

# Apocalyptic Projections



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*A Study of Past Predictions,  
Current Trends and Future  
Intimations as Related to Film  
and Literature*

Edited by

Annette M. Magid

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Apocalyptic Projections:  
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as Related to Film and Literature

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For Hillel,  
Suzie & Elie,  
Jonathan & Tamar,  
Yaakov & Ayelet,  
Shira, Devora, Dov, Sam and Ella,  
who know the potential of possibilities and the strength of hope.



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## PREFACE

The majority of the papers included in *Apocalyptic Projections: A Study of Past Predictions, Current Trends and Future Intimations as Related to Film and Literature* were presented at the Northeast Modern Language Association [NeMLA] in Rochester, New York, 2012 as well as papers submitted for the conferences, but not included in the panels. *Apocalyptic Projections: A Study of Past Predictions, Current Trends and Future Intimations as Related to Film and Literature* offers an opportunity to study the past approaches to apocalyptic projection in addition to the renewed interest in the twenty-first century related to the 2012 Mayan Apocalyptic prediction. Also, this study offers a glimpse into predictions for the future of apocalyptic predictions in literature, film and other aspects of culture.

While apocalyptic projections have been pondered since Biblical times, philosophers and other writers alike have used their media of non-fiction, fiction and science fiction to recall past events in order to help the population prepare for calamity and plan for the future. Even though the concept of apocalypse evokes images of total oblivion, threads of the possibility of redemption offer a potential fabric of hope. This monograph examines films and texts that reveal humanity's past faults, offers studies of current theories, and examines apocalyptic treatises which impart avenues of possibilities in the face of total annihilation. Interests in the topic of the apocalypse have expanded across time, genres, disciplines, and cultures, from Biblical projections to science fiction accounts and beyond.

The focus of this monograph includes critical analyses of the impact of apocalyptic projections and pedagogical approaches. Part I, 'Messages from the Past,' Chapter One begins with Luana Barossi's "Through Different Eyes: Relative Dystopia in Post-Apocalyptic Topoi" which suggests the necessity to reclassify the terms dystopian and utopian as related to apocalyptic literature. She examines four literary narratives written in Portuguese which she translates and assesses. She asserts that experience in post-apocalyptic representations can suffer a gradation from utopian to dystopian depending on the programs of truth of a narrative community or society and the subjectivity of an individual character. She also includes a more extended reading for Nobel Prize winning author,

José Saramago, whose work, *Blindness*, has been translated and adapted into film.

In Chapter Two Nowell Marshall's "Mainstreaming Marxism: *Death Race* as a Critique of Apocalyptic Capitalism" analyzes critical attacks against some specific apocalyptic issues which stem from intrinsic details that critics seemingly overlook. He focuses on *Death Race* which he asserts presents an insistent Marxist critique of capitalism and privatization of public services (in this case the prison system) in the wake of a fictional economic crisis of 2012. He asserts that *Death Race's* countercultural message caused many critics to savage the film; however, that didn't stop everyday people from seeing the film which managed something rare: it re-appropriated the science-fiction/action film medium to broadcast Marxist critique to a mainstream audience not only in theaters, but also through its eventual viewing on DVD and Blu-Ray.

Kirin Wachter-Grene focuses on "Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*: Queer 'New Stories' of the 'Fourth Dimension of Citizenship'" in Chapter Three where she assesses the relevance of the "idea/ philosophy/ new religion" called "Earthseed." She argues that Earthseed, while not spiritual, is concerned with issues of truth, power, control and action. She stipulates that even though Earthseed is seemingly practical, it is also heretical in its attempt to find "truth" which can be analyzed as a derivative of black disconnectedness, black feminism, politics, family issues as well as the influence on queer theory, "queer of color" critique, and multiracial issues. She asserts that it is through an embrace of queerness in forms physical, "racial," sexual, religious/ philosophical, and contractual, that Earthseed, a new family and form of citizenship, is engendered and mobilized as a redemptive possibility in a post-apocalyptic landscape.

Gina M. Rossetti's "After the Plague: Race and Survival in Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague*" is Chapter Four. She examines London's focus on the role of Darwinian and Spencerian principles of species survival as a means to combat annihilation. She discusses the rise of race-based prejudices, issues of assimilation and anti-immigrant attitudes in the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries. She asserts that Social Darwinists used science, particularly the adoption of eugenicist principles, to extend their notions of a stratified society. She illustrates London's fear of a pan-Asian threat which extends from the reality of his prejudices into his fiction which uses the science of biological warfare as a final solution to eliminate the fictional Asian threat.

Following Rossetti's paper, there is a transition to Part II, Current Theories. Anna Hiller's "Dystopia 101" is Chapter Five which offers a

pedagogical discussion regarding the transcendence of the film, *Metropolis*, and its continuing relevance in a world that has profoundly changed through the development, and ensuing omnipresence, of technology. Her discussion includes first-person observations as well as an inclusion of current scholarship on *Metropolis*, critiques of technology in the twentieth and twenty-first century, and current demographic and/or psychological studies of the Millennial Generation.

