

DYSTOPIAN MATERIAL (IMAGERY, RHETORIC, FIGURES OF NARRATION) AND MEDIA STUDIES: FOR A NEW CULTURAL AND COMMUNICATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: negli ultimi anni, nel campo della narrazione e della rappresentazione pubblica della fantascienza, il passato sembra contare molto di più del futuro. Tra suggestioni, mix-up, impressioni, nella fantascienza stessa si inserisce la distopia, attraverso l'illusione dei linguaggi utopici che autoalimentano nel XX secolo anche le eterotopie che, negli studi sui media e sui media digitali, cercano di declinare soltanto il presente, senza proporre alternative. La fantascienza ora non è più progresso, è semplice, arida, profondamente in crisi: non può più trattenersi, dicotomicamente, nell'happy-ending sociale, ma nemmeno essere una «contemplazione estetica» della catastrofe. In questo articolo intendiamo definire gli aspetti e le connotazioni del «materiale distopico».

Keywords: Media studies – Sociologia della cultura e della comunicazione – fiction – storytelling – immaginario postmoderno

Abstract: in recent years, in the fieldwork of science fiction storytelling and public representation, the past seems matters much more the future. Among suggestions, mix-up, impressions, in science fiction itself dystopia is embedded, across the illusion of the self-fulfilling utopians languages in twenty century also the heterotopies that, on the items also in media and digital media studies, try to decline the present alone by proposing no alternative. Science fiction now is no progress, plain, barren, deeply in crisis: it can no longer held back, dichotomously, in social happy-ending, but neither it can be an «aesthetic contemplation» of the catastrophe. In this paper we intend to define the aspects and connotations of «dystopian material».

Keywords: Media studies – Sociology of culture and communication – fiction – storytelling – postmodern imagery

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Questo articolo è il risultato di una riflessione unitaria e condivisa tra i due autori. Le parti sono attribuite come segue: l'introduzione è attribuita a entrambi gli autori; i paragrafi 3, 4, 6 a Ivo Stefano Germano; i paragrafi 1, 2, 5 a Massimiliano Panarari.

The dystopian material, in lectures, conferences, conventions, round tables, talk shows, podcasts, memes and gifs has for several decades, in relation to crisis events and periods, oscillated between an indefatigable taxonomy of a comparative nature, «there have undoubtedly been periods of crisis and/or transition...» and, conversely, a mantra, a semantic passepartout embedded in the same term crisis. In reality, the category of dystopia is capable of explaining everything without explaining anything, from the spectacular apparatus to the borders of the absurd in media studies.

The Nineteenth Century of positivism and «magnificent and progressive fortunes» – which united the historical ideologies of the time, from liberalism to socialism – generated a science fiction literature that reinforced and expanded the category of utopia¹, which, on the other hand, according to some scholars, must necessarily be considered as a sub-genre of science fiction literature². The Nineteenth Century turned the idea of utopia into a cultural product intended for a much wider audience than intellectual circles, in the name of the value of progress generally shared by political cultures. The «Short Twentieth Century» and the «Age of Extremes»³, marked by the catastrophes of world wars and totalitarianism and from the terror of the atomic bomb, built the material and conceptual context for the conversion of utopia into the notion of dystopia. Under the banner of a radical paradigm shift – or, rather, an outright reversal – for which the very victory of a certain kind of progress generates dystopian societies and regimes. In essence, it is no longer the sleep of reason that breeds monsters, but its hyperactivism in a «technocratic» version.

Writers such as Herbert G. Wells (*A Modern Utopia*, 1905; *When the Sleeper Wakes*, 1910; *The New World Order*, 1940), Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*, 1932), George Orwell (*1984*, 1948), Ray Bradbury (*Fahrenheit 451*, 1953) and Philip K. Dick (*The Man in the High Castle*, 1962) create fictional universes where the existence of humankind is rigidly programmed by political authorities (usually for the fulfillment of a series of biological or labor purposes useful to the «System»), and the individual, deprived of many of his (or her) individual freedoms, is enslaved to a collective dimension. And constantly surveilled by a «Big Brother» State and by a mass media apparatus that pushes him to the approval and conformity desired by the power.

