

Henry Donald

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for the degree of Master of Creative Writing

Abstract

This thesis consists of practice-led research in the form of a full-length script for a feature film; plus a 6000-word essay (exegesis). A summary of the script is as follows:

In New Zealand, 2047, a passionate graduating architect Annie must find a job in order to continue paying rent for herself and her sick mother. Unable to find any, she takes matters into her own hands, securing the contact details of an unconventional and eccentric property developer, Brent and successfully lands a job with him. She must move from Auckland to Whangarei and upon arrival, finds out the peculiar nature of her new employment. Annie is instructed to infiltrate a modern commune of climate refugees who live off-the-grid on a large block of land. Brent explains to Annie that a large corporation has the legal right to commandeer the land so together they can step in and buy the land, selling it back to the original owners whilst forging a deal to develop houses on the land. Annie would design the housing development and in return for a successful deal, Annie will get one of the houses for her and her family.

Annie is dropped off at the commune and successfully gains trust with the people living there, growing a strong relationship with one particular woman, Max. When Annie finds out the information required to secure a deal with the landowner, Annie realises she is on the wrong side. In a last ditch effort to save the commune, Annie convinces Brent to complete the deal in person, kidnapping him on the way before realising that it is too late.

The script is framed by an Exegesis which is a 6000-word essay on the subject of:

- (a) the genre of the script
- (b) the development process from synopsis to second draft

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Henry Donald

Exegesis

This thesis constitutes creative practice as research. It is comprised of a creative artefact (a screenplay) accompanied by a critical component (an exegesis). This conforms to AUT University's guidelines for a 'Format Three' thesis, as described in the Postgraduate Handbook 2022, which states:

Practice does not serve to illustrate theory but is more appropriately understood as the site of research; the exegesis relates directly to the practice-oriented work and as such does not have a research topic or question of its own; the purpose of the exegesis is to elucidate and clarify the relationship between the central concept, key contexts, relevant critical context (p. 93).

Accordingly, this exegesis, provides a discussion and overview of the creative work, which includes:

- A synopsis of the creative component and an explanation of my intentions.
- A review of key texts relevant to development of the creative work, in the form of a comparative analysis.
- A detailed description of the process and methodology used, and a reflection on the outcomes of this creative practice as research.
- Discussion of theoretical, historical and critical context where relevant.

Part one: Comparative study

In this section, my story, entitled *New Zealand*, is compared and contrasted in the context of other dramatic texts which have a similar central theme. These works are analysed to identify their different techniques, aims and viewpoints and to associate these similarities and differences to my story.

The central theme of my story is this: In 2047, architectural graduate, Annie, struggles to decide whether her professional ambitions, and the rewards that come with them, are worth the sacrifice of a newly discovered way of life and escaping the System.

The primary texts that will be compared with *New Zealand* will be:

- *Mephisto* (Dobai, Szabó, 1981)
- *Brazil* (Gilliam, Stoppard & McKeown, 1985)
- *Into the Wild* (Penn, 2007)
- *Sorry to Bother You* (Riley, 2018)
- *Captain Fantastic* (Ross, 2016)
- *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* (Waititi, 2016)

Commonalities between the texts

Theme

Here, the commonalities held between the five texts will be discussed. The first and one of the strongest links between texts is the theme. The wider theme that encompasses these texts is that of a protagonist having to decide whether to escape ‘the System’ or be a part of it. We see this in *Brazil*, where the main character, Sam Lowry, works as a government employee in a dystopian bureaucratic future. Lowry has recurring dreams that he is flying through the sky and a woman is calling his name. As the story progresses, we learn that the woman from his dreams is thought to be a rebel against the government and is accused of being a terrorist. Lowry falls in love with her and attempts to join her, deciding to escape the System that he lives in (Gilliam, Stoppard & McKeown, 1985).

In *Captain Fantastic*, protagonist Ben Cash and his wife and six children live a self-sufficient life in the wilderness. His wife, Leslie, commits suicide after being hospitalised due to bipolar disorder, and the family must go on a road trip to attend the funeral. It is through this journey that they experience modern society. While this story differs from *Brazil*, in that the protagonist and his family have already ‘escaped’, the same theme is explored as Cash is pulled back into the System, experiences the difficulties of having escaped and is chastised for it. We see this when

Cash visits his sister on the way to the funeral. In an argument his brother-in-law says: “You want to live in the trees, fine. That's entirely up to you. But your children are without a mother now. What you do will have a lasting impact on their entire lives” (Ross, 2016). Cash is pressured by extended family to give up his off-grid lifestyle. *Captain Fantastic* explores the theme of escaping a System and leaves the audience to ponder if this is a good thing or not, especially considering the impact it has on the people around you.

In *Into the Wild*, the theme of a protagonist escaping a System is again portrayed, but in a much simpler sense. It is the biographical story of Christopher McCandless who, after graduating university, becomes disillusioned by modern society and ventures into the Alaskan wilderness. In the story, McCandless donates all his savings to Oxfam and escapes the life in which he grew up by driving across the country to experience life ‘in the wild’. The theme is explored throughout the script, especially in the protagonist's interactions with people he meets, such as telling an old widower that “the core of man's spirit comes from new experiences” (Penn, 2007). The theme of escaping the System, whether it be today’s modern capitalistic society or a dystopian future, is found throughout the texts analysed. The exploration of this theme leads us to the second commonality of the texts: the antagonist.

Antagonist

Throughout the texts, the main antagonistic force is ‘the System’. We see this clearly in *Sorry to Bother You* where our main protagonist, Cash, is swept up in a new job where he excels and jumps up the corporate ladder. Set in a surreal dystopian future, Cash learns his employer sells military arms and cheap labour, and eventually discovers they are testing a drug that can change a person into a half-human-half-horse-like creature in order to make them more efficient workers. Swept up in the glamour of corporate life, Cash ignores his friends who protest outside the office building against the immoral actions of the corporation. Here, the antagonist is both the corporation that hires Cash, and all of his managers and bosses that bribe him with gifts and large amounts of money (Riley, 2018).

In *Mephisto*, the commonality of the antagonist remains the same. That is, the antagonist is ‘the System’. An unsuccessful German playwright, Hendrik Höfgen, hungry for success, grows in popularity from his socialist underground theatre roots just as the Nazi party comes to power. His performance as Mephisto gains him notoriety, and while his wife, fellow actors and friends go into exile, Höfgen is tempted to return Germany with the promise that he’ll be forgiven for his socialist theatre days. He has the chance to run the national theatre, is given great roles and wins many awards under the Nazi party. This success blinds him to the atrocious nature of the Nazi party. It represents the System that Höfgen realises, all too late, that he wants to escape. Although successful, Höfgen has traded his soul.

The System as the antagonist is seen throughout all these texts. This leads to my discussion of a final commonality; the main dramatic question of the stories.

The main dramatic question

The final commonality between texts is the main dramatic question. That is, where the suspense of the story comes from. In all these texts, the main dramatic question is: will the protagonist ever escape the System? In *Brazil*, Sam Lowry attempts to flee the System with his new lover: Jill. The suspense comes both internally, interpersonally and externally. Internally, Lowry struggles to sleep. His fantastical dreams turn into nightmares, in which he must save a woman (Jill) who is trapped by monsters, represented as his bosses and the System at large. Interpersonally, he is initially rejected by Jill because of his job and status within the System. This encourages him to try to escape. Finally, external suspense is literally represented by a car chase. Here, Lowry and Jill attempt to evade police because he has stolen documents about her and informed her that she is considered a terrorist by the state. This story creates a strong unified dramatic question: Will Sam Lowry escape the System?