Chapter Six, Benjamin Delloiacono's chapter assesses moral absolutes in the form of "heroes and villains" in "Caught in the Time Stream: Addressing the Challenges for Secularism in *Final Crisis*, *The Return of Bruce Wayne*, and *Captain America: Rebirth*." He asserts that the act of heroism in these graphic novels becomes pre-emptive enlightenment that can be read as the modern implementation of secular time

In Chapter Seven, Julian Cornell analyses the film *2012* in "Getting the Doomsday We Deserve: Roland Emmerich's *2012* and the Neoliberal Disaster Film." Cornell argues that the success of the film, an eschatological narrative associated with New Age cosmology, impacted the introduction of the 2012 doomsday prophecy into popular consciousness. He asserts that only a few critics attempted to debunk the film's pseudo-science. As asserted by Cornell, even though the film was a conventionality cliché disaster movie, it was an international blockbuster that brought the Mayan 2012 Prophecies to public awareness. He asserts that *2012* brings into apocalyptic films, many of which are secular in focus, a religious aspect of supernatural cataclysm and rebirth of a small group of chosen ones in a heavenly realm.

Chapter Eight, Philip Matthew Trad's "God and Machine: What It Means to Be Human in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*" assesses the "uncanniness" alluded to by Sigmund Freud regarding human behavior. Trad relates that fear is a common theme which focuses on the unknown. He asserts that the direction of technology becomes the framework which will shape the future of humanity.

In Part III, Predictions for the Future, Chapter Nine Dinah Holtzman's "This Tape is a Lightning Bolt" analyzes *Strange Days* (1995) as a collaborative project in which Kathryn Bigelow directed a screenplay written by her former husband James Cameron. Holtzman interprets *Strange Days* as a vision of a dystopian future set in racially tense postmodern Los Angeles in the aftermath of the Rodney King beating and the revelations of LAPD racism. She assesses Cameron's fantastical future vision as fin-de-millennial Los Angeles saved from apocalyptic race war.

Chapter Ten begins with Meghan Olivas' "The 'Weird Spell' of the Empty City: Reimagining America in Post-Apocalyptic Films of the

Atomic Age.” She discusses audience attitude regarding apocalyptic disaster films, for example, *San Francisco* (1936), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), and *Earthquake* (1974), that span the century and reflect Hollywood’s fascination with destruction that intrigues a large population of viewers. She illustrates that the audience finds a perverse attraction to a post-apocalyptic city. She also presents compelling examples of apocalyptic films which reflect class and race issues with intimations of future predictions.

Finally, Chapter Eleven assesses the potentiality of “Hope in the Face of Annihilation” by exploring current films and recent science fiction literature. In Chapter Eleven, Annette Magid explores the ramifications of survival in a fictional atmosphere of apocalyptic despair. Her analysis examines the need to focus upon the possibilities of hope for survival as seen in films such as *Hunger Games* and *Superman* even in the circumstance of seemingly total hopelessness for the future.

The studies in this *Apocalyptic Projections* book are reflections of society. One can learn much from societal acceptance or rejection of various doomsday theories. In addition, analyzing the multiplicity of apocalyptic treatises, both through literature and film, within a variety of generations and cultures, illustrates the need for individuals to seek answers, to attempt to create order in the continuing chaos that seems to increasingly plague societies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to those who attended the NeMLA Convention and showed much interest in the Apocalyptic Panels which I chaired and at which I presented papers. Also, thanks to the International Utopian Society attendees with whom I shared my scholarship regarding apocalyptic research. It is a privilege to be a part of such vital communities of scholars.

I am eternally grateful to my amazing husband who has encouraged me during every phase of my education and research. I appreciate his remarkable skills as a researcher as well as his ability to be a truly gracious helpmate.

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My appreciation to Amanda Millar for her professionalism and her expertise in typesetting and to the expert editorial staff at Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Finally, special thanks to Carol Koulikourdi from Cambridge Scholars Publishing whose interest in my Apocalypse Panels as a monograph candidate enabled me to bring this scholarship to a larger audience.



**PART I:**  
**MESSAGES FROM THE PAST**

# CHAPTER ONE

## THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES: RELATIVE DYSTOPIA IN POST-APOCALYPTIC TOPOI

LUANA BAROSSİ

*‘Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?’*

—Henry David Thoreau

There are several works commonly known or classified under the label of “dystopia” as a science fiction subgenre. However, this term can be read as relative to the character’s experience, depending on their programs of truth and processes of subjectivity. In other words, something may be a dystopian *topos* to one character and not to another. Thus, when calling a narrative ‘dystopian,’ it is important to understand that there is always a choice in structure of power relations involved in the process of accepting a narrative under this label. This issue presents a two pronged approach: when dystopia is associated to characters who are part of a hegemonic group (to the narrative or as a social representation) and do not take into consideration the perspective of other groups, it carries the danger of collaborating to the maintenance of anachronistic prejudices; on the other hand, when dystopia gives an account of minorities’ perspectives, it may be apprehended as a process of dismantling hegemonic power relations.

