Lost in the Fray:
Discovering Mimesis in an Estranged World

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Abstract

Dystopian fiction achieves its creative and social-political goals when it resolves its unique tension between mimesis and estrangement. The writer must simultaneously create a world which is plausible to the reader but also unfamiliar. Not only must the tension between mimesis and estrangement be resolved, but both mimesis and estrangement must be present in dystopian fiction. Should there be little or no attempt at mimesis the text will inevitably fall into the genre of fantasy. Should there be little or no attempt at estrangement the text will become a realist text rather than a dystopian fiction. This inquiry began by seeking to resolve the tension between familiarity and alienation through a close reading of the techniques of canonical SF works (Dick, Le Guin, More) in order to see if they worked as a model for my own writing. However, as a writer, it would not have been enough to simply do a survey of these works. Such a methodology is more suited to the literary studies research inquiry. My methodological approach to the problem was to write a dystopian novella alongside my episodic readings of the dystopian works. Through the method of reading interspersed with writing, I was able to incorporate various techniques and eliminate those that did not serve the creative and social-political goals of the dystopian fiction. This process required constant reflection: on the craft of writing in general; on the craft of world creation; on the process of character development; and on my interpretation of the ‘real world.’ In the same way that a boxer cannot learn to box by simply watching others box, I could not learn to write dystopian fiction simply by reading other, albeit exemplary, dystopian fictions. Such reading is an important part of the writer’s craft, but one learns to write by writing. My approach to the inquiry has resulted in an understanding of how these writers have combined techniques of realism with fantasy story-craft to render a plausible and unfamiliar world. As a writer I am not satisfied with the novella as it currently stands. However, as a researcher of the problem, my discovery of the techniques of story-craft will enable me to apply this understanding to future projects. A further and unexpected outcome of the writing was the discovery of the importance of experiences of masculinity to my reading habits and writing goals.
Introduction
There are three concepts that are crucial to my research. They are ‘mimesis,’ ‘estrangement’ and ‘dystopia’ in fiction. My research is based on the premise that there is a type of fiction that is specifically dystopian and that central to this type of fiction are elements of estrangement and mimesis. For the purposes of my research, dystopian fiction will refer to those fictions that depict a world that can trace its beginnings in our world, but has subsequently changed for the worse. These changes may be political/social, scientific/technological, environmental or a combination of all three. However, as this exegesis will demonstrate, there can sometimes be very little difference between a utopia and a dystopia. This is due to the ambiguous nature of utopian fiction and thought. Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), arguably the landmark text for all utopian/dystopian study, was set against sixteenth-century England but was not necessarily depicting a better world by contemporary liberal/humanistic standards. The Utopians, for example, practiced slavery and were unapologetic colonisers of the neighboring peoples. Much of my research regarding dystopian fiction can be and sometimes is applied to utopian fiction as well. Gordon, Tilley and Prakash argue that ‘dystopia is a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment for society’ (2010, 2). Thus, George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1950) can be read as both utopia and dystopia.

Mimesis and estrangement are presented throughout my research as being binary opposites. Mimesis is the attempt to render realistic the world and characters of a given text (Potolsky, 2006, 12). Estrangement is the attempt to render strange the world and characters of a given text. Unlike many other binary opposites, mimesis and estrangement are politically neutral terms. However, they do not remain fixed. Given the difficulty in defining what is real, it is possible to depict a very strange world and claim that it is an accurate depiction. As a result, estrangement and mimesis overlap. Simon Spiegal argues that Bertolt Brecht developed the concept of *verfremdung*, or *V-Effekt* (defamiliarisation, estrangement or alienation) in his plays to block the audience’s empathy so as to highlight the political reality, (2008, 369). Brecht used estrangement to depict a reality that he felt his audience was blind to. At its basic level, mimesis is the device or effect most commonly associated with realist fiction. For the purposes of my research estrangement is the device or effect most associated with non-realist fiction which includes Sci-Fi, fantasy, magic realism. This approach to estrangement largely ignores the Russian formalists and their use of language made strange (Spiegal, 2008, 371). Though the use of strange language
is not entirely absent in dystopian fiction, it is the not dominant estranging force. The dominant estranging force in dystopian fiction lies in the depiction of a world that is not the one in which either reader or writer live.

In an attempt to resolve or explore the tension between these two opposing creative forces in this kind of non-realist fiction, I wrote a novella set on an unnamed continent in an unnamed time. The bulk of the story takes place in a vast and resource-rich province known as The Backwater. The Backwater is ruled by various workers’ syndicates. The syndicates are constantly embroiled in various intrigues and political maneuverings in an attempt to control and dominate The Backwater. The story begins when The Backwater is on the brink of war with its former colonial ruler, a mercantile empire known as The Metropole. In between The Metropole and The Backwater is a mountain range in which a tribe of hunter-gatherers live and in the lowlands of the mountain range an autonomous dominion of The Metropole known as The Foodbowl. The story begins at a moment of crisis for all the communities mentioned. The Metropole’s desire to expand has strained the resources of The Foodbowl such that they are not fulfilling their obligations to the syndicates of The Backwater. While the various syndicates attempt to use the crisis as an opportunity to gain dominance in The Backwater, The Metropole is also attempting an invasion of The Backwater. Within this world I explore the devastating effects of unquestioning conformity to violent, patriarchal values. This is done mainly through the character-arc of a character named Sideburns Simmons. Sideburns Simmons is a high ranking member of the Federated Tram and Track Worker’s Guild. He is fiercely loyal to those he loves and is incapable of expressing his love in any way other than violence toward the enemies of those he loves. His violent lifestyle eventually gets him killed in an ambush in enemy territory far from his home. It was my intention to create a world that is decidedly not my own while exhibiting enough similarities to the world in which I live and its history for the reader to be able to follow without feeling alienated to the point of non-interest. During the actual process of writing I tried to put all analytical considerations aside and simply write the story I wanted to tell. This story kept changing as I discovered things about myself. Such as my obsession with conceptions of masculinity and the disempowerment that comes with traditional modes of masculinity was something that became obvious at a very late stage in my writing process. I found the fiction writing the most difficult. It was when I was writing my novella that I struggled
most with the fear of failure. It was at these moments when I would feel like a failure. I have very little money, a very low income and I am engaged in a project that very few people in my life see any worth in. It was these external considerations that drove me to reflect on the working class masculinity as it was this value system I felt my family was holding me to. That I was doing this was not at first apparent. Indeed, most of the learning was done after I had written my first draft and was able to reflect on my work. This process of reflection became important to my research in ways I had not anticipated. When I tried to write creatively with my research topic at the forefront of my mind my writing, my characters and my world became contrived. I had to write first and allow the various creative impulses to express themselves in an intuitive way. These impulses included, but were not confined to, techniques of both mimesis and estrangement. After I had written my draft I had the luxury of isolating various mimetic and estranging effects and reconstruct the creative process, which led to these effects in the cold light of day.

This process of analytical reflection on my writing has shaped the way this exegesis is structured. Every chapter begins with a theoretical framing of the topic. This includes a very brief literature review and my own considerations of the theories explored. In the second half of each chapter I discuss my novella and its relation to the theoretical framing. In doing this, I fuse the analytical and the creative elements of my research into a single piece of work. It is intended that the creative piece be read before the exegesis; in that way all references to the novella throughout the exegesis will make more sense to the readers of this project and they will better be able to compare my creative writing with my commentary.

While I have written a full 32,000-word draft of the novella, I have only included for this submission the first three chapters of my novella and a brief synopsis. The draft as it stands now has various structural issues that need reworking that will be reworked in a future draft. There will be some characters I will remove entirely from the narrative. There will be a large overhaul of character voice and expressions so as to better distinguish between points of view. Finally, I intend to extend the novella into a full-length novel when I begin my second draft. A novel will allow me to comfortably explore all the themes I tried to explore in the novella. I also feel
attempting a novel on the second draft will further improve my understanding of my research thus far and provide further insights into the relationship between genre and world creation.

Throughout the writing process of both my novella and my exegesis I discovered that the act of writing is itself a method of learning. Despite all the scholarly and fictional reading I had done, the various concepts and the direction of my research did not become clear until I began writing. As a writer and a practice-based researcher, the implications of this are overwhelmingly relevant. I am yet to discover at what point in the process my writing, both the exegetical and creative, becomes mere explanation of concepts or theories rather than a method of self-discovery. The writing process has felt Socratic: the knowledge is already within me, I am simply unaware of it until I begin to write. Hughes defines practice-based research ‘as an architectonic strategy for inventing and organising discourses about cultural production in a way that such discourses are inter-woven with social, political and moral discourses’ (2006, p 286). In writing a dystopian novella, I was aiming to inter-weave various discourses regarding masculinity, patriarchy, ideology and agency while also demonstrating various mimetic and estranging techniques. I have presented my research in such a way that reflects this process of learning through creative practice and practice through creative learning.

In Chapter One I define ‘genre’ and ‘form’. I restrict the definition of genre to content and theme of a given text. Similarly, I restrict the definition of form to the physical format and technical devices of a given text. Thus for my piece, novella is its form and dystopian fiction is its genre. I argue that by employing a particular form and a particular genre the author is deliberately engaging in a dialogue with and providing information to the reader. Having established this, I briefly outline the novel’s long association with realist fiction. By using the novel form, which has such an association, the author lends the text a certain amount of authority or at the very least informs the reader that s/he should read the text as though it were a factual description of actual events that took place in an actual place. At this point I turn to the genres and texts that have most influenced my novella. Next, I discuss the British fantasy writer Joe Abercrombie (1974-). When I first read Abercrombie’s novels, I felt as though he had written them knowing I would read them. Abercrombie reinvigorated my interest in fantasy fiction. He inspired the kind of characters that would inhabit the world of my novella and inspired the kind of story that would
take place in such a world. I was inspired by fantasy but impelled to write in a genre that is often
categorised as a sub-genre of SF. This fusion was so seamless I did not realise it until I began to
reflect on my work and its influences. This demonstrates the very fluid nature of genre. My
novella is a dystopian fiction, but stylistically it has been influenced by Abercrombie and other,
very different writers such as Raymond Carver, Phillip K. Dick and Ursula Le Guin. The
combination of a form that is used by writers of realist fiction with a genre that is decidedly not
realist is the first step to resolving the tension between mimesis and estrangement.

In Chapter Two I examine dystopia in detail. I explain the relationship between utopian fiction
and dystopian fiction. I argue that the philosophical mandate of utopian and dystopian fiction is
to operate as a thought experiment. By this I mean that both utopian and dystopian fictions ask
the reader to imagine a world that was once recognisably the world in which s/he currently lives
but is somehow altered. Viewing dystopian fiction in this way highlights the absolute importance
for the dystopian writer of both mimetic and estranging devices. The dystopian world and its
history, or some aspects of it, must be recognisable to the reader, otherwise the text will fail to
engage with the existing utopian/dystopian discourse. Should the world have no estranging
qualities, or should it fail to present as a possible future of the reader’s current world, the text
will present as a piece of dark realism and once again, the text will not engage in the explicit
social-political discourse that utopian/dystopian fictions should engage in. To demonstrate this I
trace utopian fiction’s history from Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) to the present. More modeled
his text on Plato’s *Republic* in which Socrates asked his students to imagine the perfect society.
More on the other hand chose to bring his utopia into the actual reality of his text instead of
being a hypothetical scenario imagined by the characters of the text. I demonstrate how both
Phillip K. Dick and Ursula Le Guin follow a similar formula for their dystopian texts. Both bring
their perfect and imperfect societies into the reality of their fictional worlds. Both rely on aspects
of human history and politics to create new societies. And all of the universes that both writers
created speak in some way to our own experiences of the world and our society. I finally turn a
critical eye to my own novella. I highlight my intentions and explain how I wanted it to operate
as a thought experiment. I created an imagined scenario in which an ideological outlook was at
stake. I wanted mostly to portray the current masculine ideal, which is one of physical prowess
and dominance, in a world where such an ideal could thrive. In doing so, I hoped to demonstrate how limiting and damaging such formulations of masculinity can be to aspirants of this ideal.

In Chapter three I consider the role of estrangement in fiction. It traces the history of estrangement and its relation to SF studies. The concept of estrangement has been central to discussions of S.F. since S.F. scholar Darko Suvin first argued that S.F. is the fiction of cognitive estrangement (Spiegal, 2008, 369). Since then this concept has been used, re-used, defined and re-defined as more and more scholars of SF have turned their attention to science fiction studies. My chapter departs from Suvin’s formulation and relies more heavily on Spiegal’s concept of diegetic estrangement (2008, 374). Spiegal’s concept refers specifically to estrangement on the level of the story. That is, depicting a world obviously different to the one in which both writer and reader live. I then demonstrate how and where my novella employs Spiegal’s diegetic estrangement and how and where it has failed to do this. I intended to create a world that was so different that characters could behave in abhorrent ways but in the context of the story and fictional world not be seen as inhuman monsters. As a writer, I did not need to rely on language made strange, or through the use of white space and type settings render the physical text strange. The type of estrangement I was aiming for should be embedded within the story.

In Chapter four I consider mimesis. Like the chapter before, I trace the history of the term and settle on Aristotle’s approach to mimesis. Aristotle argued that mimesis has more to do with ‘fidelity to convention’ than fidelity to reality (Potolsky, 2006, 97-100). By that an artist would follow the models of artistic depictions of reality that came before them. The one commonality between all forms of fiction that stands out more than any other is the characters of these texts are human or human-like. That is, they all exhibit human reactions and emotions. They always respond in a human way to any given situation. I discovered through my reading, both fiction and non-fiction, and my writing that the more relatable a character is, the more willing a reader will be to accept them, their world view and ultimately the world they live in. While I feel that many characters in my novella are not easily identified with, there are some that have potential when I come to re-drafting. These are most often the characters that I enjoy writing. They are often the characters I feel I know well. By this I mean they are or large parts of them are based on people I know and grew up with. Using my characters as the main vehicle of mimesis is not
the only approach to mimesis. Writing style is important. I must write in a way that reminds the reader of a realist writing style. In other words I need to write in such a way that presumes the reader accepts what is written refers to actual events in the actual world. Raymond Carver did not go to lengths to explain how and why cars and fishing rods are possible and plausible pieces of technology. He wrote with the assumption that his readers already know all about cars and fishing rods. And my world must have aspects of both my world and the reader’s world present. Indeed this is not only necessary for mimesis but also for the dystopian aspect of my novella.

