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# **Woman 1, Climate Disaster 0**

An analysis of female representations in three  
contemporary climate fiction films

**Signe Ljunggren**

## Abstract

This thesis takes on the task of analyzing the three contemporary Hollywood films *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Bird Box* and *Don't Look Up* in order to explore the existing portrayals of women within the films. The films all belong to the genre of climate fiction, commonly known as “cli-fi”. Using a theoretical framework based on two of ecofeminism’s most influential branches - socialist ecofeminism and cultural ecofeminism - the thesis analyzes female representations in the films from two different perspectives. The analysis is carried out through the application of Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional critical discourse analysis model, as well as through the application of ecofeminist ideal-types. The results show that the three films produce a certain common female ideal through their representations; namely that of a (white) woman conveying hope in the context of a climate disaster. In two of the films, *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Bird Box*, women were found to be portrayed much according to cultural ecofeminist thought, with an affiliation with nature and motherhood. In the remaining film, *Don't Look Up*, women were portrayed more according to socialist ecofeminist thought, placing a clear critique against capitalism.

**Key words:** climate fiction (“cli-fi”), Hollywood, ecofeminism, climate scenarios, female representation, cinema

**Number of words:** 9995

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# 1 Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing a global climate crisis, and reports about the grim state of our environment are nowadays frequent. The year of 2023 was the warmest year ever, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the report *State of the Global Climate 2023*. The same report concluded that all-time highs were reached also in concentrations of greenhouse gases, ocean heat content as well as global mean sea levels (WMO 2024).

Parallel with the ongoing environmental struggles, is an increase in the number of Western (post-)apocalyptic films, covering everything from zombie attacks to natural disasters. In an article published in the Guardian in 2022, Alex Hess states that while disaster hardly is a new topic for Hollywood, the past decade has seen more films on catastrophes than during the earlier two decades combined. The new end of the world-films also manage to cover other genres than the traditional mega budget action showstoppers (Hess 2022), many touching on questions of the environment and climate change. Films including the latter themes are proclaimed to belong to a new genre of fiction called “climate fiction” or “cli-fi” (Svoboda 2016, p. 43). Concurrently, more attention is directed towards the impact of climate scenarios and more specifically exploratory scenarios, aiming to construct plausible scenarios of the future while also questioning the robustness of climate policies (Nikoleris et al. 2017, pp. 307-308).

For years, feminist scholars have advocated for the inclusion and leadership of women in environmental-political processes. In a world where resources are greatly undistributed, the effects of climate change largely fall on those already marginalized; amongst them women (Turquet et al. 2023, p. 8). Men and women experience and understand the effects of climate change differently, and gender is thus a key factor in the impacts and mitigations of environmental issues (Sultana 2018, p. 19) - something agreed upon by ecofeminism (Gaard 2011, p. 32).

## 1.1 Purpose and research questions

According to ecofeminist theory, the question of the environment goes hand in hand with the question of gender and gender equality. The patriarchal systems of dominance, which historically have been controlled by men, enable both the devastation of the earth as well as the oppression of women; the two are intertwined (Mies & Vandana 1993, p. 14). While ecofeminism gained momentum in the 1990s, certain branches of the movement were criticized for promoting a gender essentialism, equating women with nature and planting a metaphor of the planet as “Mother Earth”. This debate has been central to the ecofeminist movement (Gaard 2011, pp. 27, 31, 39).

The recent surge of cli-fi films raises questions about the genre. Which gender ideals are promoted and reproduced by the films, and how may this be reflected in the media and in society in general? In 2017, ecofeminist Greta Gaard was surprised by the absence of women and other marginalized groups in many literary cli-fi narratives she had surveyed (Gaard 2017, pp. 154-155). She further stated that popular works within science and climate fiction were oftentimes male-authored, nonfeminist or sexist (Ibid, p. 145) - works which at the same time function to help us imagine compelling future climate scenarios (Nikoleros et al. 2017, p. 308). Altogether, this demonstrates the significance of exploring the female portrayals and narratives which *do* exist within the relatively new cli-fi genre. What is women’s purpose for the films, and what is their depicted relationship with nature like?

This thesis directs its attention to female representation, and the portrayal of women in specifically climate disastrous societies. It thus serves the purpose of investigating the link between two of the most salient present-day global political issues - climate change and gender - and how these are represented through contemporary cinema. From a broader perspective, in applying elements of ecofeminist theory to my research, I aim to connect my thesis to the fields of both feminism and of cinema as a cultural-political medium. On that account, this thesis’ research question reads as follows:

*How are women portrayed in contemporary Hollywood climate fiction cinema, in relation to ecofeminist theory?*

## **1.2 Limitations and outline**

Because of its limitations, this thesis should be placed within a decided scope. Furthermore, a certain structure will be followed throughout the thesis. These matters are accounted for below.

### **1.2.1 Scope of the analysis**

In regards to the large quantity of climate related films having been produced over the past decades, I in this thesis limit myself to analyzing works released in recent years. Still, there is an excessive number of films belonging to this group. I will therefore limit myself further, basing my analysis on three big climate-centered films (further explanations as to why I chose the specific films of this thesis follow in section 5.4) available on Netflix Sweden. The films all belong to the American film industry; they are Hollywood productions.<sup>1</sup> This is a choice which has been made in order to be able to narrow the analysis' inquiry, and because of the unique position of Hollywood within the global film industry.

### **1.2.2 From opening to end credits**

This thesis takes on the task of investigating the portrayal of women in three contemporary Hollywood cli-fi films. I will commence by presenting the background of the thesis' cinematic focus, followed by earlier research on female representation in film and cli-fi as a genre. This is followed by the theoretical framework, consisting of two branches of ecofeminism. The framework will subsequently be applied during the analysis; a critical discourse analysis after Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model, with a complementary ideal-type analysis. In the concluding discussion I answer the research question and set out my argument, which is that the films analyzed all portray women as bearers of hope in the context of a climate disaster.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Bird Box* were directed by non-American directors - they were however produced by American production companies (Chang 2015; Debruge 2018).

## **2 Setting the scene**

This section provides the thesis with earlier research on female representation in cinema, presenting a historical overview as well as common female tropes within film. It also delves into the question of why cinema is interesting from a cultural-political standpoint.

### **2.1 The cultural-political in cinematic influence**

#### **2.1.1 Cinema as culture**

Culture as a phenomenon is not necessarily easy to define. Gillian Rose views culture as representations, which in turn structure our lives and the ways in which we behave (Rose 2016, p. 2). Visual culture, furthermore, circles all the ways in which visual aspects are central to our social lives. Many argue that these aspects of culture have become the most significant ones, along with the development of digital media (Ibid, pp. 4-5).

