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The "Hunger Games" and "Star Wars": How Stories Define Political Obligations

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Introduction

Films have the extraordinary capability to stimulate an emotional response in their viewers, an experience that often encapsulates entire audiences. Films are powerful in that they provide an experience transcending race, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. Despite this bonding element, many overlook the importance utopian/dystopian films play in shaping the collective imagination. Perhaps this is because once the movie and the experience have ended, the audience part ways – never to form collectively again. But the film does not leave the audience when they leave that theater. It has become part of a shared imagination, a collective vision of the future. Imagination is important because like memory, it shapes how we define ourselves and structures our perspectives.

A recent dystopian film that has taken the popular culture by storm is the "Hunger Games" franchise. The film acts not only as a synecdoche of the political climate today but also serves a prescriptive function of how things should be in the future. In this sense, it serves as a political story, defining the civil obligations of youth today, which are embedded in the collective imagination. The "Hunger Games" was not the first film series to serve such functions. The "Star Wars" franchise reached a similar level of fame in popular culture. Likewise, it reflected the political situation of the time and called for a better vision of the future. Yet, it fell short of conferring a sense of civic duty. Not all films capture the hearts of audiences and contribute to the collective imagination as successfully as the "Hunger Games" and "Star Wars" did. These films were successful because they captured the perceived ills of the socio-political environment of the time, while also naturalizing a vision of the future and the obligations of youth in a way that resonated with the audience.

The following analysis seeks to better understand the functions of utopian/dystopian narratives in film and the political obligations that they can confer. Recent popular culture has witnessed young adult dystopian/utopian films rise to popularity in ways never seen before. Examples include the "Hunger Games", the "Divergent" series, the "Maze Runner", "Ready Player One", and "What Happened to Monday", among many others. This is coupled with a rise in science-fiction films in general, such as the "Harry Potter" series, the "Twilight" series, the "Marvel" franchise, and the "DC" franchise. At the same time, the political landscape of the U.S is being disrupted by a wave of youth movements that arguably parallel the rebellion themes seen in dystopian films. Why have these films become so popular for the millennial generation? Have these films worked together to shape their socio-political perspective? Is the phenomenon unique to this time period? Most importantly, do these films, as sources of bonding, function as tools of civic engagement? These questions are important because films are a common national pastime and have been for decades. Their position and function in society should not be overlooked, especially if they have significant political implications.

Framework

Much research has been conducted on the ties between narratives and their role in the socio-political landscape. Ott and Aoki, in particular, have made significant contributions to this field of study. Even though they discuss utopian narratives, their main messages are very applicable to dystopian and quasi-dystopian films, such as the "Hunger Games" and "Star Wars." Ott and Aoki examine narratives of the future to understand their roles in today's socio-political framework. They argue that science fiction films function to support a particular societal framework where certain views, values, and voices are validated and others are sidelined (Ott and Aoki, "Counter-imagination as interpretive practice" 149). Such films inform the socio-

political landscape through structured invitations and the creation of a collective imagination. Every narrative is a construction of a perception of the present (Ott and Aoki, “Counter-imagination as interpretive practice” 150). This allows the audience to experience the emotions evoked by the film in a similar way. Despite differences among viewers, a shared experience is created by drawing upon culturally internalized symbols. Furthermore, the film creates certain positions that the audience is prompted to identify with (known as a subject position). Such a process is described:

> A subject position is not a character in the text itself. Instead, a subject position is who the text encourages you to be as you, the reader or audience, experience that text. Rarely will a text explicitly announce its preferred subject position for the members of its audience. Instead, a subject position, like narrative, is part of the structure of a text ... the missing perspective, the point of view, required for the text to make sense. (qtd. in Ott and Aoki, “Counter-imagination as interpretive practice” 151).

Thus, audiences are solicited to view films and consequently the world from certain perspectives. As these perspectives are repeated across film and other media, a particular vision of the future becomes dominant. Thus, films collectively have the power to affect how its audience views the world. This particular vision is coined the "collective imagination." The collective imagination is powerful because how people perceive the world affects what they see as its faults, its possibilities, and what their position and obligations are relative to this world.