In this way, these first great Twentieth-Century examples of dystopian science fiction revealed the profoundly ambiguous nature of utopia, as well as its structurally political character⁴. The ultimate foundation of utopia is social constructivism, the realization of a project of a perfect society, which cannot be further improved, through the tools of rationality, which, at least hypothetically, are understandable by all mankind. And, if not, that they still have to accept for their highest good. When utopia ceases to be a critical

¹ C. Altini, 2012.

² D. Suvin, 1985.

³ E. Hobsbawm, 1994.

⁴ F. Jameson, 2007.

contestation, and comes to power, the rationality that directs it cannot be contested, and it is legitimate to resort to any means to create «heaven on Earth». Thus, utopia takes on the face of dystopia, as science fiction highlights through uchronies, parallel universes or projections into the future.

1. The viral and catastrophic imagery of postmodernism

In the postmodern world of dystopic science fiction different trends are stirring, and one of the most «fortunate» of them is that of the apocalypse, which television seriality, as Aldo Grasso highlighted, has been able to root in the visions of the public through the iterativity that identifies one of its structural features⁵. And which provides a kind of «viral imagery» for its aptitude for propagation in the transmedia and convergent universe of the postmodern landscape of mass communications and pop culture. The catastrophe has for some time now coincided with a rather precise subgenre of the end of times: the so-called «zombie apocalypse». A subversion of civilization that is invariably triggered by an epidemic, which sees the population decimated and determines the simultaneous multiplication of the «living dead». The zombie – which turns out to be attributable to the notion of the «uncanny/perturbing» – according to Sigmund Freud⁶ – is one of the most polysemic and reshaping products of the twentieth-century imagination according to the creative purposes of the different authors who use it. The zombies are also an anticipation of a further theme that is going through, from different perspectives, the painful reflection of the era of Covid-19: the category of the posthuman, declined under the pandemic regime. The «zombie-politik» is largely attributable – naturally on a fantastic level – to a general climate of biopolitical opinion such as that in which humanity was thrown by the coronavirus health crisis. And, in fact, the living dead is attributable precisely to the category of the posthuman, which from the pandemic emergency will very likely receive a series of further redefinitions inside the cultural debate. Thus, posthuman is not only the cyborg celebrated by the cyberpunk vein, but also the virus, in many ways, on which rivers of ink have been poured (and will happen again in the near future) in the name of a very curious – and deviant – process of «subjectivization». And that, in its most irrationalistic version and imbued with new age suggestions, practically identifies Covid-19 with a sort of «ambassador of doom» sent by «Gaia», the suffering Earth that would send its punisher (another figure that constellates the comic imagery and TV series) to take revenge for the excessive human footprint on its soil and for the pollution of ecosystems. All manifestations and expressions of a postmodernism in which the visions of the apocalypse are one of the fundamental ingredients, and which has also

⁵ A. Grasso, 2011.

⁶ D. Palano, 2020.

seen the genesis and diffusion in these last three decades (especially in French-speaking circles) of the knowledge of «disastrology», which found its standard bearer in the philosopher Paul Virilio (1932-2018). His thinking has constantly measured itself against what is probably the question par excellence around which postmodernism revolves in its various forms: the technique.

It identified the profound thread that ran from its analyses of the impact of speed in redefining society to its reflections on disasters as a sign of the times and the category of «stereoreality» (the «augmented reality» resulting from the split between the real and the media experience).

An elaboration always under the banner of a strongly critical vocation that led him to express very worried judgements about the age of dromocracy and turbo-capitalism, summed up in the formulas of the disappearance of art, the «epidemic of the imaginary» and the museification of the world as an effect of the disappearance of reality. So many visions of a desolate and dematerialised Earth in line with the crucial theme of catastrophe, which stemmed from his being the theorist of the accident – from the Chernobyl reactor explosion to the stock market crash – as an inevitable and ineluctable outcome of technological advancement (and the failure of technical rationality). In his thinking, the «computer bomb» (the use of the Net in a logic of war) leads to homologation and cultural colonisation with no way back, as well as to the new cyberwar.

The «futurism of the instant», disseminated everywhere by urban screens, abolished the depth of time and imposed a social culture dominated by absolute presentism.

