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# **ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT**

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Angol szakirány

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# ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

*A disztópikus filmek modernista jellemzői*

*The Features of Modernism in Dystopian Films*

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**2019**

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**Table of Contents**

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: MODERNISM AND THE RETURN OF MODERNISM.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>MODERNISM.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>THE RETURN OF MODERNISM THROUGH DYSTOPIAN FILMS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: MODERNIST PHILOSOPHY IN DYSTOPIAN FILMS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>NIETZSCHE'S NEW AESTHETICS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>BUDDHIST MODERNISM.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: MODERNIST THEMATIC FEATURES IN DYSTOPIAN FILMS.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: MODERNIST TEXTUAL SKILLS IN DYSTOPIAN FILMS.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	<b>25</b>

## Introduction

This thesis explores the connection between dystopian films and modernism by analyzing the application of modernist features in such films. Three main modernist features are discussed in this thesis. That is: philosophical background, thematic focuses, and textual techniques. In order to have an in-depth understanding of modernist features in dystopian films, three classic dystopian films which represent different eras and countries will be selected and analyzed. The films are *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick 1971), *Fahrenheit 451* (François Truffaut 1961), and *Isle of Dogs* (Wes Anderson 2018).

This thesis is divided into five sections. Chapter 1 offers a theoretical introduction to the concepts of utopia and dystopia. The chapter also provides background information for the genre of dystopian film. Additionally, it also explains the connection between filmic dystopias and literary dystopias through an analysis of their common manifestations based on the study of Blaim and Gruszevska-Blaim. Their common topics based on the study of Zsolt Cziganyik are also provided.

Chapter 2 provides important contextual information on the history of modernism. It is notable that this chapter explains that modernism is not a vain shibboleth, and the genre of dystopian film serves as an agent for the return of modernism.

Chapter 3 analyzes the philosophical elements of modernism in dystopian films. Nietzschean philosophy and the theory of Buddhist modernism are used to examine the philosophical background of modernism. Specifically, the focus is on the application of Nietzsche's overman theory in the three films in identifying the characteristics of dystopian films. Additionally, the chapter also discusses Buddhist factors in the films by explaining Buddhist influence on Schopenhauer's theory of pessimism and through a comparative study between Buddhist theory and Nietzschean philosophy.

Chapter 4 analyzes the representation of modernist motifs in dystopian films based on the seven rubrics outlined by Ihab Hassan. Additionally, the chapter also examines the dystopian settings in films through an analysis of the application of seven rubrics in the films.

Chapter 5 gives insight into the textual skills of modernism in dystopian films based on Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and Peter Childs' *Modernism*. Further, this chapter also discusses the application of filmic language which is influenced by modernist textual skills in the three films.

## Chapter 1: Utopia and Dystopia

The concept of dystopia is derived from the term utopia. There is no consensual definition of the word utopia because of its complex nature. Generally, utopia is regarded as the “dreams of an ideal society” (Czigányik 30). Thomas More coined the term in 1516. More created this neologism as the names for both his book and the imaginary island described in the book. In the study titled *The Concept of Utopia*, Vieira points out that one important background of the concept of utopia proposed by More is the philosophy of Plato. The island in More’s book is a place affiliated to Plato’s city that is portrayed in *Republic*. Vieira explains that “both Plato and More [have] imagined alternative ways of organizing society” (5). Besides the affiliation to Plato’s city, Vieira highlights two features of utopia which are isolation and aiming for an ideal state (5). Along with the process of deneologization, the term not only becomes an allusion to the “imaginary paradisiacal places” (4), but also a representation of hope and fantasy. The term has expanded to encompass the genre of utopian literature with the main core being “the desire for a better life” (6).

The first notable mention of the word dystopia is in John Stuart Mill’s speech in which the term was used in place of the opposite perspective of utopia. In other words, dystopia focuses on the dark side of utopia and it is the disbelief of utopia. Dystopia has become an aesthetic category which is the opposite of the utopian aesthetics classification. The main form of this aesthetics is dystopian literature that has developed based on the genre of utopian literature and even incorporated the principles and narrative techniques of literary utopias. Contrary to the ideal society described in utopian literature, literary dystopias portray the unpleasant society. The typical examples of dystopian literature are *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley 1932) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (George Orwell 1949). On the other hand, satirical utopia and anti-utopia are the two main sub-genres related to dystopian study. Vieira claims that the core of satirical



utopia is distrust and the core of anti-utopia is disbelief (16). However, both the two literary genres aim to disclose “the irrelevance and inconsistency of utopian dreaming and the ruin of society it might entail” (16).

