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Portfolio of Writing task

When given the task to create a film based around a dystopian future set in the year 2095, I found inspiration in historical and present political events. I also found inspiration from movies, books and television shows that are in the sci-fi dystopian category, either because of how they looked, the underlying meaning made through the writing and directing or the similarities to the real world. The films, shows and books all have one common theme; revolution or rebellion. Each of them in some way have an underlying story of the fight against an oppressive government or organisation that has taken over. I wanted my film to highlight the same ideas of an individual or group trying to change the way their own world or society is operated by bringing power back to the lower-class population through an uprising or huge change in authority. To have a better understanding of how these stories are made, my research consisted of looking into how they were written and directed. What kind of choices were made when creating them and how would I be able to emulate them for my own film making practice? I also looked into what dystopia is and what are the different variations.

I first looked into what a dystopian film is, to give me a better understanding of how to create the world around the story and vice versa. I found there are usually 4 main characteristics or themes in the overall idea of dystopia, them being corporate control, bureaucratic control, technological control and religious or philosophical control, this helped me understand where my own idea for the story fits in and how I can create a specific and more defined feel to it. Typical dystopian films are often, but not always set in the future, in a society where the government is corrupt or ineffectual. The world within the film often has nightmare-like qualities, though it usually includes elements of contemporary society. Often, dystopian films function as radical political commentary and as a warning against some element of contemporary society, which was one of the main points I wanted to make in my own narrative.

Since the start of the project, I knew the government within the world of my film would be a totalitarian one, but I was unsure how to create an understanding as to why that was the case. I research into times historically where this was the case and specifically looked into Nazi Germany, reading the book, [1] *The rise and fall of the third Reich* (Shirer, 2012) I hadn't realised before but their rise to power in Germany was not forceful in the beginning, but they were actually chosen to be in power by the people, later becoming far more controlling of the country. Taking this idea of the government in charge being chosen and then turning on its people is one that fits dystopia well, and this helped me structure how I wanted it to be presented in my story.

During my research, a series that heavily influenced my ideas was [2] *Mr Robot* (2015) since it is by far my favourite show and has given me a huge amount of inspiration and ideas in terms of the directing style and how the world is built from different characters perspectives, rather than being a background for them to move in. The directing and cinematography of *Mr Robot* has many unique and unconventional styles, while they are visually striking, they have a lot of meaning and intent behind them. Tod Campbell, director of photography, said in an interview for [3] *Vulture* that he developed his directing style

based on the main characters eyes, Elliot, played by Rami Malek. He also wanted to capture the themes of the show through the way it was shot, as an example the characters are placed within different parts of the frame depending on their situation and sometimes mood or emotion. Elliot being at the centre of a hacker vigilante operation aiming to take down the world's elite few, he is often placed in the bottom left of the frame leaving a huge amount of empty space to show the weight of what is hanging over his head, this also represents the loneliness and the disconnect from others he faces throughout the series because of his mental health issues. When it comes to the way characters interact, Tom Campbell also goes out of his way to create an unorthodox and uneasy feeling in the scenes framing. What he uses is called 'Short sighting', the characters face each other when speaking however they are made to be extremely close in an uncomfortable way, rather than having some empty space between them, it is positioned so they have empty space behind them. When using this untraditional way of framing, it stops the audience from having an understanding of the special relationship between characters, which creates the feeling that the characters themselves don't understand their relationships with each other.

Using camera angles and framing to force the audience to feel a certain way seems to be overlooked in a lot of films or shows but looking into Mr Robot pointed out how effective it can be, even though the way they did it does not fit traditional ideas of filmmaking. Mr Robot has a lot of similarities with the initial task we were given, my 2095 project is based around political government control and anti-capitalism, which can be easily linked to current social and political issues we face, for example government corruption, the huge wealth and class gap and inequality of the people, which I feel Mr Robot also makes social commentary on these issues through the story. I want to create the same sense of loneliness and overwhelming responsibility in my main character, the few techniques that I found ideas from in Mr Robot have given me a better understanding of how to do this.

Another directing and cinematic style that stood out to me was [4] *Blade Runner: 2049* (2017). The overall mood and aesthetic created in the Bladerunner world is easily recognisable as sci-fi dystopian without actually knowing what the film is about. Roger Deakins the director of photography for the film stated in an interview for [5] *Deadline* that he spent a lot of time looking at architecture and how architects used light in the designs. He also mentions that he found inspiration in the unique landscapes of places like Beijing and Saudi Arabia and how weather changes the look of the scenery drastically, [6] *"We just came up with a whole selection of different ideas of architecture and patterns of light—images of the haboob in Saudi Arabia, the dust storms they have, and the dust storm they had in Sydney a few years ago. There's images of Sydney Opera House in this kind of red dust. We took things like that as inspiration for how the world was going to look."* (Grobart and Grobart, 2021). He goes onto speaking about the specific ways he went about lighting the scenes and how those choices were made, which made me think far more about how I could effectively use lighting to change the feel of the scene entirely. Deakins also mentions the range of tools he used from "large rigs where you're doing computer-controlled programming of light to chase" all the way down to "a bare bulb" for some sets. For a film like Blade runner to have such a large production team, budget and crew I didn't expect to learn they made some of the scenes with the simplest of tools, which made me think more about how I can create the look I want without having to use large expensive lighting rigs.

Inspired by Blade Runner 2049, I wanted to attempt to take some photographs to practice creating a specific mood through lighting and a small amount of editing. I took a camera out into Swansea and photographed buildings, streets and some abandoned structures. After taking them, I found a few that I felt had the right framing and fit the aesthetic I wanted to create, I then did some small editing to them to add some depth to shadows and make a colder, darker feel. The final images I created matched what I intended to create, and the task was successful.

After completing the task and creating my narrative, I soon found there were improvements to be made. Although I felt my story concept was a good standard and fit into the dystopian category, I felt I had missed out on some deeper thinking on how my story would look and be interpreted by an audience. Moving forward with this project I aim to create more depth in my story and characters, by taking examples from the things that inspired my initial idea in the first place. I plan to write a few short scripts of how I imagine some scenes playing out, like the main character almost being caught expressing their disliking of the government through art or teaching others.

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