devices as a tool for controlling his violent impulses:

Yod is working heroically to be human; I see it every day. He wants desperately to satisfy Shira, to be her man … I wonder if the programming I gave him to balance his violent propensities wasn't a tragic error, if I did not do him an injustice in giving him

needs he may not be able to fulfil. … He strains, unsure how far he is from succeeding, because he cannot know what the real thing would be like. (340)

In my article for *Foundation*, I analysed this excerpt in relation to Yod's similarity to Shelley's creature, but there is also an underlying influence of a simulacrum of humanity to be scrutinized. Malkah's reflection on Yod's construction echoes Baudrillard's concerns when describing the simulacrum. The notion of human seems to no longer depend on what actual humans do or feel. Yod struggles with his programming because he must simulate humanity as closely as possible, but he is unable to realize if he is getting close or distant to a real human behaviour. He cannot know how "as closely as possible" is or if he is even capable of reaching it. The idea of human ceases to have any relation to individuals of that species; it is reduced to learned behaviour.

The movements traced by Yod are pervaded are pervaded by both simulacra and narrative, the latter encasing his trajectory in language, with its own representational limits. This cyberpunk novel shares a common trait with postmodern literature, the exposure of limits and mediations in narrative: in *He, She, and It*, the narrative is largely Malkah's, with several instances in which her narrative voice does not participate; ultimately, the reader must compose their own view of the conflict. That fragmented perspective provides a richer effect on the reader, but the exposure of the limitations of language, of mediated realities and personal experiences is also unsettling. In *The Simulacrum in Coded Discourse Parody*, even though the analysis consisted of different novels, I commented on the discomfort and pessimism that may emerge from these perceptions:

The hyperreal, as that sphere where signs deal with each other, is both a presence and a proof of absence regarding signs and narrative. As the mentioned illusions expose the fragility of binary and unambiguous concepts of signs, the emergence of the hyperreal

can indicate a break from labels, as a flood of language, allowing for a rebirth that
would provide less mediation in interpersonal relations. (122)

Like the resolutions in Collins's and Atwood's novels and in *He, She, and It*, that
overwhelming presence of independent signs, of simulacra, is not the trigger for chaos – rather,
the way humans and non-humans handle that mediating structure is. In *He, She, and It*, the
attacks on Tikva are not done by androids, or by the net itself; the net is an instrument to the
objectives of the corporate individuals who want access to Tikva's business secrets. While
Baudrillard poses, in his work *Why hasn't everything already disappeared?*, that all "pure"
experiences and all senses of reality were marked to vanish, Yod, Malkah and Shira collaborate
to subvert a threat that, yes, could not have been postulated without the mediation of
technology, but that was set in motion by a very human-like power struggle, that is, corporate
espionage. As I also claimed, "The pessimism that may result from the conclusion that no
communication is absolute or unframed can also be seen as an opportunity for visualizing the
forces executing these limitations" (122). In the novels, then, the pervasiveness of simulacra
unlocks a discussion on the ethics of technological advances, mediation, and human
accountability, all the while dialoguing with notions of utopia in their diverse literary spaces
and positing a utopian horizon of hope in the survival of Tikva after Yod's sacrifice and in
Nili's community.

2.4. Final remarks

As I proposed in the first section of this chapter, the novels analysed, in their variety of
relationships to concepts of utopianisms, provide diverse perspectives of how simulacra can
affect illusions of reality and how those illusions can be torn down to recreate more aware
scenarios, or at least to exclude false utopias. They display varying forms of sign awareness on
how meanings are constructed and can be taken over by the subject, be that subject a
protagonist, a narrator, or the readers themselves. In *The Doomsday Book*, previous

conceptions about what made the Middle Ages infamous for are seen from the perspective of Kivrin's experience. Although she suffers tragically because of her drive to know about their lives, history is less of a warped, mediated and selected story and more recovered through memory and critical nostalgia. In *The Heart Goes Last*, Charmaine is seduced by the allure of an abstract, consumerist utopia and, even after she escapes it, she must face the responsibility of her choices, when she discovers that she is not forced to love anyone or live anywhere – she is lost at the discovery, but she takes part in dismantling rather ominous practices in her utopia turned dystopia. The reader can only imagine how Charmaine would deal with the aftermath of the novel's events, but that suspension can also cause in the readership similar questions. Finally, in *He, She, and It*, there is the utopian-in-progress enclave of Tikva that manages to survive amid massive corporations, even if the brutal capitalism of Piercy's 2060s is not subverted; resistance remains in these enclaves and in Shira's new understanding of the implications of creating programmed life. Although simulacra are present in creating illusions and in maintaining *status quo*, as awareness about their processes increases, characters and readers find spaces of utopian hope for regaining agency over signs and their meanings.

Chapter three: The simulacrum in ideological entertainment

The simulacrum marks a dissolution of the idea of meaning in culture and communication. It occurs regardless of intent, across most media that are consumed and exchanged daily. The repercussions of simulacra in entertainment media, advertising, and even more traditional conceptions of art echo paradigms of power relations, exposing fragilities, supposedly "truth values" about an assumed natural state of affairs. In short, simulacra carry ideological repercussions that vary according to one's concept of ideology and to a medium's *modus operandi*.

Literature, the focus of this dissertation, has been affected by newer media and their narrative strategies; it incorporates codes from advertising, from television, and, in some instances, from social media. The crossings between these media within literature often coincide with what I have previously called the literary use of simulacra. In this chapter, I analyse the influence of the simulacrum in mass media, involving entertainment, advertising, and other mediated representations of a "reality" presented to characters (and often, to the readership) as a unified truth. In other words, I analyse the ideological overtones in world-building and in character awareness. The influence of simulacra-infused discourses in comparison to the world as seen by the characters will also be analysed, questioning the reliability of codes and mediations, providing evidence to the way the novels propose to solve (or not) the problem of "what if?", as speculative, fantastic and science fictional works are often based on.

This chapter focuses on representations of reality (and the limitations of saying "representation" and "reality") in contemporary science fiction novels, whose structure is heavily affected by mediation both in terms of cybernetic projection, advertising, and entertainment as tools for alienation and manipulation. The next subsections will discuss these processes in detail in Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991) and Suzanne Collins's *Mockingjay* (2013),

followed by a comparative and theoretical conclusion. The novels discussed in this chapter depict apocalyptic events that result from maximizing certain ideologies. A given ideology is extrapolated in different ways in each novel, but both culminate in an apocalyptic event. The pervasiveness of those ideologies, be it capitalism or militarism, is fostered by the literary influence by simulacra in their limited constructions of reality in media, namely entertainment, political propaganda, and product placement. After a break with a referential system of meanings and the exposure of the sign, language itself is broken down, and each novel presents a sort of reorganization of signs or signals an entrance of simulacra into the political sphere.

The connection between Baudrillard's simulacrum and the several concepts related to ideology, however, is not self-evident. The philosopher postulates the precession of simulacra as existing beyond the realm of ideology:

> [I]t is no longer a question of the ideology of power, but of the *scenario* of power. Ideology only corresponds to a corruption of reality through signs; simulation corresponds to a short circuit of reality and to its duplication through signs. It is always the goal of the ideological analysis to restore the objective process, it is always a false problem to wish to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum.
>
> This is why in the end power is so much in tune with ideological discourses and discourses in ideology, that they are discourses of *truth* – always good for countering the mortal blows of simulation, even and especially if they are revolutionary. (*Simulation*, 27)

This excerpt merits some unpacking, especially to evidence Baudrillard's view of ideology, his use of the Foucaultian term for discourse, and the relationship between simulation, truth value and ideological discourses. Firstly, Baudrillard, in quickly defining ideology as corruption of reality, communicates that he works with a definition of ideology that related to Terry Eagleton's "false consciousness." However, as Eagleton notes, pejorative concepts of ideology

coexist with notions that aim at a more neutral ground. He compares these perspectives in the beginning of his introduction, stating, "[r]oughly speaking, one central lineage, from Hegel and Marx …, has been much preoccupied with ideas of true and false cognition, with ideology as illusion …; whereas an alternative … has been less epistemological than sociological, concerned more with the function of ideas in social life than with their reality or unreality" (*Ideology*, 3). In his mention of ideology, Baudrillard does not elaborate on whether those corruptions of reality serve a dominant power or if they are manipulations regardless of their political bias. The idea, though, is that simulation would occur on another sign sphere. As ideological criticism would seek truth value, according to Baudrillard's separation of ideology and simulation, these could not be intertwined because simulation eliminates the possibility of reaching any truth. Simulation, in removing referential meanings, would make ideological criticism impossible.

In the end of his excerpt, Baudrillard indicates that power and ideology are so "in tune" because they contribute to *a* truth. This notion of a single truth behind power struggles fosters the interpretation that Baudrillard was, in fact, using the common Marxist definition of ideology, noted by Eagleton as the most common one, in "ideology has to do with *legitimating* the power of a dominant social group or class" (5). Surely, in the critical analysis for the following subsections, the majority of the ideologies behind the extrapolations that cause apocalyptic events can be traced back to currently dominant, ultra-capitalist ideologies. On the other hand, it is important to refrain from seeing a set of political stances as necessarily pejorative only because that is the set currently in power. Once again, as Eagleton notes, should a revolutionary ideology one day subvert the capitalist system, would it automatically transform into false consciousness and, therefore, narrow of reality as the previous configuration had done? If so, why change any systems? He includes in that debate the successes of the feminist movement, once marginalized and, nowadays, if not dominant, is not

unremarkable either, to argue that it is not because an ideology gains space in society that it is necessarily oppressive. Oppression and ideology, then, are not intrinsically related, but they have been strongly correlated throughout history; a critical perspective that allows for a distinction is an ongoing research investment.

This guides his discussion of ideology towards a three-pronged view so as to be applicable to different critical analysis materials. Eagleton indicates a first, more generic notion, that "involves the relations between … signs and processes of political power" (28-29). The second prong constitutes "ideas and beliefs (whether true or false) which symbolize the conditions and life experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class" (29). The third, finally, elaborates a "discursive field in which self-promoting social powers conflict and collide over questions central to the reproduction of social power as a whole" (29). Each of these inter-dependent definitions will be situated in critical discussion. For example, to reference once again to Atwood's *Oryx and Crake,* analysed in Chapter 1, there is, at the more general level, a consequence of that society's almost complete neglect for arts and humanities: the hard sciences, unchecked by sociology and ethics, implode the entire setting of life and language itself is inherited by a single individual. At the intermediate level, ultra-capitalist values contribute to that society's organization in walled compounds and poverty wastelands, separating a few wealthy individuals from the majority. Thirdly, these ideologies are often reinforced at the level of discourse, in the sources of entertainment offered to the characters. Discourse does, in the novels, at times reinforce one perspective or another of ideology, or, to use Jordan B. Kinder's (2012) argument, hyper-ideology, as I elaborate next.

Kinder begins his analysis on the relationship between hyperreality and ideology with the contention that "Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality is not only politically motivated but can function to illuminate how ideology is at work in the sphere of contemporary postmodern capitalism," against other criticism directed at the philosopher for being politically neutral (3).

Kinder's analysis is centred on companies' profiles in social media, bottled water, and contemporary practices such as the purchase of carbon credits. To him, these examples share a sort of total twist of the image/sign: "In the matrix of hyperreal, postmodern capitalism—capitalism purported as post-ideological—hyperreal commodities function to both mask and promote, simultaneously, capitalist ideologies as well as, paradoxically, anti-capitalist sentiments through consumption" ("Spectres of Simulacra," 11). Contrary to ideas of the end of history or that current society is post-ideological, Kinder poses the argument that ideology would now only exist in the past as an ideology itself. In turn, this hidden ideology, to him, preaches the naturalization of capitalist practices like commodification, including others that present themselves as resistance, but that merely provide the satisfaction of hating the system by consuming. That phenomenon is most visible in *Mockingjay*, as the war adverts sell a revolution that ultimately aimed at a mere switch in totalitarian leaders.

More importantly, I include in the analysis Kinder's conclusions that "hyperreality exposes the ways in which an ideological system … can effectively collapse dichotomous categories (activism/consumerism, ethics/consumption, person/corporation etc.) and appropriate anti-capitalist sentiments through *simulating* the categories that are arguably antithetical to capitalism." With the blurring of boundaries and with the disappearance of referents, interchangeable simulacra enable the absorbance of anti-system sentiments within themselves, with ideology playing a background role in those cannibalisms. The notion of hyper-ideology, suggested by Kinder, is tested against discourses across media in the novels analysed in this chapter.

