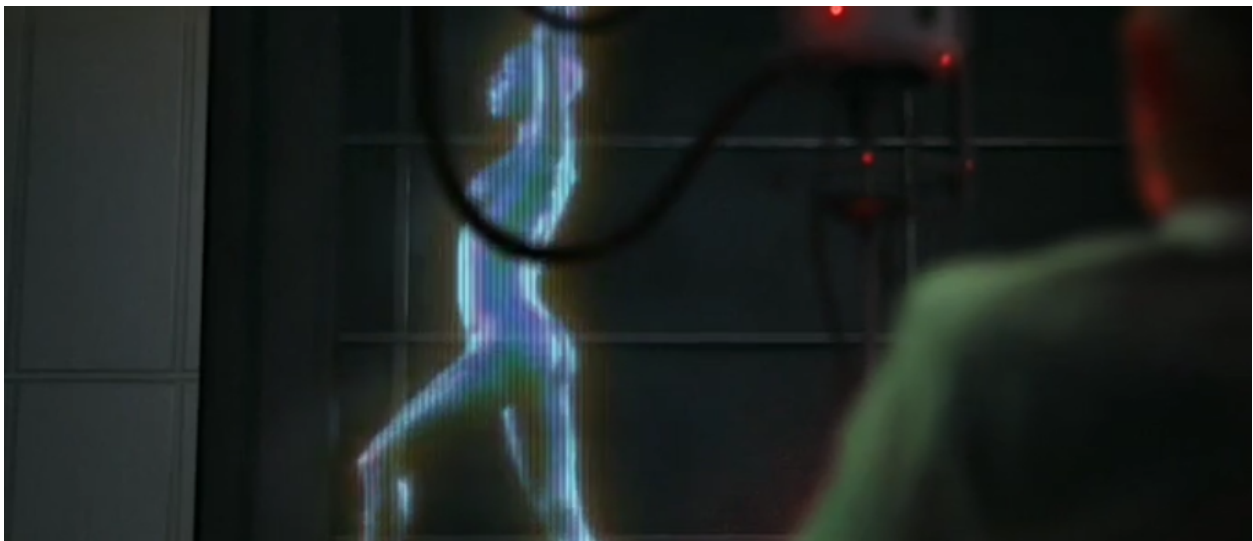


In the film THX1138, citizens of a heavily repressed society are made docile through the work of sedatives which inhibit the expression of natural human passions. As a result, the citizens are largely unconcerned with sex, romance, or any emotion that can be considered passionate. Their social lives are unanimated, distant, and antisocial. The main character, THX, speaks in an oddly impersonal style, referring to his female roommate only as his ‘mate’, despite the pair living, eating, and sleeping in the same place as each other. Although they exist in close physical proximity to one another, are of opposite sexes, and seemingly heterosexual, the lack of sexual or romantic chemistry between the two flags a serious concern for the audience, which is: why aren’t their primal instincts active? The thought that human beings could be so repressed to a point where the evolutionary drives in us are quieted, is one of the core dystopian elements in the film THX1138. Without passions, can the citizens be considered human enough, conscious enough to resist the repressive structures in the dystopian society? In this paper, I examine one pornographic scene in the earlier part of the film that, I argue, functions to reintroduce the motif of humanity back into the citizens, ultimately showing that the key to resistance is passion.

Firstly – what is the dystopian society? Explained conceptually, a dystopia is an undesirable reality, where humanity’s fears are brought to life. They also “*encourage a form of fatalism*” by failing to provide an escape, alternative, or way out of the reality that the citizens find themselves in (Wise, 70). In a surveillance society like that of THX1138, people are controlled mostly by medication and invasive, constant observation. If we examine what the dystopia looks like stylistically in THX1138, its elements are reflected in the aesthetics of the mis-en-scene. For example, the lights used in the homes of the citizens are low-lit, off-white, and evenly illuminate

every corner, which visually elongates the barrenness of the room. As well, the lack of decorative props emphasizes the emptiness of the space. With non-flickering, sterile-looking lights, their rooms, which should look like a home, instead feels devoid of any human touch or character.