That is, the signs of what Virilio identified as contemporary catastrophe, which feed into works of cultural theory inspired by him that analyse through his conceptual grids symbolic cultural products of the postmodern imagination, such as Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*⁷ and *Mao II*. Although, in confirmation of his originality, several scholars now agree on the inappropriate nature of a judgement qualifying Virilio as a postmodernist or a poststructuralist⁸. In fact, the heterodox scholar conceived the present age as a form of hypermodernity, somewhat distant from the «classical» and historicised modernity that had started with the Enlightenment, but still located within its conceptual perimeter.

A humanist, in some ways, who does not condemn modernity tout court and adopts a «catastrophic», but not «catastrophist» perception of technology, just as critical, but by no means antithetical, was his view of the legacy of the modern Enlightenment project.

This had been precisely the final landing place of his meditation, which had moved towards the shores of «disasterology» as a «neo-discipline» that derived in a necessary way from «dromology», the science of speed, the quintessential expression of the earlier phases of modernity and late-modernity that continued precisely to offer the frame of

⁷ B. Bagherzadeh Samani, H. Pirnajmuddin, B. Akhavan, 2018.

⁸ J. Armitage, 1999.

reference in which reflection on that hypermodernity, that was not postmodernity, was placed.

A conception that has found fertile ground in the cultural and economic debate of a certain left-wing, especially French-speaking, and which also underlies «collapseology», another strand that proves to be in tune with today's anxious times and is invested with the ambition to think of a «post-collapse» future. The catastrophe is that of thermo-industrial civilization, which, according to the intellectuals who elaborate these doctrines, would already be largely in action.

In a 2018 book (*Une autre fin du monde est possible*), three of the leading exponents of this strand – writer Pablo Servigne, social-ecological systems resilience specialist Raphaël Stevens, and agronomic engineer (and advisor to the Institut Royal des sciences naturelles de Belgique) Gauthier Chapelle – outline a cultural manifesto of collassology (or, as they prefer to put it, a «treatise on collaxology»). It is a radically anti-industrialist text, which also stems from anarchist inspiration – a political, or perhaps even impolitic orientation (in the meaning evoked by the philosopher Roberto Esposito) structurally underpinning its authors – and which also aims to prepare people to live with the consequences of the collapse of the western production model. Global warming, the extinction of various «non-human populations» (fauna, flora, fungi and micro-organisms) and, conversely, human overpopulation and repeated economic crises make, in their view, collapse no longer a prediction, but the fate – and, in many ways, already the present – inexorable of the Anthropocene. A vision that, under various aspects, is placed at the antithesis of that of the optimistic Californian Ideology, the «latest ideology»⁹. Nonetheless, disastrology – which in French culture has fueled the most recent cultural strand of «collaxologie» – is not entirely attributable to an apocalyptic gaze. Collaxology is part of the idea that man alters his environment permanently, and propagates the concept of ecological emergency, linked in particular to global warming and the collapse of biodiversity. Collaxologists believe, however, that the collapse of industrial civilization could come from the conjunction of different crises: environmental crisis, but also energy, economic, geopolitical, democratic. Not social construction of reality, but natural destruction of it, in the Anthropocene Era. The three «collaxologists» adopt, not by chance, a multidisciplinary approach, including in their elaborations references to science fiction and the evocation of the zombie apocalypse, and putting a lot of psychoanalysis into the text, in the name of a reflection where a certain collective imagery marked by pop culture and the cultural industry after the 1990s (those of the proclaimed end of the Short Twentieth Century) turns out to be central.

⁹ G. Balbi, 2022.

