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## SPECTACLES OF POWER AND PRECARITY: MEDIA, SURVIVAL, AND POLITICAL PERFORMANCE IN SUZANNE COLLINS'S THE HUNGER GAMES – FROM NOVEL TO FILM

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*The article examines the representation of power, survival, and media spectacle in Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games trilogy and its cinematic adaptations, focusing on the transformation of these themes from page to screen. Drawing on concepts from media studies, political theory, and cultural criticism, the study explores how authoritarian power is constructed, maintained, and challenged through spectacle, surveillance, and mediated violence. Particular attention is paid to the Hunger Games themselves as a performative mechanism that combines punishment, entertainment, and ideological control, reinforcing the Capitol's dominance while simultaneously generating the conditions for resistance.*

*The analysis highlights Katniss Everdeen's role as both a survivor and a media figure, whose body, emotions, and narrative are continuously shaped by institutional forces and broadcast to a mass audience. The article argues that the transition from literary text to film intensifies the visual and emotional dimensions of spectacle, amplifying themes of propaganda, and manipulation through cinematic techniques such as montage, and sound design. At the same time, the films reconfigure narrative perspective, partially shifting the focus from Katniss's internal consciousness to a broader political panorama.*

*By comparing narrative strategies in the novels with audiovisual strategies in the films, the article demonstrates how adaptation reshapes the critique of media power in contemporary society. Ultimately, The Hunger Games is interpreted as a dystopian reflection on modern media culture, where survival is inseparable from performance and power operates through images as much as through force. The study contributes to adaptation studies and dystopian scholarship by revealing how popular culture articulates anxieties about control, resistance, and spectatorship in the twenty-first century.*

**Key words:** *The Hunger Games, dystopian fiction, power, control, media, ideology, propaganda, surveillance*

**Баняс Наталія, Лізак Катерина, Бодок Емеше-Еріка. Видовища влади й прекарності: медіа, виживання та політична перформативність у «Голодних іграх» Сюзанни Коллінз – від роману до фільму**

*У статті розглядається репрезентація влади, виживання та медіавидовищ у трилогії Сюзанни Коллінз «Голодні ігри» та її кінематографічних адаптаціях, зосереджуючись на трансформації цих тем зі сторінки на екран. Спираючись на концепції медіазнавства, політичної теорії та культурної критики, дослідження аналізує, як авторитарна влада конструюється, підтримується та оскаржується через видовищність, спостереження та опосередковане насильство. Особливу увагу приділено*

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самим «Голодним іграм» як перформативному механізму, що поєднує покарання, розваги та ідеологічний контроль, посилюючи домінування Капітолію, одночасно створюючи умови для опору.

Аналіз підкреслює роль Катніс Евердін як особи, яка вижила, так і медіафігури, чие тіло, емоції та нарратив постійно формуються інституційними силами та транслюються масовій аудиторії. Стверджується, що перехід від літературного тексту до фільму посилює візуальні та емоційні виміри видовищності, посилюючи теми пропаганди та маніпуляцій за допомогою кінематографічних прийомів, таких як монтаж та звуковий дизайн. Водночас фільми переналаштовують нарративну перспективу, частково зміщуючи фокус із внутрішньої свідомості Катніс на ширшу політичну панораму.

Порівнюючи нарративні стратегії у романах з аудіовізуальними стратегіями у фільмах, стаття демонструє, як адаптація змінює критику медіавлади у сучасному суспільстві. Зрештою, «Голодні ігри» інтерпретуються як антиутопічне відображення сучасної медіакультури, де виживання невіддільне від вистави, а влада діє як через образи, так і через силу. Статті робить внесок у дослідження адаптації та антиутопічної науки, розкриваючи, як популярна культура висловлює тривоги щодо контролю, опору та глядацької аудиторії у XXI ст.

**Ключові слова:** «Голодні ігри», антиутопічна художня література, влада, контроль, медіа, ідеологія, пропаганда, нагляд.