This main dramatic question is also seen in *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, will main characters Ricky Baker and Hector escape ‘the System’? In this story, Baker is a foster child who lives with Hector and his wife, Bella. When Bella passes away suddenly, Ricky tries to avoid a return to Child Welfare Services by escaping into the bush. He is tracked down by Hector who breaks his

ankle in the process. While the pair camp out in the wilderness, they learn they are the focus of a national manhunt; Hector is suspected of abducting Baker. They decide to team up and disappear into the bush. This sets up the dramatic question of the story. That is, will they be able to escape the System. This question exists on two levels. First, both Hector and Baker are trying to escape the authority System: the police that are hunting them down. Second, will Baker escape the foster System that influences his poor behaviour and has led him to being abandoned by his mother. As the audience, we are waiting to see whether these characters will be able to successfully escape both ‘Systems’.

Differences between texts

Attitude

Having examined links and commonalities between the texts, next, the differences will be discussed. The first difference that is found in the texts is their attitude. In the 1985 script, *Brazil*, we see a strong attitude in its satirical tone and political meaning. In its tone, the use of satirical comedy is seen throughout the script. For example, in the scene where Lowry is given a new job, his office is so tiny that his desk is half in his office and half in that of his colleague. It only ‘fits’ through a desk-shaped hole in the wall. When Lowry sits down to start working, he feels his desk being tugged and has a small tussle with his colleague. This use of physical comedy to satirise the workplace comments on a System within the story, where workers are forced to battle with each other in an extreme world of ‘bureaucracy on steroids’. This tone combines well with the socio-political theme of anti-authoritarianism, by poking fun at the System in an extreme way. Later, and in an excellent line of dialogue, an arresting officer enters the room of a woman whose husband has just been brutally arrested. He explains the situation and hands her the necessary documentation, saying: “That is your receipt for your husband...and this is my receipt for your receipt” (Gilliam, Stoppard & McKeown, 1985). This absurd gesture of having multiple receipts makes fun of the overly bureaucratic nature of the System.

This satirical and anti-authoritarian tone found in *Brazil* is quite different to what we see in *Captain Fantastic*. An American film from 2016, *Captain Fantastic* exhibits a rather tame

attitude towards the central theme of escape from the System. The tone is light comedy, derived from ‘regular’ people interacting with the highly socially awkward Cash family. One example of this is when the eldest son, Bodevan, is kissed by a girl, Karin, in an RV park. When they are caught by Karin’s mother, Bodevan instantly begins listing his positive personal attributes and intentions in life, then turns to Karin and proposes to her. Both Karin and her mother burst out laughing (Ross, 2016). This is because in normal society people do not propose to each other the moment they share a kiss, but Bodevan’s alternative childhood means he lacks any knowledge of current Western social practices. The message is that it is better not to exist completely outside of the System, especially in regard to raising children. As the Cash children begin to discover what ‘normal’ American life looks like, some of them desire to join it, thus escaping their own childhood’s System of existence. The script ends with the family entering a more ‘normal life’. Ben still lives on a remote farm, but he lets his children go to school as a way to accommodate both ways of life. This tone of light comedy, along with an ending tinged with compromise – one must re-enter society in order to appease family and let children socialise in school – is a much more tame message than that of the dystopian ending of *Brazil*.

Setting

Another stark difference between the texts is the choice of setting. The script of *Into the Wild* clearly needs to be set in the North American wilderness. This is where the story takes place, and where the protagonist, McCandless, searches for adventure, deep in nature. At one point, McCandless kayaks down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. The story ends with him living off the land and eventually dying in a remote part of the Alaskan wilderness. The script is clearly about McCandless' desire to escape the System and be in nature, and follows his journey to this end. The story begins at his college graduation where his rejection of his comfortable urban environment begins his pursuit of the great American wild.

On the other hand, almost the reverse is seen in *Sorry to bother you*. Set in a surreal alternate universe in a time of hyper-capitalism, the setting of this story reflects the modern western cityscapes of today, and is mostly set in an office. Early in the script, the protagonist, Cash, works as a telemarketer in a generic, drab-looking open plan office with small cubicle spaces. As

the story progresses, Cash literally rises through the ranks. With each promotion, he moves to a new office further up the building until he reaches a much more lavish level with his own luxury office. This corporate office setting is of deep contrast to the wild nature of *Into the Wild*.

The ending and resolutions

The final difference between these texts are the endings and resolutions of the scripts. In *Mephisto*, the protagonist, Höfgen, agrees to run the German National Theatre during the Nazi era, choosing to overlook the atrocious acts committed by the Nazi party (Dobai & Szabó, 1981). As an audience, we are left with the resolution that Höfgen is deeply conflicted about his choice and we are left to hypothesise about what he might do next; will he continue to work with the Nazi party or not. Ultimately, Höfgen chooses not to escape the System.

In *Sorry to Bother You*, the protagonist, Cash, eventually chooses to leave the company he works for and join his friends in protest. Cash then learns that he has been secretly drugged and turns into a half-human-half-horse. The final scene shows Cash finding the address of his previous boss and CEO, Steve Lift, then breaking in to attack him (Riley, 2018). This resolution implies that after much temptation, Cash has left the corporation and joined the morally good side of his friends and co-workers. However, although he escapes the workplace, he still does not escape the System. He is back to where he started, living in his uncle's garage.

In *Brazil*, Lowry attempts to escape the System but is caught and tortured. In an interesting twist, Lowry's friend, a rogue maintenance man, swoops in and saves the day. Lowry manages to flee with Jill, his lover, but scenes appear to become more hallucinatory and, eventually, Lowry's torturers attempt to wake him. Lowry had dreamt his escape due to being heavily tortured (Gilliam, Stoppard & McKeown, 1985). Lowry does not manage to escape the System and the resumption of his torture is a clear implication that, in this dystopian authoritative future, escape is impossible, and one must comply.

Conclusions

Having examined some commonalities and differences between the texts, conclusions about how and why these texts relate and differ will be made. Firstly, the central theme of escape from the System is a universal desire in some form or another. Depictions of escape, the temptation to remain or fears of repercussions are common themes across all the texts. In my opinion, I believe this is a natural consequence of life under capitalism, an economic system that supports a growing wealth gap. Current reports say half the entirety of earth's population own just 2% of all wealth while 10% of the population own 75% of all wealth (World Inequality Report, 2022). This means most people are trapped into a system where they must earn money to survive. For some, a logical desire is to live outside of this, romanticising simpler times before capitalist economic systems, where people grew their own food and lived more harmoniously with nature. As Goldlust points out in her study of the off-grid living, “at one point it was exceptionally radical to want to build your house out of mud. Now, it’s not seen as being that radical” (Latrobe, n.d.). This shift is also caused by capitalism’s necessity for constant economic growth, which drives increased consumption of natural resources. (Pollock, 2020). This is causing increases in extreme weather events which is said to put 25-50% of people that experience it at risk of adverse mental health affects (Apha, 2017). With people becoming more impacted by climate change, people’s desire for change and escaping the System that directly contributes to climate change is growing, which can be seen in the theme: escaping the System.