2. *The new Age of anxiety and «retrotopia science fiction»*

Then, the era of Covid-19 has, curiously (but not too much), a component of *déjà vu*. Or, better, a component of already imagined. And the West, in particular, seems to be experiencing the «perfect storm» of this new «Age of anxiety» – which is significantly devastating its social, economic as well as political structure (putting the paradigm of liberal democracy under awful stress) – according to some behavioral and visual models. Or, better said, according to some formats (also in the «philological» sense of media products), which have in fact been built over time as substantial contemporary archetypes. For example, a well-known science fiction comic, *L'Eternauta* by Héctor Germán Oesterheld and Francisco Solano Lopez, published in 1957 in Argentina, told of an alien invasion that began with a snowfall that carried a lethal virus; an allegory of the unstable political situation in Latin America battered by frequent coups d'Etat. And its authors directly experienced the tragic consequences. What could be called the predictive capacity of science fiction has largely assumed, from the fiction of Philip K. Dick onwards, the connotation of dystopia. The category of «retrotopia», as is well known, derives from Bauman's neologism and reflection on liquidity. The sociologist has noticed that we no longer look to the future with any kind of optimism. Mostly, we look to it with fear. For reassurance, we look fondly backward, to some imaginary time when everything was great, especially the future. A category in which one can also include the «nostalgia of the present», understood as the past of a dystopian or apocalyptic future, that Fredric Jameson used to analyse Philip Dick's literary corpus¹⁰.

In its homonym book *Retrotopia* Bauman cites hundreds of speeches, papers and books to show western society is crumbling. Nationalism, globalization, automation, safety net removal, lack of community, loneliness, inequality are destroying all hope for the future in Western societies. The retrotopia, in fact, is the reversal of utopia, a utopia turned backwards. It is our recent attitude to place in the past – and no longer in the future or in a legendary place – the imagination of a better society. The change, therefore, as a step backwards, towards a known, reassuring time and, above all, with extraordinary unexpressed or denied potential. Even if this is not his belief.

En fact, some products of the most contemporary science fiction can be considered as manifestations of this «retrotopia science fiction», which is mainly a narrative and also ideological mirror of the fears (individual and collective, economic and political ones) of our renewed, contemporary age of anxiety. Bauman concentrated his research his research on «societal» dimension. However, at the heart of collective agenda and fears (above all those of new generations) we find now the destruction of the ecosphere, the climate change, the eco-anxiety caused by the perspective of an inhospitable planet. Therefore in «retrotopia science fiction», as film remakes realized by director Denis

¹⁰ F. Jameson, 2007.

Villeneuve (firstly *Blade Runner 2049* and *Dune*), we can find the thematization of the environmental crisis and the decomposition of urban space. *Dune*, the masterpiece of Frank Herbert (originally published in 1965), was to some extent the progenitor novel of the environmentalist science-fiction, imbued with the rising postmaterialist sensibility of the Sixties and Seventies. And, effectively, Villeneuve's film adaption – after the failure of the attempt by Alejandro Jodorowky and the controversial and too dreamlike movie by David Lynch – constitutes a retrotopic (and faithful to the original *green* inspiration) version. In 1995, the movie *Waterworld*, directed by Kevin Reynolds, the retrotopic vision of the Earth «submerged but unsaved» – we could say – anticipates concerns about global warming. And the environmentalist footprint is also very marked in *Foundation*, the series taken from the famous Isaac Asimov's cycle.

The decomposition of urban space (understood as the sphere of politics and civil society), and the dehumanized society proposed by these movies, therefore, could be interpreted in a perspective that is not exclusively apocalyptic. Ultimately, retrotopia science fiction poses a desperate question of the future; and it is opposed – sure, without the «principle of hope» typical of the Age of the Extremes – to dystopia. A look to the past to decipher and identify the signs of the mistakes made. One last call, basically.

3. Cacotopy: a world in evolution

This essay aims to attempt a possible analysis of the continuities and discontinuities of the social, political and cultural role of the word dystopia. In particular, the fundamental questions that will be asked will concern, in order, what are the historical characteristics of the dystopia? How have they changed over time and how have they adapted to new digital technologies? How have these works progressively gone beyond the context of their original production, to become keys to understanding better the symbolic and imaginary connections of contemporary society? Making the theme of dystopia has become increasingly evident, from an interdisciplinary point of view.