**Introduction.** Since its release in 2008, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* has captivated a global audience with its exploration of survival, power, and the influence of media within a dystopian world. As the first installment in Collins's acclaimed trilogy, the novel quickly established itself as a defining work in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. Its adaptation into a blockbuster film series (2012–2015), directed by Gary Ross and later Francis Lawrence, further expanded its cultural impact and critical recognition.

As a brief addition, it is also worth considering Suzanne Collins herself, as her personal background and professional experience strongly influence the themes of *The Hunger Games*. Collins is an American author who began her career as a television screenwriter, working mainly on children's and young adult programs. This background is clearly reflected in the novels' strong visual quality and in the central role of media and spectacle within the narrative. Growing up in a military family, with her father serving in the U.S. Air Force, Collins was exposed from an early age to discussions about war, loss, and power, which later became recurring motifs in her writing. She has mentioned that the idea for *The Hunger Games* emerged while channel-surfing between reality television shows and news coverage of real wars, an experience that highlights the novel's critique of media consumption. Through her work, Collins not only constructs a dystopian future but also offers a critical reflection on contemporary society, particularly on the relationship between power, violence, and mass media.

**Aim.** The article **aims** to examine the representation of power relations, survival mecha-

nisms, and media spectacle in both the novel and its cinematic adaptation, focusing on the parallels, contrasts, and the ways in which visual storytelling shapes audience perception.

The film adaptation visually amplifies this through opulent costume design, elaborate set pieces, and sophisticated cinematography, underscoring the stark disparity between the Capitol's excessive wealth and the districts' subjugation. "Television is a powerful tool in mass communication, especially in Panem where certain broadcasts are mandatory and all broadcasts are governmentally sanctioned" [13, p. 8].

### Results and discussion

#### **The Hunger Games as a Tool of Political Domination**

The narrative offers a detailed depiction of the Capitol's absolute dominance over its twelve oppressed districts, a power structure upheld through mechanisms of economic exploitation, political coercion, and psychological manipulation. "...Hunger Games themselves are played out on a computer-generated landscape, skillfully manipulated by the creators of the event so that they can ratchet up the brutality..." [12, p. 153]. Collins carefully constructs a dystopian society in which the Capitol's tyranny is revealed through Katniss Everdeen's internal reflections and perceptions, exposing the striking disparity between the extreme poverty of the districts and the excessive luxury of the Capitol. This hegemonic order finds its most explicit expression in the annual Hunger Games a state orchestrated and televised competition that serves both as a reminder of the Capitol's unchallenged supremacy and as a deterrent against any form of rebellion by normalizing institutionalized violence.

The Games, functioning as a ritualized act of control, reduce human life to a tool of political domination. “After years of being watched and controlled, the people of Panem have forgotten basic citizen birthrights and the beauty of freedom in their lives” [2, p. 79]. Through this spectacle, individuals are rendered into “bare life”, expendable entities within a political performance designed for mass consumption. Specifically, the annual reaping, where children between the ages of 12 and 18 are chosen to participate in a fight to the death, functions as a powerful tool for President Snow to assert his absolute control over Panem.

Moreover, the Capitol’s strategic manipulation of visual imagery within the Games is instrumental in shaping public perception and collective identity. By transforming violence into entertainment, the regime constructs a distorted reality that enforces compliance and submission among its citizens. “The controlling government uses visual eloquence to determine and project an accepted conception of the real and of its subjects’ identity which forcibly engenders normative commitment” [7, p. 293]. This calculated display of power strengthens the existing social hierarchy and effectively suppresses dissent by instilling both fear and a sense of futility within the districts. “Oppressive government, whose power is usually concentrated in one person, takes cruel and inhuman actions aimed at seizing total authority over the citizens; the development of new technologies only makes it easier to both manipulate and dominate the individuals. However, what still remains one of the most successful means of controlling the society is an excessive use of violence – another reappearing motif in the dystopian works” [11, p. 50].

