**GENRE ESSAY SCAFFOLD: DEVELOPMENTS IN DYSTOPIAN FILM**

**A genre studied this year is dystopian science fiction film.** Dystopian films are set in the future and contain societies very similar to present day but with subtle differences. Usually the dystopia appears to be beneficial in some regard to the human race but in reality it is oppressive and controlling of its citizens. The society is fundamentally flawed with only one elite group benefitting from the misery to which the rest of the society is subject. Dystopian films also tend to reflect an aspect of the society in which they were made and the concerns of that era. Dystopian science fiction films are often used as a vehicle for social commentary and as such are an extremely powerful mode of expression. These films also include impressive special effects which have improved dramatically over time due to technological developments.

**A significant development in the science fiction genre with the sub-genre of dystopian films can be shown through the aspect of theme.** For example the 1997 film *‘Gattaca’* directed by Andrew Niccol contains important themes such as a desire for physical perfection and fear of liberal eugenics. Liberal eugenics is the deliberate selection of the genetic makeup of children. This can be seen in the film through the character of Vincent Freeman. Vincent lives in a society where it has become commonplace for parents to genetically create their children, omitting undesirable qualities. This has resulted in the creation of a genetically superior race known as “valids”. Vincent is an “invalid” and as such cannot become an astronaut. His natural conception has left him with a shortened lifespan and impaired vision – he has to wear glasses. Occupations in this film are determined by genetic makeup as are the choosing of life partners. This has resulted in a society which discriminates based not on race or gender but on the quality of an individual’s genetic make-up. **This film reflects the concerns of the era in which it was made because at this point in time there had been rapid advancements in IVF technology and cloning.** In vitro fertilization (IVF) involves the fertilization of the egg by the sperm in test tubes, outside the mother's body. The world's first test tube baby was created in 1978. By using preimplantation parents can choose the gender, eye, skin and hair colour of the baby. Various other physical traits such as intelligence, beauty, height, freedom from mental illnesses, athletic ability can be also determined. By the early 1990’s this service had become readily available to couples seeking help to conceive. The National Director of Christian Voice, Stephen Green said, "The objection to the idea of designer babies is…there's a real sense in which it is playing God." Critics of IVF point out that the level of biodiversity in the human race will plummet. This can already be seen in China where the one child policy and the use of gender determining technology has seen the abortion rate of female foetuses skyrocket. The consequence of which is a severely unbalanced gender distribution. Another concern is that IVF could also result in an increase of fear or hatred towards anyone who appears different. People with genetic defects will be socially rejected leading to a genetic aristocracy. The fact that the price for each baby is $15000 to $18,000 in America is another factor which adds to this fear as often treatment is only a reality for the wealthy. Clearly ‘Gattaca’ and the experiences of Vincent Freemen reflect societal fears of IVF and cloning. It could also reflect society’s preoccupation with beauty and perfection as during the 1990’s plastic surgery was also becoming increasingly popular (especially in America). This is shown in the film in that “valids” are essentially flawless human beings whose genetic make-up has been designed to produce both mental and physical perfection.

**Another example of the thematic development in dystopian films can be seen in the 2009 film ‘Surrogates’ by Jonathon Moscow.** The theme shown in the film is the increased use of social media to interact in society. The film is set in a future society where a company named VSI have developed androids called “Surrogates”. The “Surrogates” walk around living the life of their controller. This advancement is seen as beneficial because the controllers are able to stay at home safe from risk of disease or accidents. In “Surrogates” The main character Tom Greer has a wife called Maggie who uses her surrogate constantly. She distances herself from her husband to escape the pain of losing her son in a car crash. Their relationship deteriorates as Tom feels isolated and distant from his wife. He mourns the relationship and physical “human” connection he has with the real Maggie. Maggie is unwilling to unplug from her surrogate as it will mean facing reality and the pain she still feels due to the loss of her son. When Tom asks her to stop using her surrogate and spend time with him she says “Things have changed Tom…This is who I am now”. This results in Tom never actually seeing or talking to his wife face to face. Throughout the film we see that the “Surrogates” are actually oppressive because they result in people losing their communication skills. Surrogate operators (like Maggie Greer) do not fully participate in life. There is the suggestion that individuals have retreated from real life for the sake or a safer more preferable alternate reality in which they do not have to ever suffer from pain, aging or disease. They can look like and become whomever they want to be**. This film reflects the concerns of society in 2009 because** it highlights concerns over the increasing development and obsessive use of social media sites and interactive online gaming. Facebook is a social networking service and website launched in February 2004. A January 2009 Compete.com study ranked Facebook as the most used social networking service by worldwide monthly active users. As of April 2012, Facebook has more than 900 million active users. The Sims is a strategic life-simulation video game. The player creates virtual people called "Sims" and places them in houses and helps direct their moods and satisfy their desires. Players can either place their Sims in pre-constructed homes or build them themselves. In 2002, The Sims became the top-selling PC game in history selling more than 6.3 million copies worldwide. Major social fears have emerged that this obsession with online interaction is resulting in a loss of face to face communication skills. This concern is emphasized by the Director Jonathon Mostow who declared “We stay at home and we are controlling these things precariously from afar, and really its like a metaphor for the internet, for how were living our lives right now in this digital age”. By using social media to communicate, we are unable to understand facial expressions and body language because we are limiting the amount of human interaction in our daily lives.

