

ISOLATION
disconnection in a connected world

Film Festival Program

Emma Deckers

Introduction

Welcome to our inaugural film festival, where we explore compelling and thought-provoking themes of dystopia, which can often be experienced as unsettling or provocative, through the lenses of alienation, environmental decay, and isolation. A dystopian film is characterized by oppression, environmental disaster, big corporations, and dehumanization in an often fictional world where society is in a steep decline. The first dystopian film ever made was *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang and released in 1927, which featured sharp commentary on class differences, the inequalities of power and resources, and the rebellious movement that seeks to enact change while being manipulated and controlled through technology. Many contemporary dystopian films have been inspired by this film, and some we will be showing here to further the conversation about how contemporary fears are being translated into film. Explore worlds that are eerily like our own, magnified and mediated through the power of film and shared community with like-minded dystopian film fanatics.

In today's ever-changing world, where technological advancements are shaping our present and future in ways we cannot fully predict, it remains unclear whether they will eradicate social divisions and ecological challenges or further push us towards destruction (Wolff 2021, 1). Issues of dehumanization, unfairness, and the isolation of people are themes that resonate more powerfully than ever in today's day and age. Moreover, issues and concerns of invasion of privacy and lack of identity exploration within conformist societies, like our own, are dystopian themes that are delved into within films like "*Alita: Battle Angel*" when Nova 'takes over' people through a microchip in their brain to stay in total control at all times, and in "*Into the Wild*" when Chris McCandless becomes his alter ego Alexander Supertramp to escape the expectations of his parents and society and wanted to explore his true identity. Therefore, our carefully curated selection of films for this film festival will explore how these themes intertwine and interact with each other, creating worlds, some fictional some not, that mirror our reality and contemporary fears, and deepen our understanding of the anxieties, progress, and struggles we face within it. These films can be stark reminders of how our future may develop given our current choices, and provide insight into the inevitable yearning for human connection when living in a world where we increasingly pretend we are not connected.

Through stories of individuals grappling with profound isolation, like "*Il Deserto Rosso*", "*The Skin I Live In*", and "*Into the Wild*", communities struggling against environmental and physical collapse, like "*Erin Brockovich*" and "*Dark Waters*," communities fighting against alienation and oppression, like "*Snowpiercer*" and "*Alita: Battle Angel*," people isolated within their personal dystopia unable to connect to others or themselves, like "*The Road*," "*Lost in Translation*," and "*I Killed My Mother*," and battling the existential dread when faced with imminent environmental catastrophe, like "*Melancholia*," we invite you to come and reflect on the past and present while contemplating the possible future, exploring your feelings and thoughts about where we are heading and how we got there. These films and narratives are not just stories; they are poignant commentaries on the human condition, cautionary tales, and calls to action that inspire or show us the consequences of inaction. For example, people like Erin Brockovich ("*Erin Brockovich*") and Robert Bilott ("*Dark*

Waters") never relented in fighting for justice for the affected people within those communities, forcing big corporations to take responsibility for their negligence. Each film, in its unique way, employs elements of isolation, environmental concerns, and alienation to portray worlds that reflect and critique our own. They invite us to examine the potential consequences of our current trajectory and consider the importance of connection, responsibility, and resilience in the face of dystopian forces.

Dystopian films expose the flaws in our own society and mediate our problems and issues in real life in the movie in a way that allows people not only to relate to them but also to feel seen and vindicated. However, these films also highlight our shortcomings and failings as humans. This exploration of the bleak prospects for our future often helps people understand the dire consequences of our actions. Dystopian narratives provide a platform for exploring complex themes, including technological advancements, environmental degradation, and social control. These films frequently use symbolism to critique contemporary issues, prompting viewers to reflect on and question the current state of affairs. By examining the flaws revealed by dystopian films within these fictional worlds, we can gain a deeper understanding of those failures. Through these narratives, we confront uncomfortable truths and begin to consider alternative paths by engaging in discussions and sharing our perspectives. Ultimately, dystopian films challenge us to envision and seek a more sustainable and just future.

Therefore, join us on this journey to understand the depths of dystopia and, hopefully, find glimmers of hope and empowerment amidst the darkness. Prepare to be inspired, moved, and challenged as we explore these cinematic landscapes and delve into the current issues that have defined our time and may shape our future. By gaining a deeper understanding of dystopian narratives, we can better prepare ourselves to navigate the complexities of our world. This journey promises not only insight but also inspiration; let us not be passive viewers but active participants in shaping our future. Together, let us examine the shadows of what could be and strive to illuminate a path toward a more hopeful and promising tomorrow.

Film Justification

- **Il Deserto Rosso (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964)**

Directly addresses environmental and psychological alienation, as the industrial landscape causes literal ecological decay and the protagonist's mental and emotional isolation.

- **Dark Waters (Todd Haynes, 2019)**

Expose corporate-driven environmental pollution and its devastating and isolating impact on affected communities, as well as the lawyers fighting for justice against big corporations.

- **The Road (John Hillcoat, 2009)**

A post-apocalyptic narrative where environmental devastation has led to extreme isolation and the total breakdown of human connection, starkly portraying a world stripped of hope.

- **Snowpiercer (Bong Joon-ho, 2013)**

Depicts a class-based dystopia where environmental disaster has forced humanity onto a train, exacerbating social estrangement and extreme inequality based on class.

- **Alita: Battle Angel (Robert Rodriguez, 2019)**

Set in a world divided by class and environmental decay, it explores the alienation of individuals in a technologically advanced yet socially fragmented society.