This project has contributed to the field of creative writing and the writing of dystopian fiction in the following ways: isolating the mimetic and estranging elements of dystopian fiction; the former being fidelity to human behaviour and conventions of the realist novel; the latter being estrangement occurring within the story rather than being a formal aspect of the text. It has reinforced the importance of creating believable and nuanced characters. Without such characters no fictional world, realistic or otherwise, will suspend the reader's disbelief. Finally, it has reaffirmed the relationship between the author's experience of the world and reaction to it and the end result of the text. Such a relationship is as important as the reader's experience of the world and reaction to the text when it comes to cultural constructions of meaning.
Chapter One

Creative Impositions of Genre and Form on Content
My inquiry deals directly with three foundational concepts or areas. They are genre, form and content. My inquiry aims to explore and resolve the tension between mimesis and estrangement in dystopian fiction. Mimesis and estrangement are devices or affects used in various generic texts. These devices inform and impose themselves on the form and content of generic texts. I have chosen to resolve the research problem through creative practice. I did not survey the entire field of utopian and dystopian literature so as to formulate a general theory that resolves the tension between mimesis and estrangement in utopian/dystopian fiction. Such an approach is decidedly academic and I identify first and foremost as a creative writer. While theory and criticism has informed my approach ultimately it is only theory until it has been tested. I have written a dystopian novella. This approach allowed me to review what I had done and determine whether or not I had solved my research problem. If so, where and how, if not, why.

The world I have created is made up of a vast resource-rich city called The Backwater. The Backwater is ruled by worker's syndicates and borders a pastoral landscape called The Foodbowl. The Foodbowl is a dominion of a distant mercantile empire called the Metropole. The novella follows the events leading up to a war between the Backwater and the Metropole. The product of my creative practice can be broken down in the following way: the novella is form; dystopia speaks to content and a dystopian novella will generally be described as a sub-genre of science fiction (S.F.). Such generic distinctions are important to my inquiry because my research is investigating the method of production of a particular genre. The categories and hierarchies and conventions of the genre directly influence its production. As a writer of dystopian fiction I did not refer to romantic novels or crime and thriller novels for inspiration and guidance. I referred to utopias, dystopias and dystopic S.F. novels. Of particular interest to me is the tension between mimesis and estrangement. Mimesis is the process by which the real world is mirrored in the text and estrangement is the process by which the world of the text is rendered different or strange compared to the empirical world of the reader and writer. It is my argument that both mimesis and estrangement are necessary for a dystopian novel’s success and it is my intention to determine what role each plays within the text. On the one hand the world must be at least partially accessible to the reader and on the other it must be obviously different and often worse than the world of the reader. I am interested in the clash or fusion of realism as a genre and the fantastic genres (SF, fantasy etc.). How is it possible to describe worlds which do not and often
cannot exist with clarity, authority and authenticity? If the world is not believable to the reader then the reader will fail to engage with the content in the intended way. For instance, Orwell’s critique of Stalinism in *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1950) would not have had the same impact if we were unable to suspend our disbelief and accept his world as a possibility albeit an unlikely one. It is my belief that there is an ontological and epistemological tug-of-war being fought between the mimetic inevitability and the estranging necessity of such genres. Estranged genres, particularly SF, push the limits of human imagination as far as possible. But, there is a limit; inevitably writers include aspects of the known world to scaffold the new or impossible. Once again we can use *Nineteen Eighty Four* as an example. Orwell constructed his fictional world out of post-war Stalinism, but his world is definitely not set in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, to assume any text is a pure mimetic realisation of the world is to accept the author’s ontological view of the world as an objective reality.

Without realism as a genre, the genres which aim to distort, re-create the world or create new worlds could not exist. Consider the tradition of romantic literature; it was a direct response and protest to the Age of Reason. In a similar way, estranged genres are speaking back to not only the world around them but to the world as constructed by other writers. They are offering the reader a chance to read about things that are not of the everyday yet are still seemingly relevant. Given the contested and rarely agreed upon history of genre, it is arguable that realism is a response to art and writing that is concerned with ideals and normative values rather than the world in which human beings live, rejoice and suffer (Wellek, 225).

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the impact on content and style of formal and generic conventions, with particular regard to dystopian fiction and realism. This detour is necessary because I am dealing with methods of production of a particular genre. Furthermore I believe dystopian fiction is a relative of realist fiction because it is employing the techniques of realism to create an alter-reality. My interest as a writer in this type of fiction began because I was a fan of such fiction. My first forays as a teenage writer were very poor imitations of George Orwell and Anthony Burgess. To understand my process as a writer of genre I must understand the history and method of genre formation. The chapter will begin with brief definitions of the above terms and basic current thought regarding the terms. It will then try to place within these
definitions the novel, realism and dystopian fiction. In this way I will build a conceptual foundation from which I can then address my research question.

This is necessary given that the novel can be referred to as both form and genre; consider these brief definitions taken from the *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*. First, “Form”:

> When we speak of the form of a literary work we refer to its shape and structure and to the manner in which it is made (thus, its style...) - as opposed to its substance or what it is about; A secondary meaning of form is the kind of work - the genre... to which it belongs... (Cuddon, 1998, 327).

**Genre:**

A French term for a kind, a literary type or class. The major classical genres were: epic, tragedy, lyric, comedy and satire to which would now be added novel and short story... (Cuddon, 1998, 342).

These definitions provide a basic platform from which I will further examine the conceptual framework of both form and genre. I intend to establish unambiguous demarcations between form and genre. I will do this by examining first, the novel as form and then, utopia and dystopia as genre. The combination of the two will result in a dystopian novel.

If we were to ask ourselves ‘What is a novel?’ We would say something like a printed and bound book of fiction. It could be argued that this answer speaks to the novel’s shape and structure and the manner in which it is made as well as its content. However, it only speaks to content insofar as it is a work of fiction. Such vague and ambiguous definitions may be adequate for a general discussion of literature, but given that I am dealing with dystopian fiction such definitions are not useful. If the novel is a genre of literature then what is dystopian fiction? It cannot be form because form does not speak to content. Is it a sub-genre of the novel? If so what are the rules that govern the novel and what are the rules that govern its sub-genres? What is the dystopian novel’s form? And finally if form does not speak to content but genre does how do the two impose upon one another? These questions can be answered or disposed of by describing the novel as form and its thematic content as genre.
John Frow’s definition of genre is far more complex and nuanced than the above definition. For Frow, genre is a system of meanings and an ongoing process of knowledge creation.

I understand genre to be a historically specific pattern of organisation of semiotic material along a number of dimensions in a specific medium and in relation to particular types of situational constraints which help shape this pattern. Genre in turn acts as a constraint upon – that is, a structuring and shaping of – meaning and value at the level of text for certain strategic ends; it produces effects of truth and authority that are specific to it, and projects a ‘world’ that is generically specific (2006, 117).

According to Frow, the novel is a genre of text rather than a physical medium, and a dystopian novel would be a sub-genre of the novel. Such a reduction of meaning removes much of Frow’s nuance and follows the taxonomical approach of Aristotle onward. Yet Frow rails against a fixed taxonomical approach to defining genre (2006, 48). He much prefers to see it as a loose system of meanings and truth values that relate to one another; that shape and are shaped by individual and collective expectations of any given generic text or artifact. Defining the novel as a mere genre is convenient. But when discussing the novel one also thinks of prose rather than poetry or verse. One thinks of chapters rather than continuous unbroken text. These are formal aspects that appear in any book of length fictional or otherwise. But would a book of unbroken printed verse be considered a novel? If novel is a genre rather than a form it is a genre that is almost exclusively reliant upon its formal characteristics. To demonstrate this S.F. can be a genre of printed fiction but it can also be a genre of film and television. There are S.F. movies, S.F. serials, S.F. comic books and much more. The S.F. genre is far less reliant on formal aspects and almost exclusively speaks to thematic content rather than formal structure. Given that S.F. and dystopian fiction are genres and speak exclusively to content rather than form why is it that such genres are so commonly manifest in the form of novels? Why did I as a writer choose the novella as the form of my dystopian story? The answer lies in the unique relationship that the novel shares with realist fiction. And this relationship goes to the heart of the tension between the mimetic and estranging elements of dystopian fiction.

Ian Watt (1963) discusses the rise of the novel as synonymous with formal realism. According to Watt, it seems that if formal realism is a genre it is a genre that can only manifest as the novel (1963, 10-11). Watt refers to the novel as both form and genre in the first chapter of *The Rise of the Novel* (10-11). In that same chapter he goes on to differentiate between novel as form and
formal realism as genre. Not that Frow is incorrect in his rather broad and exclusive definition of genre as truth making, nor is Watt incorrect in his discussion of formal realism and the novel. If formal realism cannot appear in anything but a novel or novelistic form (novella, short story) so too it appears that S.F. in its written form is unlikely to appear in anything but prose. One rarely sees any popular S.F. in verse or lyric. Freedman argues this is because of the unique nature of fiction in the novel form (2000, 80). Older styles of writing conform to predetermined convention and style. The free form, documentary style of the novel allows it greater freedom in expression and interpretation. It would be difficult to render a nuanced and complex S.F. world using rhyming couplets written in iambic pentameter. Stylistically, S.F. and realism are equally concerned with establishing an authentic and believable world.

I will discuss in greater detail the generic definitions of S.F. which for the purposes of my research also include dystopian fiction in the following chapters. Dystopian fiction requires both a mimetic quality and an estranging quality for the success of the work. If we accept Watt’s premise of formal realism being synonymous with the novel and the novel synonymous with modernity, it only seems logical that S.F. would also manifest as the novel. Frow refers to the purpose of genre as informing readers of what they should expect (Frow, 2006, 53). The novel for instance is a piece of fiction; it is supposed to be a plausible representation of the people who inhabit the world of both writer and reader. Therefore SF presenting in the novel would serve to convince the reader of the reality or potential reality of the world, its characters and plot. As a result of this unique relationship between the novel, realism, modernity and dystopia I have had to study the formal and generic conventions of both dystopian fiction and the novel in order to create a believable and yet strange world. In this chapter I argue that genre refers to the thematic content of a given text and its form is its physical layout. This distinction can incorporate Frow’s approach to genre as a system of meanings and truth-making. Both mimetic and estranging devices must play a role in the creation meaning and generic truths. The dystopian genre limits the extent to which an author can mirror the world in which he lives or estrange the world in which he lives. Failure to strike the right balance means the text has failed as a dystopian fiction.

Perhaps it would be more helpful to describe SF and dystopian fiction as genres in their own right rather than sub-genres of the nineteenth century definition of the novel. Defining the novel
as a form and the novel’s content as genre works far more harmoniously with my research than
defining novel as a broad and as a result almost meaningless genre. To demonstrate this, nearly
all definitions of genre I have read have one thing in common: genre speaks to theme and
content. What is the thematic content of the late twentieth century novel? Even if we are to
relegate S.F. romance, horror, crime and fantasy to the unflattering title of low-brow fiction, what
is the thematic content of the late twentieth century literary novel? Toni Morrison, Haruki
Murakami, Chinua Achebe are all writers whose work is taken seriously by critics. Theirs are
novels that would certainly not be categorised as low-brow or popular fiction. Yet there is no
obvious thematic link between them. It would be difficult to formulate a thematic link that
encompasses these writers but excludes the work of Ursula Le Guin and Philip K. Dick. Many of
Charles Dickens’ works were first published as weekly serials and later published as novels. But
we are not going to exclude *Hard Times* (1854) from serious discussions of the novel. We could
argue, as Frow does, that over time a text can move from one genre to another. Frow does not
stop there. He also argues that the definition of one genre can change over time. Such an
argument is implicit in the above definition. Genre is defined in relation not only to its historical
position and its semiotic material but also its relation to its situation. The novel’s situation has
changed. Its historical situation in the late twentieth century compared to previous centuries is
different. Dramatic increase in a discernible, educated reading public has meant that literature in
general has become more accessible to more people (Watt, 1963, 35-42). If we think of readers
as consumers then writers and publishers cater to market demands. The reading public is far less
homogenous than it once was (Watt, 1963, 60-61). Now novels of many genres are written and
read. Novels dealing with all kinds of themes are written and read. Given the heterogeneous
nature of the novel's contents the most obvious similarity between all novels are their formal
characteristics. This being the case a writer of dystopian fiction can employ the novel form as a
way of lending the content some authority given the novel's long association with realism (Watt,
1963, 298).

If a novel is better described as form and its genre defined by its content we then have the
beginnings of a working definition of a dystopian novel. I will define a dystopian novel as a
fictional text in the form of a novel which describes a world that resembles only the very worst
aspects of our world and our nature.
Almost as soon as I articulated this definition, problems began to appear the first of which, is the term dystopia. Of primary concern to a dystopian writer is world creation (Gordon, Tilley, Prakash, 2010, 4). Other elements, such as plot or character, are slightly less crucial. There could be a romantic plot set in a dystopian world, or political intrigue or murder mystery. These generic plot lines can take place in a dystopian world. Dystopia cannot be form because, while it may be a limited description of thematic content, it is still a term that speaks to thematic rather than structural traits of a text.

In the following chapters I will discuss generic constructions of SF and dystopian fiction in detail, but I would briefly like to mention an approach that I have found most helpful. Carl Freedman, in his attempt to define S.F., argues it is more helpful to discuss a text’s ‘generic attitude’ or its generic traits (2000, 20). As a result we could have a romantic plot set in a dystopian future with technologies that have not yet been invented. The strongest generic traits of the text would be S.F. and dystopian, but the text could be based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Frow’s approach is very similar to Freedman’s. He emphasises that genre is a rhetorical device that should be defined by how it is used rather than what it is or said to be. If this is the case, who is it used by and to what end?

Frow’s approach to genre tends to remove authorial intent from the equation. Without the author there would be no text. The author seems to be little more than a necessary and sometimes inconvenient ingredient. Given that I am a writer of an historically and politically charged genre, I feel that discussions of genre that do not address authorial intent are inadequate. The *ad hoc* nature of genre formation suggests that texts are not only defined by genre but they also define genre. They are not only conforming to genre but they have the potential to form genre, to redefine the boundaries of genre. Freedman (2000, 14-19) openly acknowledges the role of the author while Frow speaks of genre in way that distances it from authorial intent.

Consider Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* (1908) or Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1996): both of these texts are novels. But they have been deliberately written in a very particular way for a very particular purpose. This is a clear example of authors choosing the genres they are writing. They are dystopian novels. Both employ the formal characteristics of nonfiction texts.
They present as raw documents from a bygone era complete with historical footnotes and commentary. The footnotes and commentary are no more factual than the stories themselves but are written as though they were. This is not simply a fortunate accident. Atwood and London both choose a particular genre and particular formal characteristics for a very particular reason. Frow acknowledges the author’s role only in passing saying that genre provides a model for both reader and writer (2006, 112). There is no doubt that both Atwood and London have used various texts as models for their work. But Frow does not explore why an author would use one generic model over another. Or why an author would use a particular combination of generic models rather than another.

This is not to say that authors do not use genre as models or generic writing is not formulaic but, simply to say that a writer made a deliberate choice to use a particular genre or model. Genre cannot predate text. Whether that text is a spoken word piece, a cave painting, or an epic poem learned by rote, there must be a collection of texts that are similar on one level or another before their formal and generic traits can be identified.