Filmic dystopias are the cinematic extension of literary dystopias. Film has become one dominant form of entertainment in modern society. The concept has made researchers of utopia and dystopia put an emphasis on films in which dystopian elements play significant roles. The filmic utopias are not mentioned in this paper because utopian scholars and film critics agree that there is no real utopia film theoretically. Scholars agree that “utopia lacks [...] the basic elements required for a narrative film” (Czigányik 32-33). Contrary to the tenuity and paleness of the genre of nonexistent “utopian film,” dystopian film has become the main genre in the cinematic industry and the range of such film keeps expanding. Most films set in the future or those that depict “an undesirable social and political structure” require a dystopian setting (33).

Blaim and Gruszevska-Blaim explain the connection between dystopian film and dystopian literature. They claim that the motifs of filmic dystopia are adapted from literary dystopia. To some extent, filmic dystopia is “the cinematic representations of the imperfect world” (8). According to the study of Blaim and Gruszevska-Blaim, satirical dystopias and anti-utopias are the same modes of discourse and some of their functions overlap in the genre of dystopian film. The functions and uses of dystopian cinema include both satire and the critique of the existential or postulated reality (8). According to Cziganyik, the dominant topic of dystopian film is the loss of humanity in a disastrous environment, and the fundamental setting of dystopian films is based on the formation of the social structure that is considered as the precondition for a dystopian film (32). Cziganyik also concludes that there are three thematic elements in dystopian films. That is: repression, mind control, and the confrontation between individual and society (34).

## **Chapter 2: Modernism and the Return of Modernism**

### **Modernism**

Several critics and scholars have highlighted the specific connections or parallels between the study of dystopian film and the study of modernism. As an important cultural movement in the history of humankind, it is hard to define modernism in an explicit manner. The term is considered as “a general term applied retrospectively to the wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in literature and other forms of art of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Baldick 159). In the field of art, the sculptures of Jacob Epstein and the painting of Wyndham Lewis are regarded as representative works of modernism. From the perspective of literature, modernism is exemplified by a series of authors including T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Even though there are many different genres encompassed in the term, modernist artworks share some certain underlying values or principles. Levenson explains the recurrent motifs of modernist works through an analysis of social background. According to Levenson, any signs of modernism can be traced back to “the authority of the middle-class settlement” and “the entrenchment of bourgeois sensibility” (3). The development of modernism was influenced by a series of social movements during the period between 1890-1950. The First World War and the development of Soviet socialist movement made people start questioning capitalism. The concept coupled with labor struggles caused by the industrial revolution became the main social conflict. At the same time, Einstein’s relativity overturned the conventional view of the external world. Under these social forces, modernist authors paid attention to the social cataclysms caused by modernization. The repeated motifs of industrial machinery, the class conflict caused by urbanization, and the after effects of war are suggested as the main introspection to the social problems of that historical period in modernist works (1). These common devices and the general

preoccupations are examined in dystopian works in different ways that will be discussed in the later sections.

### **The Return of Modernism through Dystopian Films**

Some scholars think that modernism has lost its power and influence to modern society since the movement faded from the stage of cultural history. It is true that modernism as a living cultural force has only spanned from the late 19th to the mid-20th century in history. However, it still sustains “its provocation for all who try to understand it” (Levenson 1). Its inheritance remains vital in many fields such as literary criticism and artistic creation. In essence, the revolution of modernism is a permanent movement that changes from the comical mode to abstraction style, from symbolism to futurism, and from cubism to radicalism. The essence of modernism, “an endless pursuit of the new” (267), fits well in the contemporary society and it abidingly lives in time.

The return of modernism is taking place since it serves as the agency of change. “The change in modernism may be called postmodernism” (Hassan 11). Kermode revalues modernism in the aspect of postmodernism. From this, two categories of modernism— “paleo- and neo-modern” come out clearly (qtd. in Hassan 16). The former refers to modern and the latter corresponds to postmodern. Hassan agrees with Kermode’s classification of modernism and he adds the concept of surrealism as the meeting points of the two types of modernism. In other words, the features of modernism sustain and develop through post-modernism.

Aside from the revaluation of the function of modernism as an agent of change, the remnants of modernism in contemporary society are implemented by applying its theories into the new form of media, specifically film, which itself is “an accelerated image of modernity” (Wood 217), especially through the genre of dystopian film. Among the different film genres,

dystopian film plays a substantial role in the process of the return of modernism. Levenson explains that the importance of sustaining modernism is to “live within our own modernity” and to “be anxious about our place in time, the future of culture, and the fate of changes that the modernist sought to achieve” (1). These are also the main concerns of dystopian films.

In order to offer an in-depth understanding of the features of modernism in dystopian films, this paper discusses the aspects of modernism as exemplified in three representative films: *Fahrenheit 451*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Isle of Dogs*. These films span across different nations and eras and they encompass different types of film including feature film and animation, which reinforces the evidence that modernism regains its influence through the form of dystopian film.

