



The Faculty of Arts and Education

## MASTER'S THESIS

Study programme: Advanced teacher education for levels 8-13, specializing in English and the humanities

Spring term, 2023

Open/Confidential

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Title of thesis:

Shaping Subjectivity: An Investigation of Societal Structures in Dystopian Literature

Keywords:  
Dystopian Literature, Ideology, Subjectivity, Surveillance

Pages: 60  
+ attachment/other: 5

Stavanger, 11.05.2022  
date/year

## Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which subjectivity is affected, through its many points of contact with the outside world. To achieve this, the thesis uses two dystopian texts, Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993) and Dan Erickson's *Severance* (2022). The thesis discusses concepts and ideas surrounding the subjects: utopia, dystopia, ideology (and different types of ideologies) and subjectivity.

The thesis operates with two major functions of dystopian literature as its backbone. First, dystopian literature amplifies the societal structures that exist in our own society and imagines them in a society that serves as a warning of what the future could look like if we do not attempt to stop the developments in areas such as technology, in the present. Second, the thesis operates with the understanding that dystopian literature is able to make ideology visible, as a consequence of the first function.

In my discussions of ideology, I will employ different theorists, from Terry Eagleton and Louis Althusser to develop the understandings of the word that thesis will operate with. Through a close reading of both works that this thesis puts into question, I will attempt to show the ways in which ideology presents itself in dystopian literature and attempt to draw lines to the real world to show what exactly these works are warning against.

## **Acknowledgements**

First, before anything else, I must thank my supervisor, Janne Stigen Drangsholt for supervising and helping me through this process. She allowed me to explore the texts and concepts that I truly found interesting and helped me along the way with great ideas.

I must also thank my partner Julie, who has been patiently waiting for me to finally finish this thesis, which has finally put an end to the many consecutive late nights, spent writing at campus.

Finally, I want to give my fellow student, Vilde, Endre and Anna Charlotte a huge mention to commemorate the 5 years we have spent together at UiS. I would not have made through those years without you all.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In this thesis I will explore two different dystopian works: *The Giver* (1993) written by Lois Lowry and dan Erickson's television series *Severance* (2022). Both of these works take place in dystopian societies cloaked as utopian places. My main aim for the thesis is to investigate how dystopian fiction is used to amplify the societal structures that surrounds us, and how these same structures shapes us as human beings. In other words, how does society shape our subjectivity? In order to achieve this, I will employ theories and concepts regarding dystopian literature, ideology and subjectivity.

The term *dystopia* is a relatively new invention in the scope of literary history, as the term first came to be in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and popularized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it shares some roots back to places that are described in apocalyptic stories found in ancient Egyptian writings. While the modern dystopia and the ancient apocalyptic share the dread and misery that accompany stories that take place in such places, they differ in one critical area. Whereas the ancient apocalyptic stories made little to no room for hope, dystopian novels written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until the present, uses hope as a driving factor for their narrative. In this sense, and many other, dystopia is closely linked to Thomas More's term, *utopia*. Utopia as a good place, and dystopia as a bad place. On the surface they seem antithetical to each other, but as I will investigate in this thesis, they share many traits.

We can broadly define three eras of dystopian literature: the modern, the post-modern and the contemporary era. The three different periods come to be because dystopian fiction is concerned with problems that exist in the context of the work. This means that throughout the last 100 years or so the themes that dystopian literature problematizes changes with an ever-evolving world. In spite of this, dystopian fiction from the different periods will employ features and methods from their predecessors. I will examine this mechanism by analyzing the two texts that the thesis concerns itself with: *The Giver*, a post-modern novel, and *Severance*, a contemporary work of dystopian fiction.

One of the main features of dystopian literature that I will investigate in this thesis is the genre's ability to make ideology visible. In our own world we can never be certain of ideology's influence on society and ourselves. In dystopias however, through their amplification of societies, they unveil ideology's methods of suppression and how they keep their dominance in society. In my investigation of ideology in the two texts I will among other

concepts use Terry Eagleton's writings on the subject of ideology and Louis Althusser's concepts of *Ideological State Apparatuses* and *interpellation*, to illuminate my analysis.

As I previously mentioned, my main aim for this thesis is to investigate what effects human subjectivity and how does dystopian literature deal with this process. In my investigation of subjectivity, I will mainly use Michel Foucault's understanding of the concept to illuminate my investigation. As well as draw on the many implications that ideology has on the human subject and its subjectivity.

## Chapter 2: Literary review

“No man is an island entire of itself; every man is... a part of the main” (reference). John Donne’s poem from 1624 starts with these words, and these words also encapsulate the core of this thesis. We often believe ourselves to be autonomous beings who are the way we are because of some innate uniqueness. However, we are surrounded by structures that constantly shape and mold us. The question, then, becomes how much of our self, our subjectivity and our identity is shaped by these structures and how much of ourselves is innate and individual? As can be seen in the quote from John Donne’s poem, these are questions that literature and stories have explored since the beginning of time, which is why it is useful to also go to this source for answers. And even more so, perhaps, to go speculative fiction.

In the following, I will investigate Lois Lowry’s novel *The Giver* (1993) and Dan Erickson’s television series *Severance* (2022), both of which are works concerned with the formation of subjectivity, albeit in a dystopian space. Dystopian literature is a genre that traditionally warns of a bad place that might exist in the future. The genre is particularly interesting to explore for the purposes of the present investigation because it typically places the individual in the midst of extreme conditions. The structures and apparatuses that mold and shape us are amplified, and thus their effect on the individual can be greater. This is also the case with the current text. *The Giver* can be seen as a typical dystopian narrative in the way that it is set in a hypothetical future and deals with common themes of totalitarianism and repression. The novel’s amplification of societal structures problematizes the position of the individual and its uniqueness in a world where everything and everyone are generated according to sameness. There are no emotions, there are no colors, no history and no uniqueness. The individual is transformed into a collective being. *Severance* on the other hand, blurs its temporal setting by mixing future with contemporary technology, and furthermore takes its aesthetic inspiration from the 1960s and the following decades, while apparently being set in a version of contemporary United States. Through its temporal ambiguity *Severance* functions to raise questions about current societal issues. Moreover, through the work being dystopian, it carries the characteristic of amplified societal structures, and is able to showcase that these issues that the show is warning against, the rapid engulfment of neoliberalism, might already have taken place. In this chapter I will explore the relationship between these two dystopias and the structures, such as society and ideology, that

the narratives seek to criticize. The main analysis will focus on the social formation of subjectivity, and I will also explore different understandings of subjectivity itself.

## 2.1 The Genre of Dystopia and Utopia

As mentioned above, Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and Dan Erickson's *Severance* both belong to the genre of dystopian fiction. Dystopian literature tells stories of miserable worlds caused by one or several world-ending events or an otherwise worsening of the world. The genre projects contemporary issues, be it societal problems or technological developments into a future that serves as a warning for what might come (Abrams 414). Many of these stories take place in post-apocalyptic settings, and the stories often revolve around a protagonist breaking free from totalitarian forces. However, the genre does not only use barren land and deserted cities as the setting for their stories, but that rather show us spaces that function as societies, albeit along the lines of totalitarian rule. George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) are examples of such dystopian texts that depict dystopias that are not caused by nuclear, world-ending events, and where the dystopian societies are similar to depictions of utopian societies in literature. It is in this latter category that we find Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and Dan Erickson's *Severance*, which both take place in non-apocalyptic places and to a certain extent take place in seemingly working societies. As we can see here, this second kind of dystopia incorporates many elements that might make it similar to a utopian society, at least on the surface level. But what is really the difference between the two – or, are there any similarities.

### 2.1.1 What does Utopia and Dystopia Mean and how do they relate?

There are as mentioned above, several points of contact between utopia and dystopia, and these will play a part in both of the analyses-chapters of the thesis. However, before investigating the differences and similarities between the two, an explanation of the term *utopia* is necessary to establish an understanding of the word within this thesis. The genre can be defined as literature “that represents an ideal but nonexistent political and social way of life” (Abrams 413). In contrast to dystopian literature, that creates terrible places, the utopian genre creates places that we want to be a part of.



However, the term did not start out as the name for the literary genre. Rather it was a word created to describe a fictional, ideal place. The term was coined by Thomas More in 1516 and was used as a name of an island in More's book, *Utopia* (Vieira 3). The word is comprised of two Greek words, *ouk* and *topos*. *Ouk*, which means "not", and *topos*, which means "place" (Vieira 4). The suffix More uses: "-ia", is of great importance on the word's meaning as well. As the suffix "-ia" is used to indicate a place, utopia is then "a place which is a non-place" (Vieira 4). It allows for the possibility of such places being real, while at the same time denying it. This is in contrast to the word More used for his island before coining *utopia*. He used the name *Nusquama* as the name for his imaginary island before he created the word *utopia*(Vieira 4). Derived from the Latin word *nusquam* which means "nowhere" (Vieira 4). Vieira suggests, that More created the word *utopia* to avoid the implications that the name *Nusquama* brings. That implication being that there is no possibility for such a place to exist (4).

In the chapter "The Concept of Utopia" in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (2010), Fatima Vieira describes some of the characteristics that makes up a utopian society and utopian literature. First, Vieira writes that even though the idea of utopia should not be viewed as synonymous with perfection or a perfect place, utopian literature depicts a "non-existent social organization which is better than" (7) our own society. Utopian literature is then an encouragement to create a better world. In contrast to dystopian literature, which tries to warn us of what the future possibly could look like if we do not change our ways. Similarly to utopian literature, the effect of dystopian texts is meant to be positive. Dystopian literature, although negative in its imagery, tries to leave the reader with a feeling of encouragement and relief (Vieira 17). First, the reader is supposed to realize that it is through "social-improvement" (Vieira 17) that we can ensure a better society is in place tomorrow, rather than through "individual-improvement" (Vieira 17). Every human on the planet has some inherent flaw to them, and the collective improvement of society as a whole is then much more helpful in creating a happy society, than if everyone focuses on their own flaw (Vieira 17). The second positive effect Vieira posits is that readers of dystopian literature are meant to realize that the society they are reading about is not the actual future, rather it is "only a possibility that they have to learn to avoid" (Vieira 17) . In other words, dystopian texts warn of a bad future, and tries to give readers tools on how to avoid the dystopian outcome.

The second characteristic of utopian literature that Vieira discusses in her is chapter revolves around utopian societies being "human-centered, not relying on chance or on the

intervention of external, divine forces in order to impose order on society” (7) and consequently, order and control over its subjects. In other words, utopias are constructed by humans in order to have complete control over society and its subjects. This is similar to the societies found in the aforementioned novels. Both, *1984* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* can be characterized by their respective strong, totalitarian regimes that have taken control over every aspect of the individual’s life.

The third characteristic Vieira introduces, is that the individual is not trusted in utopian literature, and therefore “we very frequently find a rigid set of laws at the heart of utopian societies” (Vieira 7). While it might be tempting to think that utopias are places where everything and everyone work in harmony with each other, and that the need for laws might even be lessened, utopian writers traditionally depict utopias in the complete opposite manner. According to Vieira, they are typically underpinned by a fundamental distrust of the individual that leads to strict laws that repress the individual’s nature and force the individual to act in a certain way (7). Moreover, I make this point to show the inherent connection that exists between utopia and dystopia. While on complete opposite sides of the specter in terms of what they are trying to achieve in the sense of encouraging versus warning, there are many instances where utopias and dystopias, in fact, overlap. It is in this utopia for some, dystopia for most, that we find the two texts that this thesis deals with.

The fourth characteristic of utopian literature is “its relationship with reality” (Vieira 8). This is a critical feature of the genre as traditionally, utopist writers use parts of their own societies that they think need to be changed and creates places that has solved the same problems (Vieira 8). Furthermore, the imagined places in the genre often mirror the own world. That is to say, they are often imagined as complete opposites of societies that we find in our own world. Vieira posits that a consequence of utopian literature’s relationship with the real world, is that texts in the genre often contain a “subversive message, but in such a way that utopist cannot be criticized” (8). In practice, this means that writers can criticize elements of the real world that they find problematic. If the aspects they are criticizing are favored by the ruling ideology, writers can create fictional places to criticize them subliminally, without the threat of grave consequences. As we will see in especially Dan Erickson’s *Severance* literature that criticize the dominant ideology, plays a role in characters breaking free from the suppression of ideology.

The fifth characteristic of utopian literature is that it often projects its imagine society in to the future. The earliest work in utopian writing do not exhibit this feature. Vieira argues that this is the case because one of the popular contemporary perspectives on “time” during

the Renaissance was that the concept of the “future” was meaningless, as it was in the present that everything existed (9). You cannot look into the future and try to affect it. This perspective is further strengthened when Vieira argues that “time is successive... [and] deprived of an anteriority and a posteriority” (9). This meant that in this period, utopian literature dealt with imaginary non-places in a non-temporal setting. In other words, Vieira argues that this perspective on “time”, means that utopist from the Renaissance creates places where the people who lived in the utopias did not become that way through time, they simply were that way from the beginning (9). This creates an interesting juxtaposition to what I earlier mentioned that utopian literature brings, hope for a better future. In this period of the genre, the texts did not reflect the authors’ hope for a better future, but merely reflected their wishes for what could have been (Vieira 9). A change happens with regards to the temporal setting of the utopian novel in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Here, the utopia begun to be set in the future. This is important because it meant that utopian literature, which previously only expressed wishes for what a better society could look like, now reflected what authors hoped society one day could look like (Vieira 9). There was a more tangible temporal-place for such a society to exist. Moreover, this temporal-shift also brought the setting of the stories told in utopian texts, away from the faraway, remote island and into the future in the real world (Vieira 12). The greater point that is being made here is this: when the temporal-setting of the genre shifted from a non-existing place in time and space, to a future in the real world. The goal to develop or achieve a utopian society was now viewed in terms of “historical development” (Vieira 14). In other words, there was now hope that through time and growth, you could achieve a utopian state.

In this thesis I will investigate two dystopian texts that both, in different ways, have societies within them that are presented as utopias. A question that arises is after my discussion on “utopia” is: are these actually utopian instead of dystopian texts? Both genres exist in some way to criticize the status quo. They both try to inspire hope in the reader for a better future. However, the difference in how they achieve this inspiring effect, is why I have chosen, to regard both texts as dystopian texts. While the utopian novel inspires the reader with encouragement through harmonious societies, dystopian literature inspire fear in the reader and serves as a warning for a bleak future, if contemporary issues are not resolved. In the following paragraphs I will explore dystopian literature in more detail, and it will further strengthen my positions on the two works as dystopian literature.