Additionally, it is necessary to situate the discussion of ideology within science fiction. Firstly, scientificism and science fiction, that is, the rise of publications that extrapolated on recent scientific discoveries, brought about the notion that the scientific method would be the human tool to transcend our animal limitations. Early science fiction is firmly rooted in the

ideology of dominance of nature, expansion into new territories (planets, galaxies, constellations) or, in other words, it was highly colonialist and progressionist. Darko Suvin, for one, emphasizes "sf is not 'about' science but only correlative to a mature scientific method" ("*Novum* is as *novum* does," 14). The genre is rooted in the scientific toolkit, but not necessarily exercises "science" as it is. Suvin adds, "It [the *novum*] is obviously predicated on the importance and potentially the beneficence of novelty and change, linked to science and progress" ("*Novum*," 16), but very often scientific work is not directed at eliminating world hunger, for instance, focusing instead on developing new anti-aging face creams. Despite grand expectations associated with science and its achievements, the way that very impressive toolkit is directed at some developments instead of others not only carries certain ideologies with it, but as a result it may reduce the pace or even hinder advancements that might advance the species in its entirety. Suvin summarizes that thought in "Science as institution became a cultural pressure system simultaneously legitimating and disciplining the world's cadres or elite, in unholy tandem with converging pressure-systems disciplining the less skilled workforce usually called exploitation, sexism, and racism" ("*Novum*," 17). Of course, Suvin's (and my) criticism does not exist in a vacuum. To remember Baudrillard's own claim about ideology, cited previously, one could argue that Suvin's reading of how capitalism co-opted science is also ideological, that is, one could claim that Suvin's reading is based on the notion that a "truth" behind ideology can be illuminated, or that one could uncover any underlying falsehoods. However, as Eagleton has also stated, the illusion of neutrality of perspective has fallen to the ground with post-structuralist theory, which set its relativist echoes against absolute values such as neutrality.. As a result, ideological criticism does not necessarily present itself as recovering an unambiguous relationship between signs and referents. On the other hand, in highlighting structural processes of simulation, as Kinder does, it is possible to enable multifaceted views of the same discourse, as opposed to the naturalizing, conversation

ender point of view held by theorists that subscribe to the current era existing in "post-ideology."

Csicery-Ronay, Jr. provides a description of the role of science in science fiction that could be argued to be the simulacrum. The second sentence in his chapter on "Imaginary Science" says, "sf's science is always figurative. It's an *image* of science" (*Seven Beauties*, 111). His discussion approaches the several degrees to which sf works use an image of science more distant or closer to what would be "real" science. In the first half of the 20th century, scientifiction, in the words of Hugo Gernsback, was meant to serve three purposes: to instruct, to inspire, and to entertain (Csicery-Ronay Jr., *Seven Beauties*, 112). This implies that the "science" in the stories should be as exact as possible: the scientific rigour in what was published in *Amazing Stories* issues, for instance, was clearly considered to be of higher importance than storytelling skills. However, as science fiction became more varied and complex in the second half of the 20th century, so did representations (simulacra?) of science. Csicery-Ronay, Jr. adds, "They [sf works] use the language and history of technoscience to evoke the coherence and correspondence of the scientific worldview—but always with the freedom to violate, stretch, ironize, and problematize it" (*Seven Beauties*, 111). Scientific advancements have been represented as inherently positive not only in pulp magazines, but that view is also pervasive in popular space opera series, most notably in *Star Trek*. On the other hand, the novels studied here bring views that, although not necessarily negative, certainly work to expose illusions that result from assuming the good in "science" as an entity. Phillip Wegner notes the relation of that progressionist view of science to the Golden Age of pulps and, more importantly, he suggests a tendency toward realism within science fiction. To him, "a much more rigorous grounding of science fiction in actual scientific knowledge" was also accompanied by "a tremendous faith in science, rationality, and technology as 'the privileged solution to the world's ills'" (*Shockwaves,* 20). That view, also described by Jameson in

Archaeologies, once again according to Wegner, "produces group *ideologies* – but here ideology is to be thought of in terms of '*error* (false consciousness) to be replaced by a more appropriate form of truth (or better still, of *science*); but rather that ideology is always with us, that it will be present and necessary in all forms of society" (*Shockwaves*, 18). In other words, ideology would be inescapable and should be constantly managed in relation to opposing views. It important to note that Wegner does not elaborate on his concept of ideology, which could be seen as too general – like Eagleton claims, if everything is to be ideology, then nothing is –, but his analysis is focused on modernisms within science fiction. In short, he refers to a different period in the genre's history than the one scrutinized in this dissertation. However, his historical description of earlier periods, as the Golden Age of pulps, helps prove that ideologies have been behind the production of sf for a long time. Consequently, their changes over time can also be related to a more complex understanding of the discursive power of ideologies in and around literary sf texts.

Another aspect of the relationship between ideology and science fiction lies in the realm of utopias as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, the interaction between utopia and science fiction has been notable throughout its history, although its form changed and was reborn more than once. In order not to repeat arguments previously made, I intend to focus on the one statement that separates utopians within science fiction from anti-utopians. In the words of Lucy Sargisson,

> Ideologies contain utopias. Utopias inform that portion of a political ideology that maps out the world for us, helping us to plot our aspirations for the future. For example, socialism contains utopias of egalitarianism and liberalism seeks various (economic, social, and political) utopias of freedom. This aspect of utopianism (and this aspect of ideology) brings hope to politics: the hope and desire that things can be different. This is what drives us on and keeps the political world dynamic. Politics without Utopia

would be bleak indeed. Utopias (in the sense of visions of a better way of being) give

politics a sense of where it wants to be. In this sense, Utopia lies at the heart of politics.

("The Curious Relationship," 42)

Not only do imagined worlds contain ideologies within them, utopians (and that includes writers of critical dystopias) differ from anti-utopians in their active thinking that improvement is possible and, consequently, that better worlds are possible. Sargisson concludes that while there is a fear of utopias, imagining them is what constitutes the drive towards change. That drive towards change, incidentally, is coherent with Bloch's concept of educated hope, from the distinction he sees between abstract and concrete utopias, all concepts already presented and discussed in Chapter 2. As Ruth Levitas summarizes, "concrete utopia contains abstract elements, ideology may contain utopian elements, and utopia may contain elements of ideology" ("Educated Hope," 71). What remains to be added is that abstract utopias will contain simulacra that contribute to one's alienation from their own reality, as I demonstrate in the critical analysis.

Finally, before turning to the analysed novels, it is important to relate the concept of apocalypse and post-apocalyptic literature to how the simulacrum is instrumentalized in the naturalization of ideology, that is, in repackaging it as "post-ideology." James Berger, in a comprehensive analysis of representations of the apocalypse, describes three senses to the term "apocalypse": 1) the *escathon*, that is, the apocalyptic event in itself, the catastrophe; 2) the symbolic level of that event that renders it the significance of a major break with a society's previous logic, and 3) the explanatory function, that is, "in its destructive moment, [it must] clarify and illuminate the true nature of what has been brought to an end" (*After the End,* 5). The culmination of the naturalization of certain ideologies, in the three novels analysed here, lies in an apocalyptic event. In *Synners,* the worldwide strokes that kill hundreds and paralyse an entire version of the world that cannot survive without its mediating technologies comes

from mass entertainment, technophilia, and unethical technological development. In *Mockingjay*, the overthrow of the nation's system of government and the threat of a mere substitution are all echoes and consequences of using spectacle tools for political propaganda.

Interestingly, Berger notes the paradox of the post-apocalyptic representation, especially in literature: the "end" is almost never the actual end. The narrator survives, there are scattered remains and what is left to be seen is whether (and how) survival and reconstitution of society is feasible: "A disaster occurs of overwhelming, disorienting magnitude, and yet the world continues" (*After the End,* 6). In the novels, the "world" is never destroyed, but, rather, humans and their political, economic or societal structures crumble or are shaken at their core by the apocalyptic event. And that minute, survival, that may include wastelands or renewed representations of Eden, poses even more questions and, in Berger's view, tends to reveal what a given author believes to be the "true" nature of humankind.

An event, after all, is not necessarily the catastrophe that engulfs the species. In one last intersection between Berger's study of apocalypses and Wegner's comments on historical processes, the apocalyptic event becomes an *event* as it is repeated, at the level of narrative and survival. In *Life Between Two Deaths*, Wegner elaborates his concept of "event" based on Alain Badiou to argue that "the Event is the very possibility of a radical new beginning, the inauguration of that which was unexpected, unknown, and uncounted" (23). However, contrary to superficial assumptions, the *escathon* of the apocalyptic event is not the event in itself: Wegner quotes Slavoj Žižek, who explains, "when it erupts for the first time it is experienced as a contingent trauma, as an intrusion of a certain non-symbolized Real; only through repetition is this event recognized in its symbolic necessity" (24). In other words, the event is that repetition, that recognition of symbolic relevance, of a break with a perception of life that is no longer. Although his argument is focused on September 11, 2001 as the *event* to the fall of the Berlin wall's *contingent trauma*, in post-apocalyptic literary events, it is possible to claim

that the *escathon* stands for the contingent trauma whereas the narrative, the "after," and the processes of reconstruction that follow, at the level of narrative, are the events. Berger, in his second chapter to *After the End*, traces common threads between the idea of traumatic symptoms and narrative, relating them to apocalypses.

In the next section, I look into Pat Cadigan's *Synners* and its complex relationship with simulation, the body-mind duality, the processes of alienation involved in the making of multimedia content, especially immersive movies and the apocalyptic event identifiable in the Los Angeles collapse and its aftermath. Secondly, the analysis is turned to Suzanne Collins's *Mockingjay*, the last instalment of the popular *Hunger Games* trilogy, which stands apart from previous novels in its remarkable use of political propaganda to sway public opinion towards the simulacrum of a revolution, leading to the implosion of the concept of state previously existing in Collins's imagined world. Finally, I summarize the simulacrum and the observations it enabled for the five novels studied in this dissertation, comparing critical notes with the hypotheses presented in Chapter 1.

3.1. The medium as the ultimate form of existence: technocratic ideologies in *Synners*

From the five novels that are analysed in this dissertation regarding the literary use of simulacra, Pat Cadigan's *Synners*, published in 1991, is by far the most obvious object of study. The book involved virtual existences, search engines, immersive technologies for enhanced realities, and it approached the problems of discarding one's flesh to be completely, irreversibly, plugged in "the net." In the introduction he wrote for the novel's tenth anniversary edition, Neil Gailman comments on how Cadigan's book seems to have caught up with reality: "[b]ack then, the future that Cadigan described was edgy and out there and perfectly strange, a torrent of overload, predictive and cautionary" (xii). Upon reading it once again to write that

introduction, Gailman comments on how his memories of 1991 were "corrupted," in the sense that he has trouble remembering a time when "even antiviral software was an SF notion" (xii). The author herself, in an interview given at the 2018 edition of Octocon in Dublin, states that when she wrote *Synners*, "there was a lot more science fiction in it than there is today," to which her friend inquires, "Did they supress it?" to hear as a response "No, honey, it just caught up with me".[29] More than the authors whose works were discussed in the previous chapter, Cadigan actively speculates on the future to write her works and, as a result, with time they become less and less "science fiction proper."

Although that could be said about several authors and works of sf, *Synners* is particularly relevant to analyse considering Baudrillard's simulacrum because its literary presence occurs in two principal phases that are abruptly interrupted by an apocalyptic event. An overwhelming naturalization of the superiority of the mind over the body, a pervasive idea in cyberpunk, allows for skull implants to be developed and sold without considering their consequences. The second phase involves a breakage of language as the narrative dissolves into simulated images – but that dissolution, as I elaborate in this subsection, is already a symptom of a system-wide collapse.

Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke award, *Synners* balances the perspectives of four main characters: programmer Sam, her father and synthesizer Gabe, his colleague Gina and, most importantly, Visual Mark. Although the setting does include a specific time marker, it is fair to assume that it involves the late 21st or even the 22nd century, from a reference to Bob Dylan's "I want you" song from 1966 as "old, twenty-century music." Set in Los Angeles, the novel describes a society that already lives immersed in simulations even before the radical *novum* is released to the public. A corporation dedicated to producing and distributing immersive

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[29] Octocon is a recurring, yearly meeting, focused mostly on Irish science fiction. I attended Cadigan's interview and thus was able to personally record the statement mentioned in this paragraph. For more information on the event, <https://2018.octocon.com/>.

simulations, ironically named Diversifications, is the centre of the action, where Gabe is an employee, Gina and Visual Mark are freelancers, and scientist Joslin displays her most recent invention: skull sockets that enabled total projection on the net. Instead of using virtual reality goggles (nowadays available for purchase online), people would then be able to completely remove their awareness of their bodily surroundings to project their lives onto the virtual world completely. Because of the obscene profit margins that such a development signifies, its approval comes quickly (through bribes, although that is not so much a fictional element as a grim description of political dealings) in legal and governmental branches, but, before long, one of the consciousnesses (Visual Mark's) throws what is described as a "virtual clot," a virus, into the simulation systems. It had not been the first time it happened (the inventor's unexplained death foreshadows that development), but it is the one that threatens their societal structure as a whole. Hundreds of people plugged to their sockets have strokes and the entire civilization quickly crumbles, as everything, even the cars moving along the Los Angeles freeway, are digitally controlled. The crisis is averted in a suspended state without reliable resources, with humans becoming machines and powering systems with their bodily energy and with Visual Mark's merge with a newly autonomous artificial intelligence. Traumatized by the events, Gabe, one of the main characters, gives up on simulations and isolates himself, and the novel is concluded with a visit from Gina, who represents a more ethical and self-aware perspective on the inevitability of technology in human lives.