Chris Beasley and Heather Brook (2019) regard films as a natural part of our cultural landscape, both reflecting and constructing social life (p. 1). It may be argued that *all* cinema is political (Comolli & Narboni 1971, p. 30), something which is concerted also by Beasley and Brook. Without being explicitly political, mainstream films may repeat socio-economic ideas and globally disseminated themes, by doing so generating and even manipulating narratives. In this sense, culture inevitably intersects with politics and power (Beasley & Brook 2019, pp. 2-3).

#### **2.1.2 Hollywood and the context of streaming**

Discussions about the influence of cinema are reminiscent of the term *soft power* (Beasley and Brook 2019, p. 4), first expressed by Joseph S. Nye in 1990. In the aftermath of the Cold War, Nye discusses America's role in a world where interdependence between states is growing (Nye 1990, p. 153). Nye articulates the transnational attraction of American popular culture through e.g. film and industry, carrying opportunities to communicate and get across



messages (Ibid, pp. 168-169). Nye's remarks about popular culture resonate well with discussions and various pieces of research published on the soft power of specifically Hollywood in regards to its cinema.

Despite an increase in the number of media-producing states globally, the American film industry continues to clearly dominate the world cinematic stage revenue- and budget-wise (Crane 2014, p. 366, Beasley & Brook 2019, p. 1). The predominance in Hollywood film also manages to ideologically naturalize its style of film, making it the premise of filmmaking - and by studying which Hollywood films are popular with audiences, it is possible to grasp certain ideological currents in contemporary America (Benshoff & Griffin 2021, pp. 23, 29). It should also be stated that today's film industry is in a relatively new context, namely, a world of streaming services. People now consume more video entertainment than ever before, something which was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2021, pp. 157-157). The digital era in which we live has allowed for platforms - among them Netflix, which in the first quarter of 2024 had over 82 million subscribers in the US and Canada (Statista 2024) - to integrate more science into the production of films through information on customer behavior, enabling customizations aiming to coordinate with audiences (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2021, p. 161).

### **3 Earlier research**

This section provides the thesis with earlier research on female representation in film as well as on cli-fi as a genre, contributing to the thematic frame of the thesis.

#### **3.1 Female cinematic representation**

Just as film is influential, its representations of gender may reflect what a culture sees as representative regarding e.g. masculinity and femininity. Despite the fact that mainstream film portrayals are not reality - they are merely representations of it, consisting of actors depicting characters - they tell us something about societies' understandings of gender (Nelmes 2011, p. 262). It is widely argued that the media stereotypes and always has

stereotyped gender, particularly women. The stereotypes may in turn perpetuate myths which lead to the arising of certain expectations - that women should be based in the home, or that they are attracted by violent men, to name a few. Certainly tied to this stereotyping, is the disproportionate ratio of men to women in the film industry. There have historically been few women behind the camera in Hollywood, in positions like producers or directors (Nelmes 2011, pp. 269, 265), and the same goes for in front of the camera. Despite changes in the film industry, these trends are long-lasting (Lauzen 2024). More recently, the so-called Bechdel test (or the Bechdel-Wallace test) has become affiliated with the investigation of male-centredness in film. The test, originally created as a joke by comic artist Alison Bechdel, scrutinizes the portrayed relationships between women in film (Beasley & Brook 2019, pp. 128-129).

Within literature or film, a *trope* refers to a repeated archetypal theme important for the storyline (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries n.d). A historically common trope for women in film has been the "love interest waiting to be rescued" (Benshoff & Griffin 2021, p. 219), while newer tropes have been popularized throughout the years. These include women as the victims in slasher films (Ibid, p. 287), as shopping-addicted career women (Ibid, p. 293), and more recently, female superheroes (Ibid, p. 296).

## **3.2 Climate change on screen**

For decades, the fate of our civilization and our planet has been speculated within academia as well as fiction. While one category of books and films has preoccupied itself with external threats to our planet (such as alien invasions), another has come to concentrate on its internal threats we as humans pose (Oramus 2023, pp. 37-38). World War II introduced to the world the atomic bomb, which made a clear mark on the literary and cinematic scene (Ibid, p. 42).

### **3.2.1 Climate Fiction: *cli-fi***

Although people historically had argued that nuclear accidents could alter the earth's climate, anti-nuclear and environmental activists did not start to cooperate actively until the 1980s.

The term and fear “nuclear winter”, referring to freezing temperatures caused by nuclear ashes, has since been replaced by an eco-anxiety (Oramus 2023, p. 50). It was journalist Dan Bloom who first came up with the notion of “cli-fi”, short for climate fiction. Shocked by the release of an IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report, Bloom felt the need to raise awareness to climate issues through blogging. In a 2016 interview, Bloom stated that:

“For me, the best of cli-fi does two things: it delivers a powerful and emotional story and it pushes the reader to wake up to the existential threat that man-made global warming poses to future generations.”. (Bates 2016)

The now popular term of cli-fi draws from a wide range of genres, seeming capable of both anticipating and articulating climate related future prospects (Evans 2017, pp. 94-95). Scholars from varied fields agree, stressing the importance of fiction in its ability to transform climate change from something abstract to something personal and close (Nikoleris et al. 2017, p. 317). A recent study of 161 readers of cli-fi showed that the literature made the respondents imagine possible future climate scenarios, and consider the fragility of the environment (Schneider-Mayerson 2018).

## **4 Theoretical Framework**

This section presents the theoretical framework of this thesis, consisting of two different branches of ecofeminism. Included also, is background about the ecofeminist movement as well as some considerations regarding its actuality.

### **4.1 Introduction to ecofeminism**

Ecofeminism is the name of the movement which sees a simultaneous link between the subordination of women and the degradation of the natural world. First coined by French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne, the movement emerged during the second wave feminism and the green movement during the 1970s (Mellor 1997, pp. 1, 44), and through grassroots

struggles globally (Ibid, p. 3). Ideas of what eventually came to be ecofeminism had however been expressed prior. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir wrote of the designation “the Other”, which historically has been given simultaneously to both women and nature (de Beauvoir 2011, pp. 163-164) - within ecofeminism, these “others” are not only women but the colonized, economically unstable and the non-human (Stevens et al. 2018, p. 2). As a whole, ecofeminism offers a critical lens through which the power dynamics embedded in environmental questions may be studied (Gaard 2017, p. 4).

