Essay

Speculative Fiction, Sociology, and Surveillance Studies: Towards a Methodology of the Surveillance Imaginary

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Abstract

Utopian theorists often speak about the merits of reading utopian fiction in order to reimagine and rebuild a better world, but dystopian fiction is often overlooked. This is, in my view, misguided because dystopian fiction, like utopian fiction, diagnoses issues with the present, inspires activism and resistance, and, in the twenty-first century, often presents ideas of how to effect positive change through collective activism. As speculative literary genres concerned with world-building, utopian and dystopian fiction have inherent sociological concerns. These texts can therefore be utilised by sociologists and other researchers beyond the arts and humanities. Speculative fiction is important to the field of surveillance studies not only because surveillance is a major theme in these literary texts but also because their formal properties provide us with the language, imagery, and feelings associated with being under surveillance. Twenty-first-century utopian and dystopian fiction has not been thoroughly examined by surveillance scholars. Analysis of utopian and dystopian fiction in this field has also focused on texts set in, and written by authors from, the global north. Considering the plethora of dystopian novels in and beyond the global north published in recent years that discuss surveillance, the neglect of the study of these texts to date is an oversight.

Introduction

Surveillance studies is experiencing a “cultural turn” (Monahan and Murakami Wood 2018: xxxi) as scholars from the arts, humanities, and social sciences, amongst others, are paying attention to how surveillance is “imagined and experienced” (Lyon 2018: 2) around the globe. David Lyon (2018: 16) suggests that the term *surveillance culture* focuses on the “participation and engagement of surveilled and surveilling subjects” as a cultural surveillance studies approach focuses on individual and local experiences of surveillance. Torin Monahan and David Murakami Wood (2018: xxxi–xxxii) claim that the cultural turn in surveillance studies refers not only to the examination of cultural products—art, film, media, literature, and television—but also to fields that take account of positionality such as feminist, queer, and critical race studies. There have been several edited collections by Susan Flynn and Antonia Mackay published in recent years, which have brought together analysis of cultural objects and critical and cultural theory with surveillance studies: *Spaces of Surveillance: States and Selves* (2017), *Surveillance, Race, Culture* (2018) and *Surveillance, Architecture and Control: Discourses on Spatial Culture* (2019). Florian Zappe and Andrew S. Gross’s edited collection *Surveillance, Society, Culture* (2020) likewise brings together art, film, literature, and music to discuss surveillance. This cultural turn does not involve rejecting previous surveillance theories but rather engaging with these theories through analysing the depiction of surveillance in cultural objects and/or analysing surveillance technologies, practices, and experiences alongside critical and cultural theory.

Hinchliffe, Jade. 2021. Speculative Fiction, Sociology, and Surveillance Studies: Towards a Methodology of the Surveillance Imaginary. *Surveillance & Society* 19(4): 414-424.

<https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/surveillance-and-society/index> | ISSN: 1477-7487

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The value of literature to surveillance studies has been noted by surveillance scholars since the inception of the field. Dietmar Kammerer (2012: 104–105) suggests that fictional narratives—whether they be literature, television, or film—are valuable for surveillance studies for three main reasons: popular culture provides a gateway between academic discourse and the public, fiction provides us with the language and imagery of surveillance, and fiction can “serve as models to measure our own situation against,” as fiction is both shaped by and shapes our experiences of surveillance. As Mike Nellis (2009: 197) has observed, literature “has tackled the theme of surveillance in a way that parallels and complements (and quite possibly draws from) ideas being developed in the social sciences.” Nellis (2009) is right to point out that fiction parallels, complements, and draws from themes in the social sciences. I would add that the reverse is true because, whilst surveillance studies is a fairly new discipline, surveillance has been a major theme in literature for almost five centuries, as David Rosen and Aaron Santesso (2013) evidence. There are currently three monographs that bring together surveillance studies and literary studies: Rosen and Santesso’s *The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature, and Liberal Personhood* (2013), Peter Marks’ *Imagining Surveillance: Eutopian and Dystopian Literature and Film* (2017), and Tyne Daile Sumner’s *Lyric Eye: The Poetics of Twentieth-Century Surveillance* (2021).