The dystopian novel is a creative work that employs genre and form for a very particular purpose. That purpose is often political or philosophical. The novel form allows the author to present as a realist fiction and in this way the author uses the form itself as a type of commentary. By using a form that has an association with realism and mimesis to depict a different or strange world is a way of engaging in a dialogue concerning the nature of our world and our accepted views of the world. By using the novel in this way is one step toward resolving the tension between mimesis and estrangement.

For the next section of this chapter I discuss the genres and forms that have influenced my creative piece rather than trying to categorically define my piece.

My exposure to dystopian worlds began with Nineteen Eighty Four by George Orwell, followed by A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess nearly fifteen years ago. I was captured by something and have not yet managed to escape. A common theme that is present in both these texts and my novella is the dis-empowerment and control of the individual for sociological and
ideological ends. It was this aspect of limited individual agency that always brings me back to dystopian worlds. In terms of my creative piece, it will be difficult to separate the literary influences and the more personal influences. I wanted to write a story that I would enjoy reading. This has as yet not been accomplished, but it does beg the question what do I enjoy reading and why? Suffice to say my tastes are eclectic. I read poetry and I read it often. I have been impressed by the American writers Raymond Carver, John Steinbeck and Joyce Carol Oates. *The Tempest* is my favourite play by Shakespeare. I first thought of becoming a writer when I stumbled upon ‘The Tiger’ by William Blake at the age of twelve. The pleasure I get from reading good writing is a pleasure I would like to pass on to my readers. I also receive pleasure from reading about fantastically conceived worlds. The pleasure I get from reading about rather bleak and hopeless worlds is a feeling that I am not being lied to. That somebody has not contrived a story in which the good guy will win simply because s/he is the good guy. In the world I live in most people seem to break even, many suffer and a few are blessed with incredibly fortunate lives. Justice, morality and virtue have little to do with which hand is dealt to who. The ideology of manifest destiny that is reinforced and further entrenched by nearly everything that comes from Hollywood does not appeal to the vague and naive Marxist in me. Philip K. Dick’s novels often end with neither a sense of victory nor defeat for his characters, rather, with an enlightened philosophical look on life. Many of his characters are likeable but incredibly flawed. So much so that often they engage in behaviour that the reader cannot abide. The self-depreciating, dis-empowered masculinity that his male characters often portray is not only something that I have been able to relate to but also something that I saw in my own father and grandfather. As a young man desperately trying to find a balance between the models of masculinity I grew up with and socially acceptable behaviour, Philip K. Dick’s characters served as tragic if not cautionary role models. It was through them I was able to recognise mistakes that many men in my life had made and so reduce the chances of repeating them myself. These characters are by no means restricted to fantastically conceived worlds or cognitively estranged worlds, but I found it easier to learn from the characters in such worlds. The stories of Raymond Carver capture the brokenness of working class masculinity perfectly, I find too devastating for in-depth reflection on social forces, socialisation and ideology. All I am able to see are tragic people living tragic lives that are unlikely to ever change. Reading Carver is an exercise in empathy rather than revelation.
Added to the Carveresque brand of masculinity (which is very similar to Philip K. Dick’s) is a hyper-masculinity. The type most often exhibited in Hollywood action movies. Some good examples of this hyper-masculinity are characters such as John Rambo, from the *Rambo* movie series: *First Blood* (1982); *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985); *Rambo: Part III*, 1988, *Rambo*, 2008) or John Maclean from the *Die Hard* movie series (*Die Hard*, 1988, *Die Hard 2*, 1990, *Die Hard: With a Vengeance*, 1995, *Die Hard 4.0*, 2007). Though these representations of masculinity occur in a different medium than the one I am using they have still influenced my portrayals of masculinity. I personally enjoy the exploits and misadventures of these ridiculous and larger than life characters. Boyle and Brayton argue that much of Sylvester Stallone’s body of work involves the dis-empowerment of working class men (2012, 482). They analyze Stallone’s latest movie *The Expendables* (2010) from the point of view of the working class male body. This is the only commodity the working class man has and as he ages and his body weakens it is an investment of diminishing returns. The men in my life are not action heroes or soldiers. They did and do rely on their physical bodies as a means to provide for their families and fulfill their masculine duties. The biggest influence and inspiration for my own brand of hyper masculinity has come from a single source. The fantasy writer Joe Abercrombie who has written *The First Law* trilogy: *The Blade Itself* (2006), *Before They Are Hanged* (2007), and *Last Argument of Kings* (2008). He has written two stand-alone novels set in the same world: *Best Served Cold* (2009), and *The Heroes* (2011). His novels are very violent; his female characters are often strong and though not all of them are soldiers or warriors, most of them know how to fight. His stories follow the actions of kings and heroes with Machiavellian cynicism. Unlike high fantasy, such as Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (1954) there is more virtue among thieves and cowards than among kings and wizards in Abercrombie’s world. His most sympathetic characters are often the ones at the bottom of the social hierarchy and often the first to die. His novels are highly entertaining, very funny, but leave the reader in no doubt as to the reality and consequences of violence and, in particular, of war. The main characters are often old warriors haunted by their own guilt and constantly looking over their shoulders because of all the enemies they have made. Families are displaced, their homes and livelihoods destroyed. Young men are traumatised by the violence of battle and self-medicate through drinking, gambling and yet more violence. It is only now with nearly a year and a half of hindsight that I can say more than one of the characters from my novella has been inspired by the characters that inhabit
Abercrombie’s world. While my novella’s world lacks the redemptive quality of humour and good people with good intentions, the violence and the naiveté of my characters who commit acts of violence resemble many characters of Abercrombie’s world.

At this point it should be noted that not all of the influences I have discussed have been purely generic. Some of them have been stylistic. Other aspects have to do with content that is not generically bound. For instance the hyper-masculinity of Abercrombie is not restricted to either the fantasy or S.F. genre. It could be argued that it most often occurs in stories about adventure and war and these, while not of the same genre, are genres that are decidedly not realist. It stands to reason that if a text is described as a war/adventure story then its plot and content must revolve around adventures that presumably occur in a war. As already discussed in this chapter, genre and form are much used terms but conceptually inconvenient. I feel it is my obligation however to describe all the influences of my creative piece, as I have described it specifically as a dystopian fiction. It is my intention that such descriptions will outline the very blurred line that writers of all genres and styles tread.

As a practice-based researcher it seems almost impossible to sharpen that line in my writing and say without qualification that mimesis is occurring here and this is how, and estrangement there, and this is how. As Jeri Kroll notes, creative writing students study both the product and the process of creative writers who have gone before them. They study the critics and thinkers who have challenged, praised and explained those writers. But, the creative writing student, through practice, produces a unique product. This product is imbued with the student’s discoveries and insights and the student’s experience of insightful discovery. The line between explanation and creation is fused beyond recognition (2004, 95). Being a practice-based researcher means I am at once both creative writer and critical writer. My novella was written at the same as my exegesis. I cannot separate the critic from the creator in me, I am at once both critic and creator and I am neither critic nor creator. It is possible however to demonstrate that the history of certain genres have particular relationships with mimesis and estrangement. Being a product of my times, I am unlikely to escape these historical forces that have found their way to me through my education and reading habits. While in love with the more boyish genres such as fantasy and S.F, I am also uncomfortably aware of the sexism and misogyny that is perpetuated in such stories, particularly
fantasy. Similarly, as a boy I fell in love with such stories for their romantic and glorified accounts of battlefield exploits. But if the history of twentieth century war has taught me anything, it is that there is little romance and glory on the battlefield. It was my hope to keep the high thrill and excitement of violence and bravery in my own novella while at the same time creating a space for women who are not victims of violence simply because they are women. It was my hope to portray violence in a way that is ugly and upsetting without losing the adrenalin rush that such encounters can induce. I describe the violence in a detached way giving as many sensory details as I can. At the same time I neither celebrate nor degrade the violent exploits of my characters. A good example of this is the first introduction the reader has to Sideburns Simmons, a central character in my Novella:

Light was dirty. I wiped blood from my face. Blood mixed with the grime on my forearm and left a black smear. Heavin my crowbar I ploughed into the riot. This was the kind of fight I was good for, yes boss. Hammerin flesh. Most folk was hungry and weak. Hunger made them fierce fighters. But I was strong and willin to die, yes boss, strong and willin. I brought the crowbar down, a choppin swing. Landed a blow upon a woman’s head. Life left her eyes. Clamped between so much flesh; she didn’t fall. Head tilted back, lollin, blood dripped from her skull. I leaned all my weight into the wall. Made enough room to lift the crowbar. Held it with two hands like a sword. Backed against the tram, I spat. Bloody saliva spattered at me feet. Wink, beside me, holdin a large hammer. Sunlight filtered through the raised dust. A heartbeat of peace and bodies closed in. I saw the dead woman. Face smashed on the concrete. Flesh already smearin beneath so many feet.

The account is exciting and fast-paced told in a colloquial dialect. But nowhere is there any suggestion of good or bad. The reader does not know whether s/he should want Sideburns to survive or die. Wink, who fights beside Sideburns in this encounter, is a woman. But this is not
mentioned for another few pages. I did this deliberately indicating that it was not important to Sideburns, from whose perspective the excerpt is described, whether Wink is a woman or man. While Sideburns is violent and may fit the Hollywood action hero mold, he differs in his approach to women. He does not judge a person based on their gender.

As previously noted I was inspired and informed by Joe Abercrombie. In Abercrombie’s world there is a race of people known as the Northmen. These people are much larger than the average human. They are tribal and warlike, like accounts of the Vikings and or the Celts. But they are very pragmatic when it comes to their way of life. Death is rarely celebrated as some kind of passage to a spirit world, rather they describe it as ‘going back to the mud.’ (Abercrombie, 2011, ‘Order of Battle’) Those who are particularly adept at war-craft and battle become Named Men. They are given names that are supposed to say something about their character. These names refer to some rather comical incident before, during or after battle. Some of the names include: Stranger-Come-Knocking; The Bloody Nine, Hardbread, Dogman, Rudd Threetrees, Wonderful, Shivers, Black Dow. While most of these characters are men, Wonderful is a woman. The names of some of my characters are very similar to the names of Abercrombie's characters: Oldman O’Rourke, Sideburns Simmons, Jagard Janovic, Strongarm Sabina. The colloquial use of language in my piece is very similar to the way Abercrombie’s Northmen speak. My attraction to giving characters ironic or humourous names comes from my days as a printer’s apprentice. I was seventeen years old and worked exclusively with men in their late thirties and early forties. They had an unpleasant nick name for everyone on the factory floor. This process of renaming was a form of initiation and a form of control or authority by the one doing the naming. To be given a name meant I was one of them. In my own experience, and as depicted by Abercrombie, this type of renaming is a form of masculine coming of age.

The way language is used and its effect is generally referred to as style (Cuddon, 1998, 872). The point of the above description is that for the better part of two years I had assumed that my style of writing was largely influenced by Raymond Carver. This is the case some of the time but at many other points in my novel my writing style has been influenced by Abercrombie. Indeed so have my characters and the plot of my novel arguably follows a fantasy formula. It has multiple point of view characters, the characters are all likely to converge in a climactic (violent) way and
the most visceral action takes place during heated battle. Despite these generic tendencies I have traced the generic lineage of my novel through the paradigm of S.F. because scholars before me placed dystopian fiction beneath the umbrella of S.F. Not to say that this was inaccurate, but it is not absolute. The following chapters will go into greater detail about the specifics of S.F. as a genre; the point of this chapter is to discuss the impact of genre in general. My goal as a writer of dystopian fiction is to provoke thought about the nature of the world we live in and the possibilities that are lying dormant within it. In particular, I explore the role of a patriarchal power structure and the impact such a structure has on men and their perceptions of masculinity. Connell argues that ‘Hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic not just in relation to other masculinities, but in relation to the gender order as a whole. It is an expression of the privilege men have over women in a patriarchal society. The hierarchies of masculinities is an expression of the unequal shares in that privilege held by different groups of men,’ (2001, 49). I created a world in which the very worst of the masculine ideal could thrive. In this world many of the female characters would not fit comfortably in traditional categories of femininity. I was hoping to say to my readers and perhaps a younger version of me ‘This kind of man must live in this kind of world. Is this what you want?’ I took to extremes the examples of manhood I was raised with in the hope that I would create a dialogue between reader and text. I placed the John Rambo and the John Maclean archetypes in a world where they would thrive. I robbed them of their mythological prowess. I also hoped to introduce the reader to the genre of dystopia, using my novella as a means rather than an end. In this way I would introduce the reader to the dialogue between my text and those that have informed the dystopian quality of my writing. My goal was stubbornly sociological. And it was this pressure to be something beyond an entertaining piece of pulp fiction that burdened my creativity and the quality of my writing.

In his introduction to his latest novel, The Heroes (2011), Abercrombie mentions that originality in writing is less important to good writing than a good many other factors (2011, ‘Extras’). To repeat what I said earlier in the chapter; the generic and formal traits of my creative piece were deliberate choices for deliberate reasons. I chose to write a novella, for the following reasons: I had never written anything longer than ten thousand words so I would test the waters rather than leaping into the deep end. A longer piece of prose would allow greater depth in terms of exposition, character development and thematic exploration. I chose dystopia for the following
reason: I enjoy the speculation of the world to come and want to pass that joy on to my readers. A world gone mad is simply a world that does not behave in the way we want it to. What is right and wrong in such a world? Who are we? Who do we become in such a world? I believe such reflection can hold important lessons that are both thought provoking and entertaining. I chose a workers’ syndicate and laissez faire empire because I believe that there are still many problems inherent in capitalism. I believe Marxist thought has not yet been exhausted of usefulness and relevance. Traditional Marxism is intended for the entire world. It is a global program rather than a local one, (Eagleton, 2011, 16). Given the current economic and cultural globalising trends, it could be that there is yet hope for the Marxist program. Indeed, Terry Eagleton likens Capitalism to criminals and Marxism to detectives, ‘[T]here are detectives because there are criminals,’ (2011, 11). I chose hyper-masculine behaviour and idiosyncrasies because of the damage such self-destructive masculinity has caused in my own life. I would like to address and repair this damage through my writing and perhaps, through my writing I will help address or repair the damage that such patriarchal values have caused to those who may read my writing. By the end of their respective journeys the characters in my novella would either realise the destructive effect of their behaviour and distorted perspective or they would become victims of their own self-destructive nature and die by their own hand or someone else’s hand. While some of the men in my life have matured and grown out of such limiting constructions of masculinity, many have not. It is painful to watch the quality of their lives suffer as they further isolate themselves from those who are willing to help.

I chose the genres, forms, styles and writers that informed this piece because I felt they would help me best say everything I wanted to say.
In the previous chapter I established that form and genre are fluid and inconvenient concepts. I chose to define the novel as a form and dystopian fiction as genre. Thus my creative piece belongs to the genre of dystopian fiction and is written in the form of a novella. Furthermore I established that writers use form and genre as tools to help inform their reader as to expectations
of theme and content. In this chapter I will focus more specifically on the generic constructions of dystopian fiction. Before I can do this I must examine the dystopian fiction’s close and older relative: utopia.