Cadigan was the only woman author recognized by her writing at the height of the cyberpunk movement of the 80s within science fiction. *Mirrorshades*, the anthology of cyberpunk short stories edited by Bruce Sterling, includes his introduction that is more commonly read as a manifesto for the subgenre in its obviously proud and complimentary tone. He compares the cultural scenario in which sf is inserted in the eighties to the "comfortable era" of Gernsback, when sf was "safely enshrined in its ivory tower" (xiii). However,

contradicting the expectation that he might criticise the overvaluing of science in the genre, he looks at the counterculture of the 60s. To him, it would have been, "rural, romanticized, anti-science, anti-tech" (xii); as a result, cyberpunk would be a sort of counter-counterculture in which technology was unescapable, visceral, and omnipresent. In his overly macho description of cyberpunk, he praises the era's idols as "hacker and the rocker," and classifies it as "spontaneous, energetic, close to its roots" (xiii). Cadigan's short story in the anthology, "Rock On," is the first appearance of her character Gina, in first-person narration and featuring an already resistant sinner to the increasingly simulated modes of production for music. The isolation of Cadigan as the only woman cyberpunk writer has already been extensively disproven by critics such as Nixon and Wolmark, who highlight, for instance, Marge Piercy as another notable author in the subgenre, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The reception of *Synners*, specifically, was widely positive. In Marleen Barr's *Future Females: the next generation* (1991), June Deery focuses on the intertextual relationship between William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Piercy's *He, She, and It*. Considered not the first but the most influential author of cyberpunk, more than a sizeable portion of the genre's criticism seeks to argue for recognizing another work in its contrast and dialogue with the *Sprawl* trilogy. Deery focuses on the aspect of biopolitics in the "net" figured in *Neuromancer*. She begins by pointing out the common thread between the notion of cyberspace, coined by Gibson, and fiction, that is, that "[b]oth literary fiction and cyberspace are simulated worlds generated by code. Cyberspace is located somewhere between fiction and reality (in a position closer to enacted drama than the novel)" (89). One could argue, even, that cyberspace can be the ultimate realm of the simulacrum. In the same collection, Elisabeth Kraus approaches the issue of competitive truths coexisting in simulated environments, focusing specifically on *Synners*. While Sterling praises the hacker who "jacks in" the system, Kraus evidences that Cadigan's protagonists, "unlike their male partners, … never choose a bodiless existence in

cyberspace" (130), but rather enter and leave that cyberspace and exist in both environments instead of praising one over the other. That statement is mostly applied to Gina, who longs for a past in which rock n' roll was a corporeal experience, but Sam also exists outside the system, constantly pulled in by the AI, Art Fish.

Before entering into the relevance of the Schrodinger's cat paradigm to *Synners*, Kraus connects the novel's themes to Baudrillard's simulacrum, stating, "The computer is *the* simulacrum machine par excellence in Baudrillard's sense, because it allows people to hack, manipulate reality, or create 'a *real* unreal experience'" (*Synners* 197, emphasis in original). Gina's frustration at how simulation has substituted her supposedly previous real experiences is hardly ever understood by other characters, particularly Gabe, whose better life was the simulated action sequence he developed in the net. In their first meaningful encounter, she rages about how John Lennon had ceased to exist as a person not when he was murdered, but when companies developed a bot-Lennon to continue creating music and existing in entertainment media:

> I remember my grandmother telling me that, how really fucking awful it was, and fifteen years later they were still squeezing videos out of the guy, like they forgot somebody wiped him out, and it had gone from, like, because they loved him to it not mattering what had happened because they could still get the fucking videos. They cooked up a *simulation*, a fucking *simulation* of the man and got it to do interviews and give simulated answers to simulated questions before the estate pulled the plug on that . . . Do you understand a fucking word I'm saying? (215)

Gina embodies a criticism on the sublimation of the medium of music to the realm of the simulation, removing the experience of both creating and enjoying music from human individuals to the profit of label companies and mass media conglomerates. Cadigan's projection of a simulated John Lennon, although absurd, became "real" as the rapper Tupac,

deceased in 1996, was "revived" as a hologram that played a concert in 2012[30] and virtual concerts have become commonplace.[31]

There are ideological backgrounds to both the popularity of simulated celebrities in media and Gina's radical criticism on it. To use Eagleton's perspective once more, "[i]t may help to view ideology less as a particular *set* of discourses, than as a particular set of effects *within* discourses" (194). As a result, "if ideology cannot be divorced from the sign, then neither can the sign be isolated from concrete forms of social intercourse" (195), leading to the idea that, then, the sign is inseparable from ideology, and the simulacrum, in separating sign from referent, would merge all ideologies in hyperreality. However, that is not what occurs when literary simulacra are associated to that concept. Instead of looking at the sign and its subsequent processes of increased simulation and hyperreality as a disappearance, to understand the sign as code means it could never have possibly "corresponded" to a profound reality – rather, the classical concept of universal truths and realities falls apart with the presence of simulacra in media and the arts. Since codes have always existed within society and depend on our "forms of social intercourse," a supposed post-ideology is unreachable even amongst simulations. Rather, signs are repurposed, forming and exposing other effects on discourse. At the level of Cadigan's novel, while it is possible to argue that the worldwide acceptance of Lennon's simulated projection does indeed alienate his fans from the real man who was murdered before the technology to simulate him even existed, Lennon's projection also poses a question. To which extent the John Lennon who appeared in the original videos and interviews was "the real" John Lennon and not another, non-technical projection, created by himself and the entertainment industry? Gina's radical criticism on the perversity she sees

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[30] Footage available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLf920Fcaoc>.
[31] Other examples include virtual performances for live audiences, as Psy's "Gangnam style" virtual concert in Seul and, more recently, virtual concerts for virtual audiences, such as Marshmello's performance inside the videogame Fortnite, for nearly 11 million users that were online at the same time. This last example is available at the following URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBsCzN-jfvA>.

in simulating a musician comes from an effect *within* discourse. She reacts negatively to the idea that music and the artist could be simulated, because to her, that simulation would suggest that, even though she made her career fabricating visual renderings of music for virtual audiences, she still sees music as the space of the sublime, a space that would have been tainted by simulation. That is the opinion she voices in "Rock On" and in the beginning of *Synners*, but that is not her position once the novel is concluded.

Those effects within language that constitute ideological practices are also tools for fabricating naturality, unification, stability in a society that is increasingly revealed as constructed in opposition to nature. Like the immersive game, music, and video content produced by Diversifications in *Synners*, "Language itself is infinitely productive; but this incessant productivity can be artificially arrested into 'closure' – into the sealed world of ideological stability, which repels the disruptive, decentred forces of language in the name of an imaginary unity" (Eagleton, 196-197). This massive productivity performed by Diversifications, therefore, is in tune with ideologies of profit, of infotainment, and even of containment of any rebellious energy. Gabe's action simulations are the most striking example of that. As I commented in a previous article, Gabe's immersions "however, are not of an explicit sexual nature; … Gabe always enters the same adventurous simulation, helped and validated by his two female pals, Marly and Caritha. He works the minimum required to avoid being fired, spending the most time possible in the simulation" (2018, 60) Even before Marly and Caritha are instrumentalized by him to stop the progression of the net virus, "entering the simulation, Gabe seeks that same validation through manipulation of beings, environment, and himself. Both simulations were created from actual women, but he cannot fathom their real selves; to him, they were 'twinklings; fantasies; imaginary playmates' (Cadigan 1991: 44)" ("Man-Machine," 60). Laura Chernaik interprets the evolution of Gabe's stance regarding his simulation as "the psychological effect of the working through, in cyberspace, of each fantasy

that is significant. Gabe discovers that Marly and Caritha were infected with the Dr Fish virus, so they were not as imaginary as he thought; he begins to act in the 'real world' as he acts in fantasy" ("Refiguring Nature," 78). He, then, comes from a state of escapism into the simulation, alienated from his life (his daughter, for one, had become estranged, his wife left him). Eventually, he uses the technology of the projections to rescue real lives. Although Chernaik might see his previous adventures in cyberspace as a sort of "training" for the real problems, I would argue that his behaviour towards technology changes both from the urgency of an apocalyptic event and from a break with the notion that the virtual should only be an escape, a space for satisfying desire.

Surely, the most striking narrative example of how hyperreality permeates the world created by Cadigan in *Synners* lies in Visual Mark. I have already discussed how he stands for a perspective that sees the medium as superior and the flesh as an impediment to the supposedly pure appreciation of art, especially music. It is important to add to that a discussion focused on his development as a character compared to Baudrillard's phases of the image. In Baudrillard's *Why hasn't everything already disappeared?*, he discusses the trajectory of the image in modernity, which can be mirrored in Visual Mark's creative process and in the most pervasive *novum* in the novel, the skull sockets: "It would seem that the mirror has got caught up in the game and has transformed everything into a virtual, digital, computerized, numerical 'reality' – the destiny of the image being merely the tiny detail of this anthropological revolution" (33). In *Synners*, Visual Mark embodies a trajectory from the experiential to the simulated, from what Baudrillard might call the reality and the constructed reality. Born human, Visual Mark is the main test subject for the development of the skull sockets that allow total immersion in the net and in simulation software.

Gradually, he abandons his body, "the meat," claiming that his subjectivity in the net was more complete and he could be more himself than ever in his body. The narrative suggests

he was only a channel for a succession of images: "He'd just lie there and watch the pictures. … The pictures ran the way they would, and he was just the medium" (94-95). This endless stream of images in Visual Mark's yet-human brain dialogues with Baudrillard's theory of the suppression of referents by simulacra, that is, the character displays a distinct distancing from reality, towards a mirrored, constructed, virtual reality in which images flow and converse with each other, without any connection to a carnal, experience-based existence.

Visual Mark's perspective also has a platonic character: his body, as a limitation, prevents him from experiencing music and images in an unmediated form. For him, the technology in development freed him from his earthly restraints: "Video wasn't new even then, but it was getting better all the time, all the stuff you could do, hotsuits and artificial-fucking-reality, shit, you could finally be the music" (90). Cadigan's character embodies a parody of the technophiliac ideology (in the sense of "set of beliefs by a socially significant group," by Eagleton, that socially significant group being people in science and philosophers who believed humanity would reach its apex merely through implementing the scientific method in all spheres of life) behind the cyberpunk movement, preached by Sterling as the ultimate evolution of sf. Cyberpunk in itself is not an ideology, but it can be read as an expression of a set of ideologies. Sterling, the most outspoken writer and editor of the subgenre, summarizes the values imbued in cyberpunk narratives through the title and image of the mirrorshades:

> By hiding the eyes, mirrorshades prevent the forces of normalcy from realizing that one is crazed and possibly dangerous. They are the symbol of the sun-staring visionary, the biker, the rocker, the policeman, and similar outlaws. Mirrorshades – preferably in chrome and matte black, the Movement's totem colors appeared in story after story, as a kind of literary badge. (*Mirrorshades*, xi)

Cyberpunk retains the fascination with science from the golden age of the pulps, but includes in its hybridity the notion that science fiction is no longer relegated to the imaginary of the

future; however, its way of looking forward already is, in many ways, contemporary. The punk ideals that include outlaws and vigilantes have been recognizably associated with sexist ideologies of rationality and individualism.[32] H. J. Shulz, in discussing the ideology behind sf criticism throughout its history, highlights a tendency that I wish to avoid here, of homogenizing sf production behind one ideology, in the sense of "false consciousness." He elaborates: "It is precisely in the tensions between the generic act … and various ideological perpetuations of the real (or assumed) *status quo* (encoded in various generic materials assimilated by SF and represented in "content") . . . that the ideological life of SF texts is to be sought" ("Science Fiction and Ideology," 173). When Cadigan creates Visual Mark, unashamedly virtual and disgusted by the flesh, she is parodying the macho hacker of cyberpunk in a character that is not sexually desirable, not idolized, but a strange, sexless character that is tolerated because of the profit margins he means for Diversifications. Visual Mark's mirrorshades do not prevent "normalcy forces" from noticing his strangeness, but they highlight it. He becomes, in fact, grotesque.