Utopian and dystopian fiction has long been noted by surveillance scholars, but analysis of speculative fiction has tended to focus on dystopian fiction from the global north. Speculative fiction, as opposed to sci-fi, is set on Earth in either a real location or in a location that resembles a place on Earth. It depicts humans rather than aliens or fantastical beings. Speculative fiction tends to be more realistic than sci-fi in that most, if not all, of the content of the narratives could potentially happen. Having said this, speculative fiction and sci-fi are closely related genres, and many contemporary utopian and dystopian texts blur the lines between both genres. George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* ([1949] 2021) is undoubtedly the most referenced speculative novel in surveillance studies. Other examples that are often alluded to are Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* ([1932] 2014), Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* ([1985] 2017), Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* ([1924] 2020), China Miéville’s *The City and The City* (2018), Gary Shteyngart’s *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010), and Dave Eggers’ *The Circle* (2014). In the twenty-first century, speculative fiction, once predominantly a genre set in, and written by authors from, the global north, is now a global genre and many texts are written in English or translated into English. Many of these texts are dystopian. However, while historically there has been more of a focus on speculative fiction from the global north, recently there is more movement towards examining the experiences of surveillance in different cultures beyond the global north. Murakami Wood (2009) advocates moving away from examining the surveillance society to examining surveillance societies in countries across the globe. In surveillance studies today, there is a shift away from singular models of surveillance as surveillance scholars discuss the differential effects of surveillance on different groups around the world. No longer do surveillance scholars talk about the surveillance society. Instead, they examine multiple surveillance societies—real and fictional—in and beyond the global north.

In my current research, I have come across many twenty-first-century dystopian texts that have been published in English that are set in, and written by authors from, the global north and the global south. Many of these literary texts discuss the differential impacts of surveillance on different groups. These include Prayaag Akbar’s *Leila* (2018), Lauren Beukes’ *Moxyland* (2009), Chen Qiufan’s *Waste Tide* (2019), Christina Dalcher’s *Vox* (2018), Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* (2017), Maggie Shen King’s *An Excess Male* (2017), John Lanchester’s *The Wall* (2019), Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps* (2019), Sabrina Vourvoulias’ *Ink* (2018), and Leni Zumas’ *Red Clocks* (2019). This list includes authors from China, Guatemala, India, Pakistan, South Africa, and Taiwan, as well as the UK and US. The topics discussed include Brexit, the European refugee crisis, the legacy of 9/11 on border security, the legacy of the caste system in India, the legacy of the one-child policy in China, and the legacy of apartheid in South Africa. These texts refer to top-down surveillance, lateral surveillance, self-surveillance, participatory surveillance, sousveillance, racialised surveillance practices, gendered surveillance practices, surveillance capitalism, self-tracking, biometrics, data doubles, and social sorting. In order to understand how surveillance is imagined and experienced by different groups today, we must pay attention to twenty-first-century global utopian and dystopian texts. Just as we examine multiple surveillance societies, we must analyse multiple surveillance

stories because a single surveillance story cannot reflect the ways surveillance is imagined and experienced around the world.

In this paper, I begin by giving an overview of the utopian and dystopian literary genres from their inception to the present day to explain the evolution of the formal properties of these genres. Then, I outline the relationship between utopian fiction, dystopian fiction, and sociology. Next, I give an overview of the literature on speculative fiction and surveillance studies to date. Finally, I state how and why we need to explore twenty-first-century global speculative fiction and examine the differential effects of surveillance on multiple groups in fiction in and beyond the global north.

The Utopian and Dystopian Literary Genres

The utopian and dystopian genres are not binary opposites; they are deeply intertwined. These genres share the same formal elements, and they share the same goal, which is to effect positive change. The formal properties of these genres have evolved over time as utopian authors have borrowed from dystopian authors and vice versa. The literariness of utopian and dystopian texts is often overlooked by sociologists and by many surveillance scholars, who are not experts in literary studies. This overview will show why it is important to examine the form, as well as the content, of utopian and dystopian fiction.

There are three key elements that are important to all SF (sci-fi and speculative fiction) texts: cognitive estrangement, the novum, and intertextuality. Darko Suvin (2016: 15) describes SF, which originated in the nineteenth century with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), as the "literature of cognitive estrangement." The worlds depicted appear at first glance to be strange and unfamiliar, but upon further inspection, they resemble our own world more than we first thought. These worlds appear like a distorted mirror image of our own world. Suvin (2016: 86–87) states that all SF texts have an "SF element or aspect"—the novum—a thing or an event that drastically alters something from the real world that is central to the narrative. The final defining feature of SF is intertextuality. Sheryl Vint (2015: 55) claims that SF "invents new words to refer to the new things it imagines, and slowly many of these words come to be shared across texts, creating new communities of shared linguistic convention." These words are not only shared across SF texts but also can become part of our lexicon with "Big Brother" being a famous example. Vint (2015: 57) goes on to argue that in SF, "Writers operate within an understanding of a certain set of established images and motifs... that do not belong to any single text or author, but are shared, each new iteration both relying upon established meanings and associations, and also opening them up to new possibilities, creating a vast and interconnected web of meanings." Not only do SF texts share the elements of the novum and cognitive estrangement, there are certain words, images, and motifs shared across all SF texts. There are also words, images, and motifs shared across particular genres within SF, such as utopian and dystopian fiction. SF authors often refer to other canonical texts in their fiction, and they both borrow and update elements from these texts.