### 2.1.2. Three Different Dystopian Novels

The core essence that binds dystopian literature together is that it is concerned with contemporary problems that are amplified and placed in a fictional future. A consequence of such a point of departure is that the issues dealt with will change over time. These are genre-related aspects that are dealt with in the anthology *The Age of Dystopia* (2016), which is particularly concerned with dystopia's contemporary status and which looks at both classic dystopian works and the context in which they were written, as well as newer versions of similar stories and their context. The name of the book, *The Age of Dystopia*, suggests that we are living in a dystopia already. As I have previously mentioned and as I will argue later on in the chapter, in *Severance* Dan Erickson also posits this possibility. Through its history, the dystopian literature has always been concerned with the future of the individual, but in different ways and with different concerns.

In the chapter "Dystopia and the Promethean Nightmare", Riven Barton discusses three periods dystopian literature that largely correspond to literary historical periods, that is, the modern, the post-modern and the contemporary. In the earlier parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Barton explains, much of the dystopian literature was concerned with the loss of "the individual" (Barton 9). In this modern period, people feared that the ideals of communism and the rise of totalitarian regimes would cause loss of the "self", and thus this was a popular topic in dystopian literature from the period (Barton 9). Moreover, abhorrent work conditions and long hours in large factories where people were transformed into small parts in a big machine, was also causing concern for the "individual" (Barton 9). As a result, many of the dystopian novels written during this time took place in worlds where every part of society was industrialized. The modern dystopian novel viewed technology with almost a spiteful tone. The further industrialization of society brought on promises of automation, and, in return, better work conditions. However, people found themselves working longer hours and harder than ever, and the results of such an existence is a theme that many dystopian works from the period deal with (Barton 9). Examples of texts from this period? 1984?

Similarly to the modern era, the post-modern era of dystopian literature is fearful of the individual's future, but where the previous era looked at the loss of the individual as the greatest consequence of rapid societal development, the post-modern views individual loss of a sense of reality as the greatest threat against society in an era when developments in

technology caused concern for the future. As a consequence, dystopian literature in the post-modern era is defined by the protagonist's search for reality (Barton 11). During this period the world saw an increase in technological developments and, with it, questions and concerns about said technology's potential. People feared a future where technology had advanced into autonomy (Barton 11). Another pillar of the post-modern era is the abovementioned "loss of reference" to reality and self (Barton 10). Consequently, the postmodern dystopian novel often takes place in simulations or copies of the real world (Barton 11). It emphasizes the blurred the line between reality and simulation in such a way that characters experience "otherness" in two ways, or on two levels. First, the post-modern protagonist is often different from other characters in the fictitious world. Second, and possibly more salient, the characters experience "otherness" from their lack of ability to verify the experiences of their perceived reality as real (Barton 12). Barton uses *The Matrix* (1999) as an example to show how this manifests itself in post-modern dystopian literature. Here, reality is an illusion, and the real world has been overthrown by machines. Even the individuals' physical bodies become detached from their perceived reality. This creates extreme tensions between the spheres of the real and of the dream, and the whole of society, or what they perceive to be society, becomes the "other" (Barton 12). It is in this era of the dystopian novel that we also find Lois Lowry's *The Giver*. As will be explored below, in the novel all memories of the past are removed, and so are every person that lives in the community's emotions removed. All of history is collected in the mind and memory of one person, the Receiver of Memory. This becomes the novel's main character's job, and it is through this character's experience of, for the first time being able to experience emotions and receive knowledge of the past, where we find the novel's place in the post-modern dystopian novel.

In the modern and the post-modern era, dystopian literature was particularly concerned with looking to the future to visualize hypothetical potential technology and ideology. In contemporary dystopian literature, Barton argues, there has been a shift in temporality in the sense that the previously future-looking genre now deals with questions like "What if we are already living in the dystopia?" (Barton 13). In other words, contemporary dystopian literature deals much more with the present than its predecessors. Barton argues that this is because many of the warnings of earlier dystopian work have manifested themselves in the real world today. Therefore, the next logical step in the genre's evolution, is to turn the focus on the now (Barton 13). It is in this era of dystopian literature that we find the Dan Erickson's *Severance*, which takes our concerns with technological development and work-life balance and projects it on to the present.

## 2.2 The Individual and Society

In this thesis, the term “society” will play a central role in the investigation into how subjectivity is formed in the two dystopian texts in question. In dystopian novels in general, society’s role is often to act as the counterpart to the individual. This results in the protagonists often trying to overcome structures or dominant beliefs in their society. Furthermore, as we have seen above, the reality of society in dystopian literature often comes into question. In the post-modern dystopian novel, protagonists deal with questions surrounding what is real and what is a simulation. This is why it is important for this thesis to define what a society really is. The following paragraph will explain the definition of “society” that this thesis will use.

In *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought* (2007), Roger Scruton defines society as “[a]ny aggregate of individual human beings who interact in a systematic way, so as to determine criteria of membership” (649-50). In other words, a society is defined by its members’ systematic interaction with one another. In this definition, the interaction between humans is society’s key identifier. This raises questions surrounding societies that characters engage with in the post-modern dystopian novel, where society can be a threat to the individual or where it even can be a fabrication. Is it still a society if every interaction an individual have is also fabricated? Additionally, “society” is not political in its essence, but rather, politicized in its interplay with the state. The two are not the same, Scruton emphasizes, society can exist without the state, but the state cannot exist without a society. However, one might argue that, by this definition, society is inherently ideological because of the systematic interaction that takes place between its members. By following this understanding of “society”, we can draw a line to the next term that will be useful to have a grasp of, the “social”. This thesis will operate with the “social” as every aspect of life that take place within the context of any given society.

In the analyses of the *The Giver* and *Severance*, I will use this understanding of society, to be able to investigate what it is that makes a society dystopian.

## 2.3 The Individual and Ideology

A dystopian society cannot exist without an ideology that creates the extreme conditions that make it dystopian. In this part of the chapter, I will be looking at different ways of interpreting the term “ideology” and then follow up with an analysis of some of the ideologies that will play a role in this thesis.

First, ideology is a term to describe systematic approaches to forming a society. In this definition of ‘ideology’, the different approaches claim to have the answer to shape society in the best way. The different ideologies assert certain dogmatic truths that motivate their political effort (Scruton 317). In this sense of the word, we consider political, economic and cultural systems such as capitalism and liberalism, as ideologies. Each have certain dogmas that inform their political action. Second, ideology is viewed as an encapsulating force that functions to “naturalize the *status quo*” (Scruton 317). In this school of thought, the main idea does not revolve around different ideologies that claim to possess the one true way of constructing society, but rather different sets of ideas that work to keep their subjects under control. The subjugation of citizens does not have to be violent. Rather, it can be achieved through convincing its citizens that a specific set of ideas is the natural order of things (Scruton 317). In other words, ideology can be used as a tool that legitimizes the conditions that both the ruling class operate within and the conditions that the citizens live under (Scruton 317).

In *Ideology: An Introduction* (2007), Terry Eagleton provides a sustained investigation of ideology along these very lines and argues that it

is not a set of doctrines, rather it signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values and images which tie them by their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole (15)

In other words, ideology is not an explicit system that claims to have the best solution on how to form society, rather it is the way in which subjects are prohibited from perceiving the true conditions of society. Specifically, ideology is the force that shapes how we live our day to day lives and the dominant set of values and beliefs. Eagleton goes on to posit four ways in which ideology keeps its dominance in society. First, it promotes its beliefs and ideals to its

subjects (Eagleton 5). Second, ideology naturalizes its beliefs in its subjects, which in turn universalizes them. This makes its beliefs seem self-evident for the subjects (Eagleton 5).. Third, it challenges opposing beliefs and values and excludes thought that might challenge its status quo (Eagleton 5).. Fourth, it obscures subjects' perception of their reality (Eagleton 5). Eagleton argues that this definition of ideology, however convincing it seems, does not take into account the plethora of ideologies that do not hold a dominant position in society (6). For the purposes of this thesis however, this definition of ideology will be appropriate as the texts that the thesis revolves around both operate with a strong dominant ideology that operates by the four methods mentioned above.

Importantly, Eagleton's definition of ideology evokes Louis Althusser's definition in the article "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), where it is seen as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of their existence." (Althusser 1300). This definition of ideology revolves around the relationship between how we perceive our place in society and what our place in society actually is. This means, for instance, that ideology might make having a job the ultimate goal in life. When you then achieve that goal, you perceive yourself as someone who has achieved a great feat. However, in reality you are a cog in a great machine. In the article mentioned above, Althusser also investigates the mechanisms through which ideology keeps its dominance and which are responsible for the "reproduction of labour power" (Althusser 1287). In his investigations, he observes that the reproduction of the work force, is far too narrow of a scope. Rather than just focusing on actual labor forces, Althusser is much more interested in how dominant ideologies are able to reproduce subjugation to themselves. In other words, he is concerned with the mechanisms that allow ideologies to stay dominant by always reproducing new members.

To investigate these processes Althusser coins the terms "Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)" and "Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)". The RSA serves the unified repressive functions in society, such as policing (1290). The repression does not need to be of a violent nature, however, and can take what Althusser refers to as a "non-physical form" (1291). This means that institutions like the judicial system and the government will be under the umbrella of the RSA as they operate with violence. By comparison, the ideological state apparatuses exist in plurality and not as one cohesive apparatus (1291). The ISAs are all institutions that mainly reproduce themselves, and function by ideology. This includes religion, the family, schools etc. To look at how this unfolds, we can use the school system as an example, which also relates to what was said above about labor. At school, children learn how to read, write and other skills that are useful when entering the workforce. To Althusser, these skills come



second to what the ideological state apparatus of the educational system's actual objective is. In school children "also learn the 'rules' of good behaviour" (Althusser 1287), how to listen to authority and how to act appropriately in different situations. To Althusser, this is how institutions are able to reproduce themselves through ideology. The dominant ideology gains control over the population by steeping it in its ideology (Althusser 1287). Althusser uses the example of children learning to speak formal French, to make them adequate managers in factories (1287). This creates a bridge between the education system and the work force. The bridge between these two can be particularly interesting to explore in connection with the educational system in *The Giver* as well as the status of labor in *Severance*, as will be investigated below.

In his essay, moreover, Althusser argues that ideology is able to produce its subjects through a mechanism he calls "interpellation" (1306) Interpellation, or hailing, deals with how different ISAs control people, and also with how they are responsible for producing subjects. The process comprises of the ideology hailing the individual as a subject, and the individual recognizing that it is them they are hailing, thus becoming subjected to the ideology (Althusser 1306). In a practical example, this would manifest itself as someone yelling to you "Hey, you!", and you recognizing that it is meant for you, causing you to turn around. It is this act, where the system hails the individual, and the individual recognizing that it is them they are reaching out to, that comprises the creation of the subject (1306). Althusser clarifies that is not something that happens in this described sequential order. On the contrary it is innate to ideology itself (1306). Moreover, he emphasizes that "ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects" (Althusser 1306-7) and one is never not 'non-subject'. In other words, all individuals are always subjects, even before being born.

## 2.4 The Workings of the Capitalist and Neoliberal society

To investigate how the social formation of subjectivity operates, it will be useful to look at different types of societal structures and ideologies. I will here explore the concepts *capitalist realism*, *control society*, *panopticism* and *neoliberalism*. In contemporary dystopias, these types of structures are at the core of society and therefore of great importance to the formation of subjectivity. In this thesis, these concepts will be used to show how the subject is shaped in accordance with these concepts and how ideology works in our everyday lives.

In *Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative* (2009) Mark Fisher introduces the concept *capitalist realism*. At the center of capitalist realism lies the belief that “capitalism [is] the only viable political and economic system” (Fisher 2). Not in the sense that capitalism is the best way to structure society around, but that we have fallen victim to the ideology to such a great extent that there are no viable alternatives. Society has evolved incapable of ridding itself of capitalistic mechanisms. Furthermore, as a consequence of this, in a capitalist realist viewpoint we cannot even “imagine a coherent alternative” (Fisher 2) to capitalism. This Fisher writes, evokes Fredric Jameson’s idea that imagining the world ending is an easier exercise, than imagining an end to capitalism (2). In brief, at the heart of the concept lies a belief that capitalism is inevitable and eternal. Capitalist realism partly derives its power from capitalism’s ability to marketize cultures of the past (Fisher 4). In other words, by substituting the meaning of rituals and relics from the past and its cultures, into being viewed as objects that carry monetary value, capitalism takes away the power such artifacts have. The consequence of this Fisher writes, is that by capitalism preventing us from engagement with different ideologies from the past, we have become mere spectators of it (5). We are unable to use lessons from the past to alter our future. This is particularly interesting to analyze in Lowry’s *The Giver*. As I will discuss in the next chapter of the thesis, the novel deals with a society where the notion of history does not even exist. The only history present in this place, is each person’s personal history. Knowledge of past ideologies and cultures is forbidden and not even attainable to the citizens of the community, in the same way that Fisher explain capitalism realisms gains some of its power through preventing us from engaging with past cultures in a meaningful way.

Contemporary literature and other means of storytelling often contain anti-capitalist sentiments. This thesis discusses the dystopian television series *Severance* that is a part of this movement within media. Mark Fisher argues that this is actually a mechanism that reinforces capitalist realism’s presence in the world (12). It does not as one might think undermine it. Fisher takes on Robert Pfaller’s idea of “interpassivity” to explain how this process works (12). If the media we consume is anti-capitalist in its critiques, the media “performs our anti-capitalism for us” (Fisher 12). After we consume a piece of anti-capitalist media, be it in music, literature, movies or art, we are left with a feeling that our work is done. We allow the medium to do our anti-capitalistic activism for us. This is not to say that the pieces of media we consume are propaganda, in the same way media from the Soviet Union tended to be. Fisher argues that capitalism does not in fact need propagandized media to continue its dominance because it does not need to make a case for its existence (13). Rather, it keeps its

power through its subjects who are beholden to the ideology (Fisher 13). As long as people who are subjected to capitalism and have anti-capitalistic beliefs, “believe that capitalism is, we are free to continue to participate in” (Fisher 13) its practices. This is how the ideology can abstain from using propaganda to disseminate its beliefs and values. This also ties into the previous point that Fisher makes about there not being any alternative to capitalism, and that even imagining an alternative is impossible.

