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## ARTICLE

# Imagined and liquid reality, dystopia and virtuality in science fiction cinema: *Don't Worry Darling*, a case study

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## Abstract

The history of cinema has never shied away from the representation of the future, and beyond the abstract nature of the contemporary concept and its temporal fluctuations, the sheer profusion of scenarios and their different links to the very concept of the real have generated a wide range of futuristic film references, especially those conceptually linked to the dystopian.

This article presents a case study of *Don't Worry Darling*, directed by Olivia Wilde in 2022. It is a contemporary science fiction film proposal that condenses retro aestheticism and the American Way of Life with the historical proposals of science fiction and its forecasts about humanity's connection or disconnection with sensory reality and the birth of virtuality. The analytical methodology, which links patriarchal dystopia, virtual reality and gender studies, is based on the analysis of differentiating elements that provide signs with which to question the reality of the experiences of the film's main character and the environment that surrounds her.

This research employs a qualitative analysis by means of case analysis with a dual approach: the audiovisual language and signs of gaps in the filmic reality created. Firstly, the audiovisual language will be analysed through the use of the *decoupage* technique and, secondly, the sequences that generate gaps in the filmic fiction and lead the spectator to realize that he or she is facing a simulation

of reality will be organized. The anomalies identified and inferred have been subdivided for analysis into: unrealistic space/time (synchronizations and repetitions, duplications, spatial incongruities, logical errors and perfections), mediated reality and the eye metaphor and, finally, diegetic technological analysis.

### Keywords

cinema; dystopia; science fiction; technology; virtual reality

## *La realidad imaginada y líquida, la distopía y la virtualidad en el cine de ciencia ficción: Don't Worry Darling, un estudio de caso*

### Resumen

*La historia del cine nunca se ha alejado de la representación del futuro, y más allá de la naturaleza abstracta del concepto contemporáneo y sus fluctuaciones temporales, la enorme profusión de escenarios y sus diferentes vínculos con el concepto real han generado una amplia gama de referencias cinematográficas futuristas, especialmente aquellas conceptualmente vinculadas a la distopía.*

*Este artículo presenta un estudio de caso de Don't Worry Darling, dirigida por Olivia Wilde en 2022. Es una propuesta de película de ciencia ficción contemporánea que condensa la estética retro y el estilo de vida estadounidense con las propuestas históricas de ciencia ficción y sus previsiones sobre la conexión o desconexión de la humanidad con la realidad sensorial y el nacimiento de la virtualidad. La metodología analítica, que vincula la distopía patriarcal, la realidad virtual y los estudios de género, se basa en el análisis de elementos diferenciadores que proporcionan signos con los que cuestionar la realidad de las experiencias del personaje principal de la película y el entorno que la rodea.*

*Esta investigación emplea un análisis cualitativo mediante análisis del caso con un enfoque doble: el lenguaje audiovisual y los signos de brechas en la realidad cinematográfica creada. En primer lugar, el lenguaje audiovisual se analizará mediante el uso de la técnica de decoupage y, en segundo lugar, se organizarán las secuencias que generan brechas en la ficción cinematográfica y harán que el espectador se dé cuenta de que se enfrenta a una simulación de la realidad. Las anomalías identificadas e inferidas se han subdividido para su análisis en: espacio/tiempo poco realista (sincronizaciones y repeticiones, duplicaciones, incongruencias espaciales, errores lógicos y perfeccionamientos), realidad mediada y metáfora ocular y, por último, análisis tecnológico diegético.*

### Palabras clave

*cine; distopía; ciencia ficción; tecnología; realidad virtual*

## Introduction

The confluence of the perception of the environment and the current changing context is derived from a different stage of gaze (Debray 1994). The stable, predictable and routine transition is altered by a reality in constant evolution, in which new technologies prevail (García 2019, 12). In effect, we move in a liquid, flexible and inconsistent world that Bauman (2002) contrasts with solid, routine time endowed with stability and certainty. This theory describes certain aspects of contemporary society, in an era characterized by fluidity and instability, both economically and in the workplace, where traditional social structures and relationships have become volatile and ephemeral. The dissolution

of one's own certainties forces individuals to continuously adapt to a new social structure in which all its components evolve at high speed. In it, a multitude of new means of instant communication are generated but, paradigmatically, they can also lead to fragmentation and alienation (Bauman 2002).