Suvin (2016: 73) suggests that pre-twentieth-century utopian fiction is an "early and primitive branch of SF," and many scholars agree that utopian and dystopian fiction are forms of speculative fiction. But what makes a text utopian or dystopian as opposed to just speculative? Utopian and dystopian fiction are specific forms of speculative fiction that are political and concerned with world building and speculative dreaming. Utopia refers to a good place and dystopia refers to a bad place. Utopian and dystopian authors take an element of contemporary society, such as social media, and they extrapolate and exaggerate this, making the ordinary strange in order to create a discussion regarding this subject. I will be using Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan's (2003: 1–4) definitions of classical utopian fiction, classical dystopian fiction, critical utopian fiction, and critical dystopian fiction to explain how these genres have developed over time. It must be noted, however, that I disagree with Baccolini and Moylan's (2003) periodisation, as they specifically tied the development from classical to critical utopias and dystopias to developments in culture and politics in the global north, and I want to use these terms to describe the evolution of utopian and dystopian fiction globally.

The development of the formal properties of the utopian and dystopian genres are tied to the development of character and setting. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) is generally agreed upon to be the first utopian text (Moylan 2014: 1). Carter F. Hanson (2020: 69) states that in classical utopian fiction, if there is a protagonist at all, then the protagonist is usually a visitor to the utopian place, or, more rarely, they live in the utopian place. In either case, the utopian protagonist acts as a guide to the imagined utopian place. In classical utopian fiction, the protagonist is a two-dimensional character whose inner thoughts and feelings are concealed from the reader. In contrast, in the dystopian genre, which came to prominence at the beginning of the twentieth century, the narratives begin *in medias res* with the world already fully established, and the world is viewed through the viewpoints of the protagonist/protagonists, who live in the imagined dystopian place (Baccolini and Moylan 2003: 5). The protagonists in dystopian fiction are fully-rounded characters, who share their inner thoughts and feeling with the reader. In most genres, the setting is a backdrop and is secondary to character, but in dystopian fiction, the setting is just as important as the characters. Aaron Rosenfeld (2020: 39) suggests that in Orwell's ([1949] 2021) classic and well-known dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "mid-life crisis reappears as world crisis, the pathetic fallacy spread over an entire novel." At the beginning of the novel, Winston is a thirty-nine-year-old man in an unhappy marriage working in a job he hates. At the beginning of another example of dystopian fiction, Eggers' *The Circle* (2013), Mae is a twenty-something young woman, excited about her first day in a new job at a trendy tech company. The protagonists' personal circumstances lead them to paint a picture of the world that is—for Winston—cold, grey, and harsh, and—for Mae—sunny, green, and full of hope. The age, class, gender, race, social and cultural background, and mindset of the protagonist/protagonists are reflected in the settings.

Rosenfeld (2020:10) suggests that in these classical dystopian texts, "the reduced, singular perspective is pushed to an extreme. The world is viewed through a singular lens—there is only one thinking and feeling character, and only one set of forces and outcomes for everyone in the novel." In classical dystopian texts, the lone protagonist is at odds with the controlling and oppressive society; they feel isolated and alienated from others and all hope of change and resistance is crushed by the end of the main narrative. As Annika Gonnermann (2021: 49; emphasis in original) notes, classical dystopian texts portray "two (usually male) characters embodying the contradictory systems, thus using protagonist and antagonist as mouthpieces for certain abstract ideas and principles, personifying concepts and mental attitudes and *not* realistic people." Here, Gonnermann (2021) highlights a problem with character in classical dystopian fiction. Although the characters are more fully-rounded than those in classical utopian fiction, protagonists and antagonists in classical dystopian fiction are binary opposites and represent two different types of thinking.