Hereafter, I will support the above statements while interpreting some aspects of four literary narratives written in Portuguese: “O quase fim do mundo” (Almost the End of the World), by Angolan Pepetela; “Paraíso líquido” (Liquid Paradise), by Brazilian Luiz Bras; “Ensaio sobre a cegueira” (*Blindness*), by Portuguese José Saramago; and “Ventos do apocalipse” (Winds of the Apocalypse), by the Mozambican Paulina Chiziane. It must be stated that my choice for works written in Portuguese is based not only on the fact that it is my mother tongue, but also to bring consistency to the main topic of this paper, which is the expression of



discourses that arise from spaces outside the hegemonic locus of enunciation. I will extend the reading of some aspects from Saramago's *Blindness* a little more than the other narratives, since it is a better known work outside the Portuguese-speaking countries because it has been translated into several languages and has already been adapted into film. Besides, Saramago won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1998. So, while reading the aspects I mention, the reader may be able to relate my proposition to something familiar.

The common ground among these works I mention is that all of them have been categorized as dystopias on account of their narratives, which support an apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic *topos*, and focus on a time of crisis which may occur during or after a catastrophe. The latter may arise in different cadences, from gradual to sharp occurrences.

Dystopia is usually applied in opposition to utopia: while utopia may be described as an ideal future space in which to live or a perfect community, dystopia could be explained as a dismal place, where the ideals of a utopian dream were dismantled. Etymologically, utopia means "nowhere" or "good place," while dystopia means "bad place." According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*,<sup>1</sup> dystopia is:

an imagined society or state of affairs in which conditions are extremely bad, especially in which these conditions result from the continuation of some current trend to an extreme; the genre of fiction set in such a society.

However, if we consider such a condition as a "dystopia," we are automatically presuming that this place or situation could be considered bad to every individual from that society; or that the people from this narrative society who consider the situation dystopian are actually the ones who hold the ultimate truth, to the detriment of people who may see the circumstances from another perspective. While ignoring the alterity or other points of view under a circumstance that may seem bad to us, we are assuming that the others' truths are not to be considered, and when doing so, we erase these others as individuals or group of individuals.

This erasure of alterity is entailed in an establishment (or maintenance) of power relations and deterritorialization<sup>2</sup> of the other's subjectivities. But

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Prucher, ed. 2007. *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*. 2007 (New York: Oxford University Press), 39.

<sup>2</sup> The term deterritorialization was first used by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* and then better developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Although apparently related geographic territory, the concept assumes a philosophical sense and regard to 'bodies without organs,' such as human subjectivity. An individual

who is this “other,” who can bring another point of view to a circumstance which was apparently set and classified? The social imagination is formed by several programs of truth<sup>3</sup> which have been built through genealogical processes,<sup>4</sup> that are always impregnated by power relations and domination constructs. Thus, when there is a social condition which is considered ‘normal,’ it has been probably understood so because of these processes. Fortunately, nowadays there are several social movements that aim to deconstruct this social imagination that erases the alterity’s subjectivity. However, sometimes people still accept concepts as truths without thinking of their effect on others; and by contextualizing them, it becomes possible to understand the power relations imbued in this process. Thus, the alterity in the narrative correlates to the ‘minorities,’ yet not exactly minorities in quantity, as Deleuze and Guattari explain:

The notion of minority is very complex, with musical, literary, linguistic, as well as juridical and political, references. The opposition between minority and majority is not simply quantitative. Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it. Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language (Joyce’s or Ezra Pound’s *Ulysses*). It is obvious that “man” holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc. That is because he appears twice, once

---

whose subjectivity deterritorializes and reterritorializes is called nomadic subject, a concept better developed by Rosi Braidotti in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of programs of truth was developed by Paul Veyne in *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?: An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (1984). Veyne offers a relativization of the truth(s), proposing that truth is a word which should be used always in the plural: there are only heterogeneous programs of truth, which are formed by complex genealogical processes. These programs of truth are like packets that constitute the collective narratives, and consequently affect the individual processes of subjectivation.

<sup>4</sup> In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Michel Foucault says “I don’t believe the problem can solve by historicizing the subject as posited by the phenomenologists, fabricating a subject that evolves through the course of history. One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledge, discourse, domain of objects, etc. without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to a field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history” (117).

in the constant and again in the variable from which the constant is extracted. Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way around. It assumes the standard measure, not the other way around.<sup>5</sup>

By understanding the contextual specificities of knowledge and considering the voices which were historically silenced, we can avoid the trap of relativism or deletion of other epistemologies. This attitude expands the possibilities of reading, avoiding the polarizing prospect of the dominant knowledge. Henceforth, I propose a contextualized reading of the narratives, which assigns the idea of hybrid dystopia, i.e., the different experiences in the same context may lead to divergent perceptions at the same *topos*.

“O quase fim do mundo”<sup>6</sup> is a post-apocalyptic novel by Angolan writer Pepetela. The novel deals with the stories of twelve people who survive the consequences of a weapon of mass destruction created by a group of eugenicists called the “European Nationalist Front.” The goal of this group was to decimate humanity and initiate a new, pure society to re-colonize the world. However, the neo-Nazis’ plan does not develop the way they wanted, and their bunker is destroyed in the process, killing them all. Oddly enough, they did not know there were many people in Africa, and did not set enough points of destruction in that continent. Thus, twelve people survive in the fictional town of Calpe, and they start to discuss what the best strategy for their future would be.