In this paragraph I will briefly discuss what Fisher believes is the families position in capitalist realism as this will be relevant for my analyses on the two dystopian works in question. In a capital realist world, the family plays an important role, and it is a similar role to the family as an ideological state apparatus in Louis Althusser’s writings. However, Fisher first argues that after the demolition of social security measures that capitalist realism has brought with it, like for instance mental health care. The family plays a major role in the way that it operates as a space for people to experience relief “from the pressures of a world in which instability is a constant” (Fisher 33). More importantly however, is the aforementioned effect that evokes Althusser’s concept of ISAs. Fisher argues that the role of the family in 21st century capitalist society, is to reproduce “labor power” (33). We can summarize Fisher’s position on the family in modern society in the following way. On one hand the family’s role in society is create new subjects that can partake in labor, and on the other hand, the family is one of few institutions that offer relief for the stresses that the capitalist society puts on its subjects (Fisher 33). As I mentioned at the start of this paragraph, the concept of family will play a role in my analyses of the two works this thesis concerns itself with. In *The Giver*, the family is one of the few places where people talk about their feelings and in general their well-being. On the other hand, in Lowry’s novel, every family is artificially constructed by the people who possess power and is shaped and molded to their liking. This is done to ensure that the community can reproduce subjects that are subjected to the ruling ideology. This is an example of how Fisher’s idea of family in modern society unfolds itself in a dystopia. It amplifies what is happening in our own world, to illuminate what the mechanism is actually doing.

In a world subjected to capitalist realism, Fisher argues that bureaucracy has taken on a new way of operating (40). He posits that It is because of neoliberalism permeation of society that a change has happened here. This new type of bureaucracy takes on its shape through phrases such as “‘aims and objectives’, ‘outcomes’, ‘mission statements’” (Fisher 40). This is particularly interesting to look at in conjunction with one of the texts of this thesis, Erickson’s *Severance*. For instance, in the show, there is a plethora of incentives that the

workers are offered in exchange of meeting their quarterly quotas. These incentives, although they are mostly children's toys, are held to a high esteem among some of the workers. As Fisher writes, in capitalist realism the value "of symbols of achievement". (42-3) is valued more than the achievement that garnered the incentive.

In Fisher's text, we also encounter the concept of "control societies", derived from Gilles Deleuze, which refers to societies where every facet of life is assembled under one corporation (Fisher 22). This creates a perpetual state of education, working etc. Fisher exemplifies this mechanism by saying that one is always "Working from home, homing from work" (22). In other words, one cannot occupy only one role at the time. As we will see in the two texts that this thesis concerns itself with. What these types of societies exploit, according to Fisher, is a shift in the type of surveillance citizens are subject to. Instead of only surveillance carried out by governments or corporations, now "external surveillance is succeeded by internal policing" (Fisher 22). In other words, governments and corporations were previously the main perpetrators of surveillance, now colleagues, friends and family now to a greater extent, police each other. An additional feature of this process is that the individual also polices itself. Fisher argues that this is the case because control is only possible if you are participating in it (22). A consequence of this mechanism is that to be in control, one has to already be under control from someone else. As mentioned, in this type of society, you are always under surveillance, either by the government, your employer, your colleague or yourself. This sort of constant and permanent surveillance by different actors, evokes Michel Foucault's concept of the "panopticon", the third concept of the chapter. In the essay-collection *Visual Culture: The Reader*, we find an essay by Foucault where he defines "panopticism" through a reference to the panoptical prison to show how subjects themselves become the bearers of their own surveillance. In a panoptical prison, there is a watchtower in the middle of a building, arranged in such a way that from the tower, you are able to see into every single cell that surrounds it. However, from within the cell, you cannot see the guard who keeps watch in the tower (Foucault 63-4). The prisoner "is seen, but he does not see" (Foucault 65). This creates a sort of internal surveillance where, because you are not sure whether or not you are being watched, you keep in line. Foucault uses school children and workers as examples how this can manifest itself outside of the prison walls, which means that the panopticon can transcend its form as a prison and operate in the greater society. If schoolchildren are always visible and not sure that they are being watched, "there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time" (Foucault 65). Similarly, if workers are

permanently in view and unsure if they are being surveilled, there is no disorder, “no theft, no coalitions, none of those distractions that slow down the rate of work” (Foucault 65).

I highlight these two examples from Foucault among the many he presents, as they are particularly relevant in connection with the two texts that this thesis deals with. While both examples are present in both of the texts, the example of the school children is especially poignant when discussing *The Giver*. In my analysis of *The Giver*, I will argue that the society we are introduced to closely resembles Fisher’s description of a control society and use concepts derived from it to investigate how subjectivity is developed in a control society and how Foucault’s panopticon operates in the novel. As will be discussed, the children in the novel are always concerned about their own and their friends’ behavior, thus evoking the panopticon. As Foucault explains, the panopticon ensures that the effects of the surveillance are permanent, while the act of surveillance itself might have ceased to operate (65). In *The Giver*, the children are always under the threat of surveillance and attendant punishment if they act or speak out of order. For *Severance*, the worker-example is apt, as will be explained in its designated chapter. Here, the main setting of the show is under heavy surveillance. There are cameras and microphones everywhere. As a consequence, the threat of surveillance makes the effect of surveillance real. The goal of panopticism is to ensure that power is allowed to operate and further itself. Foucault argues that this mechanism, panopticism, “automizes and disindividualizes power” (65), or, in other words, power is allowed to operate automatically by individuals who believe they are under surveillance. Hence, it takes away power from the individual, on to institutions. The last point will be further explored later in the chapter.

Thus, we come to the third concept, which is neoliberalism. For this part of the chapter, I will use Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (2017) as my theoretical framework. The premise of the book is to showcase in what ways neoliberalism is unravelling democracy and its principles, such as language and justice.

Before going farther into Brown’s argument, however, it is useful to fully understand her definition of neoliberalism. Rather than only viewing neoliberalism as an economical focused ideology that sets out to define policies that reinforce capitalist positions, Brown defines it as something much more deep-rooted. Neoliberalism, in her view, has developed into a fundamental part of our world. Rather than being about pushing certain policies, Brown argues that it has shaped “every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic” (10). This means that every part of the human experience is set and guided by the economic paradigm. We exist only as what Brown refers to as *homo oeconomicus* (Brown 10). In a similar way to Brown’s understanding of

neoliberalism as something that marketizes and economizes every aspect of human life, and the human itself. Mark Fisher's capitalist realism also exhibits these same mechanisms. That is "that everything in society... should be run as a business" (Fisher 17)

Brown further extrapolates how neoliberalism is a conduit in the production of subjects. She calls on Althusser's concept of interpellation and says that neoliberalism hails us as market subjects (Brown 31). This economization of the subject holds true in every facet of life, both in domains where wealth generation is the goal, and domains where it is not (Brown 31). To exemplify how people act as market subjects in places where wealth generation is not the focus, Brown uses dating and college admissions (31). Brown argues that when entering the dating sphere, people are entering it as investors, that is, people who are looking for ways to maximize their "return on investment of affect" (Brown 31). Everywhere is a market, and the subject is always a market actor (Brown 36).

Brown sees five main consequences of neoliberalism marketization of subjects (37). First, there is "no guarantee for security, protection, or even survival" (Brown 37), because of our role as human capital for the state or whatever governing body we find ourselves subjected to. By being reduced to human capital, corporations, businesses and governments can with little to no consequence move these pieces (human capital) as they please. If there is need for layoffs or other sorts of downsizing, for instance, businesses can go about this as they please to save themselves. Second, the concept of equality is void in the neoliberal zeitgeist. Equality ceases to exist since every part of the human experience is narrowed down to being human capital and the relations we have with one another are now based on metrics of capital (Brown 37). Third, Brown argues that because capital is ubiquitous, the concept of labor is gone. This entails a complete eradication of labor laws, unions and class (Brown 37). Fourth, neoliberalism's complete takeover of every sphere and its economization of said spheres, destroys political solidarity. The subject is unable to be "concerned with public things and the common good" (Brown 37), since the subject's only perspective is in terms of the market and capital. Fifth, democracy is no longer a primary concern in a neoliberal society. Here, the state is only concerned with wealth generation and growth and keeping its competitive place in the global market (Brown 38).

For Brown, neoliberalism garners its power through its stealthiness. Brown argues that it is neoliberalism's soft power that makes it so effective (35). Rather than being a repressive system that forces changes on its population through violence and dictatorship, it uses the "proper" channels to make its mark (Brown 35). Corporations lobbying for policies that will help their business and corporations further economize every sphere people interact with.

Thus, neoliberalism's modus operandi is to try being covert and not show itself too clearly. We can see similarities with Louis Althusser's Ideological State apparatus in the way it both reproduces its subjects, and how it maintains its place as the dominant ideology. As mentioned above, Althusser holds that it is through ideology that State Apparatuses are able to reproduce or indoctrinate its subjects. Much like neoliberalism's soft power, and its effectiveness stemming from the fact that it is not a repressive power, Althusser's ISAs are effective because of their nonviolent approach. The ideology in this case follows the claim that ideology keeps its dominance by making the values and beliefs of itself, seem self-evident for its subject (Eagleton 5). This is what happens in Althusser's ISAs. Here, ideology, through the education system, religion and the family for instance, teaches its subjects "know-how, but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology*" (Althusser 1287). In other words, the skills, values and beliefs you are taught through an ISA, teaches you the actual subject at hand, and steeps you in its ideology.

I want to briefly comment on the main argument that Brown's book posits neoliberalism has done to democracy. She argues that through its many mechanisms, neoliberalism is stealthily unravelling basic principles of democracy (Brown 17). The elements she refers to are among others "vocabularies, principles of justice, political cultures, and above all, democratic imaginaries" (Brown 17). Her argument is not that it is not through neoliberalism's effect on markets, governments and other political apparatuses, that the ideology is able to corrupt democracy (Brown 17). Although, the effect it has on those arenas is certainly a contributor to a dwindling democracy. Rather, Brown's argument centers around the fact that through neoliberalism's ubiquitous presence in every part of human society, it is changing the "political character, meaning and operation of democracy's ... elements into *economic ones*" (17). She uses the educational system, especially the systems concerning higher education, in the United States to exemplify the mechanism listed above. I will use this example to illuminate her argument as a whole, as it is the same mechanism of neoliberalism that operates in the educational system that operates in the other political institutions she mentions. Previously, higher education was an arena that was put in place to educate people into knowledgeable and intelligent members of society and its purpose was to reproduce culture (Brown 23). She notes that more recently another purpose of higher education garnered popularity. That is, higher education as a means to minimize social inequality, and not only educate the elites of society, but create a generally educated population (Brown 23). Under the gaze of neoliberalism however, these virtues previously found in higher education, have vanished. She points to the increasingly steep fees that

students in the US have to pay to even go to an institution that offers higher education, as one of the ways in which neoliberalism has made its mark on the area (Brown 22). It has turned the purposes of education, that is creating well-informed citizens, into creating capital. Thus, neoliberalism changes the political “political character, meaning and operation” (Brown 17) of education, into economical ones.

The deeply worrying effect that the economization of education has on democracy, Brown argues, is that today, the educational system is no longer able to educate citizens in such a way that they have the tool kit to engage with problems that concerns democracy (175). Without knowledge about structures in society, you cannot understand the problems that they create (Brown 175). She argues that developing this tool kit that enable people to engage with society in a political manner, was the chief principle for education in previous years (Brown 175-6). In other words, the goal of education was to create political humans. In recent years, she argues that education has strayed away from this. It is now an institution that produces “human capital” (Brown 176) that are adapted to work in a neoliberal society. Another dimension of the economization of education is that the people who are seeking education, have changed their motivation as to why they want to get educated. As mentioned, the notion of education as a societal good has completely dissipated in the neoliberal society. The motivation to get a higher degree of education now lies in the capital incentives that follow with it (Brown 181). Education is now a “personal investment in individual futures, futures construed mainly in terms of earning capacity” (Brown 181).

The previously discussed effect that neoliberalism has on education evokes, as I have previously discussed in detail, Althusser’s ISAs. His argument is that ideology is able to reproduce its labor force through different ideological apparatuses. If we use the education system as an ISA, students learn how to live as behaving subjects through their years at school. In other words, they are developed into subjects, subjugated to an ideology, to become workers in the society. Similarly, Brown argues that the educational system is a vessel for neoliberalism to create subjects in the way of human capital, and as a consequence of this, democracy is being degraded. This way of viewing the education system of the contemporary and neoliberal society, as something that is damaging democracy, also evokes Mark Fisher’s idea that capitalism is creating a “desacralization of culture” (Fisher 6). He argues that it is the process of making symbols of past cultures only valuable as works of art and artifacts to view in a museum, that capitalism is able to garner some of its power (Fisher 5). This process prevents people in society of learning and engaging with past history, and thus losing the ability to identify the problems that exist in their own society.



Before I move on to discuss the ways in which this thesis will engage with the concept *subjectivity*, I will briefly discuss Dennis Ray Morgan article “Inverted totalitarianism in (post) postnormal accelerated dystopia: the arrival of Brave New World and 1984 in the twenty-first century” (2018). In the article Morgan argues that in neoliberal conditions, happiness associated with success in one’s work life is a myth (230). In a neoliberal society, work drains both energy and time, and therefore leaves no space for actual pursuit of happiness (Morgan 230). If we posit that happiness is for instance is a byproduct of freedom. We can look at Wendy Brown’s idea of freedom in neoliberal societies to understand Morgan’s argument. Brown argues that freedom, a chiefly democratic principle, has lost its political meaning (177). Instead, freedom has taken on an economical meaning. In neoliberalism, because humans are also viewed in the terms of the economical, as human capital. Humans can never be free in principle. What I mean by this is that previously, one might have felt the effects of freedom when you are not working, when you are out of the realm of the economical. In neoliberalism however, you are always subjected to market, and thus never being able to free yourself from the markets. To quote Mark Fisher, you are always “working from, homing from work” (22), there is never a moment where you are not under the scrutiny of neoliberalism. We can observe this mechanism of neoliberalism that Morgan writes about in his article in *Severance*. As I will discuss in chapter 4, while the people who work at Lumon Industries have severed their memories into two halves, that have no recollection of each other. The goal of this procedure is to secure a healthy work-life balance. However, the show actually shows how in a neoliberal society, a healthy work-life balance is in fact not achievable to measures that are put in place by capitalist and neoliberal institutions.

## 2.5 Subjectivity

Before discussing my main source that deals with subjectivity, it will be useful to first have a general understanding of the term. An anthropological definition would posit subjectivity “as actors’ thoughts, sentiments, and embodied sensibilities, an especially, their senses of self and self-world relations” (Holland & Leander 130). In other words, subjectivity is an individual’s perception of themselves and their relation to the outside world, but it also encapsulates an individual’s thoughts, senses and feelings. In chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, I will investigate the effect that dystopia has on subjectivity in *The Giver* and *Severance*. In the following

discussion I will look at different ways in which this type of subjectivity manifests itself, by looking ideas about subjectivity from the Enlightenment and theories that are to be found in the works of Michel Foucault. I will then proceed to, in the following chapters, apply these understandings of subjectivity to investigate how subjectivity is formed and shaped in dystopian societies.

