THE THIN LINE BETWEEN HELL AND HERE: DYSTOPIAN FICTION UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

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ABSTRACT

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The end of the Cold War and the global triumph of neoliberalism were accompanied by the evolution of certain themes in dystopian fiction. According to some of its advocates, such as Francis Fukuyama, neoliberalism's success signified the "end of history," understood as ideological evolution, since the decline of communism left Western liberal democracies without any major opposition in terms of global governing and discursive practices. This thesis critically compares neoliberal rhetoric concerning invisible power, the end of history, technology, freedom of consumption and the commodification of human relationships with the ideologies represented in four neoliberal dystopian works of fiction, namely *Black Mirror*, *Feed*, *The Circle*, and *The Fat Years*. These examples create a "one-dimensional" dystopian subject who is rendered incapable of possessing the utopian imagination necessary to organize political resistance, precisely as a result of the governance and discourse of neoliberalism.

Keywords: neoliberalism, dystopia, dystopian fiction, utopia, post Cold War fiction, neoliberal subject, dystopian subjectivity, *Black Mirror*, *Feed*, *The Circle*, *The Fat Years*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....iii

INTRODUCTION..... 1

CHAPTER 1: NEOLIBERALISM: DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS…….. 14

1.a: Political Criticism of Utopia/Dystopia and Dystopian Anxiety ……. 16

1.b: The Employment of "Invisible Power" ...…… 25

1.c: "The End of History" ……... 34

1.d: Freedom of Consumption and False Needs …… 43

1.e: Individual Isolation and the Blurring of the Lines between Public and Private Life through the Use of Technology …….. 48

CHAPTER 2: DYSTOPIAN FICTION UNDER NEOLIBERALISM ……. 54

2.a: Invisible Power in "15 Million Merits" and *The Circle* …….. 57

2.b: The "End of History" in *The Fat Years* ……... 66

2.c: Freedom of Consumption and False Needs in *Feed* …… 74

2.d: Individual Isolation and the Blurring of the Lines between Public and Private Life through the Use of Technology in *The Circle* ……..... 82

CONCLUSION …….. 89

WORKS CITED ……... 105

INTRODUCTION

Fear is based upon an anticipation of a change in a situation for the worse, implying a subjective comparison between the conditions of present and future. In such a state, our limited perception of time and space alters and clouds our judgements to the extent that we become incapable of envisioning the potential outcomes of our actions (or our inaction) and the effects of these outcomes on our reality, resulting in a paralysis of the imagination. Such paralysis both stems from and results in one's inability to imagine a better future, relying on a perpetual belief that the initiator of fear is lurking in the shadows, waiting for the right time to cast the dark spell that would bring total obliteration to that which has been deemed acquired, preserved, and precious. The classic examples of dystopian fiction such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* tend to elaborate on the different aspects of this paralysis of the imagination, which is caused by a particular kind of fear. Based on the "misuse" of power by a governing individual or group over its subjects, this kind of fear is related to the potential action of that individual or a group who is/are capable of stripping the individual from her rights and forcing her to live in undesirable conditions due to a loss or reduction of her self-control**.** And yet, when designed under the limits of a linearly progressing fictive world, the arrival point of this paralyzing fear, and its consequences on the state of body and mind, can hardly comprise all of the aspects of the condition of fear as it is experienced in "reality." Dystopian fiction, like any form of fiction, is a construction involving multiple projections of thought upon concepts, emotions, ideas and experiences. It relies on a singular perspective in its attempt to render a subjectively experienced or imagined reality based on dysfunction comprehendible to the reader. In this construction, any attempt to define a feeling like fear and the results born out of its

experience would necessarily leave out a plethora of alternative consequences that could have taken place in real life. What qualifies George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty Four* as dystopian fiction is the protagonist's failed trial with his oppressor in gaining back the power over his life. It is Winston's personal anxiety and fear regarding O'Brien's gaining total control over his choices, relationships, and ultimately, over "the few cubic centimeters" within his skull that leads Winston (or Orwell) to search for and attempt to build a space of resistance. A reader may very well point to the alternatives regarding the consequences of Winston's actions or his lack of skills, knowledge, and courage, leading to his failure in transforming his life for the better. However, without his chosen path resulting in failure, there is no Winston and no trace of the dystopian condition attributed to his state. Furthermore, the existence of fear is conditional upon the fact that its object, the event which has the power to paralyze the imagination from reflecting on a better future, has not arrived. As soon as the future transforms into the present, encompassing the particular event that was positioned as the object of fear in the imaginary, the thought projection that once drew a link between the present and future ceases to exist in the form of fear. The temporal gap between the future and present is the foundation upon which fear is erected**.** Considering these two distinctive features, a reader can expect the dystopian condition to be about the concept of fear, but a particular type of fear that is fictional, subjective, and most importantly, reflects on the future.

What if the fear of being manipulated by a governing power is replaced by a form of acceptance of that power's manipulation that denies any form of future transformation in the individual's condition? Should the dystopian condition be based solely on a comparison between the conditions of the present and those of the future, or can it offer reflection on a continuous state of fear (or the erasure of its continuity through acceptance) that is defined by the

internatilization of the incapacity to transform? Under these circumstances, what would a dystopia that moves from the realm of fiction to that of reality look like?

Arguably, with the arrival of neoliberalism by the 1970s, our perception regarding the definition of dystopia has changed so dramatically that those who do not benefit from the neoliberal agenda of economic expansionism are rendered thoroughly incapable of even imagining a better system of governance. A dystopian condition may very well be comprised of the following elements. One, there has never been such a great disparity between the conditions of the rich and the poor on a global basis. According to the data offered by Credit Suisse, the world's richest 1% owned close to 50% of the global wealth by the end of 2015, while around 10% of the population lives on less than $1.9 USD a day. Most of the global industrial companies that the Western world relies on for the manifacture of their technological products have multiple records of exploiting the labour of their workers who happened to have been born into poverty outside the borders of first-world countries by subjecting them to low wages and horrid working conditions. Second, as a result of growing Internet usage, data mapping of users for advertising and security purposes became increasingly intrusive, turning the collection of private information by the third parties into a norm that could easily be exploited. Also, despite considerable data regarding rising global temperatures, environmental degradation as a result of growing industrialization and irresponsible industrial practices, the recently elected president of the world's political and economic superpower has been repeatedly calling the issue of global warming a "hoax." On the other hand, the former president of the aforementioned superpower came into his position through a long-running propaganda of "change," only to wage seven wars on seven different countries and to prosecute the largest number of whistleblowers under the 1917 Espionage Act, all the while gaining a Nobel Peace Prize during his presidency, an event

reminiscent of the Orwellian concept of doublethink. Furthermore, a considerable segment of the Middle East is torn by war, secterian tribalism, and terrorism partly (if not mostly) waged by the global superpowers, having left behind innocent “casualties,” pictures of whom have been decorating the front pages of popular media sources only to be forgotten with the arrival of other fresh tragedies. As a result of war, terrorism, and economic difficulties, immigration rates have been significantly increasing over the past decade, changing the sociocultural fabric of Western countries and resulting in the rising power of right-wing white-supremacist political groups that devote considerable energy in creating legal if not utterly violent means to remove immigrants from their nations. Several other elements can be added to this list, but arguably the most important aspect of them all is a growing normalization and desensitization regarding the atrocities resulting from the irresponsible choices of the governing regimes. With the triumph of neoliberal discourse and the economic and political practices employed by its advocates, a particular kind of dystopia is appearing in which a “post-truth politics” increasingly dominates public discourse, leaving no room for transformative political organization and action to be taken seriously. Today, dystopia should be understood not only as a projection of individual fears towards a future form of governance but also as a collectively experienced reality governing the politics of the present. My aim for this project is to draw connections between four key elements of neoliberal discourse and to show how these elements are reflected in contemporary dystopian fiction writing.

"The war to end all wars" was a definitive term used for the First World War in the beginning of the twentieth century. This promise was fulfilled by the end of the Second World War, albeit in an unexpected way: the rules of the global game of conquest changed dramatically. Until then, wars had been fought with a variety of weapons reflecting the latest technology, with

the commander leading his army to victory and, if successful, emerging as a conqueror. This paradigm started to shift by the end of the Second World War, as the use of physical weapons were increasingly replaced with those of ideology and propaganda, especially in the West. In the following years, the emergence and continuation of the Cold War presented the ultimate example of this shift from the physicality of warmaking to an ideological one, paving the way with the title of "the ultimate victor" to be claimed by the economically surviving side. Francis Fukuyama's "the end of history" discourse was arguably rooted in this decisive turn, as history was deemed to accumulate towards an "end" in which the victor turned out to be neoliberalism.

Prior to the Cold War, it was customary (if not normative) for the rules and technics of warmaking as well as governance to rely on the use of physical/coercive power or "hard power." The polarizing opposition between the two superpowers, representing the ideals of communism and capitalism, created a global political environment in which the use of military and economic means to influence the decisions and behaviours of threatening political bodies were deemed as normal. After the termination of the war between these two ideological oppositions, the use of hard power lost its organizing influence. Liberal democracy under monopoly capitalism did not need to use physical power or the traditional brutal methods of warmaking in order to govern efficiently, partly due to the lack of a powerful military threat once posed by the Soviet Union. Relying on the systematic use of biopower and disciplinary power, the "invisible power" associated with the "ideological power" of liberal democracies became increasingly preferable among Western societies, due to its promises of conformity, freedom of choice, and self-governance, as well as its promotion of a predictable, "rational," and efficient system of governance. Neoliberalism has portrayed technological advancements and the free-market both as means and ends to keep its subjects peacefully occupied and entertained, as well as to satisfy their

"needs" through promoting growing economies based on consumption and individualism.

Neoliberalism remains a somewhat ambiguous term that is used in a variety of economical and sociopolitical contexts. However, as "the ultimate victor" emerging from the war of ideologies, it relies on a positive perception of the human condition with an underlying proposition that societies would remain peaceful and continue to advance socially, politically and economically through individuals' self-regulation and a self-regulating free-market, stemming from a certain understanding of humankind's inherent rationality. Neoliberalism has been touted as the most successful framework for governance numerous times, compared with its alternatives, by multiple advocates such as Milton Friedman, Francis Fukuyama, and Friedrich Hayek, partly due to their deliberate attempt to conceal its nature as a regime of governance (hence the "invisible" aspect of its power), and to portray it as a platform that serves each and every society's most fundamental needs on a global basis. With the continuous assertion of this "positive" message and the promise of an easy and fulfilling life (if not a wonderland exemplified by a technologically advanced "American Dream") waiting at the corner that can enable everyone to fulfill their needs and desires, the sense of a utopia associated with neoliberalism has increasingly become a dominant aspect of the Western collective consciousness. In this thesis, the aim is to explore the "nature" of this utopian look on neoliberalism, but more precisely, of the dystopian environment its subjects are incarcerated in, by looking at a few examples of contemporary dystopian fiction written after the end of the Cold War.

In the first chapter, I draw a parallel between the purpose and the structural elements of utopian/dystopian writing and how they were affected by the discursive success of neoliberalism after the end of the Cold War. To this end, I discuss the definition and criticism of neoliberalism first. After covering neoliberalism's theoretical evolution, I attempt to explore the etymology and

significance of utopia and dystopia as cultural products that offer criticism about the sociopolitical settings in which they were written. Furthermore, stemming from David Harvey's understanding of neoliberalism as "restoration of class power masked by a rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility, privatization and the free market," I review four distinctive aspects of neoliberalism that contribute to the dystopian condition (*Spaces of Capitalism* 16). These aspects, reflected in the chapter titles, are "The Employment of Invisible Power," "The End of History," "Freedom of Consumption and False Needs," and "Individual Isolation and the Blurring of the Lines Between Public and Private Life Through the Use of Technology."

In order to analyze the elements related to the concept of power in dystopian literature before and after the Cold War, it is necessary to frame the fictional dystopian worlds' different takes on the "nature" of power and the evolution of its use, and tie this back to the political environment in which they were written. In "The Employment of Invisible Power," I summarize Michel Foucault's concepts of traditional sovereign power and the modern forms of disciplinary power and biopower. An intrinsic historical relationship exists between disciplinary control, the creation of docile bodies and the rise of capitalism. The distinction between "hard power" versus "invisible power" that will be used in my analysis derives from Michel Foucault's work in tracing back the evolution of power structures and the changing practices of its systematization by the governing forces in the West, starting roughly around the late seventeenth century with modernity and the further spreading of capitalism. The practices of governance based on traditional sovereign power are what is equated with the elements of hard power involving a strict requirement of obedience to the law designed by the authoritative figure (the king or the state). Originating from the evolution of disciplinary power, Foucault explains invisible power as one

that "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their very actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives" (*Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 39). The subjects governed by invisible power may come to see the domination of the very forces which strip them of their power and rights as "natural" or unchangeable (which arguably plays a significant role in the creation of a dystopian condition under the governance of neoliberal ideology).

In the chapter "The End of History," I discuss Fukuyama's discourse regarding the end of history and its repurcussions. The "end of history" discourse is presented as a by-product of neoliberal culture, and it implies that humankind stands at a point beyond time in its capacity to perceive and analyze the course of ideological evolution. This is accompanied by a belief in the inherently rational occurrence of events, which is the result of a limited understanding of history. The end of history discourse arguably mirrors the neo-imperial aspect of neoliberalism, limiting the scope of historical achievement to neoliberal ideology, the symptoms of which can be found in the themes of contemporary dystopian fiction.

With the success of the neoliberal ideology, freedom has taken a new form in the everyday lives of citizens. In "Freedom of Consumption and False Needs," I focus on how the concept of freedom promoted by neoliberal discourse is a practical strategy to maintain the goal of endless economic expansionism, as well as to hide the gradual restoration of class power. The prospect of freedom offered to the subordinate groups by the economic and political elites serves the purpose of the creation of a certain discourse among the subordinate groups, limiting their understanding of freedom to the basic right to consume and to the freedom to choose among consumer items and services available in the market.

The creation of individual isolation within the neoliberal order cannot be separated from the expansion of technological innovations in the second part of the twentieth century. Globalization and its amelioration of communication technologies opened up space for individual expression, social interaction, and learning, particularly through the use of social media, which led to a certain democratization of Western societies in terms of these technologies' encouraging spaces of public discussion. On the other hand, through the use of communication technologies like social media, neoliberalism promotes individualism while taking advantage of individuals' isolation and inability to form oppositional groups by guiding and reshaping their thoughts and actions. In "Individual Isolation and the Blurring of the Lines between Public and Private Life through The Use of Technology," I focus on the use of technology under neoliberalism, which leads to the isolation of the subject and consequentially eliminates oppositional voices and the possibility of forming adversary political organizations.

The second chapter of this thesis involves a critical comparison between these selected elements, defining the negative aspects of neoliberalism and the thematic components of the examples of contemporary dystopian fiction which, I argue, emerged as symptoms of the discourse and practices of this system of governance. M.T. Anderson's *Feed*, Chan Koonchung's *The Fat Years*, Charlie Brooker's television series *Black Mirror*, and Dave Eggers' *The Circle* are the fictional examples discussed under the four headings, each positioning one or more of these four elements in their critical focus.

In *Black Mirror*, the process and commodification of resistance are exemplified by the failure of the "protagonist's trial" with the existing structures of power, focusing on the preservation of class/power through the use of information technology and media. *Black Mirror* is exemplary of the use of invisible power, as it shows how technology institutes "new, more

effective, and ever more pleasing form of social control" while shaping "the universe of human discourse and action" (Murray 42). Through invisible power, which turns screens into a technologically advanced Panopticon, surveillance does not only limit individuals' political actions in public spaces, it also creates an "intra-subjective" form of surveillance that results in the subjugation of an episode's two protagonists, Abi and Bing, to the orders of the jury who represent the governing elites. Furthermore, in *The Circle*, invisible power manipulates the protagonist Mae to the point where she loses her identity and adopts the one assigned to her by her company. As a result of her eagerness in adopting this bland uniform identity, her relationship with her family and friends deteriorates and she eventually borders on becoming the company's cyborg whose private and public life is one and the same. Changing according to the needs of her company, invisible power disciplines her through the use of social media while successfully encouraging each of its employees to become a part of the upcoming technological "revolution." Whereas in earlier examples of dystopian fiction such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, the governing elite group employs traditional sovereign power characterized by fear, threats, and physical violence to govern the citizens, in the contemporary examples discussed here, the means of governance are at first invisible, due to their intrinsic relationship to the free-market economy's selling strategies eased by the use of communication technologies such as social media.

In the chapter "The End of History in *The Fat Years*," I argue that *The Fat Years* presents an updated version of the obsession with and the necessity of the pursuit of historical records, which has been a commonly instituted theme in examples of classic dystopian fiction. As a succession of the previous discussion regarding the relationship between (*the* end of) history, dystopia, and neoliberalism, I suggest that dystopian fiction written under neoliberalism tends to

portray a world in which individuals are entrapped into a flat, unchanging (and unchangeable) "now." Various strategies stemming from the use of invisible power are employed by the governing elites to manipulate the memories of its subjects. The quest to uncover the truth behind this memory loss is linked to the nostalgia for "the time when history existed," a past when change and the positive transformation of everyday life were still perceived as achievable. Within this context, *The Fat Years* portrays a successful attempt in attacking contemporary Chinese capitalism, "which it accuses of creating a kind of fake utopia, where poverty, misery, and despair are hidden behind the fantasy life of the new Chinese consumer society" (Featherstone 183). The concept of the "end of history" is critically appropriated by Chan into his narrative, as each time there is a significant change in the political arena, those benefitting from the change are inclined to portray it as *the* end of progress.

The thematic elements of these contemporary examples of dystopian fiction portray an anxiety originating from the governing power's limitation of individual freedoms to the area of consumption and false needs. This anxiety leads to the formation of a particular dystopian condition, appearing as a result of the governing practices for achieving a "totalizing administration," which in turn serves to "mystify the actual social relations and structures by which exploitation and domination are carried on" (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* 17). In M.T. Anderson's dystopian novel *Feed,* 73% of American citizens living in a near-future carry *feednet*, which has been inserted in their brains to constantly give them information about what to buy next. The feed system is promoted as an extension of the freedom offered by the governing body's technological insight, and yet anyone who refuses to own it faces social exclusion, followed by serious physical dysfunctions. From a practical perspective, the world of *Feed* operates fairly smoothly, thanks to its citizens' mindless

acceptance of their servitude to the corporations which can dictate and organize every aspect of their life. On top of willingly embracing the constant bombardment of advertising thrown every second into their feednet, the subjects of *Feed* are incapable of drawing a link between the corporations' exploitation of natural resources, which has happened to an extent that brings about environmental destruction and their loss of health; neither are they aware of their physical and mental subjugation to the feednet technology for socializing and ultimately staying alive. There is only one way to act and one way to react, exemplifying the singular perspective and experience of a "one-dimensional man," embodied by the protagonist named Titus.