Utopian and dystopian fictions operate in a very similar way. That is as a thought experiment. Unlike realism where the writer presumes the reader has some actual lived experience with the world s/he is writing about, a utopian/dystopian writer assumes knowledge without experience. That is to say a utopian/dystopian writer posits a priori events and their consequences in a hypothetical world with all the confidence and authority of a realist writer. Below is a working definition of a thought experiment:

In a thought experiment, instead of bringing about a course of events, as in a normal experiment, we are invited to imagine one. We may then be able to ‘see’ that some result follows, or that some description is appropriate, or our inability to describe the situation may itself have some consequences ... There is no general consensus on the legitimate place of thought experiments, either to substitute for real experiment, or as a reliable device for discerning possibilities... (Blackburn, 2008, 311).

On the basis of this working definition, one can also accept the premise that fiction or fictional worlds are thought experiments of their authors. Among other things, an author of any given fictional text is inviting the reader to imagine a course of events. Even texts that are set in the empirical world of both author and reader must be thought experiments because the author is not recording facts rather s/he is creating facts or inviting the reader to imagine certain facts and disregard others. The question then follows: are some texts merely thought experiments by definition? Or to put it another way: did the author specifically want the reader to imagine a certain course of events and ponder their outcome or was the author simply writing to entertain or inform rather than engage the reader on an epistemic and ontological level? A writer that questions the nature of reality and our existence within it speaks directly to the accepted ontological outlook. Wartenberg (2007), provides some insight on this question by articulating the necessary aspects of a thought experiment. First there must be the imagined scenario, which Wartenberg calls the thought experiment proper (57). But, he insists that the imagined scenario must play a role in a broader philosophical claim, theory or principle and in doing so it is either adding or withdrawing support for the claim in question (57). Wartenberg goes on to say that
there is no singular thought experiment with a singular purpose. Thought experiments are employed by philosophers in many different ways and to many different ends (Wartenberg, 2007, 57-64). In general terms, then, how are utopian/dystopian writers positioning their texts as thought experiments and to what end? Perhaps this is the function of genre and form. Some genres and forms lend themselves to different purposes more than others. Fantasy, S.F., fairytale, magic realism and utopian/dystopian fictions all posit hypothetical worlds and characters that are inconsistent with the empirical world of author and writer. In that way they are able to highlight or comment on some aspect of the empirical world. They are more explicitly thought experiments than realist novels. But for this kind of thought experiment to work there must be within the text an epistemic and ontological link with the real world. By altering some aspects of the world in which we live, the writer estranges the text. For example in *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) by Phillip K. Dick the Axis forces were the victors of World War II. But by maintaining some aspects of the real world, the writer imbues the text with a mimetic quality. WWII was a real conflict in which the Allied and the Axis fought. Therefore the exact nature of the utopian/dystopian writer’s inquiry will determine exactly what in his/her text is estranged and what is mimetic.

It is possible to separate utopian/dystopian fiction from the other estranged genres because the purpose of utopian/dystopian fiction is often social-political or historical (Baccolini, 2004, 518-521; Procida, 1996, 157). The utopian writer is inviting the reader to imagine a course of events or a hypothetical situation in order to reveal some truth about the current social-political or historical interpretation of the world (Gordon, Tilley, Prakash, 2010, 2). Thus we have the imagined scenario and the role it plays in the broader philosophical discussion. Thomas More’s *Utopia* is a critique of sixteenth century England. He invited us to imagine an island called Utopia, upon which existed a collectivist, top-down nation state. In doing so he withdrew his support for private ownership.

While the focus of this section is specifically utopian/dystopian fiction it is helpful to also think of utopia as a discourse. Thinking of utopia (of which dystopia forms a part) as a specific field of knowledge with its own canon, controversies, internal dialogue and disagreements allows us to distinguish a general purpose or direction that has existed and evolved since Thomas More's
That purpose or direction is possibility: the possibility to transcend reality, to undermine or question the status quo; the possibility to change for better or worse. Utopian thought or utopian discourse is dedicated to imagining possibilities that are extremely different to the world in which we all live (Procida, 1996, 163). Utopian narratives are narratives dedicated to immersing the reader in a world of possibilities that has thus far not been imagined. However, as the definition above informs us the reliability of the possibilities considered is never certain. More’s *Utopia* implies this ambiguity both in the double meaning of the title and with the narrative of the text itself (Sanderlin, 1950, 74-77). More questions the logic of many Utopian institutions and practices, describing many of them as absurd (More, 2001, 134-135). *Utopia* criticises sixteenth-century England, proposes an alternative government and society complete with its own culture and values, and then in the final pages undermines the alternative, leaving the reader in doubt as to More's intention.

The questionable reliability of thought experiments and utopian fictions to achieve their aims in the empirical world of the reader should not detract from their value. The importance of utopian thinking lays not so much in exactly what is described, rather that it is possible to describe it. We are capable of imagining what is not, and for as long as we do both, hope and despair have their places in our lives.

Before we continue with this line of thought, utopia and dystopia must be distinguished from one another. Rather than seeing utopia and dystopia as two separate genres they should be viewed as two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. The dystopia may be implied as in More’s text in which the sixteenth-century England is positioned as the opposite of the perfect society. Or the dystopia may be as a result of the misapplication or poor social engineering of the prospective utopia (Gordon, Tilley, Prakash, 2010, 2). Gordon *et al* are careful not to impose a binary opposition on the two terms, suggesting that utopia may be the opposite of dystopia but dystopia is not necessarily the opposite of utopia. They describe utopia as planned perfection and ultimately beneficial, but say: ‘there are many more ways for planning to go wrong than go right, more ways to generate dystopia than utopia’ (Gordon, Tilley, Prakash, 2010, 2). If utopia is planned perfection what then is dystopia? Planned imperfection? Unplanned imperfection? Unplanned perfection? Given the ambiguity of both terms the crudest way to distinguish them
would be to suggest utopia criticises the present but inspires hope for the future. Dystopia depicts a world of despair and serves as a warning (Gordon, Tilley, Prakash, 2010, 2). Both speak to the possibility for change and suggest the future is at stake.

Now we can return to the nature of possibility within the utopian thought experiment. Fredric Jameson argues the point of utopian thought is to discover the limits of our imaginations (Jameson, 2010, 23). Viewed this way by trying to breach the horizon we will discover our limits. Not only will we learn what we are capable of learning we will become aware that we can learn no more. This thinking is not as radical as it may at first seem. The neo-liberal triumphalism and the End of History paradigm (inspired by Francis Fukuyama) that dominated in the 1990s is consistent with this idea of utopia as a lesson in what is not possible rather than what is. According to this paradigm we have reached our limits, but this is impossible to prove one way or another. While Jameson describes the utopian project as one of self-discovery, unlike Fukuyama, he is not advocating its end (Jameson, 2010, 32). To demonstrate this Jameson employs the corporate giant Wal-Mart as a vehicle for the utopian project in an industrial capitalist society (Jameson, 2010, 29). Wal-Mart viewed at its worst is an anti-competition, anti-regulation amoral corporation that exerts great power over manufacturers, distributors, retailers and consumers. It destroys small and local business. It inflicts great ecological damage. It keeps wages low and drives employment off shore (Jameson, 2010, 30). It seems to be an actual manifestation of Jack London’s oligarchy from The Iron Heel, which was first published in 1908.

On this view of Jameson’s thought experiment, the very worst dystopian projection has come real and London’s fiction foresaw it. Then Jameson asks us to consider the low prices of many necessary household goods and many luxury items that Wal-Mart provides. He points to some ecological standards that Wal-Mart has imposed on some of its suppliers. He speaks of the potential to improve labour relations. He invites us to see the emergent utopian future in the Wal-Mart Empire instead of wallowing in regressive nostalgia (Jameson, 2010, 29-34). On this alternative view of the thought experiment, drawing on a Marxist framework, Jameson describes Wal-Mart as the embodiment of the negation of the negation; it is the manifestations of late capitalism that will inevitable destroy capitalism (Jameson, 2010, 29-34). According to Jameson:
It [Wal-Mart] is a utopian suggestion, to the degree to which the valences of this power – from retail monopoly to the various producers – could be reversed without structural change (Jameson, 2010, 33).

Jameson has conducted a utopian thought experiment asking us to imagine a world in which organisations like Wal-Mart behave in a socially responsible way without sacrificing their ability to earn a profit. Wal-Mart is seen as a piece of social infrastructure, a tool that can either be used to repair and protect or intimidate and destroy.

While Jameson's thought experiment is not a narrative, it is convincing evidence that we have not yet reached our epistemological and ontological limits. The end is still nowhere in sight. Perhaps Jameson's thought experiment also demonstrates why there are so many utopian and dystopian narratives. As intriguing as the Wal-Mart thought experiment is, it is very abstract and requires at least some familiarity with Marxist theory. It is not emotive. It does not situate the reader in a world they can engage with on an emotional level. It does not play with our fears and desires the way a fictional narrative will. It serves as neither a warning nor a beacon of hope.

We finally arrive at the utopian/dystopian fictional narrative. These are imagined worlds populated by imagined characters and they are positioned opposite or alongside the empirical world of the author and reader. Again, More’s *Utopia* is a useful reference. The imagined commonwealth in this text is set on an island that has yet to be discovered by the seafaring nations of the sixteenth century. It is a place beyond the known horizon. Other narratives are set in an alternative future or past, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) or P.K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) for example. Some are set in both a different place and time such as Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974). Every story must be set somewhere at some point. But we must consider the purpose of utopian/dystopian fiction. Utopian/dystopian fiction is inviting the reader to imagine a different world with the intention of either showing us a different and better way to live or warning us of the social-political consequences of our present world. Therefore time and space in utopian/dystopian fiction is especially significant because it is referring directly to the actual history and actual location of the author. One could go so far as to suggest that the utopian text cannot achieve its purpose without entering into direct dialogue with our world. Utopia, the island, as it is described by More, is a place that no one has ever experienced. Jameson argues
that More’s world has been constructed from four codes or representational languages: the philosophical ideas of the Greeks; the humanism of Protestantism; the communal space and egalitarianism of medieval monasticism; and the Asiatic mode of production of the Incas (Jameson, 2005, 22-33). Using raw materials that he is familiar with, both contemporary and historical, More has created something new. As Jameson explains: ‘Their combination is a whole political program and in effect implicitly identifies those still existing social spaces in which the new ideological values might be incarnated’ (2005, 25). Jameson's reading of *Utopia* is very similar to his Wal-Mart thought experiment. Institutions that a contemporary of More would recognise are de-constructed or excavated for their utopian potential. Despite being a place that has never existed and is unlikely to ever exist, Utopia is temporally and spatially located in relation to sixteenth-century England.

To emphasise the importance of empirical reality in relation to a utopia another way; we consider the differences between realist fiction and S.F. Some realist texts may be as chimerical as utopian/dystopian fiction; however, realism's goal is an absolute mimetic realisation. Realism posits a world that is so like the world in which we live, that we would struggle to separate the experiences of the characters from our own experiences. Utopian/dystopian fiction's goal is an estranged world that has yet to be experienced by any living human being. It allows us to experience something that we would otherwise never be able to. That is why the chimerical nature and mimetic qualities of utopian/dystopian fiction and S.F. in general are so intriguing. P.K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* and Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* are beautiful examples of seemingly estranged worlds that are woven through with mimetic threads and constructed of bricks borrowed from this or that aspect of the respective authors and their readers’ own and history.

*The Man in the High Castle* is set in alternative future in which the Axis forces were the victors of World War II. It is set in a United States that is divided between German occupation and Japanese occupation. Dick’s world is incredibly complex and subtly filled with many different themes. But in the context of the above discussion Dick excavated the very worst of the Nazi regime, not a difficult task by any measure, and imposed it on part of his world using an ideology that had profound effects on the global human consciousness. In direct opposition to this brick is
the Japanese regime. Dick portrays the Japanese regime as benevolent, honourable, superior and possessed of a wisdom that has been lost in the technological advancements of the West. He focuses on the genocidal nature of Nazism but ignores the atrocities the Japanese committed against the Chinese and the horrible treatment of prisoners of war. The characters in the book rely on the *I Ching* or *The Book of Changes* for advice, while the German regime is described as insane. Utopia is being discussed as a thought experiment designed to predict or test various possibilities. A central theme of *The Man in the High Castle* is possibility. Not only in the alternative version of history but also in the lives of the characters themselves. *The Grass Hopper Lies Heavy* is a fictional book written by a fictional character of *The Man in the High Castle*. This non-existent text written in a non-existent world is premised on the Allied forces being victorious instead of the Axis forces. The characters in *The Man in the High Castle* live in a world that is different to ours; they read a book that is set in a world that is supposed to be similar to the one in which Dick lived and are inspired to hope by the possibilities suggested in *The Grass Hopper Lies Heavy*. Dick’s book suggests a reality that is inherently unstable and unknowable yet still familiar to our world in so many ways. Dick’s style of writing reads like a realist text. Stylistically he does nothing to suggest the fantastic nature of his world. He describes the world through his characters as they see it. He goes to no lengths to describe the history of his world. His writing assumes the reader is familiar with the ontology of his world in the same way that a realist writer such as Raymond Carver would. In reading *The Man in the High Castle*, I have found that Dick balances the mimetic elements and the estranging elements of his world through the very believable characters that inhabit it. As a reader I know that what *The Man in the High Castle* describes never happened, I believe - at least while I am immersed in the text - that it could have happened.

Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* is different in its premise to Dick’s text. But it is still unambiguously chimerical. The story is set on the two worlds Anarres and Urras. Anarres, a moon orbiting Urras, is an Anarcho-Marxist world. It is simultaneously communal and decentralised. The main character is Shevek, a brilliant physicist who is stifled by the latent systems of power on the seemingly egalitarian world. He travels to Urras, a planet that resembles earth. It is made up of various nations and regimes ranging from hybrids of capitalism and feudalism to Soviet Russia and everything in between. The planet Urras is locked in its own cold
war. As a reader born in the late eighties, I had no real experience of the Cold War. This being the case, it is easy to see the parallel between Cold War Earth and the worlds of *The Dispossessed*. There are two worlds ruled by vastly different regimes determined to prove their way is right but the laws of gravity prevent them from ever escaping physical proximity. They are physically dependent on one another. This can be seen as an allegory for the ideological tensions of the Cold War. Would McCarthyism have been tolerated if there was no Soviet Union? The opposing ideologies of the Cold War were often defined by what they were not. They were defined in opposition to each other (Sakwa, 2013, 208). There is even a wall on Anarres that surrounds the landing pad from which the Anarres people grudgingly trade with their celestial neighbor. Anyone familiar with the Cold War cannot miss the significance of a wall designed to separate two ideological opponents. *The Dispossessed* was published fifteen years before the Soviet Union finally collapsed. It was written in a time of ideological hostility between two powerful nations. Le Guin borrowed largely from these ideologies and various theoretical bastardisations of them to construct the worlds of *The Dispossessed*. *The Dispossessed* did and still does rely on our empirical world and history for its meaning and power; it is still in direct dialogue with our world. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* is a thought experiment examining ideologies and power relations in an estranged nonexistent world where the best and worst outcomes can be explored without subjecting Earth to any real danger. But given the unreliable nature of thought experiments, the true gift of *The Dispossessed* is the call to imagine possibility and possible worlds. I have demonstrated some of the mimetic threads and bricks that created the fantastic exotic but ultimately familiar worlds of Dick and Le Guin. Unfortunately, only a brief examination of some of these threads and bricks is possible here.

