A Blast from the Past: Nostalgia in Fallout (2024)

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Resume

Tv-serien *Fallout* (2024) præsenterer en alternativ fremtid for dets publikum, hvori den kolde krig blev til virkelighed og skabte et post-apokalyptisk ødeland. Dermed er det visuelle udtryk og æstetikken i serien forbundet til atomalderen i den amerikanske kontekst, både i tv-seriens fortid og fremtid. Dette speciale har til formål at analysere, hvordan tv-serien *Fallout* engagerer sig med nostalgi, gennem dets visuelle elementer, samt dets historiske og kulturelle udtryk. Teori inden for nostalgi studier skaber rammesætningen for specialets tema, og informerer derved de underliggende emner inden for analysen. Elementer i serien reflektere også en form for nostalgi i overenstemmelse med Svetlana Boyms nøglebegreber *restorative nostalgia* og *reflective nostalgia*. Ikonografi fra den amerikanske kultur og historie medvirker til tv-seriens repræsentation af amerikansk ideologi og myter, samt dets kritk af disse. Teknologien i tv-serien udtrykker også nostalgi, der til gengæld skaber en fortælling om gengivelser af popkulturelle kendetegnelser. Yderligere gennem ikonografi, kulturelle og narrative virkemidler, reflekterer tv-serien simulakra, der udtrykker en efterligning af virkeligheden. Simulakra afspejler dermed fortidens angst for atomvåben, men også nutidge overvejelser over klimaforandringer. Retrofuturisme og steampunk giver grobund til disse overvejelser, hvori nostalgien repræsenteres. Konsumerisme bliver herved også kritiseret, idet ødelandet i tv-serien formidler bæredygtighed i forbindelse med dens baggrund. *Fallout* er også et udtryk af Mark Fishers kapitalistiske realisme, da tv-serien gengiver troper og stereotyper fra popkultur. Ydermere fokuserer specialet også på de underliggende kønsroller som *Fallout* repræsenter, og hvordan tv-serien nedbryder disse stereotyper, der former en anti-nostalgisk vinkel i tv-seriens udtryk. Teknofeminisme skaber grundlaget for denne overvejelse om kønsroller, hvor tv-serien underliggende kommenterer på kvinders forhold til for eksempel præventionl, angående et dystopisk eller utopisk perspektiv. Ved at analysere tv-seriens persongalleri, samt dets visuelle opsætning, er specialet kommet frem til, at serien reflekterer brister i atomisk optimisme i

50’erne og 60’erne, visualiseret i en fjern fremtid. Ydermere er det en kritik på den amerikanske ideologisæt, men har heller ikke i sinde at finde en alternativ løsning. Dermed demonstrer tv-serien yderligere en kapitalistisk realistisk kendsgerning.

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"We are going to have peace even if we have to fight for it"

Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The quest for peace has persisted throughout history, being re-negotiated for better or for worse for humankind. *Fallout* (2024) posits what could happen if private organisations had such a grasp on the fate of humanity, and does so by utilising nostalgia to reconfigure how we perceive history by imagining an alternative one. The TV series *Fallout* is an adaptation from a game series of the same name, with nine total games in its repertoire. However, this thesis focuses solely on the TV series *Fallout* from 2024. Decades after a nuclear apocalypse, raiders force Lucy to set out on a quest to find her father in the wasteland, after being attacked in their underground bunker. Lucy is confronted with a radiated wasteland filled with mutants and a violent, lawless community of those who were left behind on the surface. The pre-apocalyptic world of the series resembles the 1950s and 1960s, which is conveyed in the future of the wasteland. Through imitating American iconography, history, and culture, *Fallout* imagines an alternative history where the nuclear threat of the Cold War occurred. Contextualising this period is, therefore, paramount in recognising the historic connections and referencing the series.

As *Fallout* is concerned with the past, it is necessary to utilise theory associated with nostalgia studies to assess how the series engages with nostalgia through its narrative and visual aesthetics. Nostalgia in the series creates a longing for a time that has passed, however, it is reflected as either being bound to the past, wanting to recreate it, or it lingers on the ruins of the past. Scholars such as Svetlana Boym, along with her key concepts of restorative and reflective nostalgia, aid in this understanding of this notion. Nostalgia is reflected in the music as well as the visual aesthetic; therefore, employing Mark Fisher's research on Hauntology assists in understanding how music enforces the series' nostalgic expression. Additionally,

Fisher's proposal on *The Slow Cancellation of the Future* facilitates comprehending how *Fallout* is a postmodern reflection of culture today, thus forming a critical perspective.

Academic research on the TV series (hereafter mostly referred to as the series) is lacking, almost non-existent, which this thesis aims to amend. It is a product of American contemporary culture and, therefore, also a product that conveys the thoughts and discourses brought on by anxieties and problematics within the anglosphere. By imagining an alternative history and speculating on the complicated history of the U.S., the series reflects the mindset of the Atomic Age in contrast to that of the future, which represents contemporary opinions and ideas. Therefore, the theoretical framework consists of an overview of speculative fiction as an umbrella term in accordance with its historical and narrative elements, utilising texts from Marek Oziewicz, as well as Marianne Kongerslev et al., and Briohny Doyle. Furthermore, wasteland and the apocalypse convey a breakdown of society, meaning that the infrastructure contributes to the worldbuilding found in the series. Christian B. Long remarks on this subject in dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction, which provides an insight into how energy plays a role in the control of a population. This aspect is present in *Fallout*, as nuclear power and cold fusion energy serve as a means to control the world and its population, contributing to one of the main conflicts in the narrative. By reconstructing the past into a new form, the series creates simulacra, as it is perceivable to be a copy of a copy. Jean Baudrillard wrote on this very subject, wanting to analyse the signs and symbols that can be found in culture, thereby creating a shared experience of such and how it relates to reality. This idea is applicable in *Fallout*, therefore making Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) beneficial for the analysis. Imagined realities is a subject that the series touches upon by using a collective memory of cultural artefacts and iconography through its visualisation and narrative.

Utilising nostalgia through culture, therefore, embodies a retrofuturistic aesthetic, which reveals the Atomic Age as a source of inspiration. Elizabeth Guffey's and Kate C.

Lemay's work on retrofuturism aids in comprehending the style's elements, which is a sleek vision of the future, with technology representing the past but reconfigured towards a futuristic visualisation. Steampunk as a style also displays an advantageous angle towards the wasteland pictured in the series, therefore becoming a form of retrofuturism. Although this theoretical foundation on retrofuturism is embodied mostly by Guffey and Lemay, as they are some key scholars on the subject, the scholar Sharon Sharpe contributes to widening this framework.

Gender is an underlying reflection in the series, therefore, it is material to analyse it from this angle. By using the Atomic Age as inspiration, the series forces the audience to deliberate on the traditional gender roles that were predominant in this period. Peter Schelde provides insight into this subject in connection to SF, as well as Katarzyna Ostalska and Tomasz Fisiak, thereby creating a base for the representation of gender within this genre. However, a more modern reflection of gender norms is important to explore since the series deters from traditional gender roles, thereby creating a temporal fragmentation. *TechnoFeminism* by Judy Wajcman researches how technology and gender have interacted in a historical context, and how they impact each other.

This thesis aims to understand how *Fallout* engages with nostalgia and how this is conveyed through its narrative, aesthetic, and visual elements, thereby illustrating the nostalgic presence of the Atomic Age. Additionally, this nostalgic omnipresence is a reflection and critique of the past and the present, thereby creating a fragmented temporality. Furthermore, this thesis includes a contextual chapter which aids in understanding the inspiration for the series' narrative.

Literature review

As this thesis falls within the field of nostalgia studies, an overview of the field is necessary. Nostalgia studies is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, therefore creating a broader field of research including many scholars. Fredric Jameson's work within the field is noticeable, with works such as his essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (1983), which delves into the argument that the recycling of styles and pastiche found in postmodernism turns everything into a commodity, as a result of late-stage capitalism.

Svetlana Boym coined the terms reflective and restorative nostalgia in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), which has created a fundamental framework within the field of nostalgia studies. Boym's work has been referenced in numerous studies and research articles, such as "Faces of Nostalgia: Restorative and Reflective Nostalgia in the Fine Arts" (2018) by Gizela Horvath. The terms Boym proposed, therefore, build upon an ongoing discussion on how nostalgia can be studied, and in different contexts, which, in the case of Horvath, is using reflective nostalgia to ascertain the term as a resource to approach the passing of time in the context of Hungarian fine arts.

Mark Fisher has also contributed much to nostalgia studies, with his works situated in Hauntology, which is derived from Jacques Derrida's terminology. Fisher focuses on 21st century culture in his book *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (2014), with specific parts focusing on music and film. Herein, he argues that nostalgia has a significant hold on the culture today, thereby creating a form of stagnation and a cycle of nostalgia. Cherilyn Elston utilises Fisher's arguments in the article "Spectres of Lost Futures: Hauntology and Juan Soto's *Parábola Del Retorno*" (2024), examining the film *Parábola Del Retorno* from a Fisherian perspective, as it conveys exile as a fragmented experience, therefore imagining lost futures. In other works, such as James Sweetings article "Hauntological Form: Where We Might Find the New in Contemporary Videogames" (2024), the defeatist nature of

Fisher's arguments for the 21st century stagnant culture is debated, rendering a more optimistic attitude towards finding the 'new' in video games that reflects familiarity.

Academic articles or research done on *Fallout* as a series are lacking, having most of their focus on the video game series instead. Furthermore, the field of nostalgia has not taken advantage of the TV series as a source of examination, therefore, this connection is difficult as well. However, it is possible to find reviews by notable publishers such as *The Guardian*. The review "Fallout review - an absolute blast of a TV show" (2024), written by Lucy Mangan, a British journalist writing for *The Guardian*, gives the series an overall positive review with five stars. Mangan notes on the series creators as "manag[ing] to combine traditional post-nuclear apocalypse tropes with semi-ironic takes on 50s motifs, B-movie conventions and horror-level blood and gore" (Mangan). What can be derived from this statement is that Mangan observes the core of nostalgic elements found in *Fallout*, stemming from a historical perspective, but also in its use of genre and cinematic conventions and traditions. It is therefore not entirely presumptuous to analyse the series from such an angle, as the review is a reflection of a larger discussion. It is not only nostalgia through conventions and historical aspects that Mangan elaborates upon, as she points out the naivety that is present in the series is notable through the main character, Lucy, noting that she "fall[s] from innocence" (Mangan). Such a statement is an essential element in my analysis as well, however, this analysis connects naivety to one found in the 50s. Overall, the review reflects some of the same notions and analytical points that I will be presenting, therefore, this thesis will be contributing and adding to an already established (however lacking in terms of the series) discussion.

Academic research done on the game series is abundant, therefore, it can be used for this section, as the TV show is set within the same parameters, such as the aesthetic and worldbuilding. The research paper "The Wasteland of the Real: Nostalgia and Simulacra in Fallout" (2018), written by Kathleen McClancy, delves into the games with a focus on its use

of nostalgia. McClancy notes that the alternate vision of the 50s in its use of technology differed from our reality, thereby "*Fallout* [...] becomes an overt example of the aesthetic of retrofuturism" (McClancy par. 4). Moreover, McClancy states that the retrofuturistic aesthetic found in the *Fallout* games is situated in its setting "from the decor to the weaponry to the quests" (McClancy par. 4). This perception is straightforward and can be applied to the TV series as well, however, the interesting aspect of this comes in the form of a fragmentation. This perception of the aesthetic is further elaborated upon, as McClancy expresses that the 50s aesthetic imagining a future has, in turn, become a relic in the future, therefore creating a fragmented form of retrofuturism. Furthermore, this retrofuturistic imagining is paralleled in the post-apocalyptic wasteland that is the 'present' of *Fallout*'s world. Thereby, *Fallout* imagines not one, but two possible futures, where aesthetics collide (McClancy par. 4). These statements coincide with the TV series' worldbuilding and aesthetic, therefore exemplifying the applicability of the research to another medium. As McClancy's research focuses on all of the games within the franchise, it therefore also comments on the difference between them, stating the later games to be more encompassing of representing the player to "the ashes of the Atomic Age's fantasies of tomorrow" (McClancy par. 5). This claim is represented in the tv-series as well, as the worldbuilding offers numerous locations which seem vast and therefore reflect the same Atomic Age referencing. Furthermore, McClancy reflects on *Fallout'*s Cold War nostalgia, in which it is deemed the period fragmented in its representation. It was a period filled with fear and instability, however, it has also "been a sign of a more innocent, safer, happier time for Americans" (McClancy par. 6). Frankly, this is precisely how *Fallout* presents the period: Deeply optimistic but troubled. McClancy reasons that this period represents a simpler time for people uncomfortable with a changing world, especially conservatives, as it was a time of stability for "domestic, suburban, middle-class, white, and heteronormative" (McClancy par. 7) Americans. Thereby, the nostalgia found herein is representative of this

exact culture and not representative of the fear and terror that was present in the U.S. political climate at the time. The series does not touch upon this discrepancy straightforwardly, but it does serve as a critique of this hegemonic representation of history and, by extension, nostalgic referencing. The statement that games' nature is "both nostalgic and ironic, both celebrating and critiquing the past" (McClancy par. 10), is paralleled in the TV series as well. The paper connects the games with Beaudrillard's concept of simulacra and simulation and posits that they create simulacrum based on "Baudrillard's third-order image: one that 'masks the *absence* of a profound reality'" (McClancy par. 15). Herein, McClancy asserts that the absent reality is "the post-apocalyptic retrofuture" (McClancy), therefore *Fallout* masks this reality, which is the dreams and future of the 50s did in fact happen, and therefore the Cold War continued. The games therefore acts as a reassurance that the dangers of nuclear war never was on the horizon, but simply acted as a tool to use authoritarian means to control the population (McClancy par. 16). In addition to this, McClancy states that after 9/11, foreign policy and security has regressed to Cold War conditions, therefore "*Fallout*'s simulacrum potentially masks their danger" (McClancy par. 17). This is exemplified by the Global War on Terror, which resulted in a focus on surveillance and security. This element can also be traced within the TV series, however, this thesis adds to the historical context by providing more immediate perspectives, such as climate change and the portrayal of gender that renders the nostalgia within it un-nostalgic. Furthermore, McClancy states that technological scepticism does not exist for the player of the games, thereby an absence of such, when, for example, drinking a cola with nuclear referencing. Even though we do not interact with the TV series as with the games, many of the characters in *Fallout* do not express a form of scepticism towards nuclear commodification.

The Atomic Age: What We Built From the Fallout

The worldbuilding and plot of *Fallout* deal with the prelude and the aftermath of an atomic event that almost decimated society as a whole, leaving the remaining human civilisation in ruins. Even though the series' apocalyptic event took place in the year 2077, much of the setting of the pre-apocalypse is located in the Atomic Age, the 50s and 60s, where this era persists in some aspect into the setting of the wasteland of the future. By utilising this period in its aesthetic vision, the series reflects a nostalgic imagining of which the audience can recognise cultural memories from an American perspective. Exploring and researching this period will help in analysing the series' contextual and historical connections.

The Atomic Age was heavily influenced by the dropping of the first atomic bomb in 1945 during World War II, hence the name. David Seed explores the Atomic Age in the chapter "Atomic Culture and the Space Race" (2014), where he focuses on the science fiction (hereafter referred to as SF) genre in connection with this time period. In the chapter, Seed notes that SF stories from after World War II until the 1980s explored the fears of atomic warfare, thereby making them all the more common in Western culture. Seed names a few examples of novels and films interested in atomic or biological warfare, and the aftermath of these events, with anxious prospects such as *Limbo* (1952) and *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). However, comic books of the 60s steered towards a more positive outlook, as they explored the theme of characters given extraordinary abilities because of radiation, therefore rendering the characters empowered rather than diminished in the face of nuclear fallout (Seed 340). Seed argues that these nuclear narratives imply an inevitable future, however, the narratives of these fantastical abilities of comic book heroes formed by radiation suggest a beneficial force for society (341). Consumer culture after World War II boasted of influence from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Music, fashion, modelling, and art put the mushroom cloud into the daily rotations of popular culture, thereby creating a more optimistic referencing of atomic culture, rather than

conveying its threatening nature (Seed 342). However, the era was not without its panic, as the public grew more and more anxious about the fallout from possible nuclear warfare. Popular culture became more sceptical of the civil defence in the U.S. and thereby created more satirical representations of life post-apocalypse, exemplified in the sketch "How I Fortified My Family Fallout Shelter" (1961) by Marvin Kitman (Seed 342). Even before the first atomic bombs were dropped, SF had already fantasised about this weapon, e.g. in Robert Cromie's book *The Crack of Doom* from 1895 (Ramirez 39). The fantasies of SF, therefore, became a reality, making the genre all the more prophetic. Whereas the genre was taken lightly before, it became apparent that SF had a nature that was worth reading and discussing (Ramirez 41).