In the chapter "Individual Isolation and the Blurring of the Lines between Public and Private Life through the Use of Technology in *The Circle*," I discuss how the propaganda of individualism perpetuated by communication technology plays a significant role in the application of neoliberal logic to its subject's everyday life, where those who do not want to share every detail of their life online are seen as a threat to the majority's understanding of democracy. The interaction and socialization of these neoliberal subjects involve sharing every detail of their experiences and memories, forcefully carrying what was once deemed personal to the public space, turning them into commodities to be inspected and normalized by the established social mechanisms. Furthermore, neoliberal dystopia tackles the ways in which advanced communication technologies can commodify individualism and social life; the futuristic plot is increasingly set in the "here and now," as pointed out by Benjamin Kunkel. This trend is tied to the rapid advancement of technology, "as our world appears to accelerate toward a plunge into chaos more profound than any pre-technological civilization would be able to take" (Kunkel 95). The destruction of the individual's private world, making the subject susceptible to outside stimuli, is eased by the social media, which initiates "the coupling between megalomania and

paranoia" on the individual (Gottlieb 11). The advent of long-distance mass communication technologies leads to the further isolation of the population, allowing for the integration of effective means of control into the society. Egger's novel *The Circle* is an accurate example of the ways in which the perfecting of communication technologies under neoliberalism leads the isolated individuals to perform the role of re-organizing and dictating desired means of social control on other isolated individuals. Furthermore, communication is not an extracurricular activity, but a task everyone working for the company needs to fulfill in order to be successful at their work and accepted as a valuable member of the social fabric. The increasing commodification of our online spaces; the censorship of content emerging as a result of the latest trend in enforcing copyright laws within the Internet realm; and last but not least, the reduction if not elimination of online anonymity on social media websites today can easily be paralleled with the thematic elements that make *The Circle* a contemporary neoliberal dystopia.

The promises of neoliberal ideology regarding individual freedom, democracy, and rationality are part of its rhetoric of hiding its initial goal of restoring the class power to the elites. The utopian discourse it offers stems from a belief that history has come to an end with the triumph of liberal democracies. However, the same discourse that reserves the end of history for neoliberal ideology results in the creation of dystopian subjectivities which are symbolized by the characters drawn in *Black Mirror*, *Feed*, *The Fat Years*, and *The Circle.* The stories told in these contemporary examples of dystopian fiction point to the ways in which the dystopian condition is created, namely through the use of invisible power, the commodification of human relationships, the "end of history" discourse, and specific forms of communication technology. These elements are equally responsible for the creation of a "one-dimensional man" under neoliberalism, who has

become devoid of a utopian imagination capable of organizing political resistance to reform or revolutionize the ruling ideology.

1.NEOLIBERALISM: DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS

The term *neoliberalism* is widely used today to define an extreme form of economic liberalism that favors free trade, globally open markets, privatization, deregulation, and the reduction of the state's hand in managing and redistributing capital resources in both local and global political environments. However, this definition alone does not explain the historical development or the socio-economic settings that have led authorities to favour it as a reliable system for Western economies, nor does it clearly convey the different understandings of the term by its most prominent advocates and critics. To draw a parallel between the neoliberal political/economic strategies that have been in use since the mid-twentieth century and the dystopian anxiety/fear that these strategies have brought forward, I attempt to examine the meaning assigned to the term neoliberalism first.

Neoliberalism is a "loosely demarcated set of political beliefs which most prominently and prototypically include the conviction that the only legitimate purpose of the state is to safeguard individual, especially commercial, liberty, as well as strong private property rights (cf. especially Mises 1962; Nozick 1974; Hayek 1979)" (Thorsen and Lie 14). Throughout the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, neoliberalism has been discussed under two main theoretical contexts. The first group of theorists defined it as a revival of "liberalism," indicating that liberalism went through a process of "initial growth, intermediary decline, and finally a recent rejuvenation" (2). On the other hand, the second group perceived neoliberalism as a distinct ideology that shared commonalities such as the historical roots and basic vocabulary but was not

identical to "liberalism proper" (2). The changing course of history, the accumulation and propagation of information, and the expanding reach of globalization altered the extent to which neoliberalism has departed ideologically from the primary arguments of classical liberalism. However, for both groups, attaining a social system in which the subjects are "free" to decide for their own economic and social activities has remained the most fundamental element. As an extension of this mutually shared belief in individual freedom, both parties claimed that a state's most important role was to protect individual rights by sustaining its authority only over the "most fundamental aspects of public order," such as military forces and law enforcement tools. Furthermore, the "non-excludable goods" needed to remain under the total control of citizens and the organizations these citizens formed (3). The group's members defined themselves as "liberals," as they committed to ideals of individual freedom in the traditional European sense. The "neo" part came in due to their commitment to the "free market principles of neoclassical economics that has emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century (thanks to the work of Alfred Marshall, William Stanley Jevons, and Leon Walras) to displace the classical theories of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and, of course, Karl Marx" (Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 20).

The cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking is rooted in the assumption that "individual freedoms are guaranteed by the freedom of the market and of trade" (7). In his article "Pretense of Knowledge," Friedrich Hayek, a prominent advocate of neoliberal ideology, wrote the following about the relationship between freedom and neoliberalism:

> In all of human history, I know of no example of a country with a large degree of political freedom that has not relied, in the main, on private markets and private arrangements for organizing its economic activity. That is why it is so important that we restrain government and cut it down to size. If we do not do so, then the marvelous heritage that America has had, of free society, of personal liberty, will be destroyed. (Hayek 55)

His statement underlines the taken-for-granted relationship between the Western concept of free society and the reduction of the state's regulative power. The legitimization of an "invisible hand," regulating the limits of both economic activity and freedom, occurred through the use of corporations, media, and the "ideological state apparatuses" such as universities, schools, and churches. The organization of think-tanks funded by corporations, the capturing of certain segments of popular sources of media, and the support of certain intellectuals of the neoliberal ways of thinking created a climate of opinion in which neoliberal political strategies were perceived as the sole guarantor of freedom, eventually leading to its consolidation within the practices of mainstream political parties (Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 40).

1.a. Political Criticism of Utopia/Dystopia and Dystopian Anxiety

As I would like to demonstrate that neoliberalism is the prevailing ideology of Western socioeconomic/political culture leading to the formation of a certain dystopian anxiety, I believe it is necessary to show how the utopian/dystopian imagination and literature can be understood as critical tools regarding the politics of its era. After this, I move on to how aspects of neoliberalism – invisible power, the "end of history" discourse, freedom of consumption, the commodification of life and the creation of false needs, as well as individual isolation and the blurring of the lines between public and private life through the use of technology – produce a particular form of subjectivity in the selected examples of post-Cold-War-era dystopian fiction. Arguably, the significance of the protagonists in these examples of dystopian fiction is their embodiment of the clash between the utopian promise and the dystopian results of neoliberal capitalism.

Our critical perception of the world is shaped and limited by our socio-political, geographical and historical setting. This position of being bound by and to societal values may

result in an inability to be critically aware of the differences between freedom and unfreedom, equality and inequality, and justice and injustice. Utopian and dystopian fiction both play a fundamental role in breaking the dominant belief systems imposed on the subjects of an established form of governance, which, for the purposes of rendering governing easier, tend to blind these subjects to "the reality of their situations." Created as a critical response to the institutionalized injustices and inequalities within a given society, these alternative, fictional worlds allow for a cracking down on the perspectives that pushes for the acceptance of these as unchangeable, which "can be a shattering experience since it suggests that our current reality is simply wrong" (Sargent 113). The reading of utopian/dystopian writing as constituents of progressive politics stems from the fact that "all utopias ask questions" about the potential for improvements in various areas from economic to cultural and political. These questions allow the reader to compare life in the present with life portrayed in the utopia/dystopia and to scratch the surface of the present to better understand "what is wrong with the way we now live" which, in turn, leads to suggestions about the ways for improvement (5). As one of the most prominent thinkers on the utopian imagination and writing, Lyman Tower Sargent claims that utopias (as well as dystopias, which can be considered as a sub-genre of utopian fiction) have the following purposes:

> A utopia can be simply a fantasy, it can be a description of a desirable or an undesirable society, an extrapolation, a warning, an alternative to the present, or a model to be achieved. And the intentional community as utopia adds a seventh purpose, to demonstrate that living a better life is possible in the here and now. (8)

Yet, under the reign of popular ideologies, one can point to an ever-transforming perception of the concepts of dystopia/utopia appearing as a result of the sociopolitical changes which affect the meanings appointed to these alternative worlds depicting common desires, fears, anxieties, and imagination.

Instead of suggesting a perfect, finished, and closed societal model to be achieved or to be subjected to in the future, the design of a utopia/dystopia can be regarded as a potential blueprint for constructing a political model alternative to the present reality. For this reason, it is more fruitful to read the utopian/dystopian design as a mirror to the present, bringing out the flaws of a society and of the current form of governance, while offering alternative ways of forming societal organizations that are comparatively better (Sargent 113). To emphasize the potential for progressive politics that utopia/dystopia presents, Frederic Jameson claims that utopianism opens up the possibility of future change and is, therefore, positive. He writes that "utopias have something to do with failure, and tell us more about our own limits and weaknesses than they do about perfect societies" ("Comments" 74–77). The continuation of such attempts to imagine is still desirable, as examples of feminist and socialist utopias showed during the '60s and '70s: they were successful in offering alternative worlds without gender domination and hierarchy, as well as in reshaping the societal paradigms regarding these concepts (Sargent 113). As Sargent states, "All utopian practice is about the actual rather than the fictional transformation of the everyday" (7). Politics and the utopian/dystopian imagination are and mostly likely will always be in a dialectical relationship in which one transforms the structure and historically established norms of the other. Even though they portray two imaginary worlds that are thematically opposite, they both serve the purpose of suggesting a critical approach towards the system in which they are written by presenting alternative ways of organizing the everyday economy and relations between citizens. The historical understanding of the utopian imagination, desire, and dystopian fears and anxieties change with the transformation of political systems, as every political system possesses its own set of shortcomings in terms of its citizens' contentment (i.e., the limitation of individual rights/freedoms in the communist societies of the past and of equality in contemporary liberal democracies).

The subversive and oppositional culture emerging from and organized by the utopian imagination has arguably been eliminated (or in many cases, re-appropriated to prevent the formation of oppositional voices) in modern society as a negation of the present system, neoliberal capitalism. Five-hundred years after the term emerged as the title of Thomas Moore's classical example of a "perfect" imaginary society, utopia today is widely used "to sustain the domination of the present economic and political systems of the West" (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 16). The post-Cold War version of monopoly capitalism (supported by the expansion of neoliberal political practices) appears to have almost successfully wiped out "the subversive utopian impulse as a negation of the present system" (16). Jameson perceives the difficulty of imagining utopia today as a consequence of our cultural and ideological bonding by societal values; such limitations kept us from envisioning a system of governance that could be radically different and comparatively "better." In Jameson's words, this system can be recognized in its ability to "colonize the last remnants and survivals of human freedom" in order to re-appropriate them as consumable objects/ideas for the "passive consumers of the post-industrial society" (Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* 97). Relying on reification and exploitation for its function, neoliberal capitalism transforms "human relations and unrestricted nature into the appearance of relationship between things that can be produced and consumed, bought, and sold" (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 16). The society, under which the utopian imagination is eliminated, is shaped into a "seamless web of media technology, multinational corporations, and international bureaucratic control" (16). Therefore, an intrinsic relationship exists between the changing conditions of societies and the particular comprehension of the meaning of utopia/dystopia, which in turn affects the economy of everyday relations by reshaping its subjects accordingly.

Unsurprisingly, the elimination of the subversive utopian impulse had its own repercussions on utopian/dystopian fiction writing, in particular resulting in a proliferation of dystopian fiction works in the aftermath of the neoliberal turn (as an extension of "postwar capitalism," as noted by Jameson) starting roughly by the end of the 1970s and reaching its peak with the end of the Cold War. As opposed to its antonym "utopia," the word "dystopia" is a relatively new term that was first used in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1868, the English philosopher John Stuart Mill placed it in a speech he gave in parliament. The use of the word conveying the meaning of a literary form as speculative and a subgenre of utopian fiction did not become commonly used until the twentieth century, during which it quickly became "the dominant form of utopian literature" (Sargent 26, 27). Aldous Huxley, in his 1946 preface to *Brave New World*, referred to the bad place as a utopia, pointing out dystopia's categorization under the genre of utopia. It was not until 1952 that the term took its final form when J. Max Patrick clarified "the distinction between the good place as 'eutopia' and its opposite, the bad place, as 'dystopia'" (qtd. in Gottlieb 4). The definition of dystopia as "bad place" was extended to "a social structure that is worse than the present social system"(4); however, as Erika Gottlieb pointed out in her book *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial*, this conceptualization of the term did not cover the structural aspects of its meaning, as "dystopia" could also represent the "writer's own society 'as is'" (4). By looking at popular dystopian fiction examples in Eastern and Central Europe, Gottlieb attempted to draw a more inclusive definition by reviewing the presented "characteristics of a society that is dystopic" (4).

According to Gottlieb, the first characteristic of dystopian fiction is that the seed of a utopian dream is always present in the plot even though the presented subjects are continuously exposed to unequal and unjust practices by the governing forces in the dystopian setting. This

push and pull between utopian and dystopian perspectives is "articulated by the ruling elite's original promise when its new system was implemented, a promise then miscarried (in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*), betrayed (in George Orwell's N*ineteen Eighty-Four*), or fulfilled in ways that show up the unexpected shortcomings of the dream (in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*)" (8). The second characteristic is the protagonist's trial against the governing forces that deliberately sustain the miscarriage of justice. The collective nightmare perpetuated by "a barbaric state religion" in which the individual is a victim "experiencing loss of control over his or her destiny in the face of a monstrous, suprahuman force that can no longer be overcome or, in many cases, even comprehended by reason" which is the third characteristic of dystopian fiction (11). Gottlieb further notes that there is a "peculiar logic of a mythical, ritualistic way of thinking" that could be observed in these dystopian societies, resembling "the logic inherent in obsessive-compulsive disorders" and "the coupling between megalomania and paranoia" (11). The destruction of the individual's private world constitutes the fifth aspect, in which the barbaric state religion spreads its propaganda and indoctrination through the use of technology and mind-altering drugs, allowing the modern state to control action not only in the social realm, but also in the individual/private realm: "The few cubic centimeters" within the skull containing the individual's private self, feelings, thoughts, emotions, personal history and sexual identity. The logic behind the use of such excessive control over the governed is clear: "…[B]y breaking down the private world of each inhabitant the monster state succeeds in breaking down the very core of the individual mind and personality – what remains is the pliable, numb consciousness of mass man," making the act of governance easier for the ruling forces (11). The final characteristic that Gottlieb points out is the protagonist's pursuit of history and the importance of a record of the past; access to the records of the past is crucial for the sanity of any society. The nightmare imposed upon dystopian subjects is a by-product of "the mythical thought approaching the logic

of a mental disorder," which blurs the lines between "present and past, cause and effect, or lies and truth" (12). As a result, the protagonist in dystopian fiction is always in search of a genuine record of the past, "a past the totalitarian regime would like to distort or deny completely," in order to discover the truth (12). The society presented in dystopian fiction is dysfunctional, as it lacks the qualities that would form the basis for a community. The rulers in these dystopian worlds are like parasites, holding onto the labour of their own people, "whom they devour in the process" (41).

One of the most compelling responses to the question regarding how post-Cold War dystopias symptomatize the conflicting (utopian vs. dystopian) characteristics of neoliberalism is given by Tom Moylan in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination.* In this book, Moylan states that "[b]inary closure gives way to an expansively negative conflict between prevailing ideology, which asserts that utopia has already arrived and all the human subject need do is passively cooperate with it, and oppositional vision, which states that the human subject has not yet experienced utopia and still must struggle towards that goal" (106). After the end of the Cold War, the neoliberal rhetoric shaping the everyday life of its subjects was left without major ideological resistance offering an alternative (at least according to its advocates) that, prior to the end of the Cold War, could organize the oppositional power around it. The transition from the sharing of power with communism (as another grand ideology in history dominating the political arena, with capitalism as the arch-enemy) to the solidification of the capitalist monopoly led to a discursive environment in which the "triumph" of neoliberalism was noted as a singular instance in the history of ideologies compared to the others. The neoliberal turn was supposedly the beginning of the "end of history," a new era when eventually

freedom would open the gate towards a new way of experiencing "progress" and to humanity's unlimited access to knowledge.

According to certain critics of neoliberalism, the merging of neoliberal ideology with the end of history discourse signified an achieved goal and paved the way for a deliberate mystification of the actual goals of the neoliberal restructuralization of everyday life. As noted earlier, David Harvey stated that neoliberalism should be regarded as a "class project, masked by a lot of neoliberal rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility, privatization, and the free market" (*The Enigma of Capital* 10). For Harvey, the promotion of positive rights ostensibly gained by the pursuit of ideals along with the advocating of neoliberal politics was merely a tactic, an elaborate scheme to hide the repercussions of the initial agenda, which is the "restoration and consolidation of class power" (*Spaces of Global Capitalism* 29). The ideals of freedom and individual choice offered by the thinkers of classical liberalism, with the later addition of easier access to the sources of knowledge through the use of technology and private ownership (owing to globalization and capitalism), were positive aspects to be brought about by the spreading of neoliberalism. However, the neoliberal rhetoric of progress and freedom concealed the primary purpose behind this propaganda of positive values: to restore the economic and political power once lost to the elites after the World War Two (with the gradual abandoning of Keynesian Economics).

Neoliberal politics has either restored class power to ruling elites (as in the US and in Britain) or prepared the basis for capitalist class formation (as in India, Russia, China, and elsewhere). The increasing social inequality among the members of a given society was shown to be necessary to promote "the entrepreneurial risk and innovation that conferred competitive power" and encouraged growth. Among the lower classes, any problems occurring as a

consequence of the neoliberal system of governance are considered their own personal failures, exemplified by their inability to fulfill societal expectations in terms of enhancing "their own human capital through dedication to education, the acquisition of a Protestant work ethic, submission to work discipline and flexibility, and the like" (Harvey *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* 156–157). In addition, Pierre Bourdieu noted that the neoliberal program gathers its social power particularly from those whose interests it represents, such as "stockholders, financial operators, industrialists, conservatives, or social-democratic politicians who have been converted to the reassuring layoffs of laissez-faire, high-level financial officials eager to impose policies advocating their own extinction because, unlike the managers of firms, they run no risk of having to eventually pay for the consequences" (2–3). On the whole, the ideals of neoliberalism serve to ameliorate the social and political conditions of those who are already powerful, casting aside the notion of sharing power with the unprivileged.