After the catastrophe, the first character to manifest himself in the narrative is Simba Ukolo, a physician, who is also the narrator most of the time. He is always worried about testing the water of the lakes in search of still-living bacteria, just as he is always looking for living animals, hoping that they could re-colonize the world with a balanced ecosystem. He believed that the survivors should try to reproduce among themselves as much as they could, so that humanity was not extinguished. To Ukolo, then, dystopia consisted precisely in the impossibility of continuing humanity. Based on the western scientific program of truth, more specifically the medicine, which puts the maintenance of life as the primary goal, the character seeks to calculate how many children each surviving woman must give birth to in order not to let humanity to be extinct. At this point, when he assigns a task to the surviving women, he disregards their subjectivities and their programs of truth, and his utopia (re-colonizing the world), becomes, to some women, their dystopia.

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<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. 2005. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 126.

<sup>6</sup> PEPETELA. 2008. *O quase fim do mundo* (Lisbon: Dom Quixote).

The character Isis, a feminist historian, is the most affected by Ukolo's request, since she understands that by doing so, she would be replicating the power structures propagated in the world pre-catastrophe, and starting over a male-dominated society, which was exactly what she fought against before the accident. Ukolo's request was responsible for a deterritorialization of her subjectivity, disregarding her position as a feminist, as a woman and as someone who wants to set her own functions in the new society, erasing the gender roles stated by the ancient world. If the reader decides to classify the work generically as 'dystopia,' he is neglecting Isis' position, and accepting Ukolo's program of truth as the absolute Truth.

The narrative has also the character Jude, a sixteen-year-old teenager who accepts Ukolo's proposal for "reproduction". However, the doctor finds himself with a moral barrier regarding Jude's age, and refuses to have sexual relations with her. She then seeks for other surviving men as an alternative, and tries to bond with Joseph Kiboro, a thief found in a local prison. Although Ukolo's proposal did not correspond to a dystopian experience to Jude as it was to Isis, his dystopia, i.e., the humanity's decimation itself, wasn't necessarily a dystopian experience to her. The girl always wanted to travel through Europe, and before the catastrophe she was prevented from going because of the European immigration policies. After the hecatomb, however, since there were no more barriers, she could go wherever she wanted. Thus, considering these particularities in the narrative, it is possible to realize that what is a dystopia to Ukolo, who holds a dominant program of truth, is actually a held utopia to Jude and the ones who could finally go wherever they liked.

The South African character Jan Dipenaar was an aircraft pilot, and taught the willing characters how to pilot small aircrafts. When travelling around Europe, Jude's utopia is turned into a dystopia: beyond the historical monuments, there is nothing of the expected glamor. A reterritorialization of desires and values is required:

Now the world seemed to be theirs only, they were richer than Croesus, all material assets to be shared among a few. However, no value was to be found in gold, in diamonds, in the euros and the dollars. There was nothing to buy. Everything was there to be effortlessly consumed. It was like a castaway on an island with only a coconut tree and a chest of jewels. If a new humanity was to come from them, would these treasures still be considered treasures? A good question. Maybe the new humanity could see

jewels in the dry leaf of a rare tree or in the flutter of a peacock's feather.  
Who could foreshadow what the new values would be?<sup>7</sup>

The new values or programs of truth are left to the reader's imagination. So, the role of the reader is to choose what kind of reterritorialization the new society is set to build.

There were two other women beyond Isis and Jude: the American scientist Janet, who studied the behavior of gorillas and middle-aged Ms. Geny, a practitioner of the religion "Paladins of the Holy Crown,"<sup>8</sup> a kind of cult invented by the neo-Nazi group with the aim of controlling humanity and turning the task of eliminating it easier. The ultimate goal of this group was to create a "Brave new world," in the style of Huxley's society.<sup>9</sup> It should be a theoretically perfect civilization, but unlike the English narrative, would not occur in a closed space surrounded by the "wild world." They relied upon the complete elimination of all other human beings by means of weapons of mass destruction, as described in this document found by the survivors:

It is necessary to state that the weapons from the "Gamma Alpha Bundle" are not bombs in the conventional sense. They do not cause explosions. They launch radiation. In other words, the weapons disintegrate into radiation, cleaning around a territory as big as Australia. The weapons disappear along with the targets. Of course, the fingers that will detonate them will also disappear. That is why we do not bother [considering] whether these fingers are black, gypsy or Arab; they're all fingers condemned to decimation anyway, just as long as they [the weapon launchers] are sincere prophets, believers in the virtues of our faith.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> With the exception of *Blindness*, which has an English translation, all the excerpts from the narratives were translated by me. In Portuguese: "Agora o mundo parecia ser deles apenas, eram mais ricos que *Cresus*, todos os bens materiais a repartir por uns poucos. No entanto, de nada valia o ouro, os diamantes, os rubis, nem os euros ou os dólares, nada havia para comprar, tudo estava ali para ser consumido sem esforço. Estava como o naufrago numa ilha só com um coqueiro e uma arca de joias. Se a partir deles houvesse uma nova humanidade, essas riquezas ainda seriam consideradas riquezas? Uma boa questão. A nova humanidade era capaz de considerar joias uma folha seca de árvore rara ou o esvoaçar de uma pena de pavão. Quem poderia pressagiar os novos valores?" PEPETELA. 2008. *O quase fim do mundo*, 330.