Once the technology allowing him to exist directly inside the simulated reality of the net is created, he abandons his body completely. His motto, "Change for the machines," is at first presented very ironically. Gabe sees him for the first time in front of a vending machine, "moving slowly, like underwater" (105), and asks him if he needs help, that is, if he needs "change for the machine" – at which point Visual Mark seems surprised at having been "understood." Surely, the irony in the motto's introduction precedes a long narrative describing Visual Mark's disregard for any sense of purity of the body, evidenced by his terming it "meat." His pull towards the simulated can also be read as a different perspective on mediation and of simulacra: that as humankind increasingly merges with machines in general, that is, with

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[32] Wolmark and Nixon, previously cited, elaborate on that, and I discuss those arguments in my (2018) article on *Synners* and *He, She, and It.*

artificial intelligences or with mediating systems (such as the skull sockets), seeking a finite, natural definition of human is a futile endeavour. As Csicery-Ronay Jr. remarks on the grotesque in sf, "[a]ny deviation from those laws, in any object living or dead, organic or inorganic, corporeal or mathematical, is a shock to the system. And when these anomalies directly affect the living sentient beings who derived the body of laws in the first place, the effect is grotesque" (*Seven Beauties*, 185). His view that the sublime lies only in the medium (be it music or image) is grotesque as it exaggerates the body beyond its limits, becoming a parody or caricature of its former self. Visual Mark's warped sense of sublime is ironic, in that *Synners*, as Chernaik highlights, Cadigan does not write about the sublime, but about how "[i]nstead, transnational capitalism and biotechnology/information technology are *material* practices and discourses which interact with each other in the fictional world of *Synners* just as in the 'real' world" ("Refiguring Science," 74, my emphasis). Cadigan's hyperreality, then, is enabled by a set of ideologies that affects individuals in unpredictable forms – and that set of ideologies, unstopped, sets off a destruction event, which is my next point of argument.

In simple terms, the cause for the apocalyptic event is the excess of unchecked mediation. Cadigan's protagonists are programmers, hackers and "synners," that is, synthesizers, "who work with the new technology and are changed by it" (Chernuik, 70). They produce commodities for mass entertainment and escapism. Because of Visual Mark's unique biology and his personal wishes to be as projected as possible, to use David Seed's words, he "supplies one link between the multiple interlocking systems of his body and those of anyone connected by the sockets" ("Cyberpunk and Dystopia," 82). This projection occurs at the same time the net's glorified search engine, the AI named Dr. Art Fish, gains consciousness and is attempting to prove its own agency. Mark's projection and Fish's drives culminate in a widespread collapse of the online systems.

An electronically transmitted virus apparently causes the deaths. In addition, it penetrates the computerized traffic control system and produces a massive failure. "Gridlid" becomes gridlock. As usual for Cadigan, the cause can never be defined, as one character insists: "It's not a virus, or a bomb" (357). … At the end of *Synners*, the identification between vehicle and free movement is dramatically disrupted as more and more characters circulate on foot. (Seed, "Cyberpunk and Dystopia," 82)

Visual Mark sees it coming before it happens. Because it had never happened before, naming it a virus gives it at the same time a biological and technological tone.

Seed comments accurately on the purposeful choice by Cadigan to situate the novel in Los Angeles, a city, already in the late twentieth century, immersed in simulation and in the reification of experiences. Seed notes how Baudrillard compared the promises of living in the city to his actual experience, that while the city offers the "ideal freedom of movement," that could only be realized in the middle of the desert and, paradoxically, he adds that "driving in L.A. involves participating in an essentially collective propulsion" (82). Once again, individual gratification via commodities, promised in advertising, helps disseminate and naturalize ultra-capitalist ideologies, even though movement in the city is revealed as anything but free, notable in Cadigan's inclusion of autopilots and, even before their time, targeted ads. As Kinder reminds us, "[a]dvertising, here, is essentially *always-already* an exercise in hyperreality—it is the creation of an alternate or virtual reality that consumers are offered the chance to enter and it is within this arena that *desire* is constructed and perpetuated" (5). The apocalyptic event, thus, is the result of an ideology naturalized within society via simulacra.

The temporarily focalized narrator in Mark warns the reader of the impending collapse:

The problem was, the meat was going to struck out again, any time now, and when it did, that would be the big one, and as long as the wired were in the head, that meant the big one – the Big One – would charge right out of the meat, into the wires, into the

system, where the little one was already waiting, and if – no, *when* – the two of them got together, they'd make something that couldn't be called a stroke, not anymore. Something like an unguided missile, a loose cannon rolling through the system, and when it found a receptor site, someone online with the sockets. (Cadigan, 326)

Two characteristics of the passage are noteworthy: firstly, that *Synners* has a biological factor causes ripples in the simulation, not just for one user, but for the entire system. The limitations of "the meat" threaten the simulations. One interpretation is a reminder that simulation, virtual and hyperreality are only possible *because* they are anchored in the meat; an attempt to break that bond would incur in a secular equivalent to a sacrilege, a monstrous breakage. A single person's stroke causes ripples so wide that it becomes virtual, reaches other bodies of "meat" and ends them, virtual and flesh. That thought is one of the factors that leads Visual Mark to try and disconnect from the net, but, tragically, he can no longer be separated from his socket. His next choice is to alert other people of the impending stroke, trying to get word to Keely, Gina, anyone that will answer. The reader is, then, led to believe that the narrative will enact some sort of punishment for Visual Mark's greediness in projection. That expectation is related to a common trait in apocalyptic literature, as indicated by Berger: "It is a study of the ideological and psychological forces that direct the apocalyptic fissions and fusions. The apocalypse would be . . . not only final and complete but absolutely clarifying. It would unmistakably separate good from evil" (8). As a result, Visual Mark, along with the scientists who developed the sockets, the owners of Diversifications, and all synners (including Gina and Gabe), as they plugged into the systems, should be wiped out when the Big One eventually came. Visual Mark's choice to name the final stroke Big One is also immersed in apocalyptic connotations that are commonly related to the beginning of the universe (the Big Bang).

Cadigan's novel does not fulfil those expectations, though. As Chanuik notes, human, projected, and artificial intelligences eventually contribute to prevent the stroke from wiping

the digital systems entirely, "[i]t is the psychological effect of the working through, in cyberspace, of each fantasy that is significant" (78). As it happens in Piercy's *He, She, and It*, the narrative displays hacker and programmers' actions as figurations, that is, as scenes, images, as music, as opposed to lines of code. This is the centre of my point regarding simulacra in science fiction: literature not only exposes the endless replication of images, but it also makes active use of figuration to expose the unrepresentable in a comprehensible manner.

Gina finds Mark inside the net after the Big One has already begun to take lives. When she says she needs to go to "medical" to try and recover Mark's body, he interrupts her, arguing, "Medical was one of the first places it went, it's all changed there, too . . . The only place to go now is into the context. If you can find it. Between the context and the content, between the mainline and the hardline, falls the shadow" (Cadigan, 364). Mark's interruption encourages Gina to try to prevent the spread of the stroke by trying to stop the replication of content without context – in other words, of signifiers without signifieds. To take control of the stroke, he instructs Gina that she has not to stop the replication of images, of signs, but to become part of it, to "change for the machines," too. His reference to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* contributes to the atmosphere of impending doom and contributes to the very context of which she must become part.

After she is removed from the net where Visual Mark merges with Art Fish, Gina experiences the endless replication of images that mix things she has seen prior to projecting, memories of herself, of Mark's, and random images pervasive in their culture. She tries to separate one from the other, unsuccessfully: "that was a mixture of both real time and… what? *Nonrealtime? Unrealtime? Un-fucking real. The real real and real unreal and the unreal real – just how high up the stupidsphere are we, and how much higher are we going to go?*" (393). Visual Mark himself, as he acknowledges this total separation from his body, seems to gain a capacity to see context in content, to understand replication. "a universe of knowledge within

him, everything from every part of the system . . . all scanned from the countless thousands that had passed through to be simulated, packaged in incidents called *commercials* and *releases* and *videos*, and more, sequences called *news*, *talk shows*, *episodes*" (361). The narrative criticizes the multiplication of simulacra at the same time it is composed by them. Simulation is at the same time the cause and the instrument for salvation. The apocalyptic event is not prevented, but its scale is diminished by hybrid action between the virtual and the actual, corporified in the merging between AI and bodiless Visual Mark. In the end, the stroke causes several deaths, but humanity – and the AI ironically renamed Markt – is given the tools to rebuild its civilization.

The denouement is coherent with Berger's commentary on the apocalypse in postmodernity being opposed to the moralistic good *versus* evil of common expectations. In that scenario, when "the absolute evil is identified and isolated, the Blessed will look across the abyss and see themselves" (8), that is, as narratives (and their foregrounding ideologies) become fragmented, "the post-apocalypse of the postmodern is Baudrillardian simulation . . . The catastrophe is the end of the whole apocalyptic hermeneutic itself" (8). If there is no good to be revealed, the subject is forced to look upon themselves as the agent of destruction. Seed argues that this sense of end, in typical postmodern replication, is only temporary and that temporariness is a sign of Cadigan's "political scepticism that change is both temporary and partial" ("Cyberpunk and Dystopia," 82). Although the apocalyptic event does not cause a radical breakage in the logic of Gina's society, I would argue that negating the possibility of change only serves the purpose of naturalizing the *status quo*, a paradox indicated by Berger in his approximation between postmodern criticism and apocalypse. There is, to him, a sort of synthesis from the hybridism that results from these paradoxes and fragmentations, a tentative resolution in sf that "what survives is some version of humanity in the midst of the unhuman," that the essence of humanity would be "what these apocalypses unveil" (10). That is, as a matter

of fact, the case with *Synners*. There is no good or evil to be expunged, but there is a clearer, albeit more hybrid, understanding of humanity and its role as it "changes for the machines."

There is a final aspect of literary simulacra in *Synners*, and it pertains to the mode of narration, as opposed to plot. Chernaik has already commented in her article on Cadigan's literary choice of polyglossia, drawing from Bakhtin's concept, claiming that each character holds a perspective on the events described in the story, highlighting how each character's perspective is not necessarily seen or recognized by the others. More curious, however, is the polyphony in *Synners*. Not only different characters have different perspectives that they must complement each other in order to make sense of their reality, but also the narrator's choice conveys that disjointedness, woven from a mixture of event description with programming language, its discourse markers and abbreviations, and typographic choices. Interactions between hackers with online interfaces are presented in italics between angle brackets, resembling coding language used today, as in ">*Are services in progress?*< she asked. >*Prayer services require an offering.*<" (36). Even that typographic choice by Cadigan inverts the actual use of angle brackets in programming: in HTML language, they are supposed to contain, not to separate, commands from the rest of the code.[33] While the brackets emphasize the virtuality of that discourse, they also highlight that it is *discourse*, not command – the interactions between synners and interfaces are as hybrid as the subjects enacting agency in the novel. The symbol for command in a specific coded discourse is removed from its context, it is inverted and resignified.

Although typographical interferences in the fabric of the text could be the topic for an entirely separate research, regarding literary simulacra, they help at the same time to appeal to a reader's previous knowledge of online platforms and displace them enough to cause

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[33] For instance, means a command for the following text to be displayed in bold until marked with . Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bracket>, last accessed Feb. 2nd, 2019.

estrangement. Entire sentences in capital letters denote not screaming, but "virtual" screaming: "ATTENTION, GINA. 'Right,' she mumbled. 'You don't have to shout.' SORRY, YOU'LL GET USED TO IT," (226) Visual Mark instructs her after she has her skull socket implanted. As her immersion progresses, his voice becomes italics, a resource also used to contrast Gina's pragmatism to her emotions in previous excerpts of the novel. Eventually, the reader, like the character, cannot fully separate what is someone else's voice, Gina's inner monologue, her words or the images fluctuating in her perception. Her narrative focus is entirely submerged in hyperreality: "They were colors now, making patterns in the black, spurting, retreating, spreading down the bowl of the sky. Colored light streamed down into her hand; she flung it back up again, making new patterns" (227). As the pictures "come to her," (227) Gina learns to manipulate images and exchange them for one another as much as she is driven by the images themselves. "Just run with it. Let the pictures come," (227), instructs Mark. Although Kraus describes Visual Mark as the "stereotypical cyberpunk hero" and Gina as the "motherly lover" (139) when discussing gender in cyberpunk, it is difficult to see Visual Mark as stereotypical since, as discussed previously, he is liminal, exaggerated, parodic in his dismissal of his body and, consequently, of his masculinity and sexuality. Wolmark summarizes these liminal portrayals when she states that "Cadigan's narratives try to avoid the kind of technological essentialism that surfaces in . . . Gibson, where a distinction is made between the high-adrenaline, male-dominated world of cyberspace and the female-dominated, passive world of . . . direct input soaps" (*Aliens*, 121). I would go an extra step and argue that this breakage with tradition occurs not only in gender roles, but in the form of the novel, by means of literary simulacra: hyperreality is the environment in which signs are received, emptied, and then exchanged. At first, synners do that for money, for their survival, to create entertainment commodities that reinforce and numb the *status quo*, but, faced with an impending apocalyptic event, they retake the technology and repurpose it – more importantly, they repurpose

themselves. One example of self-repurposing is Sam, Gabe's daughter, who modifies her insulin pump to become a human battery and power Art Fish before the stroke destroys all networks.