Ott and Aoki also posit that utopias perform three main functions: synechdochic, prescriptive, and predictive. Utopian narratives naturally lend themselves to synechdochic function because utopias depict a vision of society unlike the present-day, but they do not alter the entirety of human relations. “Every utopia represents only a partially altered future in which certain social norms, beliefs, and values inevitably remain the same” (Ott and Aoki, “Popular imagination and identity politics” 395). One of the main reasons why utopian narratives are so

popular is that they retain features that are well-known and familiar, features that the audience identifies with. Utopias are merely a modified present-day society, where the vast array of social ills are minimized and dramatized, signifying to the audience what is wrong within our society. In this sense, utopian films – acting as a distorted mirror – serve as a critic to society.

The second function of utopian narratives, Ott and Aoki argue, is prescriptive. Not only do they identify what is wrong within society, but utopias also identify what society should be. Ott and Aoki state, "In claiming to depict an 'ideal' society, utopias not only suggest *what* is wrong with society, but they also suggest *how* it 'should' be different" (Ott and Aoki, "Popular imagination and identity politics" 395). By depicting and endorsing an alternative, utopian narratives cultivate a desire for such an alternative. Conversely, dystopian narratives cultivate a disgust. Utopian narratives create a pull to a societal vision, while dystopias create a push away from a societal vision. In this sense, utopian narratives motivate the audience to pursue a prescribed conception or set of ideas.

Lastly, utopias perform a predictive function by foreshadowing the future. Utopian narratives accustom the audience to the idea of change. Alternatives are no longer seen as threatening but are welcomed. As Ott and Aoki describe, "Instead of being an avenue for escape into impossibilities, imagination has become an expression of possibilities" (qtd. in Ott and Aoki, "Popular imagination and identity politics" 395). Utopian narratives serve to naturalize a certain vision of the future, to make the audience more accepting of the prescription of society.

One important foundational work is *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* by Roger M. Smith. He posits that political membership is created in two ways: through coercive force and persuasive stories (where "stories" can be anything from arguments, rhetoric, symbols, to the more traditional narratives). Both methods contribute to the

"ongoing constitution, maintenance, and transformation of political identities" (Smith 43). While this book focuses on how stories help to create a sense of belonging to a political community, the overarching ideas are quite similar to Ott and Aoki's. Consider the following description of Smith's "stories":

> [Leaders] must suggest to constituents that, given their personal origins and history and the way the world is, if they do indeed adhere steadfastly to the community thus depicted, they are likely to experience certain sorts of good things, immediately or eventually. However well-reasoned or well documented, those promises can never be more than a plausible conjecture, an imagined scenario of how the future will unfold, made credible by a certain past and present that is usually stylized and mythical. (Smith 45).

In many ways, the "stories" political leaders tell are just science fiction utopias: they rely on a certain perception of the present, prescribe what society should be, and creates a certain position for the audience. However, the description of the future will always be distorted mirror – a stylized, imagined future that is based on the past. In order to advance a sense of belonging, leaders must work with the pre-existing conceptions of political community and identity, just as directors must utilize culturally internalized symbols and the existing socio-political framework to create a collective imagination.

An important conclusion of the Smith's work is that stories function to endow a set of obligations on a people. Smith states, "such stories proclaim that member' culture, religion, language, race, ethnicity, ancestry, history, or other such features are constitutive of their very identities as persons, in ways that both affirm their worth and delineate their obligations" (Smith 64-65). Such stories are known as ethically constitutive stories because they assert that an aspect of a members' identity (culture, religion, race, etc.) confirm their worth and define their obligations in a community. In many ways, science fiction utopias/dystopias are ethically constitutive stories because they rely on a certain understanding of the socio-political framework

and perspective of the present day, which flows from certain aspects of an identity. While this seemingly creates a very broad community, it also means that those of a certain age, language, nationality, history, etc. might be excluded from truly understanding the function of the narratives. For example, films like the "Hunger Games", "Harry Potter", and "Twilight" certainly resonate with a certain age group better than others. In this example, age is what makes these films ethically constitutive stories. However, this also means that films can confirm worth and delineate obligations in a community. This raises the question of what obligations do popular films, such as the "Hunger Games", create?

