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The Cinematic Anthropocene and the Future Politics of Killing

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Abstract:
This article considers two films, *Elysium* (Neil Bloomkamp, 2013) and *What Happened to Monday* (Tommy Wirkola, 2017), in order to demonstrate that they foreshadow a paradigmatic shift in the relationship between biopolitics and thanatopolitics. According to Michel Foucault, and later Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, it is chiefly the association of humans with biological danger that causes biopolitics to mutate into thanatopolitics. However, in these two films, humans are construed as an ecological danger that prompt thanatopolitics. They depict futures in which the regimes in power act on ecological threats by brutally micromanaging and killing members of their populations. In this the films unveil how the idea of sustainability as equilibrium can never benefit all, but must always leave some human beings out, either by abandoning them to die or by actively killing them. This is important because it brings to light the risk that the Anthropocene could engender regimes that will kill on different grounds than regimes have in the past.

Keywords: Futures; The Anthropocene; Climate Fiction; Speculation; Biopolitics; Thanatopolitics.

How could power "exercise its highest prerogatives by putting people to death, when its main role was to ensure, sustain, and multiply life?" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 138). In the first volume of *The History of*

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Sexuality (1976) Michel Foucault raises this question only to immediately answer: "One had the right to kill those who represented a kind of biological danger to others" (1978, p. 138). According to Foucault, it is thus the association of certain humans with biological danger that has typically caused "biopolitics" (i.e. politics aiming at ensuring, sustaining, and multiplying life) to mutate into "thanatopolitics" (i.e. politics aiming at killing) (Foucault, 1982/1988, p. 160). Looking at the world today (2022), Foucault's conclusion seems more dubious. On the one hand, it is undeniable that the coronavirus pandemic unveiled an already existing global paradigm in which governments, in concert with health care systems, continually decide which members of their populations they wish to sustain and which they are willing to let die. But on the other hand, these decisions seem to only slightly mirror the "immunitary logic" at play in, for example, the deaths of thousands of refugees that have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in the last decade (Esposito 2008/2013, p. 45). Following Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito, I here take immunitary logic to denote "the conservation and the defense of 'the self' from what threatens it from the outside" (Esposito 2008/2013, p. 45). Immunitary societies are in this sense "closed and walled off from their outside, opposed and hostile to everything that does not belong to them," because "community exposes each person to a contact with, and also a contagion by, an other that is potentially dangerous" (2008/2013, p. 43, 49).

Put differently, there is in this notion of contagion – that Esposito takes to be the driver of immunitary logic – a clear link to Foucault's comprehension of biological danger as the impetus of thanatopolitics. But what the comparison between the coronavirus crisis and the refugee "crisis" also makes clear is that governments can regard humans as contagious in more than one way. The notion of biological contagion that during the pandemic found its prime incarnation in the corona-infected is thus different from the notions of ideological and economic contagion that have since 2015 prompted European nation states to deny some refugees from particular countries, such as Syria, to cross their borders. Fear of exposure to an ideological contagion is a more fitting description of how European politicians have drawn attention to the risk that Islamists could use the Syrian refugee streams to slip into Europe and radicalise its youth. A fear of being exposed to an economic contagion is a fitting description of the same politicians' fear that the refugee streams could result in a decline in national budgets and economic growth.

Moreover, as geophysical conditions are rapidly changing due to the emission of greenhouse gasses and the degradation of vulnerable ecosystems, the relationship between biopolitics and thanatopolitics

may be about to undergo a more fundamental transformation. This is what a range of fictions portraying life in Anthropocene futures suggest. The term Anthropocene captures the argument that human interference with the Earth System has become so drastic as to represent a geophysical force. More formally, this means that "the Anthropocene is a real phenomenon, representing a new and unique phase of our planet's geological history, and one that will inevitably now send history on a new trajectory" (Zalasiewicz et al., 2018, p. 181). It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that Anthropocene futures – meaning futures in which anthropogenic global warming and other ecological problems have drastically escalated – are increasingly depicted in popular culture. However, in these fictive futures the danger that allows biopolitics to mutate into thanatopolitics is often not construed as biological, but rather as ecological. Put differently, in the Anthropocene futures depicted in popular culture, it is typically not biologically contagious human beings who represent the biggest threat to the general living condition of populations, but rather specific resource-consuming humans.