The ideologies naturalized in the hyperreality of *Synners* include, on the one hand, technophilia and a specific aspect of ultra-capitalist practices in the production of mass entertainment, and technophobia, in the fear of virtual experiences that some characters experienced after the apocalyptic event. On the other hand, the narration is not ambiguous towards the end, but seems to find a space for improvement (or dystopian hope, according to Baccolini). Sam tells Gina, "Doing all that for the sake of pouring it into simulated reality. After being here for – I don't know . . . that doesn't make much sense anymore. Doing all that just to simulate doing all that," to which the older woman replies, "Simulate my ass! I did video just so I could do all that shit!" (472-473). By inverting the order of priority, Gina, previously angry with the disappearance of live music, "the real thing," learns to take control of the simulations she produces so she can still enjoy her bodily sensations. One could argue that her solution is self-serving and does not impact on the ideologies perpetrated by the simulations she still produces, but, by being able to leave Mark behind in the net, she becomes, in the novel, the symbol for a hybrid, reformed stance on the relationship between the development of technology and daily experiences. When Gabe tells Gina he believes that the sockets should be banned, she replies:

> 'Forget Schrodinger. Yo, Pandora, how's your headache? . . . Mark knew. The door only swings one way. Once it's out of the box, it's always too big to go back in. Can't bury that technology. All we can do is get on top of it and stay the fuck on top. . . All *appropriate technology* hurt somebody. A whole lot of somebodies. Nuclear fission, fusion, the fucking Ford assembly line, the fucking airplane. *Fire*, for Christ's sake. Every technology has its original sin." (475)

Gina's discourse reveals a mixture of myths in her argument that blends the realms of science and religion: from Schrodinger, the scientist of quantum physics, to Greek mythology in Pandora's mention, finally culminating in Christian mythology to argue that the development of new technologies, including virtual worlds, is unavoidable, aligning that discovery and its manipulation with the fall from the garden of Eden. However, instead of representing herself and other synners as corrupt and malign, Gina uses her mosaic of references to argue for awareness of creation: "Makes us original synners. And we still got to live with what we made" (475). In synthesis, *Synners* looks at the issues caused by unchecked capitalism and hyperreality, employing simulacra in its narration, character development and in the way subjects become increasingly hybrid to salvage their civilization. More importantly, understanding that simulacra do occur and the illusions they may propose leads to awareness and a movement towards responsibility to one's creation. In the next section for this chapter, I look at spectacles and the void of political propaganda in the scenographic revolution depicted by Suzanne Collins in *Mockingjay*.

3.2. The propos of non-revolution: literary simulacra in political struggle in *Mockingjay*

The final instalment of the *Hunger Games* trilogy, *Mockingjay*, is the only novel from this dissertation' *corpus* to be considered part of the Young Adult niche. Arguably, all three novels in the series by Suzanne Collins abound with literary simulacra, and I have looked at those regarding the first novel, *The Hunger Games*, in my master's thesis (2016). In that occasion, however, my focus was on the culture of infotainment, as described by Douglas Kellner in his *Media Spectacle* (2003), especially on the spectacle of reality television. In *Mockingjay*, however, the literary simulacra are confined to a very specific sphere within the novel's structure: the production and dissemination of political propaganda. The protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, sways the result of a civil war selling her own image and voice, this time for

a revolution, instead of feeding the bottomless pit of entertainment that sustained the Capitol's power over the country's citizens. The idea of a war being decided on propaganda, on the replication of images as opposed to actual shots fired and invasions, not only is not strange to 21th century readers, but the novel's closure also warns its young intended reading public not to exchange one simulacrum of leadership for another.

Surely, that *Mockingjay* is a Young Adult novel and the closure to a trilogy has its impact on the form of the book. Sara Buggy provided a deep analysis of Young Adult series and their portrayals of the body (specially the female body) in dystopian settings (2015). Firstly, she addresses the issue that the label Young Adult imposes, with its variations in age range, in formulaic practices, and even on the resistance literary academics have displayed regarding their study as legitimate. The one aspect that can be ascertained from the label Young Adult is that it is mostly useful to the bookselling market: it affects positions in bookstores (Buggy notes how Easons, an Irish franchise of bookstores, separates Teen from Young Adult works (6-7)). At the level of structure and narrative, more important for my analysis here, Buggy cites Patty Campbell and the need for a Young Adult novel to be centred around an adolescent perspective: "a YA novel must have a teen protagonist speaking from an adolescent point of view, with all the limitations of understanding this implies" (Campbell *apud* Buggy, 7). That distinction brings with itself two implications: that Young Adult novels are conceived, from the start, to reach a certain market share, and that writing a teenager that is overly complex would cause a break in verisimilitude for the reader. Because I cannot vouch for the entire subgenre of YA novels, in the case of *Mockingjay* that would account for something that its narrative has and that *Synners* or *Oryx and Crake* lack: certainties. Katniss is certain about her motives, about the source of the evil she believes to be fighting – one could argue that such certainty is what causes her to let herself become a poster girl for "the revolution." Finally, YA novels seem to share an educational background. Buggy described them almost as training

wheels for reading and, because of that, their content and role in our culture should not be ignored: "Young Adult fiction has the potential to both influence reader's world view and to shape their future reading habits throughout adulthood" (9). It is unsurprising, then, that in *Mockingjay*, when the protagonist narrator describes illusions of reality, manipulations and the "shiny quality" of those, she will spell them out and maintain a sense that even though she cannot reach the "real" at the moment, it lies somewhere in her horizon of expectations.

Mockingjay described the fallout of the civil war that begins with the Quarter Quell, the edition of the Hunger Games that takes place in the second book of the series, *Catching Fire*. A rogue district, number 13, executes a plot to destroy the reality tv programme and rescues several participants, including Katniss herself. The novel, divided in three parts, can be separated differently according to the presence or absence of literary simulacra: the first part would include Katniss's recovery, her perception of the frugal, underground society that is District 13, and her subsequent acceptance to become "the Mockingjay," that is, to become the face of their pieces of war propaganda. This first half describes the takeover of the remaining districts by District 13, heavily swayed by Katniss's effectiveness as a speaker. Her authenticity is construed in the narration from the notion that she cannot be "scripted," that is, that she refuses attempts to write speeches for her, but that characteristics only accessible to those involved in the production of these propaganda spots, dubbed "propos" in the novel. In YA fashion, these propos are unambiguously successful, taking the plot to its second stage. That is when Katniss and other major characters become part of the Star Squad, an ironic name for Squad 451 (a subtle allusion to *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury), composed by only a few soldiers but mostly a camera crew and Katniss's friends and love interest. Even though they film a lot of content, the narration only references it in passing, focusing on the action before the protagonist and the gruelling deaths that ensue, until the culmination in the Capitol, when her sister Prim is killed, and Katniss is set to execute President Snow. Upon recognizing the

possibility that his sister could have died because of rebel action, centred in the figure of President Alma Coin, she fires her arrow towards the woman instead.

Even though *Mockingjay* was published in 2010 and adapted into two films in 2014 and 2015, I could not find critical articles focused on the novel. All critical work that included excerpts of analyses about it encompassed all three *Hunger Games* novels or all literature by Suzanne Collins. Caroline E. Jones (2016), for instance, focuses her analysis on four major characters and their relationship with the typical tropes they embody, concluding that the supporting characters somehow instrumentalize Katniss so she grows from a politically apathetic, pragmatic breadwinner to what she terms an "awakened" inspiration for rebellion. Her two romantic interests, Gale and Peeta, would be respectively the frustrated rebel and the pacific agent of resistance, both of whom she fails to understand but who shape her political awareness. On the other end, her mentor, Haymitch, is strategic and deceiving in his engagement. All three characters would spring into action when they identify the hope for change symbolized in Katniss's initial sacrifice in *The Hunger Games*, when she volunteers to be a tribute in her sister's stead. While Jones's analysis is consistent with conventions of the Young Adult genre and with Moylan's and Bloch's views on the role of hope in utopian literature, her analysis is, in my view, overly optimistic. She sees the new president of Panem as a valid choice because she is neither Snow nor Coin, for one. Additionally, when she claims, "The series demonstrates the true power of collective action to effect change," (245) there are a number of assumptions that can be problematic, amongst them the notion that collective action to change is a "true" value, almost belonging to the realm of the symbolic – of course, considering the "moral" ending of the trilogy as educational for its intended audience, that is to be expected. I would add to those conclusions that Katniss, in the period covered in *Mockingjay*, understands that there are strong, totalizing ideologies of political power and

control both in Snow and Coin, who present themselves as complete opposites but, in the end, use the same tools of inhumane destruction for their goals.

Before his execution, Snow reminds Katniss: "Oh, my dear Miss Everdeen. I thought we had agreed not to lie to each other" (418), echoing a conversation they have in *Catching Fire*, after she wins her first Hunger Games. While Snow, secure of his power in the Capitol, is upfront about his methods ("We both know I'm not above killing children, but I'm not wasteful" (417)), Coin operates strategically and subtly. When Katniss accepts to become the Mockingjay (as she is referred to in her simulacrum form, for propos and other forms of propaganda), the president of District 13 announces the terms of their negotiations, adding that "any deviance from her mission, in either *motive* or deed, will be viewed as a break in this agreement" (68-69, my emphasis). Coin never expressly states that she has chosen to sacrifice Katniss's life either because she poses a political threat or because she had identified a change in her motive for action, but, used to reading between the lines at that point, the protagonist understands that her death would be the ultimate symbolic gesture to spark the troops and end the civil war. In that respect, I agree with Jones when she claims that Katniss's personal growth allows her to refuse being a pawn either in Snow's game (as a tribute) or in Coin's (as the Mockingjay).

The protagonist narrator can recognize the forces pulling her and struggles to break free – whether she succeeds is point of argument, but she does understand the emptiness of making a spectacle of either entertainment or war. Once the war is over, one of the rebels, Plutarch Heavensbee, explains the new elections that happened while Katniss had been in the hospital. He somewhat morbidly jokes about how "we're in that sweet period where everyone agrees that our recent horrors should never be repeated" (442), which he segues by asking her if she'd "like to perform on a new singing programme he's launching in a few weeks. Something upbeat would be good" (442). The narrator, slightly horrified by the idea that she could permanently

become a media icon, does not respond. The *Hunger Games* trilogy, it could be argued, is unambiguously technophobic: Katniss is horrified by spectacle of the Games, of course, although she describes the technology involved in making it possible to great detail. Moreover, she is never awed by technological advancements such as the high-speed train that crosses all the districts in less than a day. The one gift she is said to truly have, her ability to sing, she refuses to share with the cameras during the first Games, even though, in *Mockingjay*, her camera crew manages to film her singing. Finally, after everything is over, Katniss and Peeta live the rest of their days far from the media, in a final scene described as a naturalistic, idyllic scenario in which they raise two children together: "They play in the Meadow. The dancing girl with the dark hair and blue eyes. The boy with blond curls and grey eyes, struggling to keep up on his chubby toddler legs" (454). The Epilogue is focused in the routine Katniss and Peeta have with their children, the slow rhythm of their days, and the knowledge that they will eventually learn the role their parents had in the war. The happy ending, tainted by trauma, also resembles Baudrillard's great distaste for the simulacrum, or Debord's distaste for the spectacle in media: Katniss sings only for her children and she refuses to enjoy the glory and fame that could have ensued from her actions, aware that they would probably have that "shiny quality" that Peeta used to attribute to implanted memories. Unlike *Synners*, which is concluded with a view towards hybridization and responsibility in creation, and unlike *Oryx and Crake*, concluded with the narrator's fuller understanding of himself and his role in the apocalyptic event, *Mockingjay* focuses on a retreat away from the fetichized entertainment that, criticized as it had been in the Capitol days, remains alive and well post-war.

Buggy dedicates a section of her dissertation to the issue of spectacle in the trilogy as a whole. She highlights the irony of the fact that, once Katniss accepts to become the Mockinjay, she goes through the same process of beautification the Capitol used to inflict on her. Buggy remarks, "the rebel leaders in District 13 concern themselves with ensuring that once again

Katniss's body is used against the Capitol – this time for the rebel population of Panem, rather than merely to save Katniss herself" (55). The fact that Katniss is not allowed to present herself as she is, but instead has to have her hair groomed, her skin smoothed, much in the same way she did to attract sponsors during the Games, can be seen as foreshadowing to the conclusion that she is operating between two ideologies that are, in many instances, interchangeable.