The "Hunger Games"

The "Hunger Games" is set in a dystopian world, where children are entered yearly into a lottery to fight a publicized death in a high-tech arena, known as the Hunger Games. The rest of the society watches on, knowing only one child will emerge the winner – a punishment for a past rebellion. The main character, Katniss Everdeen, volunteers to take her younger sister's place after the sister was selected to participate in the Hunger Games, saving her life. Katniss participates in the Hunger Games but is consistently frustrated by the cruelty of it all. In the end, she joins up with Peeta, another participant, and defies the government's attempt to force them to kill one each other.

While this society seems to be miles away from American society, the two are not so distant. Amber Simmons draws numerous parallels between the "Hunger Games" and society in *Class on Fire: Using the Hunger Games Trilogy to Encourage Social Action,* such as hunger in America (specifically the blatant waste of food while others starve), involuntary labor, forced warriors, and the sex trade (Simmons 22-34). Further parallels can be made, such as the culture

of fear and the deaths of innocent children while the government looks on. Here is a description of the life millennials, the cohort born in the early 1980s to early 2000s, have lived:

> In fact, many horrific things have happened since 9/11, each bookmarked in the generation's collective memory. While 9/11 and the Columbine shootings were seminal moments for older millennials, younger ones may key in more to the Sandy Hook and Orlando mass murders. Across the globe, this generation has dealt with a War on Terror — and a fear that accompanies it — for all or most of their lives. (Wagman)

The life of a millennial is one that is characterized by fear. This is especially true for "young millennials," who have never known a world where terrorism was not front and center of every news story, the same millennials who brought the "Hunger Games" to fame. Furthermore, 187,000 students attending at least 193 primary or secondary schools have experienced a shooting on campus during school hours since Columbine in 1999 (Cox and Rich). Since that time, there has been no significant gun control reform. From the perspective of the millennial, children are dying, but the government has done nothing in response.

In the terms of Ott and Aoki, the "Hunger Games" serve a synechdochic function. The films recognize the absolute worst aspects of American society and dramatize them, signaling to the audience that this is what is wrong with society. The movie takes the culture of fear and the rise of school shootings and elevates them, creating a dystopian society where the characters have only known death and despair, and children are forced to kill other children as the government delightfully watches. Here is a description of the power the government has over the people and the utter disregard it has for a child's life:

> Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch—this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. "Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you." (Collins 76)

By creating a dystopian society that makes a sport out of killing children, the "Hunger Games" serves as a critique of current society and the rise of school shootings.

The "Hunger Games" demonstrated not only what was wrong with society, but also how it should be different, thus performing a prescriptive function. Throughout the series, the characters grapple with what is wrong in their society and what their role is in the scheme of things. Katniss is continuously rebelling against a government that seemingly has all the power. She does so in the smallest ways – from sacrificing herself to save her sister in the Reaping, showing affection for Peeta her competitor, covering Rue in flowers, the silent salute, and attempting to commit double suicide at the end of the first book – all of which takes away power and control from the government in some way. In the second and third books, she more visibly protests against the government by escaping the Games, partaking in the Rebellion, and executing Coin, whom she sees as the ultimate threat to peace. Here is an example of a protest she participates in when she covers Rue in flowers:

> I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do that there is a part to every tribute they can't own. That Rue was more than a piece in their Games. And so am I. (Collins 233)

Katniss performs a prescriptive function because she is a symbol of rebellion and protest in a society where the people are seemingly powerless to the government. In the novel, which stands for a proxy for the present day, the people of Panem have to watch helplessly as the government takes their children and make them kill each other for sport. Katniss changes this by actively rebelling against the government and taking away some of its power. This is prescriptive of how today's society should be: youth should have a greater voice in the events that are affecting them. They do not have to be powerless in issues concerning their own sense of safety.

By introducing the audience to the power of youth, the "Hunger Games" serves a predictive function. The series naturalizes its viewers, who are primarily millennials, to the idea that youth can and should have a voice. Youth can recognize the faults in their government and protest against those faults. Millennials do not have to sit idly and watch their peers be affected by school violence; they do not have to be comfortable with a culture of fear. The "Hunger Games", and many other films like it, help accustom the audience to a specific vision of the future where youth are powerful, not powerless. This vision is repeated across films and other media, dominate in other books and movies like "Harry Potter" and "Divergent." Eventually, such a vision of the future is engrained in the collective imagination of the generation. Millennials have been repeatedly told by films like the "Hunger Games" that they are indeed powerful, and eventually, they come to accept such a vision of the world.