One of the most important cultural responses concerned the production of «counter-utopian» texts, ie aimed at emphasizing the inhumanity, alienation, coldness of a literally «nightmarish» social structure¹¹. Literature, art, cinema, television, advertising have focused on the *Weltanschauung* of dystonia, both as a contemporary declination of themes typical of critical sociology, such as alienation, reification, social control, and as a specific object of public debate, above all, as a result of the pandemic health emergency:

«The electronic media have contributed to the liquefaction of social ties, it is true that writing this essay in the midst of the profound health crisis of the Coronavirus leads to new

¹¹ D. Guardamagna, 1980.

reflections, if not second thoughts. The «social distancing» mantra of the months of quarantine imposed by government decree has confronted us with the fact that technological «black magic» [...] has allowed hundreds of millions of people to maintain relationships. Video calls, chats, social media: everything has gone through divided existences giving the (necessary) illusion of a possible recomposition. Grandparents and grandchildren, teachers and pupils, distant parents and children, the sexting of distant lovers, multiple video chats for an aperitif with friends constitute an articulated social phenomenology that seems to have given a new and more concrete relational meaning to the technologies of the domain. Pages of affections in our dystopian novel»¹².

Dystopy, in some ways, has been considered, like the preview of the completion of the technologized age, in a continuous dance of masking and dissimulation. In fact, amplified by the information overload, in itself, a source of contradiction and abuse of attention. In the light of what has been examined, the need to historicize the concept again, in the name and on behalf of greater theoretical and methodological clarity, has been demonstrated.

The invention of the term cacotopy has been attributed to the English philosopher John Stuart Mill, as emerged from a speech held in the House of Commons on March 12, 1868:

«Perhaps it is an excessive compliment to call them utopians, rather we should call them dystopians or cacotopists. What we commonly call utopian is something too beautiful to achieve; but what they support is too bad to think of realizing it. (speech given in the House of Commons). Understanding cacotopy means a historical overview about the birth of a word or a term used by John Stuart Mill, about a reflection to the theme of happiness in Jeremy Bentham. Cacotopy is the overturning of the machinery: from the terror aroused by the possibilities of machinery, sciences and techniques; from the extension of a soulless materialism that questions the meaning of a civilization built at the expense of the human, and that obtains happiness with recklessness and with the mechanization of behaviors»¹³.

Technological development, above all, from the point of view of «mechanism», if correlated to the consolidation of scientific explanation of a positivist matrix, based on the formulation of general laws capable, in fact, of explaining society, give back a general idea of autonomy and strength of industrial apparatus on humans. Cacotopia as a sign of unhappiness and increasingly mechanized social behaviors, largely unaware, all in all, meaningless. More clearly, cacotopia is not synonymous with fear, but rather with desperation and alienation which, throughout the 19th century, was denoted, in literary and philosophical thought, starting from the topos, like the place/place of a future collapse of civilization. In clear contrast to the idea present in certain modern political thought of the concrete realization of utopia, as a real socio-political and ideological

¹² C. Carboni, 2020, 48.

¹³ E. Di Minico, 2018, 38.

alternative to the Industrial Revolution. Technology and science, ceasing to arouse enthusiasm, tended to become a source of slavery, the main consequence of which concerned the reversal of plans between social and cultural progress and a cybernetic approach.

The landscape of a society that no longer thinks about the future, but takes refuge in invention, a reconstruction of a past that offers a comfortable oblivion, appears full of contradictions, contortions, paradoxes that are transformed into media and literary speeches and narratives. This is not a novelty, but a precise form of cultural production that has developed in the last two decades around the multidisciplinary and multidimensional issues of a smug delight in contemplating catastrophe. A fading world that is not replaced by others, whether complementary or antithetical, but which stops at an explicit acknowledgment in digital nihileo. The cultural and communicative codification, both in terms of criticism and of mere description of the «miseries of social life at the time of dystonia» has oscillated between surreality and hyperreality, for which, on the one hand, the science fiction story has registered the betrayal of the future in what a promise, on the other hand, thanks to a profound contamination of genres, he focused on the fulfillment of what seemed impossible, unthinkable, unwatchable, unimaginable. A «society of the spectacle» without spectacle, a «society of simulacra», without simulacra, such as to eclipse any possibility of a future in a globalized context.

4. Cacotopy: the era of aphasic science fiction

From the earliest days of the dystopian pandemic it was at home, whether language is still someone's or something's home. More and more than resilience, new normality, sustainability, social distancing, the adjective dystopian inundated the symbolic, within a more complex process of transformation of the hybrid imaginary of a virus seen as "black swan" or irreversible destiny of the global techno-capitalist system marching towards the «great transformation». The death of every future, at the hands of a modernizing nihilism that has removed every symbolic ritual.