It is noted that films can be used by audiences as a form of escapism to forget one’s problems (Attarieh, 2017). This can be seen in the texts that romanticise ideas of escapism, such as *Into the Wild*. Despite its cynical satire and parallels drawn to the world, *Brazil*’s futuristic setting can be seen as a form of escapism that helps us see our own world more objectively. Overall, the nature of these texts, their treatment of the protagonist’s place within a system and the pressures they face to escape or to remain reflects tensions in wider society. Used as a form of commentary and as a central theme, escapism is an idea that is widely understood by a population living under a system that is slowly killing its own population via the demands of constant economic growth and climate change. I believe that this is why the central theme of escapism exists across so many different stories and settings, such as those described in the texts here discussed.

Another conclusion is that the attitude a script takes is heavily influenced by the author of the text and their own personal and political views. *Captain Fantastic's* Author Matt Ross said the genesis of the idea for the script came from personal observations about the role he and his wife were taking as parents. His own upbringing in an 'alternative community' also influenced the script (Tedder, 2016). I believe this guided the curious examination of what it means to escape the System. On the other hand, Boots Riley, the author of the script for *Sorry to Bother You*, identifies as a communist (Hughes, 2019). This translates into a heavy-handed critique and satire of modern capitalism, that examines the temptations that lead people to become strong advocates for the System. The idea that one's personal and political viewpoints affect the story they create is important to note, especially when creating one's own story.

Relationship to my own script

Commonalities and differences can be found between *New Zealand* and the texts examined. The theme of escaping the System is a clear commonality. In *New Zealand*, the central theme is: Will protagonist Annie escape the System? Initially, Annie is drawn into the System. She agrees to help a developer take over a piece of land on which people currently reside to create a housing development. At first, Annie believes she is doing this for a moral reason; building houses for people. However, when she learns that the land is already home to the people who already live there, she recognises the temptation of having her own house and questions her reasoning. Annie must decide whether to participate in or to escape the System. This links to the central theme of *Mephisto*, where Höfgen is lured into the Nazi party with promises of success and fame, and must decide whether or not he will escape the System.

A key difference is the ending and resolution of *New Zealand*. While Annie fails to save the land from being taken over, she successfully escapes the System albeit throwing away her chance of owning a house that her sick mother could live in. This ending is different to that of *Brazil* where Lowry is simply captured and tortured for attempting to escape. It is also different to the ending of *Mephisto* where Höfgen chooses not to escape the System, but remains but is conflicted by his decision. The ending and resolutions of these stories differ because of the earlier point discussed,

how the personal viewpoint of the author impacts their intended message. However, the resolution of these stories explains further what the author's opinion is on the consequences of remaining within, or escaping the System.

Part Two

In this second section of my exegesis, my creative practice: *New Zealand*, will be examined.

Synopsis

To commence detailing *New Zealand*, the definition of a synopsis will be established. Brindley (2009) describes the generally agreed upon idea of synopsis introducing the who, what and how of the story including major characters, setting and important plot points. Overall the main aim of a synopsis is to clearly explain how the story starts, develops and ends.

Accordingly, what follows is a brief description of the story of *New Zealand*. It begins in Auckland, 2047 with Annie, a 24-year-old architectural student struggling to fit in with her peers at the fancy university she attends via scholarship. Desperately searching for a job to pay rent for the house she shares with her sick mother (currently in hospital), Annie steals the phone number of a property developer called Brent from a wealthy girl she meets at a party. Brent offers Annie a job on a project based in Whangārei, which she accepts. When she arrives, Annie is told that she must move into a modern commune of climate refugees with the intention of pressuring the owner to sell the land to Brent. Brent explains a large corporation has the legal right to commandeer the land so together they can step in and buy the land, selling it back to the original owners whilst forging a deal to develop houses on the land. She is left at the gates of the commune where she meets Max who introduces her to the main leaders. Annie goes through an orientation. She passes the tests set for her and is fully welcomed by the group. A helicopter flies overhead spooking the group, Annie learns from Brent that it belongs to the corporation she was told about. Annie goes about her life on the commune, learning about how they live and survive without connection to any grid or utilities. When a document is dropped on the commune, informing the group they must sell the land to the corporation, Annie is picked up by

Brent and taken back to his mansion where she can now begin designing the housing development. Annie finds out there is no corporation, and that Brent has intended to commandeer the land for himself all along. She convinces Brent they should return to the commune where she knocks him unconscious and tries to form a plan with the group. Brent escapes and Annie attempts to rush off a document to the council that could halt the process, but they are too late and are unable to stop the law officers from seizing the land. The group flees the area and Annie returns to normal life as she is unable to contact them. Eventually, Max gets a hold of Annie and she rejoins the group. This story is about Annie being a part of a System that she initially believes is right and good, but after living with the people her work will negatively impact, she realises what she is doing is wrong. The central theme of the story is the conflict created by Annie's desire to be in the System versus the impact of her actions on the lives of other people.

The world of the story

Next, the world in which this story is set will be examined. Truby (2007) observes that “creating a unique world for the story — and organically connecting it to the characters — is as essential to great storytelling as character, plot, theme, and dialogue” (p145).

New Zealand is set in 2047, 25 years in the future, in Auckland and Whangārei. The world is not all that different to today in the classical futuristic sense. Rather, difference is seen in the social inequality that exists between the characters. Opulence is a major theme of the elite and in the teachings of the architectural design school where Annie studies. A climate war which occurred in the 2030's is discussed. It resulted in boats filled with climate refugees coming to New Zealand, attracted by its geographic isolation and likely ability to withstand growing climate change emergencies better than other countries.

Annie gives a presentation in which she discusses the low rates of home ownership in New Zealand. New Zealand society in 2045 is highly stratified, with great division between the social and economic classes. At the highest level, an elite class of people attend university and enjoy a technologically advanced and comfortable way of life. There also is a large working class who

work simply to survive. They rent mouldy homes and are stuffed into large public hospitals when they get sick. Then there is another large chunk of people called ‘savages’, who have left society to live in modern communes. In this era, these people account for a large percentage of the population, around 30%. This is a response to the climate wars, and more notably a housing crisis that was never fixed.

This future is an artistic imagining of what the future could look like if New Zealand’s current housing crisis is left to continue. The savages live completely apart from mainstream society. They have no internet access and generally choose not to communicate with the outside world. However, they have a relatively high quality of life, growing their own food, generating their own power, water harvesting and building their own eco-homes. The savages are sometimes described by the elite as inferior beings that should be expelled from the country. For the most part, however, they simply do not admit their existence.

Theme

Next, the theme of *New Zealand* will be discussed. Hope (2014) defines ‘theme’ as how the audience responds to the story. That is “What do you want the big takeaway from the movie to be remembered for the audience? What do you want them to remember intellectually, and what do you want them to feel emotionally?” (p.65).

The theme of *New Zealand* is how much one can be pushed before choosing to escape the System. Annie is tempted to participate in a System that she eventually learns will harm people she has grown to love. Annie’s personal gain and compliance with the System are at odds with her personal morals.