<sup>8</sup> In Portuguese: *Paladinos da Coroa Sagrada*.

<sup>9</sup> Aldous Huxley. 2006. *Brave New World* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, Reprint edition).

<sup>10</sup> In Portuguese: "Sobre as armas do "Feixe Gama Alfa" é necessário dizer que não são bombas, no sentido convencional do termo, não provocam explosões.

The Paladins of the Holy Crown's enthusiasts would be the "fingers" responsible for the elimination of humanity. However, they wouldn't be aware of the consequences and of the real goals behind their creed. They would be mere pawns. The group responsible for this plan believed to be a "superior race," so this belief was their program of truth. Although their "truth" was immoral in many ways, they had the dystopian experience of their own, even if this occurrence was not felt *in loco*. The discovery of their objectives by the disaster's survivors through letters and documents with descriptions of the plan is enough to understand that the succession of events turned their utopia into a dystopian reality. This dystopia has two dimensions. The first regarding their own death, which was the only death they wanted to avoid, and miscalculations resulted in self-destruction. Secondly, there is the survival of twelve people in Africa, exactly the ones who were the main target-group for extermination.

To the African characters considered as a group, the post-apocalyptic *topos* represented initially an outline of the end of the world, but at last becomes a symbol of breaking down the barriers and the rise of a new era to those who have been historically exploited, objectified, and whose narratives were erased.

The story "Futuro Presente"<sup>11</sup> (*Present Future*), a novella by Brazilian Luiz Bras, also intersperses the narrative focus on the individual experiences of the protagonist and the collective experiences.

In the beginning of the narrative it becomes clear that this relation between an individual and a group will be important to understand how a dystopian experience can be generalized or contextualized according to identities and identifications. The main character tells her girlfriend:

You may be stunned, perplexed, and gaping, but it is true: an isolated person can be unpredictable, but one billion people acting randomly always present an orderly and predictable behavior. Believe me; the chaos of collective life always produces quantifiable standards. I examine the

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*Lançam radiações, ou melhor, as armas desintegram-se em radiações que limpam à sua volta todo o território correspondente a um continente como o australiano. As armas desaparecem pois com os alvos. Claro que os dedos que as detonarem também desaparecerão. Por isso não nos incomodamos nada pelo facto de esses dedos serem negros, árabes ou ciganos, tudo dedos condenados a desaparecer, de qualquer modo, desde que sejam profetas sinceros, crentes nas virtudes da nossa fé.*" PEPETELA. 2008. *O quase fim do mundo*, 342.

<sup>11</sup> Luiz Bras. 2010. "Paraíso Líquido". In *Paraíso Líquido* (Sao Paulo: Terracota).

field research and the statistics, and I see patterns signaling: war, war, war.<sup>12</sup>

The protagonist's obsessive-compulsive subjectivity takes place in the second part of the narrative, through a mathematic representation as a metonymy of her dystopian lived experience:

When I'm alone, sometimes I scream. Fractions and percentages. Even when I'm on my medication (in my arteries, rather than blood, flow pure fluoxetine and sertraline). But shouting the result of certain probability calculations is a much less uncomfortable disorder than, for example, having memorized the position of all the objects in the room, the hallway, the whole apartment.<sup>13</sup>

This dystopian experience related to the character's obsessive compulsive disorder is the key for her to predict that the war is coming. She starts manipulating events in her favor, always using her statistics knowledge as a strong ally. She works for the government, which in this fictional society is a new kind of capitalism in which women take advantage of the global crisis to deterritorialize the patriarchal system that has been dominant for centuries:

What makes the planet turn are the successive crises that shake its institutions. The last global economic catastrophe did not put an end to capitalism, or to the vicious cycle of finances. But it ended with the male hegemony. . . . The transition was subtle, but painful. The economic and political power is now at the hands of women. That was the response of the electorate to the phallic competition that always guided investment banks. Yesterday's predators are today's losers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In Portuguese: "*Você talvez fique pasmada, boquiaberta, perplexa, mas é verdade: uma pessoa isolada pode ser imprevisível, mas um bilhão de pessoas agindo aleatoriamente sempre apresenta um comportamento ordenado e previsível. Acredite, o caos da vida coletiva sempre produz padrões quantificáveis. Eu examino as pesquisas de campo e as estatísticas, e vejo os padrões sinalizando: guerra, guerra, Guerra.*" Bras. 2010. *Paraíso Líquido*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> In Portuguese: "*Quando estou sozinha às vezes grito. Frações e porcentagens. Mesmo quando estou tomando remédio (nas minhas artérias, em vez de sangue, correm fluoxetina e sertralina puras). Mas gritar o resultado de certos cálculos de probabilidade é um transtorno muito menos desconfortável do que, por exemplo, acertar a posição de todos os objetos do quarto, do corredor, do apartamento inteiro.*" Bras. 2010. *Paraíso Líquido*, 145.