#### **Economic Inequality and Disciplinary Power**

The complex structure of power in Panem, as depicted in Collins’s novel, extends far beyond direct political domination to include the economic and social hierarchies that secure the Capitol’s control. This oppression is maintained not only through force but also through continuous surveillance, turning citizens into self-regulating subjects who live under the constant awareness of the “watchful eye” that restricts their freedom and individuality. This system of observation closely mirrors concept of the Panopticon, where discipline and conformity are achieved through the internalized fear of being monitored and punished.

“A panopticon is a structure of unseen surveillance which conveys omnipresent and omniscient power and enforces this power by convincing the objects of this structure to mutually enforce this surveillance because they experience the effects of it” [15, p. 124]. “The novel’s focus on being watched certainly could be read as alluding to our current culture of forced surveillance” [1, p. 10].

Furthermore, the sharp economic divide between the impoverished districts and the prosperous Capitol reinforces this power structure. The Capitol exploits the districts’ labor and resources while its citizens enjoy lives of extravagant excess, characterized by frivolous consumption and superficial pleasures. The Capitol’s obsession with extreme fashion and body modification serves as a visual symbol of its social superiority and emotional detachment from the suffering of the districts. These aesthetic displays function as powerful markers of hierarchy, underlining the deep social and political inequalities within Panem. “It (the novel) raises wider questions about fashion’s origins, meaning and work in relation to class” [14, p. 181].

#### **Media Manipulation and the Spectacle of Power**

The Capitol’s projection of dominance through its aesthetic excess is further sustained by its powerful media system, which continuously disseminates a manipulated version of reality to control public perception and suppress dissent. The Hunger Games operate as both propaganda and a tool of terror, strategically designed to instill fear and reinforce the futility of opposition among the districts. “...the Capitol continually displays propaganda and even a cruel reality show that serves as a way of amusement for the people who live in the Capitol and as a punishment for those in the districts” [3, p. 33]. By televising this annual spectacle of violence, the Capitol reminds the districts of their subjugation and reasserts its absolute power, effectively deterring any collective resistance. “...the capital city successfully prevents any possible changes within Panem by maintaining the atmosphere of terror and oppression... The cruel President Snow relies on violence to control the citizens and to ensure that any possibility of a rebellion is immediately suppressed” [11, p. 55–56]. The Games thus serve as a mechanism for maintaining social hierarchy, dividing the population along class and geographic lines while ensuring the Capitol’s continued supremacy.

Furthermore, the Capitol's dominance is rooted in its monopolization of wealth and resources, extracted from the labor and suffering of the districts. "District 12 portends fear and suffering" [14, p. 183]. This economic imbalance consolidates political power, allowing the Capitol to manipulate both material needs and ideological beliefs through control of media and markets. Food, in particular, becomes a critical instrument of subjugation its distribution reflecting the unequal power dynamics that define Panem. The Capitol's indulgence in excess contrasts sharply with the perpetual hunger of the districts, symbolizing the moral corruption and exploitation underpinning its regime. This manipulation extends to the public perception of the Games themselves, where the spectacle of violence is meticulously framed as a form of justice rather than systematic oppression. "An essential difference between most turn of the 21st century dystopias, which rebelled against the instrumental logic of modernity and dehumanizing systems, and this particular cluster of films, is that the latter focus primarily on questions of wealth distribution and open social antagonism" [10, p. 114].

#### **Visualizing Power and Inequality in the Film Adaptation**

The film adaptation effectively transforms the novel's thematic contrasts into striking visual elements, employing elaborate set designs and extravagant costumes to highlight the Capitol's excessive luxury and its detachment from the hardships faced by the districts. "Shots of hard hatted miners faces blackened by dust, dressed in grimy overalls trudging to work, together with the rail wagons emblazoned with the logo of "Capitol Coal" which frame "The Reapings" scene in front of District 12's Hall of Justice underline the regime of hard physical labour, abject poverty and pain faced by its workers" [14, p. 183]. Through its visual composition, the film accentuates the grotesque opulence of the Capitol, emphasizing the vast social and economic gulf separating its privileged citizens from the impoverished populations of the outer districts. This disparity is vividly depicted through costume design the "faded, worn clothing of District 12's residents" starkly opposing the Capitol's vibrant, flamboyant fashion visually communicating class division and social inequality.