The dropping of the atomic bomb meant a new dawn for many, which Paul Boyer outlines in the chapter "Atomic-Bomb Nightmares and World-Government Dreams" (1994). Oppenheimer, the physicist who played a major role in developing the atomic bomb, saw the bomb as a means to create a different political landscape, thereby changing the world. Furthermore, bishop G. Bromley Oxnam viewed the bomb as a tool to reshape the world (Boyer 34). Arguably, they are right in their statements, as the atomic bomb changed not only the political landscape but also mass culture, as written above. Columnist Max Lerner, however, saw the dropping as either the end of the world or the start of a world state. Boyer argues that with the imminent threat of an atomic monopoly, America had the ability to impose its vision upon the world for a new world order (Boyer 34). *Fallout* recreates this vision in its narrative, thereby reflecting the discourse that was happening at the time, both politically and nationally. This discourse did not reflect a fear of atomic warfare, but rather reflected a vision optimistic in nature and reminiscent of colonialism. The same optimism can be found in Lindsey A. Freeman's book *Longing for the Bomb: Oak Ridge and Atomic Nostalgia* (2015), which focuses on American nuclear culture, centred around the first atomic city. Oak Ridge was chosen to be a part of the Manhattan Project, which oversaw the development of the atomic

bomb, thereby giving workers on the project a place to call home while it was built (Freeman 15). The city of Oak Ridge, after the end of World War II, boasted of a museum, in which atomic utopianism was prevalent, where the catchphrase 'Atoms For Peace!' was used in the 50s and 60s (Freeman 125). Freeman argues that this atomic utopian future that the 50s represented was destroyed by the failures of Chernobyl and Fukushima, as the world became aware of the devastating results that nuclear power plants could pose (176). Currently, the museum and the city are geared more towards atomic nostalgia, with pubs aptly named "Atomic Ales" (Freeman 136), where you can buy a pint of "Oppenheimer Oatmeal Stout" (Freeman 137). The towns referencing their nuclear past reflect how atomic optimism has persevered and preserved a nostalgic vision of a past laden with death and destruction. On the same note, Freeman argues that the function of these museums that represent the Atomic Age is to "influence the American public's ideas about history of the atomic bomb and the nuclear present" and "seek[s] to legitimize history and current policy" (Freeman 135). The use of nostalgia in Oak Ridge seems to downplay the atrocities of the atomic bomb, furthering the dreams of the atomic utopian future of the 50s, but not re-igniting it. Arguably, the national identity of America had shattered after creating a weapon of destruction that threatened the whole existence of humankind, thereby creating a more comfortable narrative that seeks to re-establish Oak Ridge and the bomb as a part of American mythology and reigniting their status as saviours of the West. American Exceptionalism comes to mind, as the concept refers to a mentality that the U.S. is exceptional and distinctive in comparison to other countries and strives to be "the champion of the universal rights of all humankind" (Pease). This statement denotes that the U.S. is morally superior to all other nations, and must play an important role on the global scale politically, which reinforces the 'obligation' to interject in warfare internationally. The same mentality is portrayed in *Fallout*, however, it is not politically, but economically, that American exceptionalism is represented and critiqued.

Although atomic optimism was prevalent in the Atomic Age, fear and anxiety were also a part of the national discourse. When visualising nuclear anxiety, the fallout shelter or bunker comes to mind. Urban destruction was part of the narrative after the first dropping of the atomic bomb, of which Einstein noted that atomic strikes could eviscerate whole cities, thereby creating a rhetoric based on fear (Boyd and Linehan 244). After the atomic bomb dropped, the bomb shelter turned into the fallout shelter, thereby becoming a space of dread instead of a place of vigilance (Boyd and Linehan 243). The bunker was featured in an episode of the *Twilight Zone* in 1961, named "The Shelter". A warning of a nuclear attack creates panic in this episode, compelling the protagonist to find shelter in his shelter, but in an act of fear turns away people from his community. As his neighbours try to break down the door to his shelter, an announcement is made that the warning was a false alarm. This episode shows the anarchy and brutality of such an event and the disruption of social bonds (Boyd and Linehan 244). Jill E. Anderson argues that fallout shelters offer a "homemaking for the apocalypse" (114), thereby insinuating that the space becomes less terrifying and more homely. The argument here is that the shelters give comfort through consumerism and protection against external influences in a post-apocalyptic event. Anderson argues that the fallout shelters' role was in helping anxious Americans by reproducing the portrayal of domesticity (114). Furthermore, the capitalist way of American life in the 50s created a narrative of the home as central, or a "self contained home" (Anderson 117). Anderson notes that the survival of the human race and the American people had been placed upon families, and thereby individual actions, when President Kennedy advertised the fallout shelters in a public address in 1961 (Anderson 119). The U.S. government prepared the American people and homemakers with preparation checklists, advertisements, and the opportunity to earn a "Home Preparedness Award" (Anderson 120). In addition to this, stockpiling became a part of the Cold War domestic anxiety, and food that could last for a longer time was at its prime in terms of popularity

(Anderson 120). Emotional management became a pivotal and main idea in the official narrative of shelter survival, as portrayed in several handbooks that were written on the subject. Shelter life of the 50s and 60s was meant to imitate life above ground, as much as possible, therefore creating a form of normalcy in an abnormal situation (Anderson 121). According to Anderson, the survivors of the shelters were preferably "able-bodied, white, middle-class heteropatriarchal families" (Anderson 121) for the government, and only if they came out of the experience "with a positive attitude, both in general and toward fallout shelters" (Anderson 121). The preference reflected the mentality of the period, as these families represented a normative social system, but also a resilient one in the face of war.

The culture during the Atomic Age reflects a fluctuation in the discussion of nuclear war and fallout, which is reflected in the series as well. It reimagines the Atomic Age by fragmenting the era between the past, present, and future. By employing a topic so historically significant, *Fallout* provokes the audience, and thereby contemporary discourse, to reflect on the importance of such an event and the fallout created by it.

Theoretical Framework

Hauntings of the Past

Nostalgia is a sentimental feeling that is connected to remembering the past, which is described as the encounter or experience of something familiar (Payne). The feelings of reminiscence and longing are strongly connected to the past, and interconnected to the present and future. These feelings of nostalgia are different in nature, as one might ponder over the past or want to recreate it in the present. Furthermore, nostalgia has been used as an element in popular culture to bring forth the feeling in the audience and thereby create recognisability to the subject at hand. *Fallout* is one such example, as it is influenced by the American past and reimagines it in a futuristic setting. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the different aspects of nostalgia studies.

Svetlana Boym presents the terms 'reflective nostalgia' and 'restorative nostalgia' in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). Restorative nostalgia, according to Boym, is a perfect snapshot of the past or reality, which does not reveal signs of decay (49). Restorative nostalgia reminisces about the past, wanting to recreate it in the present moment, thereby 'restoring' it. For example, restorative nostalgia can present itself by returning to "national symbols and myths" (Boym 41) and "reconstruction of monuments of the past" (Boym 41). Boym notes on restorative nostalgia's self-representation, as it sees itself more as a truth than nostalgia (41). These terms aid in understanding the different facets of nostalgia, however, Boym does not heed these terms as absolute, but renders them as tendencies of which they give meaning and can shape the feeling of longing (41). What can be gathered from this statement is that both reflective and restorative nostalgia can co-exist, as the presence of one does not exclude the other.

Another interesting idea that Boym reflects upon is restorative nostalgia's connection to conspiracy theories. When imagining or reconstructing 'home', sometimes it becomes a delusional homeland, exemplified by using pronouns such as 'we' and 'they', people find a scapegoat for their adversity. Boym exemplifies the use of pronouns: "'they' conspire against 'our' homecoming, hence 'we' have to conspire against 'them' in order to restore 'our' imagined community" (Boym 43). She remarks that violent operations of organisations such as the nazis or the red scare that McCarthy conferred, in connection to conspiracies, did so "in the name of a restored homeland" (Boym 43). Language can, in some instances, be specific in producing restorative nostalgia.

On the other hand, reflective nostalgia "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (Boym 41). In contrast to restorative nostalgia, it offers more flexibility as the term tends not to recover what is lost to time, of which restorative nostalgia sees as an absolute truth. It mediates "on history and passage of time" (Boym 49), focusing instead on the experiences of memories and sensations. Instead of focusing on a collective narrative, it focuses on the individual narrative, revering fragments of memory, rather than the whole (Boym 49). Boym acknowledges that reflective nostalgia can be ironic and humorous, whereas restorative nostalgia is more rigid and serious (Boym 49). Furthermore, it does not tend to want to restore 'home' as restorative nostalgia does, but revels in the fragmented and inconclusiveness of the past (Boym 50). These two terms, or ideas of nostalgia, can be found in media representations, such as films, music, or TV, as much of popular media tends to linger on the past to recreate a familiar feeling of 'home'. Whether or not media productions, such as *Fallout*, intend to restore or reflect is the real question.

As mentioned before, *Fallout* is inspired by the past, thereby alluding to the fact that it is haunted by 'ghosts' of the past. The 'ghosts' are tied to the past, but emerge in the present (or future) of *Fallout*, creating a form of haunting. It is important to note that it is not literal

ghosts, but rather fragments of time reflected in the series' aesthetic and worldbuilding. This evokes the idea of Hauntology, of which Grafton Tanner defines as "[...] an ephemeral, intellectually translucent concept. It is the metaphysics of absence." (Tanner 234), thereby reflecting the term's supernatural connotation. Furthermore, he argues "that concepts do not have originary foundations" (Tanner 234), thereby referring to Hauntology's function of analysing texts and media with the past in mind. Tanner's argument of Hauntology, analysing texts from the perspective of unoriginality, imbues the concept of simulacra, defined later in the chapter on imagined realities. The notion of apparitions is also an element in Hauntology, as something can always appear for the first time, even though it is rooted in replication (Tanner 234). Hauntology has many apparitions in its field of research, where music is a part of it, which is relevant for this thesis, as *Fallout*'s nostalgia lies within the music, haunting the series' present (or future). Therefore, Mark Fisher examines Hauntology in music in his book *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (2014), where he investigates the word 'haunting' and what it entails. According to Fisher, it is the refusal to give up the ghosts, thereby rendering it a failed mourning (ch. 00). This perspective can be seen as restorative nostalgic sentiment, as it refuses to let go of the past. Fisher refers to the crackle that can be heard with vinyl, i.e. the surface noise made by it, as the signature of Hauntology in the context of music. He notes that this crackle makes the listener aware of the audio being recorded and the playback systems, thereby creating awareness of time out of joint. Damaged and old records tend to create this crackling noise, which in turn makes the listener aware of the age of the record. Furthermore, much of the music in Hauntology revisits technology, specifically analogue media, which in modern times is often presented by using digital media. By focusing on this older medium, Fisher acknowledges that this creates a part of Hauntology's melancholia (ch. 00). Hauntology is a form of nostalgia, however, Fisher argues that the longing in Hauntology is not for a specific time period. It is a longing to bring back the process

of democratisation and pluralism. This can be seen as a spectre of lost futures, as Fisher puts it, which the music culture was central in projecting (Fisher ch. 00). Not only is the music of hauntology relevant to *Fallout*, but also the perspective of how it recycles elements from pop culture, thereby creating a loop of nostalgia.

Nostalgia confers the feeling of the past, not the future, in most instances. It tends to revel in these feelings of reminiscence, rather than looking forward to the future. Mark Fisher emulates this perspective in the sub-chapter "The Slow Cancellation of the Future" from *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (2014), describing how culture is stuck in a nostalgia loop, thereby haunted. Fisher contrasts the grandiosity of human endeavours in the 20th century with that of the 21st century, thereby consolidating his argument of why contemporary culture is haunted by the past. The statement "The slow cancellation of the future has been accompanied by a deflation of expectations" (Fisher ch. 00) embodies Fisher's argument well, as it reflects his statement of how the future of culture is cancelled in the form of progression, thereby becoming stagnant. Stagnation comes in the form of loops, as trends and styles become recycled again and against, creating a constant loop of nostalgia. Fisher argues that "the very distinction between past and present is breaking down" (Fisher ch. 00), thereby creating a fragmented temporality, where time becomes less linear. What can be derived from Fisher's remarks on the future is that it holds no revolutionary power as it did during the 20th century, at least culturally, thereby forcing our future to recycle through our cultural memories, which reinforces nostalgia as a cultural necessity. Fisher is concerned with this concept in connection with music, which becomes the foundation for much of the analytical framework in his book. Herein he posits that much of the music in the 21st century, such as *Arctic Monkeys*, are haunted by past styles, however, they never truly belong to this period because of "discrepancies in texture" (Fisher ch. 00), ie. the moderness of technology that is found therein, therefore creating an "implied 'timeless' era" (Fisher ch. 00) instead. Fisher's

concept of cancellation of the future is therefore able to assist in analysing *Fallout* in a manner pertaining to the study of nostalgia. Furthermore, the analysis will yield an answer to Fisher's hypothesis of the slow decline of originality in the 21st century, thereby the cancellation of the future, as the series is a part of the product of mass culture or pop culture of this century. Fisher's concept might seem defeatist in its arguments pertaining to originality and cultural advancement, however, it only reveals that the imagined future under late-stage capitalism has been preconditioned to be based on past recollections, rather than imagined anew. *Fallout* does infer this proposition as it engages with tropes within pop culture, and it becomes further nuanced by utilising Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, which is examined in the subchapter "Imagined Realities" of this thesis.

When discussing Mark Fisher, it is important to delve into the subject of his book *Capitalist Realism* from 2009, which reflects Fisher's ideological framework of the effect that capitalism and neoliberalism have had on politics and popular culture. Fisher defines what he means with the term capitalist realism: "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 2). Furthering this notion is that in post-apocalyptic narratives, it seems to expand on our current reality, thereby reflecting a capitalist vision in the form of extrapolation. Nostalgia, or at least some remnant of it, presides within capitalist realism, as Fisher states: "the feeling that there is nothing new, is itself nothing new of course" (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 6). In this instance, Fisher proposes that nothing new has been produced since the fall of the Berlin Wall, a theory perpetuated by Francis Fukuyama. It is inevitably the end of history, as we have reached the pinnacle of history marked by liberal capitalism, therefore at a historical and cultural impasse, which is accepted in the "cultural unconscious[ness]" (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 6). Fukuyama's notion of 'the end of history' has inspired Fisher's work, as his chapter "The Slow Cancellation of the Future" reflects the

same proposals or at least fundamentally shares the idea of the stagnation of original concepts and ideas in culture. *Fallout* conveys that it is easier to imagine the end of the world, rather than the end of capitalism, as it does exactly that in its narrative. It becomes a reflection of capitalist realism, by extrapolation and mitigation of the American economic structure's inferior attributes.

Fredric Jameson has explored extensively the subject of nostalgia and is a prominent figure within the field. Jameson names 'the nostalgia mode' in his article "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (1998), describing nostalgia films in relation to pastiche. Jameson generalises nostalgia films as mass culture, rather than high culture, which he posits is because of a shared cultural experience (116). Moreover, Jameson notes that nostalgia can be found not only in the aesthetic choice of a film, but also in its narrative, such as stereotypes and tropes. This permeation of other time periods, not just on the surface level, reads as a failure to focus on contemporary settings or at least that mass consumer culture expects the audience to be unable to recognise its own present (Jameson 117). Thus, Jameson comes to the realisation that "society [...] has become incapable of dealing with time and history" (117). What can be understood from this reading of Jameson's nostalgia mode is that postmodern cultural texts recycle elements from the past at a surface level.

Nostalgia is prevalent throughout *Fallout*'s narrative, aesthetic, and worldbuilding, therefore making this the overall theme of this thesis. This subchapter is utilised in understanding how *Fallout* engages with nostalgia and works as the theoretical umbrella for the analysis.

Imagined Realities

Fallout, at its main premise, is creatively imaginative for conjuring up a futuristic scenario. Therefore, the series falls into the umbrella genre of speculative fiction (hereafter referred to

as spec-fic). Whereas nostalgia is bound by a relationship to the past, spec-fic is able to push this limit. Spec-fic imagines a new reality and history, of which it might be posited to be connected to a past that is recognisable to the audience. This section of the theoretical framework focuses on spec-fic and the different facets within the umbrella term, and its relation to *Fallout*.