Utopian fiction waned in the twentieth century at the same time as dystopian fiction was flourishing, but gradually more utopian fiction received critical and popular attention as authors transformed the formal conventions of this genre (Baccolini and Moylan 2003: 2). Baccolini and Moylan (2003: 2) state that novels such as Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) are critical utopian texts. In these texts, as opposed to earlier works on utopian fiction, the characters are more fully developed and the relationship between the protagonist/protagonists and the setting is much richer. These formal qualities were borrowed from the classical dystopian genre. Additionally, more recent critical utopian texts have added a new literary convention: open endings. They did this because, as Baccolini and Moylan (2003: 2) state, these authors were "aware of the historical tendency of the utopian genre to limit the imagination to one particular ideal."

Authors of late-twentieth-century and twenty-first-century dystopian fiction have subsequently borrowed and updated literary tropes from the critical utopian genre to make the genre more hopeful. In earlier dystopian fiction, some critical utopian and dystopian tropes began to emerge, but hope is not maintained in the main narratives in these earlier texts. For example, even though the appendix on newspeak in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell [1949] 2021) suggests that the totalitarian regime in the novel has been overthrown and this shows hope inside the text, the appendix does not state how and when the totalitarian regime was overthrown. Moreover, for many years, readers and scholars did not perceive the significance of the appendix and considered the ending of the novel to be Winston claiming that he loved Big Brother. In another instance, in the historical notes at the end of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood ([1985] 2017) made it

clearer to readers than Orwell that the Gileadean regime had come to an end. Nevertheless, the fate of Atwood's protagonist—Offred—and the circumstances that led to Gilead being overthrown were left unexplained. Contemporary dystopias from the late twentieth century onwards, like critical utopias, however, have open endings to “maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work” and they are “more self-reflexively critical” (Baccolini and Moylan 2003: 7–8; emphasis in original). Baccolini (2003: 235) states that critical dystopian texts “retain the potential for change, so we can discover in our current dark times a scattering of hope and desire that will arise to aid us in the transformation of society.”

Twenty-first-century dystopias tend to be more hopeful than earlier dystopias due to their portrayal of character. There is a development from black and white alternatives in classical utopias and dystopias, to open-ended possibilities in critical utopias and dystopias, to multiple ideas and solutions in twenty-first-century dystopian fiction that is tied to the development of character in the genre. The hope or despair in classical dystopian fiction rests on the shoulders of the lone protagonist, who is often a white male, and if there is no collective awakening, activism, and resistance, then the fate of the lone protagonist determines the fate of the dystopian world. Increasingly, in twenty-first-century dystopian fiction, there tends to be more than one protagonist and/or more than one viewpoint put across. Moreover, these protagonists and characters differ in terms of age, class, gender, nationality, race, and social and cultural background, so there are more diverse perspectives and, by extension, multiple ideas and solutions put forward. Twenty-first-century dystopian fiction tends to be more hopeful because of the inclusion of multiple, diverse protagonists and/or characters who are aware of the dystopia that they are living and are collectively rebelling against this together to create a better tomorrow. Activism and resistance are depicted in the novels outlined in the introduction through sousveillance, social media activism, online petitions, protests, aid for those ignored by society, and underground networks. In most of the novels mentioned in the introduction, collective activism and resistance occurs on a small scale but in others it involves characters from across the country depicted.

This progression from the lone white male protagonist to multiple, diverse protagonists in dystopian fiction and the hopefulness of twenty-first-century dystopian fiction is due, in part, to the globalisation of SF and to more female and non-binary SF writers being published. Rosenfeld (2020: 15; emphasis in the original) states that feminist dystopian narratives are “more likely to include the possibility of other worlds and to focus not on the backward-orientated nostalgia of the last man, but on a forward-orientated *first woman* figure, for whom a change in the status quo is as likely to be promising as threatening.” Female authors, feminist theory, and feminist dystopian fiction have clearly had an impact on the dystopian genre and its depiction of the future as there is a noticeable shift in contemporary dystopias that look forward to a better future instead of nostalgically looking backwards.