This story was written to examine the sombre feeling that young people have when it comes to property ownership in New Zealand. Without an inheritance, the ability to own your own home is very difficult. My personal upbringing is certainly one of great privilege. My parents owned their own home. I can study at university. I have been overseas. It is not out of personal interest that I fear never being able to buy property, but concern that an entire generation will be cut off

from owning a home – apart from those fortunate enough to have assistance from family wealth. I am not attempting to make home ownership appear as the be all and end all of our existence, but it is a fundamental element of life. An entire generation of renters means people will work their whole lives simply to pay off their landlord's mortgage, and what will happen when they come to retire? How will they continue to afford to rent if they cannot work? Major political parties have not brought forward any large and radical changes. This story was written to examine a world where nothing changes and we see inequality grow.

In Hope's (2014) description of theme, what the audience takes away from the story, *New Zealand* aims to engage people in the idea that the status quo is likely to continue. A smaller concentration of wealth and power, and the consequences that the System will become more powerful and more difficult to escape is the unsettling feeling the audience will remember. In the script, when Annie is trying a last-ditch effort to save the land from being sold, she is passed by dozens of police cars and military vehicles' cars headed to seize the land. This image embodies the idea that although we can try to change, we will always feel the force of the System. It will not go down without a fight. In the script's resolution, Annie hitchhikes back to meet up with Max and the group. The ending intends to leave the audience with a positive feeling that other opportunities and ways of living are possible. This unsettling feeling the audience will experience seeing a dystopian view of the future ends on a positive note to give a glimmer of hope, so that the audience takes away intellectually that there are other possibilities and ways of living.

The protagonist

Next, the protagonist of *New Zealand*: Annie, will be examined. Aronson (2020) writes that the story cannot start until the protagonist is identified and shown in their normal life (into normality), and the story cannot move forward until the disturbance fractures the protagonist's normality and forces them into a course of action... Interestingly, establishing the protagonist early is the mark of successful films across all cultures (p.78).

Annie's motivation is to design affordable houses. One day, she would like to be able to afford her own house in which she, her sick mother and pregnant sister could live. Annie finds a job with property developer, Brent, who shows interest in her designs. However, due to the rather unorthodox job description, Annie negotiates with Brent to be given one of the houses on the new development as payment for her services. She then goes onto the commune to infiltrate the group living there and convince them to sell the land to an individual person instead of losing it to a corporation. The secret motivation behind this is that the group sells the land to her boss, property developer, Brent. Her plan changes when she discovers Brent has been misleading her about his plans and chooses to try and save the land and the people on it.

Annie lives in a rented house with her mother who is not able to work due to her illness. Annie struggles to keep up with rent payments, and she and her mother will be without a place to live if she doesn't find an architectural job quickly. Aronson (2020) recommends establishing the protagonist in their normal life. Accordingly, Annie is introduced presenting her final university project to her classmates in Scene Two. We then follow Annie as she goes about her daily life, working as a cleaner, cleaning away the mould in her house and visiting her sick mum. These scenes demonstrate Annie as the main protagonist and what is at stake for her. The stakes escalate when she forms a romantic relationship with Max while simultaneously living with and 'spying' on the group. In the end, she must kidnap Brent in order to try and save the land. This raises the stakes to a violent and criminal level, but it is Annie's only option to save the land.

Annie's arc as a protagonist is one where she almost completely changes her worldview and her intentions. Initially she is simply desperate to be an architect and own property for her and her family. However, her experience of living on a modern commune changes her to a point where, in the end, she leaves everything to join them. Annie is challenged as a protagonist by the opposing forces of the System in which she lives, and specifically Brent.

The antagonist

Here, the antagonists of *New Zealand*: Brent and the System at large, will be discussed. According to McKee (1998), cumulative "forces of antagonism" exist that "don't necessarily

refer to a specific antagonist or villain”. The antagonist is understood as “the sum total of all forces that oppose the character’s will and desire” (p.318)

Antagonist Brent is Annie’s new boss. He engages her in the strange task of infiltrating a group of people living off the land in order to find out information that will lead to a successful purchase. He tells Annie that he wants to develop the land into a medium density housing development in order to stop a large corporation from legally commandeering the land and allow the original owners be able to buy back their land. By offering Annie a job, Brent is initially seen as a saviour. However, in the end, Annie learns Brent has been misleading her and was planning on taking the land for himself the entire time. While Brent is his own agent, he represents a larger set of antagonisms symbolised by the System that Annie is unable to escape. These include the pressures of paying rent, the elite university she attends, and the housing crisis they live in that prevents home ownership. These are all challenges that Annie is forced to overcome. Brent and the System he represents convinces Annie to change her goals because she sees that the consequences of the sale will be harmful to the people of the land. The antagonist compels Annie to realise that escaping the System does not come through escaping the lower-class shackles and becoming a homeowner herself. She must escape the System in its entirety.

Dramatic tension

In this final section the dramatic tension and how it is generated will be discussed, specifically through the use of the plot line. Field (1979) explains that dramatic tension is found in the question of whether the protagonist gets what they want, or need. Establishing what the character wants and needs and creating obstacles that get in the way of that is the core of dramatic tension.

The initial tension in the story is Annie’s struggle to find a job. This dramatic tension is used to establish the protagonist Annie and the world that she lives in. Going to a party and hearing that her wealthy classmates have all easily found jobs, while she has not heard back from a single company is difficult for Annie; especially as she is struggling to keep up with her rent. To add further insult, Annie is mocked for being poor and taunted by one partygoer who claims she

knows of a property developer looking for an architect. Annie hides all night and wakes up early to steal the phone number of the developer from the young woman's phone. This is Annie putting herself at risk and showing what she really wants; a job. Her interview with the strange property developer, Brent, leads to the job and is the end of the dramatic set-up. Next, Annie leaves Auckland and moves to Whangārei.

The first major turning point for Annie is her discovery that the job does not simply entail designing houses for a development but requires her to infiltrate a group of people living off the land and slyly convince them of the benefits of selling to Brent. In the face of this surprise, Annie uses it to her advantage and bargains with Brent to get her own house from the deal. He agrees. This adds to the tension. As, if her plan works, Annie will get what she's always wanted, security for her family. Annie is now obliged to remain loyal to Brent.

The second major turning point is Annie successfully being accepted into the group. To do this, Annie must pass two challenges. One involves a lone three-day trek into the bush, and another where the group instructs her to kill a chicken but she refuses. She passes both tests and is fully welcomed by the group. Annie feels good about being accepted and begins to feel her opinion of the group change, gaining sympathy for their ideals. She now feels tied to the group and realises that a lot more is at stake if she decides to continue down the route of taking the land from them.

The third major turning point sees Annie convincing the group to sign a document that says they intend to sell to Brent. Annie lies to the group. She says she was kidnapped by a man who gave her the document and told her to get the owner to sign. She tells them he told her to meet him the next morning at the farm entrance, with the signed document. Annie meets Brent as planned and give him the document. He tells her to leave with him as her work is done, and it is then that Annie realises she has chosen to take the land from people she really cared about. At that moment it feels like there is no turning back for her.

The final major turning point is when Annie discovers that Brent has been misleading her. She tries to convince Brent to return and meet face-to-face with the group so that the land can be secured, before finally knocking him unconscious and kidnapping him. The moment Annie drops

the rock onto Brent's head from a tree is her moment of no return. She has chosen to try and save the land and give up the opportunity to secure a house for her family.