At its core, spec-fic situates itself within an imaginative space, embracing a number of genres that represent non-mimetic narratives, i.e. deviating from imitating reality. Oziewicz argues that historically, spec-fic created a counter-reaction to the western cultural bias, departing from an andro-centric and colonialist mindset from the Enlightenment (Oziewicz 2). Therefore, post-enlightenment literature saw a rise in non-mimetic literature, such as gothic, fantasy, and SF (Oziewicz 3). As spec-fic is seen as a cultural production, it is difficult to ascertain specific traditions or literary techniques (Oziewicz 3); however, Oziewicz establishes some large categorisations. The increased non-mimetic works of fiction that diverged away from the western notions of mimesis made way for genres to be accepted by mainstream culture, and the emergence of new genres that repelled a capitalist view of what is true or real (Oziewicz 3). Marianne Kongerslev et al. recall Margaret Atwood's perspective on SF as a genre that evokes realities and events that cannot occur in our own reality (6). When examining Atwood's most popular work, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), one can conclude that the story does not evoke a tale of an extraordinarily impossible future, therefore making the novel more speculative rather than a piece of SF. Therefore, the distinction between these two can be made on the grounds of plausibility. There is, however, a difficulty in generalising spec-fic, with the conclusion that this concept is impossible. After examining both Oziewicz and Kongerslev, the consensus seems to be that spec-fic is distinct from realist fiction, as Kongerslev et al. note (7). Furthermore, they also note that spec-fic does have an association with our reality, but still differentiated from realism (Kongerslev et al. 7). The umbrella term of spec-fic offers

multifaceted opportunities, as genres such as fantasy, the western, and dystopian fiction, to name a few, have the ability to imagine alternative histories and realities.

As *Fallout*'s worldbuilding is set in a post-apocalyptic world created by real nuclear threats, it can be defined as a subgenre of spec-fic. The genre focuses on what happens after an apocalyptic event and how society, humanity, and nature evolve after this event. Briohny Doyle remarks that post-apocalyptic fiction focuses on "decay, disaster and ruin" (101) and includes "sects, conflicts and danger" (103). Doyle also notes that narratives of post-apocalyptic fiction are often associated with a group of survivors that traverse the harsh environment of the post-apocalyptic world (104). In this context, Doyle argues that this narrative element allows a film, or other media, to explore "social and environment[al] breakdown" (104) on a more personal level. Doyle discusses different films that depict traditional relationships, such as a paternal one. However, Doyle argues that occasionally, these traditional relationships and gender roles collapse. Therefore, these roles are not bound by the societal dogma that was present in the world before the apocalypse, creating a focus on morality instead (Doyle 104). Post-apocalyptic fiction, therefore, tends to focus on humanity by exploring what it means to be human and how we consider community (Doyle 105). Doyle argues that post-apocalyptic fiction does not focus on how or why the apocalypse occurs, therefore rendering the reader's or audience's imagination beneficial. The aftermath of what emerges after the apocalypse is therefore more centred in this genre (Doyle, 105). This point can be seen as contested in *Fallout*, as the audience is made aware of the apocalyptic event and the purpose behind it, which is also a driving force in the narrative. However, much of the narrative is focused on what emerges in the post-apocalyptic world, therefore making this point partially valid. Furthermore, a common trope in post-apocalyptic fiction is the nomad, a character who travels alone in their quest (Doyle, 105). *Fallout* brings forth multiple nomadic characters, however, they all come together in different pairings, aiding each other in their different quests. These

worlds in spec-fic are not real in themselves, but are often modelled after our reality, which in turn can create simulacra.

Jean Baudrillard has written extensively on the subject of simulacra and simulation, which revolves around the discussion of signs and symbols in relation to their state of existence. The subject is rather perplexing, and arguably can be used in other instances not pertaining to signs and symbols. A simple definition of simulacrum can be found within the first page of Baudrillard's treatise *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981): "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth - it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (Baudrillard 1). What can be derived from this is that there is no truth in reality, however, simulacrum replaces reality instead. Baudrillard posits that images go through different phases: "it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 6). This quote encapsulates how ingrained simulacra are with reality as a concept, as all the phases refer to images being a reflection or relation to reality. The first phase is faithful to its original or reality, and the second order is an amalgamation of the original or reality. Furthermore, the third one can be argued to represent an image that pretends there is a reality of which there is none, and the fourth can be analysed as being a pure form of simulation. The final phase represents the images of becoming reality itself; it therefore becomes hyperreal. This connotes that a simulacrum is a copy of a copy that exists without an original form. Baudrillard explores SF and its loss with imaginary possibilities, as he notes that we are unable to "imagine any other universe" (Baudrillard 120). The reasoning behind this observation is partially because of a saturated market and partly because of no new territory, exemplified by geography; therefore, coming from an expansive reality and imagination leads to a collapse of creativity, which in turn creates a less daring imagination (Baudrillard 120). This belief emulates Fisher's concept, as it reads just as sceptical of the future of imagination

within media and culture. Infrastructure in dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction is a representation of control, of which ideology still survives, thereby reflecting a profound reality that can be masked by simulacra.

Christian B. Long analyses why infrastructure plays a crucial role in the dystopian and post-apocalyptic landscape, wherein energy is a source of power that has the ability to oppress a society through the workings of a higher power with the ability to decimate either small or larger-scale societies. First and foremost, Long argues that post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction becomes predictable in its representation of power/energy, as he notes that a world that "still uses fossil fuel or nuclear power tends to be oppressive" (35). The renewable energy of a dystopian or post-apocalyptic world is inherently guarded by a higher power, which manages these realities to remain exactly that, rather than steering towards a utopian reality (Long 35). He notes on the culture in post-apocalyptic or dystopian realities, as films and media represented in these are either used for propaganda, or in the worst case, there tends to be no culture at all because of the lack of infrastructure to support any media (Long 36). In the case of nuclear energy, Long analyses different films by how they portray their power in these fictional realities. Nuclear fusion, he argues, "offers the hope of a better way to generate electricity and escape the dystopian" (Long 43), compared to nuclear energy, underscores the danger, and therefore the dystopian, related to the renewable energy source. These concepts come from a very real standpoint in our immediate history and culture, as we have undergone crises such as the oil and energy crises of the latter half of the 20th century, to more recent ones, such as the global energy crisis caused by the pandemic in the 21st century (Hoang et al.). These issues are reflected in contemporary culture, which is exhibited in the form of hope or pessimism for the future of global energy. *Fallout* reflects both, as the wasteland symbolises that energy equals power and catastrophe can be a byproduct if not handled in good faith, however, it reignites a hope for humanity by proposing cheap renewable energy for the masses.

Nuclear energy, in contrast to energy sources such as electricity or gasoline, is more destructive on the global scale, therefore creating a power dynamic that can decimate and control a population (Long 44). Obliterating an energy source and infrastructure is equated to regressing to more primitive times for a society; therefore, re-creating the frontier-myth both in the sense of possibility that is present, but also in the form of basic necessity formed by our current infrastructure (Long 48).

This subchapter functions as a way to analyse the genre elements within *Fallout*, thereby understanding its connections to speculative and post-apocalyptic fiction, and how this serves as a commentary on contemporary culture. Furthermore, concepts on simulacra propose that the series replaces reality with its representation.

The Future That Never Was

Fallout's aesthetic choice is heavily influenced by the period of the 50s and 60s, which is a given, since this is where civilisation came to a halt in the storyline, however, stylistically, not historically, as the series diverges from our historical reality. Creating an environment based on this period, while being set in a futuristic setting, prompts the style of retrofuturism, and steampunk as a form of retrofuturism.

Elizabeth Guffey's and Kate C. Lemay's discussion of retrofuturism from their chapter "Retrofuturism and Steampunk" (2014) is used as a means to understand the style and aesthetic. They establish retrofuturism as a style that encompasses many meanings in the 20th century, with one focus on the identification of the 'future', by highlighting "nostalgia, irony, and time-bending dislocation" (Guffey and Lemay 434). Retrofuturism is a style that engages with the past and the future, as it recycles materials from our collective memories (Guffey and Lemay 434). Furthermore, they also note the context of futurism, as a term that expresses the anticipation of the future. Therefore, retrofuturism is more of how we envisioned this

anticipation to be like, or a remembrance of it (Guffey and Lemay 434). Guffey and Lemay explain how the futurist style had a hold on culture from the 19th century to the 1960s, however, retrofuturism raised doubts about futurism's optimism, which emerged in the 1970s (436). Closely linked to SF, which often brings the reader or audience out of the present moment, retrofuturism blends the past and the future, thereby exploring temporality (Guffey and Lemay 437). By exploring natural time, thereby temporality, retrofuturism questions our understanding of time and place, thus generating a fragmented temporality. Guffey and Lemay remark on retrofuturism as a "time bending vertigo" (437), meaning that retrofuturism compels contemporary culture to challenge earlier imaginings of the future. Furthermore, they argue that retrofuturism acknowledges the prognostications of the past, but keeps a place for newer ideas (Guffey and Lemay 438). This can be connected to their statement that "Retrofuturism reveals a nostalgic longing, accompanied by a deep dissatisfaction with the present moment" (Guffey and Lemay 437). These arguments reveal the nature of retrofuturism, as it is deeply rooted in the futurist ideas of the past, but affected by contemporary culture, creating a trichotomy between past, present, and future. Guffey and Lemay also discuss the political climate of the past and present, and what role retrofuturism might have. They argue that during the first couple of years of Bush's presidency, Bush aimed to divert the public discourse away from the war on terrorism by reimagining the U.S. going to the moon. This rhetoric possesses ideals from the 1960s space age, engaging with a nostalgic paradigm, which is a retrofuturistic stance (Guffey and Lemay 444). Guffey and Lemay argue that retrofuturism is seen as landing on an ironic note, thereby creating a subversive strength (445). This can be tied into reflective nostalgia, as it tends to be ironic in nature. Irony is an important element in *Fallout*, as it conveys a humorous distancing towards darker topics and the gory elements. Furthermore, retrofuturism seems to suggest an attachment to the past, but creating a space still distant from it, thereby creating a reflection of the past rather than restoring it.

Sharon Sharp posits that retrofuturism is seen as an uncertain attraction with the past and their utopian imagination of the future (25). The ambivalence is argued to be because of a "distanced interest in past visions of the future" (Sharp 25). She further argues that retrofuturism includes "jet packs, homes of tomorrow, ray guns and other space age manifestations of technological progress" (Sharp 25). Sharpe further argues that retrofuturism can be seen as a rhetorical vehicle for reflecting how the past and the future can help us understand our contemporary culture by imagining how it could be different (26). This represents that retrofuturism can be at its fundamentals ideological, and therefore by "exploring the promised visions of the future, retrofuturism can serve as a form of critique" (Sharpe 26). This remark arguably coincides with spec-fic, as it often uses temporality as a literary or narrative vehicle for its social commentary and critique, which reinforces the ties between spec-fic and retrofuturism. Sharpe offers different criticisms of retrofuturism that have been posed in the discourse of the subject, of which the first is how it is inherently a "conservative cultural impulse" (Sharpe 26). Conservatism at its core seeks to preserve traditional values and therefore also institutions, which can be argued to be regressive rather than progressive, as it ignores all other criticism of the past. The other aspect is that it reinforces the time we are in as 'meganostalgia', which therefore "functions as comfort for assuaging the technological anxieties of the present" (Sharpe 26). Contemporary culture is therefore marked by a boom of nostalgia, according to Sharpe, in which we become obsessed with the past and recreating it to distinction, which reinforces the notion of simulacrum. Sharpe argues that retrofuturism can be seen as a derivative of a new technologically advanced age, and therefore a new phase, of global communication which "ha[s] altered the perception of time and space" (Sharpe 27). In terms of time and space, it is born out of "a desire to recreate a sense of place" (Sharpe 27), which, of course, is the fundamental aspect of retrofuturism, as it is inherently based on a need to recreate a past and a sense of place in the future. Steampunk shares many of the same

elements as retrofuturism, which is conveyed in the wasteland of *Fallout* and reflects contemporary cultural anxieties.

Guffey and Lemay also explore steampunk in the same chapter as retrofuturism, referencing it as a "cultural manifestation [...] negotiates a present longing for a historical past" (Guffey and Lemay 439). The difference between the two is that steampunk manages to evoke an aesthetic that is founded on the ornamental and messy, countering retrofuturism's streamlined look. Furthermore, steampunk has also been defined by its romanticism of the Victorian era, a period that came before the Industrial Revolution and the rise of technological advancement. However, steampunk does utilise technology for its worldbuilding and aesthetic, especially technology depicted from the Industrial Revolution rather than more modern technology, which is paradoxical in its use of a pre-technological era. However, Guffey and Lemay states that utilising a period that did not harbour technology as such, forces us to revise "our conception of the digital, forcing us to reconsider its roots and historical import, but also insisting that we try to envision how it has impacted our expectations" (Gueffey and Lemay 439). This focus on revisiting and reconsidering technology and its historical ties is an element that has been anchored to *Fallout*'s worldbuilding, social commentary, and criticism. The wasteland of *Fallout* does represent the frontier and lawlessness of the Old West, which coincides with the argument that steampunk depicts the "fantasized 'Wild West'-era United States" (Guffey and Lemay 439). *Fallout* presents the audience with multiple periods of history in its worldbuilding, thereby creating a fragmented reality wherein history is revised and augmented. Much of the technology present in steampunk is founded on its homemade aesthetic that looks 'tink-able', thereby inviting the audience to do the same and "rewrite the past and create a better future" (Guffey and Lemay 440). Furthermore, Guffey and Lemay remark on the sustainable disposition of steampunk as it encourages a DIY attitude, which serves as a criticism of consumerism in the 21st century (441). *Fallout* is represented by both

retrofuturism and steampunk, as it is naturally retrofuturistic, but misses the streamlined architecture and technology that is present in retrofuturism. Retrofuturism, therefore, borrows steampunk's raw and chunky aesthetic while focusing on technology that is not intertwined with steam power. Therefore, the steampunk aesthetics found in the series can function as a form of retrofuturism, despite its contradictory elements.

Fallout employs retrofuturism and steampunk as a form of this, which reveals the darker themes within the series. This subchapter assists in analysing the series' aesthetics and style, which mediates the critque on past and present complexities.

Domestic Dreams (or Nightmares)

The main character of *Fallout* is a female character, headstrong, but brought up in an environment reminiscent of the 1950s. The 50s gender norms are grounded in traditional gender roles, however, the series does not perpetuate this rigid form of gender representation, thereby creating a fragmented reality distorted through gender identity. Exploring gender norms throughout history in terms of feminism, technology, and media representation establishes a historical, as well as a theoretical framework, contributing in contextualising and analysing *Fallout*.

Focusing on family dynamics and women's roles in the 1950s brings forth the idea of the nuclear family. The nuclear family is defined as "a heterosexual, monogamous, and legally married couple (i.e., male and female) with children, living apart from relatives" (Williams). An emphasis on traditional roles was put forth in this post-war era, encouraging women to leave their jobs, so men had plenty of opportunities, in order to take care of the children and the house (Miller et al. 566). Early marriages and large families were more popular than ever during this time, as the home became a haven and apolitical from the grim face of World War II (Matthews 210). According to Matthews, the surging fear of the Cold War and the nuclear

threat made the main quality of the housewife a soothing force. Women's clothing became more rigid and focused on their waist, pleasing men rather than seeking comfort (210). In popular culture of this time, a popular representation of the housewife can be found in the much-loved sitcom series *I Love Lucy* (1951-57). Lucy was mostly situated in domestic settings, not to be seen in the public space, thereby securing the association society had between the home and the perceived role of women (Matthews 210). Women of this period could also parallel their own lives to that of *I Love Lucy*, as the environment shown in the series mirrored their own lives. These gender roles were portrayed in other genres, such as SF, thereby permeating all of the mass culture of this period.

Per Schelde examines the role of women in his book *Androids, Humanoids, and Other Science Fiction Monsters* (1993), in terms of SF. Herein, Schelde explores the different stereotypes and representations of female roles in SF, stating that the Victorian era perceived women in SF to be a vessel for male sexuality and for procreation (66). Much aligned with the perceived roles of women in the 1950s, they were the 'natural' whereas men were perceived to be the 'cultural'. Furthermore, men are the ones who "destroys and create, takes apart and reassembles" (Schelde 65). This notion is, of course, one of an outdated nature when connecting it to *Fallout*. However, some characteristics from his reading of early SF gendered roles are recognisable in the early stages of the series. This section has explored *Fallout*'s inspirational period in connection to gender. However, as the series is located in a futuristic setting and reflects contemporary ideals, societal norms and gender roles that that is portrayed in immediate culture are needed for the analysis.