As noted both by Bourdieu and Harvey, neoliberalism conceals its primary agenda of restoring class power through a rhetoric of praising individual freedom and liberties. The mechanisms through which this concealment of neoliberalism's "true nature" (the restoration of class power) occurrences are several, of which I focus only on four due to their particular perpetuation of dystopian sensibilities and environment under neoliberal governance:

1. The employment of "invisible power"
2. "The end of history"
3. Freedom of consumption and false needs
4. Individual isolation and the blurring of the lines between public and private life through the use of technology

All of these elements promoted in the post-Cold-War neoliberal world arguably result in both the elimination of the utopian impulse and in the emergence of a specific type of subjectivity that could be viewed as a consequence of the lack of such utopian impulse. Wendy Brown, in her article "American Nightmare," claims that the combination of the "governance according to market criteria" and "valorization of state power for 'putatively moral ends'" undermine the culture, values and the practice of constitutional democracy (690). As a result of the diminishing power of democratic values, the symbiosis of rising Western trends in favoring neoconservative and neoliberal government practices produces the kind of subject that is "relatively indifferent to veracity and accountability in government and to political freedom and equality among the citizenry" (690). In the following sections, I look at how these four elements of neoliberal governance may lead to the formation of dystopian subjectivity.

1.b. The Employment of "Invisible Power"

In order to dissect the elements related to power in dystopian literature before and after the Cold War, it is necessary to frame the dystopian worlds' takes on the "nature" of power and the evolution of its use, and tie it back to the political environment in which the works of fiction were written. For the purposes of differentiating between the use of hard power (associated with traditional sovereign power) and invisible power ("ideological power," which signifies the concealment of traditional sovereign uses of power with the emergence of modern practices of governmental technology), I first attempt to briefly summarize Michel Foucault's concepts of traditional sovereign power and the modern forms of disciplinary power and bio-power that followed. This may allow the reader to have a better grasp of the evolution of the systematization of power (regimes of practice) that took place in Western societies and which were reflected back in the themes of dystopian fiction writing. Michel Foucault's conceptualization of power involves

a thorough dissection of the systems that regulate the circulation of power in a society, the systematization as well as the prediction of power flows used for the purposes of efficient governance. Even though any analysis assigning a rigidly defined position to the advocates/ benefiters and opponents/victims of power may appear problematic (especially according to Foucault's writings on the modern aspects of power, indicating its fluidity), I believe that this task is relevant within the context of dystopian fiction writing due to the genre's use of archetypical symbols of ideological power (i.e. totalitarianism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) and of their extremist components (i.e. O'Brian as the ultimate benefiter/advocate of a totalitarian rule versus Winston as the victim/opponent of totalitarianism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) in presenting a clearly defined critical stance towards the regime that their authors take issue with.

The distinction between "hard power" versus "invisible power" that I am using in my analysis derives from Michel Foucault's work of tracing back the evolution of power structures and the changing practices of its systematization by the governing forces in the West, starting roughly around the late seventeenth century. Prior practices of governance based on traditional sovereign power is what I equate with the elements of hard power, requiring obedience to the law of the authority figure (the king or the state). Under sovereign power, the authority figure had complete power over the life and the death of the ruled, meaning that when a subject did not abide by the laws and regulations, the punishment for such crimes resulted in public execution (Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* 7). The executioner's duty consisted of the physical punishment of the guilty (decapitation, gallows, etc.), as well as of the symbolic demonstration of the sovereign's power to the public in order to introduce fear and to discourage further crimes (13). This kind of "juridico-discursive" power was thoroughly negative in the sense that "power produces nothing but limit and lack"foi. The great institutions of power were

built up on "multiplicity of prior powers" and their potential forms of opposition: "dense, entangled, conflicting powers, powers tied to the direct or indirect dominion over the land, to the possession of arms, to serfdom, to bonds of suzerainty and vassalage" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 86). The legitimacy of these institutions was given on the basis of their ability to present themselves as "agencies of regulation, arbitration, and demarcation, as a way of introducing order in the midst of these powers, of establishing a principle that would temper them and distribute them according to boundaries and a fixed hierarchy" (87). Furthermore, their functioning was based on the "principle of right" and through the manifestation of "the triple distinction of forming a unitary regime, of identifying its will with the law, and of acting through mechanisms of interdiction and sanction" (87). Power was domination, repression, and forbidding, and therefore all it could demand was obedience (Rabinow 130).

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the forms of governance started to evolve as a result of industrialization and the difficulties in managing the growing population. Foucault wrote that "[sovereign power] found itself unable to govern the economic and political body of a society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization. So much that far too many things were escaping the old mechanism of the power of sovereignty, both at the top and at the bottom, both at the level of detail and at the mass level" ("Society Must Be Defended" 249). As a result of the growing interest in the human sciences, the attempt to connect their resolutions to governmental practices and the emergence of population as an economic and political problem, two basic forms of power took hold as regimes of governance: discipline and bio-power.

Bio-power emerged as a political technology in the seventeenth century, which was a period when "the fostering of life and the growth and care of populations became a central

concern of the state, when a new type of political rationality and practice found a coherent form," as a result of the problems regarding modernity (Rabinow 133). Biological existence found its place in the political realm where the status of the living "passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 143) Power was no longer limited to a point where it was a concern solely to the legal subjects' punishment and death, but rather, it took charge of their lives, their bodies, and their functions in society. As Foucault wrote, "if one can apply the term bio-history to the pressures through which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with one another, one would have to speak of bio-power to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life" (143). For the governing bodies, taking charge of life meant "continuous regulative and corrective mechanisms" and their role shifted from "bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty" to "distributing the living in the domain of value and utility" (qtd. in Rabinow 130). Power meant qualifying, measuring, and appraising the governed bodies, classifying them under different forms of hierarchy as opposed to displaying itself "in its murderous splendor" (130). The development of bio-power brought the assumption of a "normal" and placed it in a rigid opposition to the prior understanding of the law, the sword, and death (130).

If one pole of bio-power was concerned with the human species, including efforts to understand how "the processes of human regeneration" were tied to political ends, "the other pole of bio-power centered on the body not so much as the means for human reproduction, but as an object to be manipulated"; thus Foucault called it "disciplinary power" (134). Disciplinary power, the role of which is to produce human beings who could be treated as docile bodies, involved the attempt to restore these bodies to the normative (docile) and to decentralize power through

institutions of correction such as prisons, hospitals, and educational systems. These institutions' existence became central to governance, due to their roles in normalizing any individual's idiosyncrasies that did not comply with societal codes. Under disciplinary power, punishment and correction became rationally organized through surveillance of individuals and their normalization through the practices of these institutions.

An intrinsic historical relationship exists between disciplinary control, the creation of docile bodies, and the rise of capitalism. As Foucault pointed out, the development of political technology, which resulted in the accumulation of power, derived from the accumulation of capital: "…[I]t was the disciplinary technologies which underlay the growth, spread, and triumph of capitalism as an economic venture," and without the insertion of orderly, docile individuals into the machinery of production, the demands of capitalism would have never been fulfilled (qtd. in Rabinow 135). Furthermore, "the fixation, control, and rational distribution of populations on a large scale" brought forth by the disciplinary power were the "technological preconditions" for capitalism to flourish (135). Due to the measurability of the subjects' labour and the political technology that rendered possible the surveillance of every subjects' working habits, human beings started to be considered as a resource: "The individual was of interest exactly insofar as he could contribute to the strength of the state. The lives, deaths, activities, work, miseries, and joys of individuals were important to the extent that these everyday concerns became politically useful" (139).

Invisible power emerged as a result of the advancement of political technology concerning the establishment and spread of disciplinary power and biopower. It involves the ways in which a person is not aware of her rights and/or is not able to speak out about the violation of her rights due to their "hidden" nature, stemming from the policies of the governing

force created and implemented within disciplinary power structures. First described by Michel Foucault as an attempt to produce a "micro-physics of power" within the context of power mechanisms "in [their] capillary form of existences," invisible power can be viewed as a type that "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their very actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives" (*Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 39). Steven Lukes, in *Power: A Radical Review*, calls this third form of power "ideological power," which may occur when the subjects of invisible power come to see the domination of the very forces which strip them of their power and rights as "natural" or unchangeable. As a result, the issues that are experienced by the subjects of invisible power remain unquestioned. Hinson and Healey wrote that "[invisible power] is exercised in part through control of the institutions that shape and create meaning: religious institutions, the media, television, mass consumer culture, popular ideas about government and about workers and bosses, etc." (2).

Unlike in the case of hard power/sovereign power, where the law demands obedience to the king and/or to the group that represents a concentration of power and which creates the foundation for the political elite's ability to shape and control the powerless subjects constituting society, in the case of invisible power, repression is valued as a negative force, as through repression the powerful can impose "boundaries and prohibitions" which would in turn "set up limits to the desire and deeds of subjects" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 119). Production, on the other hand, is positive under invisible power, as this form of power "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, [and] produces discourse" (119). Furthermore, this form of power produces "subjects" through the repetition of discourses that aim to shape their personality and through an induced process of

setting up the "normal" in order to "normalize" the subjects it governs, while rendering them capable, obedient, and willing to adhere to restructured norms of "sanity, health, sexuality and other forms of propriety" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 119). These norms shape the soul while inscribing its limitations on the body and the extent to which they are effective is determined by "policing the boundaries between the normal and the abnormal" and by the systematization and the continuity of "surveillance that is both inter- and intra-subjective" (Lukes 91).

The relationship between neoliberalism and its methods of asserting power on its subjects has been discussed in different areas such as in international relations. Unlike Lukes, who understands power as a three-dimensional concept involving decision-making power, non-decision-making power, and ideological power (invisible power), Joseph Nye differentiates between two types of power: hard power and soft power. Nye is one of the theoretical founders of the neoliberal perspective in international relations, and he is given credit for coining the term "soft power," which shares many similarities with "invisible power." As the Soviet nuclear superpower declined towards the end of the 1980s, some analysts argued that Germany and Japan would emerge as the new rivals of the United States in holding military and economic power, potentially leading the world towards another Cold War threat. On the other hand, Nye predicted that the U.S. was "likely to remain on top" not only "in military and economic power, but also in a third power resource" that he named "soft power" (*Power in the Global Information Age: From Realism to Globalization* 6). This form of power, the "power of attraction," involved the contribution of culture and ideas to the formation of power, and it had been neglected by the aforementioned analysts in their attempts to formulate the upcoming formation of global politics. Hard power is "the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences

and strategies," which implies a rather brute force instead of an ideological influence or manipulation (Nye, *The Future of Power* 11). Persuasion and attraction, in order to shape the behaviour of the governed without resorting to competition and conflict, constitute the most fundamental differences between hard and soft power; military power and economic power are examples of "hard command power that can be used to get others to change their position," relying mainly on inducements or threats (Nye, *Power in the Global Information Age: From Realism to Globalization* 6). In contrast, soft power calls for "indirect" ways of manipulating ideas, identities, and relations in order to achieve the desired outcomes from its subjects; coercion, for example, could be replaced with co-opting. Admiration for a country's values and living conditions could cause one to "aspire" to its "level of prosperity and openness"; and considering the benefits, it was as important for the U.S. to "set the agenda and attract others in world politics" as it was "to force them to change through the threat or use of military or economic weapons" (6). This political strategy would be beneficial not only on a global level but also on a domestic level, since if a country represents values that others want to re-appropriate, it would eventually "cost less to lead" them (Nye, *The Future of Power* 6). In the modern day Western political environment, which is shaped by neoliberal ideals of freedom and private ownership, the use of hard power is arguably costlier financially and politically, even though "there is no contradiction between realism and soft power" (82). However, soft power values the possibility of cooperation and ideas over hard power, which threatens and coerces its subjects through the use of brute force (military power).

As neoliberal ideology and its repercussions on the global political arena aim to promote "peace" and expand economic ties, both soft power and invisible power fit well into neoliberalism's holistic discourse. According to Democratic Peace Theory, democracies are

never supposed to go to war with other democracies (except when they did, an inclusion of "mature" before the word "democracies" was rushed in to make a theoretical update of the theory). Nye claims that even in the case of tension and difficulties, "a democratic state will not lose its soft power" and that "in democracy, the presence of dissent and self-criticism can be beneficial," as it would "enhance the credibility of messages" (109). In *The McDonaldization of Society*, George Ritzer attempts to clarify the connection between democracies, neoliberalism, and the efficiency of soft power/invisible power that comes as a package. He quotes Thomas Friedman, one of the fathers of neoliberal ideology, who has famously stated that "no two countries that both have a McDonald's have ever fought a war since they each got McDonald's," calling his theory "Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention" (qtd. in Ritzer 9). His theory indicates that world peace lies in the expansion of the free markets worldwide. However, as noted by Ritzer, Friedman's logic was proven wrong "by the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, which had McDonald's at the time" (9) – one of many historical examples of bloody conflicts between nations that had opened their borders to neoliberal market practices. Therefore, an apparent disconnection exists between the political reality and neoliberal discourse celebrating a new age of democracy, peace, and "soft power," arguably exemplifying the opposition between the promoted utopia and the resulting dystopia.

Lukes notes that three-dimensional power "does not and cannot produce one-dimensional man" and that "power's third dimension is always focused on particular domains of experience and is never, except in fictional dystopias, more than partially effective" (Lukes 150). However, in a setting in which power as domination can effectively push for the constraint upon interests "imputed to and unrecognized by the actors," his comment on the fictive aspect of subjects shaped by totalizing, controlling practices remains incomplete as well.

1.c. "The End of History"

Modernity and changing scientific paradigms formed the intellectual basis for the emergence of liberal thinking. With modernity, the determinist values of science limiting its significance to a practice "befitting our human dignity to entrust ourselves to the intellect" (Merleau-Ponty 42) were abandoned in the face of scientific discoveries about the universe that surpassed the limits of perception of the human mind. This paradigmatic shift in the scientific world, which shook the hegemony of anthrocentric thinking adopted in the Western intellectual realm, replaced the dominion of absolute truths with partial truths. However, by ignoring the challenges to the human capacity to understand the "nature" of the universe; by pointing to the existence of absolute truths about the universe; and by reducing the process of all human history to a simplified discourse of ideological progress towards reaching political perfectionism, advocates of neoliberalism such as Fukuyama suggested that the concepts of time, history, and evolution are in fact fully perceivable by reason. The "end of history" discourse is a by-product of such fascination with neoliberalism's ideological superiority, and it implies that humankind stands at a point beyond time in its capacity to perceive and analyze the course of ideological evolution. Furthermore, according to Fukuyama, time can in fact be mapped, meaning that not only the past and the present are entirely conceivable to the human intellect of the late twentieth century, but also that the future is predictable and conveniently placed on the side of neoliberal politics. Turning to Cartesian epistemology, in which reason is the ultimate means of understanding the universe, Fukuyama's argument is not an attempt to lay out the sociopolitical conditions of the future, but an anachronistic successor of the Western intellectual tradition intertwined with imperialism. I would like to suggest that the imperial aspect of neoliberalism, limiting the scope of historical achievement to the triumph of neoliberal governance, shows its

symptoms in the creation of contemporary dystopian fiction themes in which living under the rule of a neo-imperialist form of governance successfully disguises its nightmarish aspects through a distorted understanding of rationality, and the notion that it is the only viable option. To create an urge to pursue neoliberalism's goals, Fukuyama uses a narrowed down understanding of history as his primary source of analysis, which reveals his position as an enthusiastic spokesperson for Western liberal democracy's ideals of freedom and progress. He represents the course of history as if it is a self-fulfilling prophecy and reserves the "end" of ideological growth for the liberal democracy. Fukuyama ends his famous essay with the following statement:

> The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. (18)

The "end of history" thesis grows upon a suggestion that human rationality would not only shape the course of history but would also shape it according to a hypothetical common desire towards living under the ideological discourses offered by neoliberalism. The implication is that the course of history would evolve towards the fulfilment of some predefined goals. Freedom and progress are designated as the ultimate goals of a rational subject, hence the embracing of this ideology is a matter of higher intellect. Fukuyama's understanding of dialectical progress is arguably following Georg Wilhelm Hegel's notion of the inherent progress of history. By claiming it originates from the modern language of Hegel, Fukuyama argues that the "concept of history as a dialectical process" had a "beginning, a middle, and end" (4). According to this theory, historical processes could be defined within the closed boundaries of a determined escalation towards an "absolute moment," and these processes contained a certain rationality

regarding the "truth" about the qualitative or ideological course of events. Just like Hegel, he believed that "history culminates in an absolute moment" that would have necessarily resulted in "a final, rational form of society" (4). In an attempt to decontaminate his ideological discourse from twentieth-century Marxist communism's understanding of history (which also flows through a locatable "beginning, middle, and end"), Fukuyama arguably falls into the same circular thought pattern as the early Marxists about the rationality and foreseeable operation of historical progress in carrying some "purposeful" ideological agenda in its motion, whether it would be beneficial for the expansion of liberal democracy or of communism. The problem with Fukuyama's argument is the assumption that history has a structural guidebook showing the default settings of its functioning, based solely around the progressive ideological expansion of mankind and, consequently, around the conscious choices of responsible "rational" individuals and their interactions with one another. From this perspective, the only viable path that the course of ideology may follow is one strictly leading to an "absolute moment" in which the Western practices of liberal democracy would expand their reach to every inch of civilization on the globe, while reserving the benefits for its advocates. Similar to the earliest Marxist propaganda, which was designed to stimulate larger populations to unite around the idea of a communist utopian end, neoliberal propaganda marks the closure of historical development with its own presumable utopian success in Fukuyama's text.

For Fukuyama, the most remarkable political event of the twentieth century has been the popular rise and decline of strong dictatorships all over the world from Latin America to Eastern Europe, whether they had emerged with the military-authoritarian Right or with the communist-totalitarian Left. These strong governments had been failing for 20 years by the time Fukuyama made a strong claim that this was, no doubt, a sign for liberal democracy, the only ideological

alternative remaining that could equally span different regions and cultures around the globe, to continue flourishing as the "final form of human government" (4). Liberal economic thinking has either preceded or followed the "move toward political freedom," which Fukuyama thoroughly associated with a peaceful political environment provided by the expansion of liberal democracy worldwide (*The End of History and the Last Man* xiv). He further praised his own logic by stating that "what we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" ("The End of History?" 4).

There is an assumed rationality regarding the nature of historical progress presented by neoliberal advocates such as Fukuyama. The belief that history is teleological results in an uncritical belief in the rational occurrence of events that arguably leads to a distorted and limited understanding of history. After a closer examination of the "drift of biological evolution" and the "drift of human history," Robert Wright argues in *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny* that there appears to be a "point to it all" (4). He extends the reach of his deterministic understanding of the processes of history by adding that "globalization," an element of neoliberalism that is inseparable from the logic of the liberal democracy, "has been in the cards not just since the invention of the telegraph or the steamship, or even the written word or the wheel," but "since the invention of life" (3,7).