It is time to turn the theoretical discussion to my own work. How does the dystopian world I have created operate as a thought experiment? Let us return to the definitions that we began our inquiry with:

In a thought experiment, instead of bringing about a course of events, as in a normal experiment, we are invited to imagine one. We may then be able to ‘see’ that some result follows, or that some description is appropriate, or our inability to describe the situation may itself have some consequences... There is no general consensus on the legitimate place of thought experiments, either to substitute for
real experiment, or as a reliable device for discerning possibilities ... (Blackburn, 2008, 311).

I will add to the definition Wartenberg’s two part formulation, that of imagined scenario and the position of the scenario regarding a specific philosophical argument (Wartenberg, 57).

What course of events have I invited the reader to imagine? What bricks and mimetic threads have I used to create my world? And finally, to what end? As the author I am in the privileged position of knowing my intent and inspiration. Like Le Guin, I was hoping to construct a world locked in an ideological stalemate that eventually erupts into a continental war. In the original conception of my world I wanted to create a situation that mirrored some historical views on the 1919 Versailles Peace Agreement. Some historians argue that the Versailles Treaty was punitive and more or less ensured conflict in continental Europe within a generation (Cline, 1988, 43-58; Trachtenberg, 1982, 495). The Trade Agreement mentioned in my novella was supposed to be vaguely analogous to the Versailles Treaty. Not so much in content but in the effect the actual document had on the parties involved. For as long as the Trade Agreement was adhered to it locked the Backwater and The Metropole in a hostile relationship that would eventually explode into brutal violence. Such an explosion is contrary to the Trade Agreement’s purpose. On a similar note, The Cold War served as inspiration for my world as well. In my novella there are two powerful nation states that are ideologically opposed to each other and separated physically by a wall and a mountain range. Whether they know it or not, they define themselves in relation to the other; much like the worlds of *The Dispossessed*.

There are three different ideological communities in *Lost in the Fray*. There are the militant worker's’ syndicates of The Backwater, the tribes of the mountains known as the Primitives and mercantile empire The Metropole. Of the three the least represented is The Metropole. What is described of The Metropole comes from the characters most hostile to it. Even the two Metropole soldiers Hobbes and Grim have an ambivalent affection for The Metropole. The

1Cline tracks the history of public and academic perception of the Versailles peace agreement in Britain, arguing that there was a concerted effort by a cohort of British historians throughout the 1920s and 1930s who believed the Versailles agreement was both immoral and insufferable for the German people. Trachtenberg demonstrates that the traditional view of the Paris peace conference is not simply the antagonism between the liberal and moderate Americans and the belligerent and punitive French. Despite the oversimplification of this view Trachtenberg does argue that the nature of the Versailles agreement lead to the unstable state of Europe in the inter war years.
reason for not directly representing the Metropole was deliberate. The literary utopia, at least in
the case of Thomas More, is a response to the decadence and injustice of urban capitalism. More
was writing from the centre of the empire. He was an elite member of the regime he was
criticising. He gave the reader an insider’s view of the empire and as a result the reader is not
immediately hostile to Utopia. Whereas More is an insider telling us of the outside, I wanted my
world to be seen from the outsider’s point of view. Where the truth of The Metropole is never
really known or told. The Metropole is at once something to be feared and scorned. It is
something other worldly. My intention was to tell the story of those who were once colonised
and now de-colonised. Critique from without rather than within. At this point I would like to
confess that my piece as it stands now fails as a critique of neo-liberal economics. It seems to
describe more the dangers of radical left ideology than anything else.

Finally and perhaps closest to my heart is the challenge of patriarchal values and systems of
power. There is neither shortage of feminist critiques of the world around us nor a shortage of
feminism in Speculative Fiction (Le Guin’s The Left Hand of Darkness, 1969; Attwood’s The
Handmaid’s Tale, 1996; Mitchel, 2006; Latham, 2009; Russ, 1980). I have personally felt for a
long time that the effect of the patriarchy on masculinity is not directly addressed. This is not so
much an academic claim but rather the observation of a casual reader. This personal view has
become obvious in the kind of authors I gravitate to and to the kind of writing I tend to write. It
is my personal belief, and it has been my experience, that patriarchy dominates and oppresses
women and dis-empowers and emasculates men. As Jackson Katz argues the framing of male
violence towards women as women’s issues allows men to abdicate any responsibility and
leadership concerning male violence (Katz, 1995, 163-165). On my reading of Katz, framing
male violence in this way means that while such violence is abhorrent and regrettable it is often
inevitable. Male violence is normalized. Such an attitude is tantamount to latent complicity.
Further-more it allows the ‘boys will be boys’ attitude to ensure that any men or boys who speak
out against such behavior by men are likely to be considered lesser men. This has certainly been
my experience of domestic violence. When I was five years old I witnessed, not for the last time,
my grandfather bludgeon my grandmother. My brother and I were traumatized to the point of
tears. My grandfather told us to stop crying because she deserved it. As a result these experiences
I have tried to challenge patriarchal values by portraying men who have been broken by a system
that is supposed to favour them. Because of this seemingly favourable system these men blame themselves for their failures. If one of these men were to speak honestly and openly they would say something like this, ‘It must be my fault because the system has given everything, there is something wrong with me. I am a weak man.’ Malaby's study into adult male reflections on high school experiences of bullying reinforces this idea of men blaming themselves for social or cultural impositions (2009, 384). In a system that values the masculine over the feminine, being a weak man is worse than being a weak woman. Connell describes the above aspects of masculinity or male behaviour as 'toxic effects' (2001, 51).

The gratuitous violence committed by the men in *Lost in the Fray* is supposed to demonstrate how these broken men deal with their inadequacies. Sideburns Simmons was supposed to be an obvious example of this. He is a man who knows he is not clever. But he is strong and so commits himself to violence. Violence is how he shows those closest to him how much he loves them, simultaneously showing those he hates how he feels about them. Sideburns Simmons is an amalgamation of my father and grandfather. My Father struck my mother once but for the most part he was/is too defeated by his own sense of worthlessness to behave in such a way on a regular basis. He spent most of his marriage lying about his gambling habit. He once stole money from my mother's purse and blamed it on my brother. He lied about credit card accounts. He forgot to collect me from soccer training. He would disappear for hours on end, return with a litre of milk and tell us all he went to the shops. My grandfather though very intelligent has no formal education but early primary school and what he was able to learn as a conscript in the Yugoslav Army. He is a very violent man and for the better part of a forty year marriage he bludgeoned my grandmother. My grandmother would run away every few years and spend a month hiding at one or another child's home. She always went back. My mother once told me she had been praying for her father's death for a decade: 'That man is not living, he is dying,' were her words. This was and still is a difficult thing for me to reconcile. I have very fond childhood memories of my grandfather. He taught me how to use tools. He helped me build my billy-cart. He could be charismatic, funny and generous when he wasn't driven to rage by his own paranoia. Ironically he instilled in me a strong sense of loyalty and justice. In both men I see a lack of formal education, discrimination (in Yugoslavia and Australia) as major contributing factors to their inexcusable flaws. Sideburns Simmons is man who is good, by this I mean he only has good
intentions; he has a strong sense of loyalty and truly wishes no harm on the world. He finds himself in difficult circumstances where a person with more emotional maturity may behave differently; where a person with a greater education could break free of the cycle; he, however, has no education and is emotionally stunted. His only recourse is violence. His physical prowess is his only means of empowerment. My experience of the world is still one where the masculine ideal is one of physical dominance. It was this aspect of the real world that I wanted most to say something about. I chose an estranged world as a way of distancing both myself and the reader from the very tragic reality of my childhood and that of my parents and my grandparents. It is my belief that the ideological inertia of old world masculinity has had an incredibly destructive impact on the men and women who raised me. It was my intention to demystify this kind of masculinity and portray it for what it really is; the last and only resort for absolutely disempowered men. Though the world I created for my characters is estranged from my own the men who inhabit this world are examples of the mimetic threads of my writing. Questions of ideology and agency are a part of this inquiry because gender politics and the socialisation of men and women are ideologically driven and ultimately limits agency.

Masculine dis-empowerment and disaffection is a common theme in fiction of all styles, forms and genres: *Dubliners* (1914) by James Joyce, the short stories of Carver; John Steinbeck and most relevant to my work, Philip K. Dick. In nearly all of Dick’s S.F. novels the central character is man who is employed in a lowly position, he has either just been left by his wife or girlfriend or his relationship is dysfunctional and broken. He grapples with the powerlessness of his situation and often blames himself.

In creating a new world, either utopian or dystopian, the writer introduces the reader to the systems of power and ideological infrastructure of the world as well as the characters and their struggles. As a result the reader is able to situate the characters in a global context. The reader’s ideological disposition and assumptions are more easily challenged than they would be if the story were set in the empirical world of both writer and reader.

As far as the thought experiment is concerned it was my aim to create a situation where the reader is removed from the very real stakes of the global geo-political posturing and can see the actions of the characters as arbitrary and ridiculous. I wanted to question how far ideology
impacts agency and whether there is any agency at all. Most of all I was hoping to situate the role of gender norms holistically rather than an academic obsession that is treated with suspicion by some groups of the mainstream.

Reflecting on my work I think that the violent behaviour of my characters goes well beyond arbitrary and is gratuitous. I believe this is a result of a poorly realised world and poorly realised characters. Though I am tempted to condemn my piece on all fronts, it would be unfair to say it has failed as a thought experiment. If it is difficult to judge the success of a thought experiment it must be equally difficult to judge the failure of a thought experiment. While my novella as it currently stands does not do everything I wanted it to do, it is a very good start. My methodology of episodic research, practice and reflection means that I am now well equipped to write a novel with a strong purpose, a well realised world and very poignant characters.

How to repair or realise the vision I originally had for my piece? On re-reading the first draft of my narrative it became obvious that much of the action and many of the characters lacked context. The point of view of the narrative was inconsistent. My characters were not well developed and the plot was not causal. The action of the plot did not occur because of any kind of inertia imbedded in the story rather things simply happened because they did. In short I did not balance the tension between mimesis and estrangement. What I have created would fit more comfortably under the umbrella of fantasy. By this I mean that while my world is definitely estranged, it is not set in the world I live in and has no referents to this world, it is not epistemologically linked to my world. The mandate of utopian/dystopian fiction, that is, possibility, is not fully realised in Lost in the Fray.

I decided that I needed to better understand my world I was trying to create in order to better understand the characters I was trying to develop. I began writing character histories and histories of the world. I wrote these histories from the point of view of fictional historians writing for fictional readers of The Metropole. In doing so I hope to provide my reader with more contexts, and render my commentary on masculinity violence ideology and agency more obvious.
Chapter Three

Dystopia and estrangement
Darko Suvin defines Science Fiction as the fiction of cognitive estrangement (1979, 7). Since then critics of the genre have relied in some way on this formulation. S.F. is separated from realist or naturalistic fiction in that it posits a world that is obviously not the world in which both writer and reader live. S.F. is separated from other estranged fictions (fantasy, myth, fairy tale) because the fictional S.F. world is supposed to bear some ontological and epistemological relationship to the world of both reader and writer; thus: cognitive estrangement (Suvin, 1979, 3-15).

Suvin also defines utopian and dystopian fiction as a sub-genre of S.F. He argues that utopian fiction is cognitively estranged fiction for two reasons: first it is not and is not meant to be a realistic representation of the author’s empirical environment. Second, unlike fantasy myth and fairy tales, it wishes to speak directly to the author’s/reader’s current empirical environment with either better or worse systemic, political, philosophical, ethical or environmental hypothetical forms of human existence and relationships in this world (Suvin, 1979, 49-51). Many have questioned the vagueness of this formulation while still paying the greatest respect to Suvin as the father of S.F. criticism (Freedman, 2000; Spiegel, 2008; Kincaid, 2011). Did Suvin mean estrangement on the linguistic level? Did he mean it on the structural level? The stylistic level? Or was he referring to the fictional world itself (Spiegel, 2008, 371)? It could mean any one of these and all of them at once. As Spiegel points out, Suvin never clarifies any of the above (Spiegel, 2008, 371). He seems to be referring to all forms of estrangement at once. Spiegel argues Suvin deliberately refers to Victor Shlovsky and Bertolt Brecht in an attempt to bring academic legitimacy to S.F. as well as to distinguish between quality S.F. and pulp S.F. (Spiegel, 2008, p374). Spiegel attempts to delineate different forms of estrangement and uses various SF films as examples. But he claims that his definitions can apply to written S.F. just as well. I will briefly list Spiegel's definitions: diegetic estrangement; first degree defamiliarisation; second degree defamiliarisation; naturalization.

Diegetic estrangement ‘is estrangement at the level of the story’ rather than any formal or technical types of estrangement (Spiegel, 2008, p 376). An example of this could be the electric light storm that blinds the entire population of Earth in John Wyndham's The Day of the Triffids (1951). There is no use of language made strange and no attempt on Wyndham's part to make the light storm seem a normal part of the world he has created. As far as the narrator of the story is concerned, the light storm is strange. Defamiliarisation is making the familiar strange through formal techniques. This is rare in S.F.
films and even rarer in written S.F. The formal or technical process of making the familiar seem strange is often contrary to SF’s goals, (Spiegal p 378). Such defamiliarisation seems more consistent with the concept of ostranenie, the use of language made strange by Russian formalists (Holdheim, 1974, 320). Naturalisation is the formal process of making the strange familiar, (Spiegal, 2008, p 373). What this means for a film is more easily demonstrated than what it means for written S.F. According to Spiegal the novum, or the new element of an S.F. story must be naturalised first before any kind of diegetic estrangement takes place. He uses as an example The Incredible Shrinking Man (Jack Arnold, 1957). The man is seen to shrink, through the use of special effects and trick photography the man has appeared to shrink. Then the world he finds himself appears strange to the audience because the film is shot from his point of view. But the world is still the same world you and I live in (Spiegal, 2008, p 377). This form of estrangement is directly related to the character’s perception of the world. A writer's technical tools include linguistic devices as well as layout. However by and large S.F. writers do not use language in any strange way, therefore nearly any example of the strange made familiar as far as S.F. is concerned is an example of naturalization. Indeed written S.F. uses only two of the definitions Spiegal outlines. Diegetic estrangement and naturalisation. If naturalisation is the process of formally making the strange familiar and diegetic estrangement is estrangement on the level of the story, how do the two differ for the writer? Neither process alters how the text is presented. Written S.F. is often written in accessible prose.