Katarzyna Ostalska and Tomasz Fisiak analyse contemporary gender representation in SF, in their chapter "Utopia and Dystopia in the 21st century: Feminism, intersectionality, and the rejection of binarism" (2021). Ostalska and Fisiak point out that utopian and dystopian fiction explores "re-writing social structures, advocating overall transformations of the

political, economic, and so on orders" (Ostalska and Fisiak 2). *Fallout* falls under this categorisation, as the societal structure once perpetuated in the 50s has been dismantled, however, political and financial reasons for the control of the wasteland are antiquated. Furthermore, a central point of this is also exploring what it means to be human, or a re-definition of such, a point that Briohny Doyle reflected as well. Ostalska and Fisiak also delve into a critique of dualism, as they refer to feminist scholars being in agreement that "binary positions need to be deconstructed" (3). Thereby, we turn to a post-dualist view, where binary notions of gender, objects, and the environment are deconstructed (Ostalska and Fisiak 3). This statement of a post-dualist future is connected to a post-human idea, which has been a part of the repertoire in SF, dystopian, and post-apocalyptic fiction, furthering the human body beyond the point of gender or the flesh.

Much of *Fallout*'s main premise and worldbuilding is located within its use of technology and how it controls the people within this reality. Furthermore, the technology used herein interacts with the characters, and therefore gender, creating a symbiosis or discord between the two. Therefore, techno-feminism as a concept is applicable in analysing the relationship between gender and technology, and whether or not it creates a form of liberation or oppression. This section will therefore focus on Judy Wajcman's book of the same name, *TechnoFeminism* (2004). Wajcman asserts that technology has become more embedded into our everyday life, therefore deems it important to explore the gendered inequality that has been evident since the Industrial Revolution, thereby creating a 'digital divide' (1-2). An early observation from the Industrial Revolution is that technology became patriarchal in terms of skilled trades, which created more control of technology for men instead of women. Technology "reflected male power, as well as capitalist domination" (Wajcman 26) and therefore male dominance, which became the norm in the future of technology. Wajcman's statements on female presence in technological engineering do seem cynical, however, she

does acknowledge a crucial part of technological history: “women played a major part in the early development of computers” (13). However, it is a disservice not to mention the many women who served during World War II as human computers, and even more egregious, not to mention Ada Lovelace, as she made the first prototype for the computer, thereby considered to be the first computer programmer in history (Morais). However important a contribution women have had in the history of technology, it is paramount to reflect upon the male-dominated hierarchy that has presided in society. As Wajcman notes, much of the “machinery is literally designed by men with men in mind” (Wajcman 27), therefore creating a domain for men rather than women. This subject has also been criticised lately in the medical community, as the CPR manikins are modelled after men, thereby putting women’s lives at risk either by putting defibrillator pads on wrong because of the breasts, or civilian responders being uncomfortable with touching a woman’s breast in a crucial medical situation (May). She notes that “Men’s experience was unreflectively regarded as the norm” (Wajcman 29), which becomes true and verifiable when these issues are brought up in the 21st century to be dissected and amended. Another aspect also related to the medical is the possibility of abortion, IVF, and birth control, which liberates women in the sense that they do not need to be confined by their biology, defying it instead by “[s]evering the link between femininity and maternity” (Wajcman 4). *Fallout* does not note the use of birth control per se, however, it is alluded to as being utilised in the vaults, therefore the series considers the significance of such technology to womanhood. Another element that is considered in the vaults and in the wasteland in the series is genetic engineering, thereby representing a dystopian narrative. Similarly, Wajcman focuses on the dystopian aspect of biomedical technologies, as it can be used as a tool to distort bodies and commodify them, which is seen as “another attempt at usurping self-determination of women’s bodies” (5). Biomedical technology slowly influences how we see the future of ourselves and our bodies, as it becomes more post-human than human, thereby imagining

cyborgs and overall automata as our predetermined future. Wajcman states that we become more than the flesh, which frees us from decay and failing, it leads us towards (3). When acknowledging the steady rise of biomedical technological advancement that can free us from either looking old, certain physical attributes, or remediate hormones to our liking, this statement becomes tangible. Corporate space becomes the future for women as Wajcman argues that service work has been using more empathetic skills in contrast to skilled trade, which is attributed to be more feminine: "women managers will be ideally suited for post-industrial corporations that require the more empathetic, 'soft' co-operative styles of management" (Wajcman 5). This observation is reflected in *Fallout* as it embeds the same idea in the vaults, which therefore poses the idea of the future being created in the image of femininity or empathy. Wajcman seeks to go past 'technological determinism', as it does not suggest that the advancement of technology has been affected by economic or societal reasons, arguably creating a reductionist position (33-34). This is exemplified by using General Electric's economic resources in advancing the electric refrigerator in contrast to their competitors, who used gas, as a case study of technology not being affected by efficiency, but by economic resources (Wajcman 35). Furthermore, socio-economic reasons also affected what technological products were being produced after World War II, exemplified by "single-family houses with correspondingly small-scale appliances" (Wajcman 35), which in turn contributed to the idea that "the public and private domestic spheres" (Wajcman 35) were to be divided. This idea is present in *Fallout*, as it reflects the argument that technology, and advancement of such, is bound by economic and socio-economic tendencies of the 50s environment in this worldbuilding. Furthermore, *Fallout* diverges from our present technology, as it imagines a world that leaned into the advancement of atomic engineering, rather than focusing on other technology, therefore reinforcing Wajcman's arguments. *TechnoFeminism* is constructed from a real standpoint of historical facts which they pondering over the question

of whether technology in terms of gender enters a utopian or dystopian era (Wajcman 3). *Fallout* does not at first glance seem to unpack gender stereotypes or traditional gender roles, as it does not forthrightly participate in the discourse. However, as the setting is temporally displaced, focusing on the 50s in the context of the future, it forces the audience to reimagine their past in context to the series, which confronts this time with irony, thereby critiquing the period itself.

By focusing on building a framework for the portrayal of gender roles throughout history, with a focus on media representations, this section intends to abet the analysis. Gender is an underlying subject in the series, however, it is adamant to examine this issue, as the series revels in the past, therefore implying that traditional gender roles are represented.

Exploring *Fallout*: Nostalgia, Gender, and an Imagined Future

Subverting the Gendered Echoes

Fallout, at first glance, does not appear to reflect on gender issues as stated before, however, components of the series' language, characters, and their relationships mediate gender norms and subvert these norms indirectly. The series is haunted by a past that was permeated by stereotypical gender roles, however, it seeks to dismantle them by creating characters that represent a more modern reflection of gender norms. Combining the focus on the 50s and 60s retrofuturistic Atomic Age aesthetic and the portrayal of its characters, the series expresses a form of un-nostalgia which serves as part of its social and cultural critique. This section, therefore, elaborates upon these ideas by analysing the different characters of the series and how they interact.

The series does perpetuate gender normative ideas in some areas, as exemplified by Maximus protecting Lucy in the shootout of episode two, when she is battling the Ghoul. This act of protection seems to excite Lucy, who at this point had not encountered anyone as civil as her. This act seems eerily similar to the damsel in distress or knight in shining armour trope, which reinforces traditional gender roles. By using these tropes, *Fallout* engages with Jameson's nostalgia mode, as it relies on clichés from pop culture, which poses it as superficial. It, therefore, posits that the audience is unable to recognise the present if not for these tropes. This is furthered by Lucy looking starstruck at Maximus while he battles the Ghoul, saying "I don't mean to interrupt, but… was that a knight?" ("The Target" 47:57-48:13). Enamoured or in awe by the heroic nature of Maximus, she is flabbergasted to have come across a knight, a character that lives in fairy tales and medieval folklore. Maximus, therefore, symbolises the 'cultural' by embodying a fictional archetype within a literary corpus, as Per Schelde posited was a prevalent stereotype in 50s SF. Lucy, however, is naive about either his nature or his

background, seeming to only focus on the strength and the embodied archetype he exudes. However, this trope is not sustained further, as Maximus is portrayed as more vulnerable and less like the knight character he wishes to embody. Lucy's character also becomes more independent and therefore competent in her agency, thereby negating this short portrayal of the damsel in distress stereotype. Furthermore, her character does act at times like the 'strong female character', as she is capable of independence, but not in terms of perfection, which is the main shortcoming of this trope. It is a disservice to create a female character without flaws, as they become highly unrealistic and one-dimensional. These flaws are presented in the form of synonymousness. Her character is juxtaposed by all the main men of the cast, as they are presented as morally ambiguous characters. Her main strength is her morality and righteousness, which reflect remnants from a time when virtues such as these were part of the norm. Characters of the 50s were portrayed as more morally stable and one-dimensional, in comparison to contemporary characters presented in mass culture. Furthermore, Lucy's character can be analysed as representing the goodness of what is left in this post-apocalyptic world. Her strength is also her weakness, as it is the goodness of her character that is the precursor to her problems during her journey through the wasteland. Her character may seem 'normal' in a sense, which is a deliberate choice in order for the audience to feel relatable to her character. Her 'normalcy' and quirkiness are also portrayed in the other characters of the vaults, thereby creating a homogeneous appearance.

The appearance of the characters in the vaults is very homogeneous, as they adorn the blue jumpsuits with yellow accents and numbers on the back. The blue jumpsuit represents utility, as it is reminiscent of a worker's outfit, such as a mechanic's, thereby reflecting functionality as the vault's preference. The outfit reflects a form of de-sexualisation as the homogeneous look is fitted for all body types, therefore disregarding gender norms and traditional ideas of gender representation. In contrast to the 50s, this design choice is meant to

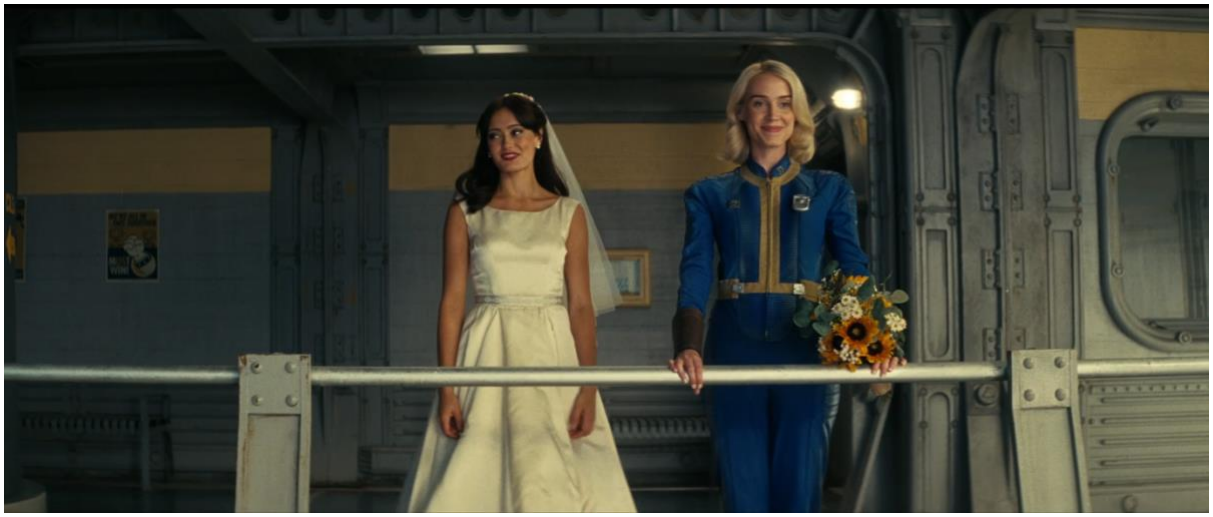

Figure 1 Lucy's wedding dress ("The End")

break away from the overtly gendered clothing, creating a form of un-nostalgia. However, the suits are retrofuturistic, as the 50s visions of the future were focused on a large part of the future being technologically advanced, and therefore imagining a world wherein outfits based on professions requiring technical skills are not far off. The homogeneity of the jumpsuits, therefore, represents a breakdown of traditional gender representation. This reiterates a post-dualist view which Ostalska and Fisiak discuss. On a similar note, Lucy rarely changes out of this outfit, but the beginning of the series relays a different look with that of a wedding dress she wears for her wedding. The dress in question is portrayed as a typical 50s mod dress as seen in figure 1, with Lucy's makeup portraying the same style, as she adorns a heavy eyeliner and a deep red lipstick. Furthermore, Lucy writes her name on the dress, indicating that it had belonged to all of the other brides in the vault throughout its lifetime ("The End" 09:24-09:43). This contradicts a post-dualist argument, however, as we know the vaults represents the past, it is, therefore, a commentary on society. Contemporary society has, therefore, not yet reached a post-dualist society. The 50s and 60s are echoed in the character of Lucy as well, especially concerning her language.

Her character is optimistic and naive at the beginning of the series, which resembles much of the mentality of U.S. gendered roles in mass culture of the 50s and 60s, such as in sitcoms like *I Love Lucy* (1951). She rarely uses profanity in her language, which is contrasted

by the ground dwellers rampant use of it, but instead uses minced oaths like “Oh golly” and “Holy moly” (“The Target” 56:10-56:20) which are expressions often associated with a time period where it was more taboo to use profanity, such as in the 50s. Using minced oaths creates a nostalgic effect, as it evokes a time when family settings were the norm, therefore, using this specific language style in old sitcoms was the standard. Minced oaths also create a comedic effect, as it is heavily paralleled with contemporary language norms where profanity and strong language are often displayed in mass culture. Lucy and the vault dwellers of Vault 33 are quite quirky in their manner of speaking and behaving, which creates the dark humour the series is recognised for. This is exemplified in the third episode: After Lucy chops off Wilzig’s head, she puts a tracker up his nose where she thereafter notes the location of the tracker as “Snug as a bug” (“The Head” 09:10-09:14). Hardened by her experiences and surroundings, death and gore does not affect her emotional state, thereby bringing forth the bunker mentality of the 50s and 60s. However, this playful and non-threatening language breaks down once Lucy is introduced to the hardships of the wasteland, where she becomes more gloomy and serious. This is exemplified in a scene where she takes pity on the Ghoul/Cooper and saves him:

> [Lucy]: You don’t get these, you turn into one of those? That how it works? I may end up looking like you… but I’ll never be like you. Golden Rule, motherfucker.
>
> (“The Ghouls” 38:10-39:10).

Her character undergoes a development by the halfway mark of the series progression, which can be seen in her language as well as her demeanour. This reflects how her surroundings in the wasteland have an effect on her character, breaking down her optimistic attitude, which symbolises her moral decline as well. This fake reality that Lucy had lived in all her life is therefore shattered by a reality more prone to representing an ironic and pessimistic worldview. The use of specific language, such as profanity, represents the social breakdowns in the post-apocalyptic future, drawing a stark distinction between civilised and uncivilised societies. As

Vault 33 is a controlled environment by the shadow organisation, it is also an idealised reality wherein it can be seen as a copy of a society that was represented through mass culture, therefore not a representation of the real world. This brings forth the notion of simulacrum, as much of the optimism and naivety, also seen through the language used, is a representation of how contemporary culture perceives the 50s and 60s, therefore creating a copy of a copy. Additionally, the antithesis of the civilised versus uncivilised is a parallelisation that is also reflected in the characterisation of the Ghoul and Lucy.

The characters of the Ghoul and Lucy are juxtaposed, and tropes from popular culture can be located in both their appearances and characteristics. The Ghoul's character trope is located within the gothic tradition, as he is a remarkably dark and ominous character. Furthermore, he becomes a part of a frame narrative, as his story is fragmented temporally, therefore creating confusion about what is real. In connection to this, as his character is spread out between two, Cooper and the Ghoul, his appearance and reality become a thing of dreams versus nightmares. His past appearance serves as a dream version of his future appearance, which represents disease and monstrousness, thereby rendering it a nightmare. Furthermore, his past life was defined by a family life and his career, which is juxtaposed by his future life, which is filled by isolation, thereby defining a gothic visual and narrative mark.

Lucy, when paralleled to the Ghoul, embodies a stark contrast to his dark gothic character, as she manifests a Sontagian Campiness which informs her character. Camp is informed by the unserious as "Camp is art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is 'too much'" (Sontag 7). Lucy's facial expression becomes theatrical and exaggerated, which not only embodies the sensibilities of the 50s optimism, but also an air of being 'too much', thereby in agreement with Sontag's statement. This is further displayed in a conversation between Lucy and Maximus, when they enter Vault 4 and meet the residents therein who all possess an upbeat attitude:

[Maximus:] This is a cult. Same as any.