Both Fukuyama and Wright, as the defenders of the expansion and success of modern liberal democracy on a global basis, attempt to impose a particular ideological rationale on the course of history by deeming the order of its events to be natural and inevitable. These "architects of international society" draw their influence from the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and

progress as they represent the humankind's linear march towards a particular kind of modernity, one that is "liberal, globalized, and cosmopolitan in appearance" (Bowden 44). John Gray opens up the characteristics of this understanding of modernity by asserting that "it is not too difficult to discern... [a core] project in the central Enlightenment thinkers, and to detect its presence in the new liberals" (Gray 120), and that the intellectual descendants of Kantianism such as "[John] Rawls and his disciples … unreflectively subscribed to a version of the Enlightenment philosophy of history in which universal convergence on a cosmopolitan and rationalist civilization … was taken for granted as the telos of the species" (125). The Kantian view of humankind's course of progress is deterministic in character, as he claims that "we desire a fragment of human history … that is drawn not from past but future time" and "therefore a predictive history" (125).

As can be deduced from these examples, the use of utopianism as a tool for ideological propaganda is not unique to any grand ideology. In fact, during the twentieth century, the concept of utopia has been understood both as a "contrast to ideology" and "interchangeably with ideology" (Sargent 118). When Communism began to show signs of collapsing, it was described not only as "the end of history" by the likes of Fukuyama, but also as "the end of utopia" (118). However, as Karl Mannheim points out, the concept of utopia entails a larger meaning than the one appointed to it by different ideologies. The decline of ideology would induce a partial crisis as well as a certain formation of objectivity born out of the unmasking of political failures, finally taking the form of "self-clarification for society as a whole" (121). The disappearance of the utopian element from human thought and action, on the other hand, would mean the transformation of man into something "no more than a thing" within a "static state of affairs" (qtd. in Sargent 121). Looking at the concept of utopia from this angle, the reason behind

Fukuyama's assumption that history came to an end appears more than just an ideological advocation of neoliberalism: it is also a critical commentary on the capabilities of man to dream of, to try to achieve a better form of governance.

1.d. Freedom of Consumption and False Needs

With the triumph of liberal democracies and of monopoly capitalism as its economic counterpart, the idea of freedom has also taken a new form in the everyday life of citizens. Growing consumption became an economic necessity for the capitalist class interests to keep the government-business alliance running, as the governing power shifted from the hands of states to the private sector. According to Harvey, freedom is promoted by neoliberal advocates as a practical strategy to hide the gradual restoration of class power to the elites and away from the lower and middle classes:

> By capturing ideals of individual freedom and turning them against the interventionist and regulatory practices of the state, capitalist class interests could hope to protect and even restore their position. Neoliberalism was well suited to this ideological task. But it had to be backed up by a practical strategy that emphasized the liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices. Neoliberalization required both politically and economically the construction of a neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism. (*A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 42)

Perhaps Harvey's argument about a group of individuals sharing the same class interests constituting a homogenous body of power that could easily intervene with the shaping of a "market-based populist culture" may appear far-fetched. After all, both liberalism and globalization have had many positive effects in terms of the amelioration of fulfilling individual needs and desires (such as the proliferation of and access to communication and travel technologies), not only serving an economic elite but those who were part of the lower and middle classes. However, as Foucault observes, the acceptance of the idea of a dominant

hegemonic ideology may not entirely exclude "the interests of subordinate groups," while simultaneously operating "to conceal or misrepresent aspects of social relations, [which] if apprehended directly, would be damaging to the interests of dominant elites" (qtd. in Lukes 126). In this regard, the prospect of freedom offered by the governing elites to the subordinate groups serves the purpose of creating a certain type of discourse among the subordinate groups, limiting their understanding of freedom to the right to consume and to the freedom to choose from among the consumer items and services available in the market. According to Foucault, this kind of limiting discourse regarding the mechanisms of a dominant ideology may appear on two levels: in the thick version, a dominant ideology is accepted by subordinate groups, making them believe actively "in the values that explain and justify their subordination" (qtd. in Lukes 126). The thin version, on the other hand, works through the conviction of subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is "natural and inevitable" (Foucault, *Discipline & Punish* 72). While thick theory involves consent, the thin theory works its magic through resignation (Lukes 126). There are multiple ways of achieving it, which cannot be separated from the use of soft and invisible power for the restoration of class-power in the neoliberal system. Furthermore, as Moylan notes, in the late transnational capitalist system, the practices of "totalizing administration" serve to "mystify the actual social relations and structures by which exploitation and domination are carried on" (*Demand the Impossible* 17). The trial to remove "autonomous human activity from the realms of real possibility" is initiated by the reduction of life to commodity and communication to "the transfer of surface images" (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 17). The result is the elimination of any form of opposition while rendering any contrarian utopian thought ineffective through commodification. In the neoliberal political system, the discourse represents itself as "power to mislead" and can take many forms, "from straightforward censorship and disinformation to the various institutionalized and personal ways

there are of infantilizing judgement, and the promotion and sustenance of all kinds of failure of rationality and illusory thinking, among them the 'naturalization' of what could be otherwise and the misrecognition of the sources of desire and belief" (Lukes 149). In order to push for a shared consensus that is the consensus of the economic elite rather than of the governed, neoliberalism creates its own subjects devoid of the utopian imagination and of the means for organizing effective opposition and political resistance through the use of neoliberal ideological discourse.

The discussion around the use of misleading power dates far back in history rather than emerging as a part of the neoliberal restructuring of cultural and political arena. A prominent cultural critic of the twentieth century, Herbert Marcuse wrote that in advanced industrial society "the social controls exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste," while the deceptive liberties concerning "free choice between brands and gadgets" help with maintaining "free competition at administered prices" and "a free press which censors itself" (17). The technologically advanced consumerist culture that Marcuse employs in his criticism appears as a vast generalization of modern Western culture, and yet by no means does it fall far from the type of practices that are instituted through neoliberal discourse today. As Marcuse reminds us, "the range of choice open to the individual" among various goods and services under the rule of repressive elites "is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom" (17). A society that has embraced the ideals of liberal democracy in appearance, i.e. in its ability to choose to elect its masters, does not come to mean the abolishment of slavery. The choices available to citizens may be simply instruments to "sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear" as well as alienation (17). The continuous reproduction of "superimposed needs" is not the establishing factor of autonomy (17). The insistence in neoliberal discourse on the sustaining of free markets and of consumption creates a microclimate in which the social system

and its rules are constantly imposed on the individual in her daily life. The same products that allow for easier and faster mass transportation and communication, as well as food, clothing, lodging, entertainment, and information industries carry "prescribed attitudes and habits" as well as "certain intellectual and emotional reactions" that "bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and to the lifestyle that these products promote" (20). Furthermore, as these products promoted as beneficial become more widely used by different individuals from different social classes, "the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity," turning it into the normative lifestyle that denies and "militates against qualitative change" (20). This one-dimensional thought and behaviour emerges from indoctrination through consumption habits, whereas any oppositional thought and habit is either repelled or "redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension" (20). The increasing domination of the system over its subjects is a direct result of the "gap between actual and potential social conditions" and increasing surplus repressions leading to "the progressive destruction of the human subject" (Levitas 159). Although individuals in such an environment "may have the illusion of having an increasing amount of choice," in reality they have less and less space for authentic and progressive demands and decisions due to the increasing subjection of external control over their mental processes (159).

The rationality attached to the triumph of economy, as well as to the deterministic understanding of history via neoliberal discourse, is also bound to bring forth its doom. The basis of earlier societies has been structured upon economic necessities which, in the new world order, leave their place to the "necessity of boundless economic development," a goal that can never be fulfilled due to its expansion-oriented nature (Debord 24). The replacement of the satisfaction of primary human needs with "a ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs" signifies a larger agenda,

according to Guy Debord. With an argument similar to the one proposed by David Harvey, Debord concluded that this agenda was geared towards "the pseudo-need for the reign of an autonomous economy to continue" (24). Neoliberalization, as a class restoration project, appropriates the ideals of individual freedom and utilizes these ideals to change existing economical and political structures so that "a neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism" is achieved and that the same "differentiated consumerism" is increasingly perceived as the sole meaning of individual freedom (Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 42). Those who are thoroughly incorporated into the type of rationality promoted by the market-economy and can afford to pursue the same ideals find that there is almost no space for their "emancipatory potentialities" to be explored outside of those that are already marketed as "creative adventure, leisure, and spectacle" (185). Furthermore, the lifestyles shaped by the populist quality and the excess of marketable products and ideas (as opposed to those shaped by authentic creation and expression) shrink the realm of freedom "before the awful logic and the hollow intensity of market involvements" (185).

1.e. Individual Isolation and the Blurring of the Lines between Public and Private Life through the Use of Technology

Through the use of technology and more specifically the social media, neoliberalism promotes individualism while taking advantage of individuals' isolation and inability to form oppositional groups by guiding their thoughts and actions, as discussed in an earlier chapter. In *The City in History,* Lewis Mumford states that the advent of long-distance mass communication technologies led to their being employed as an effective means of individual control, as they led to the isolation of the population. Furthermore,

> …the general trend towards isolation, which appears as an essential quality of urbanism, must embody a controlled reintegration of its subjects based on the planned needs of production and consumption. Such an integration into the urban lifestyle must also recapture isolated individuals as individuals *isolated together*. Factories and cultural centers, holiday camps and housing developments – all are expressly oriented to the goals of a pseudo-community of this kind. (Debord 122)

The creation of individual isolation in the neoliberal order cannot be separated from the technological innovations and their expansion in the second part of the twentieth century. Globalization and communication technologies opened up space for individuals to express themselves and interact with one another, particularly through social media, and learn without leaving the comfort of their homes through access to internet; these conditions led to a certain kind of democratization of Western societies, in terms of the amelioration of citizens' capabilities for subjective expression and of the spaces where public discussion is encouraged. Individualization and an individual's isolation did not come without its own benefits, and many found this trajectory of technology ownership and the amelioration of democracy led to a technological utopia: "Yes, they may admit, the world is technologically driven, but its trajectory leads to favorable destinations. In fact, some are inclined to day, a new Utopia is at hand" (Winner 1000). This optimistic embracing of technological determinism is also found in *Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age*, in which Alvin Toffler poses his own deterministic view on the course of history. Humanity, according to Toffler, is experiencing its third wave of revolution through advanced computing telecommunications, following the first wave, in the form of agricultural revolution, and the second wave, in the form of industrial revolution. This period in history dominates the earlier ways of living "that were based upon land, physical resources, and heavy machinery" (qtd. in Winner 1002). The most significant aspect of the third wave is that it encourages new codes of behaviour that move individuals and institutions (such as family, government, church,

neighbourhood, etc.) "beyond standardization and centralization" (1002). The discourse built around the utopian vision of this third wave can easily be tied into the larger discourse offered by neoliberalism, in which the market economy, de-centralization of institutions, technologically driven consumption and historical determinism ("the end of history") work hand in hand for the achievement of a utopian society. George Gilder, who popularized the ideas of the Chicago School during the reign of Ronald Reagan through his bestseller *Wealth and Poverty*, wrote *Microcosm* in 1989, a book in which he argued that Moore's Law would underlie all upcoming social change. According to Gilder, "the wedding of free market economics with the overthrow of matter by digital technology is a development that will liberate humankind because it generates unprecedented levels of wealth, a boon available to anyone with sufficient entrepreneurial initiative" (qtd. in Winner 1003).

However, our civilization's technologically driven attitude may strike many as chilling due to its costs on many levels, from the economic to the sociopolitical. The conventional view of technology as tied to a utopian vision lacks an understanding of technological development "as a complex social, cultural, and political phenomenon" (Winner 992). Similar to any ideology that portrays itself as the end point to humanity's common problems, "every thoroughgoing history of technological system-building points to the conclusion that technical innovations of any substantial extent involve a reweaving of the fabric of society" as well as "a reshaping of some of the roles, rules, and relationships that comprise our ways of living together" (992). And yet, many advocates of modern technology, while cheering the "essential qualities" attached to its development and expansion (such as an instrumental kind of rationality promoting "a relentless search for efficiency"), avoid discussing its birth in connection to potential harms involving "a

kind of historical momentum with indelible features that rendered other kinds of social and cultural influences upon the character of social life far less potent" (997).

Neoliberalism and the quest to achieve information for information's sake through the use of technology are highly compatible. The obsession with seeking information precedes the reasons for seeking it. Neil Postman defines this state of culture and mind "Technopoly," in which the obsession with technology and the information generated by it result in the employment of "technology itself as a means of providing a clear direction and humane purpose" (72). In this culture, the higher authority and the satisfaction driven from this authority both lie in the creation of and access to technology. Traditional beliefs lose their capacity to organize society, leading to a new kind of social order in which "the defenses against information break down" (71). With the idea that "if something could be done it should be done" comes the belief in the principles through which the invention is supposed to succeed, namely "objectivity, efficiency, expertise, standardization, measurement, and progress" (42). And yet, I believe that it is useful to read Postman's criticism of a technology and information-driven society within the context of the political economy under which it emerged, since "the criticism of out-of-control technology is in large part a critique of out-of-control commercialism" (McChesney 70).

Indeed, Postman draws a parallel between "the assumptions of the thought-world of Technopoly" and Frederick Taylor's concept of "scientific management" in the sense that they share a common belief in efficiency being the end goal of human labor and thought (51). The parallel between the two is reminiscent of the neoliberal logic of boundless economic expansion, relying on a form of rationality that is held above the one for creating a political economy that focuses on satisfying citizens' needs. According to this type of rationality, technical calculation is superior to human judgement, as human judgement is "plagued by laxity, ambiguity, and

unnecessary complexity," while "subjectivity is an obstacle to clear thinking" due to the fact that it cannot be measured, and "what cannot be measured either does not exist or is of no value" (Postman 51). The hierarchical relationship between humans and machinery is reverted under such discourse, meaning that not only are humans worth less than their machinery, but they are also "placed at the disposal of their techniques and technology" (52). In a Technopoly, humans are supposed to find their meaning in life in machinery and technique, rather than machinery and technique remaining as instruments for that purpose (52). Access to information is the sole object and goal of this metaphysical world; its necessity is not by any means tied to solving problems, but to generating, storing, and distributing more information "at greater speeds than ever before," denying any sense of purpose to human creativity, as long as it does not serve the purpose of the rationality behind information acquisition (61).

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse observes that "the modern apparatus of production and distribution creates a total system that obliterates the opposition between private and public existence, and between individual and social needs. It shapes the entire universe of discourse and action, of intellectual and material culture" (qtd. in Murray 42). The rationality attached to technological determinism, much like historical determinism, becomes a political accessory to better dominate subjects as society, nature, mind, and body are kept in a constant "state of permanent mobilization" for the defense of this universe (Marcuse 24). What Marcuse calls "the society of mobilization" shares the same characteristics with neoliberal society, in which technology as the modern apparatus of production and distribution serves to accelerate the rate of both production and consumption while dominating and reshaping the social setting and the types of interactions between its subjects. Unsurprisingly, Marcuse's examples in defining these visible trends do not fall far from the trends observable in neoliberal society. He writes that

these trends include the "concentration of the national economy on the needs of the big corporations, with the government as a stimulating, supporting, and sometimes even controlling force; hitching of this economy to a worldwide system of military alliances, monetary arrangements, technical assistance and development schemes" as well as the "invasion of the private household by the togetherness of public opinion" and the "opening of the bedroom to the media of mass communication" (25). Jan Nederveen Pieterse's essay "Digital Capitalism and Development: The Unbearable Lightness of ICT4D" displays an accurate attempt to show the relationship between the forces of globalization, free markets, and information technology in today's neoliberal society, in which digital capitalism is quickly replacing the older tools promoted by market capitalism. He argues that information technology is today deeply connected to the globalization of competition, in which the altering dynamic of inter-firm competition "involve[s] inter-corporate tie-ups, networking and mergers and acquisitions to manage the cost and risks of research and development and global marketing" (15). Since the 1980s, information and communication technologies (ICT) has been providing all the technical means for financial globalization (such as 24-hour electronic trading), which accelerated with the help of "financial deregulation and 'securitization' or the dilution of the separation between banking and non-banking forms of corporate finance," enabling in turn "corporate globalization and the wave of corporate merger activity" (15). In the Information Age, in which the global economy's primary commodity is information, labor-intensive production started to make way for knowledge-intensive production. Corporate businesses "not only own the technology, but they also exert power through it" which results in "a parasitic and predatory relationship between those who own the technology and their labor and consumer market" (Waller 1). Under global capitalism, information technology is being used "to advance private corporate interests towards … a corporate controlled information society" (1).

Globalization and capitalism provided the necessary means for global access to technological innovations and products that promoted liberal democratic ideals, as they allowed larger populations to communicate, to access information, and to create personal online spaces in which individual expression and public interactions contributed to the democratization of public spaces, especially those existing as online platforms. However, the neoliberal theory of technological progress is also structured upon a fetishized belief that every problem can potentially be fixed by the appropriate technological product, promoted by neoliberalism advocates as a direct result of the free-market competition encouraging the search for new(er) products and production methods, and new means of economic organization. As Harvey notes, this form of technological fetish flourishing under global capitalism not only serves the acceleration of individual consumption, which is beneficial for corporations, but also changes the state apparatus (particularly the military) while producing "powerful independent trends of technological change that can become destabilizing, if not counterproductive" (*A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 69). The mobilization of technological innovations, according to both Harvey and Marcuse, undermines dominant social relations and institutions while modifying "common sense to their own pecuniary advantage" (69). The examples of such undermining and reshaping through neoliberal discourse of technology point to an inner connection between "technological dynamism, instability, dissolution of social solidarities, environmental degradation, deindustrialization, rapid shifts in time-space relations, speculative bubbles, and the general tendency towards crisis formation within capitalism" (69).

2. DYSTOPIAN FICTION UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberal discourse and practice have been successful in optimizing capital and cultural revenue by manipulating the extent and content of personal spaces through a proposed conviction that they would offer their subjects "more freedom" while hiding what needs to be sacrificed to attain this ambiguous goal. One could observe parallels between the selling strategies of neoliberalism (deriving from a certain discourse of utopia attached to rationality, economic expansionism, technological progress or freedom) and the themes of contemporary dystopian fiction in which a governing body consisting of "rational" and thus valuable persons controls the activity of the governed subjects by hiding the costs of the proposed utopia. Under the neoliberal system of governance, dystopian fiction has taken its own form regarding the nature of the dystopian environment in terms of its thematic elements. In all the examples of fiction that I discuss in this chapter, there is always both a clash and a gap between what is hailed by the governing powers as an upcoming or achieved utopian system of governance and what is attained and experienced by the governed. The dystopian world emerges as a direct consequence of the promoted lies or "partial truths" espoused by an elite group regarding the nature of their governmental practices toward preserving the image of a utopian society. The characters in the dystopian novels written after 1991 (significant due to its being the year of the dissolution of the USSR and consequently, that of a triumph for the advocates of neoliberalism) show these clashing ideals and symptoms of neoliberal culture. How are these symptoms different than those in novels written prior to the end of the Cold War? More specifically, what is the relation between the power politics presented in contemporary dystopian fiction and in neoliberal ideology, which David Harvey defines as the "restoration of class power"? (*A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 69). In the first chapter, I laid out four specific aspects of neoliberalism that play

prominent roles in preparing the specific conditions for the constitution and preservation of dystopian anxiety and fear. In this chapter, I draw parallels between these four conditions and four examples of dystopian fiction in hope of laying out their intrinsic relationships.