Spiegal’s terminology can be adapted for written S.F. in the following way. Naturalisation does not speak to what is described but how it is described. The strange elements of an S.F. world are often presented as a normal part of that world. Characters respond to these strange elements in a way that suggests it is a normal experience for them. Diegetic estrangement in written S.F. is the opposite. It speaks to what is described rather than how. For example More’s Utopia does not use any particularly alienating device. But as readers we know that the descriptions of Utopia are not consistent with anything we have experienced in the context of our own empirical reality. So as far as written S.F. goes the technical or formal device used is naturalisation and the process of describing or depicting elements of a world that do not and cannot exists is diegetic estrangement.

Much of S.F. is both making the familiar strange and the strange familiar. How do the acts of naturalisation and diegetic estrangement fit into Suvin's cognitive estrangement? Diegetic estrangement
has an obvious place in cognitive estrangement but naturalisation does not. At its simplest level cognitive estrangement is a world that is obviously different from the author’s but can in some way be traced back to it either through technology or socio-political institutions, (Suvin, 1979, p 8). This is opposed to fantasy in its various forms which makes no attempt to situate the reader in the context of the author's actual world. But as mentioned above, how is this cognitive estrangement achieved? Is it achieved technically or on the level of the depicted world? I would like approach this problem from the context of epistemology and ontology. While this chapter focuses on estrangement in various forms, estrangement cannot be identified unless there is some standard of reality with which it can be compared. To ask what is impossible implies the limits of possibility are known. To ask what is unknown implies that there are things which are known. A description of an alien world can only be achieved in relation to a world that is not alien. Is it simply the writing style and structure of the text that makes cognitive estrangement possible? Or is it that the author posits an alternative ontological world that traces its beginnings in the author's empirical reality? Is it possible to fuse the ontology of our world with fictional worlds? Or is there a clear demarcation between them? I will attempt to answer these questions later. First I would give a brief history of estrangement as it relates to S.F. criticism.

Suvin draws heavily on the formalist concept of Ostranenie and Brecht’s estranging effect or verfremdung (estrangement, defamiliarisation alienation), (Spiegel p 369). The formalists rendered language strange while Brecht made the familiar strange. Think of The Man in the High Castle the language and structure of the novel is completely familiar and accessible. Neither the language nor the ‘familiar’ is estranged. Defamiliarisation is estrangement via formal or stylistic means. An example of this is Cormac McCarthy’s The Road (2006) dialogue is written without quotation marks or inverted commas. Whether the dialogue is enclosed within inverted commas or not does not change what is said nor does it change the world in which the story takes place. But it does have an effect on how the story is read. Arguably another example could be McCarthy’s use of pronouns rather than names for his two main characters. This too is a stylistic device. This device does not change what is described but how it is described has an effect on how the reader responds. McCarthy’s depiction of the end of the world questions much of what we attribute meaning to. In a world that is imploding personal identity becomes less relevant than survival.

While formal estrangement, naturalisation and defamiliarisation can add nuance and depth to a story it is not integral to SF. Ultimately the kind of estrangement that makes S.F. what it is lies within the
fictional world that is depicted. This is especially true of utopian and dystopian worlds. Traditionally utopias have taken the form of a travel narrative (Marin, 1993, p 8). A style of writing that is dedicated to factual reporting of the other places. It is in this way that the island of Utopia seems plausible. The story itself is not told in an unconventional way. More wrote in a way that was not abnormal or confronting for his time. It was rather what was being described that was strange. McCarthy’s *The Road* is an estranged world. It is set in the near future. Is it necessarily a dystopian world? The generic distinctions of utopia were discussed in the previous chapter. But it is generally accepted that like utopian and dystopian worlds are rendered through socio-political institutions. There are no such institutions in *The Road*. Nor is it possible to say without a doubt that the world is a post-apocalyptic world. How McCarthy's world came to be is never made clear. There is no cognition to go with the estrangement. The reader is given no reason, plausible or otherwise for how McCarthy’s bleak landscape was created. The story begins without any kind of background. Does this put *The Road* in the same genre as fantasy, fable, myth and fairy tale? Perhaps *The Road* is among other things a commentary on the utopian impulse and the dystopian obsession that has gripped artists and thinkers for the last century and a half. *The Road* has more in common with Zombie stories than it does with the utopian/dystopian world. This is because there is no political message or criticism. Rather it is about the human spirit’s ability to triumph in the face of unimaginable horror. But it is a distant relative to the Zombie story. Similar questions are raised in all fictions that posit a worse state of affairs than the ones in which we currently live. How these questions are framed vary but they centre on the existential side of human possibility and purpose. To what extent are we capable of good? Or Evil? And to what end? Is this the only way? Are there better ways? And finally; is it worth it? If utopian fiction and its counter- part dystopian fiction have any mandate surely it must be to address the above questions, as opposed to other fictional stories where such questions are incidental to their purpose.

All cultural production is either a commentary on or result of the world in which our artists and thinkers live. Given this, is it fair to claim that other estranged genres are not in direct dialogue with the empirical world of the author? To what extent was *Lord of the Rings* a criticism of Fascism and industrialised warfare? Suvin does not explicitly argue that the other estranged genres are not critical of the world around them but that the criticism that other estranged genres make takes the form of allegory. Most scholars writing on S.F. seem to agree on one point. That is the relation of the fictional world to the author's world is obvious in some way. Spiegel argues that Suvin being a Marxist is drawn
to S.F. because of the utopian nature of the genre. An author takes the world and much like Marx did during the industrial revolution predicts the world to come, either as warning or guide. Unlike S.F. fantasy fails to suggest why change is necessary and how it is to be achieved. Fantasy often harks back to a pre-modern, pre-historical world as an answer to the evil nature of change. As a writer of a dystopian novella, I base my writing on the premise that change is inevitable and it can be either for the better or worse. It is up to us as intelligent creatures with some control over our physical environment, to direct change as best we can in a positive direction.

The all too brief generic outlines above demonstrate that for most S.F. the estrangement or cognitive estrangement occurs within the story. It is achieved through neither formal nor structural means. There must be an epistemological relationship between the fictional world and the author's world. The fictional world must have an ontology that begins in the empirical world but at the point of the story alters course, thus presenting the reader with alternative histories or futures.

Having established the relationship between S.F. and estrangement in general it is time to consider dystopia and estrangement. For a dystopia to be successful must there be a relationship to the author’s world? Or to employ Suvin’s terminology; must there be cognition as well as estrangement? Can a dystopia be written in much the same way that fantasy is written? A world that in some ways resembles our world but is not our world? The Man in the High Castle certainly has an epistemological relationship with our world and its ontology has deep roots in our own world. Le Guin’s The Dispossessed is less obviously related to our own world but still draws on our own philosophies and theories for her socio-political institutions. Even some of the physics is drawn from our own systems of knowledge. She also implies that the humans of her story are descendants of twentieth century humans. But her story quickly alters course as she creates her own theories of physics for her own purposes.

Given that estrangement occurs at the level of the fictional world, the success or failure of any given dystopia depends on the skill of the individual author. An author must be able to convincingly describe and expose a world that is in so many ways alien to the reader without alienating the reader. Exposition nearly always occurs early in the universe of the novel but not completely in the opening pages. It is a process of layering. The reader must be drawn into the story step by step. A dry account of every single aspect of the world in the first pages is not good fiction. One could argue that such writing is poor
writing whether it is fictional or not. One must be able to provide information in a logical and step by step process whether the information is fictional or not. While Stanislaw Lem’s *Solaris* (1970) is neither utopia nor dystopia it is a perfect example. Lem has scattered his novel with large sections of information regarding his fictional world and the history and scientific nature of it. But the novel does not begin this way. The Novel begins in *media res* and raises story questions without disorientating the reader. Consider the first two paragraphs:

At 19:00 hours, ship’s time, I made my way to the launching bay. The men around the shaft stood aside to let me pass, and I climbed down into the capsule.

Inside the narrow cockpit, there was scarcely room to move. I attached the hose to the valve on my space suit and it inflated rapidly. From then on, I was incapable of making the smallest movement. There I stood, or rather hung suspended, enveloped in my pneumactic suit and yoke to the metal hull. (Lem, 1)

The only technical type of estrangement is the use of ‘19:00 hours’ instead of seven o’clock. This perhaps could be an example of *ostranenie* or language made strange. Regardless of this one dubious exception it is not the way the language is used that tells us the narrator is a cosmonaut preparing for launch. The language is simple, even spartan in style. In the above passage there are neither metaphors nor similes. There are barely half a dozen adjectives and adverbs. The sentences are short and without unnecessary descriptions. This is not a writing style one would use to estrange the reader. This is the style one would use to convince the reader of the reality of the world. There is little if any diegetic estrangement, that is estrangement at the level of the world depicted. *Solaris* was first published in 1970, this was the height of the space race. Any person aware of current events and popular culture would be familiar with images surrounding space exploration. Cosmonauts and astronauts, space shuttles and launches such images by the 1970s were no longer exotic. *Solaris* is narrated in the first person. The point of view never changes. As a result the world of the narrator is only estranged when the story places the narrator in an alien or estranged environment. The pages and pages of fictional information that can be found in *Solaris* do not appear until the reader has been drawn into the world of *Solaris*. That is to say that the reader has accepted as plausible that there is a planet called Solaris and that humans were able to establish a research complex on the surface of the planet. So far I have spent more time describing what Lem has done rather than how he has done it. I will try to briefly rectify this now. *Solaris* is written in the first person. The reader only has the narrator’s word therefore the reader must trust the narrator if s/he is to accept that the world being described is plausible. That is why Lem
has used a very direct and spartan writing style. The style only documents what happens and the description is not evocative or emotive. Lem is not trying to get an emotional reaction so much as he is trying to establish reality. Returning to dystopia consider the opening and closing paragraphs of *The Man in the High Castle*:

> For a week Mr. R Childan had been anxiously watching the mail. But the valuable shipment from the Rocky Mountain States had not arrived … As he opened up his store on Friday morning and saw only letters on the floor by the mail slot he thought, I'm going to have an angry customer.

There is no obvious example of technical, formal or stylistic estrangement. Nor is there any example of naturalisation. In the opening paragraph we as readers find ourselves in a comfortably mundane world. It becomes obvious to the reader that the world depicted is one that does not exist much of what occurs in the novel is naturalisation rather than estrangement. Consider the final paragraph:

> She walked on without looking again at the Abendsen house and, as she walked, searching up and down the streets for a cab or a car, moving and bright and living, to take her back to her motel.

There is very little in either of these paragraphs that suggest the world depicted is in any way different from our own. There is nothing particularly exotic about the language used or syntax. This is because Dick needs us to believe the world he is depicting. By introducing, first, believable characters he can then introduce elements of a different world. Consider the opening of P.K. Dick’s realist novel *In Milton Lumky Territory* (1985):

> At sunset, acrid-smelling air from the lake puffed along the empty streets of Montario, Idaho. With the air appeared clouds of sharp winged yellow flies; they smashed against the windshields of cars in motion. The drivers strove to clear them away with their wipers. As the street lights lit up Hill Street, stores began to close until only the drugstores—one at each end of town—remained open. The Luxor movie theater did not open until six-thirty. The several cafes did not count as parts of the town; open or shut, they belonged to the high way, US 95, which made use of Hill Street. (p 9).

This excerpt is nearly identical in writing style to those taken from *The Man in the High Castle*. Yet one is about a post-war America ruled by the victorious Axis, and the other about a young man struggling to make his way in the world in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Thus it seems that while estrangement
must occur at the level of the fictional world the opposite is occurring at a technical and formal level. Formal devices traditionally associated with realist fiction are being employed to depict worlds that are in many ways obviously removed from reality. This will be discussed further in the next chapter but for now I’d like to return to my own work.

After reflecting on my own work, it became obvious that the estranging effect I had discussed in my research proposal was not evident in my novella. It seems that my novella could just as easily have been set in a pretty dark corner of our world. Given that part of my goal was to create a vastly different yet mimetic world, it could also be seen as a nod to my skill as a writer. I let my ego swell for only a few moments before I reconsidered the relationship between Suvin’s formulation of cognitive estrangement and my own work. How was my work any different from that of other non-scientific fantastic genre’s. What cognitive connection does my created world have to my empirical existence. There does not appear to be a direct ontological link between Melbourne, Australia, 2013 and the Backwater. Rather than pushing any epistemological frontier I am more writing an allegorical story set in a possible but very improbable world.

My novella is not without any form of estrangement. First of all the vernacular spoken by the characters of the Backwater is definitely an example of language made strange. Using different voices for different points of view was an attempt to highlight to the reader the differences between those who lived in the Backwater compared to those who did not. It was my hope to demonstrate the different opportunities and experiences of the characters by using a vastly different dialect for each. Consider the two excerpts below, the first is the internal monologue of Sideburns Simmons. The second is the internal monologue of the Metropole commander Hobbes.

Hub to Gate was a six week journey for a fully loaded transport. But with six empty carriages me and Wink made it in three. Was a quiet journey .The cold, dry of the winter meant the corpse kept well. We took turns at drivin. Wink drove the day and I took the night. She said her eye didn’t do so good in the heavy Backwater night. The closer we got to the Gate the more I got to thinkin ’bout the old days. ’bout all the folk I’d killed and all
the folk what tried to kill me. I was born to the Backwater. Wink wasn’t ‘least thats what she said. Wink said lots of stuff, yes boss. Wink said she was once in Metropole City. When she was first slaved as a girl. Said they had enough tricity to make lights at night. Said Metropole city was never dark. I never believed what Wink said, no boss. Wink always said stuff what wasn’t true, yes boss. She always said somethin different ‘bout how her eye was put out. Sometimes was a farmer, Sometimes was a Metropole Officer, Sometimes was her old man when she was girl.

She first became aware of voices, low and droning. Then the hard cold surface she lay on. She was lying on her side. Face in the dirt. Arms still bound behind her one leg crossed over the other. She was shivering. It was this that woke her. For three days she had been dragged along like a slave. What had happened to the slaves, to that great, docile snake of humanity, she didn’t know. Her contact was a part of that snake, a single insignificant scale. Blood for blood, that’s what the bony man had said. A track monkey’s brat was bled and now there is war. Pieces roughly cut not easily fitted together. Why war? The Federation couldn’t possibly win.