[Lucy:] It's not a cult.

[Maximus:] Everybody is smiling.

("The Trap" 15:08-15:13)

This interaction reflects the discrepancy between Lucy and Maximus' upbringings and experiences, where Lucy represents the 50s and Maximus contemporary times, meaning that Maximus is inclined to be more cynical rather than trusting. Furthermore, her character does not seem to consolidate seriousness, which reflects Susan Sontag's perception of Camp as a style and aesthetic: "The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious" (Sontag 10). Additionally, her language also reflects campiness, as her optimistic attitude in the face of the violent wasteland creates an ironic distanciation. Additionally, this juxtaposition between Lucy and the Ghoul is furthered by an underlying gendered representation.

Two scenes in the series can be compared in terms of symbolism of gender and the Atomic Age. In the fighting scene between the raider and Lucy, it is noticeable that the stove is named "Atomic Queen" ("The End" 23:30-23:40) when she is pushed up against it. This works as a foreshadowing of her capabilities to come; she experiences the wasteland and a new world, and becomes able to survive it, meanwhile changing the world for the better, therefore becoming 'the atomic queen of the wasteland'. In comparison, the fourth episode presents the viewer with a TV named "Radiation King" ("The Ghouls" 41:30-42:49) of which the Ghoul is watching his own film. In comparison to Lucy, this symbolises not only his capability of surviving the post-apocalyptic wasteland, but also his role in being the foreman in the marketing of the apocalypse. Furthermore, 'Radiation King' is an on-the-nose representation of the Ghoul; he is embedded with radiation that makes him a 'monster', and he is remarked on in the wasteland for his prowess in not decaying faster. These two comparisons make the audience aware of the comparability of the two characters, however, it also seeks to join the

two in a juxtaposition. Lucy's characteristics of goodness and naivety are elements that the Ghoul does not possess, nevertheless, they come to influence each other. Furthermore, the TV and the stove both symbolise what the future had in store for them, if not for the apocalypse. This juxtaposition is furthered by the notion of gendered artefacts. The stove is associated with a female action, whereas, in this context, the TV is associated with a male action. Lucy's predetermined societal expectations for her life were to be a mother and therefore a housewife, whereas the Ghoul/Cooper could have resumed his career as an actor. Positioning Cooper in this image mirrors Schelde's reflection on tropes in SF during the 20th century, as men were prone to be the 'cultural' representation, rather than the natural. Additionally, it acts as a superficial element, as it reflects the nostalgia mode. By positioning this gendered artefact in front of the Ghoul, and Lucy for that matter, it supersedes any expectation the series has for the audience to understand the complexities of history by relying on references of gender specific culture from the past. Furthermore, by producing gendered symbolising through these artefacts, the series represents Wajcman's idea of the gendered digital divide, proving that the past did, in fact, negate women's relationship with technology. By utilising this symbolism in the series, it acknowledges that contemporary culture has not reached further past this divide. Furthermore, the Atomic Age is of course also represented in the name of the appliances and technology, as they bear the name 'atomic'. However, these are positively embedded within the words of 'Queen' and 'King', therefore, denouncing the fatalistic nature of nuclear power, rendering it ironic. Even though this underlying gendered symbolism is present in the series, the men and women of Lucy's vault is perceived as equal.

Vault 33 is portrayed to be a community in which the inhabitants help each other and build a society with roles distributed among them in order for them to survive. When the audience is first introduced to Lucy, they become aware of her capabilities within the vault. She explains to the audience what it means to survive in the vault, which includes combat

training. These acts are not similar to the gendered acts of domesticity that the 50s and 60s were accustomed to; however, they contest them, as the women of the series are portrayed with more agency and empowerment. However, one aspect of that time period had endured: The wish for a family. It is perceived as a vital part of Vault 33's community to marry, and the emphasis was laid on not procreating with their cousins, as this could result in inbreeding. The survival of the human species is therefore at the forefront of the mentality of the vault, serving as more pragmatic in nature, rather than emotionally laden. Lucy is therefore also pragmatic in nature, which constructs her character as forthright at times.

The inhabitants in the vaults seem alike in their school of thought, thereby developing a community resembling one big family. However, Lucy's family is portrayed to be that of the nuclear family, with her brother, father, and mother. Although her mother is deceased, the portrayal still ignites the feeling of an 'ideal' family structure. When parallelled to the rest of the characters presented in the post-apocalyptic storyline, such as Maximus, who is an orphan, they are the only ones that reflect this patriarchal nucleus. However, Maximus and Lucy have one thing in common in terms of family structure: They are both from a sheltered background. This sheltered nature appears in the form of naivety, which is reflected in their, at times, inability to read social cues. In the same sense, Lucy's character is interesting in terms of sexual identity, as she perceives sex and romantic relationships located in much of her life to be casual in nature. In the sixth episode, Lucy and Maximus engage in some awkward flirting while waiting to be released from quarantine in Vault 4, which reflects both their characters' relationship and knowledge of sex:

[Maximus:] You smell good.

[Lucy:] What? (sniffs). Oh. You want to have sex?

[Maximus:] You mean use my cock?

[Lucy:] Yeah.

[Maximus:] I don't know. Uh, that weird thing could happen.

[Lucy:] What weird thing?

[Maximus:] Well, it's just for some guys - not me - uh, but for some guys, you know, when they make it move, it gets all big and hard like a big pimple and then it pops. And they say it can happen to anybody, but it's still, it's… It's gross.

[Lucy:] You know, that's… uh, that's actually completely normal. It happens all the time. Every time, ideally.

[Maximus:] I'm a knight. Um, a knight of the Brotherhood. We're - we're not supposed to.

[Lucy:] Okey dokey.

("The Trap" 12:54-14:09)

This interaction between Lucy and Maximus portrays an experience that is non-normative than what is portrayed with traditional gender roles of the 50s and 60s. Lucy takes control of the flirting and sexual advances, thereby acting casual in terms of sexual relationships, which creates a subversion of the norms in traditional gender roles. Their respective presumed roles are reversed, creating a form of un-nostalgia. Furthermore, reading between the lines of this conversation hints at the accessibility of birth control in the vaults. Lucy does not seem to fear the possibility of a pregnancy, thereby gaining autonomy in her own biology, separating femininity and maternity. According to Wajcman's discussion on technofeminism, one would assume this perpetuates a possible utopia for women in the vaults. However, with the knowledge of the experiments done in the vaults, it also implies that it is another means of control over women's bodies.

The relationship between Lucy and Maximus in this example exudes naivety and bears an awkward air. However, they find common ground as they both are unaware of what a relationship constitutes: Lucy's relationship had been arranged for her, while Maximus never

experienced one. Socially, they are both inept, as social norms and cues are presumed to have changed because of the apocalypse and the breakdown of civilised society. Furthermore, it is not only a representation of the naivety of their characters, but also the naivety of a new civilisation. This opposition of normative gender roles in terms of sexuality and desire seems to create a temporal fragmentation between past and present. Gender and sexuality as a topic, therefore, becomes non-nostalgic, reversed nostalgic, or un-nostalgic, in the sense that it does not seek to represent a past in order to lament on presumed identities. The series rejects the past in terms of gender norms, but is disjointed when looking at the vaults and the wasteland. This furthers the discussion on the post-dualist expression the series exudes. Binary genders and the environment are deconstructed, making way for a new one that expresses how contemporary culture anticipates the future to represent. However, post-dualism has not been fulfilled completely, as gendered symbolism is still present, which is conveyed in the portrayal of Maximus.

Maximus is introduced in the first episode as a down-on-his-luck, but morally ambiguous, character, as he is presented as being slightly egotistical. He manages to become a squire in the organisation of The Brotherhood of Steel, and when the knight he is assigned to falls in a fight against a mutated bear, he steals the knight's suit and poses as him. In the scene where he tries on the suit, it is portrayed that he likes the power that comes with it. The music accompanying this scene is Betty Huxton's "It's A Man" (1951), which represents a heteronormative gender identity from a woman's perspective of the 50s:

> Girls! Girls! Watch out! Watch out! There's a two legged animal running about. If it smokes a great big cigar and it hangs around at a bar. If it tells the biggest lies, wears the loudest ties. It's a man. If it walks, if it talks. If its habits are a little bit peculiar. If it brags and tries to make you think it's wonderful. Be on the lookout, don't let it fool

> ya. But if it makes the moon up on high, more than just a light in the sky. If it kisses you and you find you like it too. Grab it! It's a man.
>
> ("The Target" 27:09-28:20).

The lyrics create a 'manskript', meaning that it portrays a manuskript of what a 'man' should act like. However, the lyrics, accompanied by the mise-en-scene, functions as a critique of traditional gender roles, as Maximus is only powerful when putting on the armour, thereby masking his insecurities and weaknesses, which can be seen as a product of a heteronormative society, just as 'man' puts on his tie and brag can function as a defense mechanism. The satirical reflections in the song's lyrics reflect a 50s and 60s mindset, as they denote the idea that a man can possess certain flaws, exemplified by bragging, smoking, and lying, but still be desirable for women. Furthermore, this song is an example of gender performativity, as it exemplifies how society determines masculine behaviour, rather than biological sex, thereby creating a performance of gender. This resonates with how Maximus acts when being in the power armour, as he performs what their society deems masculine: Heroism through violence. Maximus becomes dependent on this power armour in order to become what he deems to be masculine as well, as he becomes more assertive and powerful by performing as the perceived gender. This is exemplified in episode seven, as he goes for his armour before he 'saves' Lucy in Vault 4 ("The Radio" 19:57-21:14). This performativity is reversed in terms of traditional gender roles, in the portrayal of Steph and Chet.

Lucy is a capable and powerful female character, however, she is not the only one. Lucy's friend, Steph, is more than capable of proving herself strong and able. While the vault is being attacked by ground dwellers, Steph, while visibly pregnant, gets stabbed in the eye, but manages to kill her attacker. Even faced with domesticity and homemaking, her role is not fixed as the housewife and mother, but rather an empowered character capable of defending herself and others. One scene in particular reflects a more modern representation of domestic

Figure 2: Step and Chet ("The Radio")

work and gender stereotypes. In this picture, the audience can see Chet holding Steph's baby in the kitchen, thereby carrying out more feminine and domestic work in the eyes of the 1950s, whereas Steph sits on a chair almost 'manspreading' while icing her crotch (fig. 2). Not only does it inform the audience of the power dynamics between the characters, but it also portrays gender roles in discordance with the traditional gender roles of the 50s and 60s. By deconstructing traditional gender roles in this episode, *Fallout* furthers the post-dualist impression it seeks to represent, thereby rewriting social structures. The relationship between Steph and Chet, therefore, becomes un-nostalgic as it reflects a modern vision of childbearing and domestic work. In this case, the series reflects a feminist approach by dismantling an archaic social structure and rewriting gender roles.

This section of the analysis focused on how *Fallout* represents gender in accordance with its nostalgic devices. By utilising a period that performed gender roles and stereotypes in a very dissimilar manner to our own contemporary society, it is assumed that these roles were preserved in some aspect or other. However, this is not the case with the series, as the representation of gender is deconstructed and subverted from its inspirational era, thereby creating a fragmented temporality.

A Blast from a Future Past

A part of *Fallout*'s aesthetic is deeply rooted in the 50's and 60's, both in the setting and in its worldbuilding. The aesthetic of the series is important in relaying nostalgia for a time long gone, however, the series also utilises historical referencing in order to create a resemblance to our own reality, thereby making the world similar and at times creating simulacra. Elements such as iconography serve to refer to a cultural memory, of which the series utilises it as a vehicle to relay its criticism of past history and immediate reality. In addition to this, retrofuturism provides the series' commentary on a world focused on the past, creating a critique of contemporary culture that seeks to wallow in its own past, rather than focusing on the future.

The visual elements found within the series refer to the past, especially the Atomic Age. The Atomic Age can especially be seen in the vaults and their decorations, as the vaults function as a tomb, preserving *Fallout*'s imagined Atomic Age of 2077. This is exemplified in Vault 33 and the homes they have built within, as well as the common areas. The wallpaper seen in Lucy's room is decorated with stars against a blue backdrop, with multiple lines forming squares. Additionally, old school blue fans and a blue potted plant that resembles a rocket can be seen in the background, forming a picture that resembles the retrofuturistic decoration that could be found in the Atomic Age of the 50s (fig. 3). Furthermore, by alluding

Figure 3: Lucy's room ("The End")

to rockets and stars, it reflects the optimism of this age, as the period was striving for the stars through technological advancement. However, in the series, it is rendered insignificant and huddled away from its technological dreams, creating an ironic portrayal of the dream of the future of Manifest Destiny. Creating an ironic stance towards Manifest Destiny solidifies the series as speculative, as this can be seen as a counter-reaction towards a cultural bias of the Western world, as Oziewicz proposed. Manifest Destiny has also found a new territory in the American discourse, as President Donald Trump has declared space to be the new frontier of American expansion (Jones). This statement happened after the making of the series, however, it has been part of the American discourse for a while, with Elon Musk leading the charge with his company SpaceX (Chang par. 2). Therefore, the series calls into question the expansionist

Figure 4: Vault 33's background ("The End") and Cooper's set ("The Head")

view of the past and the future. The interior of Lucy's room also alludes to a future of

expansionist dreams, acts as a remembrance of a past and a nation, therefore criticising that their ideology is their own worst enemy in achieving their dreams. The idea of the frontier myth is also manifested in places other than the vaults. Vault 33 and the set of one of Cooper's filmsare eerily similar when comparing the pictures in figure 4. The background of Cooper's film is reminiscent of the typical cowboy location of the Navajo desert and its mountains, whereas the background of Vault 33 is reminiscent of the Appalachian land and mountain range, however, they both instil the spirit of the frontier. However, both landscapes and mountains are also reminiscent of a midwestern, or more precisely, Montana nature. This reveals the truth of the frontier and how *Fallout* wants to present it as: A myth and nothing more. By comparing these two images and revealing the interrelation, the series informs the audience of the artificiality of the vault, thereby criticising the frontier myth and the American Dream as ironic. The American Dream is also represented in the technology found within the series, adding another layer to the critique of the belief.

The technology in the vault also reflects the 50s and references the period's technological advancement, as seen in figure 5, where a 3D projector with the text, 'Telesonic Magic of 3D', can be seen. The 50s saw the golden age of 3D cinema, and the technology has seen little improvement and popularity since this period, but reemerged in 2009 with the film *Avatar* (Lewis). Using this technology, therefore, recalls a period of wonder in cinematic

Figure 5: 3D projector ("The End")

Figure 6: Marquee sign in Filly ("The Target")

history, connected to a cultural knowledge from contemporary history, creating a fragmentation of time and space. In comparison, the wasteland of *Fallout* preserves some aesthetics from the Atomic Age, as a marquee sign with light bulbs shaped like a star can be seen (fig 6). This sign stands in contrast to the background, which shows the town of Filly, which is made out of scraps and reflects the ruin and decay of the wasteland. The sign represents the optimism found in the Atomic Age and the entertainment industry, however, the decay reflects the destruction of this utopianism. By showing a future ruined by a capitalist monopoly aiming to rule the world, thereby reflecting that the Atomic Age is an illusion of a utopian future. The vaults are also a reflection of this, an illusion of safety in the hands of a few, thereby referencing a disillusionment with the American Dream. The freedom and opportunity to obtain a better life, as proclaimed in the belief of the American Dream (Murtoff), is therefore criticised in the representation of the vaults. By adding a retrofuturistic semblance to the vaults, which represents a proposed mentality of the 50s, the audience is forced to recontextualise the denotation that lies within the name and the mentality found herein.