### Chapter 3: Modernist Philosophy in Dystopian Films

#### Nietzsche's New Aesthetics

Besides the exterior forces, modernism has been shaped by some philosophical theoreticians including Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, and Sartre. The intellectual challenge offered by Nietzsche has a huge impact on modernism. Nietzsche is the first philosopher to exclude God in the discussion of “human responsibility and freedom” in the history of philosophy (Childs 69). His thoughts of “God is dead” and “the reevaluation of all the values” cause a thorough disillusionment with conventional values, and they also foreshadow “the modernists’ self-scrutinizing” (63). As a pioneer of Modernism, Nietzsche’s thoughts enlighten the kernel spirit of modernism: secularism, which contends that “natural selection [has] replaced God’s ordering of creation and a human will to power [has] eclipsed the divine will” (63). Furthermore, the essence of Nietzschean new aesthetics, the thoughts of doubt and negation, are the cornerstone for the *Weltanschauung* of all dystopian films.

The meaning of the existence of morality is the issue that both Nietzsche and other modernists try to give a systematic and precise explanation about. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the opus that embodies Nietzsche’s inclinations of modernism. In the book, Nietzsche talks about his view about life and how he yearns for a new individual to create new values. For Nietzsche, the representation of the ideal individual is Zarathustra through whom he brings up the decisive concept of his philosophy—*Übermensch* (super- or over-man). Nietzsche indicates that “man is something that must be overcome” (158). In this regard, Overman is the being “who could transcend religion, morality and ordinary society,” and represents “the highest goal that humanity could achieve” (Childs 65). Overman regards life as a sacred dance and longs for solitude; they are always lonely and never understood by the majority (Nietzsche 9). Nietzsche explains the

characteristics of overman in the aspects of Dionysian spirit, will to power, and eternal recurrence.

Nietzsche regards overman as an avatar of the Dionysian spirit which refers to “aesthetic pleasure” (Childs 63). Aesthetic pleasure is the status of self-forgetfulness and intoxication that manifests in the process of creating art. The protagonist of *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex, is a character with Dionysian spirit. Although Alex is a sociopath who perpetrates crimes without caring about moral boundaries, he interprets the immoral actions as the process of creating artworks. Thus, he creates a sense of ritual and ties it to his acts of violence and sex in a number of ways such as listening to Beethoven while fancying sex and violence, and singing “Singin’ in the Rain” while his droogs punch the author and rape his wife. All these imply that he pursues pure enjoyment and rapture through violence and sex.

One central component of overman is the will to power which is a prominent concept conceived by Nietzsche to describe his life principle. In essence, it is “the driving energy behind human” (Childs 64). Nietzsche claims that the lifetime’s ambition of overman is “[to] become what you are” (67) and overman achieves this goal in the process of seeking the truth of the world and in the process of self-overcoming. The protagonists of the three films (Alex, Montag, and Atari) grant value to their lives because they pursue the will to the power of life instead of idling time away and wasting life. All the three characters possess a deep love towards their lives and a dedicated spirit of creating values for their lives. The will to power for Alex is sex and violence, for Montag it is learning knowledge from books, and for Atari it is saving dogs from the trash island. However, Alex is the closest to the level of overman because his will to power is above all the other criteria. Overman aims for the transcendence of values and regards life as “an endeavor to maximize one’s own feelings of power over other people or things” (64). Both the wills of Montag and Atari are restricted by ethical codes. Only Alex ignores and breaks the

restriction of morality and builds up his own morality which is constructed by violence and sex. Thus, he achieves the height of overman that is beyond the standard of goodness and evil.

The term perspectivism is used by Nietzsche to explain the manifestation of the will to power. By means of perspectivism, Nietzsche argues that life itself is subjective and humans tend to interpret the world from their non-objective angle. Perspectivism helps the strong will to conquer other smaller wills “in the process of self-surmounting,” which assures individuals of “an absolute freedom of development” because everything is made up of the will to power (101). Moreover, perspectivism also helps mankind to get rid of the state of binary opposition between a subjective individual and the objective reality.

The narrative of *Isle of Dogs* is divided into two perspectives: the world of humans and the world of dogs. The concept is brought out in a language setting where dogs speak English and humans speak Japanese. Thus, audiences are forced to put themselves in the position of dogs and to understand the world from their point of view instead of a human identity which they are familiar with. The setting helps audiences to interpret the issue of human-dog relationship from the perspective of victims (dogs). In the film, humans think they are superior to other creatures as a matter of course. In contrast, in the perspective of dogs, dogs are equal to human beings. Chief (the wild dog) notices this inequity and he has been struggling with the decision of whether to help Atari as his friend or to abandon him as a human enemy. However, he solves the dilemma with the help of Nutmeg (the show-dog). In the scene, he asks Nutmeg why he is supposed to help Atari and Nutmeg replies that “because he is a 12-year-old boy, dogs love those” (*Isle of Dogs* 00:34:22-00:34:25). The response helps Chief to realize that dogs naturally love humans. Thus, he resolves to stop aligning himself with the humans’ perspective on dogs and instead accept his will as a dog, which means being friends with Atari. His will to power helps himself

conquer the distrust of humans. In the end, he accepts his new-identity as exemplified in his role as the new body-guard dog of Atari.