Accordingly, this article considers the relationship between biopolitics and thanatopolitics in two films from the 2010s, *Elysium* (Neil Bloomkamp, 2013) and *What Happened to Monday* (Tommy Wirkola, 2017). Both of these films take their cue from the Anthropocene, as they take place in futures in which anthropogenic global warming and the exploitation of ecosystems have become deeply catastrophic. In *Elysium*, the intertwined events of technological development and ecological degradation have driven human division to a point where the wealthiest humans have left Earth. Orbiting Earth onboard the space station Elysium, they enjoy a life of extreme luxury, while Earth is diseased, polluted, and vastly overpopulated. When migrants from Earth try to enter Elysium, they are shot out of the sky. In *What Happened to Monday*, escalating anthropogenic global warming and exploitation of ecosystems have resulted in an agricultural crisis hampering the food and water supply globally. In response, a federation of nations called the European Federation has implemented the Child Allocation Act. The Act means that families within the Federation are only allowed to have one child, with the brutal Child Allocation Bureau in charge of enforcing the Act. The Bureau not only monitors, maps, and severely punishes parents who try to evade the Act. It also secretly kills children who have not been born as their parents' first child. What comes to the fore in both films are thus regimes that in response to major ecological problems selectively kill some humans in order to safeguard the best possible living conditions for others. The films are, in other words, fictions in which biopolitics and thanatopolitics intersect.

That said, biopolitics and thanatopolitics were not originally complementary terms. Foucault coined the term biopolitics well before he coined the term thanatopolitics, and while the first term appears frequently in his writings, the latter hardly surfaces. The coinage of thanatopolitics can nonetheless be seen as an important moment in Foucault's oeuvre, as it fills a gap created by the historical significance he ascribes to biopolitics. Foucault claims that biopolitics – which "endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply life, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" – has from "at least the end of the eighteenth century and onwards" been the dominant form of governmentality (1976/1978, p. 137; 1997/2003, p. 249). But if it is true that biopolitics has from at least the end of the eighteenth century and onwards been the dominant form of governmentality, how does one explain the tremendous amount of blood spilled in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries by states targeting their own populations? As already shown, Foucault finds the answer to this question in the fact that humans have repeatedly been killed because they were seen as a biological danger to the general health and well-being of other members of a population. Foucault arrives at this conclusion already in his 1975-1976-lectures "*Society Must be Defended*", but the term thanatopolitics first appears six years later in his lecture "The Political Technology of Individuals" (1982). Here Foucault states:

> We can say ... that the true object of police becomes, at the end of the eighteenth century, the population, or, in other words, the state has essentially to take care of men as population. It wields its power over living beings as living beings, and its politics therefore has to be biopolitics. Since the population is nothing more than what the state takes care of for its own sake, of course, the state is entitled to slaughter it, if necessary. So, the reverse of biopolitics is thanatopolitics. (1988, p. 160)

This means that biopolitics will not optimise the lives of all members of a population. As there will always be humans, who – in the eyes of those who govern – put the health and well-being of the population at risk, biopolitics will resort to its sinister "twin" thanatopolitics, who will then indirectly or directly prompt the death of those standing in the way of biopolitics. However, where Foucault arrived at this conclusion by studying the past, the intent of this article is to harness key insights from fictive depictions of Anthropocene futures. What is particularly exciting about such depictions is that they, crudely put, exist "to prevent and invent the future" (Augé, 2014, n.p.). It is thus characteristic of *Elysium* and *What Happened to Monday* that they belong

to a type of fiction – namely speculative climate fiction (cli-fi) – that often warns against potential future developments by way of their world-making.[1] It may therefore also be said of these fictions that they invent future worlds in order to prevent them from coming into being – or at least to pre-empt some of their worst features.

Elysium and the Racist Thanatopolitics of the Lifeboat

Directed by South African Neil Bloomkamp, *Elysium* is thought-provoking because it unfolds a plot in which biological and ecological danger in combination prompt biopolitics to mutate into thanatopolitics. Set in 2154, *Elysium* depicts a diseased, polluted, and vastly overpopulated Earth. Zooming in on Los Angeles, the film displays mainly poor black and brown humans living in polluted, waste-filled slums and working in factories where they are exposed to dangerous conditions. Just as work in the shantytown sweatshops of the globalised economy is outsourced by countries that want to consume the goods the sweatshops produce, but not house their production, the workers depicted in *Elysium* do not produce goods for themselves. Rather, they do the toxic work required to create technology belonging to an elite of super rich humans who have left Earth. This elite enjoys a life of luxury orbiting Earth on the space station Elysium. In fact, when we first meet the main protagonist of the film, Max Da Costa (Matt Damon), he is working in a factory producing specimens of the robotic police forces enabling the administration on Elysium to ruthlessly control the population on Earth.