The social imagination is no longer able to redeem reality. The apology can be read in the recent film adaptation of Dune, directed by Denis Villeneuve in 2021. The third attempt after the preliminary draft by Alejandro Jodorowsky in the seventies and the historical precedent directed by David Lynch in 1984. The last Dune absorbs in full the simulacral vacuum of every mythopoiesis of and about the future, that subtle omnipresent tension in fights against aliens who wanted to subdue the earth until the transposition of rites of passage to become Jedi, as in the grueling epic of Star Wars, in

the name of a marketing Disney's infinity no longer flows into the being or becoming of a cosmos or parallel universes.

The current architrave is fear, or better, the many daily phobias that tend to turn into small deaths of desire, of dreams, of possibility.

Ultimately, the question to start with is the following: «Is the future that has become nostalgic», vice versa, «is it the pandemic that has produced a piercing nostalgia for the future»?

The vast repertoire of fiction, comics, science fiction cinema, long television series that revolves around a phase characterized by a strong aphasia on the future and a parallel sociopolitical allegory of the return to an unreal and paradoxical past tries to answer many questions, about a The main consequence concerned the oscillation between an aphasic stage, that is, a suspension of the story and a painful and unproductive stiff neck of ideas and imaginaries. To say the least, paralyzing and, in all evidence, static.

It seems evident that the preliminary question to be asked has as its object the sociological relevance of science fiction, that is, whether it can constitute, from a theoretical and methodological point of view, a significant field of study. Within and beyond the whirlwind of definitions, a corpus of volumes, essays, research is outlined which, in manifest or latent form, have modulated multiple and articulated scans of sociological reasoning on actors, contexts, processes, ideologies, representations of the relationship between science fiction and social.

5. Fleeing from the future, no longer near, let alone the future.

Contemporary science fiction is nostalgically declined, from the fashion system to fiction, from streaming on platforms to social media. It is not a recursive mechanism, but a sheltered refuge from all that is outside, beyond, beyond. The past as hyper-connected, digital, instant Arcadia you can count on. Perhaps, the only possible foothold, as long as you have not experienced it directly or concretely. In recent years, science fiction has subsumed, structured and de-structured an excruciating fear of tomorrow, at the same time, a stubborn rejection of the future. From a pop-culture perspective, all this has translated into an incurable nostalgia for the future, at the base of which there seems to be a precise cultural datum: ours is a society unable to psychologically and socially withstand tomorrow and prefers to hole up in the kennel, comfortable and reassuring, of the past.

Bittersweet, self-referential, digitized. If we will never be again, then, all that remains is to share memories, memories, fragments of the past, ad libitum. An aura of the sublime, to put it in Benjamin's style, steeped in splinters of the past of which to make the

most of the hype, the engagement, where the time of memory, that is, something capable of fixing the instant, has prevailed over the time of memory collective that, beyond any semantic short-circuit, instead, possesses in itself the sense of duration. The sociological study on the «current vocation» of science fiction¹⁴ revolves around the awareness of escaping from the simple link between aesthetics and ethics, commitment and historical and existential attitude. It is a question of engaging in an interpretation that takes into account claustrophobia, impediments, denials, blocks, drifts, conjectures, in some ways, at the end of the race. Science fiction is no longer just a social show, albeit, at least initially niche, but one of the most advanced forms of surrender, almost total, to the laws of the present, that's how things go, that's how they must go. The oxymoron is constitutive of the «present state of science fiction» which, according to this type of sociological analysis, would seem to renounce the future as an explicit temporal practice. More or less paradoxically, by taking to extremes, within an increasingly platformized society, the tendency to feel nostalgia for the future, but also for the past. No longer relegated to a dimension of «inner exile», rather, in a value dimension focused on becoming technical and technological, hyper-connected and vertiginous, in most cases, of a syndromic nature.

A multitematic and multidisciplinary framework, from literature to television series, from the cinematographic medium to neuroscience, has been increasingly intertwined with a certain idea of consciously living real dystopias.