The use of contrasting cinematographic techniques, such as bright, saturated colors for the Capitol and muted, desaturated tones for the

districts, further reinforces this separation, visually mirroring the story's themes of control and disparity. Additionally, the Capitol's exaggerated sense of style functions not merely as aesthetic excess but as a calculated tool of distraction and manipulation, turning consumerism and spectacle into mechanisms of political domination that divert attention from the systemic exploitation underlying Panem's society. "So the practice and pursuit of fashion distinguishes the excesses of the citizenry of "Capitol" from the district proletariat whose lives are marked by hunger, poverty and scarcity and whose banal exploitation serves Panem's privileged enclave" [14, p. 183].

The film's visual narrative thus becomes a critical analytical lens through which the audience can perceive the intricate mechanisms of power and control, particularly how media spectacle is deployed to sanitize brutality and maintain social order. This meticulous visual strategy not only highlights the economic exploitation of the districts but also critiques the voyeuristic consumption of suffering inherent in reality television and media-driven violence. The adaptation demonstrates how the spectacle of "bare life" is presented as entertainment, drawing parallels between the historical context of gladiatorial games and contemporary media consumption. "In this sense we could think of the function of the Hunger Games arena as a technologically spectacularly produced space of the inclusive exclusion – including bare lives from the districts in the Capitol city by excluding them into a certain location" [4, p. 80]. The film powerfully underscores the dehumanizing aspect of the Games, transforming the child tributes into mere pawns in a meticulously crafted public display designed to entertain and subjugate. "Either through manipulating the power that children hold within their own disabled districts, or the reformation of the tributes who are about to enter into the Games, the government seeks to use the child's image as a mean in which to rule" [8, p. 89].

**Conclusions.** Both the novel and its film adaptation explore the complex intersection of media, power, and survival, revealing how these forces interact to uphold an oppressive social and political hierarchy. Together, they expose the consequences of economic inequality and the manipulation of public perception through controlled narratives. Through distinct narrative and visual techniques, each medium critiques modern concerns such as labor exploitation,

the commodification of violence, and the moral implications of consumerism within a divided society. “Spared the agony of making any sacrifice at all amongst the elite spectators and officials the Games cultivate a blasé hedonism and a consciousness which prioritises getting their fashionable self-presentation and its mannered protocols right, even in the face of the barbarity of its murderous denouement” [14, p. 188].

The lasting relevance of *The Hunger Games* in both literature and film lies in its insightful examination of power relations, the struggle for survival, and the pervasive role of media in shaping identity and ideology. Ultimately, the story stands as a profound commentary on social injustice and the enduring potential for resistance and hope in the face of systemic oppression. The series encourages readers and viewers to confront uncomfortable realities within their own societies, particularly regarding the ethical consequences of engaging with media that sensationalizes suffer-

ing while obscuring systemic problems. As such, it operates as a compelling dystopian critique, cautioning audiences about the societal dangers that arise when entertainment becomes entangled with political control and economic exploitation. “The failure of detailed world building in the series allows readers to creatively interpret much of the book, filling in gaps with their own interpretations, particularly because the fast-paced, first-person narrative does not encourage the reader to reflect, making it easy to skip past what might be crucial details” [9, p. 10].

Additionally, it prompts reflection on individual complicity, drawing parallels between audiences’ consumption of the narrative and the Capitol citizens’ detached enjoyment of the Games. While the trilogy’s appeal to young adults fosters engagement with dystopian themes, it also carries the risk of passive consumption, potentially diluting the active social critique that the genre seeks to inspire.

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