Nevertheless, Max dreams of becoming a citizen of Elysium – a dream that is transformed into an urgent need when he is exposed to a lethal dose of radiation at the factory. On Elysium, citizens have access to healing machines capable of curing any physical ailment, so Max turns to his former boss, Spider (Wagner Moura), who illegally traffics people from Earth to Elysium. Spider introduces Max to his plans of stealing the information stored inside the mind of a citizen of Elysium, as this will enable him to traffic more people to Elysium. Together Spider and Max

1 Climate fiction or cli-fi has repeatedly been defined as fiction "dealing explicitly with anthropogenic climate change" (Mehnert, 2016, p. 4). There have been good reasons for this, as the cli-fi-term was initially used arbitrarily, and often to refer to fictions that did not relate to anthropogenic global warming. Nevertheless, it has in recent years become more and more difficult to uphold the distinction between fictions depicting anthropogenic global warming and fictions depicting other environmental problems. In this context, I therefore use the term to refer to fictions that in their world-making incorporate anthropogenic global warming in conjunction with other environmental threats.

decide that this citizen should be Max's former boss, Carlyle (William Fichtner). They are, however, unaware that Carlyle has been bought to take part in a coup by the Elysium Secretary of Defence, Delacourt (Jodie Foster), meaning that stored inside Carlyle's mind is a rebooting program for Elysium. This program will make Delacourt president of Elysium and thereby give her mandate to use increased force to stop the migration from Earth to Elysium. After Max and Spider steal the information from Carlyle, they become aware of this plan. They head to Elysium, where Max dies in his attempt to get Spider past Elysium agents so he can install the rebooting program on Elysium's main computer. Spider manages, however, to install the program, making himself the new president of Elysium. He then grants everyone on Earth citizenship to Elysium, and the film ends with a scene in which healing machines are brought to Earth.

My focus will be on Delacourt and her administration of Elysium's defence. The key issue is thus how her grasp for extended power – so she can kill more migrants before they enter Elysium's atmosphere – is tied to a perception of both biological and ecological danger. In this regard, one could assume that the presence of the healing machines on Elysium would rule out the existence of any biological concern. This is not the case however, as Delacourt is driven by a concern of losing access not only to the healing machines, but also to all the privileges associated with life on Elysium. In her perception, access to the healing machines is conditioned upon the limited social design of Elysium; that is, she sees the limited social design of Elysium as an absolute condition for the general well-being of its citizens. This means that the biological danger of being contaminated by diseases via migrants from Earth cannot be separated from the more general danger of having Elysium's ecology ruined. Or to be more precise: Earth is here a mirror of what Delacourt fears Elysium will become if more migrants are allowed into the fragile ecology of its engineered atmo- and biosphere. In Delacourt's view, the limited social design of Elysium is the only way to secure that the ecological limits of the habitat are not exceeded, which would spell the end of its citizens' well-being. And since this well-being is the overarching aim of biopolitics, it would also spell the end of biopolitics and its role in ensuring and sustaining life. It is precisely this prospect of an end to the very conditions enabling biopolitics that is, in the film, the impetus of thanatopolitics, as it prompts Delacourt to pursue the power to kill more migrants.

This is particularly visible in a scene where Elysium's elected president, Patel (Faran Tahir), asks Delacourt to explain why she has had an agent on Earth illegally shoot down a migrant fleet bound for Elysium. In her answer, Delacourt frames herself as someone who is willing to protect the