The naming of bunker/fallout shelter to vault ignites a reconfiguration of what it implies. Bunker implies a defence from unknown forces, whereas a fallout shelter implies doom in the form of an apocalypse. Vault, in contrast, implies the safety of something precious, like a vault in a bank. This is a direct reference to how the people in the vaults are presented,

as commodification for corporations to take advantage of. Vault 33 is positive in their attitude and empathetic when compared to the wasteland, but the reasons for this have more morally ambiguous undertones. Norm confronts one of the leaders of Vault-Tec, who lives in Vault 31, but only as a brain on a Roomba, who then confesses what the experiments of Vaults 32 and 33 entailed:

> [Norm:] So what's Vault 32 and 33? Just people to be controlled?
>
> [Brain-on-a-Roomba/Bud:] What? No! When you put it like that, it sounds downright morally questionable. They're our breeding pool, the ultimate expression of HR R&D. Genetically selected to breed with my Buds to create a class of super managers. People with positivity. People who make lemonade. People who will inherit the Earth after we've wiped the surface clean.
>
> ("The Beginning" 22:10-22:35)

The experiment expresses a wish for the future of the Earth to be more empathetic, which reflects Wajcman's notion of the workplace post-industrial reality. This mentality also references the bunker/fallout shelter mentality of the 50s and 60s, which was rooted in the ability to manage emotions (Anderson 121). The characters from Vault 33 handle tough situations in the same manner as was advised from that time period. In the first episode, the audience is introduced to the lives of the vault dwellers, which include their everyday tasks, such as being taught to fight. However, this fighting seems to be more inclined towards the defensive rather than the offensive, therefore reconstructing the mentality of the 50s and 60s. Such an example can be found in the second episode, where Lucy tries to protect Wilzig from the Ghoul:

> [Lucy:] I'm going to have to ask you to leave him alone. Now, I acknowledge that I'm unfamiliar with your circumstances. But, at first glance your treatment of this man appears unfair, and I'm obliged to intervene. Now, if your instinct is to harm me, as a

> person simply trying to de-escalate a conflict, then I'll have to assume, of the two of you, you are likely the primary aggressor. In which case, I think everyone in this town would agree that force is justified. Unless you willingly stand down now.
>
> ("The Target" 44:15-45:00).

What can be derived from this is that the training for the vault dwellers included de-escalating confrontations by applying a logical and kind approach. This mindset is reflected in the posters that adorn the vault's walls, which serve as a propaganda device.

Figure 7: Poster in Vault 33 ("The End")

Propaganda is also applied in Vault 33, exemplified by the poster in figure 7, which shows the Vault Boy with the text: Don't lose your head. This reflects the same kind of mentality that was perpetuated in the 50s in the context of the bunkers, thereby creating a historical connection. It proposes the idea of restorative nostalgia, however, it refutes it. Boym noted the language being used when something reflects restorative nostalgia, as an 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric, used in propaganda in order to recreate 'home' (Boym 43). However, in the instance of *Fallout*, it is a criticism of restorative nostalgia, as it is shown to be an illusion rather than an absolute truth, which restorative nostalgia sees itself as. The propaganda poster also seems out of place, as it appears cheerful with Vault Boy's thumbs-up pose, whereas the concrete wall it is on and the blast doors on the side of the image reflect another mentality: Fear. The disparity between these two emotions of optimism and fear displays the series'

critique of false safety and the irony that is this false safety. However, as Lucy comes to realise, the post-apocalyptic world above ground is separated from her own as it favours lawlessness and violence over morality. There is no false safety here, only the truth of the wasteland, which is the constant danger not veiled by optimism or empathy. She presumes that humanity has evolved, rather than devolved, into a society that was depicted in the vault, which represented a time before the atomic bombs dropped. 'Morally right' is perhaps not the right word to use in connection with the vaults, as the audience comes to find out later in the series, but this was the ideals the vault dwellers were taught in Vault 33, as Lucy notes to the Ghoul:

> [Lucy:] You can't treat people like this.
>
> [Ghoul:] Yeah, why's that?
>
> [Lucy:] Because of the golden rule. 'Do unto others as you would have unto you' ("The Head" 34:30-34:41).

This quote encapsulates another part of the U.S. mentality: Christianity. Religion had always been a considerable element of the U.S. mentality and daily life, however, Christianity as a core belief system was ramped up during the cold war, in order to secure American hostility towards the Soviet Union, therefore creating an anti-communist stance (Aiello par. 2). Furthermore, the sentence "Under God" was added by the congress to the pledge of allegiance in 1954, under president Eisenhower's encouragement, thereby tainting patriotism with religious symbolic value (Canipe 319). The series does not refer to Christianity as an outright religion in the fictional 50s or the post-apocalyptic bunker society, but the mentality is present

herein. The Brotherhood of Steel is presented as a quasi-religious paramilitary order, with the leader of the faction, Elder Cleric Quintus, resembling a monk with his long tunic or habit (fig. 8). Moreover, calling the leader a 'cleric' therefore designates him as a religious leader, rather than a military leader. In Vault 4, religion also persists, however, only surface dwellers who found shelter here are inclined to do so. They worship Moldaver, referring to her as 'Flame Mother', and is portrayed more pagan in their ways of reverence, as they worship in the nude and cover themselves in the ashes of those who died in the bombing of Shady Sands ("The Trap" 45:55-47:45). It also resembles a cult, evoking one of Doyle's elements of post-apocalyptic fiction: Sects. Using cults and sects like this reinforces the tropes within the genre,

Figure 8: Elder Cleric Quintus ("The End")

thereby invoking further the nostalgia mode found in the series' narrative device. By only portraying religion to be present by those coming from the wasteland, and not the vaults, it creates a fragmentation of reality. The vaults are supposed to reflect the 50s and 60s, which included religiosity, however, this is not the case. It circumvents the expectations of this representation, in return creating simulacra. In this case, it is the third order of simulacra, as the vaults pretend to represent the 50s and 60s, however, it strives further away from reality itself. As religion was a big part of this period, we can see that it in fact it is a copy of a copy. Religion is the only dogmatic representation in the series that is bound by ideology, as an economic proposition is the crux for the apocalypse in *Fallout*.

Some of the mentality proposed in the 50s and 60s, as stated before, had been focused on the atomic bombs as being a uniting factor for the world that could either create a world state, ending wars between countries for good, or decimate it. This notion is paralleled in the character of Barb, as she notes that "A nuclear event would be a tragedy but also an opportunity. Perhaps the greatest opportunity in history because when we are the only ones left, there will be no one to fight. A true monopoly" ("The Beginning" 23:55-24:10). Barb subverts the norm of the representation of gender in SF, as Schelde noted men being the ones who breaks and destroys, thereby deconstructing binary notions of gender. Furthermore, this can be seen in *Fallout*'s critique of capitalism, as monopolising the world (or the end) is reflected upon to be disastrous. According to Malcolm Sawyer, when comparing capitalist monopolies against neo-liberal doctrines, it can be concluded that the neo-liberal doctrines are able to "bring economic and social benefits" (1226). It is by empowering a free market initiative and less regulation that a neo-liberalist doctrine can be marked as positive for an economy. Sawyer claims that "the conditions of oligopoly and monopoly are viewed to reduce the propensities to invest and to innovate" (1237), which means that this sort of market structure halts advancement and competitiveness. This claim is reflected in *Fallout* as well, as it is only a few private firms that hold the power over the (fictional) American market, such as Vault-Tec and RobCo, which in turn leads to the apocalypse. This is furthered by the wording of Barb, indicating that the series focuses on and critiques economic systems rather than ideology, as the word 'monopoly' reflects a business vocabulary rather than a political statement. Barb's statements reflect the desire to create a homogeneous society with Vault-Tec and its contributors being at the forefront. The wasteland proves that homogeneity and a 'true' monopoly cannot be achieved, as proven by the different factions that reside herein. The Brotherhood of Steel and the acolytes of Moldaver in Vault 4 are a reflection of how religion survives in even the harshest environments, proving that homogeneity cannot be achieved. The wasteland is therefore a

tapestry of different people, including different dogmas, which is also the case with Filly, which represents lawlessness and freedom. However, Filly is haunted by the past of which is represented as antithetical.

The set design of the town of 'Filly' consists of remnants of the pre-apocalyptic world. This is evident in the second episode, as the audience can catch a glimpse of a drive-in diner, which was popular in the 50s, and a motel aptly named "Atomic Motel" ("The Target" 32:36-32:44). In the same scene the audience will notice an advertisement for 'Nuka Cola', which is shaped like a rocket. The name of the motel and the beverage create a vision of a pre-apocalyptic world concentrated around atomic power and weaponry, which presumably was not focused on the fear of it, but possessed the optimism that was depicted in the 50s. Another aspect that tells us that this pre-apocalyptic society was optimistically defined is the Vault Boy, which can be found as an advertisement throughout the series. In the third episode the audience can spot him on a billboard promoting the vaults, and the assurance of survival from an atomic catastrophe, with a text saying: "It's never too late!" ("The Head" 48:27-48:40). The thumbs up the Vault Boy poses with is a reference to the original actor in the series, Cooper, who suggested they use the pose for the advertisements. Later, right before the bombs are dropped, Cooper tells his daughter the pose is a way to estimate the distance of an atomic bomb dropping and how deadly it would be in that position. The meaning behind the pose adds to the dark humour of *Fallout*; that behind the seemingly positive positioning of mass cultured society lies propaganda and conspiracy, threatening the existence of the world. When paralleling it against U.S. mentality and mass culture of the 50s and 60s, this can be seen as a critique of nuclear warfare and its representation in mass culture. Furthermore, this critique is further established through the technology presented in the series. The alternative reality of the post-apocalyptic world of *Fallout* has not evolved in its technological advances past the 50s, devolving into a

Wild West scenario instead. The Wild West representation is present in the wasteland, however, the past of the 50s looms as ruins of the past in every inch of the post-apocalypse.

Much of the setting of the wasteland consists of 50s architecture and iconography, as is visualised in the fourth episode. The supermarket in this episode is named "Superdupermart" ("The Ghouls" 18:15-18:30), which reflects the optimistic attitude from that time period. Furthermore, the symbol of the supermarket is a sun, which in turn reflects the nuclear influence the period had on society. Much of everyday life had this nuclear optimism integrated into mass culture, thereby reflecting the naivety American culture had on the subject (Davis). However, this supermarket has turned ruinous and morally sinister, thereby, the iconography embedded within it serves as a social critique of the 50s nuclear optimism. In the third episode, the series recalls a memory of U.S. iconography. The donut shop that Lucy and Wilzig pass by in the desert, or wasteland, adorns a massive donut on top of the roof, intact but deteriorated ("The Head" 06:31-07:05). This is seemingly made to imitate Randy's Donuts located in California ("Randy's Donuts"), which has been included in many films such as *Mars Attacks* (1996) and *Iron Man 2* (2010). It is not only a landmark of California, but also a representation of Americana and American Kitsch, thereby reproducing American cultural heritage in the series. Furthermore, in the last episode, the series tension and conflict come to a tipping point, in the form of a battle between the Brotherhood of Steel and the New California Republic, which is located at the famous Griffith Observatory. This is a well-known landmark of California, where tourists and visitors can watch the Hollywood sign and observe stars at night. In the series, however, the landmark is deprived of its charms and elegant architecture by becoming a fortress instead, a sign of violence in contrast to its dream-like state of space exploration ("The Beginning" 38:00-38:04). The original landmark represents progress, which reflects the mid-century optimism in accordance with scientific advancement, however, in *Fallout* it masks the absence of a profound reality. This profound reality is, therefore, that the

comfort that the Atomic Age represents in terms of nuclear anxiety, does not exist. It is a false sense of safety, thereby negating atomic optimism. Furthermore, it is also a reflection of surveillance contemporary culture, as we have become accustomed to being watched in the public space and online. This aspect is taken lightly, as we have become complacent to big corporations, like Meta, stealing our privacy, thereby creating a false sense of safety from a capitalist monopoly. This coincides with McClancy's argument that the *Fallout* games' profound reality is the Cold War, which continues to today, and a surveillance state.

Corn stalks are common in the world of both the vaults and the wasteland of *Fallout*. In Vaults 33 and 32, they can be seen in the common rooms, thereby symbolising fertility and the American Dream, however, in Vault 4, trees are the common room's main greenery, which reflects how each vault was intended to pursue different purposes. Corn and corn stalks is a significant part of American iconography, as the U.S. have been one of the biggest exporters of such, therefore representing Americana in the context of its economy and farming community ("The History and Cultural Significance of Corn" par. 2). Corn and the use of this in the series, creates simulacra, as the original context of Native Americans and their utilisation of it have been lost to the advancement of the U.S.. It is intentional to use corn as the crop for the post-apocalypse, as it is meaningful to the American cultural heritage. It symbolises the belief of American Exceptionalism, as this crop is what survived the end, therefore becoming the superior crop. The last time the audience encounters the corn stalks is in connection to Moldaver and the New California Republic (NCR), in the battle at the Griffith Observatory, which is where their base resides. The NCR represents revitalisation and renewal, and with their use of corn in the wasteland that promises death and destruction, it constitutes the renewal and the persistence of the American Dream. However, the American Dream, even rejuvenated, is portrayed to still be violent, as seen in a scene of the last episode. Here, the corn in the foreground is contrasted with the violence and death in the background, creating a picture that

is similar to a Renaissance painting or that of the American War of Independence (fig. 9). The series draws upon Baudrillard's concept of simulacra again, as this image symbolises a shared American cultural memory. American mythology becomes "a strategy of the real, of the neoreal and the hyperreal that everywhere is the double of a strategy of deterrence" (Baudrillard 7), meaning by exaggeration, this image manages to deter us from an original reality which might not exist anymore. This, of course, is the American Dream, meaning that the series posits the non-existence of this national ethos. The American Dream and the right to freedom are represented in the form of the wasteland, thereby interconnected to the Ghouls' character.

Figure 9: Fight at the Griffith Observatory ("The Beginning")

Iconography and American cultural heritage can also be found in the character of the Ghoul, as he is an ideal representation of the western genre's stereotypical cowboy or outlaw. In the third episode, the audience is introduced to the character's backstory, which includes his career as an actor and, most notably, acting within the western genre. This creates a nostalgic aspect, as (spaghetti) westerns were very popular in the 60s, with films such as *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) being one of the more recognisable productions from this era. Even one of the lines from his films creates a meta-referencing for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, as it sounds alike: "Feo, fuerte y formal" ("The Beginning" 46:16-46:22). This line in Spanish means "He was ugly, strong, and had dignity", which in turn corresponds with Cooper's character development in the wasteland. The wasteland creates the same morally ambiguous

character that Cooper acted as before the apocalypse, and he essentially becomes this character due to the hardships of the post-apocalyptic landscape. Additionally, his character creates simulacra as the Ghoul is a twisted copy of Cooper's character, which in turn is a copy of the western genre's archetype. The Ghoul's appearance appears monstrous, thereby symbolising a distortion of the original character through simulacrum, consequently forming another new and revised version by imitation. Furthermore, the wasteland represents a new frontier, however, this new frontier does not offer opportunity as the western genre presented it, but rather desperation and depravity. The new frontier of *Fallout* presents simulacra through its aesthetic and ideology, as it conveys the stereotypical view of mass culture and reimagines it in a post-apocalyptic narrative. It revives characters and elements such as the shootout in the second episode ("The Target" 40:17-41:40), thereby imitating tropes which in turn create a fragmented reality that exists simultaneously in the past and in the future. In addition to this we see the Ghoul watching his own film, "The Man from Deadhorse", being played on the TV in the Superdupermart where he delivers the line "I hope you like the taste of lead, you commie son of a bitch" ("The Ghouls" 41:30-42:49). Based on the fact that communism had not been a heated subject in the U.S. until the first and second Red Scare after the first and second world war (Roland), it is interesting that this is represented in a western film. This creates temporal fragmentation, leaving the audience to adhere to historical problems in a different historical setting. Of course, it can also be argued to be a representation of the Red Scare in Hollywood (Roland), of which many were condemned because of their political ideology, thereby imagining a reality which aligns with our own historical reality. These parallels to our own history create an apparent reflective nostalgia, as it presents our historical reality as lost to time, but presenting it in a post-apocalyptic future creates no longing for the actions of the past. To further add to the argument that the wasteland represents a new frontier, is the patriotic feelings and mindset depicted in the series. After World War II, it was clear in the mindset of the

American people who the enemies were, and the role of the U.S. as a major power in world politics and war. This mindset is active in the worldbuilding and representation of the heroes in *Fallout*, exemplified in episode five. Lucy and Maximus meet again and they agree to journey together, going off into the distance as "Battle Hymn of the Republic" is played in the background ("The Past" 14:25-14:50). The song of choice is of course of a patriotic nature, however, the walk off into the distance is reminiscent of the western genre trope of riding into the sunset, marking the end of the hero's quest. This, however, does not mean the end for Lucy and Maximus, but the beginning of their journey, meaning the act serves as a remembrance of the frontier as a patriotic place and time, reimagining it in the wasteland of the post-apocalypse. Furthermore, Vault 33's mission was to repopulate the world in their image as Lucy remarks: "The entire purpose of my vault was to come up to the surface one day and… restart civilization. It's Reclamation Day, it's what keeps us all going and… it… already happened without us" ("The Past" 29:08-29:30). This was an event that was celebrated in the vault, which is reminiscent of Independence Day, or the 4th of July, which celebrates the day that the U.S. was united as a nation. This, in turn, remarks that the 'Proclamation Day' intends to do the same in the same patriotic manner, reclaiming the world and reshaping it in their image. This infers the idea of Manifest Destiny, which is fundamentally a way to justify colonisation. Manifest Destiny is therefore a recognisable national ethos, which creates nostalgia for the past and the present.