While the notion of ecofeminism innately implies some fundamental ideas, there are different schools of ecofeminist thought entailing slight differences. It should be stated that ecofeminism is hard to pinpoint as it has been debated and unfolded in many contexts (Stevens et al. 2018, p. 3; Carlassare 2000, p. 91), and that many types of feminism - liberal, social, socialist and cultural - have been concerned with the relationship between human and environment (Merchant 1996, p. 5). During the 1990s, critique towards ecofeminism emerged from among others poststructuralist and third wave feminists, suggesting that ecofeminism was purely essentialist in its proclaims of ties between women and nature (Gaard 2011, p. 31). Others went further, describing ecofeminism as ethnocentric and elitist (Ibid, p. 41). Dissent from the ecofeminist literary tradition occurred, with scholars now choosing to phrase the field in which they carried out research as e.g. “feminist environmentalism”, “social ecofeminism” or “gender and environment” (Ibid, p. 27).<sup>2</sup>

Although ecofeminism has been contested, the movement’s importance lies in its ability to reveal connections between social and environmental injustices. This is argued by Lara Stevens, Peta Tait and Denise Varney, who defend the pertinence of the movement to this day (Stevens et al. 2018, p. 1). Below will be presented two of the most predominant schools within ecofeminism (Carlassare 2000, p. 89), in order to get a comprehensive view of the field. Through revisiting the works of several scholars I concentrate first and foremost on the general descriptions of the theory in question and its normative goals. Secondly, I specifically look into the descriptions of the relationship between woman and nature. The two feminist perspectives will subsequently serve as the basis of this thesis’ analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> Provided this information, I could have chosen to call this framework something else than ecofeminist. For clarity and consistency reasons however, I will stick to its original designation.

### 4.1.1 Socialist ecofeminism

Socialist ecofeminism, sometimes materialist ecofeminism, distinctly emphasizes a capitalist critique as its theoretical and argumentative ground. One might even say that socialist ecofeminism is a “feminist transformation of socialist ecology”, implying that reproduction rather than production is a concept central for a just world (Merchant 1996, p. 15). It is modern day capitalism, with its accompanying market economy, which uses both women and the environment simultaneously (Ibid, pp. 5, 7). For this patriarchal capitalism to function, the unpaid work of women globally is crucial (Carlassare 2000, p. 92). Similarly, the individualism embedded in western philosophy is seen as a reason for consumerism, private ownership and profit-seeking, all pushing for both gender-based and ecological exploitation (Mellor 1997, p. 179). Socialist ecofeminists believe that our humanity is a patriarchal one, which by the never-ending expansions of capitalism homogenizes cultures and disrupts ecological balances (King 1995, p. 354). Altogether, not only capitalism but imperialism is relevant to the socialist ecofeminist struggle (Carlassare 2000, p. 92).

Socialist ecofeminism aims for a reproductional sustainability - an ecological balance between humans and nature alike, both in production and in reproduction. Reproduction interests the reproduction of all life, not just human (Ibid, p. 17). In line with the critique aimed at capitalism, socialist ecofeminism questions interventionist technologies, asking what birth control, sterilization, surrogacy and adoption has in stake for women (Ibid, p. 15). It is thought that these modern reproductive technologies have made childbirth into a capitalist interest in the hands of men (King 1995, p. 367). Reproductive freedom entails the freedom both to have and to not have children, and hence, safe reproduction contraception must be guaranteed (Merchant 1995, p. 18).

Within socialist ecofeminism, one generally strives to walk away from the woman-nature connection promoted by some other ecofeminists. Socialist ecofeminist Mary Mellor (1997) states that there is a danger in reactionary conservatives using the debate to their advantage (Mellor 1997, p. 95), while Ynestra King, another socialist ecofeminist and pioneer within the ecofeminist movement as a whole, states that going past the woman-nature dualism *is* the ecofeminist agenda (King 1995, p. 360). It is not that humans overall are not embodied in nature - it is rather that men are less rooted in nature by practice and by patriarchy. In this

sense, women have become more connected to nature in the patriarchal rejection of embodiment (Mellor 1997, p. 60).

#### **4.1.2 Cultural ecofeminism**

Another branch of ecofeminism called cultural ecofeminism likewise analyzes environmental issues from a critique of patriarchy, with the goal of liberating both women and nature. It has however delved more into the woman-nature connection than socialist ecofeminism (Merchant 1996, pp. 5,7). Cultural ecofeminists blame the patriarchy for devaluing qualities often associated with the term “woman”, and some accordingly seek to reclaim e.g. intuition, nurture and care (Carlassare 2000, pp. 93-94).

Distancing itself from a merely scientific and technological standpoint, cultural ecofeminism points to the special relationship between women and nature, often involving elements of spirituality. Cultural ecofeminism stems from a rediscovery of connectedness, (Mies & Shiva 1993, p. 16), and Charlene Spretnak, who calls herself a cultural/radical ecofeminist, states that humans have been cut off from this grounding to our natural world (Spretnak 1990, pp. 9, 6). There is thus a need to acknowledge moments of awakening, allowing people to connect with nature rather than giving in to the dominant culture of “denial, distancing, fear and ignorance” (Ibid, pp. 6-7), and to “reclaim Gaia as an earth-mother” (Merchant 1996, p. 1). Spirituality is capable of social change, and so cultural ecofeminists use everything from worship rituals to direct political action in their work. Some cultural ecofeminists celebrate prehistoric depictions of women as mothers of nature - sometimes pregnant, surrounded by trees and butterflies (Merchant 1996, pp. 10-11) - and some credit religion to feeding a human need, providing symbols and rituals related to nature (Mellor 1997, p. 53). According to cultural ecofeminism, patriarchy degraded women when it replaced female goddesses with male gods. Further, when the scientific revolution came around, a masculinist mechanism arose which impaired nature (Merchant 1995, p. 10).

Cultural ecofeminism does not express explicit concern with capitalism. Nevertheless, it criticizes many aspects of our modern society centered around industry and technology. Within cultural ecofeminism exists often a clear critique against anything military - Spretnak

writes that an antibiological revolution is currently being waged by military, as well as by technological experts, businessmen and government officials (Spretnak 1990, p. 10).

It is male-designed inventions and techniques as well as nuclear power and hazardous waste, claim cultural ecofeminists, which negatively affect both women's reproductive organs and the environment (Merchant 1996, p. 11). Regarding reproduction, cultural ecofeminism similarly to its socialist sibling aims criticism at modern reproductive technologies (Spretnak 1990, p. 10). In accordance with the celebration of womanhood, elements of motherhood are acknowledged and celebrated. Cultural ecofeminist Carol P. Christ states that since many women have children, it would be to deny the physical reality to not embrace motherhood, childbirth and female sexuality (Christ 1997, pp. 92-93).

## **5 Method**

In this section, I will go over the methods and method tools chosen for answering the thesis' research question. Also included in the section, are subdivisions on potential pitfalls regarding the method and the operationalization of the analysis.