Twenty-first-century dystopian fiction is set more or less in the present—or in the very near future—in recognisable locations, as there is a shift from global dystopian narratives to localised narratives, which are more specific in terms of their historical, political, and social contexts. This means that solutions are easier to find as the problems discussed in the texts are more specific. Rosenfeld (2020: 248) states that “the dystopia settles into the present not because the utopian impulse has sputtered, but because it has shifted away from grand collective narratives of world-making and toward more modest and local forms of dreaming and preservation.” Rahime Çokay Nebioğlu (2020: 2) likewise states that twenty-first-century dystopian fiction “has passed from a progress-driven form to a process-oriented form that places the emphasis on the actual societies rather than on a possible one.” Sean Seeger and Daniel Davison-Vecchione (2019: 11) also present a similar argument as they use the term “extrapolative dystopias” to describe dystopian texts that “imagine the likely consequences of existing social patterns and trends,” and they use dystopian novels written in the last decade to illustrate this definition. Of course, dystopian fiction has always been about the present and has extrapolated from the present. In my current research, however, I have observed that many twenty-first-century dystopian texts are more specific in terms of their location and socio-political context than twentieth-century dystopian narratives. This is no doubt in part due to the shift in the dystopian genre from a genre set in, and written by authors from, the global north to a global genre. Each author borrows tropes from canonical dystopian fiction, and at the same time, they appropriate

literary SF tropes from their home country to discuss a contemporary issue that is relevant to a specific place. There is a sense, particularly in dystopian fiction from the global south, that authors are making a conscious effort to educate a global audience—and perhaps a global north audience in particular—on current political situations in their home countries through their dystopian fiction, which is published in English.

Dystopian fiction published today is more relevant to our current society in terms of the content of the narratives (the issues being discussed) and the formal properties of the narrative (the language, characters, settings, images, tropes, and motifs). The dystopian genre, like all SF genres, is self-reflexive, constantly evolving, and it is a hybrid genre as dystopian authors borrow from other SF genres and they make references to other dystopian texts. As Gonnermann (2021: 12) notes, “since dystopias are always children of their time, their historical socio-political background must be considered.” There are still insights to be gleaned from reading canonical dystopian texts, but in order for contemporary readers to see themselves and the current world reflected in dystopian narratives, they need to pay attention to the most recent dystopian fiction, as it is more relevant not only because of its content but also because of its formal properties, which reflect diverse characters, diverse perspectives, and diverse stories.

Speculative Fiction and Sociology

Utopian fiction has long been noted by sociologists for its inherent sociological concerns and its value to the discipline, but dystopian fiction has been overlooked. This is due, in part, to the perception of dystopian fiction as a negative, nightmarish genre that offers no hope and presents no solutions to the issues it discusses. Gregory Claeys (2016: 4–5; emphasis in original) states that we speak of utopianism as an umbrella term that encompasses utopian thinking across different disciplines but that “we do not normally speak of dystopianism, and we recognize no dystopian ideologies as such.” This article, however, does speak of dystopianism and argues that the neglect of the study of dystopian fiction in sociology is a mistake. Not only does dystopian fiction have inherent sociological concerns, like utopian fiction, but also dystopian fiction is perhaps even more important to sociology than utopian fiction because of its content, formal properties, and popular appeal.

Dystopian fiction is an important genre for sociological analysis because sociology, like utopian and dystopian fiction, is concerned with speculative dreaming, world building, utopian methodology, and the desire to effect positive change. Ruth Levitas (2013) states that utopia is not a place but a process that involves three stages: archaeology, ontology, and architecture. The archaeological mode involves analysing the “models of the good society underpinning policy, politics and culture, exposing them to scrutiny and critique” (Levitas 2013: 154). The ontological mode involves thinking about who we are as a species and where we want to be (Levitas 2013: 177). Finally, utopian dreaming needs to involve world-building (Levitas 2013: 197). Levitas (2013) argues that the architectural mode of the utopian process is facilitated by utopian fiction and rejects using dystopian fiction for the utopian process. Seeger and Davison-Vecchione (2019: 6), however, state that “constructing and analysing social worlds that ‘might be’ is itself a potential exercise of the sociological imagination.” As Seeger and Davison-Vecchione (2019: 17) suggest, “one could see [dystopian fiction] as extrapolating from empirical observations of present conditions in a manner which is fully consonant with the aims of sociology.” Dystopian authors have been described as “symptomologists” (Nebioğlu 2020: 73) who diagnose issues with the present (Lyon 2018; Willmetts 2018). In order to imagine a society, which is better or worse than our own, utopian and dystopian authors diagnose issues with the current society—whether good or bad—(archaeology), consider what society humans want to live in (ontology), and then create an imagined society (architecture) to inspire the reader with the desire to effect positive change. Utopian and dystopian fiction can be used to evidence all three stages of Levitas’ (2013) utopian methodology, and both genres are concerned with effecting positive change rather than encouraging a sense of fatalism, which Levitas (2011: 226) argues dystopian fiction does.