I will use Nick Mansfield book *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self From Freud to Haraway* (2000) as my theoretical framework when discussing the term subjectivity. Mansfield presents four ways in which “the term subject defines our relationship to the world” (3). The first way is as the “subject of grammar” (Mansfield 3) and here subjectivity is likely to be distorted in some sense, as it depends on personal experiences and interpretation (Mansfield 3). In this sense of the term, the word “I” is crucial. It is through this world that we report our lives through “I feel... I did... I think...” (Mansfield 3). The second is as a “politico-legal subject” (Mansfield 4), where we are subject to laws. As a result, our subjectivity is restricted to a certain set of values established by a certain system (Mansfield 4). It is in this sense of the word that we have collectively signed Rousseau’s “social contract”. The laws that we have agreed to follow, in some sense dictate the values that our society believes to be important, and thus those collective values become individual values (Mansfield 4). The third is as the “philosophical subject” (Mansfield 4). Here, Mansfield takes inspiration from Immanuel Kant and places the subject in the “centre of truth, morality and meaning”, which means that he relates it to a higher authority than the ideological or political system that the subject finds itself in (4). The final way is the “subject as human person” (Mansfield 4). This, Mansfield argues, is where we find the subjectivity that is regarded as identity (4). Furthermore, it involves how we shift our personality depending on how we want to be perceived (Mansfield 4).

In his discussion, Mansfield shows how our understanding of “subjectivity” has developed from the Enlightenment to today, and he draws upon the works of thinkers like Descartes, Rousseau, Deleuze, and Haraway. For the purposes of this thesis, my focus will mainly be on Mansfield’s discussions of Foucauldian understandings of subjectivity. Significantly, Foucault rejects the Enlightenment’s ideas of an autonomous subject. In the Enlightenment, the idea of the subject as autonomous and unique can be found in the work of philosophers like Rousseau (Mansfield 16). Subjectivity is to Rousseau something one is born with and something that is innate to human nature and which is later disrupted and tainted by external forces (17). Defeating those external forces and rejoining yourself with your true nature is, to Rousseau, the only way to truly be human (18).

Foucault is critical to Rousseau and the Enlightenment thinkers and voices some of the same concerns that we find in dystopian literature in the modern and post-modern periods. To Foucault, the subject is a cultural construct rather than something autonomous and authentic (51). The foundation for this construction is “power”. Foucault’s understanding of “power” is derived from Nietzsche and revolves around institutions, rather than individual people, as “power-wielders” that use power to create a well-organized population (58). This evokes Fisher’s control society and Althusser’s concept of ideological state apparatuses. They all have in common that it is not single individuals who in fact are in control. It is institutions or corporations who are the real power-wielders. For Fisher, a control society is governed under one big corporation and for Althusser, there are several ideological institutions, like religion or the educational system, who creates subjects and suppresses them. In addition to where power accumulates, its effectiveness in creating control, Foucault argues, stems from humans’ eagerness to feel free, autonomous and unique (55). What he means by this is that by viewing ourselves in the way Rousseau and thinkers of the Enlightenment did, that is, as autonomous individuals, we allow power to work in the shadows. This evokes Mark Fisher’s ideas on how a population is controlled in a control society. As signaled above, Fisher notes that “internal policing” has, to some extent, taken over the need for mass surveillance executed by the government (Fisher 22). In the same way that the previously discussed Foucauldian concept “panopticism” also posits that a type of internal policing has taken over. It is through individuals being unable to verify that they are being watched that they begin to surveil themselves or act orderly (Foucault 65).

Subjectivity, for Foucault, is produced through “the relationships that form the human context” (Mansfield 52). These are power-based relationships which are ubiquitous in society, including, for instance, your relationship to the place you work at and other institutions that you engage with. For Foucault, the subject is constructed through power, and subjectivity, in turn, is produced by the subject’s relations to those same powers. It is then the manifestation of power that assumes its subjects’ subjectivity. Louis Althusser also speaks about these power-based relationships in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1971).

For the purposes of this thesis, Althusser’s ISA (Ideological State Apparatus) of the family might be relevant. A family that is expecting a child, just by the act of expecting alone, interpellates the child as a subject. The child is being born into a set of rules, norms and expectations that it will adhere to. Furthermore, it is born into the role of son or daughter and that also carries certain expectations. Traditionally, boys and girls, from the moment they are born, are viewed through different lenses. These lenses often decide the child’s subjectivity in

their childhood years. The family can then play a major role in how subjectivity is formed, but also what that subjectivity looks like. I highlight this example in this part of the chapter because it is particularly relevant to one of the texts that the thesis revolves around, *The Giver*, where the family plays a pivotal role in the development of subjectivity in the novel. Furthermore, it is an important part of how the ideology that the society is beholden to makes it subjects.

We will understand more of these concepts that I have laid out in this chapter as we now move on to the analysis of the two dystopian texts that this thesis concerns itself with. In chapter 3 I will use the theories and concepts that I have laid out in this chapter to inform my analysis of Lois Lowry's *The Giver*. By developing an understanding of the concepts discussed above, I will be able to investigate what that molds and shapes subjectivity in a dystopian society set in a hypothetical future. In chapter 4 I will analyze Dan Erickson's series, *Severance*. By employing the same concepts and theories that I did in chapter 3, we will be able to investigate differences in how the societies in the two texts, use the same mechanisms, but set in, not only two different eras of the dystopian genre, but also how the two different temporal setting affect the applied concepts.

## Chapter 3: Lois Lowry's *The Giver*

Dystopian literature makes ideology visible through the genre's ability to heighten present-day political, societal or technological structures and project them into a hypothetical future. *The Giver* (1993) by Lois Lowry makes this unveiling of ideology clear through its problematization of themes such as totalitarianism, surveillance, emotion, erasure of memories of the past and questions concerning what it means to be human. The novel is a faux utopian, dystopian novel, where we encounter a society where free will, happiness and subjectivity are nonexistent. Such social and subjective liberties are mechanically and meticulously eradicated by the novel's authoritarian government. They achieve this by removing the ability to see colors, as well as by removing emotions and through a strict policing of language and, accordingly, thoughts. Every citizen is at a young age assigned a job that will be their occupation for the rest of their working lives through which they are under heavy surveillance at all times.

The novel can be placed in the post-modern era of dystopian literature as it deals with a protagonist, Jonas, who is grappling with an ever-evolving sense of reality as he undergoes training to become the new Receiver of Memory, the person who holds all the world's memories. *The Giver* borrows ideas and features from the modern era of dystopian literature that concerns itself with the loss of the individual in a world where the very idea of uniqueness has vanished. It evokes dystopian classics from the modern era of the genre, like George Orwell's *1984* (1949), where repression of emotions and individualism is a central part of the narrative. Furthermore, it evokes the dystopian texts from the post-modern era that build narratives around simulations and copies of the world as a warning of technological autonomy, in the sense that Jonas lives in a fabricated reality. He does not live in a simulation or a copy of the world in the sense that his reality is not fabricated, but at the same time, his reality is void of all things that makes life, life. This creates a narrative where on the one hand, the protagonist is grappling with his changing perception of the world as reality unveils itself to him, making him question everything he knows, while, on the other hand, we are presented with a community that is void of individualism and emotions, where everyone is a part of a big machine, and where not following suit is not an option.

## 3.1 Institutions and their function

### 3.1.1 Society and Ideology:

As discussed in the previous chapter, a core feature of dystopian literature is that it criticizes current political, societal or technological developments of the present, and projects them into the future to serve as a warning of what might happen if we do not mitigate those developments. It is therefore important to look at what sort of community Lois Lowry created in *The Giver* to understand its place in the tradition of dystopian literature and what issues she warns us against. Life in the *The Giver*'s community is described as "where nothing was ever unexpected. Or inconvenient. Or unusual. The life without color, pain, or past" (Lowry 207). In other words, it can in many ways be seen as an existence void of life itself.

We find the answer for why there is an apparent lifelessness in the community, in the society's ideological makeup. The dominant belief system or ideology in the novel, is the concept of Sameness. The ideology's goal is to create a world that is void of differences and free choice, and consequently, to control its population. The main belief of the ideology is that through minimizing or completely getting rid of any differences in society, you will create a homogenized population that is easily controlled. The ideology achieves its goal through several different processes that is either constantly operating, or through massive changes in the make-up of the world. An important factor that allows the ideology to keep its dominance in the community, is that the citizens have no recollection of the past, and no past to reference their experience up against. This evokes what Riven Barton classifies as post-modern dystopian literature. In this period of the genre, dystopian societies are often only simulations or copies of the real world. In this dystopian society however, the simulation or copy takes on a different shape. Instead of creating a new reality, Lowry dismantles it.

The ideology's modus operandi is similar to what Mark Fisher discusses in *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative*, when he investigates how capitalist realism is able to gain some of its power. Capitalist realism is in essence, the belief that capitalism is "the only viable political and economic system" (Fisher 2), and we are not able to imagine a viable alternative. If we extrapolate this idea, and remove "capitalism" from the equation, we can use this same idea on the ideology that we find in *The Giver*. We can then say, that Sameness keeps its dominance by presenting itself, as the only viable option with regards to how to structure society. Moreover, the novel takes Fisher's latter point and pushes it to the extremes,

as is the function of the dystopian novel. The latter point of Fisher's capitalist realism, just to reiterate, is the idea that we are not able to envision a viable alternative to capitalism. In a capitalist society, Fisher argues this happens through a marketization of history (4). If we, instead of learning from the past, and engaging with the cultures and ideologies that previously existed. We are only mere spectators of past cultures and ideologies. Only viewing it through artifacts in museums. Lois Lowry, as I mentioned, amplifies the idea. In *The Giver*, the people of the community are not even able to be spectators of history, as they are oblivious to its existence. The only history that they are aware of, is their personal one. This is one of the ways in which, Sameness presents itself as the only alternative, because the people have no knowledge of any other way of structuring society. A consequence of this, is that they are able to minimize the difference in people's knowledge levels. There is not, in the eyes of the ideology, a reason to worry that someone in the community possesses any knowledge that might damage its power.

There are other ways in which Sameness seeks to reduce or in many cases completely, get rid of differences in life in the community. In order to minimize differences in physical appearance they have "genetic scientists" (Lowry 119) working to ensure physical similarity. As is mentioned in the novel, the scientists that work on this have not yet perfected this process and is thought to "drive them crazy" (Lowry 120). While one could suggest that this would enable the ideology to be vulnerable to attacks on its dominance, this is not the case for a few reasons. First, in view of Fisher's capitalist realism, the ideology does not have to be perfect or infallible. It only has to manage its subjects in such a way that the ideology is the only viable option. In this novel, the ideology has achieved this. Second, the ideology has provided itself with several fail-safes that will ensure that if there are any differences in how the people look, in this instance. The ideology has ensured itself through removing color from the community. Furthermore, the community have in order to minimize differences in landscape they have flattened every hill visible to the community. They have managed to control weather in order to minimize differences in seasons. Every part of life in the community is governed by Sameness. Its goal is to secure its own reproduction and it achieves this through the processes that I have discussed above.

Before delving in further into the novel, it will be important to create a general understanding of how the society is built up. First, we can look at the interpersonal power structure that community operates with. The community is structured in a hierarchical manner. At the top sits the Committee of Elders who are responsible for handing out Assignments, creating rules and are "the leaders of the community" (Lowry 19). They have

the most power of any group in the community. They are the equivalent to a national assembly that we find in many countries around the world, however, they are not voted to a seat on the Committee of Elders. The novel never reveals by which merits the people who sit on the committee are chosen, but I argue that in view of my previous discussion of the ruling ideology in the novel, that the people who are chosen to sit on the committee, are people who the ideology interpellates as true believers in its beliefs. As I will discuss later on in the chapter, the Committee of Elders are also responsible for deciding which man, and which woman are compatible as partners in the community, and when they are ready to receive children. I choose to mention this here, because this plays such an important role in both how the society works in general, but more importantly, how subjectivity is shaped in the community.

Underneath the Committee of Elders on the hierarchical pyramid, the next group of people are workers in the society, who have received Assignments that hold a certain sense of worth. Most of the adults in the community can belong in this group. It encompasses the jobs Jonas' parents have for instance. His father who is a "Nurturer" (Lowry 20), explains that he "felt very fortunate" (Lowry 20), to have receive this as his Assignment. This suggests that there is also a hierarchical structure that supposes value to some jobs, but not to others. It is here we find the next group of people. The assignment of Birthmothers, referring to those who are responsible for birthing babies for the community, is viewed as "a job without honor" (Lowry 67). This suggests that despite the undeniably important role they serve the community, their role in the hierarchy is low, as they present the third class of people in the community together with night workers and Laborers. I suggest the reason for why the community view the role of Birthmother as something undignified is the fact that the ideology, Sameness, has such a dominant present in the community. Consequently, people who carry and birth children are a small minority of the population. They are the only ones who have experienced bearing a child. This makes them different to every other woman in the community. If every individual in the community is subjected to Sameness, the fact that Birthmothers are different to everyone else, could suggest that they are viewed as having less virtue, because they exhibit this otherness.

As we can see in my discussion above, in *The Giver*, the presence of a dominant ideology is felt throughout every aspect of life in the community. The ideology's complete engulfment of the community evokes Terry Eagleton's definition of the word, where he states that



Ideology is not a set of doctrines, rather it signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values and images, which tie them by their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge (15)

One of the main features of the community in *The Giver*, is the people's perception of their societal conditions is manufactured to eliminate free will. The ideology achieves this by making itself seem self-evident to its subjects. This is one of four ways according to Eagleton, ideology keeps its dominance. The people themselves believe that the system that they live in is the best and most efficient, even Jonas exclaims "We don't dare to let people make choices of their own" (Lowry 124) after conversing with the Giver about the idea of free will. The ideology has naturalized itself in its citizens, making its beliefs seem self-evident. Not only does this mechanism evoke Eagleton, it also brings to mind what Mark Fisher calls capital realism. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, in brief, capitalist realism is the idea that capitalism is the only way to structure society, and people cannot envision any other viable option (Fisher 2). In this scene where Jonas exclaims how the society would not "dare to let people make choices of their own" (Lowry 124), we can see Fisher concept in full effect. At this stage of Jonas' journey, he cannot even comprehend the idea of free will. The idea to let people decide what they want to do with their lives, seems extremely alien to Jonas. He does not have the reference points of past cultures and ideologies, to possess the knowledge of a world where free will is a reality. Again, this shows the important role that history has in how the ruling ideology is able to maintain its position, as both Fisher and Wendy Brown writes about in their respective works.