longevity of the habitat with whatever means necessary. Or as she puts it: "when they [migrants from Earth] come for your [Patel's] home or the house you built for your children ... it won't be PR or campaign promises that will keep them out. It will be me." In Delacourt's answer one therefore also find an understanding of Elysium as a "lifeboat" with limited room (Hardin, 2001, p. 37). What becomes visible here is thus how the engineered atmosphere of Elysium encourages a selection, alerting us to "the danger of anthropogenic global warming inspiring fascism" (Andersen, 2020, p. 114). Moreover, as this selection merges with an imagination of security – in which biopolitics depends upon ecological equilibrium – thanatopolitics becomes a tool to maintain sustainability. In fact, thanatopolitics is just one of the tools that Delacourt and the Elysium administration deploy in their efforts to secure ecological equilibrium. The robotic police force running Earth is another, as its brutality ensures that conduct on Earth generally conforms with the interests of the elite on Elysium. The latter is pertinent because the film thereby brings to light an ominous connection between artificial intelligence and totalitarianism. In fact, we may go so far as to say that in the Anthropocene future displayed in *Elysium*, the techno-optimistic dream of automatisation has turned into a nightmare, as automatisation is here indispensable to the realisation of totalitarian desire.

Foucault clarified how the recognition of society as a "milieu" proliferated the desire to govern all biological aspects of human life (2004/2007, p. 20). More specifically, he showed how the comprehension of society as a fragile biological collective paved the way for the new "art of governing men" that is biopolitics (2004/2007, p. 165). To this it may now be added that the recognition of the human collective as a driver of geophysical disturbances intensifies the desire for complete control over all the beings that together comprise an ecologically connected system. *Elysium* makes visible how this desire may intensify to the point where it breeds totalitarianism and instrumentalises thanatopolitics. This is obviously an important insight, but even more important is the fact that the impetus of this desire is the idea of sustainability as equilibrium. Amongst the things that *Elysium* brings to light, the latter is thus of particular relevance, because it reveals how the idea of sustainability as equilibrium is essentially an exclusion mechanism, a conception that can never fit all, but must always leave some human beings out, either by abandoning them to die or by actively killing them. This conclusion has an affinity with recently formulated theories concerned with the interhuman violence galvanising the escalation of the Anthropocene. For instance, in *Savage Ecology. War and Geopolitics at the End of the World* (2019), American social scientist Jairus Victor Grove argues that war

represents the central grid for understanding the past, present, and possible futures of the Anthropocene. For Grove, this means that:

> The Anthropocene is always a geo-biopolitical concept. Its Malthusian past is also a Malthusian future in which making particular forms of life live comes about directly through a necropolitical administration of murder and authoritarian abandonment. (p. 47)

In this Grove is criticising Foucault, as the primary discovery in Foucault's analysis of war was that "war continues to rage in all the mechanisms of power, even the most regular" (Foucault, 1997/2003, p. 50). According to Foucault, war is thus first and foremost "the motor behind institutions and orders" and "peace itself a coded war" (1997/2003, p. 50, 51). It is this discovery that leads Foucault to his discovery of "biopower" and its manifestations as "anatomo-politics" and "biopolitics" – with anatomo-politics referring to the disciplinary power directed at individual bodies and biopolitics referring to the biological administration directed at populations (1997/2003, p. 243). When Foucault states that "peace is a coded war", he is, therefore, implying that this coded war is fought within the realms of anatomo-politics and biopolitics, that is, via the disciplining of bodies and the biological administration of populations.

Grove attacks this analysis for being too Eurocentric. He brings a postcolonial critique to the table in which Foucault's analysis of war – and its subsequent reading of biopolitics – is fundamentally lacking, as it fails to consider the violence committed by Europeans in the colonies over many centuries. Even when Foucault turns to Nazism to take its biopolitical and thanatopolitical extremity as his analytical object, he is, according to Grove, ignoring that the Holocaust represented a continuation of biopolitical and thanatopolitical forms of violence that had long been deployed in the colonies. In Grove's critique, one therefore finds an echo of Kathryn Yusoff, who asserts that "black and brown death is the precondition of every Anthropocene origin story" (2018, p. 66). This assertion leads us back to *Elysium*, which encourages a similar line of thought. It is thus striking how the film's slumified version of Los Angeles also conveys an image in which structural racism is the true backbone of capitalistic exploitation and hence ecological destruction. However, where Grove and Yusoff are mainly interested in explicating how the Anthropocene has roots in past processes of postcolonial violence, *Elysium* predicts that the future will only intensify the racist violence, escalating ecological destruction.

The film does so by depicting Earth and Elysium as two habitats administered on the basis of two separate yet intertwined logics.