The truth dawns when Annie discovers that Brent is actually the corporation. She spots a helicopter on his property, and sees it is the same one that flew over the farm. Annie realises she has been misled by Brent this entire time and she goes into panic mode, trying to figure out how she can stop him. This is where the climax of the story begins and momentum ramps up. Annie makes the final decision to attack and kidnap Brent, come clean to the group about what she has been doing, and then formulate a plan to save the land for the group.

At the point where Annie drives away in Brent's car to deliver a document to the council which would halt the sale process, she passes by dozens of police and military vehicles going to secure the land on Brent's orders. This is the moment we understand that, despite Annie's best intentions, she is too late. The others from the group run away on foot. They decide between them that they can't be stopped, and they will find another group to join. This resolves the tension with a negative ending. Annie isn't able to get what she wants; the group loses the land and the antagonistic forces win.

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Exegesis

This thesis constitutes creative practice as research. It is comprised of a creative artefact (a screenplay) accompanied by a critical component (an exegesis). This conforms to AUT University's guidelines for a 'Format Three' thesis, as described in the Postgraduate Handbook 2022, which states:

Practice does not serve to illustrate theory but is more appropriately understood as the site of research; the exegesis relates directly to the practice-oriented work and as such does not have a research topic or question of its own; the purpose of the exegesis is to elucidate and clarify the relationship between the central concept, key contexts, relevant critical context (p. 93).

Accordingly, this exegesis, provides a discussion and overview of the creative work, which includes:

- A synopsis of the creative component and an explanation of my intentions.
- A review of key texts relevant to development of the creative work, in the form of a comparative analysis.
- A detailed description of the process and methodology used, and a reflection on the outcomes of this creative practice as research.
- Discussion of theoretical, historical and critical context where relevant.

Part one: Comparative study

In this section, my story, entitled *New Zealand*, is compared and contrasted in the context of other dramatic texts which have a similar central theme. These works are analysed to identify their different techniques, aims and viewpoints and to associate these similarities and differences to my story.

The central theme of my story is this: In 2047, architectural graduate, Annie, struggles to decide whether her professional ambitions, and the rewards that come with them, are worth the sacrifice of a newly discovered way of life and escaping the System.

The primary texts that will be compared with *New Zealand* will be:

- *Mephisto* (Dobai, Szabó, 1981)
- *Brazil* (Gilliam, Stoppard & McKeown, 1985)
- *Into the Wild* (Penn, 2007)
- *Sorry to Bother You* (Riley, 2018)
- *Captain Fantastic* (Ross, 2016)
- *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* (Waititi, 2016)

Commonalities between the texts

Theme

Here, the commonalities held between the five texts will be discussed. The first and one of the strongest links between texts is the theme. The wider theme that encompasses these texts is that of a protagonist having to decide whether to escape ‘the System’ or be a part of it. We see this in *Brazil*, where the main character, Sam Lowry, works as a government employee in a dystopian bureaucratic future. Lowry has recurring dreams that he is flying through the sky and a woman is calling his name. As the story progresses, we learn that the woman from his dreams is thought to be a rebel against the government and is accused of being a terrorist. Lowry falls in love with her and attempts to join her, deciding to escape the System that he lives in (Gilliam, Stoppard & McKeown, 1985).

In *Captain Fantastic*, protagonist Ben Cash and his wife and six children live a self-sufficient life in the wilderness. His wife, Leslie, commits suicide after being hospitalised due to bipolar disorder, and the family must go on a road trip to attend the funeral. It is through this journey that they experience modern society. While this story differs from *Brazil*, in that the protagonist and his family have already ‘escaped’, the same theme is explored as Cash is pulled back into the System, experiences the difficulties of having escaped and is chastised for it. We see this when Cash visits his sister on the way to the funeral. In an argument his brother-in-law says: “You want to live in the trees, fine. That’s entirely up to you. But your children are without a mother

now. What you do will have a lasting impact on their entire lives” (Ross, 2016). Cash is pressured by extended family to give up his off-grid lifestyle. *Captain Fantastic* explores the theme of escaping a System and leaves the audience to ponder if this is a good thing or not, especially considering the impact it has on the people around you.

In *Into the Wild*, the theme of a protagonist escaping a System is again portrayed, but in a much simpler sense. It is the biographical story of Christopher McCandless who, after graduating university, becomes disillusioned by modern society and ventures into the Alaskan wilderness. In the story, McCandless donates all his savings to Oxfam and escapes the life in which he grew up by driving across the country to experience life ‘in the wild’. The theme is explored throughout the script, especially in the protagonist's interactions with people he meets, such as telling an old widower that “the core of man's spirit comes from new experiences” (Penn, 2007). The theme of escaping the System, whether it be today’s modern capitalistic society or a dystopian future, is found throughout the texts analysed. The exploration of this theme leads us to the second commonality of the texts: the antagonist.

Antagonist

Throughout the texts, the main antagonistic force is ‘the System’. We see this clearly in *Sorry to Bother You* where our main protagonist, Cash, is swept up in a new job where he excels and jumps up the corporate ladder. Set in a surreal dystopian future, Cash learns his employer sells military arms and cheap labour, and eventually discovers they are testing a drug that can change a person into a half-human-half-horse-like creature in order to make them more efficient workers. Swept up in the glamour of corporate life, Cash ignores his friends who protest outside the office building against the immoral actions of the corporation. Here, the antagonist is both the corporation that hires Cash, and all of his managers and bosses that bribe him with gifts and large amounts of money (Riley, 2018).

In *Mephisto*, the commonality of the antagonist remains the same. That is, the antagonist is ‘the System’. An unsuccessful German playwright, Hendrik Höfgen, hungry for success, grows in popularity from his socialist underground theatre roots just as the Nazi party comes to power. His

performance as Mephisto gains him notoriety, and while his wife, fellow actors and friends go into exile, Höfgen is tempted to return Germany with the promise that he'll be forgiven for his socialist theatre days. He has the chance to run the national theatre, is given great roles and wins many awards under the Nazi party. This success blinds him to the atrocious nature of the Nazi party. It represents the System that Höfgen realises, all too late, that he wants to escape. Although successful, Höfgen has traded his soul.

The System as the antagonist is seen throughout all these texts. This leads to my discussion of a final commonality; the main dramatic question of the stories.

The main dramatic question

The final commonality between texts is the main dramatic question. That is, where the suspense of the story comes from. In all these texts, the main dramatic question is: will the protagonist ever escape the System? In *Brazil*, Sam Lowry attempts to flee the System with his new lover: Jill. The suspense comes both internally, interpersonally and externally. Internally, Lowry struggles to sleep. His fantastical dreams turn into nightmares, in which he must save a woman (Jill) who is trapped by monsters, represented as his bosses and the System at large. Interpersonally, he is initially rejected by Jill because of his job and status within the System. This encourages him to try to escape. Finally, external suspense is literally represented by a car chase. Here, Lowry and Jill attempt to evade police because he has stolen documents about her and informed her that she is considered a terrorist by the state. This story creates a strong unified dramatic question: Will Sam Lowry escape the System?