In order to better understand how ideology functions in the society, I will in the following paragraphs look at some of the institutions that are part of everyday life of citizens in *The Giver's* community and their ideological functions.

### 3.1.2 Education

Like in other dystopian novels, the educational system in *The Giver* is used to create desensitized subjects and to minimize the risk of subjects opposing the status quo. The function of the ideological educational system is to get the children ready for their working-life and their life within the ideology. The school in *The Giver* has four different subjects, that is, "language and communications; commerce and industry; science and technology; civil

procedures and government” (Lowry 112). These subjects give us an indication of what this society values as useful skills and important sciences. First, “language and communications” is a subject where the children acquire language. More importantly, the subject teaches children how to accurately communicate. For instance, learning to never lie is “an integral part of the learning of precise language” (Lowry 89). This ensures the state does not have to worry about their subjects lying to authorities. Furthermore, the school is an arena where the Committee of Elders can monitor and surveil the children to be able to assign them an appropriate Assignment.

We can see a clear example of how exactly the school prepares them for a life in the ideology in a scene where the narrator is explaining how the children will be studying for the Assignment they just got: “Each night for years the children had memorized the required lessons for school, often yawning with boredom. Tonight they would all begin eagerly to memorize the rules for their adult Assignments” (Lowry 83). The educational system is in this case naturalizing the act of memorizing school material, to make memorizing “the rules for their adult Assignments” (83) seem self-evident. This evokes one of the four ways Eagleton proposes that ideology keeps its dominance, by naturalizing its beliefs in its subjects. Furthermore, this process also brings to mind Althusser’s concept of Ideological State Apparatuses. In this case the ISA of the educational system, not only do the children learn skills and subjects, but also how to behave in the meeting with ideology. This in turn, makes the school in *The Giver* function as a bridge, to not only be a productive member of the labor force, but also to create subjects who behave in accordance with the ideology. Importantly, this is how the ideology is able to reproduce itself. Another aspect of the educational system in *The Giver*, is the ceremonies they perform every year. Importantly, the final ceremony, the “Ceremony of Twelve” ends their education.

As mentioned, the twelve ceremonies that children go through from ages one through twelve is an important part of life and an institution in *The Giver*. The ceremonies serve as transitional stages between the ages and bring with them small changes to the everyday life of the children. The ideological function of the ceremonies is to ensure complete control over children’s development and minimize the ability for self-expression. We can look at a few of the ceremonies in more detail to identify these two processes. During the Ceremony of Ten “females lost their braids at Ten, and males, too, relinquished their long childish hair and took on the more manly short style which exposed their ears” (Lowry 59). This shows how the state limits self-expression in the community and it indicates a shift in the children’s development from children to young adults.

The Ceremony of Eleven is only noted as “a marking of time with no meaningful changes” (Lowry 60). However, the changes that come with the ceremony, are tools that limit the children’s self-expression: “There was new clothing: different undergarments for the females ... and longer trousers for the males, with a specially shaped pocket for the small calculator that they would use this year in school” (Lowry 60). They are throughout their life as children, not allowed to choose their clothing. This all in the name of Sameness, which restricts choice and wants to ensure that there are no differences. The ceremony also shows how interconnected all of the institutions in this society are.

The most impactful of the ceremonies, is the Ceremony of Twelve. Here the children get their Assignment, the job they will have for the rest of their working-life. This ceremony signifies the end of the children’s childhood, and the start of their adult lives. The ceremony also has the possibility to completely change someone’s life. As the job they get, is the only one they will have for the rest of their lives. With the exception of Birthmothers, who will after “Three years ... [and] Three births” (Lowry 7), no longer be viable to serve in their role, and are moved to work as Laborers, who are the ones in the society who carry out most of the physically intensive labor in the community. This closely resembles what Althusser posits ideology does to create its subjects, it interpellates them. Moreover, it interpellates them in such a way that they never have chance to break free from the ideology’s hailing. As I discussed in the previous chapter, interpellation is the act of ideology calling out to an individual and calling it its subject. The pivotal part of this process is that the individual recognizes that it is them, specifically they are referring to. In the Ceremony of Twelve, we can see this same process play out. Many of the children already now, or have a strong feeling as to what their assignment will be. We can use Jonas’ father who explains how the year he took part in the Ceremony of Twelve played out. There is “increasing level of observation” (Lowry 20) of the children who are next in line for the ceremony. The presence Committee of Elders, the group who assign children to their future job, becomes stronger. This surveillance takes place in all of the institutions that children engage with on a daily basis. Again, showing the interconnectivity that all of the ideological institutions have. Jonas asks his father if any of the children were disappointed in the role they were assigned, to which he answers: “No...Of course the Elders are so careful in their observations and selection” (Lowry 20). This interaction I believe exemplifies Althusser’s concept of interpellation. The subjects recognize that this is their role, and accepts.

### 3.1.3 Families

In chapter 2, I discussed how Mark Fisher views the concept of family within a capitalist realist framework. The family is an institution that plays two different roles in contemporary society. On one hand, it is place for people to escape the pressures of society. On the other, its purpose is to reproduce workers (Fisher 36). In *The Giver*, the influence and the function of the family unit evokes both Althusser's concept of ISAs and Fisher's aforementioned capitalist realist family. In the novel, the family unit is an ISA as it is an institution of the community that operates through ideology. There are several ways in which Lowry makes this clear to us. First, the creation of the family unit is unnatural or artificial. Every unit consists of a pair of adults and two children, one girl and one boy. What is more, the reason for this organization is that this is believed to be the most efficient way to structure the family unit. Since there is no free will, one cannot choose or create one's own family.

As a consequence of the lack of free will, and choice that lies within the family unit, the every-day life of the family is clearly structured by the ideology. In the novel, the family follows the previously discussed rituals and get food delivered for each meal of the day. Even after Jonas has gone through a long period of training and has yearned for the choice to choose, even he still believes that this way of structuring families is the best way because "We really have to protect people from wrong choices" (Lowry 124). This speaks to the naturalization and universalization of ideology that Eagleton writes about, which makes the beliefs of the ideology seem self-evident. Even though Jonas has been able to remove himself from the grapples of the ideology, the values and beliefs that it holds still hold on to him to a wavering degree.

How the family unit is formed in *The Giver* is important to how the society reproduces itself. Once you reach a certain age are given a spouse. However, a partner is not randomly chosen for you. The Committee of Elders match couples after carefully considering the compatibleness of the two future spouses. This process of consideration is called "the Matching of Spouses" (Lowry 61), and several features of the two people in question are meticulously monitored before their Match is approved. Their "disposition, energy level, intelligence, and interests – had to correspond and to interact perfectly" (Lowry 62) before being approved. I argue that this done for the complete opposite reasons that is suggested towards in the novel. Instead of finding matches that "correspond and interact perfectly" (Lowry 62) in the sense that they fit together as a romantic couple. They match two people

that they are sure will not match on a personal level, to avoid attraction and love at all cost. In the ideology's eyes, to "correspond and interact perfectly" (Lowry 62), would be to not have chemistry in a way that would weaken their allegiance to the community. The reason that such a relationship would damage ideology is for one, because of what Terry Eagleton describes regarding how ideology legitimizes itself. For it to keep its power, it has to be ubiquitous. Thus, within the framework of the novel, for Sameness to keep its dominance, *everything* has to be the same. The artificial creation of the family unit is one of the tools of control that the state has over the people of the community. It enables the state to construct the everyday life of the population and has everything to do with eliminating choice, one of the key tenants of Sameness. After being given a spouse, the married couple can apply for children. The rules are simple, "Two children – one male, one female" (Lowry 11) is given to each Match. This only happens after being carefully monitored by the Committee of Elders for three years, and the applying to receive the children. The Giver was once sought to advise the Committee of Elders on if they should change the limit to three children for each family unit. He used his memory of the past and saw that "hunger...The population had gotten so big that hunger was everywhere" (Lowry 140-1) was one of the consequences of rising populations and therefore the motion to increase the limit of children per family unit was denied. This is an interesting point to take a closer look at within the context of the community in the novel and in connection with what Fisher writes about the importance of engagement with history. This scene can show us how when all the memories of the past are installed into only one person, wrong interpretations of the past might be done. Although hunger can be a result of overpopulation, it does not necessarily come about in the way that the Giver, in this instance, might have thought. The novel leaves us with an impression that the size of the community is in accordance with a small town in our world, everyone seems to know each other, or at least have knowledge about everyone. I suggest that this is the case because of Lowry's persistent use of the word "community" when referring to the society in the novel. The society also presents itself as a utopia, suggesting that growing food is not a problem they are likely to encounter. These two points lead me to suggest that the community could afford to let each family have one more child. I believe this is an important point to be made because it shows us the power that knowledge of history can have. If the community had access to other kinds of historical sources, that did not depend on the interpretation of a person who only have experienced history through memories of other people, they could have known that letting each family unit have one more child, would not bring on hunger. This again speaks to the control the state has over the population. The function of ideology in this

case, is not to maximize the reproduction of labor, rather it is as Eagleton posits, to keep the status quo.

The children themselves are not created by the Matches, they are born to Birthmothers, whose job it is to keep the stream of newborns running in the community. After being nurtured in the Nurturing facility and deemed ready for placement, they are given to applying Matches or couples. When children grow up and become adults, the parents in the unit are moved away from the dwelling where they lived with their spouse and children. They are moved “to live with the Childless Adults” (Lowry 128). The ideological function that this serves, is that the adults have performed their function and duties as parents which is to raise children that will fit in and uphold the ideology of the state. When the children become adults, they are “no longer needed to create family units” (Lowry 128) and are therefore moved away from the familial dwellings.

The community revolves around controlling its citizens. Every part of life in the community is in one way or another, a method of control and the family unit plays a key role in this system. We can look at the several rituals the citizens take part in the family context, to look at how this presents itself in the novel. During breakfast, each member of the family unit talks about the dreams they had the previous night. We can call this “The Ritual of Dreams”. This ritual is used to suppress feelings of for instance lawlessness. During one of these rituals, Lily, Jonas’ sister, tells of a dream she had were she had against the community’s rules, used her mother’s bicycle. This becomes a moment where the family unit discusses the warning that the dream presented Lily with. The narrator tells us that Jonas rarely dreams. His dreams are fragmented, and he does not have the capacity to put them together in a meaningful way to be worthy of telling during the ritual. However, during one of the rituals Jonas has something to tell and it’s an even more telling example of the ritual’s function of suppression of feeling than the previous. “It was only me and Fiona, alone in the room, standing beside the tub.” (Lowry 45) he explains, alluding to the sexual nature of his dream. In this community, strong feelings of any manner are suppressed especially feelings that can create rifts in the structure of the society. Therefore, is this instance where Jonas tells of his first “Stirrings” (47), interesting to look at in connection with the response he gets from his parents after telling them about it because it tells us something about how the community manages to control its citizens. Jonas’ mother offers him a pill as treatment for the Stirrings. A pill that every citizen takes after they experience their first Stirrings. This pill represses these feelings, leaving every citizen void of any sexual thoughts and feelings. This is how the community is able to

convince its citizens that their way of creating a family is the only one that, not only exists, but is the one that is most effective.

The ritual functions to reveal thoughts of disobedience or feelings that are not wanted in the community, to suppress them before they present themselves outside of the dream-world. Evoking what Mark Fisher writes about surveillance, in a control society, the authorities are not the main actor in surveillance of its citizens. The citizens themselves, to a greater degree undertake the surveillance of their co-citizens and of themselves. There is evidence in the novel that the function of these rituals that take place in the family unit is to report thoughts of disobedience and non-wanted feelings. After a short conversation with his mother about his Stirrings, Jonas asks her if he has to report it to the people in charge. Which his mother answers “You did, in the dream-telling” (Lowry 47). This reveals the surveillance and keeping people in check that Fisher talks about. That it is a goal in and of itself for the authorities to make the citizens keep each other in check.

This scene showcases a common feature of dystopian literature, the surveillance of its subjects, and as such it evokes Foucault’s panopticism. As discussed in the chapter 2, Foucault’s concept of the panopticon or panoptical surveillance, takes place when the subject is aware that they may be watched, but is not able to verify if they actually are being watched (65). As a consequence, the effects of surveillance become permanent, while the actual surveillance might have ceased. This allows for power to take a less active part in creating order in society. The subjects, by being under the impression that they are under observation, will control themselves to behave appropriately, and partake in an internal surveillance of themselves. In scene from *The Giver* discussed in the previous paragraph, it is not only the parents who keeps Jonas under surveillance. Rather, Jonas is himself the one who “assures the automatic functioning of power” (65) in the sense that he immediately asks if he has to report it his “stirrings”. He does this because he is used to be under constant watch, from his parents, friends, school and state and even himself. The goal of a panoptical society is to shape subjects in such a way that the power-wielders do not have to interfere to heavily in keeping its subjects in order. Foucault believes that power’s effectiveness comes from its ability to work in the shadows.

An even clearer example of panopticism in practice in *The Giver* is the children’s own surveillance of each other and themselves. Throughout the novel, characters are constantly apologizing for various things that they have done that might only slightly skew from behavior that is allowed. In most cases, these apologies precede any negative sanctions put upon them. As these characters are used to being under constant watch, the continuous

apologizing might suggest that if they are caught not apologizing appropriately, there might be consequence. One scene that is particularly interesting pertaining to panopticism and the incessant remorsefulness is when, one afternoon, some of the children in the community are playing pretend war. Jonas refuses to participate after his newly acquired knowledge of the atrocities that war naturally brings with it. Asher, one of the children in the community speaks to Jonas in a crass manner, but shortly realizes that Jonas' status as the Receiver of Memory demands a certain respect when addressed. Asher says: "I apologize for not paying you the respect you deserve" (Lowry 169). This suggests that, as previously mentioned, there might be consequences to not apologizing and people in the community are at all times not able to verify if they are being watched. This turns the burden of surveillance on the individual rather than the power-wielders. In the same scene, we also get to see how they control each other. As previously discussed in the chapter, preciseness of language is a major component of everyday life in the community. Just before Asher's apology, he remarks that games are not part of his "area of expertdness" (Lowry 168). To which Jonas quickly corrects him and says "expertise" (Lowry 168).

The only place where Jonas is relieved from his duties to constantly apologize for any minor inconvenience is in the Giver's office (97). This is a place that is void of the constant possibility of surveillance that exists everywhere else in the community. In this space, Jonas is free from the fear of being watched that exists in the panopticon...