On the one hand, Earth is administered on the basis of a capitalistic logic of exploitation that seemingly has no limits. The way the regime on Elysium treats Earth thus brings to mind a point made by French philosopher Éric Alliez and Italian philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato, which reads that "no limit can truly worry the capitalist, since disasters are normal modalities of its functioning and limits represent the means of production of its development" (2016/2018, p. 351). In the film, this shows in how the regime on Elysium continues to exploit Earth far beyond the limits that would sustain conditions favourable to its human and non-human population. Whether aimed at human or non-human forms of life, the regime's exploitation stops at nothing, because its only purpose is to supply the super-rich on Elysium with ever more sophisticated goods, that is, to give them a sense that their luxury is perpetually growing. Intrinsic to this logic is black and brown death, as it subjects mainly black and brown humans to deadly working and environmental conditions. In its portrayal of this capitalistic logic of exploitation, *Elysium* is thus commenting on the way contemporary neoliberalism simultaneous integrates and expels the global poor, that is, how the globalised neoliberal economy depends upon an endless circulation of cheap labour that can be discarded and replaced when totally exhausted.

On the other hand, Elysium is also administered on the basis of an immunitary logic that prevents mainly black and brown humans from entering Elysium, and in this kills them, either by shooting them out of the sky or by abandoning them to the deathly conditions on Earth. The combination of the capitalistic logic of exploitation with this immunitary logic means that for most black and brown humans, thanatopolitics is basically unescapable. With their deaths certain, the only question is whether they will be killed slowly by toxic working and environmental conditions or quickly by brute force. Against this background, one may therefore also question whether *Elysium* foreshadows a paradigmatic shift in the relationship between biopolitics and thanatopolitics. It would certainly be fair to emphasise that the two logics do not forebode something new, but rather affirm Giorgio Agamben's claim that "the birth of the camp in our time appears as an event that decisively signals the political space of modernity" (1995/1998, p. 174). After all, is the future world that *Elysium* depicts not simply a world in which Earth itself has been turned into a camp? We should thus remember that an exploitative logic that worked people to death was also ingrained in the camp-apparatuses of Stalinism and Nazism. And so too was an immunitary logic, meaning that those who were sent to the camps where at large considered to be ideologically and biologically contagious to the

long-term survival of Stalin's and Hitler's regimes. This does not, however, change the fact that *Elysium* portrays the relationship between biopolitics and thanatopolitics within a context that was not anticipated by either Foucault or Agamben. Like Foucault, Agamben does not generally concern himself with environmental problems. Agamben asserts that:

> If there is a line in every modern state marking the point at which the decision on life becomes a decision on death, and biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics, this line no longer appears today as a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones. This line is now in motion and gradually moving into areas other than that of political life, areas in which the sovereign is entering into an ever more intimate symbiosis not only with the jurist, but also with the doctor, scientist, the expert, and the priest. (1995/1998, p. 122)

But this is the closest Agamben comes to presaging a future in which ecological dangers, rather than biological dangers, drive biopolitics towards thanatopolitics. In contrast, *Elysium* shows us a future in which it is no longer biologically contaminating human bodies that represent the ultimate danger to biopolitics, but rather specific (i.e. mainly black and brown) resource-consuming humans who could put ecological equilibrium at risk.

What Happened to Monday and the Thanatopolitical Obsession with Equilibrium

Created for Netflix by Norwegian director Tommy Wirkola, *What Happened to Monday* brings to light a similar shift in the relationship between biopolitics and thanatopolitics. The film begins with a montage of non-fictive clips displaying dense human crowds, car-queues, and calving icebergs. The clips are voiced-over by a narrator stating that "in the last fifty years we have doubled our population, tripled the amount of food and water we use, and we have quadrupled the use of fossils fuels". The film subsequently morphs into a fictitious narrative describing a future where "extreme droughts and massive dust storms have shut down the Earth's entire agricultural system." In an attempt to combat the resulting food and water shortage, a federation of nations called the European Federation has sponsored the development of genetically modified crops. However, these crops result in multiple births and genetic defects, causing a return to a situation where the global population lacks food and water. Consequently, the European Federation implements the Child Allocation Act. The Act subjects the population of the Federation to a one child policy, and children who are

not born as only children are taken from their families by the Child Allocation Bureau. Officially, the Bureau puts these children into "bureau-enforced cryosleep", but in reality, the Bureau burns them to death.