Dystopian fiction is also important for sociological analysis because it is a political genre that inspires critical thinking and activism. Dystopian authors tend to comment on the issues that they explore in their fiction in real-life, as the canonical dystopian authors Huxley, Orwell, and Atwood have, and this supports

the idea that dystopian authors want to effect change. Seeger and Davison-Vecchione (2019: 17) argue that “the move from dystopian speculation to direct social commentary suggests that dystopian fiction provides constructive grounds for real-world social and political interventions.” The authors of many of the novels discussed in the introduction have a background in journalism or political fiction, and many are activists, who raise awareness of the issues they discuss in their dystopian fiction and in other ways. Not only do the authors go through the utopian process but so do the fictional characters and the readers. The protagonists of dystopian fiction go on a journey where they begin to critically reflect on their dystopian world (archaeology), consider what it is about their current world that is having a negative impact on them and other characters (ontology), and imagine a world that is better than theirs (architecture). Readers of dystopian fiction likewise critique the imagined dystopian reality (archaeology) and reflect on how the novel comments on issues in the real world that conflict with their views (ontology). When readers engage in activism that has been inspired by dystopian novels, they contribute to the rebuilding of their society (architecture). People around the world have taken quotes and images from Orwell’s and Atwood’s dystopian novels for their placards to march in protest against laws that restrict their freedom. Arguably, dystopian fiction has even more potential to inspire real-world change today, as social media and online journalism makes it possible for authors and readers to discuss issues, share petitions, and organise protests. Gerry Canavan (2016: xxii) suggests that Suvin, as well as Moylan (2000) and Frederic Jameson (2000), argue that what is important in SF and utopian and dystopian fiction is the impact of the novel on society and whether it drives social change.

Dystopian fiction is not only important to sociology because of its thematic content but also because of its formal properties as a literary genre. Drawing on C. Wright Mill’s (1999) argument that the sociological imagination views biography and history—or the individual and society—as intertwined, Seeger and Davison-Vecchione (2019: 6) state that “the literary conventions of the dystopia more readily illustrate the relationship between the inner life of the individual and the greater whole of social historical reality.” This is because the protagonist/protagonists in dystopian fiction are “more fully developed characters” and are “more conscious of how social and historical developments shape their lives” (Seeger and Davison-Vecchione 2019: 16), as previously discussed. Rosenfeld (2020: 34) notes that Tom Moylan (2000) and other literary critics state that “dystopias, unlike utopias, are much more like novels than philosophical tracts.” Again, this is because of the development of character in dystopian fiction, which is tied to the setting.

Sociologists are often sceptical of utilising dystopian fiction for utopian thinking because of the endings of dystopian texts, but this is a mistake. When Huxley’s, Orwell’s, and Atwood’s novels were first published, they shocked and horrified readers, which is why they are seared into the minds of our collective consciousness. Today, dystopian texts that portray a lone dystopian protagonist who rebels against the system on their own and is subsequently crushed can be somewhat ineffective. As this storyline has been repeated over and over, the reader expects this plot. This does not mean that there cannot be affective bleak endings in contemporary dystopian fiction, however, as Eggers (2014) has shown. *The Circle* (Eggers 2014) has a bleak ending, but the protagonist is not a rebel. When reading the novel, the reader is waiting for Mae to recognise that she is in a dystopia, become critical, and rebel. This does not happen. By changing one important trope—the rebellious protagonist—Eggers is able to create an effective warning because he introduces a frightening possibility—the possibility that you could be in a dystopia and not realise. When dystopian texts had open endings for the first time, this changed the established plotline. After many decades of open endings, however, it is not surprising that some readers and researchers feel that open endings do not go far enough and want to see solutions being put forward. It is also a valid criticism to wonder whether dystopian fiction with happy endings will warn the reader enough and leave them feeling a sense of urgency, as Baccolini (2020) points out. Nevertheless, after a century of dystopian protagonists being tortured and killed, open endings and happy endings can make dystopian fiction more hopeful by suggesting that, while the struggle against an unfair system may be long and painful, it is worth it in the end. Whether the endings of dystopian fiction are bleak, open, or happy, as long as they warn the reader and have a positive impact on society by inspiring readers to effect change then they have achieved their goal. If dystopian fiction can also offer ideas and solutions to current issues then that is valuable, but utopian and dystopian fiction should

not be seen as a guidebook or a template—its main purpose is to generate discussion rather than put forward a blueprint. Contemporary utopian and dystopian fiction reject the idea of a single solution, and instead, they encourage input and debate from multiple, diverse people.