Similarly, to the Ritual of Dreams, the family unit participates in what we can call the Ritual of Feelings. This ritual takes on a similar shape and function to the previous one, but in this ritual the family divulge their feelings to each other. With what we already know about emotions and feelings in this novel, this ritual might seem unnecessary. If they do not experience emotions or feelings, then how are they able to, each and every day, have conversations about those feelings. The reason is the same in this ritual as the previous one, however, to make sure that no one in the family unit have feelings that they are not supposed to have, to make sure that everyone is the same for the sake of Sameness. In the first chapter of the novel, we observe this ritual in action. The context of the scene is that Jonas struggles to put into words what he is feeling. He starts out frightened, which turns into eagerness and finally ends up in apprehensiveness. He is experiencing this fluctuation of emotions due to the upcoming Ceremony of Twelve where he will get his Assignment. This changing experience of emotion is interesting to consider in relation to the aforementioned lack of feelings people in this community have. The question then becomes why are people in *The Giver* deprived of emotions and what is the ideological function that it operates by?



In an attempt to answer the question above I will use a concept derived from Rebecca Solnit's *The Mother of all Questions*. In the book she discusses repressing emotions or silencing men in connection with their emotions as functions of the patriarchy (Solnit 28-9). The consequence of this function is that men who do this become vulnerable to the patriarchy. They become engulfed in it. To exemplify this mechanism, she uses her experiences with gay men, and juxtaposes it to her experience with heterosexual men. She writes that "many of the gay men in [her] life seemed more whole than most of the straight men [she's] known" (Solnit 29). She argues that it is a certain type of masculinity that brings with it the mechanism of repressing feelings. The processes that are at play in Solnit's writings, I argue also find place, in *The Giver*, and can give us a possible answer as to why the ideology have taken away emotion, and moreover, what its ideologic function is. If we use Solnit's train of thought, we can posit that in ideology, emotion is one of few ways in which subjects can fight against the ideology. Through repressing these emotions, the ideology is able to produce subjects who are vulnerable to it. In contrast, subjects who do have emotions, are stronger in the meeting with ideology. The ideological function of repressing emotions, is then, to create vulnerable subject.

### 3.2 The individual in the modern dystopia, the post-modern dystopia and in *The Giver*

As discussed by Riven Barton in "Dystopia and the Promethean Nightmare", in the modern period of dystopian literature, the future of the individual was the core concern, specifically, the loss of the individual. A consequence of this is that the texts from this period often concern themselves with societies where the individual is lost in the collective system. In the post-modern dystopia, Barton argues, authors are still worried about the individual's future. Here, the individual is not to the same extent melting into the collective mind, however, but losing its sense of reality by simulating worlds that blurs the individual's perception. In *The Giver*, the representation of the individual can be seen as a combination of these two types or, indeed, concerns.

On one hand, the individual is lost. Through Sameness, the individual has lost everything that makes it unique. Differences between people are minimized through genetic coding and limited choice of clothing. Evoking the modern dystopian texts' concern with the individual, the people in *The Giver* are much less individuals, in the sense that there is

something unique about them, and more viewed as one collective being. On the other hand, the individual lives in an altered version of reality. This only reveals itself, however, after Jonas has started his training with the Giver. As discussed in chapter 2, utopias and dystopias are created by humans, and for humans. A consequence of this is that it is only the human who can break free from the dystopia, and that it is with the individual the hope lies.

### 3.2.1 The individual rebels against the state

This focus on the hope that lies within the individual is something that Lowry signals very early on. For instance, we quickly learn that Jonas is different from everyone else. Instead of dark eyes like everyone else in the community has, his eyes are pale. He randomly experiences flashes of color, an ability we learn is called “seeing-beyond” (Lowry 114). He is not only outwardly different than everyone else, but he is internally different. The reason he is assigned as the new Receiver of Memory is because he has this ability to “see-beyond”. In other words, the rest of the community can only see in shades of grey and lives entirely in Sameness, Jonas can sometimes see beyond the grey veil. This could suggest that Jonas not only has the ability to see flashes of color before his training with the Giver, but also the ability to experience true emotion. The Receiver of Memory is the person in the community that is selected to keep “the memories of the whole world” (Lowry 98). The people of the community do not have any knowledge of the world beyond its borders, or of the past. This is reserved for the Receiver of Memory, who can be called upon by the Committee of Elders to give advice on issues that they do not have experience with. The Giver, the former Receiver of Memory before Jonas was selected, whose job it is to transmit the world's memories to Jonas, speaks of a greater communal function that his role serves, as the Committee rarely calls on him to advise them that “they need a Receiver to contain all that pain. And knowledge” (Lowry 131). This remark follows a story of one time where some memories were released “to the place where memories once existed” (Lowry 131), the people of the community. This created a period of chaos, as the emancipated memories contained knowledge of suffering like they never had experienced. With this release of memory, knowledge that the state does not want the people to access, also was released. The function of the Receiver of Memory is then on one hand, to keep knowledge of pain and suffering from the people, and on the other, and maybe more importantly, keep away knowledge that would disrupt the control the state has on the community.

There is also evidence that suggests that has reference points in his memory of being frightened. As this discussed previously, reference points in one's memory, might be what makes emotions genuine or at least makes the experience of them more powerful. A year prior to the events that is told in this novel, a plane flew over the community. Again, Jonas goes through a series of emotions: fascination with the plane, then anxiousness because this was not usual cargo plane that often flew by, but fighter jet, and then being frightened. "The sense of his own community silent, waiting" (Lowry 3) made him terrified. Jonas is able to, in the present, use the reference point of the plane flying over the community that had led him to be "frightened then" (Lowry 3), to compare the way he was feeling in the present about the upcoming Ceremony of Twelve and conclude "It was not what he was feeling now" (Lowry 4). Jonas, juxtaposing these two events and their accompanying emotions or feelings lends credence to my assertion that the memory of an emotion in the past, and the experience of an emotion in the present is strongly linked, and that this is an ability that Jonas possesses even before he starts his training with the Giver. If we compare this scene of Jonas comparing his two experiences with fright, with the scene were Jonas comes to the realization that the emotions the people of the community experience are not true emotions, we can see a similarity in his invalidation of those feelings. The similarity in the way that Jonas invalidates his own feelings at the beginning of the novel, with the way he negates the feelings that his sister and mother experienced later in the story, both stem from the remembrance of an emotion. In the first instance, Jonas makes the decision that he is not afraid because "he remembered that moment of palpable, stomach-sinking terror [...] It was not what he was feeling now" (Lowry 4). It is the recollection of the past memory where the emotion was so strong that it created "stomach-sinking terror" (4) that made him realize fright, was not what he was feeling with December approaching. Similarly, the same thought process is used to assert that Lily could not have felt anger because when he had experienced anger, it was a feeling of "rage that welled up so passionately inside him that the thought of discussing it calmly at the evening meal was unthinkable" (Lowry 165).

These two scenes are interesting to look at in relation to one another because of when they happen in correlation to Jonas' journey of becoming the Receiver of Memory. The first scene takes place before Jonas is assigned the role and is therefore clueless to what he learns to be true emotion during his training. The second scene takes place after Jonas has gone through training for some time. Similarities between the scenes also appear in the language that is being used to express the memory of an emotion. In the first scene being afraid is described as "palpable, stomach-sinking terror" (Lowry 4), while in the second, anger is

described as “rage that welled up so passionately inside him” (Lowry 165). Both descriptions use language that speaks to the physicality of experiencing emotion. Here, it is important to remember what Jonas calls Lily’s anger, impatience and annoyance. The two previous recollections of being frightened and being angry are much more similar, then any of them are to Lily’s anger. This suggests that my previous assertion that Jonas already has an ability to experience emotions due to his ability to see-beyond before even starting his training, to some extent holds true.

### 3.2.2 Can the individual save the world?

This doubled focus of the novel with the loss of the individual, on one hand and loss of reality on the other, creates a conflict within Jonas where he wants to share “his new awareness to his friend.” (Lowry 125) as he now sees how deprived the community is of everything that accumulates into life, while simultaneously not wanting to distance himself too far from the community in fear of losing the safety that he feels there. This conflict fully reveals itself in the final pages of the novel, after he has run away from the community and is struggling for food and motivation to keep going on his mission. His mission being, getting as far away from the community so the memories he has been given by The Giver would release themselves to the people in the community. In this scene Jonas grapples with the idea of choice: “Once he had yearned for choice. Then, when he had had a choice, he had made the wrong one: the choice to leave. And now he was starving. But if he had stayed... he would have starved in other ways. He would have lived a life hungry of feelings, for color, for love.” (Lowry 217-8). Jonas on one hand, regrets his decision to leave behind his community, his parents, his sister, his friends and safety. On the other hand, he accepts the hardships that have come with his choice to leave because what he gained from what he has experienced is much greater. This puts into question what life in the community actually is.

The dystopian nature of the novel *The Giver* (1993), is apparent from the first sentence: “It was almost December, and Jonas was beginning to be frightened” (Lowry 1). The choice of framing the sentence with “almost December” and “beginning to be frightened”, tells us that there is something about ominous about December or what happens during the month. Additionally, December can signify the end of something, as it is the end of the year, and therefore it might be the ending of something that frightens Jonas. We come to

learn that in December, Jonas will go through the Ceremony of Twelve, where he and all of the other Elevens will be given their Assignments. Assignments are jobs that are chosen for them by a committee, which they will have for the rest of their working life. This then suggests that what Jonas might be frightened about ending, is his childhood, a theme explored later in the novel.

The destruction of nature is a feature of dystopian literature that is used to realize the consequences of human interference with it. The genre visualizes the destruction of nature caused by present day developments in for instance the capitalism, wars and conflict, and global warming. This is present in *The Giver*. The first time Jonas receives a memory from the Giver, he for the first-time experiences snow and hills. The descriptions that Jonas gives of both snow and hill reveals to us how little the people of the community actually experience of their surroundings. During Jonas' first encounter with snow, snow is described as "bright, whirling torrent of crystals in the air" (Lowry 102). He has no word for it because he never experienced it. This short description also alludes to their inability to see color. The use of description words like "pale", "dark", or in this instance "bright", is used as replacement words for colors. This will be delved more into later in the chapter. During Jonas' first encounter with a hill, it is described as "a long, extended mound that rose from the very land where he was" (Lowry 103). This description makes the very idea of hills and mountains seem almost outlandish. The Giver later reveals why the concept of snow and hills are foreign to the people of the community, Sameness. An idea that is best summed up ("The life where nothing was ever unexpected. Or inconvenient. Or unusual. The life without color, pain, or past." (Lowry 207)). In the distant past it was decided that to achieve this life of convenience, predictable weather would be practical for farming reasons. Snow then served no purpose, so they got rid of it. Hills were flattened to make it easier for vehicles to move around efficiently. Notably, the Giver mentions that hills "made conveyance of goods unwieldy." (Lowry 106). One could argue that this puts into question the true motives behind flattening landscapes and weather control. Instead of Sameness being the goal, the financial benefits that would come from such measures, could be argued to be the true motives.

The artificial suppression of emotions is another dystopian feature found in *The Giver* and it plays a major role in Jonas' character development. In the community where Jonas lives, people experience what they imagine emotions are, they get angry, frustrated and sad. However, they never actually experience those emotions. When they are angry, all they really feel is "Shallow impatience and exasperation" (Lowry 165) because they lack the reference points or memories that makes those emotions genuine. In other words, without a memory

that is tied to a certain emotion, that emotion cannot be fully experienced. Jonas realizes this because he has anchor points in his memory that are tied with different emotions, which makes him able to fully experience them. He can be angry because he has “experienced injustice and cruelty” (Lowry 165). He can feel sadness because “He had felt grief.” (Lowry 165). It is the reference point that exists in memories that make emotions real.

As I discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, Foucault rejects the ideas of subjectivity from the enlightenment. In this novel, I argue that we can see a journey from the Foucauldian concept of subjectivity, to the Enlightenment version of the word. The Foucauldian subject is created through Foucault’s understanding of “power”. As I have discussed in this chapter, it is through this power that the subjects in *The Giver* are produced. It is through the different ideological functions that I have explored in this chapter that we find the creation of the subject. Thus, as creation of subjectivity, in the Foucauldian sense, happens through the subject’s relationships with those powers. Here, it is Jonas’ relationship with his family, school and other institutions that are present in the novel. In this novel however, it is not until Jonas at the end of the story begins to break free from the ideology and realizes what it actually means to be human. As I have discussed previously, in the Enlightenment, subjectivity is something that you are born with. It is the external structures that taints it and the only way to truly be human is to defeat those structures, and to rejoin your lost, innate subjectivity. This is important for the novel suggests that Jonas is not able to be truly human before two things happen. First, he learns about the past, and with historical memory and knowledge the world unfolds in front of him. In response to a yearning to break free from the grasp of ideology he wants to tell everyone what he has discovered. Ultimately, he flees the community, and it is not until then that he is truly able to be human.

## Chapter 4: Dan Erickson's Severance

In *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (2010), Fatima Vieira lays out the foundations for a typical narrative in utopian literature. A man or woman arrives at a utopia, gets a guided tour, an explanation of the social, political and economic organization of the utopia and at the end it implies the return of that man or woman to their home country. On their arrival they speak of the utopia they have visited, and how there are better ways of organizing society (Vieira 9). This is similar to the way we are introduced to the world in *Severance*. We view this interaction between a newcomer and an inhabitant of the society, and the interactions that takes place between them. However, the society that we meet in *Severance* is far from a utopia, although it leads itself to believe that.

As signaled above, *Severance* (2022), unlike Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, which takes place in a dystopian future, is set in a reimagined, present-day America. We follow Mark Scout (Adam Smith) who works in the Macro Data Refinement department (hereafter MDR) of a mega-corporation called Lumon Industries together with three other people: Helly (Britt Lower), Dylan (Zach Cherry) and Irving (John Turturro). Lumon Industries has developed a procedure that allows one's memory to be split in to two non-coalescing halves, called "severance", which Mark has received to help him with the grief following his wife's death. Lumon claims that severing is the solution that will allow for a stable work-life balance and recommend the procedure in order to prevent "yourself to snap beneath the wight of your stressful and unbalanced life" (Severance.wiki). Throughout the series, this is problematized through the characters conflicts with the dominant ideology. It is in this procedure that we find one of the core warnings that this dystopian text engages with, the eradication of work-life balance in the framework of neoliberalism. The show creates a dystopia where the marketization of the individual, and, in turn, the perception of humans as capital in the meeting with neoliberalism, is elevated, allowing us to see how structures that are basically in place today affect the human experience. The show is able to heighten the effects of these structures by creating a world within the office building where the individual starts out as a blank canvas for the ideology to paint itself in its own image. The consequence of this is that the individual becomes a "perfect subject".