### **5.1 Critical discourse analysis**

In my endeavor to analyze how women are portrayed in cli-fi films, I aim to explore the language and semiotics used for the construction of gender within cinema. Discourse analysis is a series of interdisciplinary approaches used to study different social domains, all with the underlying assumption that language plays an important role in the shaping of identities and the construction of social patterns (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 2). Language constructs representations of reality, which in turn construct different realities. It is through discourse that objects and phenomena gain meaning, which may be changed over time through new discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 9). This assumption is a social constructionist one, and with discourse analysis comes ontological and epistemological premises arguing that

language socially constructs the world. Hence, discourse analysis does not only work methodologically, but theoretically (Ibid, p. 4).

Notwithstanding the field of discourse analysis' common presumptions, there exists different approaches within it. One of these, and the one chosen for this thesis, is a critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA). Besides the fundamental motives for analyzing discourse, a CDA often has an aim of analyzing and investigating power relations in society, including in cultural and social phenomena (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, pp. 3, 60-61). Within CDA, it is also believed that discursive practices create and reproduce inequality when it comes to power relations. This inequality for instance touches on gender (Ibid, p. 63), which adds to the suitability of CDA for this specific thesis.

Discourse here encompasses both spoken or written text *and* visual images, as well as the relationship between the types of discourse, for why it may be used to analyze film. Linguist Norman Fairclough's view of discourse includes this broader perspective (Fairclough 1995, p. 131), as he discusses the influence societal forces have on discourse. Exemplified here are e.g political systems and the institutional aspects of media, which may provide concrete discursive constitutions to contexts or settings (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, pp. 61-62). Fairclough himself describes the purpose of CDA to be:

“... to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural practices, relations and processes;...” (Fairclough 1995, p. 132)

In due course, a critical discourse analysis will here be applied.

### **5.1.1 Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis**

Fairclough views discourse as the use of language as a social practice (Fairclough 1995, p. 7). Further, texts should not be excluded from the discursive and institutional practices in which they are embedded (Ibid, p. 9); no text should be analyzed in its isolation. In order to understand them, they need to be placed in a social context where relations to other webs of



texts are acknowledged (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 70) - this Fairclough calls intertextuality (Ibid, p. 73). Under these terms, Fairclough proposes a methodological framework perceiving discourse as a three-dimensional conception consisting of:

- i) a language text, either spoken or written
- ii) a discursive practice; the production and interpretation of the text
- iii) a sociocultural practice

The three dimensions can be summarized as situational, institutional and societal - the first dimension offers a text analysis, a description, the second a process analysis, an interpretation, and the third and final one a social analysis, an explanation (Fairclough 1995, pp. 97-98). It is not necessary for a research project to include all three of Fairclough's dimensions, as a method design and application should be tailored after the scope of each research (Fairclough 1992, p. 226; Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 76). This thesis will see the application of only the two first dimensions. One reason for this is the similar social contexts in which the three films analyzed are located - they are all Hollywood films produced by Netflix or by companies which have sold streaming rights to Netflix, presenting the films to very similar consumers and placing them in somewhat similar social contexts. The social dimension will however be integrated in the discussion in section 7.2, and so the application of only two dimensions is deemed adequate. Moreover, a three-dimensional analysis of all three films would entail a task much larger than what is possible, given the limitations of this thesis. Below follows more in-depth explanations of the two first dimensions.

### **i) Text dimension**

The textual dimension of a discourse can according to Fairclough be made up of writings, speeches, visual images or a combination of the mentioned. An analysis of it implies a focus on the linguistic and more formal aspects of the text, such as vocabulary, syntax and grammar (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, pp. 68-69). Fairclough proposes a series of more concrete analytical tools which may here be utilized. I will look at three of these, namely interactional control, ethos and metaphors (Ibid, p. 83).

**Interactional control** investigates which speaker gets to set the agenda of conversations. Here, one might look at things such as: who opens or closes an interaction, who introduces the topic, and is there an asymmetry in control (Fairclough 1992, p. 152)?

**Ethos** instead refers to identities, and how these may be socially constructed through language. Ethos may be signaled through both verbal and non-verbal comportment, and be manifested by the whole body (Fairclough 1992, pp. 166-167).

**Metaphors** are concerned with what may be symbolized through wordings. Particular metaphors might have been imported politically or ideologically, and through them, we signify and therefore also construct our realities (Fairclough 1992, pp. 77, 194).

## **ii) Discursive practice dimension**

Fairclough's second analysis dimension is interested in how the text draws on earlier genres and texts to create a new text, as well as how the text receivers do the same in order to interpret and read the text. This process of production and consumption *is* the discursive practice. It is here that the text takes shape, through the social practice of consuming language (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, pp. 68-69).

Fairclough sees the need of considering the discursive practice both by looking at how people produce and interpret the text, and by investigating the nature of the resources and circumstances behind the interpretations. Fairclough sees the two as inevitably linked, where the former provides evidence for the latter (Fairclough 1992, pp. 85-86). I will thus base the second analysis dimension on discussions of the productions behind the films, as well as on interpretations of the films by scholars.

## 5.2 The construction of ecofeminist ideal-types

Ideal-types were famously introduced by sociologist Max Weber, who created descriptions about phenomena derived from empirical observations. An ideal-type analysis involves the structuring of data within qualitative research, where a series of groupings together form a typology, enabling a comparison of patterns and differences (Stapley et al., 2022, p. 2). When creating ideal-types, one should strive for an unambiguousness. The ideal-types should neither contain too much nor too little information, making them difficult to link to the material of analysis. One should nonetheless be aware of the fact that ideal-types are simplifications of phenomena, created to bring structure to an analysis, whose forms may differ from one analysis to another (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 42).

Below is a typology scheme of different standpoints, created from and based on the theoretical framework presented in section 3. The ideal-types encircle the key focus of each of the theoretical perspectives, as well as the positions on the link between woman/nature. Following the CDA, these ideal-types will assist the analysis in section 6-7.

<b>Branch of ecofeminism/ideal type</b>	<b>Described key critique</b>	<b>Described link between women and nature</b>
<b>Socialist ecofeminism</b>	The lack of an ecofeminist perspective in the fight against patriarchal capitalism.	The dualism between women-nature is a patriarchal construction keeping women subordinated.
<b>Cultural ecofeminism</b>	The devaluing of women and nature, and of female associations by patriarchy.	Women are embodiments of nature. Patriarchy wants to hinder this embeddedness.