But this in itself is not enough to place my work in the category of cognitively estranged fiction. As my research continued and my readings left Suvin’s work and those that praised him without question I began to consider that the problem was not with my work but with Suvin’s formulation. As I have discussed above. My work has not made the familiar strange but has made the strange familiar. The estrangement in my work is something closer to what Spiegal has called diegetic estrangement. That is
The pre-twentieth century world is gone. A modern reader will find it difficult to accept the undiscovered island state premise of the traditional utopian genre. Nor was I interested in creating an off-world community (Mars, the moon, a long distance space vehicle of some sort) because such an idea, while hypothetically possible is conceptually infinite. That final frontier is yet to be conquered and is pregnant with the possibility of both perfection and despair. I wanted my readers to consider possibilities that are limited by the impositions of their empirical world. Impositions such as: resources; environmental damage; over reliance on a single source of energy; and the inherent human tendency of exclusivity as a form of protection and survival (citizen vs denizen, the fear of the other, us vs them).

The philosophical conclusions of the utopian discourse since Thomas More are that utopia is a named but unknowable and unrealisable place. The world in which my narrative takes place is an unnamed but knowable and realisable place. By refusing to name the world, by refusing to state when the story is taking place, an alternative past or a distant future, and by refusing to use ‘real-world’ referents that would place it in spatial and temporal relation to our world, I have created conceptual distance for the reader. My work can be seen as allegorical because it breaks from many of the utopian/dystopian traditions of explicitly situating the people and course of events in our universe. It is implicitly situated in our universe by use of motifs such as the tram network. Trams are a technology that began in the nineteenth century and continued through the twenty-first century. They are a particularly common as a form of transportation in densely populated urban environments. If I were to truly create a fantastic world that is situated in another universe I could not use trams as a motif and if I did I could not call them trams. To do so would connect our universe to the created one etymologically and ontologically. Whether this was intended or not, a reader can only know and visualise trams in the context of his/her empirical environment. Simply by employing these common use nouns for commonplace events in an estranged environment places my world in implicit epistemological and ontological contact with mine and the reader’s empirical world. This argument is by no means hole proof and I feel it is vulnerable to criticism on many fronts. But I believe that its main weakness stems from generic distinctions of realism, S.F. and utopian fiction. In many ways the ontological and epistemological questions posed by writers of S.F. and fantasy are the same as those posed by writers of realism. Simply because this writer or that writer rendered the world thus does it mean that it is an objective state of being and nature?
Such questions are beyond the parameters of my research. I am most concerned with the tensions between literary mimesis and literary estrangement faced by writers of utopian/dystopian fiction. I must rely on the generic distinctions of those who have gone before me. I have decided to create a world that is not explicitly set on planet earth because I did not want to create bias in the reader’s mind based on the current state of affairs and their own ideological perspectives. The story can begin as fantasy, which is as something that exists outside of our space and our time. As a result I have limited the amount of real-world connections that may distract the reader from the world I have created. I am not saying this is how we should be living or this is what we are doing wrong. I am saying this is one possibility. This could happen to us. It may be unlikely but it is no secret that, politically speaking, similar things happened to human communities in the past and still are.

My intention was to create a rather bleak world. A world that is bleak due to systemic and ideological impositions. The world views of the characters and the decision they make are informed by, and often controlled by, the state of the world around them and their experiential relationship to it. I intended to make a comment on the nature of agency, ideology and masculinity and the relationship between the three. I demonstrated in my story that the three concepts above share an un-equal relationship. Agency is affected by ideology and notions of masculinity. Was it necessary to place my characters in a world that is decidedly not our own to explore these themes? Perhaps not, but, if I did not do this I would have had less control over what I wanted to say about these themes. I would have had to balance the technical concerns regarding mimesis and realism with the themes. Consider the following excerpt:

Strongarm and Bill was all tangled together. The blanket only half covered their naked bodies. Bill’s head was resting just above Strongarm’s tits. Strongarm’s fingers was laced through his hair. Roman had followed him in, holdin an oil-rag lamp. O’Rourke couldn’t take his eyes of the thin filthy bodies. He stomped his heavy boots three times. Both jerked awake.

‘We got word...Guild is plannin to strike.’
‘What?’ Bill yawned.
O’Rourke spat and stepped forward. He grabbed Strongarm by the hair and pulled her away from the thin
mattress and stiff blankets. Before she could fight he held the blade to her throat.

'What the fuck ol man,' Her voice cracked.

'You fuckers brought the Metropole into my city...you fuckers is gonna pay.' He pushed the blade into her throat and sawed the flesh away. Hot blood spilled over his hands. Strongarm gurgled some words...mother...or somethin. It took longer than it should have he wasn’t as strong as he used to be. He released her and stepped back. Her body slumped to the ground. Still gurgling. Steam rising from her bloody corpse. A little stream trickled between her breasts and was caught between the clump of hair between her legs.

O'Rourke stepped over her body. Bill was standin, Fist clenched in front of him. His shoulders hunched.

'Roman,' O'Rourke called over his shoulder. Roman settled the flame down and stepped past O'Rourke. He towered above Bill. Bill lunged forward. He led with his left. Roman dodged easily and landed his fist against Bill’s temple. Bill’s cock slapped against his stomach as he fell.

Roman made room for O'Rourke.

'You wanted to fight the Federation? You too young to remember the War? This is how we won young flesh.' He pulled Bill against his body. The knife handle was slippery. Bill was slower to die. He shit himself. O'Rourke left the utility covered in blood and shit.

'Have this cleaned up,' he said quietly. 'I need to rest. Threw me back out.' O'Rourke gave the blade to Roman. He stripped naked. Threw his overalls into the nearest fire barrel. He ate his breakfast naked. Hot stew dripped from the bowl and spattered on his thighs. The dried blood formed a second skin on his hands.

This scene was difficult to write and difficult to read over again. The violence is gratuitous. On one level it was meant to be. One could argue that the inherent nature of violence is gratuitous why should it be any different in fiction? Stylised violence or glorified violence will detract from the bleakness of
the world I have created. I feel that these characters can be accepted by the reader because they are hypothetical and are intended to be. I am giving the reader the chance to view something horrific from a safe distance. Mimesis requires an illusion of the real. Such violence in a world that is supposed to be shared by the reader may be intolerable and the greater philosophical point I am trying to make may be lost. All fictional characters are hypothetical but those of realist text are supposed to be so identifiable that the reader may feel s/he knows someone like them. My characters are supposed to raise questions such as, ‘What would I do in his or her shoes? would I behave any differently?’ The reader cannot know someone like my characters because my characters are defined by their environment. The reader can only wonder at their behaviour and decide whether such behaviour is or is not reasonable given the circumstances.

Consider the stylistic nature of the excerpt. Stylistically I am not trying to ‘make the strange familiar’ as Spiegol put it. The scene is quite literally a blow-by-blow account of a cold-blooded murder. What is strange is not so much the words used or how they are used, but what the character does. Old Man O’Rourke calmly eats his breakfast with the blood of his victims still drying on his hands. I can think of no standard by which such behaviour can be measured as normal. It is reported in such a way that would suggest in this world it is normal or commonplace.
As discussed in earlier chapters, Suvin’s generic formulation of Science Fiction while problematic is indispensable. The notion of cognitive estrangement as Suvin defined it may be vague and contradictory, but it seems to have gone to the heart of what SF is or should be. The idea that it should project an as yet unrealised possibility is almost irrefutable. This chapter will argue that for the relevant cognition to occur there must be a mimetic representation of the world both reader and writer live in.
Furthermore, that such a mimetic representation is epistemologically impossible to avoid. We can only know what we know. We can only imagine what we are able to imagine. We can only express what we are able to express. The tautological statements above suggest the direction of thought this chapter will follow. First of all, that no artwork or cultural artifact is or can be an objective representation of reality. Rather, any cultural production represents both the artist’s interpretation of reality and the current cultural perception of the world and society at the time of production. S.F writers cannot escape the limitations of the world around them and the limitations of collective human knowledge.

I will begin with a brief description mimetic discourse then how this discourse has imposed itself on S.F in general and on utopian/dystopian fiction in particular. I will consider the particular techniques and artistic choices made by the individual writers that made the mimetic representations manifest in their work. I will also demonstrate how it is these very mimetic representations that allow the other side of Suvin’s formulation, the estranging effect, possible. The ultimate argument of this chapter is this: it is the particular nature of the mimetic quality of S.F that differentiates it from other estranged genres.

Mimesis can refer to a quality of a particular artwork, it can refer to a process or method by which artists create versions of their world or it can refer to a complex discourse concerned with the epistemological problems associated with interpreting and describing the world around us. The concept of mimesis is a shorthand reference to the tensions between interpretation and depiction of reality. Before I can turn to the tensions between creating and depicting a world that mirrors our own and creating and depicting a world that is not our own (mimesis versus estrangement) I must conduct a lengthy survey of the history of mimesis as a discourse. As I will demonstrate, it is not simply a matter of mimesis equals realism. Before any description can be considered mimetic one must establish what is real.

Mimesis, in its simplest terms, is the process by which artists mirror their world. Plato described mimesis as mere imitation and deception. For Plato mimesis was not only an artistic phenomenon, but something that was manifest in everyday life (Potolsky, 2006, 20). Children imitated adults, adults imitated leaders and leader imitated gods (2006, 21). For Plato it was the job of philosophers and men of reason to see through the many false representations of the forms to see the true and untainted nature of things. This notion of pure forms is best explained in his metaphor of the cave. Men are shackled
within a dimly lit cave and all they can see of the world are the fire-cast shadows on the cave wall. For these men the flickering shadows are the known and knowable world. With no knowledge of anything else and no ability to compare the shadowy forms to the original these men will live and die thinking these crude representations are everything that makes up the world. Without reason, the senses are easily deceived. This for Plato is why reason and argumentation is morally better than art and its reliance on the senses (Potolsky, 2006, p 17).

Aristotle does not see mimesis as a threat to an ordered and stable society. Rather Aristotle’s idea of mimesis and art in general is almost intuitive to most people in the West today. Consider Potolsky’s argument:

Aristotle’s focus on probability and necessity suggests that the realism of a mimetic work comes not from its reflection of the external world but from its congruence with the norms of human thought. The work strikes us as realistic because the events of the plot are joined according to the same rules that govern events in our actual experience (Potolsky, 2006, 41).

Thus mimesis is not concerned solely with representing the world as observed by the senses but also as understood by the mind and experienced emotionally. Potolsky goes on to argue that Aristotle sees mimetic fiction as a conduit to experience things vicariously that would otherwise be too dreadful or painful to experience ourselves. In this way mimesis becomes educational or enlightening as well as allowing the audience some authority into the meaning and nature of the work. The idea that being well read and familiar with high literature improves the moral character of a person seems today laughingly fallacious. The idea that art can affect a reader or an audience is still accepted. Eric Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1955) demonstrates the relationship between society, writer and audience. His comparison of Homer’s *The Odyssey* with the Old Testament in the first chapter is a good example. According to Auerbach, Homer goes to great lengths to describe the world around his characters, the actions of the characters their lineage and their history. There is very little character development. The characters’ psychological and emotional states remain fixed. Auerbach argues that everything in the Homeric epics is in the foreground (1955, 7). That is, nothing is left to the reader’s imagination. Nothing rests on the power of suggestion or the suspense of disbelief, everything is causal. Nature is ordered rather than chaotic and arbitrary. Nature is there for everyone to see and understand. Auerbach compares this to the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of his son Isaac.
from the Old Testament. There is very little temporal or spatial description but the psychological journey the characters go through is explicit (Auerbach, 1955, 9). What is important in this story is not time and place, nor is it the character’s lineage and great deeds and failures. Rather it is Abraham’s relationship to God. And God is never described in the same way that the gods of Homer’s epics are. God is a mysterious presence. His will, His desire, His reason can only be guessed at by men. God is beyond question or rebuke. His presence is felt throughout the bible rather than explicitly described and portrayed. While God is unknowable in the same way that the Homeric gods are, God is the ultimate reality of the Bible (Auerbach, 1955, 23).

The differences between the two texts are obvious so are their intentions and their intended audiences. Homer’s intention was to entertain as much as to inform (Auerbach, 1955, p 13). The Old Testament is a sacred text designed to impart divine knowledge of life, the way to live a life that honours God. The reader of The Bible is not supposed to be concerned with worldly things so much as his/her soul and relationship to God (Auerbach, 1955, p 14). That is why the main characters of the Bible stories are not exclusively Kings, Queens and noblemen, but rather farmers, shepherds, carpenters and beggars. We all have a soul and it is always in jeopardy. This mortal life is but a moment compared to the eternity that awaits us after death.

To what end do writers and artists create mimetic works? What reality are they representing? Auerbach’s research takes us through antiquity, the renaissance, the romantic era, to the mid-twentieth century. Following the method he establishes in the first chapter, he undertakes a comparison of two contemporaneous texts, their relationship to the world, and their culture and society. This method in itself is enough to suggest that perceptions and representations are not only crude shadows upon the wall but are also shadows imbued with shades and edges that come from within both artist and audience. Mimesis is not merely an epistemological problem but also an ontological one. It can challenge or perpetuate, through the means of cultural production, what is currently considered real. That what is considered real is constantly in flux and so are the cultural representations of reality speaks to the nature of our being as well as our knowledge. More specifically, how we perceive the nature of our being and what meaning such perceptions hold for us. According to Auerbach, Homer’s world was ordered and aristocratic, gods were as petty as men. But the world of the Old Testament was not so aristocratic. All men were equal under God. And God was not petty but divine. The nature of
being is represented very differently between the two texts. Such an interpretation of Auerbach’s *Mimesis* is supported by Potolsky who claims that mimesis occurs as a result of shared set of conventions between audience and artist. As a result neither party is able to recognise that it is participating in a recreation of conventions rather than objective reality. ‘Fidelity to convention, not fidelity to nature, is the source of mimesis’ (Potolsky, 2006, 4). Both Auerbach’s and Potolsky’s discussions demonstrate that a mimetic representation of reality is dependent on cultural understandings and formulations of reality. A mimetic representation of today’s world will depend on the author’s and the reader’s understanding of what real is.

If we turn such discussions to the topic of utopian/dystopian fiction, our task is made more complex. Being a genre, utopia is deliberately employing certain conventions for plot development and world exposition. But the world and the plot is decidedly not our own world. Yet certain elements are. Is it possible that, as Potolsky posits fidelity to convention is the source of mimesis as well as the source of estrangement? This cannot be. The utopian tradition has slowly mutated ever since its conception. More’s *Utopia* was based on Plato’s *Republic*. The two texts are very different. The conventions have little to do with world creation and exposition itself. Rather that the fictional world is not as we know it seems to be the convention. But the nature of the world, the people, laws and customs are by no means conventional. That the text challenges that status quo is the convention; the exact nature of the challenge and its purpose is not restricted by convention. Examining the two novels that I have explored in previous chapters, I will demonstrate that the nature of mimesis in these texts has more to do with the probability of action and events as Aristotle argued rather than precisely what is depicted.