This main dramatic question is also seen in *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, will main characters Ricky Baker and Hector escape 'the System'? In this story, Baker is a foster child who lives with Hector and his wife, Bella. When Bella passes away suddenly, Ricky tries to avoid a return to Child Welfare Services by escaping into the bush. He is tracked down by Hector who breaks his ankle in the process. While the pair camp out in the wilderness, they learn they are the focus of a national manhunt; Hector is suspected of abducting Baker. They decide to team up and disappear into the bush. This sets up the dramatic question of the story. That is, will they be able to escape

the System. This question exists on two levels. First, both Hector and Baker are trying to escape the authority System: the police that are hunting them down. Second, will Baker escape the foster System that influences his poor behaviour and has led him to being abandoned by his mother. As the audience, we are waiting to see whether these characters will be able to successfully escape both 'Systems'.

Differences between texts

Attitude

Having examined links and commonalities between the texts, next, the differences will be discussed. The first difference that is found in the texts is their attitude. In the 1985 script, *Brazil*, we see a strong attitude in its satirical tone and political meaning. In its tone, the use of satirical comedy is seen throughout the script. For example, in the scene where Lowry is given a new job, his office is so tiny that his desk is half in his office and half in that of his colleague. It only 'fits' through a desk-shaped hole in the wall. When Lowry sits down to start working, he feels his desk being tugged and has a small tussle with his colleague. This use of physical comedy to satirise the workplace comments on a System within the story, where workers are forced to battle with each other in an extreme world of 'bureaucracy on steroids'. This tone combines well with the socio-political theme of anti-authoritarianism, by poking fun at the System in an extreme way. Later, and in an excellent line of dialogue, an arresting officer enters the room of a woman whose husband has just been brutally arrested. He explains the situation and hands her the necessary documentation, saying: "That is your receipt for your husband...and this is my receipt for your receipt" (Gilliam, Stoppard & McKeown, 1985). This absurd gesture of having multiple receipts makes fun of the overly bureaucratic nature of the System.

This satirical and anti-authoritarian tone found in *Brazil* is quite different to what we see in *Captain Fantastic*. An American film from 2016, *Captain Fantastic* exhibits a rather tame attitude towards the central theme of escape from the System. The tone is light comedy, derived from 'regular' people interacting with the highly socially awkward Cash family. One example of this is when the eldest son, Bodevan, is kissed by a girl, Karin, in an RV park. When they are

caught by Karin's mother, Bodevan instantly begins listing his positive personal attributes and intentions in life, then turns to Karin and proposes to her. Both Karin and her mother burst out laughing (Ross, 2016). This is because in normal society people do not propose to each other the moment they share a kiss, but Bodevan's alternative childhood means he lacks any knowledge of current Western social practices. The message is that it is better not to exist completely outside of the System, especially in regard to raising children. As the Cash children begin to discover what 'normal' American life looks like, some of them desire to join it, thus escaping their own childhood's System of existence. The script ends with the family entering a more 'normal life'. Ben still lives on a remote farm, but he lets his children go to school as a way to accommodate both ways of life. This tone of light comedy, along with an ending tinged with compromise – one must re-enter society in order to appease family and let children socialise in school – is a much more tame message than that of the dystopian ending of *Brazil*.

Setting

Another stark difference between the texts is the choice of setting. The script of *Into the Wild* clearly needs to be set in the North American wilderness. This is where the story takes place, and where the protagonist, McCandless, searches for adventure, deep in nature. At one point, McCandless kayaks down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. The story ends with him living off the land and eventually dying in a remote part of the Alaskan wilderness. The script is clearly about McCandless' desire to escape the System and be in nature, and follows his journey to this end. The story begins at his college graduation where his rejection of his comfortable urban environment begins his pursuit of the great American wild.

On the other hand, almost the reverse is seen in *Sorry to bother you*. Set in a surreal alternate universe in a time of hyper-capitalism, the setting of this story reflects the modern western cityscapes of today, and is mostly set in an office. Early in the script, the protagonist, Cash, works as a telemarketer in a generic, drab-looking open plan office with small cubicle spaces. As the story progresses, Cash literally rises through the ranks. With each promotion, he moves to a new office further up the building until he reaches a much more lavish level with his own luxury office. This corporate office setting is of deep contrast to the wild nature of *Into the Wild*.

The ending and resolutions

The final difference between these texts are the endings and resolutions of the scripts. In *Mephisto*, the protagonist, Höfgen, agrees to run the German National Theatre during the Nazi era, choosing to overlook the atrocious acts committed by the Nazi party (Dobai & Szabó, 1981). As an audience, we are left with the resolution that Höfgen is deeply conflicted about his choice and we are left to hypothesise about what he might do next; will he continue to work with the Nazi party or not. Ultimately, Höfgen chooses not to escape the System.

In *Sorry to Bother You*, the protagonist, Cash, eventually chooses to leave the company he works for and join his friends in protest. Cash then learns that he has been secretly drugged and turns into a half-human-half-horse. The final scene shows Cash finding the address of his previous boss and CEO, Steve Lift, then breaking in to attack him (Riley, 2018). This resolution implies that after much temptation, Cash has left the corporation and joined the morally good side of his friends and co-workers. However, although he escapes the workplace, he still does not escape the System. He is back to where he started, living in his uncle's garage.

In *Brazil*, Lowry attempts to escape the System but is caught and tortured. In an interesting twist, Lowry's friend, a rogue maintenance man, swoops in and saves the day. Lowry manages to flee with Jill, his lover, but scenes appear to become more hallucinatory and, eventually, Lowry's torturers attempt to wake him. Lowry had dreamt his escape due to being heavily tortured (Gilliam, Stoppard & McKeown, 1985). Lowry does not manage to escape the System and the resumption of his torture is a clear implication that, in this dystopian authoritative future, escape is impossible, and one must comply.

Conclusions

Having examined some commonalities and differences between the texts, conclusions about how and why these texts relate and differ will be made. Firstly, the central theme of escape from the System is a universal desire in some form or another. Depictions of escape, the temptation to

remain or fears of repercussions are common themes across all the texts. In my opinion, I believe this is a natural consequence of life under capitalism, an economic system that supports a growing wealth gap. Current reports say half the entirety of earth's population own just 2% of all wealth while 10% of the population own 75% of all wealth (World Inequality Report, 2022). This means most people are trapped into a system where they must earn money to survive. For some, a logical desire is to live outside of this, romanticising simpler times before capitalist economic systems, where people grew their own food and lived more harmoniously with nature. As Goldlust points out in her study of the off-grid living, “at one point it was exceptionally radical to want to build your house out of mud. Now, it’s not seen as being that radical” (Latrobe, n.d.). This shift is also caused by capitalism’s necessity for constant economic growth, which drives increased consumption of natural resources. (Pollock, 2020). This is causing increases in extreme weather events which is said to put 25-50% of people that experience it at risk of adverse mental health affects (Apha, 2017). With people becoming more impacted by climate change, people’s desire for change and escaping the System that directly contributes to climate change is growing, which can be seen in the theme: escaping the System.

It is noted that films can be used by audiences as a form of escapism to forget one’s problems (Attarieh, 2017). This can be seen in the texts that romanticise ideas of escapism, such as *Into the Wild*. Despite its cynical satire and parallels drawn to the world, *Brazil*’s futuristic setting can be seen as a form of escapism that helps us see our own world more objectively. Overall, the nature of these texts, their treatment of the protagonist’s place within a system and the pressures they face to escape or to remain reflects tensions in wider society. Used as a form of commentary and as a central theme, escapism is an idea that is widely understood by a population living under a system that is slowly killing its own population via the demands of constant economic growth and climate change. I believe that this is why the central theme of escapism exists across so many different stories and settings, such as those described in the texts here discussed.