While it is important to understand how films such as the "Hunger Games" can affect how a generation perceives itself, it is also important to understand the consequences of such narratives. What political function do these narratives play? As previously discussed, science fiction utopias/dystopias often take the form of ethically constitutive stories. The "Hunger Games", in particular, draws upon membership in the millennial generation to confirm worth and define obligations. While the movies can arguably be enjoyed by anyone, it ultimately calls upon the perspective of a millennial. The narrative tells a story of a culture of fear, helplessness, and violence, specifically against children. Only Americans of a certain age group would have that subject position, that certain point of view that is required for the narrative to really resonate. As an ethically constitutive story, the "Hunger Games" binds millennials into a political community. With this political membership comes obligation, which the film clearly delineates.

The “Hunger Games” expresses multifaceted notions of citizenship that deal with sacrifice, competing obligations, dissent, and respect for institutions. While it may seem obvious that the series advocates for youth to be more dissenting toward an unwilling government, the obligations it demands are actually quite complex. First, Katniss’ primary loyalty is her family, which causes her to subvert government policies (such as hunting and selling on the black market) and ultimately causes her to take her sister’s place in the Games. Second, despite this subversion and other acts of rebellion, she still acts as a responsible citizen by working within the institutions of the capital. She attends the Reaping and she participates in the preparation, training, and performance required of the Games. She dresses up for the Capitol and puts on the performance needed to gain the favor of donors. She rebels against the government, but she does so within the framework of the system. Third, she places loyalty to peers above loyalty to the government. This can be seen in the way she buries Rue and rescues Peeta from death. In a game that is supposed to turn the children against each other, she turns to them for mutual survival. Thus, Katniss must navigate a complex array of obligations: she has to fulfill responsibilities to the oppressive system to protect her family, yet her obligations to her peers force her to defy the government. In the end, Katniss is able to negotiate these loyalties in a way that creates change in the system, beneficial to both her family and her peers. As Lucey et al. argue, the “Hunger Games” “define engaged citizenship as one’s ability to use his or her talents and loyalties to affect a mutually respectful community that benefits all members and that negotiates systems to bring about change when it is needed.” As an ethically constitutive story, the film delineates similar notions of obligations for millennials.

To summarize, the film portrays the obligations of millennials as having a loyalty to their family/community and a loyalty to peers, which results in the duty to protest government failings

in a way that works within the framework of the system. Interestingly, this reflects how many millennials already feel due to the unique experience of the generation. For example,

> Millennials in general... are closer to their parents than other generations were, and the period of intense unity in the aftermath of 9/11 and related anthrax scares reinforced their importance of community "on a subliminal level." (Wagman).

These obligations felt by the political community of millennials can help explain recent political events. In 2018, the U.S has seen a fierce youth movement calling for gun reform. Thousands of students from over 2,500 schools participated in the National School Walkout, demanding gun reform (Karimi and Yan). During this time, students observed a moment of silence, marched to a local lawmaker's office, put on an open-mic time, and helped register those who were eligible to vote (Karimi and Yan). Students of the Parkland school shooting opted to give moving speeches at the country's capital (Karimi and Yan). But the demonstrations do not end there. Townhalls are scheduled across the country to allow students to voice their opinions. In February, Parkland students addressed Senator Marco Rubio, Senator Bill Nelson, and Representative Ted Deutch in a townhall regarding gun reform (Epstein). While townhalls are not novel, what is revolutionary is that it was aired live on national television and involved students, especially students who were gun control advocates. Even more revolutionary was that the students were able to get Rubio to admit his views were changing, something a sitting senator typically does not do (Epstein). It should be noted that all of these protests, while outing the government, also work within the framework of the system. Today's youth feel a loyalty to their community and to their peers who are currently living in fear and thus view it as a duty to protest the government. The result is a youth movement for gun reform that has taken U.S politics by storm.