Recreating U.S. iconography creates recognisability and nostalgia, as it is an element embedded into the U.S. cultural memory. However, using iconography creates simulacra, as the doughnut shop is reduced to a symbol, thereby distorting reality. Furthermore, recreating and reproducing the retrofuturistic iconography of Randy's Donuts, the imagery becomes hyperreal, as this simulated reality becomes more 'real' than reality. What remains is a copy of a copy, which is reproduced endlessly until the original is lost. One of the main aspects of the

series functioning as a copy of a copy is its adaptational element. It is evident that the series can be seen as a copy of the original series of games, which in turn is a copy of the 50s, thereby rendering the series as a simulacrum. This thesis is not focusing on this aspect, however, it became apparent to remark on the subject, however small an appearance it will take on. Overall, the series uses an upbeat reality, the vaults, that are paralleled by the gruesome nature of the real world, which is the wasteland. At first, the vault's purpose is to mimic the 50s with its optimistic nature, but distorts the image that contemporary mass culture perceives it as, by using gory and violent elements, thereby creating a dark comedic effect. The upbeat nature is also conveyed through the music utilised in the series, which is paralleled by the gore.

Many of the songs in the series are comforting in nature, but set against a backdrop of brutality, masking the violence in a jazzy and upbeat fashion. The songs range predominantly from the late 1930s to the 60s, which creates a fragmented and distorted reality, as the futuristic setting and the outdated music clash in both mentality and age. "We'll Meet Again" is a particularly well known and recognisable song, which was used in the third episode ("The Head" 22:45-23:50). The song's recognisability stems from it being used in popular media, such as Stanley Kubric's film *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), which interestingly enough concerns itself with a nuclear holocaust. As the song was released just as World War II broke out, it is often related to nationalistic values and was meant to boost morale during the war. If the audience can relate the song to its wartime period and connect it to another famous film dealing with the same topic as *Fallout*, it can thereby give rise to nostalgia through intertextuality. Furthermore, the song can also be argued to be nostalgic in its semantics, as the general meaning of the song is located in the longing and loss of soldiers going to war. *Fallout*, however, uses a The Ink Spots cover (1941), rather than the original, sung by Vera Lynn (1939). Furthermore, the series also used the cover song "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire" (1941) from The Ink Spots. Using cover songs rather than the original brings forth the idea of

simulacrum, as using a reproduction distorts the meaning of the original, therefore rendering *Fallout* a copy of a copy within this aspect. The use of these older songs recorded on an analogue medium makes the audience aware of their age and thereby of another time period. Record scratching is one of the elements often associated with older records, which is the case with "We'll Meet Again". Fisher notes: "Crackle, then, connotes the return of a certain sense of loss. At the same time, it is also the sign of a found (audio) object, the indication that we are in a scavenger's space." (Fisher ch. 02). Meaning, that the audience knows this space is that of an intentional nature. The song has been hunted down from the past, therefore implying the use to be intentional in order to create a sense of loss. By utilising this song that contains a crackle, the audio becomes an audio-spectre instead, thereby haunting *Fallout* and creating nostalgia.

The series offers some meta commentary on music and its nostalgic nature, as exemplified in the seventh episode, when Thaddeus is in possession of the relic, which is lodged in Wilzig's head, and uses the KPSS radio station as a meeting point for the Brotherhood of Steel. Thaddeus, while waiting, talks with DJ Carl, who runs the radio station in the wasteland:

> [Thaddeus:] So, you were saying earlier that some people, they don't, uh, like the sound of this music, really?
>
> [DJ Carl:] Oh, people get fully mad. The thing no one appreciates is these are the original recordings. You can't get that warm sound anymore. You know, the bass, the treble, the mids.
>
> "The Radio 42:00-42:20".

The audience do get a snippet of the songs played on the radio, which is fiddle music with so much static that it almost becomes unrecogniseable for the listener ("The Radio" 41:34-42:00). The music and DJ Carl's statements about it become ironic, as the 'warmth' and the technical forms, such as the treble and the mids, are no longer there and the audience does not even care

for the music. This representation of the music and the interaction between Thaddeus and DJ Carl reflects the series' critique of nostalgia and its excessive use in contemporary culture. The series notes on how contemporary culture holds onto the past, thereby reflecting its restorative nature, rather than letting go and moving forward. Elements such as these reflect a stubborn nature in contemporary culture, and as Fisher puts it, "The threat is no longer the deadly sweet seduction of nostalgia. The problem is not, any more, the longing to get to the past, but the inability to get out of it." (Fisher ch. 02). Fisher therefore implies we are stuck in a loop of nostalgia, unable to get out of it. This subject is what the conversation touches upon, thereby forcing the audience to confront contemporary culture revelling in the past, unable to let go. However, utilising the Cold War as a source of inspiration broaches issues on atomic warfare in contemporary international political discourses.

One argument that persists throughout the historical theoretical framework is how the period has been represented as a conservative and complacent time, in which capitalism was at its peak. It was also a period of extreme uncertainty in terms of tensions with the USSR brought on by the arms race and therefore the possibility of nuclear warfare ("Wartime Alliance Tensions"). This would lead to an anti-communist mindset in the US, as the U.S. senator Joseph McCarthy brought on hearings to expose possible communist sympathisers in the government, whom the period was named McCarthyism (Achter). This uncertainty of the future of the past is ideal to imagine in *Fallout*, rendering the Cold War into a much 'warmer' one. Furthermore, this period was also seen as a golden period of American history, as the economy boomed, therefore becoming mythological in the eyes of the present. Recently, Donald Trump's rhetoric in domestic and international economic conditions reflects a romanticised vision of the 50s, as the president urges to strengthen the U.S. economy by using tariffs to do so, thereby bringing forth a new 'golden age' (Sadrolodabaee). From this aspect stems a form of optimism, as the period was stable for the middle class, and technological advancement promised American

sovereignty. *Fallout* uses it as political satire by uncovering the fear and violence hidden under the nuclear optimism of the 50s. In the same sense, the series represents corporations as cartoonishly evil powers that can sell even the end of the world to the masses, thereby creating a political commentary and a critique of consumerism.

The Atomic Age has a hold on not only the series' aesthetic but also the narrative. This section aims to understand how history and iconography within an American context inform *Fallout*, thereby illuminating the nostalgia mode in which it engages with.

Speculating on the End

This thesis has already gone through some of the historical context in which the series parallels our own, however, this chapter will focus on how *Fallout* differentiates and speculates an alternate reality. By imagining another reality, elements such as technology and energy sources become vastly different from ours. Using extrapolation in these instances conveys the series' commentary on contemporary issues, such as Global Warming anxieties and the stagnation in culture.

Spec-fic is manifested in different aspects of fiction, such as worldbuilding and aesthetics. Technology is an interesting catalyst when analysing *Fallout* in terms of its speculative elements. One of the more recognisable gadgets from the series is the Pip-Boy, which is a small computer that the vault dwellers wear on their wrists and is comparable to the modern smartwatch. These Pip-Boys can be used as a Geiger counter, i.e. reading radioactive levels in things and surrounding areas. Furthermore, they can be used as a navigational tool, tracking device, entertainment centre (games), and communication tool in the vaults, and aesthetically, the Pip-Boy does not appear modern or sleek, however, it is bulky and retrofuturistic. The screen of the Pip-Boy also exudes a retrofuturistic impression, as it adorns a black screen with green pixelated text or image appearing on the monitor. Early days of

computing used these simple monitors, which, most notably, have been used in the cult classic film *The Matrix* (1999), therefore also creating recognisability in terms of outdated technology in contemporary times. As *The Matrix* uses this kind of outdated text for its aesthetic, it is already haunted by the past, therefore "it won't allow us to fall into the illusion of presence." (Fisher ch. 00). Fisher uses this in the context of the audio crackle, however, it is relevant as to how the film discloses its anchor to the past, even though the setting of the matrix simulation imitates the present of the 90s, and the 'real' world outside the matrix as futuristic. In this same context, it is therefore a copy of a past cultural and technological memory, thereby rendering *Fallout*'s version a copy of a copy, thereby conveying simulacra. *The Matrix* and *Fallout* are unable to imagine another reality, thereby any other form of representation of this technology's aesthetic, thus copying elements of the past. Furthering this example with the Pip-Boy (fig. 10), which in style resembles *The Matrix*'s green coding in its colour scheme, reprises Fisher's comment: "cultural time has folded back on itself, and the impression of linear development has given way to a strange simultaneity" (Fisher ch. 00). By styling the Pip-Boy to resemble *The Matrix*'s aesthetic, *Fallout* creates nothing new, only leaning towards generating intertextuality from past cultural and media iconography. Using this 'outdated' aesthetic creates a retro look, which, therefore, is perceived as nostalgic, as the series pulls on the

Figure 10: Pip-Boy ("The Target")

connection from pop culture as well as a historical technological aspect. As mentioned before, this technology is retrofuturistic as it is comprehensible that the technology in *Fallout* appears to be what, for example, the 50s or 60s, would imagine futuristic technology to appear like. The knight's armour, as well as the Pip-Boy, are bulky and not streamlined as one might imagine of a futuristic society that is perceivably technologically advanced. Of course, the justification here is that society in the series is still stuck in the alternate reality mimicking our reality's 1950s, thereby rendering the technology as temporally fragmented. This is further reinforced by the Brotherhood of Steel's main mission to ascertain control of the pre-war technology, thereby causing a stark stop in the technological advancement of the world. The technology of this imagined reality, however, is different from the one we share a cultural memory of. History has inspired *Fallout*, but the series extrapolates the nuclear technology that was formed after World War II, thereby creating a fragmentation of reality.

Fallout is located in an alternate reality from ours, however, it is not without its inspiration from history. One of the more prominent historical ties found within the series is the USSR and communist references being apparent in both the past and the future. In the second episode, Wilzig and Lucy are travelling the wasteland, or desert, where they come across a satellite painted red, with CCCP written on it (fig. 11). The audience is therefore made aware that the USSR in this alternate reality was still technologically advanced, bringing the

Figure 11: CCCP sattellite ("The Head")

space race of the 50s to mind, when the Soviet Union charged the frontline of the Space Race with their artificial satellite: Sputnik (Garber). However, when comparing the two, they appear different, as the satellite in the wasteland of *Fallout* seems more advanced on the basis it is adorned with what seems to be solar panels and a camera, which implies it was used for surveillance. Using the satellite for surveillance plays into the fear of atomic war, as it suggests it was used for image surveillance by countries planning their atomic offence. During the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 (Taylor), the U.S. used aerial footage to their advantage, which contributes historical connotations to the surveillance technology found in this scene. Furthering this historical tie, a flashback can be seen from before the apocalypse, when the Ghoul is talking to his colleague on a (fictional) Hollywood set about a writer. The colleague notes that "Bob's a bit of a communist" ("The Head" 02:56-03:08), therefore, he had been fired. This is a reference to the notorious Hollywood Blacklist of the 50s, where multiple people were suspected of being communist, therefore fired and blacklisted from the industry (Perlman). An audience with historical knowledge of that period would therefore be able to connect this fictional reality with our own, thereby hinting towards the plausibility of the series' reality. These historical ties create a speculative approach, blurring the lines between fictionality and history. Additionally, this confers simulacrum; this satellite is used to innuendo to our own reality, however, it is not a faithful copy of reality, thereby denoting the simulacra nature to Baudrillard's third order, which "masks the absence of a profound reality" (6). The audience has to fill in the gaps, as the satellite in fact does not resemble Sputnik but simply refers to the USSR, therefore, "it plays at being an appearance" (Baudrillard 6). The reality is substituted for something else, there is no original, and it just plays at being real. This third order is further noted on in the narrative, as the audience comes to know of the ongoing war between the USSR and the U.S. before the apocalypse, with Cooper remarking on the rise of communism within his community:

> [Cooper:] Sorry you couldn't make it to the party the other night, Charlie. Guess you had one of your meetings, huh? One of your communist meetings? Come on, man. We watched people die together up north fighting against all that horseshit.
>
> [Charlie:] Yeah, and for what?
>
> [Cooper:] What do you mean for what? For the American Dream.
>
> ("The Trap" 20:38-20:56).

The American Dream and communism are mentioned, however, this is not an exact reflection of history and reality, therefore forcing the viewer to substitute their own reality in this fictional one. Baudrillard further posits: "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (2). The point here is that nature and artificiality are becoming harder to differentiate in culture, which is true when looking at this conversation. It has not become a pure form of simulacra just yet, but it is on the verge of becoming one. Substitution is also an aspect that can be seen in the homes of the fictional reality of the 50s in *Fallout*, as the robots' role is in the home, as well as other places, thereby mimicking that of the domestic workers.

Robots are also part of the series' technological reality, which can be seen in the character of Mr. Handy. This robot had been a part of General Atomics International creations and serves as a multipurpose robot, thereby functioning to serve humans in the home and institutions. Wajcman wrote on the socio-economic reasons for the digital divide between genders, noting that appliances in single-family houses were predominantly small, therefore making a market for this type of product. Mr. Handy is quite big and useful in every way, thereby taking the place of the homemaker, reverting a domesticated space once dominated by women into a post-human space. In a way, this can be read as 'utopian' in the context of female liberation. In the fourth episode, we are introduced to the same robot model, however, this robot, named Snip Snip, have been reprogrammed to harvest organs from people, thereby given

a sinister function instead of a helping function. However, Snip Snip is still programmed to speak nicely to his 'patients', a remnant from his past role in society pre-apocalypse. While Snip Snip is wheeling Lucy to the operating table to harvest her organs, he keeps the friendly attitude: "Where are you from again? Never been there myself. Hope to go there someday soon" ("The Ghouls" 30:45- 30:55). This language mimics that of the vault dwellers and is accompanied by Sam Fonteyn's cheerful song "Journey Into Melody" (1965 and 2016) thereby creating a retelling of the optimistic attitude that was portrayed in the 50s. Furthermore, the robot is voiced by Sebastian Leslie, a British actor within the *Fallout* universe, who was famous for playing a butler, which serves a critique of capitalism and materialism, as he notes: "I mean I've dipped my bits in the same gravy train. Sold my vocal rights to that spinning robot they sell to housewives and perverts" ("The Trap" 08:50-09:00). Furthermore, it is also a comment on commercialisation and commodification as individuals are used as products and exploited by private corporations seeking to gain more control and power. As the 50s U.S. saw a rise in the economy due to mass consumerism after World War II (Cohen 237), corporations also became more powerful, thus, Leslie's statement is a reflection on history and how commercialisation could have turned into an extreme endeavour as is presented in *Fallout*. Furthermore, Leslie also blatantly references people turning into a commodity: "Listen to me, Hollywood is the past. Forget Hollywood. The future, my friend, is products. You're a product. I'm a product. The end of the world is a product" ("The Trap" 09:32-09:43). These remarks always lead back to consumerism and capitalism being one of the series' main social criticisms, functioning as a storytelling and story progression device. This critique of capitalism resonates with Fisher's thoughts on the anti-capitalist movement after 9/11. Here, he notes: "anti-capitalist movement seemed also to have conceded too much to capitalist realism. Since it was unable to posit a coherent alternative political-economic model to capitalism, the suspicion was that the actual aim was not to replace capitalism but to mitigate its worst excesses" (Fisher

Capitalist Realism 14). Thereby meaning that the anti-capitalist movements did not intend to replace capitalism with a better economic structure, however, as it aimed to alleviate the worst aspects of it. *Fallout* does not posit a better world without capitalism, it reconfigures it by showing how the future and the characters within it survive capitalism. Additionally, in the world of *Fallout*, capitalism causes the collapse of the world, however, it still lingers in the ruins of the wasteland like a ghost, and Vault-Tec still controls some aspects of the world. There is no other economic system that replaces that of capitalism, therefore insinuating that the idea of capitalist realism is true. It is the very definition of what Fisher proposes: "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (*Capitalist Realism* 1). Additionally, the character of Sebastian Leslie can be analysed as a nod to the typecasting happening in Hollywood, specifically the actor Arthur Threacher, who was typecast as the British manservant or butler (Tomasson). This is a further reflection of how commodification of people is happening in the cultural sphere, ie. Hollywood, thereby contemplating on the "worst excess" (Fisher *Capitalist Realism* 14) of capitalism. The perception that the end of capitalism is harder to imagine than the end of the world is manifested in Leslie's on-stage persona being preserved in the wasteland. His character, therefore, symbolises the non-replacement of capitalism. The (almost) end of the world is portrayed in the series, thereby insinuating the plausibility of a resolution of this rather than an economic structure as capitalist. The end of the world also means the end of infrastructure, which is reflected in the settings and the narrative of *Fallout*.

