younger actor in *Little Miss Sunshine,* where he played the (rather clichéd) part of a rebellious teenager (still managing to deliver the best line, or rather, word, of the whole film). In *Ruby Sparks,* Dano's performance is mature and witty and, without necessarily making the audience to identify with his character, he brings the spectator to his side. The only downside is his rather young appearance, and he is not entirely believable as a character whose previous success is already ten years old.

Ruby Sparks is a very enjoyable film that captures attention from the beginning and is able to keep it till the end.

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The Hunger Games. Dir. Gary Ross. Perf. Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson. Lionsgate, 2012. Film.

Since Huxley's *Brave New World,* dystopia has been developed as a genre that, as utopia, focuses on the future. But instead of the utopian dream to be realized, dystopias show a nightmare marked, in general, by a post-apocalyptic scenario in which the suppression of freedoms, the numbness of the masses and the use of force by the established political regime are the order of the day.

The Hunger Games is part of this tradition and seeks in our reality the origins of a bleak future, inviting us to a reflection on the present. Brought to the screen in 2012 by director Gary Ross, Suzanne Collins's story appeals to the empathy of viewers immersed in the modem entertainment world. Situated in an undetermined point in the future, after wars and natural disasters that led almost to the extinction of the human race, Panem, the scenario of this saga, is what remains of North America. Its founding myth is closely linked to US history: whereas the latter was formed from 13

colonies, Panem was formed of 13 districts. From the original districts, only 12 remain. The 13th was obliterated by the Capitol, Panem's seat of power, during the civil war which nearly destroyed the nation and became known as "The Black Days." And if the allegory of the 13 colonies works as a starting point for this nation building, "The Black Days" constitute the justification for the social order and, alongside the thirteen districts, the founding myth for the new era of Panem: the crushed rebellion against the Capitol must be kept alive in memories to never happen again.

It is by controlling the means of production, the fear, the terror, the police and propaganda that President Snow (Donald Sutherland), the ruler of Panem, can perpetuate his control over areas essential to the survival of the social order. But not only through these clearly coercive practices. The very name of the nation reveals the author's inspiration: *Panem et circenses*, bread and circuses, the Ancient Roman policy to entertain the masses and keep them busy - and alienated. The Hunger Games are the main event of this circus: each district must annually provide a boy and a girl as a symbol of its submission in order to appease the capital's rage.

These elements, coupled with the passivity of the citizens of Panem until the 74th Games, carry an atmosphere very similar to the one portrayed by Hannah Arendt, the German American political theorist, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). The Capitol is the center of a totalitarian government that, in its onion-shaped structure pointed by the German philosopher, has more influence over the districts that are closer: districts 1, 2 and 4 do not just suffer the oppression on a smaller scale, but also absorb the logic created and dedicate themselves to preparing the next champions of the games. District 12, the coal supplier, is on the outskirts of Panem: it is the farthest district, and one of the poorest. Its electric fences are no longer on, which allows the protagonist, Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence), to hunt and feed her family, while the peacekeepers turn a blind eye to the black market.

The inhabitants of the districts are distinctly different from those of the capital, even in their appearance and manners. They are not exactly seen as the same human species. Before the public presentation, the teenagers "reaped" for the games need to be bathed and scrubbed to be "presentable." But this is only part of the show: the dehumanization starts over again when the games begin and 24 children start killing one another, until the last one remains. The citizens of Panem not only watch the games; several of them, notably the ones from the Capitol (which does not send their children to the games), eagerly wait for the high point of

the annual calendar. We watch the pure implementation of the concept of *Schadenfreude*, developed by Schopenhauer and Kant to express pleasure in seeing others suffer.

And *Schadenfreude* is the right word to explain the furor surrounding the event. The film criticizes the futile Capitol citizens who enjoy the barbarism of the games: they cheer for their favorites, complain when a day ends with no deaths, like the bloody deaths better than deaths from exposure or hunger, and yearn for the final strike. But this criticism can also be extended to us, enjoying a movie depicting such an alienated society. In our age, where celebrities have their daily lapses exposed on websites and in newspapers, in an era of reality shows, insensitivity seems to be the normal state.

In Panem, the offering of tributes to the Hunger Games is a ritual sacrifice for peacekeeping. The logic of fear persists as, even in greater number, districts do not rise up against the capital. In these circumstances, Katniss turns into a new Theseus, fighting a monster whose sphere of action goes far beyond a maze. Her sacrifice is magnified by the characteristics of the heroine: it is not the desire to achieve fame or to inspire a riot that drives her, but her protective character. Katniss is driven by the instinct to protect those she loves, or those who find themselves in an unfair position, such as Rue (Amandla Stenberg) and Peeta *(Josh* Hutcherson). When Katniss takes her sister Prim's place in the "Reaping" or when she is willing to die instead of killing Peeta (even though she thinks there are good chances of the organizers sparing them), it is her self-sacrifice that provokes the empathy of viewers.

In Panem, an Orwellian version of the future, technological domination is essential to maintain the social order. Consequently, the development of mass media reaches unprecedented proportions: the death is taken as a sport and the masses are immerged in entertainment. With a totalitarian structure working for the alienation, *The Hunger Games* can be seen as 1984 in the age of reality shows.

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