The main part of the film takes place in 2073, 30 years after the Child Allocation Act was first implemented. Having been taught to evade the attention of the Child Allocation Bureau by their grandfather, Terrence Settman (Willem Dafoe), the seven siblings Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday (all played by Naomi Rapace) live in hiding. That is, until Monday – motivated by her desire to give herself and the twins she is secretly pregnant with a life free from hiding – betrays her sisters and informs the Bureau of their whereabouts. This enables the Child Allocation Bureau to hunt down and kill most of the sisters, leaving only Thursday and Tuesday alive to disclose Monday's betrayal and revolt against the Bureau and its charismatic leader, Dr. Nicolette Cayman (Glenn Close). Cayman is running for Parliament to ensure that the Child Allocation Act continues to decrease the population of the Federation. Yet when Thursday and Tuesday manage to display a video of a child being burned to death in one of the Child Allocation Bureau's facilities during the official announcement of Cayman's candidature, it instead spells the end of her power. The revelation of the video not only leads to Federation-wide rioting, forcing the repeal of the Child Allocation Act; Cayman is also imprisoned and sentenced to death.

My focus will be on Cayman and her motivation for burning children to death. Obviously, overpopulation is a key concern for Cayman. We are therefore dealing with a biopolitical issue, as concerns with population size are intrinsic to the regulation of populations that is biopolitics. However, as Foucault stresses, the fact that concerns with population size galvanise biopolitics does not mean that biopolitics regulate on the basis of birth and mortality rates alone. Biopolitics also takes the environment into consideration, as the environment is not "natural, [but] has been created by the population and therefore has effects on [the] population" (Foucault, 1997/2003, p. 245). This understanding leads Foucault to the conclusion that "most important of all" biopolitics strive "to establish an equilibrium ... a sort of homeostasis" between the population and its environment that will allow the population to thrive (1997/2003, p. 246).

Returning to *What Happened to Monday*, the same connections appear, as the fear of overpopulation is here intrinsically intertwined with the fear of the human-induced geophysical problems (i.e. anthropogenic global warming and collapsing ecosystems) threatening the population of the Federation. Cayman and her accomplices in the Child Allocation Bureau

act on the premise that these geophysical problems will worsen with a growing population. And that this will not only inflict pain on the population (via food and water shortage), but also severely deteriorate its chances of future survival. From this logic emerges Cayman's and the Bureau's obsession with obtaining an ecological equilibrium, as is apparent in several scenes in the film. For example, when Cayman meets Tuesday for the first time, she expresses her moral disgust by saying:

> 'Do you have any idea of how much food and water was taken out of others' mouths so you could be here today? If everyone was as cruel and selfish as Terence Settman the world would end tomorrow'.

Moreover, when Cayman announces her candidature for Parliament, she presents her political program in the following manner:

> For three decades the Child Allocation Bureau has combated the most serious crisis the world has ever faced: Catastrophic overpopulation. [...]... In a perfect world every child has the right to live. That is why I am running for office. So I can reform the law. Anyone who wants to bring a child into this world must be able to prove financial stability and be able to guarantee the emotional and physical well-being of that child. There may even be room for siblings, if the data measures up. So, I commend you for your vision as we continue to take positive action to build a sustainable future full of hope and possibility. Together we will survive.

Cayman's reference to the data which must measure up for the Federation to allow the birth of siblings, is particularly revealing here. It explicates how she and the Child Allocation Bureau equate governance with maintaining the right balance between the size of the population and the resources available for its consumption. In other words, Cayman equates the management of the population within the Federation with the keeping of a budget that must perpetually strike a balance between the number of consumers and the resources available for consumption. Imbalance in this budget would, in Cayman's view, be disastrous for the living conditions of everyone. To echo Foucault, it would basically ruin the basis for biopolitics, as it would make it impossible to ensure and sustain life within the Federation. What appears here is therefore also the tendency of biopolitics to turn into thanatopolitics whenever the general living conditions of a population are believed to be threatened. As previously explained, Foucault pointed at this tendency repeatedly. But he did not foresee that this tendency could be triggered by resource scarcity in a world tormented by escalating global warming and eco-systemic

collapse. This is not to say that Foucault did not reflect upon resource scarcity. In fact, "the problem of scarcity" plays a major role in Foucault's understanding of the "birth of the new art of government" that is biopolitics (2004/2007, p. 341, 345). But although Foucault goes on to examine this new art of government via the chief thinkers of neoliberalism, resource scarcity does not resurface in his writings as a modern problem. It is simply not an issue he links to present or, for that matter, future societies.