<sup>14</sup> In Portuguese: "*O que faz o planeta girar são as sucessivas crises que abalam suas instituições. A última catástrofe econômica mundial não acabou com o*

This excerpt could be superficially analyzed as a feminist utopia. However, when reproducing a system which has several gaps by only changing the group that has the power of domination is a problem which has been pointed out by Jacques Derrida.<sup>15</sup> The author draws attention to the ambush of mere exchange of positions between the hegemonic discourse and the marginalized discourse in an attempt to promote historical deconstructions. This event would maintain the focus on logocentrism, a concept criticized by him. The logocentrism would, therefore, be playing a new hierarchy with the replacement of the social position of a particular protagonist by the other, erasing the complexities imbued in this process. Then, by inserting the marginalized group in the place where the hegemonic group has been standing for centuries while the means of action remain the same, the narrative is not imbued in the process of deconstruction.

However, with the female supremacy in the three governments, since the world in the story is divided into three major political blocs, the focus of the struggle ceases to be related to gender:

After the war of the sexes at the end of the last century, the axis of the new conflicts has become again geopolitical competition, the clash of ideologies. . . . It does not matter if male or female, politics is and always will be led by predators.<sup>16</sup>

The three large political blocs refer, indirectly, to George Orwell's disciplinary society from the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, not only by the similar names but because they are in constant warfare against each other. They are America, Eurasia and Oceania. The protagonist, working in the coalition of America, tries to manipulate the government in her favor. Her first purpose was to postpone the war that would be established, so that her death would be put off. This event shows the constant struggle between the individual and political goals. During an extremely ironic stream of

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*capitalismo nem com o ciclo vicioso das finanças. Mas acabou com a hegemonia do macho. . . . A transição foi sutil, porém dolorosa. O poder político e econômico está agora na mão das mulheres. Essa foi a resposta do eleitorado à competição fállica que sempre norteava os bancos de investimento. . . . Os predadores de ontem são os perdedores de hoje.”* Bras. 2010. *Paraíso Líquido*, 146.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida. 1997. *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press).

<sup>16</sup> In Portuguese: “*Terminada a guerra dos sexos no final do século passado, o eixo dos novos conflitos voltou a ser a competição geopolítica, o embate de ideologias. . . . Tanto faz se masculina ou feminina, a política é e sempre será conduzida por predadores.*” Bras. 2010. *Paraíso Líquido*, 146, 158.



consciousness, she reveals one of the scariest features of this disciplinary society, which corresponds to her great dystopia as an individual, but also to all individuals who would like to choose their professional goals:

I was supposed to graduate in physics. That's why I studied so hard. But the university council, in its vast and unquestionable wisdom, decided that I should attend the geology course. America needs geologists, they said. They had in mind the Brazilian oil, of course.<sup>17</sup>

Formal education in the story is focused on the interests of the government and the large corporations. Individual dystopia is then materialized, because the choices are limited to the faculties' regiments, the disciplines and areas of training, hiking to the interests of those segments. Personal expectations and critical skills are neglected in this process.

Besides the inordinate chronology as a resource to propose the idea of relativity of time, the story embodies the statistical predictions of the protagonist: "As I had predicted, I was elected the third president of the global alliance. Also according to my predictions, before that glorious election came the war. And I died as soon as it started."<sup>18</sup>

At first glance, the reader is led to believe that the narrative would be then a posthumous memoir. However, what happens is the suspension of the "dead" character in half-life, something like the cryogenics proposed in movies like "Abra los Ojos" and "Vanilla Sky," but after a scientific resurrection, alluding to Shelley's *Frankenstein*.<sup>19</sup> During this period, she undergoes experiences of understanding phenomena not explained by science. This plot alludes to the relativism of the western scientific program of truth, considered by several people as the only way to understand an alleged reality.

I woke up seventy years later. It was still a bit dark, but as I regained consciousness, I soon noticed the cold had passed. . . . I was the first human to go through the suspension in half-life and come back. . . . During

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<sup>17</sup> In Portuguese: "Era para eu ter me graduado em física. Foi para isso que eu matei de estudar. Mas o conselho universitário, em sua vasta e inquestionável sabedoria, decidiu que eu deveria cursar geologia. A América precisa de geólogos, disseram. Tinham em mente o petróleo brasileiro, é claro." Bras. 2010. *Paraíso Líquido*, 147.

<sup>18</sup> In Portuguese: "Conforme eu havia previsto, fui eleita a terceira presidente da aliança global. Também conforme minhas previsões antes dessa gloriosa eleição veio a guerra. E eu morri logo no seu início." Bras. 2010. *Paraíso Líquido*, 159.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Shelley. 1994. *Frankenstein* (New York: Dover).

the seventy years I spent in the thermal bag, part of my body was artificially reconstructed; the part the explosion had ignited.<sup>20</sup>

After waking up, the character-narrator describes the moment she faces the post-apocalyptic world, destroyed by several wars while she was in half-life suspension:

It was hard to accept that I would never see Bruna [her girlfriend] again. Grief made everything else seem gray and dull. The brave new world did not scare me so much. International politics was a mess. . . . The global alliance had collapsed soon after my death. The war was coming to an end, through sheer exhaustion; America, Eurasia and Oceania followed by leaps and bounds, indigent and bankrupt.<sup>21</sup>