*The Man In The High Castle* is set in a world that has never existed. There have been political regimes similar but never so dominant or global. The characters of the novel are emotionally dysfunctional, often petty and jealous, but at the same time capable of great acts of human compassion and sacrifice. Perhaps the largest criticism to be made of Philip K. Dick is his blatant misogyny. His female characters are largely one dimensional, selfish and sexually manipulative. The love or lust his male characters have for them is possessive, patriarchal and objectifying. Consider the dynamic between Juliana Frink and Joe, the Gestapo Agent she is having a sexual affair with, as they travel across the American continent:
Juliana said in a steady voice, “We'll go and register at the hotel first. So we can change. Then we'll eat.” And it better be a really fine hotel she thought, or it's all off. Even this late. And we'll ask them at the hotel what's the best place in Denver to eat. And the name of a good nightclub where we can see a once-in-a-lifetime act, not some local talent but some big names from Europe, like Eleanor Perez or Willie Beck. I know Great UFA stars like that come out to Denver, because I've seen the ads. And I won't settle for anything less. (Dick, 1962, 191).

While Juliana’s insight into Joe’s psyche is both reflective and profound, there is rarely any self-reflection. Nearly all decisions she makes throughout the story are made with the same unpredictable fickleness. Whether it is buying fine clothes at Joe’s expense, or slicing Joe’s throat. This depiction of female characters breaks the spell of realistic character behaviour. On the other hand, his male characters are well-realised human beings behaving in ways that readers can at least understand if not condone. And they all go on a journey from a place of dull, blind self-unawareness to an exhilarating and sometimes painful awareness of themselves and their place in the universe. For many of the characters, the place they arrive at has little to do with their material existence and more to do with their understanding of themselves. They find some kind of peace within themselves and this gives them the strength to go on in the world. First consider Robert Childan, the specialty antique store owner. As a colonised subject of the Japanese he speaks a form of Japanese English in an attempt to be more Japanese and less American. He represents the very worst of any oppressed population. He is a collaborator. He dismisses his history, his very identity with the most bitter contempt, and praises his occupiers almost to the point of worship.

Consider his adoration of the young Japanese couple, the Kasouras; his fearful respect for Paul and his self-depreciating lust for Betty. He considers himself a ‘white barbarian’ compared to them. He refers to white Americans as ‘half baked,’ as if they were ‘[a]llowed out of the kiln too early’ (Dick, 1962 103). But toward the end of the novel in his effort to exploit an American craftsmen he is made to realise his own sense of self. He takes pride in himself and his people conquered though they are and despite the risk to his business and livelihood, he sells with pride the original American crafted jewelry. Robert Childan’s story is a powerful story of the subaltern taking back his own identity and writing back to the centre with his own voice. Though Childan himself is not the artist, he is the one with the power to exploit his fellow Americans and further ingratiate himself with the ruling Japanese, for whatever little social advancement he can gain. Or he can reclaim for Americans, their identity by promoting and selling original handcrafted jewelry for what it is truly worth.
Childan represents the petty and degrading greed that can come from the divide and conquer paradigm of colonisation. Frank Frink represents the emasculation, self-depreciation and despair that comes from occupation. His wife has left him. He is defeated by his own helplessness. He swore revenge on the Japanese, a vengeance that was never realised. Then he had to make do with what he had, a talent for metal works. He is forced to labour under the corrupt Wyndam-Matson for very little remuneration. After an altercation with his employer he is fired. He goes into business with a colleague. It is these two craftsmen that are exploited by Robert Childan and it is their creations that ultimately allow them some sense of power and allows Childan to reclaim some pride in his American identity. Frink is arrested by Japanese authorities, and under treaty obligations the Japanese have with the Third Reich, is very nearly handed over to Reich authorities on account of being Jewish. However, in an act of rebellious morality a Japanese bureaucrat refuses to sign the necessary paperwork. Frink is released vaguely understanding how close he came to death. With nothing else to do and a new sense of gratitude he returns to his workshop and continues creating original American handcrafts.

All these interactions could have taken place in any colonial context. The estranged setting was not necessary to render the human interactions realistic. Rather, it is the human interactions that render the estranged environment realistic. That is to say, the kind of mimesis that Aristotle refers to seems to be at work here. Potolsky’s description of a fidelity to convention is also occurring. The conventions that make mimesis possible are conventions of human behaviour and emotional response rather than conventions of story craft or literary genres.

Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* offers a different set of problems when it comes to fidelity to convention and human behaviour. *The Dispossessed* can be described as a Science Fiction novel as easily as it can be described as either utopian or dystopian. It is set in the future on different worlds in a different galaxy. The main character Shevek is a physicist on the cutting edge of science. His theories are coveted by every planetary and galactic power. The social and political structures depicted are definitely utopian in nature. The best and worst of every alternative is made clear to the reader through the lived experience of the Shevek, his family and his friends. Unlike Dick’s characters, who perpetuate dominant attitudes of misogyny and patriarchal power structures, Le Guin’s world of Anarres is socially progressive to the point of estrangement. It is not just the world that is different but the way
people behave and relate to each other. Homosexuality is no longer taboo. Bi-sexuality is often practiced, children are rarely raised in the traditional family unit and the family unit itself is no longer the norm. Beyond petty property everything is collectively owned. How do readers find common ground with people who live so differently? Whose desires are so different to ours? The Man in the High Castle follows a large swathe of characters while The Dispossessed focuses mainly on one and describes the world as he sees it. As a result, while we only see events through one perspective it is an incredibly well realised and nuanced point of view, imbued with the struggles of an individual trying to realise true agency in a world that cannot abide it. It is in Shevek’s nature as a scientist to question everything and it is this questioning that allows the reader a sense of familiarity. The reader feels that this world is strange or at least not quite right. The reader is reassured by the fact that Shevek and his friends also feel that something is amiss. It is not this alone that gives the text its ambiguous mimetic quality. Prejudice, greed, jealousy and intolerance are alive and well on Anarres. These are all too familiar human qualities. And people who are susceptible to them are very familiar to the reader, if not on occasion a reflection of the reader. In the utopian tradition started by More and still observed in The Man in the High Castle and The Dispossessed one world is compared to another. In More’s Utopia it was the ideal with the actual. In The Man in the High Castle it was the oriental ideal against the western industrial ideal and in The Dispossessed it is the anarcho-marxist against a planet that very much resembles the geopolitics of Cold War Earth. This resemblance to earth would be less obvious if it wasn’t juxtaposed against a radically different world with a radical social structure. It is the world and values that are most familiar to us that are made strange. This is demonstrated by a scene from Shevek’s childhood. He and his classmates are discussing what a jail is. The concept is alien and barbaric to them but perversely thrilling. They construct a makeshift prison and one of them volunteers to be prisoner. He is locked in the crawl space for thirty hours and suffers, among other indignities, diarrhea. The boys are horrified at themselves and never discuss the incident again. Prison, solitary confinement, capital punishment and so many other human rights abuses fill our history so much that, though they are shocking, they rarely surprise us or cause us to question why and how beyond banal academic reflections. We understand the circumstances of history. This event led to this event, but rarely do we ask ourselves would I have done that were I in that situation? The scene with the makeshift prison, and so many others, force the reader to consider things freshly. The reader is forced to see a familiar world through the eyes of an articulate innocent. Being an intelligent and questioning person, Shevek is able to experience both his world and the world of Urras and decide for himself
where and how he will live. While Le Guin has created a brilliant world filled with brilliant and novel characters, they are still driven by lust, love, fear and anger. They still starve if not fed, they still cry if hurt, they collapse if exhausted and they run if hunted. The characters have adapted to their environments but, there is enough in them that is human for their actions and reactions to remind us of ourselves.

The mimetic techniques employed by a writer of utopian/dystopian fiction are characterisation and point of view. Unlike realism, fidelity to literary convention is not enough for a mimetic world. The world of a dystopian novel is not mimetic, only the characters of the world can truly bridge the gap between alien environment and knowable reality.

By the time I had near completed my first draft, I realised that I was critiquing a mid twentieth-century mode of masculinity that I had grown up with. The violent dynamic of my parents became obvious in both male and female characters. As a child my, father’s lack of education, imagination and ambition put him at odds with my mother’s intelligence and ambition. Whether she meant to or not, she emasculated him. He retreated from life more and more as the years went by. When not at work he was either gambling or sprawled before the television. In response my mother adopted traits more traditionally viewed as masculine. She became both mother and father. My father’s infantile intellect and emotional maturity is best personified by my character Sideburns Simmons. But all male characters share the emotional sensitivity that sees them respond too quickly with violence rather than reflection and reasonable action. Coupled with the theme of disempowering masculinity, I was hoping to create a deterministic world whereby it would be obvious to the reader that all things were causal. In this way, readers might be able to recognise patterns of behavior and systems of power in their own lives that limit their agency. The characters of my novella were going to do what they were going to do by virtue of who they are and the world in which they live. They all had, at the very best, a limited type of agency. One of the questions I was hoping my readers would ask themselves is not what would I have done were that me? But, could I have done any different were that me? I was trying to convey the complex of emotions and causes that are related to violence. Drawn largely from my own experience of witnessing and sometimes experiencing violence at the hands of those who were supposed to protect and guide me. I was trying to demonstrate that rarely are human beings monsters, more often they are frightened and trapped. It is possible that I was trying to reconcile the bitter resentment I feel with the
deepest compassion I have for these very people. While I can never justify what they have done, at
times, I feel very close to understanding their actions and even forgiving them. This is always brought
to an abrupt halt, I feel that simply because a thing is does not mean it ought to be.

This is partly what I was hoping to achieve with the trappings of a dystopian world which allowed me
to reflect upon my own experiences, motivations and patterns of emotional dysfunction vicariously.
And it was this I was hoping my reader would also do. Experience a world of fear and violence without
the trauma of knowing it is an actual world. Such a view may allow a more critical and reflective
approach to questions of violence, social pressure and political disaffection.

In retrospect I think it would be better to focus much of my world and story through fewer points of
view. The characters I most enjoy writing for are Sideburns Simmons, Strong Arm Sabina and Hobbes.
I feel that if I were to rewrite the novel through one or all of these character's points of view the themes
and the world I have created would be much clearer. I would have a representative from each of the
major political actors, their interactions and interpretations of each other would create a more coherent
world. Combining both the methods of Le Guin and Dick, I was hoping to create very real characters in
a world that is at first glance not at all real. I was hoping to combine the dysfunctional masculinity and
hyper masculine world of Dick with the nuanced expressions of basic human emotions such as fear,
anger, hurt, and grief of Le Guin.

In my attempt to create a very real world I have failed to include any kind of redemption or joy. Joy
can be found in the darkest corners of the world and can be missing in the lives of those most
privileged. I resisted the urge for joy because I didn’t want everything to be okay simply because the
reader would sleep better at night. Sometimes in life things are not okay and they never will be. Also I
felt that I was incapable of anything better than poorly rendered sentiment and such contrivances would
make for a worse piece of writing. This was a naive approach. As a result my characters are poorly
realised manifestations of human emotion and behaviour. They are, at best unlikable, at worst un-
relatable. I need to give my characters the ability to find joy in their lives, this will then imbue my very
stark and unforgiving world with some hope. Alternatively, it is possible that they can show
compassion or kindness in the smallest way if not joy.
While estrangement in dystopian fiction pertains to world creation and world depiction, mimesis is concerned with the one thing that unites all human environments, humanity. How human behaviour and emotion is described will determine the mimetic quality of the work. This is not to say that technical aspects such as language and form do not come into play but they are the skeleton rather than the living flesh.
Conclusion

I have demonstrated through creative and exegetical writing that central to dystopian fiction are the concepts of estrangement and mimesis. These concepts, as I have described them, can have opposing effects but a dystopian fiction without both fails to be dystopian. The kind of estrangement a dystopian writer must rely on most is what Spiegel called ‘diegetic estrangement’ that is ‘estrangement at the level of the story’ rather than estrangement through formal or stylistic means (Spiegel, 2008, p 376).
Along with depicting a strange world a dystopian writer must make the strangeness of his/her world seem familiar to the reader. This process is what Spiegal refers to as naturalisation. This process is part of the mimetic devices a dystopian writer must use to ensure the full social-political potential of his/her dystopian novel to be realised. But this alone is not enough. The complete mimetic affect necessary can only be realised through the characters of any given dystopian fiction. Though the world may be strange the actions and reactions of the characters must be logical human behaviour, given the context of the text.

I have demonstrated this firstly by discussing and investigating the role that genre plays in writing and meaning making. In doing so, I established that the generic models and generic intentions of dystopian writing are of absolute importance to the dystopian writer. The dystopian writer is engaging in an ongoing conversation regarding humanity’s potential for change and corruption. In the second chapter I focused exclusively on utopian and dystopian fiction, further isolating and defining them. Dystopian fiction operates on the premise that the reader is willing to imagine the world depicted and consider the implications of such a depiction. In other words, dystopian fiction operates as a thought experiment and does so deliberately. But for the dystopian thought experiment to fulfill its purpose it must be set in a world that was once our own, and it must be populated by people who resemble people we know, at the same time as being an obviously different or an obviously changed world, thus the tension between mimesis and estrangement.

The final two chapters focus on estrangement and mimesis respectively demonstrating in greater detail the importance of an estranged world peopled by relatable human beings. Throughout the exegesis I rely on two texts above all others. They are *The Man in the High Castle* by Philip K. Dick and *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin. These texts demonstrate beautifully the intricate and seamless exchange between mimesis and estrangement that is possible in the hands of great writers. In the case of both texts though, the worlds are decidedly far removed from any world you or I will ever know. The characters that inhabit these worlds are so well realised, that readers willingly suspend disbelief as they follow these characters on their adventures.

In terms of my own creative writing, I discovered that I was drawn to themes of masculinity and without realising it was critiquing the physically dominant masculine ideal. This realisation came to me
late in the research/writing process. It was only through the act of writing that I discovered what it was I wanted to write about. This holds particular lessons for me and general lessons for writers of dystopian fiction. Given the often politically charged nature of dystopian fiction, a clear critical direction will help in the formation of the world and its people. I began my novella two and a half years ago with a vague sense of Marxist righteousness. I wanted to demonstrate the effect that capitalism and the commodification of labour had on the agency of the working class. My experience of the working class world has coloured my view of masculinity. My experience of violent working class men has coloured my view of capitalism. It was these personal experiences that I could bring to life through my writing. I could describe rather particular incidences with disturbing detail and yet the horror and trauma of these can be universally felt by all readers. I am not capable of such specificity with universal reach when it comes to subjects such as late capitalism’s affect on agency and labour relations. Ultimately, what makes a text feel real is the human element, regardless of when or where the text is set. It is the human reaction and interpretation of the world that allows the reader to navigate alien and often hostile environments without ever losing the chilling feeling that it could be real. It could happen to me.

WORKS CITED


**FILMOGRAPHY**