One likely explanation for this is that the issue of future resource scarcity deviated to much from Foucault's interest in the past and biological factors such as race, mental illness, and sexual behaviour. As Donna Haraway puts it, Foucault's "biopolitical figures [are] all involved in dramas of health, degeneration, and the organic efficiencies and pathologies of production and reproduction" (1997, p. 12). This means – to reuse the formulation by Grove previously cited – that Foucault is basically blind to the risk that "the Anthropocene will not only have a Malthusian past, but also a Malthusian future". I have previously indicated that Agamben's thoughts on biopolitics and thanatopolitics fall into the same basket, as Agamben does not really concern himself with environmental problems. But although Agamben thereby bypasses what has arguably become the most important issue for humanity in the 21st century – namely the escalation of the Anthropocene – he warns at the end of *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995) that "an unprecedented biopolitical catastrophe" could lie ahead (1998, p. 188).

Judging from *What Happened to Monday*, this catastrophe may very well take the form of future regimes that will kill in order to control the sizes of their populations. In fact, the film points out how advances in digital technologies could potentially help such regimes realise their purpose, as the digital technologies used by the Child Allocation Bureau for surveillance assist the technology used for killing in its cryo-sleep facilities. These digital technologies are, in other words, not just deployed by the Bureau to monitor and moderate behaviour. They are also deployed in order to abet the Bureau's thanatopolitical scheme.

An obvious source of inspiration for the film is the Holocaust, as the film portrays a world in which the modernisation of technologies serves an apparatus that burns humans to death on a mass-scale. But at the same time, the Holocaust imagined in *What Happened to Monday* is clearly not the same Holocaust as the Shoah. Unlike Nazi thanatopolitics, the aim of Cayman's and The Child Allocation Bureau's thanatopolitics is not to racially cleanse the population. Instead, it is to reach and maintain an equilibrium in population size, ensuring that the climatic and ecological footprint of the population does not exceed ecological limits. The politics

of killing carried out by Cayman and The Child Allocation Bureau is thus essentially generated by the recognition that 1) the environment containing the Federation's population has some ecological boundaries, 2) these boundaries make the environment vulnerable to human-induced stresses, and 3) this vulnerability has put the well-being of the population (the aim of biopolitics) in jeopardy. What also re-emerges here is therefore the idea of sustainability as equilibrium, as Cayman and The Child Allocation Bureau seek to eliminate this jeopardy by reaching a population size balanced with the limits of the environment.

Thus, *What Happened to Monday* portrays a future in which "the protection and negation of life" continues to be "global politics' only horizon of sense" (Esposito, 2004/2008, p. 147) – but not in a way that affirms that global politics will continue to be dominated by a biopolitical paradigm "that makes the preservation of life through reproduction the only project that enjoys universal legitimacy" (Esposito, 2004/2008, p. 147). In the future world of *What Happened to Monday*, this biopolitical paradigm has, at least in part, lost its legitimacy, as The Child Allocation Bureau only assigns the right to live to first-born children. Instead, the film makes visible a biopolitical paradigm in which the consideration of a human being's projected climatic and ecological footprint comes before its right to live.

This is, in particular, a consequence of The Child Allocation Bureau's use of quantification, as this quantification reduces human life to numbers – more precisely, to data about resource consumption – thereby distancing Cayman and her accomplices from the understanding that human life has a value in itself. What the quantification conveys to them is that the lives of some humans will not benefit the long-term survival of the general population and therefore have a negative value. Consequently, the quantification leads to thanatopolitics, but only because the quantification is a by-product of the Bureau's idea of sustainability as ecological equilibrium. It is, in other words, this idea that brands certain resource-consuming humans (namely children not born as only children) as a danger to the general health and well-being of the population, thereby paving the way for their killings.

