Fictional Futures In The Science Fiction Texts Immersion By Aliette De Bodard And Gattaca By Andrew Niccol

Science fiction texts explore fictional worlds through speculative conventions and themes, allowing composers to highlight present or emerging issues. Gattaca (1997) directed by Andrew Niccol and Immersion (2012) by Aliette De Bodard are both science fiction texts that explore identity loss and alienation of individuals due to irresponsible technological growth. Through features and forms, the composers connect the audience with evocative ‘what ifs’ that engender different evaluations of issues in the presence of discrimination and cultural loss.

Science fiction texts such as Gattaca and Immersion examine a fictional future that conveys the fear of technology creating new fractures within society, alienating and imposing conformity upon individuals. Gattaca generates a society where most individuals are made genetically superior and discrimination is deeply ingrained for invalids like Vincent. In close-up frames of the opening scenes, the camera magnifies the minuscule fragments of DNA. These symbolic macro-shots suggest that Gattaca’s society places extreme importance on the smallest element of a human being rather than the individual’s qualities. The harsh diegetic sounds of Vincent scrubbing away his invalid identity shows that these actions are painful and unnatural yet necessary. This aspect of Vincent’s ‘inferior’ identity causes isolation as he grows up as demonstrated in the symbolic close-up shot of Vincent’s hand on the bars at the kindergarten as the woman closes the gate and opportunities on him. This scene captures Vincent’s exclusion from society, forming a continual pattern until Vincent is forced to assume another identity. In this way, Niccol utilizes Vincent’s character to demonstrate the alienation of individuals who fail to conform. Similarly, Immersion imagines a future where society creates pressure for individuals to change who they are. Initially, the use of second-person perspective creates a character who is only referred to as ‘you’, establishing a character who is seemingly estranged from herself. The text juxtaposes who Agnes’ avatar appears to be in ‘the stylish clothes of a well-traveled, well-connected woman’ to Agnes’ true self in ‘smaller, squatter and in every way diminished- a stranger’ to demonstrate how Agnes feels exiled by her own identity as a Rong. It shows how Agnes thinks she is only acceptable in her world if she becomes like a Galactic. Like Gattaca, Immersion conveys the alienation of individuals and the need to change or shed identity to belong. Hence, through character, both the fictional futures of Gattaca and Immersion warn the presence of technological consequences that will catalyze the alienation of individuals instead of bringing about human advancements.

However, while both texts use speculative conventions and themes of identity loss to explore their fictional futures, the texts make different criticisms of the present. Gattaca argues that technology could be used to discriminate blindly, regardless of the individual. The discrimination Vincent faces parallels with society discriminating based on race during the segregation era. The irony is used in the scene where Vincent is unable to get a job and a person of color is in a position of power. This ironic subversion of the racial trope demonstrates how Gattaca’s society discriminates blindly despite Vincent’s qualities. The metaphor of sight and blindness is used in the scene where Vincent’s invalid face and genetic code appear on the screen. The high angle close-up shot of the director missing the detail and instead of pointing to the mission path shows how unaware the workers are of the deceit but also the qualities of the man right in front of them. Niccol uses this to comment on discrimination in the present where those in positions of

power remain myopically tethered to stereotypes and expectations, failing to acknowledge individual merits. Conversely, the assumed identity in Immersion conveys ideas of cultural imperialism. Agnes' compares her Rong appearance to that of a 'jackfruit', a South-East Asian fruit, which is visually displeasing but she says 'you can be made perfect…someone pale skinned...and beautiful'. This shows how Agnes perceives being Galactic as the social norm for desirable beauty. The metaphor of the immerser, therefore, represents western cultural imperialism in the present where those of Asian descent often want to alter who they are to become more Caucasian. The purpose of the extended metaphorical conceit captures the demand for social homogeny, reflecting the anxieties felt by present racial minorities living in predominantly Caucasian societies. This metaphor emphasizes Bodard's criticism of western imperialism, which has fuelled the desire for Asian individuals to homogenize to become more acceptable. Thus, Gattaca argues that senseless discrimination has created personal identity loss, which is applicable to both the present and speculative future, whereas Immersion criticizes the globalization of western culture, which has led to a loss of cultural identity.

Therefore, the science fiction texts Immersion and Gattaca explore fictional futures by utilizing themes and conventions to expose ongoing or emerging issues in the present. Through characters, both texts explore the exclusion and alienation of individuals as a result of technology, however, Gattaca and Immersion utilize this common notion to make different criticisms of the present. Whilst Gattaca comments on senseless discrimination that ignores the attributes of the individual, Immersion faults the spread of western culture, which has consumed local cultural space to maintain its' dominance.