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**The significance of this thematic development particularly for the audience** **is** *that science fiction films can always be seen as vehicles for social commentary providing relevant messages and warnings about the world around us. Science fiction is an evolving genre of film which is able to influence the thoughts and actions of the audience in regards to the issue or ideas being conveyed. Therefore the narrative of a science fiction film can be seen as an extremely powerful tool and mode of expression. Dystopian films in particular provide audiences with a rather bleak view of the future unless we evaluate carefully the consequences of our actions and the negative ramifications which may occur if we do not choose wisely.*

**A significant development in the science fiction genre with the sub-genre of dystopian films can be shown through the aspect of Special Effects (SFX).** An example which helps show this development is the 1983 film “Blade Runner” directed by Ridley Scott. The film is set in Los Angeles 2019. At this point in time the use of computer generated special effects, like we see in modern films were non-existent as the technology had not yet been developed. Special effects were created “in camera” using miniature models, costume, makeup and man-made sets, for example, the Los Angeles skyline and the Tyrell Corporation building. The police vehicles or hovercrafts (“Spinners”) were also created by filming man-made life size models. The “Spinner” vehicle was conceived and designed by Syd Mead and was transformed into 25 working vehicles. The futuristic cityscape was created on a large table using miniature models. The models near the front were large and 3-dimensional, as the scene went on the models became smaller. Forced perspective was used to make it appear that there was depth to the cityscape and tiny fibre optic lights were fitted to give the city a modern and realistic look. In comparison many of these images would now be created using a combination of CGI and green screen. Smoke machines were also used to blur the horizon and to give the city a dark, dystopian feel. The special effects used in this film were considered revolutionary and innovative at the time in which it was made. Although for modern audiences they seem unrealistic and unimpressive. The film was nominated for a number of awards for its use of Special effects at both the 1983 Academy and Bafta awards ceremonies.

**A significant development in the aspect of Special Effects can be seen in the Andrew Niccol’s 1997 film “Gattaca”.** The development of Computer generated imagery technology (CGI) was a major turning point in the special effects industry. CGI enabled special effect designers to generate images on the computer without having to physically make them as they had done in the past, as shown in films like ‘Blade runner’. However due to the fact that CGI was effectively in its infancy and the small budget for special effects ($36 million), the use of CGI was very minimal. The only use of CGI in ‘Gattaca’ was the rocket taking off in the launch and these effects are not very realistic. The Rocket launch which is seen from a distance. Although it is more advanced than the timed explosions and small man made fireballs used in Bladerunner to modern audiences it is unimpressive and unrealistic. The majority of “Gattaca” uses scenery such as the set of the “Gattaca Space Station” to make the film appear futuristic. Low angles and low key lighting helped to create a dystopian society.

**Another major development in the aspect of Special Effects can be seen in the \_\_\_\_\_\_ film \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ directed by…**

**As shown special effects technology is an aspect of the science-fiction genre which is constantly evolving.** This is largely due to the demand from audiences for increasingly impressive special effects and the invention of new technology. The significance and implications of these developments include high audience expectations and a need for realism. The audience must believe what they see on screen is possible and a type of reality in order to engage- hence the saying “Suspension of disbelief”. Another implication of this development on the genre is that filmmakers will strive to develop progressively innovative cutting-edge technology. Films become increasingly realistic and other genres benefit as a result. Impressive new special effects also attracts high audience numbers and therefore results in higher profits – which we all know is the major incentive behind the production of any film. James Cameron stated in an interview that the future of the film industry is to ensure that “movies can’t be replaced by what people see in their homes”. Therefore special effects technology must continue to advance and impress in order for this genre to survive.