Popular Films and the Warning of Future Thanatopolitics

In this article, I have examined *Elysium* and *What Happened to Monday* as films that imagine future bio- and thanatopolitics via worlds in which the Anthropocene has dramatically escalated. This has led to some crucial findings. To begin with, my analyses of the two films have unveiled imaginings of the future that foreshadow a paradigmatic shift in the relationship between biopolitics and thanatopolitics. The configuration of

bio- and thanatopolitics in the two films thus breaks with what Michel Foucault, and later Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, highlight as the impetus of biopolitics' transformation into thanatopolitics. According to these thinkers, it is chiefly the association of certain humans with biological dangers that causes biopolitics to mutate into thanatopolitics. In *Elysium* and *What Happened to Monday* this is not the case. Here it is primarily humans construed as an ecological danger that make biopolitics turn to thanatopolitics, as the escalation of the Anthropocene prompts the regimes in power to pursue the best possible conditions for some humans by selectively killing others.

In *Elysium*, this selection has clear racist implications, as the film depicts a future in which black and brown death conditions both global ecological destruction and the maintenance of a sustainable lifeboat for the rich. In *What Happened to Monday*, the selection targets siblings, as the film depicts a future in which the main concern is overpopulation. Despite this difference both films depict Anthropocene futures in which the regimes in power act on global ecological threats by brutally micromanaging populations and killing some of their members. What comes to light via both films is thus that there is a risk that the Anthropocene will engender regimes that will seek complete control over all the beings that together comprise an ecologically connected system – be it a closed local system as in *Elysium* or major parts of the Earth System as in *What Happened to Monday*. Moreover, both films show how this desire can potentially intensify to the point where it will instrumentalise thanatopolitics. In fact, among the things that the two films unveil, this desire for complete control is particularly revealing, as it exposes an unsettling underside to the idea of sustainability as equilibrium. In the two films, it is thus this idea that pushes biopolitics into a totalitarian form and from there makes biopolitics mutate into thanatopolitics.

This is a warning that should be taken seriously at time when climatic and ecological degradation continues seemingly without interruption. Fictions such as *Elysium* and *What Happened to Monday* have of course been created to entertain, but this does not negate their speculative relevance and disqualify them as catalysts for reflection. Rather than perceive Hollywood and other inventors of fictive Anthropocene futures "as the low bar of thoughtful speculation" (Wainwright & Mann, 2018, p. 130), we should recognise that they offer a unique form of engagement with possible future dangers. As shown, it is for instance noteworthy that the regimes in power in both *Elysium* and *What Happened to Monday* operate on the basis of highly automated devices. In fact, in both films the complexity of these devices decides the scale on which the regimes in power can operate biopolitically and thanatopolitically. The more

complex the degree of automatisation, the more intrusive and powerful the regimes appear, that is, the more capable are they of inferring in all aspects of life. Ultimately, this capability is put in the service of thanatopolitics when the focus of the regimes in power shifts from complete control to the killing of those who jeopardise ecological equilibrium.

In this respect, *Elysium* and *What Happened to Monday* warn more explicitly about a potential future connection between artificial intelligence and thanatopolitics than other films that also depict catastrophic Anthropocene futures. For example, in *Snowpiercer* (Bong Joon-ho, 2013) and *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014), one finds regimes that kill for reasons very similar to those of the regimes in *Elysium* and *What Happened to Monday*, but their thanatopolitics are not as explicitly linked to the use of artificial intelligence. In fact, in *Interstellar* the most important representation of artificial intelligence, the robot TARS, is depicted as an avatar of friendliness. Instead, a stronger link between *Elysium, What Happened to Monday, Snowpiercer*, and *Interstellar* exists in the way all four films depict futures in which human degradation of the Earth System leads to a conception of resource scarcity and then to thanatopolitics. In *Interstellar*, it is food shortage that prompts the regime in power to ask NASA "to drop bombs from the stratosphere on the starving people", and it is a deeply problematic conception of resource scarcity that drives Wilford (Ed Harris), the master of the train in *Snowpiercer*, to thin out the passengers of the trail section.

Considering that there is a long tradition in post-apocalyptic films of depicting resource scarcity as the grounds on which draconian regimes kill, it will perhaps come as no surprise that *Elysium*, *What Happened to Monday*, *Interstellar*, and *Snowpiercer* all link thanatopolitics to resource scarcity. Yet this should not obscure the fact that they also represent a renewal within this tradition, as they each explore how resource scarcity could be managed in different Anthropocene futures. It is, in other words, their appropriation of escalating Anthropocene phenomena such as anthropogenic global warming and the accelerating extinction of many species that makes these films particularly relevant for revisiting and revising the philosophical conceptualisation of thanatopolitics.

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