

The speculative voice  
– huxley vs niccol  
(bnw and gattaca)  
essay sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The purpose of the speculative voice is to not only to warn people of inhumane trends developing into widely accepted culture but also to make people reconsider the whole idea of a “ utopian society”. The idea that a world can be a place of perfect equality between all humans and still have stability is an idea that if put into practice is sure to fail and cause upheaval and possibly the demise of humanity itself. A composer’s outlook on creativity comes from their contextual background, whether it be their social, cultural, political or personal history, their context has a profound effect on their texts. Aldous Huxley’s dystopian novel “ Brave New World”, published in 1932, explores the issues that can evolve from a totalitarian society where technology is considered more important than human values. Similarly in Andrew Niccol’s 1997 film “ Gattaca” people are dehumanised and branded by their genetic makeup. Though these texts were composed 60 years apart they both explore similar issues and share the same theme of technological, genetic and scientific advance taking over and replacing human values and culture.

The title “ Brave new world” is a quote taken from Shakespeare’s “ The Tempest”. It refers to Miranda’s Quote “ O’ brave new world that has such people in it” upon meeting people from the outside world for the first time in her life. She is overwhelmed with joy to see these exiting new people, However, Huxley used this as a juxtaposition to emphasise the bland, tasteless people of his dystopian society. Huxley’s use of the satirical title was to warn his high cultured audience -who would be familiar with the quote- about the current hype of the recent industrial revolution and how technology would eventually replace emotion and individuality if the trends

of the period were to continue. Thus resulting in a bleak dystopian society as Huxley accurately represents and mocks through the use of this satirical title. The idea of the title being a motif throughout the whole text is also present in Andrew Niccol's "Gattaca" where the word Gattaca represents DNA or gene coding. Gattaca was made in a time when IVF was just becoming available to people in developed countries.

This raised a lot of media attention as it went against religious beliefs. Many people argued that IVF could get out of hand to a point where it was pushing the boundaries of what it meant to be human. Niccol's protagonist Vincent has to strive to overcome his naturally selected genes that render him "invalid" in a world of idealistic genetically engineered "valids". The reference to genes in the title is ironic because although Vincent is genetically inadequate, with determination he achieves greater than his genetically engineered brother Anton. This reflects the ideas of the time that genetics are not to be tampered with because with perfection comes the loss of human qualities such as will power and determination which renders life itself pointless. Both composers use their speculative voice through the title of their text to show the irony of their proposed worlds and to link their context to their speculation of the future.

The speculative voice is a genre that explores current trends in society, amplified in a futuristic setting. Both composers create their own neologisms to make the audience consider the futuristic setting and to juxtapose the present with the future. Huxley creates terms such as Bokanovsky Process, soma, the feelies, pneumatic and electromagnetic golf to achieve this. The word Pneumatic is frequently used to describe both Lenina's appearance and <https://assignbuster.com/the-speculative-voice-huxley-vs-niccol-bnw-gattaca-essay-sample/>

chairs. Lenina boasts to Bernard that her lovers usually find her pneumatic and Bernard describes chairs as pneumatic both at the feelies and in Mond's office. The use of this word to describe both a woman and a piece of furniture outlines the novel's theme of humanity being degraded to the level of a commodity. In comparison Niccol's uses his own neologisms like de-gene-erate, borrowed-ladder, faith-birth and valid and in-valid. A recurring motif throughout the film is the use of in-valid and valid to describe people. Vincent is an "in-valid" and has to secretly use the DNA of "valid" cripple Jerome Morrow to pass as a valid and achieve his goal of becoming an astronaut, which also brands Vincent as a borrowed-ladder.

The way Niccol's uses valid and in-valid is similar to Huxley's use of the word pneumatic, to strip away any sense of human emotion and portray people as a worthless, replaceable item rather than a living, thinking human being. Both composers reflect on the idea that technological and scientific advancement, relative to their context, will eventually outweigh humanity's values. For composers to make an impact on their audience and deliver a didactic message about the faults of striving for a "utopia" is to use their speculative voice to create a "dystopia". Huxley uses the character of John The Savage to emphasize the faults in his proposed dystopian society. John grew up in a primitive Indian village where he was rejected. He was raised with only a Holy Bible and the Complete Works of William Shakespeare to gain insight from. In essence John is a Shakespearian character trapped in a world devoid of any emotion. This idea is projected through John's frustrated feelings towards Lenina. He can only see her as a heroin or an "impudent strumpet" which, neither view accurately describes her.

John's inability to integrate with the World State society and his rejection from the Indian village ultimately leads to his tragic suicide. In contrast the suicide of Gerome Morrow in *Gattaca* is not so much tragic but pitiful. After Vincent achieves his goal of becoming an astronaut Gerome feels as if he has no place left among society. This is evident in the scene where he is accused of being an in-valid by a security guard, because he is wheelchair bound. He is enraged by this judgemental assumption and repeatedly shouts " what's your number!" to belittle the security guard, as if he were going to report him to a higher authority. Niccol's uses Gerome's suicide in contrast with Vincent's achievement to highlight the fact that, this society won't be changed by Vincent's actions and Gerome's suicide by incinerator will go unnoticed.

Humanity will still be based on the validity of people's genetic makeup rather than their characteristics, thus rendering it a dystopian society. Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* can be described as a modern take on Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. They both explore the same themes of science and technology becoming the driving force of humanity rather than culture and emotion. Though the two composers use different forms to convey their speculative voice, Huxley using high cultured literature and Niccol's using film, they both send a didactic message on the dangers of a utopia by creating a dystopia that strips away individuality and emotion. Both composers take issues from their immediate context and amplify them in a futuristic setting in the hope that their audiences will consider the chosen issues and not let them determine the future.