More specifically, the science fiction of the 21st century seems to oscillate between a real, increasingly dictated by apocalyptic forms and ways, and an almost certainty that a despotic real is dizzyingly in the process of being realized. This is a far from unprecedented plan, to the extent that it refers, as inspiration and overall modality, to what would once be called «social science fiction»: a mix of scenarios, revelations, «hidden truths», profound references.

6. Cold fiction: between McLuhan and Baudrillard

In the previous pages, the cacotopy serves as a perspective to put the new contents of science fiction as a theme, no longer a pure atmosphere and / or an apologue on the existing: «a materialization of the processes of conventionalization in which the synthetic icon is inspired in order to come into existence»¹⁵.

On a more detailed reading, it becomes possible to recover some historically relevant strands. For example, regarding the fear of the atomic bomb, *The Day After*: a television documentary film, written by Edward Hume and directed, in 1983, by Nicholas Meyer,

¹⁴ D. Bennato (a cura di), 2018.

¹⁵ J. Baudrillard 1988, 19.

aired on November 20 on ABC. Shortly thereafter, the ecological catastrophe became a genre, rather than a reality, aestheticized as part of the «Cold War», within which the mental and social framework perceived the start of a gigantic and pervasive countdown. The day after represented the construction of social alarm and fear of the end, due to, here the spectrum is very broad, a meteorite, a comet, a rain of frogs, as in the finale of *Magnolia* by Paul Thomas Anderson (1999). The metaphorical posture of science fiction, from the Eighties onwards, tends to merge with cultural typologies well defined by nihilistic prophecy, by the pessimism of the so-called «professionals of the apocalypse» in the near future. In the face of experiences such as *Koyanisquatsi*, with the music of Philip Glass, *Powaquatsi* and *Nakoysquatsi*, filmic paraphrases of a social unbalanced and desertified, completely devoid of a vision of elsewhere.

Even more cacotopic, *Rollerball* (1975) directed by Norman Jewison, which tells of Jonathan's fight. The poster appears very topical: «in the near future, there will be no more wars, but rollerball, something you have never seen, but you will be able to see». Based on a short story by William Harrison published in *Esquire Magazine*, who participated in the screenplay of the film. It is a very serious game capable of deciphering the signs of an imaginary passage, in the midst of the US-USSR cold war that seemed to lock the world up. A society that has become unbearable that of 2018, gloomy, bored, with no more nations, governed by a directory that, to better control aggressive impulses and violent raptus, devises the *Rollerball*. Nations and wars have disappeared and everything is a generalized luxury, since «man must no longer have desires because he already has everything he wants». Beautiful world which has as its counterpart a battle, practiced by each Corporation, through its own team with a collective anthem, for skaters who beat each other to death, in technologically advanced arenas.

It is a cinematically beaten theme in the 70s¹⁶ by *THX 1138*, *The Man Who Escaped from the Future*, *Logan's Escape*. More direct than Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), *Rollerball* really tells the future and the removal of all grounding and memory. At a certain point, in fact, Jonathan will challenge the interdict, on books and documents, swallowed by Zero a liquid brain, programmed to put into practice the chilling outcome of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953).

The «depth psychology» joins George Orwell's negative utopia prophecy in 1984.

On the basis of the examples used, it is possible to reason on the gradual detachment from the narrative perspective on social transformations, in the form of future promises (Spanu 2001), typical of a genre that has been affirming itself in the second half of the nineteenth century, driven by a strong vitality society and a deep faith in scientific and technological progress:

¹⁶ Cossi 2012.

«When new technologies impose themselves on societies long accustomed to older technologies, all kinds of anxieties arise. Our electronic world now needs a unified field of global awareness; the private conscience, suited to the man of the press age, can be considered as an unbearable loophole compared to the collective conscience required by the electronic flow of information. In this impasse, the only adequate response would seem to be the suspension of all conditioned reflexes»¹⁷.

Science fiction has become cold, distant, remote, prey to a carousel of special childish effects, or to endless dialogues on the “meaning of life”. In both cases: cold fiction, between Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard, and the production mechanism of abundant dystopian material.

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¹⁷ M. McLuhan 1963, 19.

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