Since the narrative is not linear, in the next chapter the character returns to the time she was cryogenized, assuming at some excerpts the role of the narrator, as if she knew what was happening outside her “parallel world.” She outlines what the scientists were hoping to find out: how it was like to be in half-life suspension; how it was like to ‘have only half of her life’:

The doctors, the specialists, they were excited, beside themselves; they wanted all the details; they needed to know how it felt like to be in half-life. . . . I was tired of being just a ghost trapped in a thermal bag inside a transparent casket. I was exhausted of dwelling only in my mind.<sup>22</sup>

She also describes how it was like to be in that situation and what kind of oneiric experience made her realize that there were programs of truth

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<sup>20</sup> In Portuguese: “Acordei setenta anos depois. Ainda estava um pouco escuro, mas ao recuperar a consciência logo notei que o frio havia passado. . . . Fui a primeira cobaia humana a passar pela suspensão em meia-vida e voltar. . . . Nos setenta anos que passei na bolsa térmica parte do meu corpo foi reconstruída artificialmente. A parte que a explosão tinha incinerado.” Bras. 2010. *Paraíso Líquido*, 162-163.

<sup>21</sup> In Portuguese: “Foi difícil aceitar que jamais veria Bruna outra vez. O luto fez todo o resto parecer cinza e sem graça. O admirável mundo novo não me assustou tanto. A política internacional estava a maior bagunça. . . . A aliança global ruína logo após minha morte, a guerra estava chegando ao fim, por pura exaustão, e a América, a Eurásia e a Oceania seguiam aos rancos e barrancos, falidas na indigência.” Bras. 2010. *Paraíso Líquido*, 163.

<sup>22</sup> In Portuguese: “. . . os doutores, os especialistas, estavam excitados, fora de si, queriam todos os detalhes, precisavam saber qual era a sensação de estar em meia-vida. . . . Eu estava cansada de ser só um fantasma preso numa bolsa térmica dentro de um esquite transparente. Eu estava exausta de habitar apenas minha mente.” Bras. 2010. *Paraíso Líquido*, 167.

which could lead beyond the discourses proposed by the experimental scientists. This is an important field of deconstruction of hegemonic discourses, since experimental science is considered by a huge amount of people as an axiom. Proposing a displacement of perspective and the deconstruction of axioms, the narrative ironically presents, in a digression, a two-dimensional space, inhabited by two-dimensional beings, who did not believe in a third dimension for lack of empirical evidence.

The narrative quips about certain human struggles and offers a critique of the Cartesian and empirical programs of truth. It might be said that the novella falls into an ontological or fantastic field, but the constant references to experimental physics and the need to weld the knowledge from theoretical, experimental and human sciences implies an ironic perspective on the axioms in which contemporary Western societies are based.

The novel *Blindness*,<sup>23</sup> by the Portuguese writer José Saramago, also offers a new perspective on the deconstruction of established programs of truth, but focuses on the commonplaces and clichés in which people usually believe as ultimate truths. Usually classified as a ‘dystopia,’ *Blindness* has complex narratives that permeate the most profound aspects of the human condition.

There is a mass epidemic of white blindness that affects firstly a small group of people who are put in quarantine in an old closed hospital; and from then on, blindness also starts to affect others until the whole of society is taken by it. The novel focus is on the first group, but as the narrative progresses, the heterodiegetic narrator presents other groups of characters who are set apart because of their condition, and the reader is led to observe and feel the extremes of violence and humanity in this closed space. When the place is full and almost unbearable to endure, the first group of blind people discovers that the epidemic has reached everyone outside, so they leave the hospital guided by the doctor’s wife. She could be considered the protagonist and is the only character in the entire novel who does not lose her sight, though she pretended to be blind to be sent to quarantine along with her husband.

Although this is a didactic generalization, if we consider this first group of characters as a community with similar beliefs and feelings, the dystopia in the narrative relative to their experience would result in a sine function graphic representation, thanks to the ups and downs of their undergoing situation. This happens because of the experience of the extremes present in the human condition: from the worst kind of violence

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<sup>23</sup> José Saramago. 2013. *Blindness* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

and erasure of the alterity to the highest level of humanity. When they change physical locations, their experiences change. When the epidemic achieves a catastrophic level, blinding the entire society (with the exception of the doctor's wife), all the spaces are taken by scatological and bestial situations, which for some critics could be the ultimate image of dystopia. However, the sense of community of the first group leads to an experience of abetment and mutual support which would be rare even in a world free of epidemics.

Another interesting hybridity in dystopia is the position of the woman who does not lose her sight. In the opinion of all other members of the first group, she is privileged for this capacity, but the description of her experience proves that being the only one with sight in a blind world is not exactly a utopian feature.