Eternal recurrence is another crucial aspect of overman mentioned by Nietzsche. Eternal recurrence is not merely the repetition of time and experience. Rather, it is a desire which involves overman's love to life. It is an "axiom for affirmative life," through which overman "live[s] each moment as though it were to be eternally repeated" (Childs 67). In Nietzsche's view, the strongest passion for life manifests as the willingness to repeat the experience, and only overman has that strong level of love towards life. In this case, the will to power is the bedrock of the process of eternal recurrence.

The theme of eternal recurrence plays an important role in *Fahrenheit 451* and is particularly reflected through the scenes related to the Bookman group. In the sequences where the leader of Bookman group explains the method of transferring the knowledge they have gained from books to future generations, he tells Montag that "when the next age of darkness comes, those of who come after us will do again as we have done" (*Fahrenheit 451* 01:47:58-01:48:05). The leader of Bookman realizes that the development of society follows a circular orbit. Although they are at the bottom of the circle at the moment which represents the dark time in human history, the bright era will come only if they do not give up their will to power. Additionally, their knowledge will continually be passed on from generation to generation. During the cycles of the dark era and the bright era, the truth and knowledge of overman gain immortality.

Nietzsche defines the antithesis of overman as *Letzter Mensch* (last man) who represents individuals belonging to the majority of the society and who have no idea on the direction and meaning of their lives. Nietzsche describes the last man as a well-fed, well-clothed, well sheltered, and well-medicated person who misunderstand that he gains the truth of happiness; he is the existence that only pursues comfort, satisfies with the present situation, and thinks little



about progress. The image of the last man is portrayed through the representation of majority in the three films such as Alex's parents and the gangster members in *A Clockwork Orange*, Linda and her friends in *Fahrenheit 451*, and Mayor Kobayashi and his assistants in *Isle of Dogs*. These people take no interest in their responsibility and they emanate emptiness and disorientation which brings out the disenchantment under the facade of regular life in modern society. These are people who lack the will to power and they do not contribute to social progress. In *Fahrenheit 451*, Linda and her friends are the typical last man whose lives are full of emptiness. In the scene when Montag reads *Dover Beach* in front of them, they shed tears uncontrollably though they do not know why they are crying in the first place. This scene implies that such people have lost the ability to think and react emotionally to things happening around them because of their ignorance. This alludes to the notion that people in modern society are losing the abilities to think and cherish life and ultimately become the last man.

### **Buddhist Modernism**

During the movement of modernism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Buddhism has been embraced by western enthusiasts as the “responses to the dominant problems and questions of modernity” (McMahan 5), which triggered the emergence of Buddhist modernism. Buddhist modernism, as the product of the development of society, refers to the engagement of Buddhism with the “dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity” (5). The movement facilitates the reconstruction and reformulation of Buddhism in an effort to fit in modern society from a worldwide perspective. Under the influence of Buddhist modernism, Buddhist ideas have been used in modernist literature works to emphasize on the inner world, the transcendence of conventional ethics, and the pursuing of simplicity (Mistry 76). During this process, many modernists have tried to give a modernized interpretation to Buddhist theory, especially

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche who are regarded as the two important philosophical pioneers of modernism.

Schopenhauer's affiliation to Buddhism is represented through his standpoint on pessimism which is the manifestation of Buddhist thought of "dukkha" (suffering). Both Buddha and Schopenhauer agree that suffering is the ultimate form of life. This is besides the notion that suffering is the root of the sense of despair which underpins the dystopian settings of filmic dystopias. The storylines of the three films revolve around the suffering of protagonists. Alex suffers from the loss of his free will, Montag suffers from the social suppression of his eagerness for knowledge, and Atari suffers from the loss of his bodyguard dog who is also his best friend. Their suffering is endless because new obstacles constantly appear in their lives even though they overcome the temporary obstacles. The idea of endless suffering is alluded to the foundation of Schopenhauerian philosophy: "pessimism is deduced from the immanent structure of the world" (Nanajivako 132), and life is "a constant for this existence itself" (Schopenhauer 403). This idea is highlighted in *Isle of Dogs* through the depiction of dogs' suffering. From the beginning of the film, dogs are regarded as unnecessary belonging for humans. In the end, though the pro-dog leader Atari becomes the new mayor, dogs are still relegated to inferior positions in the human society. Although dogs escape from Trash Island, they cannot escape from their destiny as tamed house-pets enslaved by humans. This irreconcilable contradiction between dogs and humans is part of the intrinsic structure of the world which alludes to Schopenhauer's pessimistic vision of life and it implies that the suffering of dogs does not have an end.