Andrea Ruthven, in her (2017) paper, also focuses her analysis on Katniss, from a theoretical feminist perspective, contrasting in different actions by the protagonist a journey towards collectivism over individualism, towards affection over competition, arguing that those attitudes set her apart from other characters. Her unexpected behaviour in the face of her socioeconomic situation unifies the districts that had, up until her first Games, next to no contact with each other. I must note, however, that her use of the term utopian falls short of its discussion in academia specifically because she uses utopian as a synonym to "idealized, unachievable,"[34] hindering some conclusions regarding the end of the series. I do agree with her when she claims that Katniss is also an embodiment of a break with pre-conceived notions about communal life and society when she says, "Katniss extends her network of affective bonds beyond relationships of filiation towards those of affiliation" (52). That value, of affection over filiation, is one of the factors that enable citizens from other districts to empathize with them and, indeed, as Ruthven concludes, "affection for others can be a political strategy" (52). Even though she mostly focuses on the first two novels, her notion that Katniss could be seen as a posthuman proposal is also relevant, in tone with Lykke Guanio-Uluru's (2017) article, as well. The author explores the topic further, though, looking at the Capitol as a technophiliac regime that uses seamless, nearly invisible technology to ensure its citizens are "beautiful:" "[h]er exposure to the Capitol's bio-medically assisted aesthetic culture sets her

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[34] I have already indicated the problems in associating utopianism with perfection or idealism in Chapter One, drawing from Lucy Sargisson's discussion in *Fool's Gold?* (2016).

on a course toward posthuman embodiment" (60). The notion that such an exacerbated culture towards appearances results in the ultimate symbol of rebellion is first of the two main simulacra that occur and propel the story of *Mockingjay*.

The bird that inspired the title and Katniss's rebellious avatar is a hybrid from a naturally occurring bird and a mutation developed by Capitol scientists. It is described in *Catching Fire*: "A mockingjay is a creature the Capitol never intended to exist. They hadn't counted on the highly controlled jabberjay having the brains to adapt to the wild, to pass on its genetic code, to thrive in a new form. They hadn't anticipated its will to live'" (91). It is quite clear that Collins's narrator is setting the scene for the reader to recognize the threads in common between the bird and Katniss: she is often portrayed as a survivor and as an unpredictability. For Ruthven, that means that "By becoming the Mockingjay, Katniss embraces the potential in becoming-animal and disrupts understandings of bounded, humanist bodies" (58), whereas to Guanio-Uluru, "The connotation of the mockingjay is at first positive, but its significance is modified in the final volume, as the rebels' use of the mockingjay is paralleled with their readiness to employ advanced destructive technology in the fight against the oppressive regime" (77), a view not wholly opposed to Ruthven's, but that I find more concise in the context of the series. There most certainly is a deterioration of the symbolism of the mockingjay, from idealist resistance, to actual combat, to strikes that kill innocent children, and she is hardly ever in control of the character she embodies.

Katniss displays a good deal of resistance before accepting to "be their Mockingjay," wary from past experiences of being a symbol more than a person.

What they want is for me to truly take on the role they designed for me. The symbol of the revolution. The Mockingjay. It isn't enough, what I've done in the past . . They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my

appearances – as if *that* doesn't sound horribly familiar – and all I have to do is play my part. (12)

Some terms stand out in this excerpt, denoting Katniss's lack of agency and authenticity for that job – more importantly, the extent to which she recognizes what she is supposed to do stands out. There is a "role" "designed" for her, that is, she must act as something other than herself and follow someone else's (Plutarch's) script. There is also a certain disdain associated to what is being asked of the protagonist in describing her role as the "symbol" of the rebellion, adding that all she lost in the past had not sufficed. When I argued that simulacra in discourses often have the effect of alerting subjects (be it readers or even characters themselves) to illusions of reality in their surroundings, I tangentially mentioned the development of that process in *Mockingjay*: "as signs seem to lose meaning . . . , as Katniss realizes her simulation efforts have only sunk her deeper into formulaic behaviour after she becomes a victor, there is conflict and subsequent rebirth . . . in Katniss's war experience in *Mockingjay*" (2016, 122). Although Jones and Buggy argue for an increase in Katniss's agency and political awareness, the first part of the novel, which describes the propos and the way they are staged, is hardly a case for that.

Katniss is issued top-tier war equipment and a bulletproof suit that, albeit functional, serve their primary purpose of being beautiful. Originally, her "costume" should have been only visually pleasing, but the scientist in charge resists the order. "'I mean, what if you need it sometime? As more than a fashion accessory?'" (82), he contents, arguing for pragmatism in spectacle-making. Even when she eventually engages in combat, her look is recognized as exaggerated, distanced from the actual garb of battle: "'Yes, we've got our bows,' I hold mine up, then realize how decorative it must seem. 'It's more deadly than it looks.'" (113). The obvious enhancement of her weapons to make them look attractive feeds what District 13 perceives as an ongoing fascination with the simulacrum-based spectacle that the Capitol fed

to its districts for decades. To President Coin and her designer (Katniss still uses the term Gamemaker) Plutarch, Katniss cannot be her sour and rude self in front of the rebels. More importantly, they believe they can safely take over the system of spectacle that the Capitol had set up to turn it against them.

Even Katniss herself, at times, believes it. If one is to consider that Debord sees the spectacle as "the present *model* of socially dominant life" (paragraph 6), Plutarch Heavensbee's choice to use the same system of signification is already a suggestion that the model of society is not going to evolve, but it is merely about to change hands. Debord adds, "[t]he language of the spectacle consists of *signs* of the ruling production, which at the same time are the ultimate goal of this production" (paragraph 7), suggesting that the spectacle is necessarily associated to rulers and, therefore, to a ruling ideology that seeks to maintain itself. That spectacle occurs, necessarily, by a house of mirrors that "inverts the real," in which "[l]ived reality is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle while simultaneously absorbing the spectacular order, giving it positive cohesiveness" (paragraph 8). In other words, the spectacle produces and is produced to naturalize an ideology, in this case a false consciousness. That process is identifiable in both the Capitol and in President Coin's policies for war propaganda and, although she does not like it, Katniss submits to the beautifications and the glowing weapons.

Differently from *Synners* and from *Oryx and Crake*, *Mockingjay* focuses its criticism of mass media on television and not the internet. Although one could argue that, in Atwood's book, the internet is merely a tool to watch content much as one would on television, the passivity of watching what is in front of one's face is heightened in Collins's work, while Jimmy and Crake have their own selection of preferred channels. In Panem, there is no mention of a multitude of entertainment options, at least not in the districts, as seen from the protagonist first-person narration. There is only the official, government-sanctioned channel, which provides the mandatory, ongoing "entertainment" in the form of reality television. Because of

its allegedly total passivity, the television, as a medium, has endured harsher criticism both from Young Adult novels and theoreticians.

Eagleton, when approaching the ways of maintaining an ideology, adds to the criticism. He claims that, despite the assumption that the political bias of a newspaper could sway public opinion, "research indicates that a good proportion of these readers are either indifferent or actively hostile to the politics of these journals," (34) adding that, in fact, citizens tend to spend the majority of their time watching television. Before claiming that political bias on television is what maintains a hegemonic ideology, however, Eagleton reminds his readers that, possibly from the exhaustion of a day's work, people are less inclined to engage in political debate or resistance, showing preference to less mind-consuming activities, as television is, in his opinion. Despite the very partial judgment on a medium instead of how that medium is used, Eagleton still contributes to the discussion of ideology on television with the following notion: "What is politically important about television is probably less its ideological content than the act of watching it . . . It is more a form of social control than an ideological apparatus" (34-35). Curiously, Eagleton does not conclude that tools for social control can disseminate or maintain ideologies regardless of their being designed to that end or not, but his argument leads to the conclusion that mediatic spectacle is not effective on a population that is not exhausted from work.[35] The way different districts – different social classes – view the spectacle on television in Collins's trilogy evidences that Capitol citizens see constant reinforcement that their easy-going way of life is natural, and district workers watch it for escapist release and for rest until their next shift. Television, in *Mockingjay*, is the site of dispute for a national narrative, as rebels and loyalists hack each other's signal on the official broadcast, which means that all citizens of Panem cannot avoid consuming and seeing the conflict in those narratives.

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[35] Since it is not the aim of this dissertation to dwell on the relationship between work and maintenance of ideology, I direct the reader to Kathi Weeks's *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (2011).

Differently from Crake and Jimmy, they cannot simply close the window when they are no longer entertained.

Another striking feature of *Mockingjay* is how unreal and mediated the war is for Katniss, until the Star Squad slowly dies or is disbanded, and she becomes part of actual fights. Similarly to what happens to her simulation of love for Peeta in the first novel,[36] the effort to produce the propos fails when Katniss must follow a script, but they cannot simply let her into battle, as that would be too "disgusting:" "'Yes, but is she scared and bloody? Is she glowing with the fire of rebellion? Just how grimy can we make her without disgusting people?'" (53), questions one of the stylists. It is imperative that her image is better than the real Katniss, but it cannot cross the line into the grotesque, as monstrosity is not tolerated in the series and is promptly disregarded as "inhuman" (the mutations of beasts with human faces that appear in the first novel or the zombie-like figures that attack in the sewers in the third one being the prime examples). The "solution" of sorts eventually is to attempt a halfway situation: Katniss is sent to an actual fight zone, but she is heavily guarded. "Find the least dangerous situation that can evoke some spontaneity in you" (90), Coin orders. The fact that her war appearances are half real and half staged gives an even more hyperreal touch to the propos, end-result of those moments.

> They play back the last few minutes of taping and I watch the woman on the screen. Her body seems larger in stature, more imposing than mine. Her face smudged but sexy. Her brows black and drawn in an angle of defiance. Wisps of smoke – suggesting she has either just been extinguished or is about to burst into flames – rise from her clothes. I do not know who this person is. (83-84)

The most remarkable thing about Katniss's perception of the propo is how she promptly dissociates herself from the person in the images. The narration includes markers of feminine

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[36] I looked at that in detail in the first chapter of my master's dissertation (2016).

beauty (the brows, the use of "sexy"), but not enough that she could be perceived as fragile: she is also "imposing" and "larger" – stylists are cautious to ensure that she is threatening, but that she still performs as a female. Finally, there is the touch of spectacle in the smoke, whose fire does not appear, but suggests a recent altercation. Two observations can be drawn from this excerpt: firstly, that once again the rebels use the same spectacle toolbox that the Capitol does; second, that what fosters the rebel cause is never Katniss herself, but retouched, remade, versions of her. Both Capitol and district citizens debate over who is the real Katniss: the innocent lovelorn girl who won the first Games (*The Hunger Games*), the one who was about to plan a very public, spectacle-ridden wedding (*Catching Fire*), or that fierce woman in the propaganda spots (*Mockingjay*). That debate occurs, however, over conflicting images, conflicting simulations of Katniss, instead of any desires or characteristics from the girl herself.

The last issue to be addressed in the simulation practices portrayed in *Mockingjay* is related to the apocalyptic event of the novel. The series as a whole describes Katniss as someone with several befores and afters: her father's death, the day she volunteers for the Hunger Games, and, finally, the airstrike in front of Snow's castle that results in the death of her sister, Prim. The teenager's death is ironically tragic because it reminds the reader that the protagonist's drive to protect her had been the action which kickstarted the entire rebellion and civil war. Moreover, her death is the final blow to Katniss's fragile relationship with President Coin – also ironically, Snow is the one who convinces her that he had not been involved in Prim's death, as she originally expected. For citizens of Panem, of course, there could be another before and after: in the end of the novel, when Katniss is set to execute Snow, she fires her arrow at Coin instead, causing immediate chaos and, eventually, elections that put another character, Paylor, in office. Because the series is riddled with befores and afters, not to mention the traumas that result from them, I would like to focus on one event, Prim's death, and the processes of simulation involved in orchestrating and eventually perpetrating it.

Katniss notices, before that event, that officers had been collecting Capitol children at the front of the mob trying to seek refuge in Snow's mansion. What is announced in speakers around the city as a protective measure is, to her, a cruel strategy to shield Snow. "I know immediately it's not for their protection. If the Capitol wanted to safeguard them, they'd be down in a bunker somewhere. This is for Snow's protection" (404), she muses as she approaches. There is, then, an explosion behind her that forces the mob forwards, so more people and children are pressed against the mansion gates. At the same time, she recognizes a rebel medical crew coming in to assess the injured. That is the moment when Katniss locks eyes with her sister for the last time, but "that's when the parachutes go off" (406). The ensuing explosion, right next to the girl, kills her and people around her instantly, while Katniss is blown back and out of consciousness. To depict the limbo states in which she lives post-trauma, Collins resorts to a recurring motif between her and Peeta: whenever he is not sure a memory was implanted on his brain or it happened, he would ask her "real or not real?" That apocalyptic event, personal for Katniss and historical as the last strike of the civil war, repeats how interwoven small- and large-scale traumas occur in *Oryx and Crake*, with the Jimmy/Snowman duality, and that echo is also consistent with Berger's views on literary apocalypses. "Post-apocalyptic discourses try to say what *cannot* be said (in a strict epistemological sense) and what *must not* be said (what is interdicted by ethical, religious, or other social sanctions" (14). Katniss's narration does not say that Prim died, but merely that the parachutes exploded, and the reader is left to link both pieces of information. Along with the literal, there is a metaphorical explosion as Katniss resorts to the "real or not real" motif herself:

> Real or not real? I am on fire. The balls of flame that erupted from the parachutes shot over the barricades, through the snowy air, and landed in the crowd. I was just turning away when one caught me, ran its tongue up the back of my body and transformed me into something new. A creature as unquenchable as the sun.