However, at around the 13-minute mark of the movie, THX curiously decides to watch holographic porn (despite being meters away from his female mate). This is the first scene of the movie where nudity, music, entertainment, and pleasure are introduced. It's a strong juxtaposition to previous scenes in the dystopian environment that discouraged any form of self-pleasure and gratification. But the scene where THX self-pleasures to the dancing nude woman stands out even from the other channels that THX switches to after ejaculating. Firstly, the woman is nude. While the rest of the citizens are donned in the same white jumpsuit, the dancing woman is the first instance that a person is unrobed, as well as oiled – which accentuates the curves and shape of her body.



The music that accompanies this scene is upbeat, rapid, and somewhat dissonant in sound, with individual musical notes slightly reverberating as if they were played live with imperfection intentionally woven in. This contrasts sharply with the ostensibly flawless structure of the

dystopian society, which would be better represented by meticulously crafted, mathematically precise musical compositions, rather than the spontaneous sensual notes that can be danced to, erotically. The hologram of the erotic dancers is also visually distinct from the people portrayed in the other channels because the colours emanating from the holographic projections are much more chromatic, mesmerizing, and gives off a prismatic glow that shifts and evolves with every movement. This helps to make the scene visually 'stand out' from the rest of the channels. The reason why this is pertinent is because the erotic dancing is, I believe, representing something that goes beyond satisfying the basic human physiological needs. If the dystopian society allowed masturbation purely for the health of its citizens, then surely, they could have created a machine that pleasures the individual without pornography. I think the choice of including the pornography was ideological; it was to convey the motif of sex and how it relates to the subjugation of the people. The choice of using pornography was also tantalizing, because fornication is prohibited in the dystopian society (THX and LUH get in trouble for that, later). Why allow your citizens to lust after the body of another human being if it is, in practise, not allowed? Promoting lust in this way makes me think that the pornography wasn't included as part of the diegetic storyline, but rather as a non-diegetic feature of the film. That is, it was used to comment on the dystopian nature of the reality, rather than a feature of the society's structure as such. Lastly, on the topic of colour – when the camera capture's THX's breathless heaving face, a red hue is cast over him, which follows after LUH places a red pill into his dinner box. The pill that LUH has snuck into THX's meal is a lower dose of his regular pills, and reducing the medication would wake him up to his passions. So, since the red pill effectively symbolizes a return to passion, casting the red hue on his face shows the red pill's effects unleashed. Surely enough, THX awakens to these passions and ends up having sex with LUH shortly afterwards.



With this scene in mind, we may now ask: what is the significance of placing a human urge like sex at the center of a largely unanimated, aromantic dystopian scene? In THX1138, the basic principle of the society was efficiency and economy. Romantic, intimate, or passionate relationships were discouraged because they distracted the citizens from being productive labourers. When roommates did have sex, they would be reassigned rooms. Sedatives were administered to render their bodies docile and dispassionate. As a result, THX seemed totally indifferent/oblivious to LUH's sexuality, going as far as to use pornography while she was standing a few meters away from him. During their free time, the two hardly exchanged meaningful dialogue. It is hard to conceive of these citizens as truly human or conscious, if their mental lives are so devoid of emotion, passion, or connection. Although they possess enough intelligence to operate machinery and be effective workers, without a strong passion, the hope for resistance is futile. I think that the pornographic scene represented the first sign of hope that THX is not too far gone. Sex as a motif functions in the scene as a resistance against conformity, because although repressive measures can be taken to control the way a person speaks, dresses, and behaves, the basic human urges are inextricable from our evolutionary drives. A kind of

spiritual essentialism must be attributed to humanity to escape the fatalism that the dystopia presents us with. That is, we must believe that our innermost passions and soul cannot be stolen from us, if we want to survive the dystopian reality in the film. Otherwise, we'd have to accept that the dystopia won; that things won't get better. However, in THX1138, the erotic dancing scene serves as a glimmer of hope amidst the sterile backdrop of the dystopian society by showing that passion wins over; that resistance is built into human nature. That is, this scene asserts the indomitable nature of human passion, which persist as essential elements of human identity. What I have tried to argue in this paper is that the erotic dancing scene, with its vibrant colours, spontaneous music, and nudity, emerges as a harbinger of this resistance, tapping into the primal instincts of the characters and hinting at the possibility of reclaiming their humanity. The erotic dance scene was a purposeful cinematic device that foreshadowed the 'key' to resistance in THX1138.

## REFERENCE LIST

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