Dystopian fiction, then, is a genre that is valuable for sociologists, but how can sociologists utilise utopian and dystopian fiction? Richard Tutton (2016) states that “Fictions of the future as opposed to sociology of the future, take us beyond the cognitive to explore emotional responses and questions of morality and ethics. This, however, is not enough and this is where the sociologist must draw on these fictional accounts and couple them with critical analysis of how to effect social change today.” Utopian and dystopian fiction can be used by sociologists and literary theorists in their research, teaching, and public engagement. These genres help to diagnose current issues, alert us to present anxieties, and warn us of potential consequences of current trends. They also provide examples of complex theoretical concepts, such as the panopticon and the surveillant assemblage. Authors and readers of dystopian fiction may be unfamiliar with the connections to surveillance theory and the ways in which the novels describe, confirm, or contradict surveillance concepts and ideas. Reading and analysing utopian and dystopian fiction alongside theory, then, can help researchers to understand the present moment, explain their research to a wider audience, and provide researchers with ideas of how to effect positive change.

Speculative Fiction and Surveillance Studies

In recent years, surveillance scholars have begun to fully analyse utopian and dystopian fiction for the first time rather than merely alluding to it. To date, there is only one in-depth study of surveillance studies and utopian and dystopian fiction: Peter Marks’ *Imagining Surveillance: Eutopian and Dystopian Literature and Film* (2017). Marks begun the analysis of utopian and dystopian fiction in surveillance studies with two articles on this topic in *Surveillance & Society* (2005, 2013), a book chapter on Orwell’s influence on surveillance studies (2015), and the monograph. Marks’ (2017) book analyses surveillance in utopian and dystopian fiction before *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell [1949] 2021), examines Orwell’s dystopian classic as well as other canonical texts such as *We* (Zamyatin [1924] 2020) and *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Atwood [1985] 2017), and discusses twenty-first-century dystopian novels such as *The Circle* (Eggers 2014) and *The City and The City* (Miéville 2018), as well as films. Marks (2017) shows that dystopian fiction depicts the feelings associated with being monitored and controlled through its formal properties: portrayal of character and setting, world building, narrative voice (first person, third person, free indirect discourse), tropes (novum, cognitive estrangement, intertextuality), and language and imagery. Since Marks’ first article on utopian and dystopian fiction and surveillance studies in 2005, there has been more research published on utopian and dystopian fiction in this field; most notably, book chapters and articles by Birgit Däwes (2020), Victoria Flanagan (2014), Felix Hasse (2020), Brian Jarvis (2019), Mike Nellis (2009), Virginia Pignagnoli (2017), and Simon Willmetts (2018).

There has been a recent shift away from analysis of twentieth-century texts and towards an analysis of twenty-first-century texts. There are several reasons why twenty-first-century dystopian fiction is important to surveillance studies. Firstly, twentieth-century novels were published before major events important to surveillance studies, such as 9/11, and they were written before major technological developments such as the internet, smart phones, social media and data doubles. Secondly, twentieth-century fiction describes surveillance in disciplinary societies rather than control societies, where we are monitored on the go. This is why Lyon (2018: 2) claims that “Big Brother is the wrong metaphor for surveillance today.” Lyon (2018: 3) suggests that *The Circle* (Eggers 2014) could be the twenty-first-century equivalent of Orwell’s ([1949] 2021) surveillance classic. Although Eggers’ novel is very important to surveillance studies, it is a mistake to search for a single story of surveillance to use as a template of twenty-first-century surveillance, just as it is a mistake to focus on a surveillance society. As Karen Fang (2019: 741) argues, the “canonical status” of *Brave New World* (Huxley [1932] 2014) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell [1949] 2021) has “popularised a racially and geographically limited dichotomy.” All the literature on utopian and dystopian fiction in surveillance studies to date has focused on texts from the global north. In order to understand the

differential impacts of surveillance on different groups across the globe today, multiple surveillance stories set, and written by authors, in and beyond the global north need to be examined.