**Table 1:** typology scheme of two socialist/cultural ecofeminist ideal types

## 5.3 Method considerations

As a discourse analyst, one often takes part in the cultures and discourses being studied. Bearing in mind the social constructionist presumption within the field, one might deem the matter insolvable - an individual will always presuppose a representation of the world over other alternative representations. This however articulates the need for the analyst to distance him- or herself from the material. It is through a stringent application not only of the method, but of the theory, that scientific legitimacy may be attained (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, pp. 21-23). This awareness of oneself as an analyst is called *reflexivity* (Ibid, pp. 116-117). In the case of this thesis, it is ecofeminism and not my own perception which composes the vantage point of analysis.

One should know that no analysis can show everything. It is up to the analyst to assume a transcription system, and to determine how detailed the analysis ought to be in order to complement the research question(s) (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 81). When analyzing, the question of how to select samples for the analysis also arises (Fairclough 1992, p. 230) - not to mention that the choice of research topic and analysis inevitably will reflect the author. To avoid any pitfalls, it is ergo crucial for an analyst to make every decision he or she makes in the research project as transparent as possible (Teorell & Svensson 2007, pp. 36-37).

## 5.4 Material

In this thesis, three films are subjects of analysis in order to explore the portrayal of women in cli-fi film. The choice of analyzing the cinematic medium was an active one, taking into account the cultural impact of cinema as well as the position of specifically Hollywood film (see sections 2.1.1-2.1.2).

### 5.4.1 Choice of films

The films analyzed in this thesis were chosen based on their affiliation with climate change, all either allegorizing climate change, or taking place either before, during or after events

caused by climate change.<sup>3</sup> Choosing the material was neither obvious nor simple. Films on climate change have been made for decades, although the genre of cli-fi is just now in the process of establishing itself (as seen in section 3.3.1). Research on other cinematic questions might have benefited from choosing award-winning or high-grossing productions. Efforts regarding the sooner have come into existence, exemplified by for example the UK-based tve (television for the environment) Global Sustainability Awards (tve Media 2024). This thesis nevertheless concerns Hollywood productions, and alas, there is no Academy or Emmy Award for climate-themed films or series. Regarding grossings or “box offices”, implying the profits made from films, cli-fi productions of course are not guaranteed to do well economically - nor yet does production revenue always matter in a world of streaming services, where film companies choose to premiere their productions online rather than in cinema theaters (Hennig-Turau et al. 2021, pp 157-158). This being stated, both *Bird Box* and *Don't Look Up* are amongst the ten most watched films ever on Netflix (Netflix 2024), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* was a financial success (Benshoff & Griffin 2021, p. 296).

There exists no official list of cli-fi films, although some have tried to compile the genre. In 2023, journalist Amanda Shendruk took help from professor Michael Svoboda and his research in order to establish a list of 100 climate change films and series, spanning from 1966 to 2023 (Shendruk & Svoboda 2023). I have partly used this list to base my choices of films on, where recent Hollywood films were chosen - I also looked for the presence of important female characters, enabling the analysis. One of the chosen materials, *Bird Box*, is not included in Shendruk and Svoboda's list. This film was chosen based on its strong apocalyptic themes. Although not explicitly associated with climate, it has been argued that its theme is an allegory to an environmental disaster (Momcilovic 2021, p. 115; Lloyd 2019). This goes in line with the point argued by Kirk Boyle (2013), who asserts that other disaster films may allegorize widespread collective anxieties - such as the ongoing climate crisis - without decidedly touching upon environmental themes. Boyle claims that human-induced global warming functions as a trauma, and for that reason, films may circle it by using metaphors (p. 7)

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<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, one of the films portrays a climate disaster approaching, one the arrival of an apocalypse, and one a life *in* the climate disaster.

Below follows information about the three chosen films of this thesis, enunciating their affiliation to the thesis' specific framework. The films or series are placed in an ascending order by year of release.

### ***Mad Max: Fury Road (2015)***

A follow-up to the Mad Max films of the 1980s, *Mad Max: Fury Road* tells the story of Max Rockatansky, a survivor navigating a post-ecocide desert world. After being captured by a warlord, Max joins one of the warlord's officers, Furiosa, in the rebellious quest of fleeing society and reaching "the Green Place". With them on the way, are the five young wives of the warlord.

### ***Bird Box (2018)***

In this Netflix production, pregnant woman Malorie witnesses the arrival of an apocalypse, leading people to commit mass-suicide. She joins a group of survivors and the following months are characterized by chaos and deaths of members of the group. In the end, Malory is the lone survivor whose goal is to bring two young children to safety.

### ***Don't Look Up (2021)***

The Netflix satire production *Don't Look Up* tells of Kate Dibiasky, an astronomy PhD student who discovers a comet heading towards the earth. Together with her professor, Professor Mindy, she sets out to inform the public and the government about the catastrophe which is to arrive in six months - something which proves to be difficult.

### **5.4.2 Reservations regarding material**

Despite my motives for choosing each film or series in this thesis, questions and doubts may arise. Considering the vast amount of cli-fi cinematic productions which exist, there are many films and series which *could* have been chosen and analyzed. What would my analysis have achieved, had I chosen a different analysis material? I seek not to answer this question - it is presumably neither possible, nor beneficial. Notwithstanding, this thesis will need to be placed in its specific context, surrounding its theoretical framework on ecofeminism as well as the specific chosen films. Although contextual, this thesis will hopefully tie into future similar discussions about other films, and principally, about how women are constructed in cli-fi films and what effects this may have.

## **5.5 Operationalization of the analysis**

As part of the analysis of this thesis, each of the films were watched carefully, during which attention consistently was put on the portrayal of the female character(s). Scenes and aspects interesting for the research were noted, re-watched and transcribed. The primary focus was put on the main female character of each film - yet other female characters were likewise interesting for analysis and comparison.

The analysis of this thesis will proceed as follows: each of the three films will be analyzed firstly according to Fairclough's first analysis dimension, and subsequently according to his second analysis dimension. Following this, an application of the ideal-types to each film will proceed.

## 6 Analysis

Below, the three films will be analyzed first according to Fairclough's textual and discursive dimensions, and then according to the ideal-types developed in section 5.2.

### 6.1 *Mad Max: Fury Road*

#### 6.1.1 Textual dimension

In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Furiosa stands out from the other few women in the film. As an officer in the war lord's army, she is respected and is therefore in possession of a unique interactional control (the remaining women are instead either poor citizens of the Citadel, or wives/providers of breast milk to the war lord). Her ethos is a controlled and determined one, as she tells those around her what to do:

“Out here, everything hurts. You wanna get through this? Do as I say. Now pick up what you can and run.”