A fire mutt knows only a single sensation: agony. (407)

The narrator is removed from her reality due to physical and personal trauma, dissociating again, but this time not to understand her simulated version in a propo. Her self-description as a fire mutt (mutation) precedes a near death mediated by distorted images of birds and monsters. She *cannot*, as Berger suggests, describe in literal form the details of her surroundings, blinded by pain as she is, and the book *must not* turn too much to the scene of gore, possibly from genre restrictions ("Just how grimy can we make her without disgusting people?," here, becomes a meta exposition of Collin's own literary production). Her survival and management of trauma are quickly followed by her interview with Snow, discussed previously, who suggests that he had no reason to order that attack. Coin, on the other hand, would have eroded his remaining support. She tries to find reason in that act but is unable to believe completely in either Snow or Coin. "Snow's lying. Manipulating me as he always has. ... Yes. Of course. Then what's nagging me?" (420). Unable to decide on her own and also unable to discuss the issue with someone else, her intuition rather than reason cause the final rupture, with both Coin and Snow dead.

By denying what she perceives as the extremes of violent methods of achieving power, Katniss is, to a certain extent, capable to learn the misgivings associated to naturalizing violent practices, even if they should enable a "better" future – she sees through the systems of simulation, having been a part of them herself for years, and subsequently removes herself from that context. *Mockingjay*'s simulacra do not produce a complex and wide display of how signs are emptied and then resignified, as it happens in the majority of the novels analysed in this dissertation. Instead, there is not just a technophobic effect, but a rejection of all forms of spectacle in the society of Panem. The form technologies of spectacle are used by District 13 does not represent a resignification, but only a substitution, and Katniss recognizes that. This recognition, enabled by her long exposure to conflicts of "real or not real," is a positive trait of

the series, despite its idyllic, slightly predictable resolution. The Panem of post-apocalypse exists as an imaginary of improvement, possibly under the new leader, Paylor, but the reader does not have access to that. Literary simulacra in the novel, then, expose the functioning of the spectacle and the hyperreality of the images it reinforces, but they are not resignified to an identifiable degree as the novel is concluded, so there is some utopian hope, with a grain of salt.

Final remarks

The concepts of simulacrum, simulation, hyperreality, science fiction, utopianism and ideology pervaded this dissertation and, as it often happens in cultural criticism and theory, their interconnections were relatively unpredictable throughout the research process. This section looks back at the hypotheses and subsequent conclusions reached across these three chapters, comparing the five analyzed novels, with the occasional mention of related works, when relevant. Seven main points are summarized and formulated towards a comparative conclusion on contemporary sf: 1) The political aspect of the simulacrum for cultural criticism; 2) Differences between the simulacrum as postulated by Baudrillard and its intra-media application in this dissertation; 3) How the novels display a duality between reproduction and representation; 4) A revisitation of the three conclusions proposed in Chapter One, related to the novels from the *corpus*; 5) The simulacrum as a critical tool specific to the criticism of science fiction; 6) The relationship between utopianism and the simulacrum; finally, 7) The interconnections between the simulacrum and concepts of ideology, their dissemination and their identification, with potential literary effects.

I started Chapter One tracing a seemingly established duality in Jean Baudrillard's theoretical work, including his formulation of symbolic exchange and the development of the concept of simulacrum, problematizing the notion that his philosophy could be separated into a highly politically engaged Marxism and a disenchanted, "neutral" postmodern analysis of culture that also comes off, ironically, as apocalyptic. However, Kinder successfully demonstrated a traceable connection between his concept of the simulacrum, based on the symbolic exchange, and the processes of commodification. The latter, very common in orthodox Marxism, in indicating the replication of products and the distance set between worker and the fruit of their labor, would surface in the processes of symbolic exchange; however, Baudrillard furthered the idea that the public is alienated from objects and products.

The simulacrum is, then, the commodity, but at the level of symbols and communication. By an insistent manufacturing of simulations, as opposed to usual representations, the sign itself lost its connection to meanings, distanced from the subjects using it. Like serial commodities, which only deal with each other, simulacra interacting amongst each other, without ever relating to the real, sparked a hyperreality that prevented the real from ever resurfacing. This postulation implies that subverting that process would be impossible, as the real could never be captured.

This literary characteristic was elicited from studying novels with Baudrillard's concept: the commodification of signs. In *The Heart Goes Last*, it is clearly identifiable in the theme of the prostibots and the Elvis impersonators. The prostibots are robots made to satisfy customers sexually, built to look the same as determined people.

> Replica women; slut machines, some call them. There was earnest talk about them among the fellow scooter repair guys: the real-life pain they might prevent, the money they might make. Maybe all women should be robots, he thinks with a tinge of acid: the flesh-and-blood ones are out of control.
>
> "It's Dutch, so who knows what it says exactly," says Kevin. "But something like *better than real.*" (221, emphasis in original)

The iconic phrase to describe a simulacrum, "better than real," here quoted ironically and immediately followed by disagreement ("Not exactly. But the voice options are great"), described the simulacra of people. The "villain," Ed, commissions a prostibot in Charmaine's image, but he eventually grows tired of the robot and seeks the "real" woman. Meanwhile, Stan survives as a casino Elvis impersonator. The culture of the 1950s, oddly sacralised within the Consilience Project, gives new strength to symbols of both masculinity and femininity in the widespread Elvises and Marylyn Monroes, among other celebrities: "'There's a lot of Elvises and Marylins there anyway,' says Kevin. 'Alive ones. So the replicas blend right in.'" (251,

says the same character, before describing bots shaped after small children, supposedly to "keep pervs off the streets." Both humans dressed and behaving like Elvises and robots designed like human individuals are not only promised to be "better than real," but they are consumer products. Commodification invades, thus, the realm of the individual, exposing the fragility of the concept of an entire, united individual, emptying the meaning it had once obtained. The "real" remains at the margin, not present, but merely a promise of wish fulfilment.

The same process of commodification of the sign occurs in *Synners*. However, Cadigan does not portray that movement in the destruction of the individual; instead, she empties all media of meaning, especially music. As I discussed previously in this chapter, Gina represents a hybrid solution and, at first, a resistance to this sublimation into the virtual world of experiences. However, the world construed around her is built on the appreciation of virtuality. Visual Mark exclaims, "You can finally see the music," in a clear desire to transform audio signs into visual signs, while Gabe spends the majority of his time projected onto a self-validating simulation. In *Synners,* it is not that humans lose their sense of self, but the species, as a category, shifts from being an agent to becoming a medium. After being implanted, Visual Mark comments on how finally "the video show that ran endlessly in his head was coming up to where he could see it better – or that he was going down to where it was" (94-95). More importantly, "the pictures ran the way they would, and he was just the medium" (95), which suggests that now, with his altered mind, he was no longer the subject who appreciated art being produced, but he was the medium itself for consumers of videos; some humans, specially the synner characters, changed from being subjects to becoming media. However, if humans were becoming the means of production for simulacra – that simulacra being the self-interacting images to rock music –, then the role of the subject, previously played by humans, is emptied as they become the means of production instead of the producers. The chain of

signification, on which meanings were tentatively established to achieve a kind of communication, is broken to reaffirm the lack of a supposed real. In the end, Sam becomes a medium, too: when her insulin pump is altered to drain energy from her and power other hackers' computers, like a battery, the human body also becomes a means to spread simulacra. The characters in *Synners* become media after a process of commodification of the artist and of art itself.

In these instances, commodification pervades communication and art, transforming both into reproduction and products, respectively, invading the way everything is produced and spread. The resulting loss of meaning of that invasion can also expose power relations, their imbalance, and the reproductions of images commonly used to sustain a given societal structure. Moreover, simulations, their processes and instrumentalization are not apolitical, for the politics of simulations is marked by its covert trait. The connection between simulation and politics is not dependent on a connexion with Marxist criticism or its terms, but that the simulacrum can mask power relations or, often, be instrumentalized in simulations that naturalize them.

However, I cannot affirm that the concept of simulacrum used in this dissertation is the same simulacrum as described by the French philosopher. Cultural criticism, with the simulacrum as a tool for evidencing the characteristics I have listed, bears a strong resemblance to Baudrillard's concept, but it is not the same. For one, I have chosen to set aside the doom-announcing trait in Baudrillard's concept. Even though the simulacrum in my analysis is often present where alienation and deterioration also are, it is not necessarily a sign of the end of times (as ironic as it would be to say that the simulacrum is the *sign* of anything). Additionally, the simulacrum for cultural criticism is, not unironically, a more stable category, related to identifying the replication of self-dependent images in world building, character perception, or even in language use in narrative. If I were to consider all nuances of the simulacrum in

Baudrillard's criticism of cinema, Disneyworld, or North American recent history and treatment of journalism, the multiplicity of readings by Baudrillard himself would hinder an elaboration of conclusions and/or trends. For that reason, I sought to maintain a conception, described in Chapter One, that referred to the chapters from *Simulacra and Simulation* most relevant to this discussion ("The Precession of Simulacra," "History, a Retro Scenario," and "Simulacra and Science Fiction").

Seeing the simulacrum in this narrower, but more focused way, allowed the identification of simulated value judgements as well. That was the case with Willis's *The Doomsday Book*, whose duality between the Middle Ages and Oxford in the 2050s eventually exposed simulacra in the factual tone in historical accounts and the values assigned to these writings. That tone was revealed as one-sided and distant from the investigated period. In other words, Willis displays the disdain attributed to the Middle Ages, which in turn is based on the general perception of it as "the muck hole of History," as a period that represented the worst our species could do. In contrast, the middle of the 21st century would represent advancement, progress, and rational evolution. However, Kivrin's and Dunworthy's experiences reveal that historical narratives are approximations, based on partial accounts; more importantly, Kivrin's historical log reveals a faith she had in science, much like the period she is from, regulated by that supposed rationality and later taken by storm because of a virus. In analysing historical tropes that are considered truths, that is, by repositioning accounts as versions, not as the real, the narrative recovers not the experience of history, but its multiplicity of versions. To see narratives, and history, as partial and incomplete serves the purpose of questioning fixed notions: of good and bad, of progresses and setbacks, which evidences the relativeness of assigning value judgements.

Baudrillard did not explicitly postulate a duality between reproduction and representation, but both terms inhabit his writing. Considering *Simulacra and Simulation*,

Utopia Deferred, *Why hasn't everything already disappeared?*, and *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, the simulacrum marks the absence of representation. Indeed, the simulacrum marks the very impossibility of representing something, dissimulating that representation as reproduction. Serial reproduction would be the mark of late-stage capitalism, a trait of the hyperreality in products, in art, and even in language itself. That process was present in the novels studied here, and probably the hyperreality of products is the outstanding consequence of cultural criticism carried out with that perspective. In *Synners*, a reproduction of one aspect of John Lennon, an actual musician who lived in the 20th century, is "reborn" as a simulation; that simulation in turn produces "new" "Lennon" music. In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy is constantly frustrated because Oryx, the "real" woman standing in front of him, denies him her full story and refuses to perform as the third-world abused girl stereotype he wants her to, because that in turn would allow him to step into the saviour stereotype. He tries to force his reproduced notions on her, and he does not understand why the image that results from that process cannot possibly represent the woman he loves. In *He, She, and It*, the citizens of Tikva export simulacra and that is their main source of income. The so-called chimeras are traps in programming, pitfalls among lines of code, to prevent invasions; Malkah survives after an attack because she had previously substituted her medical files for false versions – producing simulations is the main line of work in the city. Piercy's portrayal of simulations as instruments, although heavily reliant on reproduction over representation, differs from the rest of the corpus in the sense that simulation has become an instrument for survival and for balancing the town's powers against massive corporations – an idea that, incidentally, breaks with the stereotype that simulations are necessarily negative.