One of the underlying topics of my project is to show that there are multiple ways to reach a nightmare society, as demonstrated by classic examples of dystopian fiction, whether through overt totalitarianism (as in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*), or by manipulating society's concept of freedom by reducing it to a freedom of consumption (such as in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*). As Benjamin Kunkel notes, dystopia is a subgenre of the gothic or horror novel in which the protagonist slowly reveals a barbaric truth about the governance of society "lurking beneath a civilized façade" (which fits the definition of dystopia in *Brave New World*, but is ambiguous in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, due to its criticism of the use of hard power for governance); the dystopian subgenre also appropriates the thematic of traditional gothic-novel penalties such as madness, isolation and ruin (96). However, dystopias also often divorce the elements of the horror genre from the gothic elements of shadows and decay, in that dystopian novels' "atmosphere of cleanliness and rationality only serves, as in a hospital, to underline the ambient dread" (95). Therefore, the rationality of the system of governance and cleanliness of the societal setting are shown to be elements that can well exist with totalitarian logic in dystopian fiction. Milovan Djilas claims that "every tyranny begins with some absolute truths about man and society" and that "whatsoever aspires to the articulation of final absolute truth about man and society has already planted the seed of tyranny" (150). Djilas's explanation of the meaning of tyranny as a regime that articulates a final, absolute truth about the nature of man and society is important, as it directly speaks to the question of which part of neoliberalism plays a role in the creation of a dystopian setting or subjectivity.

Neoliberalism draws a limit on the "nature" of humanity's progress and the social systems that can ever be built, implying that this limit is impassable and thus reserves the end of history for itself. Imposing the acceptance that there are no alternatives to the neoliberal regime, the experience of which can easily be reduced to living "under a regime of endless capital accumulation and economic growth no matter what the social, ecological, or political consequences are," is a large part of neoliberalism's discourse of "truth" and propaganda (Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 182). Furthermore, when a "truth" both implies and points towards geographically expanding the reach of an ideology "by violence (as in Chile and Iraq), by imperialist practices (such as those of the World Trade Organization, the IMF, and the World Bank) or through primitive accumulation (as in China and Russia)" and by hiding its violent facet through false claims about the "nature" of freedom and of humanity's ideological evolution, the emergence of fear and anxiety regarding the systematic violence applied to its subjects in everyday life (more "covert" in Western societies, and much more open and direct in the rest) is not evitable (182). A world order designed through considering only the necessities of "gleaming predatory corporations or a world of filthy post-technological scavengers – either one, or both at once" as well as "the effort to avert such disasters by some political means" would "provoke new and real moral dilemmas" (Kunkel 96). In the following chapters, I try to illustrate these "new and real moral dilemmas" portrayed in the selected works of dystopian fiction.

2.a. Invisible Power in "15 Million Merits" and *The Circle*

"From Yevgeney Zamyatin's OneState to Margaret Atwood's Gilead, the state," as an authoritarian institution, constituted "the major target of critique in the classical dystopian narrative" written prior to the end of the Cold War (Moylan and Baccolini 135). "Yet in the dystopian turn of the closing decades of the twentieth century, the power of the authoritarian

state" was replaced by "the more pervasive tyranny of the corporation," as the concept of state lost its supremacy in governance through the elimination of the USSR (135). "Everyday life in the new dystopias is still observed, ruled, and controlled; but now it is also reified, exploited and commodified ... as the corporation rules, and does so more effectively than any state and as its exploitative tentacles reach into the cultures and bodies of the people who serve it and who are cast aside by it" (135–136). Furthermore, as Raffaella Baccolini points out in her essay "Dystopia and Histories," as the end of the 1980s hit, several speculative fiction writers moved away from the "engaged utopianism of the 1970s" and the "fashionable temptation to despair in the early 1980" by turning to dystopian fiction in an attempt to shed light on the changing social reality and to confront the decade's "simultaneous silencing and co-optation of Utopia" (3). Acclaimed science fiction writers such as Octavia E. Butler, Pat Cadigan, Suzy Mckee Charnas, Kim Stanley Robinson, Ursula K. Le Guin and Marge Piercy took up the classical forms of utopian fiction and bended them in order to reform the dystopian narrative as a critical text that "worked against the grain of the economic, political, and cultural climate" (3).

Whereas in earlier dystopian fiction, such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, the governing elite uses fear, threats, and physical violence to dominate and rule their citizens, in contemporary examples of dystopian fiction, the tools and means of governance are invisible at first sight, partly due to their intrinsic relationship to the free market economy's selling strategies and its elimination or re-appropriation of the utopian imagination. Examples of dystopian fiction written after the triumph of neoliberalism tend to take a critical approach toward the ways in which the governing forces manipulate their subjects to believe that their dystopian sensibilities have arisen due to their own inabilities and errors. The theme of

"Invisible Power" and its criticism are employed as a result of its adoption as the most efficient governing strategy in the neoliberal sociopolitical environment. Tom Moylan writes:

> In the late or transnational capitalist system, the practices of reification and totalizing administration have themselves served to opaque, to mystify, the actual social relations and structures by which exploitation and domination are carried on. By reducing life to the status of commodity and communication to the transfer of surface images, and therefore by trying to remove autonomous human activity from the realms of real possibility, this dominant social formation threatens to remove the very threat of opposition and resistance by turning even negative and utopian actions into mere commodities or images. (*Demand the Impossible* 17)

As early as 1958, Aldous Huxley wrote in *Brave New World Revisited* that for the future of governance, "the odds were more in favor of something like *Brave New World* than of something like *1984*" (5), in an attempt to point out the elements of the future dystopian settings, perhaps because of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s more archaic definition of a nightmare society that is structured on the uses of traditional sovereign power, aligned with physical punishment and the fear of such punishment. His argument relied on expanding knowledge about animal and human behavior, which taught humanity that "control through the punishment of undesirable behavior is less effective in the long run" when compared to "control through the reinforcement of desirable behavior by rewards" (5). After World War II, Western governments were quick to realize that "government through terror works on the whole less well than government through the non-violent manipulation of the environment" as well as "of the thoughts and feelings of individual men, women and children" (5). Huxley also claimed that "impersonal forces over which we have almost no control" were pushing Western societies towards a "Brave New Worldian nightmare," the arrival of which was accelerated by the paths taken by "the representatives of commercial and political organizations who have developed a number of new techniques for manipulating, in the interest of some minority, the thoughts, and feelings of the masses" (7). What Huxley defined as "impersonal forces over which we have almost no control" is quietly reminiscent of the nature of

invisible power and its disciplinary mechanisms. Huxley's envisioning of the shift of governing power from hard to invisible that would take hold in the West can also be located in Foucault's definition of the "perfect" form of power, which should necessarily "render its actual exercise unnecessary" and "should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it" (*Discipline & Punish* 20). In this sense, Huxley envisioned very accurately the future regime of practice in which the presumed perfection of power allows almost no room for the dystopian subject to become aware of her manipulation or subjugation.

If Huxley were still alive today, he would have possibly been very proud to witness how accurate his prophecies about the future of governance were, in terms of the growing use of the plethora of techniques for manipulation in the interest of some minority. In this sense, Charlie Brooker's television series *Black Mirror* is exemplary, as it shows how technology institutes "new, more effective, and ever more pleasing form of social control" while shaping "the universe of human discourse and action" (Murray 42). The name *Black Mirror* references blank TV and computer screens that show a dark mirror image of our "reality," reflecting "the terrifying image of what we have become and how helpless we are against the totalitarian media manipulation of our needs and desires by vested interests" (44). According to Murray, such an attempt to reflect "reality" is incomplete due to the fact that the institutions Brooker criticizes have "already assimilated his message" by turning his show into a commodity signifying the most dystopian element of its content (44). *Black Mirror* constantly refers to its own impotence to reflect "how the system absorbs the very energies that oppose it, eviscerating and precluding any intelligent rejection, or even widespread recognition, of its mind-numbing, sense-deadening cycle of oppression" (44). In other words, it portrays the success of the system's functioning, which stems from its ability to turn any directed criticism into its own benefit. The stories told in *Black Mirror*

display a self-awareness regarding the very impotency they deal with: it is an entertainment piece, the critical value of which is assimilated through its economic nature as an "enjoyable escapist product" to be consumed, rather than offering potential change over the issue of being just another "pleasant instrument of our systematic repression and pacification" (44). Holding a blank screen to the faces of its audience, its "mirror" absorbs "all the light it might otherwise shed on our reality" (42).

In the *Black Mirror* episode "15 Million Merits," the process and commodification of resistance are exemplified by the failure of the "protagonist's trial" with the existing structures of power, focusing on class/power preservation through the use of information technology and media. The protagonist, Bing, lives in an underground facility with others and rides a gym bicycle for work in order to accumulate "merits" based on the physical power spent on the machine. One day, another drone, Abi, starts to work in the same facility and after hearing her beautiful voice, Bing decides to give his 15 million merits, earned through his mind-numbing work, to Abi so that she can join Hot-Shots, a reality TV competition show rewarding the talented participants by turning them into TV stars, and ultimately by rewarding them with a comparatively better life. The show is presented as the sole disciplinary institution through which the existing status quo can be seemingly challenged. The judges appreciate Abi's singing, but their appreciation originates from their discovery of a talent that can act "only as more fodder to their oppressive machine." In a very polite manner, they explain to Abi that she has only one chance to "make it," and that is not by becoming a singer (as she is not "good enough"), but by becoming a porn-star. Abi's only "reasonable" option is to accept their offer, because as the judges point out, there are millions of consumers out there who are pedaling to watch her sing and who would do anything to access the same chance of success offered to her. What "sells" is her sexuality and her willingness for a successful career, and both her sexuality and her naïve

desire to be on screen are instantly commodified through the jury's response. She is left without a choice due to her fear of returning to the soul-destroying screen pedaling work. After seeing Abi accept what is offered to her instead of her initial goal of becoming a singer, Bing gets angry at the perverseness of the jury's systematic degradation of the individuals who want to rescue themselves from the type of slavery pushed on them. He works hard on the pedalling to accumulate another 15 million merits so that he can buy his way into becoming a Hot Shots contestant. As soon as he is on stage in front of the jury, he puts a shard of glass on his neck and rages against the machine by shouting: "All you see is not people, just fodder, fake fodder!" ("Fifteen Million Merits"). The first criticism of the episode reveals itself through Bing's angry speech, as "all we know anymore is fake fodder, and the only kind of dreams we have been consumer dreams – buying a new app for our own screen, for example" (Murray 42). Bing continues:

> When you find any wonder whatsoever you dole it out in meager portions, where it's augmented and packaged and pumped through ten thousand pre-assigned filters, till it's nothing more than a meaningless series of lights, while we ride, day-in and day-out. Going where? Powering what? All tiny cells and tiny screens and bigger cells and bigger screens and fuck you! Fuck you for sitting there and slowly making things worse! ("Fifteen Million Merits")

For merely a few seconds, the audience and the jury look in awe at Bing for his courage to speak out openly about the emperor's lack of clothes, and yet the jury's astonishment withers quickly and they propose to Bing a job in their machinery. History repeats itself as Bing is left without any other "reasonable" choice (if he does not want to go back to pedalling) other than accepting their job proposal as a reality-TV "comedian." His rage against the jury and ultimately the system he is a part of, as well as his potential in striking a chord with the viewers to transform their affect into systemic change, is commodified through a perfected machine governed by invisible power: its subjects perceive the forces (which in this case is a governing elite that is symbolized by the

jury) stripping them of their power and rights as "natural" or unchangeable. Furthermore, the types of production that individuals are allowed to choose from (pedal-slavery, porn, and popular entertainment) shape the specific characteristics and behaviours of subjects and induce a process of setting up the "normal" while rendering them obedient and willing to adhere to restructured norms of "sanity, health, sexuality and other forms of propriety" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 119). The norms which do not allow talented individuals to pursue their desired goals inscribe their own type of limitations on the body. In Abi's case, she can only save herself from pedalling by turning her sexuality into a product and performing within the limitations of her assigned job. The effectiveness of the systematic transformation of the subjects' behaviours and characters are determined by the continuity of "surveillance that is both inter and intra-subjective," which explains the jury's success in turning Bing's failed attempt to break the systematic machine of oppression (symbolized by the popular television entertainment) that could have been beneficial for millions of pedal-slaves who are watching, into just another commodity (Lukes 91). There is no need for either the jury or someone else from the ruling class (never revealed in the episode) to apply hard power on Bing to eliminate the threat he poses to the established system. Through invisible power which turns screens into a technologically advanced Panopticon, surveillance does not only limit the individual's actions in the public space, it also creates an "intra-subjective" form of surveillance that results in the subjugation of both Abi and Bing to the orders of the jury and the governing elites.

Another recent example of dystopian literature that points to the growing use of invisible power in the neoliberal system is Dave Eggers' *The Circle*. It tells the story of Mae Holland who gets a job at "the most influential company in the world," which aims to merge all of an individual's online interactions (such as her social media accounts, and her personal information,

such as medical records) into a single online identity platform called "TruYou." The ultimate goal of TruYou is to store and display every bit of virtual information that exists across the world. Reminiscent of the likes of Facebook and Google, the company posits itself as the future of technological innovation, laying the groundwork for a more efficient and accountable society by encouraging (and eventually forcing) transparency in all areas of public and personal life. Mae starts to work in Customer Experience and initially is worried about her privacy; but as she rises in the ranks of the company, her worries slowly wither. She becomes romantically involved with Kalden, who warns her about the completion of the Circle, meaning everyone's personal information becoming mandatorily public. Furthermore, her ex-boyfriend Mercer warns her against the new regulations pushed by the Circle, involving the monitoring of the everyday life and biological functions of every citizen through the use of personally carried cameras, an action that rejects the preservation of private spaces and of voluntary anonymity by nature. After an incident in which Mae does not live-stream her kayaking at night, she is made to endure public shaming in front of the company workers and is forced to accept her role as the primary "transparent" face of the Circle. As soon as this incident occurs, Mae completely delves into the benefits of the company, to the point that all parts of her life (public and private) are thoroughly dedicated to the company's success in rendering TruYou a socially and politically transformative platform. In the meantime, government officials and a growing number of people are pressured to give up their privacy and to become completely "transparent."

By effectively becoming a cyborg for the company she works for, Mae ends up weakening her relationships with her friends and her parents. The power that manipulates Mae into losing her former identity, her "real life" circle, and that turns her into a company cyborg appears to be hidden from her throughout the story. At one point, one of her colleagues tells her that the company "never wants the customer to think they're dealing with a faceless entity," and

that therefore she should "always be sure to inject humanity into the process" (Eggers 42). Unaware of her transformation into a Marcusian prototype of a "one-dimensional man" through giving up her subjectivity and adopting the company's, Mae enjoys the thought that "No robots work here" (42). The "micro-physics of power," which touches her body and reaches to the very grain of her individuality, "inserts itself" into her "very actions and attitudes" as well as into her "discourses." At one point, she chats with her ex-boyfriend Mercer, who is utterly aware of the promoted "utopian" agenda of completion of the Circle, ultimately bringing forth a dystopian society in which the preservation of private spaces is increasingly despised by the majority. They argue about "Homie," an offshoot service of TruYou (and part of the company's larger plan to "complete" the Circle), which allows phones to scan an individual's house for product barcodes to automatically re-order if the person runs out of these products. Mercer tells Mae:

> You know how they framed it for me? It's the usual utopian vision. This time they were saying it'll reduce waste. If stores know what their customers want, then they don't overproduce, don't overship, don't have to throw stuff away when it's not bought. I mean, like everything else you guys are pushing, it sounds perfect, sounds progressive, but it carries with it more control, more central tracking of everything we do. (176)

Mae confronts him, stating that they are not "all in a room somewhere, watching [him]" and "planning world domination" (177). However, she seems to be unaware of the fact that invisible power is effective as long as it is thoroughly hidden in the process of the "utopian" turn, feeding on the support and work of people like her. Mercer knows that the support the company needs comes from people like her, rather than a visibly spectacular evil lurking behind the glory of the company's promises and deeds, which is precisely why he is worried. What if someone is willing to use this power to punish those who challenge it? It is neither a surprise nor a coincidence in the world of *the Circle* that challengers who talk about the growing monopoly are punished by suddenly being ensnared "in some terrible sex-porn-witchcraft controversy" (342). The

punishment and the normalization process that follows never occur in a way that the institutions of disciplinary power can be shown as being accountable for them. Furthermore, invisible power not only oppresses through fairly anonymous means, as offered by the internet, but invisible power also encourages its supporters to unknowingly be part of its oppression machine. Mercer summarizes this by stating:

> Here, though, there are no oppressors. No one's forcing you to do this. You willingly tie yourself to these leashes. And you willingly become utterly socially autistic. You no longer pick up on basic human communication clues. You're at a table with three humans, all of whom are looking at you and trying to talk to you, and you're staring at a screen, searching for strangers in Dubai. (343).

2.b. The End of History in *The Fat Years*

The dystopian subject's obsession with archives derives from the obliteration or manipulation of historical records by the governing elite toward preserving their hierarchical positions was a common thematic element in dystopian fiction prior to the end of the Cold War, as Gottlieb pointed out. Contemporary examples of dystopian fiction often take this element of obsession with archiving to another level, in which various strategies stemming from the use of invisible power are employed by the governing elites to manipulate the desires of their subjects, mainly with the help of technology and social media. Furthermore, the archival obsessions are shown as a result of the nostalgia for "the time when history existed," a past when change and the positive transformation of everyday life were still perceived as achievable. In Dave Egger's *The Circle*, social media and personal archives are used against individuals by the governing elite to shape their actions (i.e. revealing the sex tapes of anyone who refuses the monopoly of the Circle by the Three Wise Men, the ruling elites). In "15 Million Merits," the pedal slaves do not have access to their archives, as it appears as though they are not allowed to possess any personal

items. It is the invisible governing elite that has access to both technology and records. This chapter focuses on Chan Koochung's *The Fat Years*, to explore how it employs a particular kind of criticism involving the issue of memory in relation to the sensibility of the arrival of the end of history.