The wives, on the other hand, have little interactional control status. Together they present an ethos which is caring and nurturing. Even in threatening situations, like when a war boy comes into the war rig (the car in which they flee with Furiosa and Max), they choose to spare his life: “We agreed! No unnecessary killing!”. Also Furiosa, who is portrayed as a tough warrior in many ways different from the wives, grows compassionate for Max and begs him to stay with the women.

Turning to metaphors, the women in the film symbolize hope and fertility; both for the environment and for humans. On their escape-route, the wives repeat where they are going: “We're going to the green place... we're going to the green place of many mothers”. This green place in turn seems to metaphor a paradise, where the earth is still habitable and life still endurable. One of the older mothers they meet shows a wife her pouch containing seeds,



leaving the wife impressed. “Trees, flowers, fruit...”, the old mother says, “...back then there was no need to snap [kill] anybody”. A healthy soil thus appears to metaphor peace.

### 6.1.2 Discursive dimension

*Mad Max: Fury Road* is a Warner Brothers release, in association with Village Roadshow Pictures and Kennedy Miller Mitchell productions (Chang 2015), the two latter being Australian (Village Roadshow n.d; Douglas 2021, p. 18). George Miller was director of the film, and wrote the screenplay with Brendan McCarthy and Nico Lathouris (Chang 2015). Playwright Eve Ensler was an advisor on set, advising on gendered violence and more, which some enthusiastically praised (Du Plooy 2019, p. 418).

Darin Payne (2017) points out a number of aspects regarding gender in *Mad Max: Fury Road*. The film more than fulfills the Bechdel test, challenging the image of the classic male-dominated Hollywood Blockbuster. There are “damsels” in the film (referring to the wives), but these are ultimately saved by Furiosa, opening up for nontraditional gender performances (pp. 107-108, 122). The film also includes intertextual elements, like the mythical trope of wise old women at work, as stated by Du Plooy (2019). The fact that there exist different female tropes in the film bear the message of women being recognized (p. 418).

On the other hand, some have interpreted *Mad Max: Fury Road* as a masculinist film. Payne states that the wives all conform to traditional feminine beauty expectations, and that Max ultimately remains a hero (an intertextual reference to the earlier Mad Max films) by saving Furiosa’s life (Payne 2017, pp. 122-123). Michelle Yates (2017) dissents this, claiming that the film draws from and disrupts a traditional passive female nature, instead transforming nature into “a space of female possibility” (Yates 2017, p. 355).

### **6.1.3 Ideal-type analysis**

A comparison between *Mad Max: Fury Road* and the typology scheme presented in section 4.2, gives us several insights. In the film, women and nature are clearly exploited parallelly. The war lord keeps his wives locked up inside a room, and in another room in his headquarters, women are seen sitting bare-chested in chairs. This is where the “mother’s milk”, a resource for the war lord, is collected. The war lord refers to his wives as his “property” - others refer to them as “breeders”. The film does not present a distinct critique against capitalism, yet we know that the ecocide present was caused by resource dearth. Water is scarce and dispersed unevenly in the dystopian society depicted, where those with power decide on its distribution. This makes the society in *Mad Max: Fury Road* one described and criticized according to the socialist ecofeminist ideal-type.

The women in the film - the wives, the mothers and to a lesser extent, Furiosa - all present a seemingly inherent connection to nature, and to the idea of a fertile soil. This is suggesting that the women display a link to nature close to that of the culturally ecofeminist ideal-type.

## **6.2 *Bird Box***

### **6.2.1 Textual dimension**

In *Bird Box*, Malorie displays an ethos which on the one hand is independent and determined. In the house where the group of survivors reside, she distances herself from the others; especially from Olympia, the other pregnant woman in the group. As a character, Malorie is honest and has interactional control. However as the film progresses and as more people succumb to the apocalyptic disease, Malorie gains more of a nurturing ethos, comforting Olympia and others around her.

This is clear especially in the final scenes, as Malorie travels with her and Olympia’s respective children on the river to security. In the final scene of the film, Malorie tear-eyedly

declares something to a woman in the sanctuary which she has not yet dared to do: “Yes. I’m their mother”.

Turning to metaphors, birds are a recurring sight in the film. In the apocalyptic society, the group learns that birds signal danger, after which Malorie brings a bird into the house. During the labors of Malorie and Olympia, the bird is heard chirping. When Malorie and the children finally make it to safety at the end of the film, they enter a garden full of birds singing. Further, the two cases of pregnancy in the film indicate a symbolism of hope. There are no other children portrayed in the film (until the final scenes in the sanctuary), and so the children represent a hope about the future. Lastly, one of the main components of the film - the blindfolds people wear in order to avoid the disease - may be metaphorical to those choosing not to witness climate change.

### **6.2.2 Discursive dimension**

Based on a novel by Josh Malerman, *Bird Box* is a Netflix Original Film directed by Danish director Susanne Bier and with a screenplay written by Eric Heisserer. The film was co-produced by the production companies of Chris Morgan and Scott Stuber (Debruge 2018).

Raffaella Baccolini and Chiara Xausa (2022) mention the role which pregnant women normally play in film; as primarily important biologically, referring to the forthcoming generations (p. 404). Further, they argue that *Bird Box* here presents an unconventional representation of pregnancy and maternal care. Malorie is pragmatic and harsh, which in the end proves to be successful for the children’s and her survival. Her qualities also stand in contrast to Tom, the survivor with whom Malorie develops a romantic relationship, who is soft and empathic (Ibid, p. 405). This reversal of gender roles is agreed upon by Ebru Thwaites Dikon (2020), who deems Bier’s narration nuanced. From one standpoint, Bier sacralizes motherhood and allows for a nuclear family to emerge from the apocalyptic chaos - from another one, this family does not conform to patriarchal expectations (p. 56).

Moreover, Thwaites Dikon comments on the death of Tom, raising questions of what the implications of this may be. Does the new life in the sanctuary without a father figure

symbolize the end of patriarchy, or is it a messianic feminist opening (intertextually repeating the sometimes present cultural ecofeminist religiousness) - a return to “primal feminine subjectivity” (Thwaites Dikon 2020, pp. 56-58)?

### 6.2.3 Ideal-type analysis

The apocalyptic disease in *Bird Box* strikes the world with surprise, and as an audience we have no clue of where it may come from. For the first ideal-type, this makes it difficult to place the situation pictured in either a socialist ecofeminist or cultural ecofeminist context, directing a capitalist or patriarchal critique. Notwithstanding, Malorie does experience certain hardships with being a woman in a contemporary American society. As a single pregnant woman she is anxious by the thought of becoming a mother, expressing herself while at a prenatal clinic: “Something about it... It hasn't really clicked with me. You know? The idea. Motherhood.”. In addition to her pregnancy status, Malorie does not fulfill the career expectations of those around her. Of her occupation before the chaos, she self-awarably states that she did “Whatever paid the bills until I figured out what I want to be.”.