Another conclusion is that the attitude a script takes is heavily influenced by the author of the text and their own personal and political views. *Captain Fantastic*’s Author Matt Ross said the genesis of the idea for the script came from personal observations about the role he and his wife were taking as parents. His own upbringing in an ‘alternative community’ also influenced the

script (Tedder, 2016). I believe this guided the curious examination of what it means to escape the System. On the other hand, Boots Riley, the author of the script for *Sorry to Bother You*, identifies as a communist (Hughes, 2019). This translates into a heavy-handed critique and satire of modern capitalism, that examines the temptations that lead people to become strong advocates for the System. The idea that one's personal and political viewpoints affect the story they create is important to note, especially when creating one's own story.

Relationship to my own script

Commonalities and differences can be found between *New Zealand* and the texts examined. The theme of escaping the System is a clear commonality. In *New Zealand*, the central theme is: Will protagonist Annie escape the System? Initially, Annie is drawn into the System. She agrees to help a developer take over a piece of land on which people currently reside to create a housing development. At first, Annie believes she is doing this for a moral reason; building houses for people. However, when she learns that the land is already home to the people who already live there, she recognises the temptation of having her own house and questions her reasoning. Annie must decide whether to participate in or to escape the System. This links to the central theme of *Mephisto*, where Höfgen is lured into the Nazi party with promises of success and fame, and must decide whether or not he will escape the System.

A key difference is the ending and resolution of *New Zealand*. While Annie fails to save the land from being taken over, she successfully escapes the System albeit throwing away her chance of owning a house that her sick mother could live in. This ending is different to that of *Brazil* where Lowry is simply captured and tortured for attempting to escape. It is also different to the ending of *Mephisto* where Höfgen chooses not to escape the System, but remains but is conflicted by his decision. The ending and resolutions of these stories differ because of the earlier point discussed, how the personal viewpoint of the author impacts their intended message. However, the resolution of these stories explains further what the author's opinion is on the consequences of remaining within, or escaping the System.

Part Two

In this second section of my exegesis, my creative practice: *New Zealand*, will be examined.

Synopsis

To commence detailing *New Zealand*, the definition of a synopsis will be established. Brindley (2009) describes the generally agreed upon idea of synopsis introducing the who, what and how of the story including major characters, setting and important plot points. Overall the main aim of a synopsis is to clearly explain how the story starts, develops and ends.

Accordingly, what follows is a brief description of the story of *New Zealand*. It begins in Auckland, 2047 with Annie, a 24-year-old architectural student struggling to fit in with her peers at the fancy university she attends via scholarship. Desperately searching for a job to pay rent for the house she shares with her sick mother (currently in hospital), Annie steals the phone number of a property developer called Brent from a wealthy girl she meets at a party. Brent offers Annie a job on a project based in Whangārei, which she accepts. When she arrives, Annie is told that she must move into a modern commune of climate refugees with the intention of pressuring the owner to sell the land to Brent. Brent explains a large corporation has the legal right to commandeer the land so together they can step in and buy the land, selling it back to the original owners whilst forging a deal to develop houses on the land. She is left at the gates of the commune where she meets Max who introduces her to the main leaders. Annie goes through an orientation. She passes the tests set for her and is fully welcomed by the group. A helicopter flies overhead spooking the group, Annie learns from Brent that it belongs to the corporation she was told about. Annie goes about her life on the commune, learning about how they live and survive without connection to any grid or utilities. When a document is dropped on the commune, informing the group they must sell the land to the corporation, Annie is picked up by Brent and taken back to his mansion where she can now begin designing the housing development. Annie finds out there is no corporation, and that Brent has intended to commandeer the land for himself all along. She convinces Brent they should return to the commune where she knocks him unconscious and tries to form a plan with the group. Brent

escapes and Annie attempts to rush off a document to the council that could halt the process, but they are too late and are unable to stop the law officers from seizing the land. The group flees the area and Annie returns to normal life as she is unable to contact them. Eventually, Max gets a hold of Annie and she rejoins the group. This story is about Annie being a part of a System that she initially believes is right and good, but after living with the people her work will negatively impact, she realises what she is doing is wrong. The central theme of the story is the conflict created by Annie's desire to be in the System versus the impact of her actions on the lives of other people.

The world of the story

Next, the world in which this story is set will be examined. Truby (2007) observes that “creating a unique world for the story — and organically connecting it to the characters — is as essential to great storytelling as character, plot, theme, and dialogue” (p145).

New Zealand is set in 2047, 25 years in the future, in Auckland and Whangārei. The world is not all that different to today in the classical futuristic sense. Rather, difference is seen in the social inequality that exists between the characters. Opulence is a major theme of the elite and in the teachings of the architectural design school where Annie studies. A climate war which occurred in the 2030's is discussed. It resulted in boats filled with climate refugees coming to New Zealand, attracted by its geographic isolation and likely ability to withstand growing climate change emergencies better than other countries.

Annie gives a presentation in which she discusses the low rates of home ownership in New Zealand. New Zealand society in 2045 is highly stratified, with great division between the social and economic classes. At the highest level, an elite class of people attend university and enjoy a technologically advanced and comfortable way of life. There also is a large working class who work simply to survive. They rent mouldy homes and are stuffed into large public hospitals when they get sick. Then there is another large chunk of people called ‘savages’, who have left society to live in modern communes. In this era, these people account for a large percentage of the

population, around 30%. This is a response to the climate wars, and more notably a housing crisis that was never fixed.

This future is an artistic imagining of what the future could look like if New Zealand's current housing crisis is left to continue. The savages live completely apart from mainstream society. They have no internet access and generally choose not to communicate with the outside world. However, they have a relatively high quality of life, growing their own food, generating their own power, water harvesting and building their own eco-homes. The savages are sometimes described by the elite as inferior beings that should be expelled from the country. For the most part, however, they simply do not admit their existence.

Theme

Next, the theme of *New Zealand* will be discussed. Hope (2014) defines 'theme' as how the audience responds to the story. That is "What do you want the big takeaway from the movie to be remembered for the audience? What do you want them to remember intellectually, and what do you want them to feel emotionally?" (p.65).

The theme of *New Zealand* is how much one can be pushed before choosing to escape the System. Annie is tempted to participate in a System that she eventually learns will harm people she has grown to love. Annie's personal gain and compliance with the System are at odds with her personal morals.

This story was written to examine the sombre feeling that young people have when it comes to property ownership in New Zealand. Without an inheritance, the ability to own your own home is very difficult. My personal upbringing is certainly one of great privilege. My parents owned their own home. I can study at university. I have been overseas. It is not out of personal interest that I fear never being able to buy property, but concern that an entire generation will be cut off from owning a home – apart from those fortunate enough to have assistance from family wealth. I am not attempting to make home ownership appear as the be all and end all of our existence, but it is a fundamental element of life. An entire generation of renters means people will work

their whole lives simply to pay off their landlord's mortgage, and what will happen when they come to retire? How will they continue to afford to rent if they cannot work? Major political parties have not brought forward any large and radical changes. This story was written to examine a world where nothing changes and we see inequality grow.