This includes technology and, in particular, this study focuses on virtual reality<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter VR) and its representation in contemporary cinema. Arguably, contemporaneity itself is another volatile and continuously mutable concept by definition. VR, from a technological point of view, has three main characteristics (immersion, interactivity and virtual environment). However, its use within cinematic fiction can be further subdivided into a technological tool for creation, or a dystopian subcategory within the science fiction imaginary, as a metaphor for

1. Virtual reality (VR), the use of computer modelling and simulation that enables a person to interact with an artificial three-dimensional (3-D) visual or other sensory (Lowood 2023).

imagined social evolutions, usually of a repressive and authoritarian, or respectively Huxlerian, elusive nature. If we add a further breakdown of each technological feature, it could be even greater; as Nilsson *et al.* (2016) say, “immersion in VR could be a property of the system, immersion as a response to the development of narrative, diegetic or virtual characters, and immersion as a response to challenges that demand the use of intellect or sensorimotor skills.”

While the technological gap is becoming increasingly extreme in this world and its geographical and socio-economic differences, Needham (1974) questioned the success of technological development if it is only applied to certain cultural contexts and specific environments. His idea is based on the lack of consideration of the recipient's cultural environment and its influence on his or her own use of technology, recognizing through his research the gap in knowledge to be filled at that time. Other studies, such as Ruse (2005), focus on technological evolution and follow Bergson's approach to the relevance of multidisciplinary human research in technological development.

The case study of *Don't Worry Darling* (Olivia Wilde 2022) confronts this paradigm of the classical with this liquid reality taken to its maximum expression, where traditional institutions are durable and less meaningful, as well as the use of VR as a social metaphor. Paradoxically, the omnipresence of images does not perfect our ability to read but rather reduces it to disenchantment, superficiality and the literalness of reiterative meanings (González 2016, 232).

Nevertheless, the proliferation of images in Western society and the integration of technology in everyday life, which governs the way we live, is what Olivia Wilde uses as the basis for the frustration of the classical, patriarchal, nuclear and heterosexual structure of the family in this film. To do so, she uses the interference posed by the recurring dilemma of whether technology governs the worldview of the human being, as both its creator and subject at the same time (Couto 2015, 110), in the duality of marriages, knowledge and the use of VR. This is not a new plot in the history of science fiction, as will be discussed in this text, but what might make *Don't Worry Darling* an interesting case to analyse is the lack of awareness on the part of the viewer that the main character is in a VR immersion as opposed to the usual cases. That is, the audience is forced, without any other choice, to follow Alice's path to discover that the world she is immersed in is a simulation of which she is unaware. The different mechanisms to reach that conclusion will be analysed in this text.

The bond of reciprocity between science fiction cinema and society is undeniable: the mutual relationship of events as predictions or consequences of social occurrences (Delgado 2012, 342). On the other hand, the realism of the events shown on the screen will depend on different factors, such as judgement, the feeling of veracity and the credibility of the image (Torregrosa 2010, 202); although this image may not be real itself, its construction is a product of technologies such as virtual reality. A clear divergence emerges: the use of VR in the films themselves, or the approximation of science fiction to the characters through the recording of real worlds, which purport to be a simulation.

Both options are found in the analysis of *Don't Worry Darling*, as the use of CGI is present, but the bulk of this analysis and its methodology will be based on the latter.

Significant technological advances have allowed VR to create narratives in space and time in cinema, in which differentiating between physical and created reality (Rojas-Redondo & Barranco 2021, 449) is complex. Reality, as Berger and Luckmann (2003, 34) state, is not an automatic conception that is the product of vision, but a construction created by the eye when seeing. It is a representation that can be influenced by gender, social, cultural and economic factors (Justo Von *et al.* 2011, 2), which means that the reading of a work is conditioned by the norms of its creator, thus governing its understanding of previously established parameters. This is based on the iconicity of the object and its degree of similarity to its reference in the real world (Vilasuso 2018, 28). The user's doubts about the veracity of cinematic experiences arise from their perception of the degree of similarity and the likelihood that these experiences are perceived as real and the iconicity of the subjects or objects. In the current context, fictional cinema acquires the basis for visualizing a coherent and possible imagery (Quintana 2011, 106) within a virtual space.