According to Elman, Nietzsche's acquaintance with Buddhism is influenced by Schopenhauer (676). He gives high praises to the philosophy of Schopenhauer in his early philosophical career. However, in his later career, Nietzsche renounces his agreement on Schopenhauerian theory and associates Buddhism with his accusation on Schopenhauer. In

*Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche condemns Schopenhauer and Buddha as “under the spell and delusion of morality” (qtd. in Elman 678). Nietzsche’s attitude towards Buddhism is controversial though he views Buddhism as “nihilistic,” “spiritually enervating,” and a tool used to “comfort and accommodate those whom he labeled decadent” (McMahan 4), he also gives positive remarks on Buddhism in *The Antichrist*. In addition, some scholars find similarities between the philosophies of Buddhism and Nietzsche. Elman argues that “Buddhism lies at the center of any attempt to understand Nietzsche's thought in its entirety” (686). Besides, McMahan points out that “an irrevocable spiritual nexus between the two perspectives” is the process of transformation (11), which refers to the concept of self-redemption. Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence and Buddhist samsara (the wheel of rebirth) are complementary approaches to self-redemption (4). In Nietzsche’s view, self-redemption is gained through the process of eternal recurrence where one achieves the goal of becoming overman. In Buddhist theory, self-redemption is gained through the process of samsara and it aims for salvation.

Both eternal recurrence and samsara refer to the repetition of duration and experience. However, they are divergent in the aspect of the mode of experience (12). The mode of experience in Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence is to transcend all the limitations and gain eternal joy. This is synonymous to achieving the goal of Dionysian spirit. For Nietzsche, the will to power becomes explicit in the process of suffering, and the spirit of Dionysian comes from the process of suffering because rapture and enjoyment both originate from the darkest status of society in which God is dead. In contrast, in Buddhist samsara, the mode of experience is ascetic practices. During the repetition of the mortification of the flesh, the attainment of nirvana (the rebirths in the process of samsara) helps one reach the highest goal of anatta (non-existence) and escape from spiritual exhaustion. In other words, humans escape from suffering and step out of the incessant cycle of samsara through nirvana.

The different modes of experience between eternal recurrence and samsara are explored in the three films. The mode of eternal recurrence is portrayed through the life of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*. Although Alex suffers from the Ludovico's Technique and the unjust treatments from his family and droogs, the suffering helps him be aware of his strong will and make the decision to return to his original lifestyle that revolves around sex and violence. The extreme torment confirms his determination to accept himself as a villain. In the end, he chooses evil rather than forced goodness because he knows violence and sex are the pivots of his life. Thus, he gains eternal joy. However, in *Fahrenheit 451* and *Isle of Dogs*, the lives of the protagonists turn around and they successfully escape from their suffering. Montag becomes a bookman whose job is to save books from a fireman whose job is to destroy books. Likewise, Atari becomes the new pro-dog mayor from a rebel who opposes the government. In the changing process, Montag and Atari both achieve their goal of escaping from the unstable status and restart their lives in a different way.

Besides differentiating between modes of experience, the two approaches to self-redemption are the representation of Occident and Orient perspectives (McMahan 7). Occident perspective (eternal recurrence) focuses on individual, but Orient perspective (samsara) focuses on collective and aims for new ethics and the sublimation of society. The Occident perspective is implied in *A Clockwork Orange*. The film focuses on his personal transcendence which revolves around the depiction of the loss and return of his free will in the process of suffering. The Orient perspective is implied in *Fahrenheit 451* and *Isle of Dogs*. In *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag decides to become a bookman who devotes himself to conveying knowledge to future societies. In *Isle of Dogs*, the film ends with the scene where Atari gains the support from citizens and becomes the new mayor who establishes a lot of pro-dog policies. Through his governance, Kobayashi city transforms to a pro-dog society from a pro-cat society. Both films focus on the efforts made by protagonists to establish a new system in the society and to lead the society towards the right direction they believed in.

#### Chapter 4: Modernist Thematic Features in Dystopian Films

The integration of Nietzschean philosophy, the Buddhist modernism theory, and many other modernist philosophies play a crucial role in helping modernism to come out clearly through a sophisticated system. A number of scholars have noticed some repeated motifs in modernist works. In the famous piece “POSTmodernISM,” Hassan uses seven rubrics to explain the common themes of modernist works. These rubrics are (anti-) technologism, urbanism, antinomianism, dehumanization, denaturalization, primitivism, eroticism, and experimentalism (Hassan 19-21). Moreover, the rubrics are also the foundation for dystopian settings in films and they are examined in diverse ways to achieve different thematic goals in the three films.