In Hope's (2014) description of theme, what the audience takes away from the story, *New Zealand* aims to engage people in the idea that the status quo is likely to continue. A smaller concentration of wealth and power, and the consequences that the System will become more powerful and more difficult to escape is the unsettling feeling the audience will remember. In the script, when Annie is trying a last-ditch effort to save the land from being sold, she is passed by dozens of police cars and military vehicles' cars headed to seize the land. This image embodies the idea that although we can try to change, we will always feel the force of the System. It will not go down without a fight. In the script's resolution, Annie hitchhikes back to meet up with Max and the group. The ending intends to leave the audience with a positive feeling that other opportunities and ways of living are possible. This unsettling feeling the audience will experience seeing a dystopian view of the future ends on a positive note to give a glimmer of hope, so that the audience takes away intellectually that there are other possibilities and ways of living.

The protagonist

Next, the protagonist of *New Zealand*: Annie, will be examined. Aronson (2020) writes that the story cannot start until the protagonist is identified and shown in their normal life (into normality), and the story cannot move forward until the disturbance fractures the protagonist's normality and forces them into a course of action... Interestingly, establishing the protagonist early is the mark of successful films across all cultures (p.78).

Annie's motivation is to design affordable houses. One day, she would like to be able to afford her own house in which she, her sick mother and pregnant sister could live. Annie finds a job with property developer, Brent, who shows interest in her designs. However, due to the rather unorthodox job description, Annie negotiates with Brent to be given one of the houses on the

new development as payment for her services. She then goes onto the commune to infiltrate the group living there and convince them to sell the land to an individual person instead of losing it to a corporation. The secret motivation behind this is that the group sells the land to her boss, property developer, Brent. Her plan changes when she discovers Brent has been misleading her about his plans and chooses to try and save the land and the people on it.

Annie lives in a rented house with her mother who is not able to work due to her illness. Annie struggles to keep up with rent payments, and she and her mother will be without a place to live if she doesn't find an architectural job quickly. Aronson (2020) recommends establishing the protagonist in their normal life. Accordingly, Annie is introduced presenting her final university project to her classmates in Scene Two. We then follow Annie as she goes about her daily life, working as a cleaner, cleaning away the mould in her house and visiting her sick mum. These scenes demonstrate Annie as the main protagonist and what is at stake for her. The stakes escalate when she forms a romantic relationship with Max while simultaneously living with and 'spying' on the group. In the end, she must kidnap Brent in order to try and save the land. This raises the stakes to a violent and criminal level, but it is Annie's only option to save the land.

Annie's arc as a protagonist is one where she almost completely changes her worldview and her intentions. Initially she is simply desperate to be an architect and own property for her and her family. However, her experience of living on a modern commune changes her to a point where, in the end, she leaves everything to join them. Annie is challenged as a protagonist by the opposing forces of the System in which she lives, and specifically Brent.

The antagonist

Here, the antagonists of *New Zealand*: Brent and the System at large, will be discussed. According to McKee (1998), cumulative "forces of antagonism" exist that "don't necessarily refer to a specific antagonist or villain". The antagonist is understood as "the sum total of all forces that oppose the character's will and desire" (p.318)

Antagonist Brent is Annie's new boss. He engages her in the strange task of infiltrating a group of people living off the land in order to find out information that will lead to a successful purchase. He tells Annie that he wants to develop the land into a medium density housing development in order to stop a large corporation from legally commandeering the land and allow the original owners be able to buy back their land. By offering Annie a job, Brent is initially seen as a saviour. However, in the end, Annie learns Brent has been misleading her and was planning on taking the land for himself the entire time. While Brent is his own agent, he represents a larger set of antagonisms symbolised by the System that Annie is unable to escape. These include the pressures of paying rent, the elite university she attends, and the housing crisis they live in that prevents home ownership. These are all challenges that Annie is forced to overcome. Brent and the System he represents convinces Annie to change her goals because she sees that the consequences of the sale will be harmful to the people of the land. The antagonist compels Annie to realise that escaping the System does not come through escaping the lower-class shackles and becoming a homeowner herself. She must escape the System in its entirety.

Dramatic tension

In this final section the dramatic tension and how it is generated will be discussed, specifically through the use of the plot line. Field (1979) explains that dramatic tension is found in the question of whether the protagonist gets what they want, or need. Establishing what the character wants and needs and creating obstacles that get in the way of that is the core of dramatic tension.

The initial tension in the story is Annie's struggle to find a job. This dramatic tension is used to establish the protagonist Annie and the world that she lives in. Going to a party and hearing that her wealthy classmates have all easily found jobs, while she has not heard back from a single company is difficult for Annie; especially as she is struggling to keep up with her rent. To add further insult, Annie is mocked for being poor and taunted by one partygoer who claims she knows of a property developer looking for an architect. Annie hides all night and wakes up early to steal the phone number of the developer from the young woman's phone. This is Annie putting herself at risk and showing what she really wants; a job. Her interview with the strange

property developer, Brent, leads to the job and is the end of the dramatic set-up. Next, Annie leaves Auckland and moves to Whangārei.

The first major turning point for Annie is her discovery that the job does not simply entail designing houses for a development but requires her to infiltrate a group of people living off the land and slyly convince them of the benefits of selling to Brent. In the face of this surprise, Annie uses it to her advantage and bargains with Brent to get her own house from the deal. He agrees. This adds to the tension. As, if her plan works, Annie will get what she's always wanted, security for her family. Annie is now obliged to remain loyal to Brent.

The second major turning point is Annie successfully being accepted into the group. To do this, Annie must pass two challenges. One involves a lone three-day trek into the bush, and another where the group instructs her to kill a chicken but she refuses. She passes both tests and is fully welcomed by the group. Annie feels good about being accepted and begins to feel her opinion of the group change, gaining sympathy for their ideals. She now feels tied to the group and realises that a lot more is at stake if she decides to continue down the route of taking the land from them.

The third major turning point sees Annie convincing the group to sign a document that says they intend to sell to Brent. Annie lies to the group. She says she was kidnapped by a man who gave her the document and told her to get the owner to sign. She tells them he told her to meet him the next morning at the farm entrance, with the signed document. Annie meets Brent as planned and give him the document. He tells her to leave with him as her work is done, and it is then that Annie realises she has chosen to take the land from people she really cared about. At that moment it feels like there is no turning back for her.

The final major turning point is when Annie discovers that Brent has been misleading her. She tries to convince Brent to return and meet face-to-face with the group so that the land can be secured, before finally knocking him unconscious and kidnapping him. The moment Annie drops the rock onto Brent's head from a tree is her moment of no return. She has chosen to try and save the land and give up the opportunity to secure a house for her family.

The truth dawns when Annie discovers that Brent is actually the corporation. She spots a helicopter on his property, and sees it is the same one that flew over the farm. Annie realises she has been misled by Brent this entire time and she goes into panic mode, trying to figure out how she can stop him. This is where the climax of the story begins and momentum ramps up. Annie makes the final decision to attack and kidnap Brent, come clean to the group about what she has been doing, and then formulate a plan to save the land for the group.

At the point where Annie drives away in Brent's car to deliver a document to the council which would halt the sale process, she passes by dozens of police and military vehicles going to secure the land on Brent's orders. This is the moment we understand that, despite Annie's best intentions, she is too late. The others from the group run away on foot. They decide between them that they can't be stopped, and they will find another group to join. This resolves the tension with a negative ending. Annie isn't able to get what she wants; the group loses the land and the antagonistic forces win.

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