Here is a collection of quotes from students who spoke out during National School Walkout Day and during town halls in the past few months:

> Arielle Geismar: “I've grown up in the generation of students who are realizing that we have lockdown drills all the time. We live with the constant fear that there is the possibility of a school shooting. No one should have to live like that.” (Karimi and Yan)
>
> Lane Murdock: “We should be horrified, and we're not anymore. It's American culture.” (Karimi and Yan)
>
> Ryan Servaites: “Enough is enough. Children are dying. Children are being hurt. We won't stop. This is why.” (Karimi and Yan)
>
> Cameron Kasky: “My generation — having spent our entire lives seeing mass shooting after mass shooting — has learned that our voices are powerful and our votes matter. We must educate ourselves and start conversations that keep our country moving forward and we will. We hereby promise to fix the broken system we’ve been forced into and create a better world for the generations to come. Don’t worry, we’ve got this.” (Segarra)

These quotes and others like them reflect the messages conveyed in the “Hunger Games”, while also demonstrating the obligations the students feel. In the quotes, there is a perspective that reflects a culture of fear and a routineness of violence, just like the “Hunger Games” presents. There is a recognition that society should not be this way and should be something different. Most importantly, the quotes reflect an accepted vision of the future, a vision where the youth can change the faults in the system. Not only can the youth change the system, but they have an obligation to do so. For millennials, being a responsible citizen means creating a better world, and the way to do this is through civic protest.

“Star Wars”

It is clear that popular utopian/dystopian films have made an impact on the youth of today by shaping their perspective on today's world and helping form their sense of civic responsibility. But is this unique? Have popular utopian/dystopian films made important impacts on past generations? One generation that experienced a similar culture of fear is the generation who grew up during the Cold War when tensions were high between the U.S and the Soviet Union. The cohort can roughly be described as those born between the early 1960s and the early

1980s, known as Generation X. One science-fiction film series that reached huge popularity during that time was the "Star Wars" original trilogy. The first film was released in 1977 (around the same time the oldest of Generation X would be in the midst of their teenage years), with subsequent films being released in 1980 and 1983. The film unquestionably impacted Generation X in their youth, but did it also shape their perceptions of society and their political obligations?

The Star Wars trilogy is set in space and follows the journey of Luke Skywalker, the movie's protagonist. Luke is training to become a member of the Jedi – a knightly order that protects peace and justice by using the mystical power of the "Force." The main threat to peace is the Empire, which is the brutal dictatorship that controls the Galaxy. The main antagonist is Darth Vader, a Jedi Knight who turned to the "dark side" by becoming a leader of the Empire. He served the Emperor for decades, working to eliminate the Jedi forces. It is later revealed that Darth Vader is Anakin Skywalker, Luke's father. In the end, Darth Vader sacrifices his life to save his son's, redeeming himself.

The "Star Wars" original trilogy certainly reflected certain aspects of society during the time, serving a synechdochic function. Throughout the films, there are obvious comparisons to the Cold War. There are only two sides in the film: good and evil. The rebellion forces represent all that is moral and just, while the Empire represents all that dark and immoral. The two are clearly separated and there is no gray area (Lev 31). This distinction represents America's view on the Cold War. The U.S and the Soviet Union were clearly on different sides, and the U.S was on the moral high ground. This is furthered represented by the Empires' minions lacking character or distinction – they are just a faceless evil (Meyer 100). The threat posed by nuclear weapons is symbolized by the Death Star - the ultimate weapon of mass destruction - which was used to obliterate Princess Leia's home planet of Alderaan, a blue sphere which conveniently

resembled Earth (Klein). The continual struggle between good and evil is a critique of what was wrong with society at the time. By 1977, U.S citizens had been living in constant fear of a Soviet Union attack. In the minds of many, the obliteration of Alderaan was not a distant fantasy, but a possible reality. The continual struggle between the U.S and the Soviet Union meant a world that lived in constant fear.

The prescriptive role of the trilogy was not revealed until the end of the final movie. In the end Luke, who symbolizes the U.S, recognizes the power of self-control and compassion:

> By the end of Return of the Jedi, however, Luke finally reaches mature mastery over himself, with the understanding of the importance not only of self-knowledge and self-control but also of the power of compassionate self-sacrifice. The Empire in Jedi is finally defeated when [Luke]…rejects anger, hatred, aggression, and fear, and maturely accepts his own possible death as the price he must pay for his moral choice (Lancashire 239).