Twenty-first-century dystopian fiction presents the differential impacts of surveillance much more explicitly than older texts, and it presents global differences by referring to specific historical and contemporary events. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, there are the inner party members, outer party members, and proles (Orwell [1949] 2021). In *The Handmaid's Tale* there are wives, aunts, handmaids, commanders, guardians, eyes, and unwomen in the colonies and the brothels (Atwood [1985] 2017). Why is it then that Willmetts (2018: 269, 275) argues the Orwellian metaphor of surveillance “ignore[s] the differential effects of surveillance on different sections of society” and “overlook[s] the embodied nature of surveillance that positions race, class[,]... and gender, as key variables that structure surveillance along differential lines”? Firstly, this is because many twentieth-century narratives are set, and written by authors, in the global north so there are less surveillance societies and less cultural differences presented. Secondly, this is because many twentieth-century narratives have a lone protagonist so, whilst the reader is aware that different characters will have different experiences of surveillance, the reader does not gain much, if any, insight from characters other than the protagonist. Thirdly, twenty-first-century dystopian fiction tends to be much more specific in terms of its setting and context than twentieth-century dystopian fiction. Instead of referring to fictional categories such as proles and party members, twenty-first-century dystopian narratives tend to discuss class, gender, and race much more explicitly and the narratives are tied to specific historical and socio-political events in specific places. For instance, in Akbar's *Leila* (2018), set in India, most of the characters live inside a dome, which regulates the air quality, with characters of different castes separated into different sectors. Those outside the dome have health issues, as they live in a filthy, polluted environment with poor quality air and water. The theme of purity—tied to caste, morality, and cleanliness—is referenced throughout the novel and the legacy of the caste system is made clear.

A number of other contemporary works of dystopian fiction also highlight the differential impacts of global surveillance. Beukes' *Moxyland* (2009) is set in South Africa and portrays surveillance and inequality in relation to smartphones. Those without smartphones are excluded from society and cannot access transport, certain spaces, the internet, and vital services. Beukes depicts the smartphone and the data double similarly to Shteyngart but, again, context is important as the legacy of apartheid and the AIDS crisis are tied to the development of surveillance practices. Chen's *Waste Tide* (2019) portrays the surveillance of rural migrants in manufacturing towns in China and King's *An Excess Male* (2017) portrays new marriage and reproduction laws in China, made in light of the gender imbalance created by the one-child policy. Shah's *Before She Sleeps* (2019) likewise portrays new marriage and reproduction laws in Southwest Asia, which is influenced by gendered surveillance practices in Asia in relation to the cultural preference for male heirs and in relation to purdah. Dalcher's *Vox* (2018) and Zumas's *Red Clocks* (2019) are two novels that discuss gendered surveillance practices in relation to women's rights in the US after the 2016 presidential election. Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), Lanchester's *The Wall* (2019), and Vourvoulias's *Ink* (2018) all discuss the ban-opticon. *Exit West* (Hamid 2017) is set in a city based on Lahore in Pakistan, and it focuses on the surveillance of refugees, as it is influenced by the European refugee crisis; *The Wall* (Lanchester 2019) depicts the surveillance of migrants at borders in Britain after Brexit; meanwhile, *Ink* (Vourvoulias 2018) portrays biometric surveillance practices in the US as first- and second-generation immigrants and temporary workers—most of whom are Latinx—have an identification tattoo and a chip monitoring their location. This is just a short sample of critically acclaimed twenty-first-century dystopian novels that depict the differential impacts of surveillance across the globe, and there are many more speculative novels and short stories to examine. It is valuable for surveillance researchers to examine the literary texts mentioned as well as the many other contemporary speculative fiction stories published in recent years to describe, discuss, and debate how surveillance is being imagined and experienced today.

Conclusion

How then can surveillance researchers utilise twenty-first-century global utopian and dystopian fiction in their research, teaching, and public engagement to raise awareness of problems and effect positive change?

In terms of surveillance research, reading and analysing twenty-first-century utopian and dystopian fiction in and beyond the global north will provide insights regarding how surveillance is being imagined and how it is experienced today. An analysis of the content of the literary texts may confirm or contradict empirical and theoretical research in surveillance studies and offer alternative perspectives. An analysis of the formal properties of the texts, such as the depiction of character, as well as the content may provide new insights that are particularly relevant to those scholars studying class, gender, race, and the differential impacts of surveillance. In terms of teaching and public engagement, utopian and dystopian fiction can illustrate examples of complex theoretical concepts and can show how the characters experience and feel about surveillance. Collaboration between surveillance researchers from different disciplines as well as collaboration between surveillance researchers and authors of utopian and dystopian fiction is another exciting possibility. This special issue will contribute towards the development of the surveillance imaginary in this field, and it may also provide the basis for collaboration between surveillance researchers from different disciplines with speculative fiction authors.

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