The rubric of (anti-) technologism agrees with Nietzsche’s attack on science. Hassan points out that technology can cause the “dissociation of sensibility” because of the “diffusion of the human will” (19) which is also addressed in Nietzsche’s new aesthetics. Nietzsche argues that scientific progress suppresses the “motive power” of society, and gives the hypothesis that when “scientific progress reaches the point,” “the hunger for knowledge” becomes the despair of society because of the inability to fully understand reality (Gooding-Williams 6-7). For Nietzsche, this despair is the root of nihilism, which is a term popularized by Ivan Turgenev who uses it as a sign of “decline and recession of the power of the spirit” in his book *Fathers and Sons* (Childs 65). The theme that scientific progress causes the decay of society has been highlighted in *Fahrenheit 451*. Interactive television is a typical example of advanced technology in the futuristic society. There are many scenes depicting Linda’s addiction to VR television in the film. From the scenes, it is evident that Linda spends a great percentage of her life watching television and this makes her lose interest in other things. In some sense, television reinforces her emptiness and causes her drug addiction which helps her to escape from reality. Her spirit is corrupted in the

process of mental sleep and physical sleep. Linda's life is used in the film to highlight the potential crisis in a high technological society as exemplified in the emptiness of spirit.

Besides agreeing with Nietzsche's condemnation of science, Hassan gives a further explanation of the elements used to express the theme of anti-technology in modernist works. Hassan claims that mythical elements such as "mythical space and occult images" are "subtle reactions to technology" (19). Childs agrees on the importance of mythology for modernist literature and he links the use of mythology in modernist literature to Freud's theory of unconscious mind. Childs explains that the power of myth comes from the logic which is based on emotion and is triggered by subconsciousness rather than "the formal progression of scientific inquiry" (66). This subjectiveness grants myth the ability of capturing the purest sensibility of human nature which has lost in the fast-changing world as the process of technology development. It is important to note that the prologue scene of *Isle of Dogs* uses the form of mythology to tell the historical conflict between dogs and Kobayashi dynasty. In the legend, Boy Samurai (the child warrior) betrays mankind and fights for the freedom of dogs because of his sympathy to the underdog. His heroic deeds of betraying humankind and saving dogs from annihilation culminate in empathy which is not applicable to a high-developed society because the development of technology decreases human ability to understand others' feelings and experience (Manney 1).

Besides contributing to the theme of anti-technologism, the use of ancient myth also represents the rubric of primitivism. Moreover, using traditional Japanese kabuki performance to introduce the background of the story and applying the art forms of ukiyoe and haiku in the opening scene are a wonderful combination of nostalgia and modern technique.

Hassan indicates the symbiosis between the rubrics of urbanism and technologism by contending that "city and machine make and remake one another" (19). All three films are set in

futuristic cities and they focus on urban life. Additionally, nature is omitted in the setting of the films. The topics of the degeneration and emptiness of city life are addressed in all three films through a portrayal of the citizens' life, such as the violent gangsters in *A Clockwork Orange*, the television addicted housewives in *Fahrenheit 451*, and the party-election broadcast audience in *Isle of Dogs*.

The rubric of antinomianism is influenced by Nietzsche's thoughts of doubt and negation. According to Childs, "Nietzsche's hatred for systematizers is visible in the modernists' earnest desire to speak for and as individuals" (68). His thoughts of "emphasis on the individual mind" and "[opposing] to the mass of the mindless" (67) are recurrent issues addressed in modernist literature and dystopian films. Hassan thinks that the two aspects of antinomianism, alienation and non-serviam, are the critical elements of modernist apocalypse writing (21). All three films follow the same structure where the marginalized protagonist doubts the correctness of the criteria used in societies where they have lived, and they decide to go against the established criteria and build up a new system based on their own belief. It is notable that both *Fahrenheit 451* and *Isle of dogs* are set in societies ruined by strong centralist and autocratic government which are often set as background of stories in modernist apocalypse writing.

The traits of dehumanization and denaturalization are illustrated in subtle ways in the films. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the naked women sculptures in the milk bar imply that females are objectified from the view of Alex and his gangster members. In *Isle of Dogs*, the theme of dehumanization is highlighted in the scene in which the pro-cat government plans to use robot dogs to replace real pets. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the Mechanical Hound (electrical hyena) who chase for Montag in the novel has been changed to humans with air vehicles. The concept of bookman also has some symbolic meaning of dehumanization. Harrison claims that the setting of bookman "make[s] books [...] as human as possible in the film" (56). These settings blur the boundary

between the identities of non-humans and humans in the films, which implies that the human nature has been lost in the distorted society. It also shows the opposition to the notion of the suppression of human's will.

The rubric of eroticism is mainly suggested in the film *A Clockwork Orange*. Many settings in the film are full of sexual innuendoes such as the milk bar with sculptures of naked women in the first scene and the Yoga teacher's room with many genital ornaments. On the one hand, the settings give audiences visual shock; and on the other hand, the degeneration and emptiness of the society are represented through these sex-related installations. Because humans cannot find any other thing that they can value in the society, they opt to express their emptiness through sexual desires.