Before I delve into the analyses section of this chapter, I want to briefly present the characters from the show that it is useful to have knowledge about. The four main characters of the show is Mark, Helly, Dylan and Irving. They work together on the severed floor of the

Lumon Industries and all do the same meaningless work. Their supervisor, Mr. Milchick (Tramell Tillman) is always omnipresent and is under their religious fanatical boss, Harmony Cobel.

#### 4.1 Dystopia/what does the society look like

While Lois Lowry's *The Giver* walked the line between the modern and post-modern dystopian text, *Severance* (2022) created by Dan Erickson, balances between the post-modern and the contemporary dystopian tradition. The show released at a time where the Covid 19-pandemic still made its impact on everyday life for people in the world. The increasing popularity of working from home, meant that there were some cuts in cost of living for workers, no need to pay for transportation and eating at home instead ordering food from a restaurant every day. While there were some obvious positive effects of this new style of working, a side effect that it brought with it, was that the work-life balance of workers around the world diminished. The months of doing work from your own house, meant that the threshold for working might have increased. A possible reason for this is that the line between being at work and being at home disappeared. This might have garnered positive numbers on companies' bottom line, but for the workers that actually did the work it might have, to quote Mark Fisher, created a perpetual feeling of "Working from home, homing from work" (22). Furthermore, as I will go into more detail later in the chapter the show criticizes and warns against present day business practices of companies and corporations in the real world. That is why Barton posits, contemporary dystopian literature is asking the question: "What if we are already living in the dystopia" (Barton 13)? This is also the question that *Severance* posits. Dan Erickson creates a world, not too dissimilar from ours, to warn us against what might happen if we do not something about developments in technology and ideology. A major theme of the show is the difficulty in finding a healthy work life balance in a neoliberal society or, as Mark Fisher puts it in *Capitalist Realism*, "Working from home, homing from work" (22). Dennis Ray Morgan in "Inverted totalitarianism in (post) postnormal accelerated dystopia: the arrival of Brave New World and 1984 in the twenty-first century" (2018), as previously mentioned argues that in neoliberal conditions, happiness associated with success in one's work life is a myth (230). In neoliberal conditions, work drains both energy and time, and therefore leaves no space for actual pursuit of happiness (Morgan 230). *Severance* pushes this theme to its extremes by creating a self which is perpetually at work. It is in this way that,



dystopian literature amplifies real-world issues and structures and amplifies them and enables us to see ideology.

Erickson uses the character's life as a perpetual worker to show that this is actually what is happening now in the American society, that a lot of people are always at work. It uses contemporary issues, in a contemporary setting, to show that we might already live in the dystopia. On the other hand, there are features of post-modern literature, however they do not manifest themselves in the classical way of simulations of the world, like in the movie *The Matrix*, features of the post-modern dystopian text, appears through manufactured world inside of the Lumon building, the mega-corporation that the series revolves around. The dystopian society that is presented in *Severance* seems to be a depiction of contemporary America in the sense that, for instance, we get a glimpse of Mark's driver's license, which expires in 2020 (Good News About Hell 8:17). This is evidence that the show takes place in a reasonably close contemporary American society. However, through its aesthetic and set design, the show blurs the line between different time periods, from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

In many ways, we seem to be dealing with two different worlds in *Severance* – one that operates along the kind of ideology that we know and recognize where democratic principles and free speech rule the society, and one that is closed and totalitarian and has more in common with a typical dystopian society. The first one lies outside of the Lumon Industries building and can be called the outside, and the other one lies within the building and can be called the inside. The outside-society Dan Erickson has created does not differ too much from its real-world inspiration, although, because of the show's focus we do not learn much about the world outside of the Lumon Industries building. In other words, there is no sense of the dystopian, totalitarian, big-brother state like we find in *The Giver*. It more closely resembles current day governments, and of course the problematic issues that those birth.

First, there is not the usual totalitarian government that exists in many of the dystopian genre's text. We can see this at a dinner party at his sister's house, where Mark is confronted with the fact that he is severed by the party's guests as one of the guest remarks "we know where you fall on the congressional goings-on" ("Good News About Hell" 42:42). The fact that there are congressional hearings suggests that there is, to a certain degree, a functioning, democratic government. Second, the power corporation in the show evokes the Amazons and Apples of the world. The choice of not having a totalitarian regime in place in the show might suggest that Erickson posits that the era of totalitarian regime might be over. We are now treading into a far scarier time where we have something that is far more difficult to manage

and fight back against. Large corporations with great political power and little to no governmental oversight. In an article from *The Intercept* from 2022, it was revealed that Amazon had created a chat app that their workers could use, whose goal “was to reduce employee attrition by fostering happiness among workers – and also productivity” (Klippenstein). However, a list of planned banned words revealed that Amazon planned to ban words connected to unionization, unfair work conditions and other sentiments that were negative towards the company (Klippenstein). As will be discussed later in this chapter, this kind of sinister surveillance is also something that we find in the corporation in *Severance*. Again, then, Erickson is suggesting that we might already live in the dystopia. Companies are to a larger degree than ever before mass-surveilling their workers. In an investigative podcast from *The New York Times*, a worker explained a system in her place of work that would take a screenshot of the computer screen and a simultaneous picture of her face through the computer’s camera, on a ten-minute interval. If you were not actively working when the screenshot was taken, you would not get paid for those ten minutes (Kantor). In practice, you could work for the majority of those ten minutes, but if you happened to be gone when the screenshot was taken, you would not get paid for that work. Again, *Severance* reminds us that the dystopia is already here in terms of what Fisher refers to as control society ...

The equivalent to these corporations and companies in *Severance* is called Lumon Industries, a bio-tech corporation whose products and services are both many and obscure. As mentioned above, they have developed a procedure that allows you to have a severed memory, one out of work, and one at work, and the two memories have no recollection of each other. This effectively means that your outside self, your “outtie” as the show names it, have no memory of going to work, and your work-self, your “innie”, only remembers what has happened at work. It is in the show’s second society, that of the “innies”, where we get the more traditional dystopian society that we have come to know from the genre, which is to be found on the severed floor in the Lumon Industries building. This society is characterized by a high degree of surveillance, strict hierarchical structures, stringent bureaucracy, grueling punishments and bizarre work. The surveillance of the workers at Lumon is one of the keyways in which the upper management controls them.

## 4.2 Ideological Indoctrination: External Indoctrination

As mentioned in chapter 2, according to Terry Eagleton's definition of ideology there are four ways in which ideology keeps its dominance. First, the only text or literature that is allowed on the severed floor of the Lumon building, is text created by Lumon themselves. This also applies to art and paintings. By doing this, Lumon is able to control its subjects. Once they have undergone the severance procedure, the innie-versions of the workers will never have any knowledge of the outside world, they are essentially reborn. By creating a philosophy and a set of rules that are told to them since they have been reborn, they can shape their subjects however they want. The subjects do not have any reference point to anything else but what Lumon tells them. Second, as a consequence of the previous point, the beliefs of Lumon and its ideology have become self-evident for most of the workers. They have universalized themselves in the subjects (More). Third, by banning all text that is not created by Lumon Industries, the only beliefs and values that can be promoted are the ones that the corporation or the ideology have. The three previous ways in which an ideology stays dominant, culminates in the fourth, by obscuring reality. That is what Lumon is doing when they are banning all other literature and art, other than the ones they have created. They can manufacture the reality they want their workers to live in, as a way of controlling them.

Neoliberalism is not first and foremost an economic or political modality but rather a self-regulating rationality, and one that is detrimental to the well-being of democratic institutions as it shapes language, concepts, law, citizenship, governance, culture, and even the realm of fantasy. Eroding democracy from within, neoliberal rationality replaces politics with economics. — Whereas Stalinism or Nazism was connected to a specific place and time, neoliberalism is spatio-temporally dispersed, fluid, and seemingly omnipresent — it is not policies, but an ideological force.

Neoliberalism, as Wendy Brown argues in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (2017), is the complete economization and marketization of every aspect of the human experience. People have become human capital, or, what Brown refers to as the *homo oeconomicus* (Brown 10). In *Severance*, Mark's innie-version is the complete embodiment of this. He lives only to serve the corporation, and said corporation has complete control over every minute of his being at Lumon. As Brown argues, a consequence of the human, turning into human capital, is that it loses any security and that corporations can almost use them however they see fit (37).

Surveillance as a way of enforcing ideology: We can look at two types of surveillance that are prevalent in *Severance*. First, there is external surveillance. Mr. Milchick, the de facto babysitter of Mark, Helly, Dylan and Irving, the four people who work together in the MDR department at Lumon, is constantly either watching security footage of the group, or physically checking in on them. Throughout the show, we are shown the abundance of surveillance cameras on the severed floor, in every hallway, on every computer. Someone is always watching, or the fear of being watched is present at all times. This strongly evokes Foucault's concept of the panoptical structure of surveillance in society that I discussed in the previous chapters. Foucault posits that when you are in a position that creates the possibility of always being watched, the surveillance turns inwards. It does not matter if someone is actually watching you, the threat of it is enough. We find this phenomenon in many different sequences of the show, and this type of surveillance is arguably the one that is most used. As I mentioned, the computers in the office have cameras and microphones. This creates the threat that there is someone else on the other side of that camera that watches you. This is arguably why, Mark and Irving, at least at the beginning of the show, focused on following the rules to the point. As they have experienced, and I will discuss later on in the chapter, the punishment that they receive if they are caught not following the rules, are dire. The ideological function of surveillance in view of Foucault's panopticon, is then that ensures that it has well-behaved work force. The fact that they surveil themselves instead of being constantly surveilled by people who are positioned higher than them in the society, aids in power's want to work in stealthily. Power wants to avoid using its "power", it would rather let the subjects themselves do its work for it.

Similar to *The Giver*, the role of self- surveillance and internal policing, in contemporary society, as laid out by Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism* and through Foucault's panopticon, also have prevalent positions in *Severance*. From Fisher we get the idea that surveillance have become to a larger extent, done by the subject, either on to its peers, or onto themselves. Terry Eagleton argues that the dominant ideology keeps in dominant position in society in four ways (5). It promotes its beliefs, it universalizes itself, challenges and excludes opposing beliefs and obscuring subjects' perception of reality. Irving, one of Mark coworkers, who has been at Lumon for the longest time of the group, starts out as a completely subjugated subject. There are several instances of this in *Severance*. In the following we will look at three different spaces, where this is examined in the series.

### *The break room*

One example is “the break room”. Although the name suggests it, this is not a place where the workers sit down during their break. The show operates with a more literal meaning of the phrase. When we read the phrase, break room, we expect the meaning of the noun. We expect this because we are in a work place setting, but when true meaning of the room is unveiled, it pulls us back, and we realize that what we are dealing with is not just a work place, it is in fact much more sinister. The break room is in place to break down on any riotous or negative actions or thoughts that are caught by either external or internal surveillance. The break room consists of one desk with a screen running down the middle, and hand imprints to place one’s hands that measures one’s earnestness. The screen displays a paragraph, called “the compunction statement”, that the one who has done something to upset upper management has to read, until Mr. Milchick is satisfied in that they are telling the truth:

Forgive me for the harm I have cause this world. None may atone for my actions but me, and only in me shall their stain live on. I am thankful to have been caught, my fall cut short by those with wizened hands. All I can be is sorry, and that is all that I am (“Half Loop” 43:21)

In one scene, Helly, the rebel of the group is sent to the break room after trying to escape the severed floor. She starts out disobedient and she reads the statement reluctantly. As she reads, she gets increasingly more broken down, but at the end of the shift Mr. Milchick is still not convinced of her earnestness and says, “We’ll try again in the morning” (“The You You Are” 1:49). Of course, for innie Helly “the morning” will be in only minutes. As she walks into the elevator to leave work, she will wake up in the same elevator only moments after. This mechanism is what truly makes the break room effective. The next morning, she exclaims “I really am sorry” (“The You You Are” 3:54), which is answered with that there is no room for paraphrasing. This suggests, that even if her statement of being sorry was true, the real meaning and function of the break room, is not making subjects feel regret for their actions, but rather to break down the subject until it has no more left. Its function is to completely subdue the subject under the ideology. In the end she has read the statement 1072 times. It is through this amplification of present-day societal structures or problems, that enables dystopian literature to put characters in extreme conditions and display the effects of these structures to warn us of a possible future.

### *Perpetuity Wing*

In the following paragraphs I will investigate the importance of the perpetuity wing. In this exploration I will use Irving as the framework for the discussion. He has to follow the rules at all times and we understand that he is absorbed into the ideology's philosophy. One example from early on in the series is his suggestion to Mark on how to get Helly to find meaning on the severed floor. Instead of the plethora of incentives that they can receive for doing their work, Irving posits that "If it's a deeper meaning she craves, she should see the perpetuity wing" ("In Perpetuity" 24:31). One definition of the noun *perpetuity* that is of particular relevance to *Severance*, is perpetuity as a state of being. Being in a perpetual state, refers to being in a state of endlessness or permanence (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). In this sense, the noun not only refers to Lumon as an ageless, timeless and eternal structure, but it also functions to say something important about the state that the severed workers find themselves in. They are never not at work. At the end of the day, they walk into an elevator to leave, only to moments after wake up in that same elevator to start their shift. Now why call it the perpetuity wing then. I suggest that has something to do with the diffuse nature of time in the show that I have spoken about previously in the chapter. Although Lumon Industries was established around 200 years in the past. A part of their ethos is to build up their ideology to emulate religion and its sense of infinity. In other words, Lumon Industries have crafted their story and created a Jesus/God-figure in Kier Eagan, the company's founder. By making him this God-figure, the ideology is able to break free from the constraints of the temporal restrictions and is able to evoke him, in the same vein Christianity evokes the words of their God. In addition to perpetuity as a state of being, the fact that the word has a plethora of definitions, speaks to the jumbled nature of Lumon and its ideology. By hiding behind the several definitions, the true goal of the ideology might be lost.

The perpetuity wing is a museum that exhibits Lumon Industries history but to Irving it functions more like a religious sight, similar to Mecca for Muslims. To him "That place is everything" ("In Perpetuity 24:48). The show presents him as one who is completely beholden to the ideology because when he first got his memory severed, he felt shapeless. He had no context of who he was. The moment he describes as the turning point was when he learned that he "worked for a company that has been actively caring for mankind since 1866" ("In Perpetuity" 39:15). He has bought in to this idea perpetuated by the corporation, and therefore acts on behalf of the ideology. He has no reason not to believe them, because his reference points of the outside world no longer exist, and he, for all intents and purposes, is

reborn for this inside world alone. It is because of this, that he, like their managers, is constantly surveilling or correcting his coworkers. He does not know a world outside of the ideology, outside of the rules and the workers' manual. Since the workers do not have any reference to the outside world, the structures that are in place at Lumon, reflect in the people who work there.