Retrofuturism is a subcategory of spec-fic, and collectively they both reflect upon an imagined future through a contemporary and historical perspective. Therefore, the use of retrofuturism in *Fallout* creates nostalgia, as argued before, the 50s had been prone to imagining a future through atomic energy and how it could benefit society. This, therefore, leads into a discussion on the series' infrastructure. The infrastructure in *Fallout* reflects the primitiveness of the frontier, as roads and communication are destroyed on the surface. The

Figure 12: Filly marked on a ship ("The Target")

way to locate the town of Filly, for example, is marked by what looks like a ship (fig. 12). Culture in the form of media such as radio and film is scarce, but does not seek to suppress or act in the form of propaganda, at least in the future of the wasteland. Propaganda comes in the form of advertisements and films made by Cooper and Vault-Tec from before the apocalypse. However, the propaganda is to bring this decimated future forth by controlling the political and world discourse. Some infrastructure persists in the wasteland, such as the KPSS radio station, however, the wasteland condemns it, as it is constantly under attack (fig. 13). This suggests

Figure 13: KPSS Radiostation ("The Radio")

that culture from before the apocalypse is not welcome in the wasteland, thereby only acting as a remnant from the past. Most of the residents of the wasteland confer a reflective form of nostalgia, rather than restorative nostalgia, thereby seeking to live with the remnant from the

past rather than restoring national symbols. Even though the wasteland embodies a hopelessness in the form of its infrastructure, the narrative invites a ray of hope in the form of a renewable energy source.

Another aspect that Long touches upon in his chapter on infrastructure in dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction is the possibility of a renewable energy source. In *Fallout*, this is presented by Moldaver's invention of cold fusion energy, serving as the Novum of the narrative, and eventually materialises in the last episode. The novum informs the series' differentiation from realism, as this kind of technology is not possible. The narrative behind cold fusion is predictable, Long noting this as well in his introduction on the subject, as it is guarded, or prevented, by a higher power, which in this case is Vault-Tec. Furthermore, cold fusion creates a hope for the people of the wasteland, thereby the hope of escaping the dystopian world in which they inhabit. Predictability in the narrative evokes Fisher's concept of "The Slow Cancellation of the Future". Creating a source of hope, especially in the form of cold fusion, is a trope that has been repeated in the American film corpus, such as *Chain Reaction* (1996) or *Oblivion* (2013). Thus, the cold fusion narrative demonstrates Fisher's idea of the stagnation in culture, by recycling and recreating narrative elements found in post-apocalyptic fiction and reflecting the nostalgia mode as well. A Fisherian perception is also located in *Fallout*'s technology, which represents a slowdown in the advancement of such.

The future of the series is haunted by the past, as no new revolutionary ideas, like new technology, for example, can exist without being a reference to its predecessor. The cold fusion energy that Moldaver is trying to make accessible in the wasteland was an energy source that was invented in the past by herself, thereby rendering this revolutionary technological advancement tied to the past, rather than a reflection of the future. Another aspect is that the future presented in *Fallout* is already haunted by the past of the 1950s, thereby portraying Fisher's concept of cancellation of the future in action: "there's an increasing sense that culture

has lost the ability to grasp and articulate the present" (Fisher ch. 00). The present in the narrative of the series cannot grasp or articulate its present, it is founded in the past and the actions herein. Additionally, it is not only the actions of the past in the narrative that reflect a Fisherian attitude. Using the 50s reflects a stagnation in culture, as the series is bound by this period from the narrative to the aesthetic. By continuation, much of the connection to Fisher's concepts lies within the attachment between our reality and history. In the fictional world of *Fallout*, however, the last statement would be more of a commentary on culture in the 21st century. By having a character like Moldaver so adamant in reinforcing past actions, despite her good will in doing so, the series considers Fisher's comment on culture, as the difference between the past and the present is approaching disintegration (Fisher ch. 00). The past and the present are therefore interconnected, creating a narrative that is built upon superseding any new ideas or advancement. In addition to this, the series, as stated before, is a criticism of capitalism and greed, which is represented throughout the series' narrative. However, one important facet of this is the tight grasp capitalism has on anything that has the hope of ending or starting anew. The apocalypse never really means the end of the world, just as it never really means a new beginning for the other. This is reflected by the concept of the Brotherhood of Steel, as their whole identity is forged by the need to hold the new world back, in terms of technological advancement. Moreover, they are the reincarnation of religion, therefore holding themselves back in terms of societal advancement. The names of some of the members of the organisation, Maximus, Titus, and Thaddeus, also reflect how the past haunts the future. These names all have biblical or Roman roots, therefore implying that the organisation is bound by archaicness and therefore haunted by a past that is an even further past than the 50s. On this same notion, the bombing of Shady Sands also represents capitalism's greed and need for control. Hank, Lucy's father and Vault-Tec executive, was the one who ordered the bombing of this city, which was built after the nuclear bombings of 2077. This action was meant to keep the control

of the wasteland regaining their autonomy and population, which reflects the stagnation in culture that Fisher proposes: “The slow cancellation of the future has been accompanied by a deflation of expectations” (Fisher ch. 00). The idea that the future of *Fallout* never advances or ends means that it stays stagnant, therefore creating a non-linear advancement within the narrative. Another part of stagnant culture is also reflected in the vaults, as they are an illusion of freedom and free will, illustrated by Vault-Tec’s need for control.

In terms of reflective and restorative nostalgia, the series leans more towards the first, as it remains critical of the past paralleled in an alternative reality, however, informed by our own. Vault-Tec is representative of a restorative nostalgic mindset as its ideology is deeply rooted in maintaining order, control, and discourse found in its past. The vaults are adorned with national and historical symbols, which create a yearning for a lost home of the past. The vaults are meant as a recreating of symbols found in the past, which in turn creates a feeling of longing and a need to recreate the past on the surface, as is exemplified by the vault holiday: Reclamation day (“The Past” 29:08-29:30). When seeing the interior of Vault 33 and its occupants, it becomes clear that it was founded on ideals and virtues found within the American discourse from the 50s, exemplified through patriotism and nationalism. The vaults and Vault-Tec become a parody of restorative nostalgia and a critique of such, as this form of nostalgia is represented in the series as creating a simulation, rather than a reality, that in turn acts as an authoritarian state in which the population is indoctrinated. As Lucy had become indoctrinated into this experiment, her vision and mindset is informed by a restorative nostalgia. She is set on rescuing her father and returning to normalcy, which is her vault and its ideology and is further reflected upon in her happiness of being in a vault again in the eighth episode. However, her optimism and ideology are always challenged on her surface, and therefore her restorative nostalgia turns into a reflective nostalgia. The restorative parts of the series stem from characters and plotlines, as stated before, which is not the series’ critical or social commentary

apparatus. This, however, is informed by a reflective form of nostalgia, as it realises the faults of the past and maximises it for dramatic and ironic effect. Vault-Tec's marketing trick was grounded in the promise of a safe environment, however, the reality became quite different and very dangerous, therefore creating an ironic juxtaposition. This is meant as a commentary on the trust society and individuals lay in private institutions, and a warning of such. These darker problematics that are criticised in the series are conveyed through an ironic distancing, thereby reflecting a detachment from these values. By detaching from these values, the series emulates a mitigation of the worst aspects of capitalism, therefore ratifying capitalism instead of proposing an alternative system (Fisher *Capitalist Realism* 14).

As mentioned above, the series uses irony to distance itself from much darker problematics and themes, thereby creating a capitalist realist attitude. Mark Fisher states: "The attitude of ironic distance proper to postmodern capitalism is supposed to immunize us against the seductions of fanaticism" (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 5). Belief is a part of the series worldbuilding, however, it is not within its main critique. The overseer for Vault 4, Benjamin, is a prime example of ironic optimism, as he dismisses serious issues humorously. In episode seven he holds Lucy captive after she causes harm to one of the people in vault 4, and holds a sword that suggests he is going to kill her: "For causing harm to a fellow survivor, you are hereby sentenced to death…by banishment to the surface!" ("The Radio" 17:15-18:50). However, he uses the sword to let her go of her restraints, cutting it rather slowly, thereby creating a humorous moment that deflects the dark theme of death. Benjamin further explains his reasoning for supposedly sparing Lucy:

> [Lucy:] You're just… letting me go?
>
> [Benjamin:] Well, that's certainly an optimistic perspective. You'll be killed almost immediately on the surface by lord knows what. That's why we're giving you two weeks supplies to take with you […] After that, you're on your own, Goosey.

("The Radio" 19:10-19:32)

It seems for the dwellers in Vault 4, the fate of the wasteland is worse than being executed, and it would also seem rather sadistic that they would prolong her suffering by helping her survive, but believing the wasteland to be fatal. Moreover, it also reveals the fact that they lack knowledge of the wasteland by keeping to the bubble they have built for themselves. Since they come from a vault that experimented genetically on their inhabitants, they believe that the wasteland has incorporated some of their more deadly subjects, which is true to some extent. Furthermore, adding 'goosey' as an endearing term to this sentence that reflects a rather dark fate creates an ironic distance to the serious issues at hand. Furthermore, it recalls the 50s optimistic attitude, which was ironic in the sense that it was a period filled with nuclear fear and a tumultuous world feud. At the end of the series, Lucy responds to the ghoul with "Okey dokey" ("The Beginning" 50:30-50:40) very seriously. What was once an upbeat catchphrase has become something more serious, thereby reflecting Lucy's journey through the wasteland and the character development she had undergone. Furthermore, the manner in which it is spoken reflects ironic distancing, as her demeanour harbours sadness, rather than the optimistic attitude it was connected to. By using irony in this instance, Lucy's character becomes less idealised towards belief systems and therefore not fanatical. It also expresses a Sontagian Campiness, as she states: "One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious" (Sontag 10). Lucy's serious 'okey dokey' thereby utilises seriousness about the frivolousness, as this minced oath proclaims that everything is alright, when in fact it is the opposite. Lucy, throughout the series, has used the other approach more, frivolous about the serious, by using optimistic language in tough, and at times gory, situations. While irony and the frivolous can be found in the retrofuturist representation of the vaults, the wasteland represents a more serious nature in contemporary culture.

Figure 14: Girl from shop in Filly ("The Head")

Global anxiety over the fate of the planet, i.e. global warming and the depletion of ressources, have been on the rise over the last 20 years ("Yale Experts" par. 4). This anxiety is mirrored in the use of steampunk as an aesthetic in *Fallout*, thereby reflecting a contemporary anxiety paralleled with the nuclear anxiety of The Cold War. The city of Filly is the best example of the use of steampunk, as the setting of the town reflects the DIY nature of steampunk, with scraps and parts being put together to create technology, gear, and, at its core, society. Maximus asks for repairs for his armour in the town, thereby reflecting the attitude of Filly and the wasteland, that technology is meant to be reusable, rejecting the commodification of the past. The vendor of the shop also wears an attire reflecting steampunk's aesthetic, with scraps of metal performing as protective gear (fig. 14). Additionally, the setting of Filly is filled with reclaimed materials, such as aeroplanes and buses, as seen in figure 15. As mentioned on numerous occasions, the wasteland functions as a reflection of the frontier myth and the Wild West. This stands in accordance with Guffey and Lemay's proposition of the same nature, in part glamourising the idea of it as real, compared to that of the vaults that reflects the artificiality of modernity. The technology found within the wasteland is in discord with the era it is trying to portray, such as the robotic prosthetic leg Wilzig wears after having one of his legs brutally blown off by one of the Ghoul's explosives bullets ("The Target" 40:15-50:16). This kind of technology is blatantly from a different period than the Wild West, thus

Figure 15: Filly ("The Target")

contemplating our interpretation of technology in a historical context, and how we imagined the future of technology. McClancy noted on the two possible futures where aesthetics collide, meaning the past and the present in the video-game series, which is the same notion that is posited in the TV series as well. The vaults represent the past and the aesthetic of retrofuturism, and as stated before, the wasteland represents the past by encapsulating a steampunk aesthetic. From the interior to the clothing, the vaults are the epitome of the 50s, while embodying Fisher's comment on stagnation within culture. It also constitutes a dream with a false promise of safety. This false promise of safety reflects the paranoia of the Cold War, hiding from the reality above in a domesticated and commodified fantasy. However, the wasteland depicts reality, of which the 50s and retrofuturism are trying to escape from, signifying instead the collapse of progression, both in the form of a cultural and technological progression. The wasteland does induce a Fisherian deliberation, however, instead of naturally mimicking the past as the vaults do, it reimagines the past instead. However, by echoing and reimagining the past, the wasteland still reinforces a culture that creates a cycle of nostalgia. Even though the wasteland is also represented as a place of violence, it conveys a sympathy towards a certain past, creating nostalgia more inclined to seek recreating the past, thereby rendering it partly as a form of reflective nostalgia.

This section analysed and examined the spec-fic elements within the series, which is reflected in both the aesthetics and the narrative. By utilising retrofuturism and steampunk in both the technology and overall setting of wasteland the series manages to convey an exaggerated vision of contemporary problems. Additionally, using irony reflects a mitigation of the worst aspects of capitalism, rather than a proposal of an alternative system. The series, therefore, becomes a product of capitalist realism, which conveys simulacra. Furthermore, some aspects, such as the vaults, within this imagined reality are a critique of restorative nostalgia, thereby, the series is a product of reflective nostalgia.

Conclusion

Okey dokey. This thesis aimed to understand how *Fallout* engages with nostalgia in its visual elements, narrative, and worldbuilding. Nostalgia is of a restorative nature, and the restorative elements found herein are used as a critical device. The 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric serves as a restorative nostalgic element, but is denounced, thereby reflecting a rejection of a Western bias, which speaks to its speculative approach. The series does not intend to recreate the past in the present, but lingers on the ruins and contemplates the disagreeable part of history.

Using stereotypes and tropes evokes Fisher's notion of stagnation in culture, therefore, the series is a product of a postmodern mass culture, rendering it neither new or original. In the same sense of originality and copying, *Fallout* evokes simulacra through its American iconography and what it represents. It is by constructing a collective memory that *Fallout* create simulacra, which include elements that play at being real, such as the referencing to the CCCP and the false comfort that the Atomic Age represented. This is further reflected on, as to symbolise the false sense of comfort or safety that is present in our society, in the context of larger corporations surveilling us online. Therefore, it also falls into the surveillance state reflection that McClancy proposes in the game series. *Fallout* also criticises consumerism through irony and humour, as the world is controlled by an economic structure, rather than a political one. It is a blatant criticism of what happens when a capitalist monopoly stays in control, with no resistance to object to their control. By mitigating the worst aspects of capitalism, it seeks to live with the system, rather than replace it. Steampunk is represented as the future of the world and the anxieties that lies within the present. By conveying sustainability in the present (or future) of the wasteland the series evokes contemporary anxieties which are juxtapositioned against the Cold War nuclear anxiety. This confers that there is always a new threat to the world, and they are always the fault of mankind. As the wasteland is a lawless and

violent place, it communicates the complacency that is capitalist realism: it truly is “easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (*Capitalist Realism* 1).

The traditional gender roles are expected as the series utilises the Atomic Age, and these gender roles are still represented in symbolism and through gender performativity, which reinforces the notion of stagnation in culture. The Ghoul is an example of gender performativity, however, these kinds of gender performativity and roles are critised and dismantled in other instances. Steph and Cheta are fine examples of flipping the traditional gender roles, therefore, a good example of the series’ deconstruction of gender roles. Technofeminist aspects of the series reflect the underlying social commentary, thereby reinforcing the notion that there is a digital divide, both in the past and in the present. Furthermore, it manifests a post-dualist depiction where binary notions of gender roles are dismantled, creating an (almost) utopian world. It is a rejection of the Western cultural bias, such as the nuclear family, thereby rendering the series a faithful depiction of speculative fiction.

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