In this dissertation's first chapter, I suggested three possible conclusions or effects to be drawn from reading literature with the simulacrum as a critical perspective. The first instalment, that simulation changes relationships between meanings and that it is also present,

as a result, in cultural objects, is a more general conclusion. It is particularly visible in *Oryx and Crake*, with Snowman's struggle with language, in the influence of entertainment on his perception of "reality"; in *The Heart Goes Last*, it related to the aforementioned prostibots, and in the reduction of art to a single aesthetics, deemed universal; and in *Synners*, as the images produced in rock videos directly influence the outcome of a crisis, with a deterioration that (even) appears in the author's typographic choices. More importantly, simulacra in literature mark the blurring of boundaries in meanings themselves, and of an increase in the pervasiveness of simulation. As simulations are more present in daily life, they appear more frequently in literature.

The second conclusion, that identifying literary simulacra does not imply an eventual restoration in how signs relate to each other, appeared positively (that is, there was a rebirth of meanings, or a hybrid resolution) in *He, She, and It*. Shira refuses to rebuild Yod for her personal satisfaction, and her town learns to deal with artificial intelligences. In *MaddAdam*, the novel displays a unique process in which humans and post-humans rebuild not just society, but language and storytelling.[37] Negatively, *Mockingjay* resolves into a discovery that the opposing sides were, in fact, equally power hungry, and Panem maintains its values of spectacle and entertainment. This conclusion would merit further investigation, in a larger *corpus*, to ascertain whether there is any relation between the novel that not providing a hybrid solution due to its adherence to the young adult genre, a more easily marketable, or didactic, format, or to another characteristic that did not emerge in this research.

Finally, the third conclusion, that simulacra occurs frequently in world building for science fiction works, which often leads to increased agency in characters, *Mockingjay* and *Synners* are the prime examples. Both Katniss and Gina struggle with dualities and their

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[37] In *MaddAddam*, the community of humans and Crakers build a new mythology; they actively rewrite their stories of origin, as Toby narrates their origin to them and, after her death, a Craker becomes the storyteller of the community.

attempts to break free from them happen after intense contact with simulacra. In Katniss's case, those are mostly related to beauty standards, revolutionary ideas, and the initially straightforward narrative of the war in which she was fighting. Eventually she chooses to exist far from the simulations. Gina, on the other hand, having spent most of her life making simulations, at the same time that she missed "the real thing," learns that technology involves accountability and decides to have a grounded view of the issue.

It is not that science fiction is the only genre that bears discussion on technology, accountability and simulation. It is more to the point that works whose themes highlight these conflicts can often be read as science fiction. Choosing to see works as science fiction is to direct one's eye towards a certain set of characteristics, dilemmas and history. That perspective is not limiting as long as one acknowledges it as itself: a perspective. I state here that the perspective of science fiction is particularly fruitful for contemporary literature as it deals with the overflow of information, the troubles to sort through it, at the same time it fosters fictive sciences, in Csicery-Ronay, Jr.'s terms. That fictive science is imperative in the world building of *Synners* and *The Doomsday Book*. Cadigan's *novum* is more innovative in its narrative development than its conception, as the novel describes a structural consequence of a particular scientific discovery and its subsequent commodification. In Willis's work, time travel as a possibility of observation only permits a mirroring effect between the Middle Ages and the imagined future Oxford: the fictive science of time travel casts ironic shade on misconceptions of the Middle Ages and even on stable notions of utopia and dystopia.

Regarding the relationship between utopianisms and the simulacrum, it would be an impactful though an empty statement to say that utopia is a simulacrum. As discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, both utopia and dystopia establish dialectical connections that entangle in their web both author, readership and societal structures. Identifying and discussing intra-media simulacra allowed for an exposure of the foundations of these imagined

societies. Additionally, such exposure opened space for analysing outcomes and imagining other realities, which is, incidentally, the perspective defended by Ruth Levitas, when she describes utopia as a method. The critical dystopias included in the *corpus* were examples of imagined realities built on foundations of one's extrapolated realities (*The Heart Goes Last, Oryx and Crake, He, She and It*). In their open endings, there is space for reinvention and for a reconfiguration of society and the values on which it may be based. Although, in these undesirable societies the simulacrum had been a building block, it did not have to vanish for a rebirth to begin – as a matter of fact, it was instrumental for that end. The *MaddAddam* trilogy, in its embryonary utopia, is built on simulacra at several levels: language, history, and storytelling, to name a few, while Charmaine, in *The Heart Goes Last*, is handed the tools to choose her truth. Tikva, from Piercy's book, still uses chimeras as a commodity, but also as a tool for protection. Utopianisms and simulacra have, thus, a relationship of construction and implosion.

At last, Chapter Three examined how ideologies are naturalized or estranged in contemporary science fiction and the literary simulacra used to reach those effects. The matter posed issues such as the multifaceted character of the concept of ideology, so I sought to explicit when ideology referred to the Marxist notion of "false consciousness" or to a set of effects within discourse, and to when ideology is a set of beliefs framed by sociohistorical contexts in "relevant" communities, to borrow Eagleton's term. *Synners* and *Mockingjay* employed simulacra differently, to criticise naturalized discourses, and similarly, hinting at that their unchecked dissemination. In both cases, the reinforcement of hyperreality leads to apocalyptic events that rupture the logic of the existing society. Those apocalyptic events occurred both in the public and private spheres, echoing as trauma in characters, and that trauma, in turn, was often expressed by dissociation and even more displacement of meaning.

In *Synners*, Pat Cadigan introduced the consequences of unethical technological development, resistance and exacerbated acceptance of mediating practices. Her cyberpunk is not technophiliac nor technophobic, indicating instead the necessity of a hybrid and aware behaviour towards mediation as a whole. Ideologies behind creation are not to be negated, but to be looked at critically, and recognizing the moment when symbols lose their referents is a critical aspect of an aware process. Finally, *Mockingjay* displayed a war that is fought more at the symbolic level than on the battlefield. Its protagonist narrator is often manufactured into a simulacrum herself, in her many versions for war propaganda. Her distaste for the tools of spectacle and ideological control in the media cause her to reject mediation, but also to see through its mechanisms (fragment, rephrase). The relationship between literary simulacra and illusions of reality (what is the difference between them?) is intensely linked to both naturalizing and estranging ideologies, constituting an aesthetic trend and a cultural practice that can lead to more awareness in communal practices and in art.

The interest in the ideas of original and copy was the spark for the theoretical perspective in this dissertation. Baudrillard's work contributed to destabilize the superior role attributed to the idea of original; as he demonstrated, it is not simply that there is a distance between an original and a copy, but that the quest for an original can result in a winding path crossed by several others copies, originals, representations, and, eventually, reproductions. His arguments also elicited the dissemination of copies *of* copies, that is, that the allusive original of previous periods had become so distant from its copies that it was no longer present in these simulacra. The philosopher accompanies this movement in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, and in *Simulacra and Simulation* he identifies the replication of simulacra in entertainment structures (theme parks), film, and in science fiction. That uncontrolled replication, he defended, had sparked hyperreality, that is, a warped perception of one's "reality," deeply affected and manipulated by simulacra.

He does not claim that the entirety of literature, or of film, had succumbed to the hyperreal. However, his analysis of Ballard's *Crash*, a novel critically analysed in science fiction and in mainstream literature, allowed for an analysis on the influence of the simulacrum in literary works. In this dissertation, I proposed a framework for these analyses and suggested common literary effects. Recognizing simulacra, I concluded, fosters critical reading and subject awareness, which in turn can empower characters (at the level of narrative) and readers.

The examination of the simulacrum in contemporary science fiction included more than a few challenges during the progress of this research. Firstly, navigating Baudrillard's writing implied contrasting several excerpts from four of his works (*Simulacra and Simulation, Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?, Writings from Utopie,* and *Symbolic Exchange and Death*), so that the concept of simulacrum could be responsibly used in critical analysis. Selecting what articles to comment on and which ones were too tangential for my topic was a complex issue. Still regarding my choice of theoretical background, political stances were also problematic: Baudrillard himself was not consistent on his political opinions throughout his career (nor should one expect it to be that way). Because the politics in his critical work was related to one of my objectives directly, to contextualize, and at the same time to disagree on, some points formed a research stage that lasted longer than predicted.

In Chapter One, I traced the connections between Baudrillard's theoretical trajectory, the simulacrum and its pervasiveness in everyday life, to connect it eventually to science fiction and utopian/dystopian novels. As exchanges of signs for meanings turned into signs exchanged for other signs, displacements of experiences went from an occasional event to the rule of communication. Considering that literature both influences and is influenced by political and symbolic shifts in society, the simulacrum was also influential in science fictional works published in the late 20th century and through these two first decades of the 21st. That is not to say that displacements of meaning did not occur previously, but more that there was an

intensification in that process, related to widespread mediation in the arts and in everyday life. It is not merely that life imitates art. Simulacra in literature have become evidence that the boundaries between signs, realities and their manipulations are among the most important contemporary problems. Information has become a relative idea, as opposed to an absolute one, with the spread of "fake news." This relativization, incidentally, is ominously present in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. The concept from early Saussureian linguistic studies that one object would be equivalent to one spoken or written sign does not resist the breakup of language, and that is identifiable in *Oryx and Crake*, and in the decay of all digital systems in *Synners*.

Another trend of contemporary science fiction and simulacrum is that of the hybrid solution, as presented in Chapters one through three. The genre is still marked by fictive science, that is, by a projection of science and its possible effects on society. Technological advances, formerly portrayed as threats or as new forms of life to be controlled, are repositioned towards a stance of accountability from creators and consumers. In *He, She, and It*, the conflict with multinationals and the death of the cyborg do not restore the peace in Tikva to a former, pure state, but both provide a more complex understanding for readers and in-world characters of the consequences stemming from developing technology and technology-based life forms. The similar stance taken by Gina, in *Synners*, is that humanity cannot control technology, but still it must be responsible for it and be aware of consequences – a core principle of the final considerations for this dissertation, the reason why it was chosen as the epigraph.

To say that recognizing simulacra fosters agency and empowerment is a statement that must be considered with caution. Novels whose world building includes a high level of displacement of meanings through the manipulation of signs and experiences have a tendency to provoke increased empowerment and/awareness on readers. However, that is not certain, and Collins's *Mockingjay* was a unique example of that. The protagonist recognizes the

systems of simulation and, to her, the solution is to distance herself from that system as much as possible, a very similar proposal to Gabe's, from *Synners*. What they learn is the perception of alienating structures through identifying simulacra in their lives.

Two other concepts were related to simulacra in fiction: utopianisms and ideology. In Chapter Two, I discussed the intersections between world-building in utopias and dystopias and simulacra. For that, I considered Tom Moylan's and Rafaella Baccolini's critical dystopia, Ruth Levitas's argument that utopianisms are a mode of reading literature, and Lucy Sargisson's work on the difference between utopia and idealism. The ideal is not attainable; hence, utopia cannot be a blueprint to the perfect society, but an exercise in imagination of a different one, guided by different values. More importantly, utopia and dystopia in the novels discussed here are often complementary spaces within each other. That was visible in the tension between past and future in *The Doomsday Book*, which displaces science as the ultimate truth and destiny, exposing Kivrin's nearly religious belief in the methods of science at the same time that chaos takes place in the future despite Oxford's supposed advanced precautions. In *The Heart Goes Last*, the dystopia swallows the utopian impulse in a very clear way: the Consilience/Positron community/prison. Even the utopia that is sold to citizens trying to escape an economic fallout is a reduced, warped and detached reproduction of the 1950s, meaning that it is reconstructed from a totalizing notion of that period. *He, She, and It* presents the hybrid solution from the second postulation on sf and the simulacrum, even though the system is mostly unchanged: only one corporation loses a modicum of political power in the resolution. Ideology, on the other hand, often poses a controversial idea to that of the simulacrum, as discussed in Chapter Three. There is a challenge first to delimitating its boundaries and, afterwards, to tracing its relation (if any) to the simulacrum in sf. False consciousness does not equal simulation; simulation was one of the ways in which one can naturalize power discourses that maintain an oppressive *status quo*. This notion appeared in *Synners*, with the substitution

of proper procedure for capitalist profit, and in *Mockingjay*, to unite people under a supposed "rebellion."

Further studies in this field would benefit from considering other relevant contemporary authors, such as Ann Leckie, Gwyneth Jones, William Gibson (*Pattern Recognition* in particular), and Octavia Butler. Beyond the realm of sf, N.K. Jemisin and her approach to memory and displacement of identities could be analysed with the simulacrum as a critical tool. Further theoretical analysis on the relevance of technology in the formation of the human identity could unveil issues related to simulation as well.

This dissertation outlined the presence of simulacra in contemporary science fiction, with repercussions in world building, the human identity and its relationship with technology. The recognition and the exposure of the simulacra pervading both literature and its surrounding societies can lead to a more critical and conscious perspective of one's surroundings. It can also serve to expose naturalized concepts of what language produces and it can suggest paths for communication and conflict resolution, to dismantle and expose power structures and, later, instrumentalize simulations to subvert oppressive dynamics.

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