Malorie does not interact much with nature, since the characters of *Bird Box* are confined to a house for a large part of the film. Regardless of this, there are scenes bringing to mind a supposed link between woman and nature, alluding to the cultural ecofeminist ideal-type. One of these scenes is the final scene of the film, when Malorie and the children reach safety after the dangerous journey on the river. Entering the school where the survivors are residing, a vibrant greenness greets Malorie and the children. Birds can be seen flying around the garden, as the sun suddenly shines. In another of the film's scenes, it appears as if pregnancy is celebrated according to cultural ecofeminist tradition. Here, Tom talks of his sister's pregnancy: “I'm always touching her belly. It's calming”, to which Malorie replies: “Yeah, it's nature's dirty little trick”.

## 6.3 *Don't Look Up*

### 6.3.1 Textual dimension

From the start of *Don't Look Up*, it is clear that the character of Kate possesses no interactional control. Kate is overlooked and ignored from the moment she discovers the comet, and instead, all recognition is given to Professor Mindy. When the two meet the president, Kate's presence is questioned by the president's son and chief of staff: "Seriously. Who is she?"

When Kate finally takes interactional control, which happens when she and Professor Mindy make an appearance at a big television show, she is regarded and treated like an emotional wreck. After which Kate storms out of the studio, the female television show host is heard saying:

"The handsome astronomer can come back anytime. Yelling lady, not so much."

Anxious by her discovery and by the apparent existential threat, Kate's ethos is a stressed and disturbed one. She admits that she feels distressed, and tries to calm her nerves by taking a few of Professor Mindy's sedating Xanax pills. Kate's ethos contrasts those of other women in the film. One of these is Professor Mindy's wife, who presents herself as the caring mother looking after the couple's sons while her husband is away working. After Professor Mindy has an affair, she forgives him and welcomes him back without much thought.

The storyline of *Don't Look Up* is metaphorical in its allegory to climate change. Further, the public and political response to the news of the approaching comet may metaphor the current reactions to news about climate degradations. One of the film's final scenes shows Kate and others gathered around a dinner table together with Professor Mindy and his family, just before the comet hits the earth; reminiscent of the last supper in the bible.

### 6.3.2 Discursive dimension

*Don't Look Up* is a Netflix release in collaboration with Hyperobject Industries, a company developed by the film's director and screenwriter Adam McKay (Debruge 2021; Hyperobject Industries n.d.). From its release, the film has been recognized as an allegory for climate change and for the public's denial of it. Adam McKay himself has stated that he wants to be a "kick in the pants" with his film, prompting urgent environmental action (Buckley 2022).

Interpretations of *Don't Look Up* have included praisings of the accurate depiction of life for female scientists. Amy Chambers (2022) intertextually points out that the film reminds us of the online movement "#thisiswhata scientistlookslike", combating stereotypes about people in science and other fields. Kate is everything but commodified - she belongs to the wrong gender, goes to the wrong university, etc. (pp. 2,4). When the comet is named the Dibiasky comet after Kate herself, it is indirectly signaled that Kate *is* the enemy (Ibid, p. 5). Along the same lines, Julie Doyle (2022) calls attention to the separate treatments of Kate and Professor Mindy, referring to the sooner who is heckled through memes after her outcry on television. After this, Kate resorts to continuing her questioning of late-capitalism on social media, where her statements lead to public uprisings (p. 4).

Neither Chambers nor Doyle do however see the film and its female portrayals as exclusively critically realistic. Chambers mentions the very few female scientists who do exist in the film, of whom one is corrupt (Chambers 2022, p. 2). Doyle instead turns to the question of who really is the hero in the film - her answer is, that the narrative focus at the end of the film suggests Professor Mindy as the real hero of the film, returning home to his wife and a normatively gendered and patriarchal world (Doyle 2022, p. 4).

### 6.3.3 Ideal-type analysis

In *Don't Look Up*, Kate is excluded from many of the formalities regarding the comet and the countermeasures adapted to prevent the devastating effects of it. Moreover, the countermeasures are controlled by a billionaire with close ties to the government. At one

point in the film, it is discovered that the government and the billionaire plan on using the comet for its rare minerals. Kate reacts strongly to this:

“They found out there’s a bunch of gold and diamonds and other rare shit in the comet and now they’re going to let it hit earth so a bunch of rich people can get even more disgustingly rich!”

This places a clear social ecofeminist view on the society depicted, relating to the ideal-type on described key critique. Placing the film within either of the two ideal-types on the link between woman/nature is less evident. While Kate does not exactly affiliate herself with nature, she cares for the planet more than most other characters in the film. Contradictory, this is used by other characters in the film to liken her with an emotional irrational, incapable of making decisions.

## **7 Discussion and concluding remarks**

In this concluding section of the thesis, the analysis findings will be summarized and discussed both from an ecofeminist perspective and from a wider socio-political one. Following that, is a conclusion as well as some hopeful words regarding potential future research.

### **7.1 Summary of the findings**

The analysis in section 6 showed that the female characters of the three films all displayed differences in regards to interactional control, ethos and metaphors. In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Furiosa presents herself as a listened-to leader - similarly to what Malorie eventually is forced to be in *Bird Box* - while Kate possesses no social power in *Don't Look Up*. Within all three of the films, there exists women who present nurturing and mothering ethoses. Naturalistic metaphors exist in both *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Bird Box*, while the perhaps most prevalent metaphor in *Don't Look Up* is its allegorized theme of environmental skepticism.

Through following interpretations of the films, discourses were found which may read both as appraising and skeptical of the female portrayals in the film. This is true especially for *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Don't Look Up*, where some interpreters of the film saw white men as the conclusive heroes of the films.

In all three of the films, the socialist or cultural ecofeminist ideal-types were identifiable in some fashion. *Mad Max: Fury Road* depicts a society appearing to symbolize a post-capitalist collapse, which at the same time is missing human connectedness in nature, echoing both the first socialist and cultural ecofeminist ideal-types. Although harder to place, *Bird Box* and *Don't Look Up* echo more of the capitalist-criticizing socialist ecofeminist ideal-type, as nature is not as present in the films. Regarding the second ideal-type, both *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Bird Box* contain female representations which appear to allude to a link between women and nature, reminiscent of the cultural ecofeminist ideal-type. This cannot be said of *Don't Look Up*, in which the female characters generally are subjected to discrimination *because of* patriarchal expectations of women, resonant with the socialist ecofeminist ideal-type.