Hassan explains the rubric of experimentalism as "innovation, dissociation, the brilliance of change in all its aesthetic shapes" (21). He also proposes that the main manifestation of experimentalism in modernist works is the creation of new concepts. There are many new concepts constructed in the universe of *A Clockwork Orange*. For instance, the slang with which Alex and other gangster members use in speech, Nadsat, is a fictitious language made up of English, Russian and Cockney expressions. Additionally, the bizarre costume such as the white uniform of Alex's droogs and the uncanny decor like the gaudy wallpapers in the living room of Alex's home create an unsettling atmosphere that detaches the film from reality. In some sense, all these hyper-stylized sets of mise-en-scene offer audiences some protection which reduces the feeling of disturbance by exaggerating the unrealistic aspects of the gloomy futuristic society.



## Chapter 5: Modernist Textual Skills in Dystopian Films

Besides subject matter, dystopian film draws its cinematic style from modernist textual features. According to Childs, many cinematic styles are borrowed from modernist writers, especially “Woolf, Joyce, Beckett, Lowry and Conrad” (128). Childs also claims that filmic techniques in dystopian films are echoed with modernist literary skills which cover many avant-garde textual styles under the names of “expressionism, imagism, surrealism, futurism, Dadaism, vorticism, formalism and [...] impressionism” (15). According to Booth, one key characteristic that distinguishes modernist literature from other literary genres is its rich and complicated narrative and rhetoric methods. The following discussion analyzes the three dystopian films from the aspects of the illustrative ways of modernist narratives and rhetoric methods based on Childs’ *Modernism* and Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction*.

Childs points out that under the influence of expressionism, modernist writers are more “subjective and associative prompting of the unconscious mind than to the formal progression of scientific inquiry” (66). Modernists focus more on the deconstruction of the inner world of humans rather than the rationality of scientific issues. They focus on the non-linear and divergent aspects of human thinking. The idea of divergent thinking is mainly expressed in modernist works of stream-of-consciousness which uses non-chronological narrative and focuses on the changing emotions. Childs also points out that the technique of non-linear discontinuous narrative is accompanied by montage skill in the staging of expressionist dramas such as Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (113). The non-chronological narrative is represented in *Isle of Dogs* by combining with the montage technique, by which space is handled in a non-linear way in the film. In the sequences about the death of professor Watanabe, the camera keeps changing among the scenes of sushi making, professor Watanabe’s eating process of the poisoned sushi, and the new adventure of Atari’s group. The rapid camera movements coupled with the juxtaposition of

different scenes imply that Atari will face more hazards in his new adventure and there will be more sacrifices like professor Watanabe's in the process of saving the exiled dogs. At the same time, the last scene of this sequence in which the indignant students are assembled by Tracy Walker (the international student with rebellious spirit) because of Watanabe's death transfers the idea that the victims of the conspiracy of the cat-pro government accelerate the awakening of people who are cheated and used by politicians. In addition to the non-linear narrative, filmic dystopias also tend to accompany the non-chronological narrative with the camera language thus projecting the inner world of characters. In the sequences about the Ludovico Technique treatment in *A Clockwork Orange*, there are many close-up shots about the distortion of Alex's face. This kind of camera language exaggerates the torture feeling and transfers Alex's feelings of despair to audiences.

Booth points out that many modernist authors tend to create "deliberate confusion" to break down "reader's conventional notion" (288). For them to create confusion, the unreliable narrative is used in many modernist works. The application of such narratives in *Isle of Dogs* is highlighted through the idea of being potentially deceptive in certain plots. For instance, when Atari arrives at the trash Island and finds the skeletal remains of Spots, he arranges a special funeral for Spots after overcoming grief brought about by the death of his bodyguard dog. Prior to this moment audiences have accepted the truth that Spots has died. However, in the later scene, audiences are abruptly told that the carcass belongs to another dog and Spots is still alive. This inversion causes dramatic tension by creating a feeling of suspense first and then denying the established truth which audiences believe.

Childs claims that modernist texts have the tendency to subsume "social, spiritual or personal collapse" within history through symbolism (20). The use of metaphors is the main approach to symbolism. Booth explains that "the emphasis on metaphor in modernism can be

demonstrated from its use of symbols” for “representational effect” (201). Filmic metaphors are used as allusions to specific themes in the three films. They mainly function as political allusions in *Isle of Dogs*. For instance, when Atari launches on the trash island, the eruption of his aircraft produces a mushroom cloud which is an allusion to the atomic bomb in Hiroshima during the Second World War. Also, the names of the five companion dogs in the trash island, Chief, Rex, King, Boss, and Duke are allusions to the five ranks of aristocracy in the traditional Japanese social hierarchy. The most important metaphorical statement in *A Clockwork Orange* is the title itself. It refers to the clockwork toy controlled by God, which represents that humans within the disciplined society are like mechanical toys that can never get individual freedom.