Written at the dawn of the end of the Cold War, Fukuyama's neoimperialist discourse on history presents a type of history that is "progressive," and yet ironically, also one that freezes its critical position into the ideological limits of seventeenth-century liberalism. What renders the neoliberal subject as a dystopian individual is the fact that this ideology and its practices represent the present system of governance as a monolithic and fulfilled model that closes onto itself, as well as one that has no better alternatives. In this chapter, I attempt to clarify the characteristics of this entrapment in the present by examining Chan Koochung's book *The Fat Years*. As a succession to the previous discussion about the relationships between (the end of) history, dystopia and neoliberalism, I would like to suggest that examples of dystopian fiction under neoliberalism tend to portray a world in which individuals are entrapped into a flat, unchanging (and unchangeable) "now."

Chan Koochung's Chinese dystopia *The Fat Years* deals with the themes of "the end of history," memory, and the restoration of power in a globally established capitalist setting. Banned in China upon its release in 2009, *The Fat Years* portrays a successful attempt to attack contemporary Chinese capitalism, "which it accuses of creating a kind of fake utopia, where poverty, misery, and despair are hidden behind the fantasy life of the new Chinese consumer society" (Featherstone 183). By the late 1970s, as "the brutal truth" of neoliberal capitalism had already established its status as the future of a globally shared ideology and system of governance, Deng Xiaoping turned the country's economic system into an open free market from

Mao's closed communist system. However, the turn to neoliberal ideology was concealed behind what Rem Koolhas has termed "Infrared," meaning that "despite the apparent turn to capitalism and the free market, the Chinese Communist Party maintains the view that the real purpose of market reform is to further the objectives of communism" (Featherstone 183). Communist utopian ideology, organized around equality, comradeship, and social security, is hidden behind the temporarily adopted agenda of neoliberal capitalism that embraces privatization, global economic competition, and minimal welfare. As Mark Featherstone notes, this path towards communism is compatible with Karl Marx's view that communism has to pass through capitalism to achieve the type of development necessary for society to reach "the kingdom of freedom" (Marx and Engels qtd. in Featherstone 183). However, the Chinese version was unique in its own way, due to the CCP's seeking to achieve it through deliberately instituting the capitalist means of production, prioritizing urbanism over the rural. In an attempt to criticize the deliberate creation of the means of capitalism as a path towards communism, *The Fat Years* constructs its dystopianism around the forgotten communist principles of equality and comradeship in the new urban China where "money has become an end in itself" (Featherstone 183). As a result of Deng's reform and the shift in the governing power from Chinese society to a party which deceives them through making them believe that "the good life is waiting somewhere around the corner," "the good society" has disappeared (183). The principle of deception constitutes the backbone of Chan's dystopia (183).

The element of deception does not solely stem from the promise of a utopia that is unfulfilled, but also from the issue of memory. The society that is depicted by Chan mostly consists of citizens who do not remember any time "beyond the happy golden age the people currently inhabit" (183). Furthermore, a whole month is completely wiped out from almost

everyone's memory, as they do not seem to recall any individual or societal event that happened then. It appears as if the part of their brains concerning memory or any larger sense of history has been reset and restarted by an external power. Such loss is reminiscent of Fukuyama's notion of the "end of history," in the sense that history has reached a point at which no meta-narrative discourse concerning the collective memory of a society can contest what has already been promised and achieved by the neoliberal system. Chan's Beijingers appear docile and happy beyond stupidity, and are "incapable of thought beyond their immediate circumstances" (Featherstone 183). Knowledge of their past is a "hazardous subject" that should not be brought up, due to the dangers posed by memory in inspiring political resistance.

The ruling elites' alteration of the historical records and their subjects' limited perception of history have been common themes in dystopian fiction classics. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, any historical records that do not conform to the Party's policies are either removed or constantly altered to fit into the established paradigm (Orwell 39). The World State in *Brave New World*, on the other hand, gets rid of anything it deems "old" including any form of nostalgia deriving precisely from the disappearance of memory, with the help of the happiness-drug "Soma." Instead, it "focuses on the continuous production of new merchandise to keep its residents occupied with looking forward to the next best product" (Booker 63). Just as with Chan's Beijingers, the desired outcomes in all these examples bear a resemblance to one another: the emphasize is on the "now." The attempt is successful to the point that the potential for the subjects to distance themselves from their current reality in order to gain a critical perspective is thoroughly eliminated (Featherstone 183). As Gottlieb noted, one of the most important elements of dystopian fiction is that the protagonist's pursuit of history as a nightmare imposed on the subjects is a by-product of "the mythical thought approaching the logic of a mental disorder," which blurs the lines between "present and past, cause and effect, or lies and truth" (12). In

classic works of dystopian fiction, the attempt to break through this temporal paralysis is rarely successful:

> Although the protagonist generally does manage to establish a link with former generations, be it via childhood memories or concrete texts, he fails to get a coherent picture of those days. His notion of the past is furthermore restricted to mere nostalgia and disappears again when he is defeated near the end. (Featherstone 183)

However, in later critical examples of dystopian fiction, the dialogue with history becomes a possibility for the protagonist, and there is an emphasis on the sharing of her individual experience with others in order to form a "basis for collective resistance" (Moylan and Baccolini 130).

The importance of forming this "basis for collective resistance" is displayed in *The Fat Years* as the only potential way to reach *the* truth, which is why solving the problem concerning the erasure of collective memory is critical. After an economic crisis in 2011 affects Western nations and brings the economy to stagnation, China enters a "Golden Age of Ascendancy" in the near future of 2013. A Hong-Kong writer named Lao Chen feels content with his life until he gets pulled into events by his friend Fang Caodi. Throughout the story, Caodi and Wei Xihong (Little Xi, an internet activist and former public security bureau lawyer) find themselves on a quest to retrieve memories of the missing month, February 2011, in official records and in the minds of individuals. Little Xi is suspicious about the sudden occurrence of mass-happiness around her, as she appears to be the only one being critical of the government and unable to feel content. Little Xi and Fang Caodi's limited recollections of the missing month and their discovery of the missing/altered status of the official political records and literature of the 1980s (most famously the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989) disturbs Lao Chen, and as a consequence, his contentment regarding the political situation in his country vanishes. As he tries to understand, he asks:

> What happened during a spell of exactly twenty-eight days in the spring of 2011 when the government carried out one of the Chinese Communist Party's periodic violent crackdowns? Why are most Chinese people unable to remember the violence and the economic panic of this crackdown? Or, in fact, any of the other even more violent episodes in the sixty-plus-year history of Chinese Communist Party rule? (…) The realistic expose, with only one or two exaggerations, reveals the Chinese Communist party-state control system, and the Chinese Communist Party's plans to replace the United States as the most dominant superpower in the world. (Chan 291, 293)

After a film screening at a friend's restaurant, Fang, Wei and a guitarist named Zhang Dou who remembers February 2011 convince Lao to join their quest to access the truth behind the alteration of public memory and historical records, and to that end, to kidnap He Dongsheng, a Politburo member who is responsible for the "Action Plan for Ruling the Nation and Pacifying the World." They reach their goal as Dongsheng explains that after the economic recession, the Communist Party's authority and legitimacy were challenged, resulting in the party's decision to enact the "Action Plan for Ruling the Nation and Pacifying the World" in the midst of the crisis. The government services and forces took total control for one week and intervention was possible only with express permission, resulting in widespread upheaval and rumours in Chinese society. Eventually, the People's Liberation Army and the police intervened in order to restore the power and authority of the Communist Party in the eyes of the public. In an attempt to save the Chinese economy, the Chinese government also took intrusive measures, such as converting national bank savings accounts to vouchers, deregulation, corruption crackdowns, property rights enforcement, price controls, and "misinformation," all reminiscent of the neoliberal "structural adjustments." Furthermore, "Chinese Monroe Doctrine" (a play on the American "Monroe Doctrine") is also initiated by the CCP in order to gather Eastern Asian countries under the Chinese economic/political umbrella, as well as to advocate "non-interventionist" economic cooperation globally. Dongsheng further adds that the general air of contentment felt and expressed by the majority in China is the direct result of the addition of the drug MDMA to public drinking water

(similar to the miracle drug SOMA that is distributed to the public in order to keep them happy 24/7 in *Brave New World*). The missing month of February 2011, on the other hand, is explained as being simply a case of "social amnesia." Fang, Zhang, Wei, and Lao cannot convince Dongsheng what "liberal democracy" as the desired form of governance should entail, and they release him in the morning.

As Baccolini points out, in classic dystopian works of fiction such as *Brave New World*, *We*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "the recovery of history is often accompanied by a nostalgia for the past – its authors apparently forgetting that it is from that very past that the dystopian fiction originates – and it is never fully attained: and yet, it is presupposed that history, without the authoritarian state's interference, could be known objectively" (116). The promise of utopia resulting in dystopia and history's significance in the creation of the dystopian setting "at the level of genre and theme" appears to be one of the most critical elements in the dystopian fiction written under neoliberalism as well (Baccolini 117). The recovery of history and memory is central both to accessing the truth and to the "development of resistance and the maintenance of hope, even when it is a dystopian history that is remembered" (116). Compared to classic dystopian fiction, contemporary examples are characteristically "less naïve about the nature of historical knowledge and certainly is less nostalgic" (116). This critical approach towards memory and history, within the context of the "end of history" discourse of neoliberalism, reveals itself in *The Fat Years* as well, partially resolved by the final elimination of its advocate:

> In a short time the shocking news was broadcast that Chairman Mao's designated successor, General Lin Biao, had betrayed the nation and attempted to flee, but his plane had crashed in Outer Mongolia. Fang Lijun (Fang Caodi) refused to go work again after that. He told me that he believed "history had come to an end." He wrote a small note and went to the bridge between Zhongnanhai Party Headquarters and North Lake, where he stuffed the note into a slit in the white marble railing. The note said, "History has already come to a halt and will no longer move forward. From now on, all new revolutions will be

> counterrevolutions. Don't try to fool me anymore. What right do you have to make me dig for a coal?" (Chan 83)

The concept of the "end of history" is critically appropriated by Chan into his narrative, as it suggests that each time a significant change in the political arena occurs, it always appears to those who portray it as *the* end. The ending does not signify the arrival of utopia for the main characters of *The Fat Years*, but rather suggests a forced choice between the "good hell" which implies the accepting of a lie about the "Golden Age" emerging as the result of the neoliberal politics in China, or "bad heaven" which means living without access to the truth regarding the CCP's lies about history and its attempts to keep society in order by lying about the economy and policies, aiming to push for a neoliberal regime. Lao Chen tells Little Xi:

> Lu Xun said that some people are nostalgic for a "lost good hell" because there'll always be a bad hell that's worse than that lost good hell. That goes without saying. But between a good hell and a counterfeit paradise, which one will people choose? No matter what you might say, many people will believe that a counterfeit paradise is better than a good hell. They know perfectly well it's a counterfeit paradise, but they don't dare expose it. As time goes by, they will even forget that it *is* a fake paradise. They start arguing in defense of this fake paradise, asserting that it is actually the only paradise. But there's always a small minority, who will choose the good hell no matter how painful it is, because in good hell at least everyone is fully aware that they are living in hell. (114)

All the examples of contemporary dystopian novels that are offered here share one thing in common: they all portray a certain critical awareness about neoliberalism's use of having attained the "best of all possible worlds," meaning the ideological perfectionism that would be expected from a utopian form of governance. The foundations of skepticism towards the authority of those claiming to have found the best possible answer to every social, political, and economic problem, were seeded in the critical utopias of the 1960s and 1970s. The dystopian fiction of the neoliberal age borrows from this tradition by offering a critical look at these so-called-perfect systems and at how such a "utopian" system established by the governing elite may result in the creation of dystopian spaces and sensibilities.

2.c. Freedom of Consumption and False Needs in *Feed*

As I discussed in earlier chapters, with the triumph of liberal democracies and advanced capitalism as its economic counterpart, the understanding of freedom was limited to the realm of consumption in which individuals are "free" to choose from and consume the products they like. Furthermore, the concept of freedom is promoted by the neoliberal advocates in an attempt to restore and protect capitalist class interests, as well as to hide the gradual restoration of class power to the elites from the lower and middle classes, as argued by David Harvey. On a similar note, in "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno attempted to define the characteristics of individual freedom under capitalism, in which the culture industry is perceived as a prominent actor playing into the systematization and commodification processes of its subjects' needs, behaviours, ideologies, and interpersonal relationships. They wrote:

> Today the culture industry has taken over the civilizing inheritance of the frontier and entrepreneurial democracy, whose receptivity to intellectual deviations was never too highly developed. All are free to dance and amuse themselves, just as, since the historical neutralization of religion, they have been free to join any of the countless sects. But freedom to choose an ideology, which always reflects economic coercion, everywhere proves to be freedom to be the same. The way in which the young girl accepts and performs the obligatory date, the tone of voice used on the telephone and in the most intimate situations, the choice of words in conversation, indeed, the whole inner life compartmentalized according to the categories of vulgarized depth psychology, bears witness to the attempt to turn oneself into an apparatus meeting the requirements of success, an apparatus which, even in its unconscious impulses, conforms to the model presented by the culture industry. The most intimate reactions of human beings have become so entirely reified, even to themselves, that the idea of anything peculiar to them survives only in extreme abstraction: personality means hardly more than dazzling white teeth and freedom from body odor and emotions. (135–136)

Written in 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno's interpretation of the culture industry's particular discourse as installing designed behaviours and social roles does not lie very far from today's Western social climate in which, arguably, Marcuse's concept of "false needs" plays a significant

role in the creation of a one-dimensional individual that is easily controlled. The concept of false needs implies needs that are "superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression" and bolster a particular mindset and behaviour involving "toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice" (Marcuse 15). While the satisfaction of these needs initially appears as gratifying to the subject, in the long run the same sensation of satisfaction and gratification hinders the subject from developing "the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease," resulting in "euphoria in unhappiness" (15). Marcuse relates such unhappiness to the individual's desire to consume, behave, and have fun according to the imagery of pseudo-lifestyles offered by advertisements. He concludes that the mutually shared desire of individuals to fit into the roles pushed by these constructed images should be classified under the category of false needs (15).

The theme of fear and anxiety originating from the limiting of "freedom" to the realm of consumption and false needs has been employed in some of the earlier works of dystopian fiction, such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. In this chapter, I would like to show that the contemporary examples discussed here increasingly portray such fear and anxiety regarding the governing power and ideology's limitation of individual freedoms to the area of consumption and false needs. These negative feelings resulting in the dystopian condition can be viewed as symptoms of the late transnational capitalist system, pushing for practices of "totalizing administration," which in turn serves to "mystify the actual social relations and structures by which exploitation and domination are carried on" (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 17). The autonomous individual's potential in actively participating and changing the conditions of "the realms of real possibility" is eliminated through transnational capitalism's "reduction of life to commodity and communication to transfer of surface images" (17). Corporations play their part

in pushing for surface images about "socially acceptable" roles and behaviours through popular media and advertisements, which are designed to create consumption-oriented and obedient one-dimensional individuals. Thoroughly intruding into the everyday lives of its subjects in order to preserve and ameliorate the economic/social position of the upper classes[1], neoliberal ideology not only restores power to the already powerful but it also eliminates oppositional voices, roles, and behaviours while "rendering any negative or utopian thought ineffective through commodification" (17).

In M.T. Anderson's novel *Feed*, 73% of American citizens living in a near-future carry *feednet* (a large computer network), which has been inserted in their brains and which constantly "feeds" them information on the latest products, such as pop song lyrics, so they know the best upcoming product on which they can spend their money. The feed system (resembling the newsfeed of Twitter and Facebook, but more technologically advanced) is portrayed as an extension of the freedom discourse offered by the governing body (which remains hidden throughout the story). Yet, anyone who refuses to get the feed technology faces serious social and physical consequences. It is promoted as the most reliable tool for citizens to access "information" on digital databases, to socialize with others and share their experiences regarding consumer products, such as entertainment programs, music, memories[2], etc. while telepathically connecting through closed channels with those who own the *feednet* technology. Even though advanced technological products, such as those of the *feednet*, can offer citizens access to information and communication through privatization/commodification, they are not capable of

[1] In the case of neoliberalism, "the upper classes" defines a relatively small group of large corporation owners, CEOs, and these corporations' economic and political counterparts, such as the established politicians and bureaucrats they support through the lobbying efforts)

[2] The physical products of memories, such as photos, videos, personal messages, etc.

offering citizens a clean and healthy environment. In the ecologically devastated world of *Feed*, the clouds are artificially replaced by the trademarked Clouds™ as a result of atmospheric pollution. Water is toxic; humans are incapable of reproducing through natural means, resulting in the use of "in-vitro fertilization," which allows future parents to custom-design their children in advance. Teenagers wear the increasing number of lesions appearing on their bodies as a fashion statement, not aware that they appear as a consequence of their exposure to the polluted water and air. Furthermore, the corporations that are responsible for the *feednet* technology run various all-privatized public services, such as School™, indicating that all the disciplinary institutions are under the control of a trademarked company. No other major political control mechanisms (such as a relatively powerful and independent state body) exist to replace the established monopoly capitalist power structure, other than a briefly appearing president, whose purpose is to encourage citizens to trust in the future benefits of advanced capitalism, all the while trying to avert the Global Alliance (a global coalition among countries) from contemplating a world war due to the negligence of the United States in preventing globally spread ecological destruction.

Feed tells the story of a teenager named Titus who, while on a vacation on the Moon with his friends, meets another teen named Violet whom he starts to date. Violet is different from Titus' friends, in terms of her critical questioning attitude towards the sociopolitical system in which they live, and a trait which appears to be unique in the world of *Feed*. Titus', Violet's, and their friends' feednets get hacked by a man from an anti-feed organization. Their feednets remain inaccessible to them until they get them repaired and they leave the hospital to return to Earth. However, Violet's feed does not get fixed like the rest; it starts to deteriorate and malfunction, resulting in the shutting down of various parts of her body. Interestingly enough, this

malfunctioning is parallel to her increasing rejection of and messing around with the system that has successfully created one-dimensional individuals who buy into whatever fashionable object of consumption is offered to them through the feednet. *Feednet* tracks their consumption trends, analyzing their personal information and interests in order to offer them a selection of goods. Violet messes around with the algorithm of the feednet by showing interest in a random assortment of products that appear completely unrelated, so she can evade being categorized under any prototypical consumer profile and can prevent the corporations from analyzing her personal information and profiling her desires/needs. Violet and Titus go to a mall, request information on different items, only to end up not buying them. The repercussions of these actions are more intense than predicted by Violet. Someone is now able to access her personal information through her dreams, so Violet calls *FeedTech* customer service. At first, the problem appears to be related to her having had the feed installed later in life, unlike her friends. Later on, however, she realizes that the malfunctioning is rather related to her conscious act of messing with her customer profile, her family's lack of funding in fixing her feednet system, and possibly her and her father's contrarian approach towards the kind of life dominated by the interests of corporations. As a result, she not only slowly loses her bodily functions but also loses memories of the year before she got the feed installed. Her relationship with Titus deteriorates in time due to this malfunctioning, and as her life system becomes progressively weaker, the advertising slogan "Everything Must Go" flashes repeatedly in progressively smaller fonts.