## 7.2 Discussion

Despite the different analysis results in section 6, where different conclusions could be stated for the different female portrayals of the films - I find that the results demonstrate that there is a common female ideal conveyed in all of the films. Every film presents a strong female character leading the way and ultimately behaving in ways which help overcome the depicted disastrous climate scenario (although Kate likely perishes with the majority of the rest of the world in the final scenes of *Don't Look Up*, she leads the normatively correct way by arguing for counteractions against the comet). These women are all young, white and fulfill Western standards of beauty. Besides from this, two of the films (*Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Bird Box*) provide examples of female characters who display a connectedness to nature, much like cultural ecofeminists would second. These are my main arguments and likewise my answer to the research question, and I find that these women not only convey a theme of hope, but of motherhood and of nurture.



Bearing in mind section 2 of this thesis, cinematic influence goes beyond the movie theaters. When analyzing cinema, it is fruitful to investigate not only the circumstances behind and the contexts around a film - but also to discuss its potential socio-political effects. I believe that my main argument - that there is a certain female ideal in the three analyzed cli-fi films - can be interpreted in different ways. Women symbolizing hope could speculatively endorse the inclusion of women in climate politics and environmental actions, repeating Yate's (2022) message about female possibility (see the discursive practice in 6.1) through climate scenarios. In opposition to this, some would perhaps see the woman/nature link forwarded as a possible delay in the overcoming of gender stereotypes. This resonates with socialist ecofeminist Mellor's (1997) worries about "reactionary conservatives" using the dualism (see section 4.1.1). Mellor would perhaps point to a trend emerging after the attacks on September 11th 2001, namely a trend of reassuring American traditional masculinity in film (Benshoff & Griffin 2021, p. 294).

Through a further application of the theoretical framework on the analysis results, it becomes clear that traces of ecofeminism may be found in many aspects of the films, not only regarding those covered by the socialist and cultural ecofeminist ideal-types. The very basis of ecofeminism - that the environment and women both are subordinated - can be distinguished in both *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Don't Look Up*. In the sooner, women have no societal status whatsoever, and in the latter, Kate is not only overlooked, but harassed; by her ex-boyfriend who writes publicly of their sex, and by the president's son who attempts to kiss her. In both of these films, women are excluded from male-dominated societal spheres such as science and governance, and therefore operate through grassroots-like movements, much like the early ecofeminists. Moreover, the many female characters shown by the analysis to be e.g. nurturing and caring, accommodate to the cultural ecofeminist wish of reclaiming these qualities.

What may the analysis say about contemporary (American) societies, or about contemporary politics? Here, scrutinizing the wider settings of the films becomes relevant. From the discursive dimension analyses in sections 6.1-6.3, one might notice the scarce number of women involved in the production of the films - in fact, Susanne Bier stands out as the *only* woman involved in directing or screenwriting, once again echoing an ecofeminist critique of female exclusion. Does this imply that the films and female portrayals are anti-feminist and patriarchal? This is difficult to say. Ecofeminists, especially socialist ones, would likely point

out the patriarchal capitalism which underlies Hollywood, enabling the continuance of male domination. Benschoff and Griffin (2021) discuss the history of male dominance in Hollywood, while at the same time stating that the now increasing presence of women in Hollywood does not necessarily entail feminist films. Hollywood films tend to follow similar ideological or narrative formats, to which female directors perhaps feel obliged to abide (pp. 288, 290).

One of the interesting findings through the analyses of the films, is the theme of pregnancy in both *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Bird Box*. The depictions of pregnant women naturally remind us of cultural ecofeminism (see section 4.1.2), however it also awakens the topic of reproduction. What role does reproduction play in civilizations struck by climate disasters? This question will not be answered, as it is far too complex for this thesis. It may nevertheless be added that a growing number of scholars are interested in investigating the link between climate change and its effects, and human reproduction (Sasser 2023, p. 2).

In this discussion, the character of Kate in *Don't Look Up* too is highly interesting. Kate openly suffers from the anxiety which the comet (that is, the climate change) brings her; the comet is, in Boyle's (2013) words, a collective anxiety (see section 5.5.1). As a result, she avoids reflecting upon her future. This also has been a matter of interest for recent research. Climate change has been shown to significantly impact people's mental health, where depression, anxiety and guilt all have surfaced as symptoms of climate worrying. One of the ways in which the mental impact of climate change is evident, is through a growing reproductive hesitancy. Studies have shown that eco-anxiety has a negative effect on the reproductive plans of both millennials and Gen Z-ers (Sasser 2023, p. 8) - information which is interesting in the light of the reproductive theme of the remaining two films. Interesting also, is the American reproductive debate taking place right now after several states have restricted reproductive rights (OHCHR<sup>4</sup> 2023). This is not to assume Kate's sexuality, or to assume that Kate would have wanted children in a world unaffected by climate change - it is merely to shine light on some of the present-day research being outcarried.

Another one of the analyses' findings is the uniformity of race in the films; this accounts not only for female characters, but for the overall film casts. All of the films present black and

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<sup>4</sup> The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (United Nations)

other non-white portrayals. These are however dismissed to relatively small roles (the exception is Tom in *Bird Box*, who is black - yet Tom is no protagonist). It is no secret that Hollywood always has presupposed its viewers to identify with whiteness (Benshoff & Griffin 2021, p. 56). Despite efforts advocating for and defending a more diverse film industry, including the online movement “#oscarssowwhite” (Ibid, p. 100), Hollywood continues to be a place of white male dominance. 2023 saw the majority of female characters in speaking roles within the top grossing US films (which in turn were 35 % of all of the speaking roles) as being white (Lauzen 2023, pp. 1, 9). Whereas ecofeminism includes an intersectional dimension proclaiming that women of the third world suffer the most from exploitation (Mies & Vandana 1993, p. 20), it would doubtlessly be of interest to analyze non-Hollywood films from an ecofeminist perspective.

### **7.3 Reflections and segway into future research**

This thesis has explored the female representations of three contemporary Hollywood cli-fi films. It has also investigated ecofeminist theory, seeing if a framework largely written in the 1990s is relevant in today’s film.

As I was writing the thesis, I sometimes doubted my choice of analyzing *Bird Box*. Although the film’s success with audiences and its interpreted climate theme motivated my decision to include it, I wonder what could have been found through analyzing a film with a more straightforward tie to climate change. Further, I often wished I could have chosen a larger number of films for analysis. What conclusions would I have reached, had I analyzed ten or more films; or non-American films? I nonetheless deem my findings interesting. In a different situation, where I had been provided with more time and a longer text to produce, I would perhaps have considered executing a quantitative analysis, looking for specific elements - such as pregnancies - in the films. I find this interesting, taking into account the link between climate change and reproduction currently being observed. I now hope that future research seeks to study these questions closer.

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