When the hospital gets crowded, the narrative reaches the top of the second parabola relative to the group dystopia, considering it as the second huge dystopian experience, after the individual experience of going blind. The confined space of the hospital, which represents a period in the life of the characters, can be related to Michel Foucault's idea on heterotopias of disciplinary societies.<sup>24</sup> Heterotopias are real spaces created at the very foundation of society, like fulfilled utopias in which representations of all other real spaces might be found. They are walled spaces in which power structures from the outside world are repeated or exacerbated, as well as the programs of truth from the cultures in which they operate. They can be classified as *heterotopias of crisis* and *heterotopias of deviation*, and in some cases, these two forms overlap. Generally they are closed spaces which aim to adapt individuals to live within pre-established social rules and conventions. I propose to read the space of the hospital to which the blind were sent at the beginning as a heterotopia that is both of crisis and deviation. At the same time, blindness could be considered another heterotopia, at the same time individual, since people cannot see the outside, and collective, since almost everyone gets trapped in this 'space.' Although not formed by walls, this blindness immerses the individuals in a milky fluid that prevents them from seeing, usually literally, but sometimes metaphorically, meaning they cannot apprehend the suffering of others. Throughout the work, the space that should be a deviation space which differentiates itself from the "reality" outside transforms the society itself, and what was deviation becomes the default. The doctor's wife, the

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault. 1984. "Des espaces autres" (Paper presented at the Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, 14 March 1967, in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, n.5, Paris), 46-49.

only person who can see, confirms the existence of the structures of power and strength within the heterotopia in which they are embedded:

Standing there, the doctor's wife watched the two blind men who were arguing; she noticed they made no gestures, that they barely moved their bodies, having quickly learned that only their voice and hearing now served any purpose. True, they had their arms; they could fight, grapple, and come to blows, as the saying goes, but a bed swapped by mistake was not worth so much fuss. If only all life's deceptions were like this one, and all they had to do was to come to some agreement: Number two is mine; yours is number three. Let that be understood once and for all. Were it not for the fact that we're blind, this mix-up would never have happened. You're right; our problem is that we're blind. The doctor's wife said to her husband: The whole world is right here.<sup>25</sup>

These two heterotopias are responsible for a post-apocalyptic *topos*, noticeable thanks to experiences such as hunger; living in a scatological setting, covered by feces and not having water to wash themselves; and finally the extreme violence generated by the brutalization of individuals living in such conditions. However, this brutal scenario can be experienced basically in two extreme ways, since the hybridity of the dystopian experience is always present in the *topos*. Firstly, by dehumanizing the other, through their reification, by naturalizing violence in personal relations, which could be a metaphorical blindness, since when that happens, it becomes impossible to see the other. This situation could be read as the banality of evil,<sup>26</sup> since it is the reproduction of the acts of violence derived from power relations of institutionalized spaces. Secondly, by the extreme humanization, responsible for the becoming-other<sup>27</sup> at a situation in which any other—a human being, an animal, or any individual who is physically or psychologically unattached from the person in concern—is inserted is unbearable to accept even as a

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<sup>25</sup> Saramago. 2013. *Blindness*, 97.

<sup>26</sup> Banality of evil is a concept by Hannah Arendt, present in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Her thesis is that a person who performs the acts that Eichmann performed is not necessarily a sociopath or a deliberately evil person, but an ordinary person who accepted the premises of an institution which is based on acts of annihilation, turning then state and institutionalized violence into something normal.

<sup>27</sup> Guattari Deleuze. 2005. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.

possibility, since it is the extreme of the dystopian experience. Then, an ethics of the alterity takes place in the assemblage.<sup>28</sup>

One symptom that is part of the banality of evil in society is the basis of human and social values in commonplaces, which can be expressed in the form of adages and proverbs. When the speeches of these random and automatically repeated phrases are taken as being true, their content is inserted as truth in the social imaginary. When the first group of blind characters, in the company of the doctor's wife, discovers that the epidemics had spread to every individual even outside the mental hospital, they leave the heterotopia and go to the house of the girl with dark glasses:

She let the girl go ahead since she knew the way; she did not mind the shadows into which the stairway was plunged. In her nervous haste, the girl with dark glasses stumbled twice, but laughed it off, Just imagine, **stairs that I used to be able to go up and down with my eyes closed**, clichés are like that; they are insensitive to the thousand subtleties of meaning. This one, for example, does not know the difference between closing one's eyes and being blind. On the landing of the second floor, the door they were looking for was closed.<sup>29</sup>

The adage “do something with your eyes closed” is deconstructed in this context. The subtleties to which the girl with dark glasses refers, are exactly the ones that are ignored, that trivialize the commonplace, ending up into what Arendt called ‘banality.’ There is also a paradox in the adage: if she could do that with her eyes closed, why couldn't she do it when blind? So, in some aspects, the uncritical acceptance of adages, clichés and proverbs may lead to a condition which is possibly related to the dystopian experience.

There is the deconstruction of another important adage in the narrative, the Latin adage *in regione caecorum rex est luscus*, assigned to Erasmus of Rotterdam, that means “in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.” If we put a question mark at the end of the sentence: “In the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king?”, and then read the excerpt from the novel when the doctor's wife can finally vent her feelings by being the only one who could see, we are able to understand the problems imbued in the assertion of the proverb:

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<sup>28</sup> “An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections.” Deleuze. 2005. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Saramago. 2013. *Blindness*, 246. Emphasis added.