Marcuse writes that in an advanced industrial society, "the social controls exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste," while the creation of false needs and the promotion of deceptive liberties concerning "free choice between brands and gadgets" help maintain "free competition at administered prices" and "a free press which censors

itself" (17). The consumption-oriented environment of *Feed*, in which teenagers socialize through showing off their possessions advertised to them through the *feednet* technology, posits an accurate example of both the advanced capitalist-industrial society that Marcuse mentions and the future of a world that is stimulated by the adoption of the free-market ideology and ethics of neoliberalism. Neoliberal ideology's insistence on the sustaining of free markets and a consumption-oriented culture constructs a climate in which a new set of social rules governing the everyday interactions between citizens are imposed on each individual. These "prescribed attitudes and habits" are carried through the increasing access to the products that allow for faster transportation and communication, as well as the branded and trademarked food, clothing, lodging, entertainment, and information industries. The intellectual and emotional reactions "bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and to the lifestyle that their products promote" (Marcuse 20). Furthermore, as the beneficial products become more and more widely used by different individuals from different social classes, "the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity," turning it into a specific form of lifestyle that denies and "militates against qualitative change" (20). The one-dimensional thought and behaviour emerges from such indoctrination through consumption habits, whereas oppositional thoughts and habits are either repelled or "redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension" (20).

Violet's upbringing with an educated father (which strikes the reader as a quality lacking in every other parent appearing in the story) is unusual compared to the rest of the teenagers, and allows her to be critical and creative about the purpose and use of the technologies that are portrayed as ultimate necessities. However, her critical and practical capabilities in messing with the feednet technology ultimately place her at a disadvantage in her social circle and with the sociopolitical system in which she is trying to survive. Her boyfriend Titus, whom she tries to

educate about the exploitative system, has extremely mediocre ideas about the world they are forced to live in. He is aware of the potential discontent, which has already become outdated, regarding a world that is dominated by monopoly capitalism, but his response to such discontent stays within the boundaries of an ignorant and unoriginal form of acceptance. His response epitomizes the backbone of the comfort zone shared by the members of the neoliberal society. Titus says:

> Of course, everyone is like, *da da da, evil corporations, oh they're so bad*, we all say that, and we all know they control everything. I mean, it's not great, because who knows what evil shit they're up to. Everyone feels bad about that. But they're the only way to get all this stuff, and it's no good getting pissy about it, because they're still going to control everything whether you like it or not. Plus, they keep like everyone in the world employed, so it's not like we could do without them. (Anderson 48, 49)

From a practical perspective, the world of *Feed* functions fairly smoothly due to its citizens' unquestioned acceptance of their servitude to the corporations that dictate and organize every aspect of their lives, to the point that they thoroughly internalize the impossibility of its reformation or destruction. On top of being constantly bombarded by the advertisements and products, they are incapable of drawing a link between the corporations' exploitation of natural resources to the point of environmental destruction and their loss of health; nor are they able to acknowledge their physical and mental subjugation to the feednet technology both to socialize and stay alive. Life for those who obey is made fairly easy by the advanced technology appropriated by monopoly capitalism, the ease of which can be shown as the reason for containing the obedience: "The more rational, productive, technical, and total the repressive administration of society become, the more unimaginable the means and ways by which the administered individuals might break their servitude and seize their own liberation" (Marcuse 16). Titus' association of the feednet technology with the fulfillment of every citizen's desire to own any commodity they want is illustrated by his following comment:

> But the braggest thing about the feed, the thing that made it really big, is that it knows everything you want and hope for, sometimes before you even know what those things are. It can tell you how to get them, and help you make buying decisions that are hard. Everything we think and feel is taken in by the corporations, mainly by data ones like Feedlink and OnFeed and American Feedware, and they make a special profile, one that's keyed just to you, and then they give it to their branch companies, or other companies buy them, and they can get to know what it is we need, so all you have to do is want something and there's a chance it will be yours. (Anderson 48)

The world of *Feed* resembles a Technopoly in the sense that the hierarchy between the individuals and the machinery is subverted: the technology they created has completely dominated their desires and needs. All they have to do is "want something" that is suggested by the algorithms under the jurisdiction of the feed technology and their desire for ownership is instantaneously fulfilled, only to be replaced by further objects of desire.

Violet is in a different position than Titus, as she has experienced life without the feednet. In addition to this, she has an educated father who is a history teacher (unlike Titus' bubble-headed parents) and is critical of the transformation of society due to the subjugation resulting from an exploitative technology. As Marcuse notes, in an advanced capitalist society the consciousness of servitude is key to all forms of liberation and "the predominance of needs and satisfactions" hinders the emergence of this consciousness through making them appear as solely the individual's problem (16). This is why Violet can never get the support she seeks from anyone (from Titus or from the company responsible for the creation of the *feednet*), apart from her father. The time and environment in which the knowledge of history and comparative critical abilities arising from this knowledge belong to a past that preceded the establishment of the world of *Feed*, resulting in her expulsion from the social sphere and eventually in losing her bodily functions. There is only one way to act and one way to react, exemplified by the singular perspective and experience of Titus, the "one-dimensional man" at his best.

2.d Individual Isolation and the Blurring of the Lines between Public and Private Life through the Use of Technology in *The Circle*

In his article "Dystopia and the End of Politics," Benjamin Kunkel analyzes the thematic elements of neoliberal dystopia and points out that recent advancements in technology play a significant role in the commodification of individualism and of personal relationships. In an attempt to discover the reason for "the migration of sci-fi material into the literary mainstream," as well as dystopian fiction authors' choice of setting their futuristic plots in "the here and now," Kunkel concludes that the basis for this emerging trend in dystopian fiction is based on the fact that "…technology is advancing at an ever more rapid pace even as our world appears to accelerate toward a plunge into chaos more profound than any pre-technological civilization would be able to take" (95). The result is the lending of "a certain grim plausibility to both the apocalyptic and the dystopian scenarios," which is, from the audience's perspective, progressively easier to relate to in a world that already has certain regions "showcasing technological dystopia or post-technological collapse" (95). The destruction of the individual's private world, making it susceptible to the outside stimuli, is eased by online social media, which initiate precisely "the coupling between megalomania and paranoia" on the individual (Gottlieb 11). The advent of long-distance mass communications allowed for such isolation of the population, in turn allowing for the societal integration of effective means of control. Furthermore, isolation as an essential reality of urbanism "must also embody a controlled reintegration of the workers based on the planned needs of production and consumption" (Debord 122). This integration into the system must portray the individual isolation in a way that the society in which they exist is formed solely of "individuals isolated together" (122). Under the reigning economic system of advanced capitalism, "isolation underpins technology," which in

turn creates isolation: "…[A]ll goods proposed by the spectacular system, from cars to televisions, also serve as weapons for that system as it strives to reinforce the isolation of 'the lonely crowd'" (122).

Today, social media and communication technologies aim to connect people, and yet in practice, they connect people through separating them into smaller parts through a propaganda of individualism. In the world of social media, every individual that embraces them is valuable enough to be given an equal chance of fitting into the type of docile body that such technology dictates. The systematization of this propaganda towards a certain understanding of value, democracy, equality, and freedom plays a major role in the application of the neoliberal logic to everyday life through technological means, and most importantly, through the use of the Internet and social media. However, as Postman argues, it should also be noted that the particular discourses of technology and the political economy do not necessarily have a hierarchical relationship; they equally inform and transform one another on a continuous basis. The technological tools that are created and promoted under neoliberalism have the power to redefine the meaning of our most important terminology: "[They redefine] 'freedom,' 'truth,' 'intelligence,' 'fact,' 'wisdom,' 'memory,' 'history' – all the words we live by" (Postman 8).

In *The Circle,* those who do not want to share every detail of their lives online are seen as a threat to the majority's understanding of "democracy." The interaction and socialization of the neoliberal subjects, as well as their concepts of "freedom" and "democracy," involve sharing every detail of their experiences and memories online, carrying what was once deemed as personal into the public space and turning them into commodities to be inspected and bought by the members of the online Panopticon. All the personal experiences, objects of desire, and memories are instantaneously turned into the elements of the Debordian "spectacle" through the

"effective" use of communication technology which, in turn, blurs the boundaries between not only the public and the personal, but also the present and the past.

The Circle also presents an accurate example of the ways in which the perfecting of communication technologies under neoliberalism leads isolated individuals to perform a "policing" role, in re-organizing and dictating the desired manners of social control on other isolated individuals. Mae epitomizes such a state of embraced individual isolation that is promoted by the technologies offered by her company. Her workplace resembles a large university campus with impressive amenities, such as beautiful dorms and gyms, all fully accessible to the workers. Multiple recreation activities (Pilates classes) and parties (with "gourmet" food) take place all the time, and in the meantime, all the latest technological products are showcased. The world outside the company headquarters starts to appear horrible to Mae, once she adapts to her role as a significant part of the company's progress: "Outside the walls of the Circle, all was noise and struggle, failure and filth. But here, all had been perfected. The best people had made the best systems and the best systems had reaped funds, unlimited funds, that made possible this, the best place to work" (Eggers 30). The utopian lifestyle promoted by the company is necessary in order to sustain the belief in its being the "best of all possible worlds," allowing the company to continuously prosper. The desirable working conditions and the initially friendly behaviour towards newcomers instantly attract Mae to her new job. Ironically, as she starts to work longer hours, she has increasingly less time to use the beautiful facilities that attracted her to the job in the first place. Her extra-curricular activities start to involve working on her online profile so that she can have more online influence on her customers and get better customer service ratings from them. Sitting in front of her computer at her office, she is alone both physically and mentally, and yet her isolation involves her trial in "socializing" online

through messaging with her customers and sharing intricate details of her private life, such as her consumer product preferences, her pictures, and her overall life experiences. As the novel progresses, she starts to have little time to herself due to company policies requiring her to socialize with her colleagues. However, her "anti-social" behaviour does not sit well with her co-workers and supervisors. In many instances, she is warned by them about having missed the company's social events. As she dabbles with the catch-22 social orientation process, one of her colleagues named Dan shares his concerns: "You missed at least two newbie events, and at the circus, it looked like you couldn't wait to leave. I think you were out of there in twenty minutes. And those things would be understandable if your Participation Rank weren't so low. Do you know what it is?" (176) According to company policy, communication is not an extracurricular activity but a task she needs to fulfill in order to be successful at her job. Another co-worker redefines aspects of the community work for her by stating the following: "If you visit a co-worker's page and write something on the wall, that's a positive thing. That's an act of community. An act of reaching out. And of course I don't have to tell you that this company exists because of the social media you consider 'extracurricular'" (129). Mae cannot keep her individual space, as she has to (if not pretend to) "socialize" with her colleagues in every instance that she is not communicating with the customers isolated in a room.

In addition to working under such a polite version of constant surveillance which drains her energy, leaves her no personal space, and consequently isolates her, Mae begins to lose her connection with her parents and anyone outside the work sphere. Spending most of her time working for and promoting the ever-socially-progressive policies her company adopts, she merges her own desires and expectations with her company's. Her parents are proud of her at first, but as she becomes further enmeshed with the Circle sphere and as she requests them to

screen their lives through the *SeeChange* cameras installed at their apartment, her attempts to keep in touch are increasingly ignored. Eventually the idea of having to entertain millions of strangers who have instant online access to their daily activities becomes too intrusive for her parents and they decide to cover up all the cameras installed in their private sphere, with Mercer's help. Sadly, this does not stop Mae from pushing the intrusion further upon her parents. She decides to visit their house in order to both discuss this problem and to broadcast their conservation live to her virtual followers. As she enters their bedroom with a camera, she finds her parents engaging in oral sex. Their private space immediately turns into a public one, regardless of the individuals' consent in or opposition to making it so. Moreover, Mercer, as a family friend and Mae's former partner, attempts to discuss his worries concerning her sudden deep immersion into the Circle's supposedly world-transforming "democratic" sociopolitical agenda and her losing sight of her own beliefs, desires, and personality. Yet, Mae is already thoroughly convinced that she helps with the democratization of the world by allowing everyone to track her every step and activity (excluding her bathroom activities, which surprisingly remain private throughout the story). Her company and self-imposed duty as a democracy-warrior convinces her of her guilt in desiring privacy when her co-worker Josiah hears about her unrecorded kayaking adventure. He starts out with guilt-tripping her by asking how the other Circlers, the only community she remains a part of, might feel when they realize that she does not want to share her hobbies and interests with them. Mae's answer ("I don't think they'd feel anything") leads Josiah to remind her of her significance in being an active member of their co-worker community. "'It's just kayaking!'" answers Mae, "laughing again, trying to bring the discussion back to a place of levity … 'Just kayaking? Do you realize that kayaking is a three-billion-dollar industry? And you say it's 'just kayaking'! Mae, don't you see that it's all connected? You play your part. You have to participate'" (248). The company's economic

sustainability and expansion should never be considered as independent from its workers' personal businesses and social connectivity. Opening up her private life through sharing her experience with kayaking online is inherently positive, not only for "democracy" and "progress," but also for market-share competition. The openness and economic credibility associated with the sharing of the private is supposed to be intrinsically linked to the Circlers' particular social values. Mae, as bland a character as she can be, buys into Josiah's and almost every other Circler's direct equation between community and lack of privacy fairly quickly.

The commercial and political methods used under modern capitalist societies merge opposites under a single dimension. This is why popular media outlets of the established order would present anything that contradicts its order "as a token of its truth," if not re-appropriate any discourse that might hinder their designated goals towards serving their own purposes. The efficiency of the system is secured through crippling the individual's acknowledgement, which communicates no facts that would make its repressive discourse visible. In "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse writes that "the concept of alienation seems to become questionable when the individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them" (qtd. in Murray 44). By using communication technologies such as social media, those who hide the Circle's underlying agenda in establishing a system with maximum social control progressively remove the concept of private space by reducing the concepts of community and democracy to an act of sharing every single personal experience and thought online. Similarly, as Thomas Moylan argues, "modern capitalism's mass mediated and commodified culture" also reinforces the removal of subjectivity and individual thought by blocking attempts to protect private spaces where much of the critical thinking occurs (*Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 116). Today, the increasing commodification of our online spaces (which can be exemplified by the data-tracking companies selling users' information to advertisers and companies); content censorship,

emerging as a result of the latest trend in enforcing copyright laws within the Internet realm which used to be comparatively free of the capitalist-monopolization; and last but not least, the reduction if not elimination of online anonymity on social media websites today can easily be paralleled with the thematic elements that make *The Circle* a contemporary neoliberal dystopia. Certainly, the loss of private space and individuality are much more complex matters in real life than in the didactic dystopian world offered by Eggers and the others. Nevertheless, the questions the narrative raises remain relevant to our experience under neoliberalism. Bailey, who is one of the "Three Wise Men" responsible for the societal transformation, provides Mae with a sample of these questions (as well as the answers from his perspective) by asking:

> "…[W]hat if we all behaved as if we were being watched? It would lead to a more moral way of life. Who would do something unethical or immoral or illegal if they were being watched? If their illegal money transfer was being tracked? If their blackmailing phone call was being recorded? If their stick-up at the gas station was being filmed by a dozen cameras, and even their retinas identified during the robbery? If their philandering was being documented in a dozen ways?" (Eggers 381)

With the help of advancing communication technologies, the kind of morality expected from the neoliberal subjects can be easily attained through the policing and censorship that are repackaged to appear as desirable products.

CONCLUSION

After the Cold War, the changing political and societal transformations initiated by the global-scale victory of neoliberalism brought their own set of problems, anxieties, and fears to the subjects of neoliberalism, due to the consequences of this system of governance, which openly supports monopoly-capitalism, globalization of market-share competition, and surveillance through the use of communication technologies. In this thesis, I have tried to show the ways in which the changing sociopolitical environment has affected the thematic elements of

dystopian fiction by looking at four examples of contemporary dystopian fiction: Charlie Brooker's television series *Black Mirror*, Dave Egger's *The Circle*, Chan Koonchung's *The Fat Years*, and M.T. Anderson's *Feed*. Arguably, utopian desire and dystopian fiction both play a fundamental role in breaking the dominant belief systems imposed on the subjects of an established form of governance, which, for the purposes of rendering governing easier, tend to blind these subjects to the "reality" of their situations. By exposing the readers to these commonly shared problems experienced as a result of living under this system of governance, the questions asked in dystopian fiction allow them to compare life in the present to the life portrayed in the fictional world, so that they can scratch the surface of the present to figure out "what is wrong with the way we now live." In today's modern society, and more specifically after the end of the Cold War, the subversive and oppositional culture emerging from and organized by the utopian imagination has been eliminated by the expanding forces of capitalism, shaping the society into a "seamless web of media technology, multinational corporations, and international bureaucratic control" (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 16). Viewing the significance of dystopian/utopian fiction from this perspective, in the first chapter, I tried to analyze the historical context in which the term "dystopia" emerged, as well as the structural thematic components of dystopian fiction. This was necessary in order to be able to compare the differences between examples of pre-Cold War dystopian fiction and examples written under the established system of neoliberalism.

Since my goal was to draw a parallel between neoliberal political/economic strategies that have been in use since the late 1970s and dystopian anxiety/fear, as well as the neoliberal dystopian subjectivities that neoliberalism brought forward, I attempted to define the particular characteristics of neoliberalism based on its criticism as an ideology whose ultimate purpose is the "restoration of class power." After briefly presenting the emergence of the neoliberal

ideology and its historical roots, I discussed the critical work of David Harvey, who viewed the core agenda of neoliberalism as a "class project, masked by a lot of neoliberal rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility, privatization and the free market" (*The Enigma of Capital* 10).

His particular definition was useful in explaining popular consent towards the legitimization of the neoliberal turn which was formed through the use of corporate strategies. The organization of think-tanks funded by corporations, the capturing of certain segments of popular sources of media, and certain intellectuals' support of neoliberal ways of thinking created a climate of opinion in which neoliberal politics were perceived as the sole guarantor of individual freedom, which led in turn to the consolidation of class power. After the end of the Cold War, according to its advocates, the neoliberal rhetoric shaping everyday life was left without a major ideological resistance that could once influence the formation of oppositional political practices. The transition from the sharing of power structures with communism to becoming a monolithic ideology led to a discursive environment in which the "triumph" of neoliberalism was mentioned as the most unique instance in the history of ideologies. Furthermore, as Pierre Bourdieu noted, the neoliberal program gathers its social power particularly from those whose interests it represents. All these elements that are promoted as necessities or necessary evils in the post-Cold War neoliberal world arguably pushed for the emergence of a specific type of subjectivity. In her article "American Nightmare," Wendy Brown claimed that the combination of the "governance according to market criteria" and the "valorization of state power for 'putatively moral ends" undermined the culture, values, and practice of constitutional democracy (690). As a result of the diminishing power of democratic values, the symbiosis of the rising Western trends in favoring neoconservative and neoliberal

government practices produced a kind of subject that was "relatively indifferent to veracity and accountability in government and to political freedom and equality among the citizenry" (690).