This lesson demonstrates how humankind falters when it is ruled by anger, hate, egotism, and fear. Luke also learns the importance of laying weapons down and that technological advancement comes at a cost (Meyers 114). In the end, technology gives him no military or technical advantage, and the only choice left is compassion (Luke refuses to kill Darth and Darth ends up saving Luke) (Meyers 114). Lastly, Darth becomes redeemable through an act of love, not of power. His one act of sacrifice seems to atone for his past wrongdoings, as his "ghost" appears next to those of Obi-Wan and Yoda. All of these themes of compassion and forgiveness send a message about what society should look like. The U.S and the Soviet Union should lay down their weapons and realize that technology comes with costs. They should practice self-control and compassion, instead of self-interest and fear. If they did so, the world would be in a state of peace, just like the world of the Ewoks and the Rebels at the end of the trilogy.

In hindsight, the "Star Wars" trilogy indeed served a predictive function in U.S politics. The films naturalized the audience to a vision of the future where the U.S is less aggressive, shows self-restraint, and agrees to lay down its nuclear weapons. While it took almost a decade after the last film was released, eventually such a vision was fulfilled. During that decade, U.S politics centered on nuclear arms reduction. Reagan first proposed the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks in June 1982 (The Cold War Timeline). By December 2-3, 1989, the Malta Summit between Gorbachov and George H W Bush reversed much of the provisions of the Yalta Conference 1945, ushering in the beginning of the end of the Cold War (The Cold War Timeline). Finally, on July 31, 1991, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty was signed between Russia and the U.S., reducing the threat of nuclear war (The Cold War Timeline). In many ways, the "Star Wars" trilogy contributed to a changing era in U.S politics by naturalizing American society to the idea of a more compassionate, self-constrained U.S.

So, the "Star Wars" trilogy fulfills the three functions that utopian/dystopian narratives perform, but does it confer obligations on Generation X? The film calls for a societal change but did the youth of the time feel a sense of duty to enact this change? At the generational level, the answer is no. This is arguably because the "Star Wars" trilogy did not adequately create a subject position, thus creating a weak sense of obligation. As mentioned previously, a subject position is not a character in the narrative, but who the text encourages the audience to be. In the "Hunger Games", the audience can easily see themselves as Katniss, a simple teenager who loved her family and community. Thus, they are prompted to take on an outspoken role, similar to the one Katniss plays. It is easy to transfer the elements of the narrative over to present day society. It is not a far stretch for the audience to voice their opinion against the government, show respect for the fallen, and work to strengthen bonds of community. On the other hand, "Star Wars" is

relatable but not transferable. Both the heroes and the villains of the film are members of an elite, ruling family with Jedi powers. The audience is more like the other members of the Resistance, commoners with no special powers. The audience is left to observe the family drama, with no special roles to play, no unique position to fulfill. An important aspect of ethically constitutive stories is that they demand obligations of the members. If a narrative does not create a role for the audience, then there is no way to place obligations on them.

A future avenue of research could explore the functions and the political obligations of the new "Star Wars" trilogy which was recently released that includes "Star Wars: The Force Awakens", "Star Wars: The Last Jedi", and "Star Wars: Episode IX." What aspects of present-day society are reflected in this trilogy and what aspects is it criticizing? Is the audience given a role that confers a sense of duty and is easily transferable? Do the films appeal to both Generation X and millennials, or is the created community more limited? Such research would have significant implications for understanding generational similarities/differences and how important film characteristics are in producing political moments.

Conclusion

Films are more than meaningless fantasies. They are stories that have the power to bind an audience and shape the way they perceive the world. Films project certain perspectives that, when repeated, become ingrained in the imagination of the audience. Utopian/dystopian films, in particular, serve as a critique to present day society, projecting a vision of how the future should be. Perhaps this is why utopian/dystopian films become so popular. They are not representations of a foreign, unfamiliar society. Rather, they represent all that the audience wishes to change about the society they currently live in. Such films are particularly popular when they fulfill the three functions of a utopian/dystopian film: synecdochic, prescriptive, and predictive. By

fulfilling these functions, they resonate with the frustrations and the wishes of a particular community. Often, these films create obligations for the community they resonate with by forming a preferred vision of the future and giving the audience a role in creating that vision. However, not all utopias/dystopias create obligations. To do so, they must succinctly capture the imagination of a generation and create a role for them that is transferable to present day society. If the audience is not invited into an empowering subject position, it is unlikely that they will feel a sense of duty to realize the prescribed vision of the future. Films can be powerful political tools, but only if the audience is given an empowering role worthy of inspiring a sense of civic duty.

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