- **The Skin I Live In (Pedro Almodóvar, 2011)**

Explores extreme isolation and alienation through a twisted narrative of a surgeon who holds a woman captive, blurring the lines of identity and control.

- **I Killed My Mother (Xavier Dolan, 2009)**

Poignantly deals with familial estrangement and the emotional isolation of a young man struggling to connect with his mother, reflecting a personal dystopia.

- **Lost in Translation (Sofia Coppola, 2003)**

Focuses on the isolation and alienation of individuals in a foreign, hyper-modern environment, emphasizing the emotional disconnect in a globalized world.

- **Into The Wild (Sean Penn, 2007)**

Explores self-imposed isolation as a response to societal estrangement; however, it also touches on the dangers of romanticizing complete disconnection from society and the allure of the wilderness.

- **Melancholia (Lars von Trier, 2011)**

Presents a world facing environmental catastrophe (an impending planetary collision) and the psychological isolation and alienation experienced by the individuals in the film while they grapple with existential dread.

- **Erin Brockovich (Steven Soderbergh, 2000)**

Highlights environmental destruction caused by corporate negligence, leading to community isolation and estrangement as they fight for justice and accountability.

Screening Order

1. Il Deserto Rosso (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964)
2. Dark Waters (Todd Haynes, 2019)
3. The Road (John Hillcoat, 2009)
4. Snowpiercer (Bong Joon-ho, 2013)
5. Alita: Battle Angel (Robert Rodriguez, 2019)
6. The Skin I Live In (Pedro Almodóvar, 2011)
7. I Killed My Mother (Xavier Dolan, 2009)
8. Lost in Translation (Sofia Coppola, 2003)
9. Into The Wild (Sean Penn, 2007)
10. Melancholia (Lars von Trier, 2011)
11. Erin Brockovich (Steven Soderbergh, 2000)

Rationale

Starting with the iconic film “Il Deserto Rosso” helps set the tone for the entire film festival, as it dives deep into the complex themes of dystopia, isolation, and alienation. At the same time, it is visually captivating and stunning, as it uses color, especially red, against the bleak landscape, and the environmental degradation effectively introduces the theme in a thought-provoking way. Furthermore, the pace of this film is slower than all other films, which will help audiences appreciate the other (slower) films more than when starting with a fast-paced, action-filled film like “Alita: Battle Angel”. Then, working its way through the other films, with “Dark Waters” next as a transition to a more contemporary environmental dystopia, the narrative of corporate negligence and its impact on public health provides a grounded and clear perspective on environmental issues. Continuing with “The Road” and “Snowpiercer”, both set in a post-apocalyptic world where the emphasis is on survival, societal breakdown, and environmental degradation. Subsequently shown is “Alita: Battle Angel,” where social inequality and the struggle for identity in a divided world serve as a bridge towards a more personal narrative. Then questions of identity, control, and alienation are continued in “The Skin I Live In”, while opening up the way to a highly emotionally charged and personal narrative in the struggle of self-expression and connection in “I Killed My Mother”. For a moment of reflection, consider “Lost in Translation” and the subtle portrayal of loneliness in a globalized modern world. This modernization contrasts nicely with “Into the Wild”, where the protagonist yearns for the wilderness to escape societal norms, but unfortunately, it leads to tragic consequences. Then, continuing with psychological isolation and grappling with existential dread in “Melancholia”. Finally, the festival concludes poignantly with “Erin Brockovich,” as this film, based on a true story, leaves viewers with a sense of empowerment and justice, creating an impression of resolution.

Illustrations



Analysis of illustrations

I chose both of these illustrations because they showcase the vastness of the environment and how isolated we can be within our surroundings. I deliberately chose to juxtapose natural and urban elements within the illustrations, as the films on my film festival list explore both settings as well. Furthermore, I thought the first image spoke to the desire to create or find something good or beautiful within the chaos, and fighting for this found beauty can be isolating, as others will try to stop you from nurturing it or take it away from you, as seen, for example, in the film *Erin Brockovich*. While the second illustration portrays the serenity of nature, it also conveys an overwhelming sense of aloneness within the vast wilderness, as seen, for example, in the film *Into the Wild*. Together, these illustrations create a sense of being simultaneously alone, while finding beauty within, with a hint of ominous feelings still present.

Literary quotation

“‘There is more than one kind of freedom,’ said Aunt Lydia. ‘Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don’t underrate it.’” A quote from page 21 of “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood. It speaks to a larger idea that “there is no freedom without power.”

Rationale for literary quotation

Power manifests differently for everyone, and the consequences of power's absence or abundance are explored within the chosen films for the film festival. For example, in Snowpiercer the elite in the front sections hold the power over the poor in the tail as they control the resources aboard the train and oppress the poor by unfairly distributing the food, threatening them with firepower to do the ‘dirty work’, and force them to live in inadequate living quarters. The poor then start a rebellion to regain their power and fight for their freedom and a fair distribution of resources. While working at Dark Waters, Robert Bilott was able to fight for the victims of DuPont poisoning due to his influence and status within the legal world. He succeeded in fighting for justice due to his persistence and resources; without his help, the affected community would not have had the necessary strength to overcome the challenges. They would have remained powerless against the big corporation.

Bibliography

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid’s Tale: A Novel*. Vintage, 1998.

Wolff, Josephine. “How Is Technology Changing the World, and How Should the World

Change Technology?” *Global Perspectives* 2, no. 1. January 1, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gp.2021.27353>