I focused on four elements that arguably were responsible for perpetuating dystopian subjectivity under neoliberal governance:

1. The employment of "invisible power"

In order to draw a comparison among the elements of power in dystopian literature before and after the Cold War, it is necessary to frame the dystopian worlds' takes on the "nature" of power and the evolution of its use, and tie this back to the political environment in which these novels were written. Deriving from the work of Michel Foucault, who traced the evolution of power structures and the changing practices of its systematization, I first tried to define traditional sovereign power, which was the preferred regime of practice in the West prior to the seventeenth century. This form of power involved obedience to the law of the authority figure, the failure to do so resulting in physical punishment. After the arrival of the industrial era and modernity, "[sovereign power] found itself unable to govern the economic and political body of a society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization" ("Society Must Be Defended" 249). Bio power emerged as a political technology in the seventeenth century, due to the necessity of a "new type of political rationality and practice" in the face of the problems generated by modernity (Rabinow 133). Biological existence found its place in the political realm where the status of the living "passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 143). Power was no longer kept at a limit where it was concerned solely with the legal subjects' punishment and death; instead, it took charge of their lives, their bodies, and their functions in society. Power took a new form, involving

qualifying, measuring, and appraising the governed bodies, classifying them under different forms of hierarchy, as opposed to displaying itself "in its murderous splendor" (Rabinow 130). Disciplinary power constituted the other pole of biopower, the role of which was to produce human beings who could be treated as docile bodies, and it involved the attempt to restore those bodies to the normative (docile), and to decentralize power through institutions of correction, such as prisons, hospitals, and educational systems. Under disciplinary power, punishment and correction became rationally organized through the surveillance of individuals and their normalization, effected through the practices of these institutions.

Described first by Michel Foucault as an attempt to produce a "micro-physics of power" within the context of power mechanisms "in its capillary form of existences," invisible power can be viewed as a type that "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their very actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives" (*Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 39). Steven Lukes, in *Power: A Radical Review*, calls invisible power "ideological power." The subjects of invisible power may come to see the domination of the very forces which strip them of their power and rights as "natural" or unchangeable. As a result, the issues experienced by the subjects of invisible power remain unquestioned. Hinson and Healey wrote that "[invisible power] is exercised in part through control of" the disciplinary bodies "that shape and create meaning: religious institutions, the media, television, mass consumer culture, popular ideas about government and about workers and bosses, etc." (2). In opposition, "hard power" or "traditional sovereign power" comprises "the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies," which implies the use of brute force instead of ideological manipulation (Nye, *The Future of Power* 11). Whereas hard power relies on the employment of

physical force on the part of the political elite to shape and control powerless subjects, in the case of "invisible power," repression is deemed as a negative force, for through repression the powerful can impose "boundaries and prohibitions" which would in turn "set up limits to the desire and deeds of subjects" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 119). In the modern day Western political environment, shaped by the neoliberal ideals of freedom and private ownership, the use of hard power is arguably costlier in the financial and political realms. The significance of "invisible power" within the context of this thesis stems from its disciplinary use in forming "subjects" by shaping their personalities. This shaping process is brought about through an induced procedure of setting up the "normal" and "normalizing" the governed subjects, while rendering them capable, obedient, and willing to adhere to restructured norms of "sanity, health, sexuality, and other forms of propriety" (Lukes 91).

2. "The end of history"

The imperial aspect of neoliberalism, limiting the scope of historical achievement to neoliberal ideology, shows its symptoms in the creation of the themes of contemporary dystopian fiction, in which living under the rule of a neo-imperialist form of governance successfully disguises its nightmarish nature as *rational* and the only viable option. To create an urge to pursue neoliberalism's goals, Francis Fukuyama uses a narrowed-down understanding of history as his primary source of analysis. He represents the course of history as if it is a self-fulfilling prophecy and reserves the "end" of ideological growth for itself, namely the liberal democracy. By ignoring the challenging aspects of the human capacity to understand the "nature" and logic of the universe; by pointing to the existence of absolute truths regarding the universe's operation; and by reducing the process of all human history to a simplified discourse of ideological progress

aimed at reaching political perfectionism, Fukuyama exemplifies neoliberal logic by arguing that the concepts of time, history, and evolution are in fact fully perceivable by reason. The "end of history*"* discourse is a by-product of neoliberal discourse, and it implies that humankind stands at a point beyond time in its capacity to perceive and analyze the course of ideological evolution. On a similar note, after a closer examination of the "drift of biological evolution" and the "drift of human history," Robert Wright also came to the conclusion that there appears to be a "point to it all" (4). He extended the reach of his deterministic view on the course of history by adding that "globalization… has been in the cards not just since the invention of the telegraph or the steamship, or even the written word or the wheel," but "since the invention of life" (3, 7). Both Fukuyama and Wright, as defenders of the expansion and success of modern liberal democracies on a globalized basis, attempted to impose a particular ideological rationale on the course of history by deeming the order of its events to be natural and inevitable. This discourse of rationality, shared by the likes of Fukuyama and Wright, plays a fundamental role in creating neoliberal subjects that are devoid of the skills to imagine alternatives to the political system that denies them any room for progress.

3. Freedom of consumption and false needs

Neoliberalism creates its own subjects who are devoid of the utopian imagination and of the means for organizing effective opposition and political resistance; this is effected through the use of multiple media in order to push for a shared consensus, which is that of an economic elite rather than of the governed. As the governing power shifted from the hands of states to the private sector, citizens' growing consumption became an economic necessity for the capitalist class interests to keep their government-business alliance running. According to David Harvey, freedom is promoted by the advocates of neoliberalism as a practical strategy to hide the gradual

restoration of class power to the elites from the lower and middle classes. The prospect of freedom offered to the subordinate groups by the elites serves the purpose of creating a certain discourse among the subordinate groups, limiting the understanding of freedom to the basic right to consume and to choose among the consumer items and services available in the market. In the late transnational capitalist system, the practices of "totalizing administration" serve to "mystify the actual social relations and structures by which exploitation and domination are carried on" (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 17) Neoliberal ideology's insistence on sustaining free markets and consumption creates a microclimate in which the social system and its rules are constantly imposed on the individual in her daily life. The same products that allow for easier and faster mass transportation and communication, as well as food, clothing, lodging, entertainment, and information industries, carry "prescribed attitudes and habits" as well as "certain intellectual and emotional reactions … [which] bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and to the lifestyle that these products promote" (Marcuse 20). Furthermore, as beneficial products become widely used by different individuals from different social classes, "the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity," turning it into a specific form of lifestyle that denies and "militates against qualitative change" (20). The one-dimensional thought and behaviour emerges from such indoctrination through consumption habits, whereas oppositional thoughts and habits are either repelled or "redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension" (20).

4. Individual isolation and the blurring of the lines between public and private life through the use of technology

Arguably, the creation of individual isolation in the neoliberal order cannot be separated from technological innovations and their expansion in the second part of the twentieth century.

Globalization and the increasing use of communication technology opened up spaces for individuals to express themselves, learn without leaving the comfort of their homes, and interact with one another, which led to a certain democratization of Western societies, in terms of the amelioration of citizens' capabilities for subjective expression and of the spaces where public discussion is encouraged, particularly through the growing use of social media. However, through the use of these technological products and social media, neoliberalism promotes individualism while taking advantage of individuals' isolation and their inability to form oppositional groups by guiding their thoughts and actions. While cheering the "essential qualities" attached to the development and expansion of modern technology (such as an instrumental kind of rationality promoting "a relentless search for efficiency"), many advocates of modern technology such as Robert Wright avoid discussing its creation of potential harms involving "a kind of historical momentum with indelible features that rendered other kinds of social and cultural influences upon the character of social life far less potent" (Winner 992). In *One-Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse observes that "the modern apparatus of production and distribution creates a total system that obliterates the opposition between private and public existence, and between individual and social needs. It shapes the entire universe of discourse and action, of intellectual and material culture" (qtd. in Murray 42). The rationality attached to technological determinism, much like historical determinism, becomes a political accessory for better domination of subjects as society, nature, mind, and body are kept in a constant "state of permanent mobilization" for the defense of this universe. Jan Nederveen Pieterse's essay "Digital Capitalism and Development: The Unbearable Lightness of ICT4D" displays an accurate attempt to show the relationship between the forces of globalization, free markets, and information technology in today's neoliberal society, in which digital capitalism is quickly replacing the older tools promoted by market capitalism. He argues that information technology is deeply connected

to today's globalization of competition, in which the dynamic of inter-firm competition involves "inter-corporate tie-ups, networking, and mergers and acquisitions to manage the cost and risks of research and development and global marketing" (Pieterse 15). The neoliberal theory of technological progress relies on a fetishized belief that every problem can potentially be fixed by the appropriate technological product, a belief promoted by neoliberal advocates as a direct result of free-market competition driving the search for new(er) products, production methods, and new ways of organization. As Harvey notes, this form of technological fetishizing flourishing under global capitalism not only serves the acceleration of individual consumption, which is beneficial for corporations' economic agenda, but also transforms the functions of the state apparatus by producing "powerful, independent trends of technological change that can become destabilizing, if not counterproductive" (Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 69). The mobilization of technological innovations, according to both Harvey and Marcuse, transforms dominant social relations and institutions as well as reshaping "common sense to their own pecuniary advantage" (*A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 69).

In the second chapter of this thesis, I analyzed four examples of neoliberal dystopian fiction within the context of the four headlines discussed above. In "Invisible Power in '15 Million Merits' and *The Circle*," I attempted to show that these examples of contemporary dystopian fiction tend to take a critical approach towards the ways in which the governing elites manipulate their subjects into believing that their dystopian sensibilities have arisen due to their own inabilities and errors. The theme of "invisible power" and its criticism in these two examples are employed as a result of its adoption as the most efficient governing strategy in the neoliberal sociopolitical environment. In the *Black Mirror* episode "15 Million Merits," the process of resistance and the commodification of resistance is exemplified by the protagonist's failed trial

within the existing structures of power, which are focused on class preservation through the use of technology and media. Power is mediated through screens that constitute a technologically advanced Panopticon. Surveillance not only limits the individual's actions in the public space, it also creates an "intra-subjective" form of surveillance that results in the easy subjugation of both Abi and Bing to the orders of the jury that symbolizes the ruling elite. Furthermore, in *The Circle*, invisible power manipulates the protagonist Mae to the point where she loses her identity and adopts the one assigned to her by her company. As a result of this, her relationships with her family and friends deteriorate and she eventually borders on being a company cyborg whose private and public life is one and the same. Invisible power disciplines her through her use of social media, which meets the needs of the company while successfully encouraging its subjects to become a part of the upcoming technological "revolution." Whereas in earlier examples of dystopian fiction, such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, in which the governing elite group uses traditional sovereign power involving fear, threats, and physical violence to dominate and rule over the citizens, in the contemporary examples discussed here, the tools and means of governance are invisible at first sight, due to their intrinsic relationship to the free market economy's successful selling strategies, which are eased by the use of communication technologies.

In the chapter "The End of History in *The Fat Years*," I argued that *The Fat Years* presents an updated version of the obsession with and the necessity of the pursuit of historical records, which has been a common theme in classic works of dystopian fiction. Following from the previous discussion regarding the relationship between (the end of) history, dystopia, and neoliberalism, I suggested that dystopian fiction written under neoliberalism tends to portray a world in which individuals are entrapped in a flat, unchanging (and unchangeable) "now."

Various strategies stemming from the use of invisible power are employed by the governing elites to manipulate the memory of their subjects. The quest to uncover the truth behind the memory loss is linked to the nostalgia for "the time when history existed," a past when change and the positive transformation of everyday life were still perceived as achievable. Within this context, *The Fat Years* represents a successful attempt to attack contemporary Chinese capitalism, "which it accuses of creating a kind of fake utopia, where poverty, misery, and despair are hidden behind the fantasy life of the new Chinese consumer society" (Featherstone 183). Chan critically appropriates the concept of the "end of history" in his narrative, as each time there is a significant change in the political arena, those benefitting from the change are inclined to portray it as *the* end of progress. Such an end does not signify the arrival of utopia for the characters of *The Fat Years*, but rather a forced choice between the "good hell," implying the acceptance of a lie about the "Golden Age" of neoliberal politics in China, or "bad heaven," which means living with the truth of the CCP's lies about history as an attempt to keep society in order by distorting the truth regarding its unpopular economic and political activities. All the examples of dystopian fiction examined in this thesis share one thing in common: they all portray a certain awareness of neoliberal discourse's notion of having attained the "best of all possible worlds," which is tied to the perfectionism that would be expected from a utopian form of governance. The seeds of the foundations of skepticism towards the authority of those claiming to have found the best possible answer to every social problem were planted in the critical utopias of the 1960s and 1970s. Dystopian fiction of the neoliberal age borrows from this tradition by offering a critical look at these so-called-perfect systems and at how such a "utopian" system established by the governing elite may result in the creation of dystopian subjects.

In "Freedom of Consumption and False Needs in *Feed,"* I first looked at Horkheimer and Adorno's definition of the characteristics of individual freedom under capitalism, in which the culture industry is perceived as the sole actor playing into the processes of systematization and commodification of its subjects' needs, behaviours, ideologies, and interpersonal relationships. As discussed by Harvey, the promotion of freedom is a helpful rhetoric in hiding the restoration and protection of capitalist class interests. The thematic elements of these examples of contemporary dystopian fiction portray the anxiety stemming from the governing power's limitation of individual freedoms to the area of consumption and false needs. This anxiety leads to the formation of a particular dystopian condition, appearing as a result of the governing practices aimed at achieving a "totalizing administration," which in turn serves to "mystify the actual social relations and structures by which exploitation and domination are carried on" (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 17). The autonomous individual's potential in actively participating in and changing the conditions of "the realms of real possibility" is eliminated through transnational capitalism's "reduction of life to commodity and communication to transfer of surface images" (17). In M.T. Anderson's dystopian novel *Feed,* 73% of American citizens living in a near-future have had *feednet* inserted in their brains, and which constantly gives them information on what to buy next. The feed system is promoted as an extension of the freedom offered by the governing body, and yet anyone who refuses to own it faces social exclusion and serious physical consequences. From a practical perspective, the world of *Feed* functions fairly smoothly due to its citizens' mindless acceptance of their servitude to the corporations which dictate and organize every aspect of their life. On top of willingly embracing the constant bombardment of advertising, the subjects of *Feed* are incapable of drawing a link between the corporations' exploitation of natural resources, which has happened to an extent that brings about environmental destruction and their loss of health; neither are they aware of their physical and

mental subjugation to the feednet technology for socializing, and ultimately, staying alive. There is only one way to act and one way to react, exemplifying the singular perspective and experience of a "one-dimensional man," as embodied by the character named Titus.

In "Individual Isolation and the Blurring of the Lines between Public and Private Life through the Use of Technology in *The Circle,"* I discussed how the propaganda of individualism perpetuated by communication technologies plays a significant role in the application of the neoliberal logic to its subject's everyday life. In *The Circle,* those who do not want to share every detail of their lives online are seen as a threat to the majority's understanding of democracy. The interaction and socialization of the neoliberal subjects involve sharing every detail of experiences and memories, forcefully carrying what was once deemed as personal into the public space, turning them into commodities to be inspected and normalized by the established social mechanisms. All the personal experiences, objects of desire, and memories are turned into the elements of a Debordian "spectacle" through the effective use of communication technologies, which in turn blur the boundaries between the public and the personal spheres. Furthermore, neoliberal dystopia tackles the ways in which advanced communication technologies can commodify individualism and social life, while the futuristic plot is increasingly set in the "here and now," as pointed out by Benjamin Kunkel. This trend is tied to the rapid advancement of technology, "as our world appears to accelerate toward a plunge into chaos more profound than any pre-technological civilization would be able to take" (Kunkel 95). The destruction of the individual's private world, making it susceptible to manipulation, is eased by social media, which initiates "the coupling between megalomania and paranoia" within the individual. The advent of long-distance mass communication technologies led to the further isolation of the population, allowing the integration of effective means of control into the society. Egger's novel *The Circle*

is an accurate example of the ways in which the perfecting of communication technologies under neoliberalism leads isolated individuals to perform the role of re-organizing and dictating the desired means of social control on other isolated individuals. In *The Circle*, communication is not an extracurricular activity but a task everyone working for the company needs to fulfill in order to be successful at their work and to be accepted as a valuable member of the social fabric. As noted by Marcuse, the efficiency of the system is secured through its crippling of the individual's acknowledgement of its repression, which communicates no facts that would make its repressive power visible. In "Repressive Tolerance," he wrote that "the concept of alienation seems to become questionable when the individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them" (qtd. in Murray 44). The increasing commodification of our online spaces; content censorship, emerging as a result of the latest trend in enforcing copyright laws within the Internet realm; and last but not least, the reduction if not elimination of online anonymity on social media websites today can easily be paralleled with the thematic elements that make *The Circle* a contemporary neoliberal dystopian novel.

The promises of neoliberal ideology regarding individual freedom, democracy, and rationality are part of the rhetoric aimed at hiding its initial goal of restoring class power to the elites. The utopian discourse it offers stems from a belief that history has come to an end with the triumph of liberal democracies. However, the same discourse that reserves the end of history for neoliberal ideology results in the creation of dystopian subjectivities, symbolized by the characters drawn in *Black Mirror*, *Feed*, *The Fat Years*, and *The Circle.* The stories told in these examples of contemporary dystopian fiction point to the ways in which the dystopian condition is created, namely through the use of invisible power, the commodification of human relationships, the "end of history" discourse, and particular forms of communication technology, such as social

media. These elements are equally responsible for the creation of a neoliberal "one-dimensional man," who has become devoid of the utopian imagination that could be directed to organizing political resistance to reform or revolutionize the ruling ideology. The examples of neoliberal dystopian fiction examined in this thesis do not necessarily suggest a resolution to the problems they portray about the "one-dimensional" condition of the neoliberal dystopian subject; however, these works of fiction have critical value regarding this system of governance, in the sense that they are mirroring some of the most important problems posed by neoliberal rhetoric and its negative effects on the living conditions of a globally interconnected society. In the neoliberal age, looking at ourselves in these fictional mirrors can be more useful to figuring out our own paths towards solutions to our problems, rather than expecting a collectively experienced nightmare to arrive some time in the future, as the line between hell and here may not be as wide as we may think.

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