According to Booth, narrative irony is one commonplace in formalist literature to create “comic delight” (14). Hassan explains that the use of irony functions as “the aloofness of art but also sly hints for its radical incompleteness” (20). The method of irony is applied in *A Clockwork Orange* through the sequences on Alex’s stay in jail. During the jail life, Alex shows his enthusiasm for reading the bible. However, in the later bible reading and hymn singing scene, Alex’s mind is occupied by the fantasies of violence and sex. This irony shows that Alex’s goodness is not authentic and his nature does not change in the two years’ jail life. He is still addicted to violence and sex. In *Isle of Dogs*, irony is displayed in the scene where the mayor Kobayashi pretends to be a cat lover and carries a cat with him during the interview, but he immediately gets rid of it and shows his aversion towards the cat once the camera moves away from him. This set of irony satirizes the phenomena of political grandstanding. Besides, the use of comical elements also functions as irony in *Fahrenheit 451* (Whalen 182). These are highlighted through the shining uniforms worn by nurses and the funny medical treatment process in the scenes where Linda has been sent to the hospital. Another interesting comedy element comes out in the scene focusing on the interactive television game in which Linda has a

foolish conversation with the people on the television. In some sense, this kind of visual joke evades genuine realities through humor.

Childs claims that the technique of doubling character is used to convey the suggestion of dualism in modernist fictions. The concept enables that “good/bad, spiritual/physical, repressed/expressed split selves into the two characters” (Childs 191). Double cast is used in *Fahrenheit 451* between the characters of Clarisse and Linda. This setting implies that Clarisse is the doppelganger figure of Linda. Linda is the actual wife of Montag while Clarisse is the spiritual partner of Montag. They represent the two sides of human nature; Linda represents the ignorance and emptiness of mankind and Clarisse represents the intellectual aspect of mankind. Both of them try to convince Montag the correctness of their lifestyles. Linda aims for stability and she drags Montag into accepting the established reality. But Clarisse pushes Montag to step out of the status quo and create a new system. In some sense, they are the externalization of the inner conflicts of Montag.

Booth states that modernists use abstract forms to create the effect of the “pure realization” of the depicted facts and the “disinterested contemplation” for readers (127). Hassan claims that the technique of abstraction is used for the purpose of “impersonality, sophisticated simplicity, reduction and construction, time decomposed or spatialized” in modernist works (20). In *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick uses fast motion to compress the scene which depicts Alex’s sex with two young girls. This depiction reduces the sense of immersion which enlarges the distance between audiences and film to help audiences view the film objectively. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the director deliberately plays down the romantic feeling of the protagonist Montag. Audiences can hardly see Montag’s change of emotion because he does not have many facial expressions. Eller gives the reason that the director designs the character in the way of “lack of passion on screen” to achieve the goal of impersonality (248).

## Conclusion

As the cinematic extension of dystopian literature, dystopian film adapts the motifs and textual skills of dystopian literature in the scope of modernism and plays a vital role in the process of the return of modernism. The modernist influence on dystopian films is rooted in the modernist philosophy including Nietzschean philosophy and Buddhist theories. The kernel of Nietzsche's new aesthetic, overman theory, is examined in dystopian films through the aspects of Dionysian spirit, will to power, and eternal recurrence. In the process of Buddhist modernism, the idea of suffering in Buddhism has influenced Schopenhauer's viewpoint on pessimism and this contributes to the settings of dystopian films. In this conjuncture, the different approaches towards self-redemption between Nietzsche's eternal recurrence and Buddhist samsara are represented as the Occident perspective and the Orient perspective in dystopian films. In particular, Hassan uses seven rubrics of modernism to explain the common motifs in modernist works which are examined in dystopian films for different thematic purposes. Furthermore, modernist textual skills including narrative skills and rhetoric skills are also applied in dystopian films to achieve certain filmic goals.

The discussion applies the representation of modernism to dystopian films based on the aspects of philosophical support, thematic reflections, and textual devices in a bid to offer a new perspective on the study of such film. Additionally, the thesis also attempts to offer more possibilities for filming dystopian films by combining modernist features with filmic languages. The discussion on the issue of the return of modernism by the agent of film aims to draw readers' attention to the power of film and other media and to suggest the influence of the media in maintaining the life force of different forms of culture. The thesis yearns for learning modernist thoughts of doubt and negation from dystopian films which includes questioning the society and the world around us rather than being satisfied with the status quo. Furthermore, in some sense dystopian films are predictions of the future world thus help humans be aware of the potential risks in modern society which are addresses in dystopian films.

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