### *Optics and design*

The goal behind the severance procedure is to create an individual that is internally divided, so that Lumon is able to shape and mold their subjectivity in a way that fits their ideology. The concept of keeping literature away from the workers is an important mechanism that Lumon uses to keep the severed workers internally divided and believing in the ideology.. There are supposed to be "No books except the handbook" ("The You You Are" 19:55) as Mark tells the group after Irving found a book in the office written by Mark's brother-in-law. We can see the effect this book ban had on innie-Mark especially. After being given the book Irving found and reading it, his actions reflect an anti-establishment sentiment that has fostered within him. The sentence "Your job needs you, not the other way around" ("The You You Are" 42:36") from Ricken, Mark's brother-in law's book seems to have sparked something in Mark. The book is a cliché-ridden self-help book, but Mark especially, seems to get something meaningful out of it. It is his readings of the book that widens his scope of reality, as the work deals with issues not mentioned in Lumon text. From the book, he is able to get reference points from the outside world in relation to how a job is supposed to be for instance. One of the lines from the book that Mark reads and takes note of is the following: "Should you find yourself contorting to fit a system dear reader, stop and ask if it's truly you that must change or the system" (The Grim Barbarity of Optics and Design 9:25). Through his reading, and thus his new knowledge of what it means to be a worker, leads him to join forces with Helly who is still trying to escape her severed life. The three previous ways in which an ideology stays dominant, culminates in the fourth, by obscuring reality. That is what Lumon is doing when they are banning all other literature and art, other than the ones they have created. They can manufacture the reality they want their workers to live in, as a way of controlling them.

### 4.3 Formation of subjectivity in *Severance*

“Work and life become inseparable. Capital follows you when you dream. Time ceases to be linear, becomes chaotic, broken down into punctiform divisions.” (Fisher 34). This quote is useful in order to understand how the work-home balance is being used in both the text. In *Severance*, where on the surface, where one’s subjectivity is able to split into two different, never-fusible, identities, it would seem that work and life have become separable, the antithesis of Fisher’s statement. However, considering outtie-Mark’s evolving obsession with what is innie-self is doing this does not in fact happen. Under neoliberal conditions, the economical, is as I have previously mentioned in my discussion on Wendy Brown, always present. In *Severance*, we watch what one could describe as peak-neoliberalism. The concept of “human capital”, is according to Brown a major

Every character at one point in the series breaks free from the ideology. From the very beginning, Helly has challenged the status quo at Lumon. Mark, after reading Ricken’s book, which “opened up the world” (“The We We Are” 15:30) for him, becomes more dissenting towards Lumon. And Dylan who got to see his kid after Milchick had overridden the severance chip, resulting in innie-Dylan waking up in his outtie’s house, becomes obsessed with seeing his child again. The most striking example of a character breaking free from the grasp of ideology, however, is Irving’s descent into rebellion. As previously mentioned in this chapter, Irving was the one in the group who cared the most about the rules and the philosophy of the ideology. Throughout the series, Irving develops a relationship with Burt, who is the department head of the Optics and Design department on the severance floor. This, in the beginning, casual relationship, quickly evolves into a deeper romantic relationship. In the episode “Hide and Seek”, Irving and Burt’s relationship reaches its apex. Burt has brought Irving to a plant-filled room. A room, juxtaposed to the rest of the severed floor, filled with life (Maybe a point to say that the character’s innies, are just as alive, or maybe more alive than their outtie counterparts?). At this point, Irving is still clinging on to the dogmas of Lumon’s ideology. He rejects Burt’s passes as the handbooks “discourage romantic fraternization” (“Hide and Seek” 07:33). It is clear that Irving wants to be with Burt, but the control that Lumon has over him is that strong. His breaking point, or his detachment from the ideology, comes when Burt retires. Of course, this is outtie-Burt’s decision. It is important to



remember that for these characters, the innies, the life inside the walls on the severed floors is all they know. If we use Foucault's understanding of the subject, as a construct of power, and subjectivity, as "the relationships that form the human context" (Mansfield 52), the life that the innies experience is, according to Foucault, just as real as the outties' lives, or at least, they exist as subjects with subjectivity to the same degree as the outties do. Just as dystopian literature does with other societal structure, *Severance* amplifies Foucault's construction of the subject, by literally constructing a part of the human mind in which they are in control over.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The ever-increasing popularity of the dystopian genre through different mediums such as film, tv-series and literature, might be a bad sign for the future to come. The dystopian novel depicts a world that is worse than our own, and function as a warning for what might happen if we do not attempt to stop issues that concern our greater society. The concept of dystopia finds its background in its juxtaposition, the utopia. The good place. Thomas More's term from the 16<sup>th</sup> century that he used to describe an ideal society has taken on many forms since its inception. For the purposes of this thesis however, it has been viewed in the aforementioned way, as the good place, an ideal society that should encourage people who engage with it, to create a future that looks it. The two texts that this thesis has put into question, both present societies that themselves view as utopias. That is, the ideology of those societies views itself through a utopic lens. It is here we find what often is the case with utopias. It is a utopia for some, but a dystopia for most. This is a trend that especially in recent years have gained traction. As the want for the post-apocalyptic dystopia might have died down in recent years (with HBO's *The Last of Us* as glaring exception), the simultaneous utopia/dystopia narrative gained popularity. We do not have to look very far down into HBO's other dystopian shows to find examples of this. The recent success of the adaptation of Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is one of many of what we can call self-presenting utopias that sparked something in audiences. What, especially, recent dystopian literature, have in common and it something that might be a reason for the success the genre has had, is their temporal setting, as I have discussed in this thesis with Riven Barton's writing about the three different periods of the genre's history. He argues that in the contemporary dystopian text, many of the stories that are told are not in set in faraway future societies that warns of something bad to come. Rather, that "something bad" is already here (Barton 13). It is dystopian literature's revolt surrounding what is happening in the here-and-now that draws readers to it.

The era in which dystopian texts are written have importance on the themes that they deal with. As Barton writes, the three different periods of dystopian literature, the modern, the post-modern and the contemporary, share some of the same themes. However, their execution differs vastly. In the modern era, dystopian writers tried to warn against the rise of totalitarian regimes around the world (Barton 9). Texts from the period as a consequence, often depicts the classical "big-brother" state, found in Georg Orwell's *1984* for instance. In the post-

modern period, a greater distrust was placed on the rapid developments in the tech-space (Barton 11). As a consequence, literature from the period often depicts different manifestations of technologies as the new “big- brother” state. In the contemporary period, that we find ourselves today, we still find ourselves concerned about the same things that both previous periods did. This signaled a shift in the genre. The before future-set dystopian novel, now turned its attention to the present, and asked: “What if we are already living in the dystopia?” (Barton 13).

We can see that themes of the genre really have not changed that much throughout its life course. It is the context of when a text is written that in a way decides, what themes and conventions the novel will employ. If we take a look at the world, in the same time period that the genre has existed, can we with full confidence say that we have avoided the problematic issues that earlier dystopian novels warned against. Barton does not believe we can say this, as he posits that the contemporary dystopian text takes place in the present because we did not heed the warnings of writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We can start to move away from the topic of dystopia for a moment to introduce Mark Fisher into this discussion. In *Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative* (2009), he posits that humans, in a capitalist realist society, have obtained attribute that has been detrimental to the humanity. He posits that in such a society that I laid out above, there exists an “interpassivity” (Fisher 12) within humans. The consequence of this is as he argues, people are more than enough willing to engage with anti-capitalistic media, but they view the act of consuming that media, as enough, we can call it activism in this context. (Fisher 12) The consummation of anti-capitalist art is the anti-capitalistic act itself under the presence of interpassivity. We can extrapolate this argument and turn it to dystopian literature as well. Although it must be mentioned that much of dystopian texts are anti-capitalistic. In the dystopian context, we can view interpassivity in this way, being warned about what might happen if we do not stop the way we operate society today, is the way in which activism is done through. It is not finding ways to stop the dystopia from happening that is the activism, it is the consummation of the media at hand that. As long as we know about its existence, we are left with a feeling that we have done our part.

My aim for this thesis was to investigate hoe the subject, and in turn the subject’s subjectivity is shaped and molded. This posits questions that we can find answers in different theories of “subjectivity”. For the purposes of this thesis, I focused on in chapter 2, on Foucault’s understanding of the word, and this laid the foundation of my analyzes of the two works this thesis deals with. His understanding of subjectivity derives from the subject’s relationship with its society. The subject is in turn a consequence of a power that exists in

society (Mansfield 52). Power to Foucault, is not power in the sense that there are a few people in powerful positions. Rather, he understands it as a more ominous present that is ubiquitous in society. Subjectivity is then created and shaped through the subject interactions with power.

As I based my analysis on Foucault's subjectivity, it was also important to discuss the different mechanism that lies underneath the word "power". In the word, we find many concepts that have to do with what the Foucauldian subjectivity. First an understanding of ideology and its many functions was necessary to allow my analysis to engage with the ideologies present in the two works, and the ways in which they function. Terry Eagleton's four ways in which ideology legitimizes itself and keeps itself in a dominant position, showed pivotal to the thesis. He posits that ideology keeps itself in power because it first, promotes its beliefs to its subject. Second, it naturalizes the beliefs in its subject. Third it crushes opposing views, beliefs and values, and fourth it obscures reality (Eagleton 5). In the two texts that the thesis deals with we find these four markers. In Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), one of the main ways in which ideology promotes its beliefs, is through the educational system. One could argue that is exactly what we find in Dan Erickson's *Severance* as well. Here however, the educational system does not manifest in what we would traditionally think of when we imagine the education system. In the show, the lessons and the writings that they receive on the severed floor of the Lumon building functions in the same way that a school does. It teaches the subjects what this world looks like, and makes sure that the subjects are fit to be a part of the society they will partake in. The second process that ideology uses is also present in both texts. This point really is an extension of the previous method, but all of them are connected in some way. In *The Giver* and *Severance* they both naturalize the ideology's beliefs from birth. This manifests itself differently in the two texts, but the mechanism by which it achieves it and the function it serves are similar. As I discussed in the chapter concerning *Severance*, the severed employees at Lumon Industries are essentially reborn when they first wake up from their procedure. Similar to newborns, they have no knowledge of the world and no knowledge of themselves. This makes them just like young children, extremely susceptible to the ideology's beliefs and values. In the chapter, I drew particular focus to Irving, who arguably is the character in the show who is the most drawn into the ideology's beliefs and values. We can see the affect that ideology has, if we compare his innie-version with his outtie-version. His innie, is portrayed as an, almost god-fearing man. He is the one who has to remind Mark, when rules are broken. His outtie however, the few scenes we share with him is portrayed as tortured soul. Always depicted painting the same

dark and gloomy painting. One similarity that transcends the severed memory, is his affection for art. I will discuss this point later in the conclusion, so I will stop this point here. Similarly to *Severance*, the children in *The Giver*, is where the naturalization of the ideology's beliefs and values start. We can use the way in which children are taught to speak as an example of how this manifested itself in the novel. In the community, there is an obsession with precise language. At all times, you must use appropriate nouns, verbs and adjectives to precisely convey yourself when you talk. A part of this is that "an integral part of the learning of precise language" (Lowry 89), was to learn to never lie. This ensures that the ideology does not have to worry about people who lie to undermine the authority of ruling powers. So from a young age, so to speak, the people in both works are naturalizing their respective ideology's belief system.

Eagleton's third and fourth ways can be found by looking at how the texts deals with oppositional ideas. In both instances, opposing viewpoints and beliefs are essentially banned. Interestingly, they both evoke Mark Fisher's idea of how capitalism gains some of its power. In a capitalist realist society, some of the power that it possesses comes from the fact that it hides the meaning of cultural artifacts (Fisher 5). In other words, instead of looking backwards at cultures and ideologies that have previously existed, in capitalist realism, we are only spectators to history. We are not able to engage with, only observe artifacts and relics of a lost past in museums. The ideological function that this serve is to create a population that is not able to stand up to ideology. As Fisher posits, capitalism realism is the notion that capitalism is the only way that works, and it is impossible to imagine anything else (2). We are not able to conjure up alternatives to capitalism as a consequence of the fact that we are not engaged with our past, according to Fisher. I want specifically to look at *Severance* with regards to this as something truly interesting is happening. If we posit that we can extrapolate, when Fisher writes about the past and the artifacts, to also include art, the text showcases how art can be a possible solution to the dystopias that authors write about. I want to draw focus on to the book that the Mark, Helly, Dylan and Irving discover on the severed floor. As previously discussed, this book was left at outtie-Mark's doorstep, but was stolen by the boss that resides the severed floor. The groups reaction to the book is what I want to focus on because to us consumers of the text, *Severance*, view the writing that makes up Mark's brother-in-law's self-help book, as terrible. However, the group responds extremely strong to the book, and it truly becomes a self-help book. The actual target audience of the book could not be further from the four people the show centers around. As it is meant for the already rich. The effect the book has on the characters are similar to effects that deeply religious

people have they read their sacred texts. It is the show's catalyst for the uprising that the characters plan and execute at the end of the show. Them being able to engage with art, is what opened their minds up to that the fact there is an actual alternative. This supposes the question that in our world, that Mark Fisher describes, can we through actually engaging with art, and cultures of the past so that we can imagine an alternative to capitalism?

I want to briefly reiterate what I believe my analysis of the works have shown. Through its interaction with ideology and the ideological functions of institutions. Dystopian literature is able to illuminate how our subjectivity is shaped by our surroundings. It is able to achieve this because at the core of the dystopian novel I have found, there exist two processes that the genre engages with. First, it is able to transpose societal structures and issues of the real world into extremes in the fictional world. What this allows the genre to do is place the human in the midst of powerful structures ruled by ideology. Second, it is able through its amplification of the real world, to make ideology visible. As ideology often is describe as difficult word to understand, and ideologies difficult to comprehend, by making them visible, we can more easily perceive the effects that it has on the human, and on its subjectivity.

I want to end my thesis by discussing the challenges and limitations that my thesis had, but as well topics for further research that I believe would be interesting do in the future. First, I limited myself by choosing a new show, as it only was released last year. What this did, was it limited my scholarly work to writing that was not specific to the texts at hand. I could have remedied this by choosing different primarily literature, but in the end I felt that the two texts that I had chosen could create something interesting. As the it is expected that the second season of the show will release sometimes next year, I believe a similar thesis to this one, where the sequels to both shows are the texts in question could be interesting to look at in connection with the concept that is laid out in this thesis.

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