Therefore, it is worth revisiting the main objective of this text, although, as already mentioned, the links between liquid reality and its corresponding nostalgia for other historical periods, as well as virtual technological dystopia, intersect in the proposed case study. *Don't Worry Darling* is a paradigmatic and significant example directly linked to these intersections of concepts and their ideological translation into film narrative, which is what is to be analysed.

## 1. Links between science fiction, dystopia, and virtual reality

The virtual is often associated with digital technologies and is loosely defined as the opposite of the real world. VR creates simulations, synthetic images created by a computer, with the illusion of movement and three-dimensionality that includes, along with the adhesion of real objects and subjects, an increase in its degree of realism, managing to produce the effects of the world perceived through the sensory organs. Its purpose is not representation; it is a representation in itself that seeks to overcome reality and be perceived as such (Castañares 2011). Taking it a step further, in this film case study, the spectator views a character who is a passive spectator of her own life, which turns a conservative utopia into a dystopia.

The current technological gap is enormous and continues to increase. Within neoliberal capitalism of unlimited growth, technology is perceived as an engine of innovation and progress for humanity. However, it is worth mentioning that in the history of literature and cinema, its conception is usually dystopian, especially as the origin of catastrophes, collapse or the subjugation of humanity (Aibar 2022,

3). As Vizcarra (2012, 79) states, modernity is a distant representation of futuristic cinema and has been the fundamental basis of science fiction narratives, in which civilization and barbarism coexist. Futuristic cinema moves away from the naive concept of photography as a faithful representation, more closely resembling the fusion of the elements of which real space is comprised and virtual elements that produce joint architectural spaces to manipulate the composition of said elements and to represent its own version of reality (Palomo & Reséndiz 2022, 73).

Therefore, it is necessary to briefly define *dystopia*. The birth of this term was preceded by its opposite: *utopia*. The concept of utopia arises from the publication in 1516 of the homonymous work by Tomas Moro (2016). The concept appears in the historical context of cultural expansion during the Renaissance. In the 19th century, the term *uchronia*, which presents an alternative history to real events, was first coined by Charles-Bernard Renouvier in 1857 in his book, *Uchronie: L'utopie dans l'Histoire* (2015). In this work, he describes what the Roman Empire would have become with a slight change of the events.

Finally, the concept of dystopia was born, referenced for the first time more than three centuries after its antonym, with the rise of the Industrial Revolution. It is based on the birth of new political trends, in parallel with the birth of new social classes and socioeconomic structures following the massive abandonment of rurality for much more oppressive urban environments. *Dystopia*, coined by John Stuart Mill, first appeared in 1868 and is considered one of the main exponents of classical liberalism. According to Aulestia and Paéz (2017, 440-44), cinematic dystopia has diverse elements: socio-political, eco-telluric, biological and technological. These categories are not watertight, because, in analysis, many of the constellations of images and plots in science fiction are born out of the intertwining of these elements, with a relative causality between them that leads humanity to its own destruction.

VR has been widely represented in the science fiction genre, in the form of full-length feature films or TV series. This analysis builds on previous studies linking science fiction, VR and dystopia, such as Lencina's *Ronald Reagan's reality-show is the monster: John Carpenter's They Live* (2019) or *Paraisos artificiales: la utopía cibernética en eXistenZ* by Merás (2014). In the case of the former, John Carpenter's *They Live*, released in 1988, takes up elements from science fiction with the aim of reworking the conventional form of the monster by using modified black sunglasses, managing to peel away the layers of illusion. In a convulsive American social context, under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, this film proposes a shallow metaphor for the devastating social consequences that this new leadership will have on the popular classes through capitalist propaganda, the rise of unemployment and the phenomenon of homelessness (Lencina 2019, 3). In the second case, Merás proposes a journey through biotechnology with an openly metaphorical, science-fictional sexual component and the ethical-psychological debate of the characters in the face of this post-New Flesh that contrasts the real-biological and the virtual-technological in game mode.

Other paradigmatic cases on television would be the fundamental *Black Mirror* (Jones & Brooker 2011-present) and its different interpretations of the world understood through VR and its consequences, such as the episode "San Junipero" (season 3, chapter 4) and the conscious evasion of the sensory real world and its corporal limitations or the video game-centered episode "Playtest" (season 3, chapter 2), which cannot avoid being compared to the Cronenbergian example by doubting whether or not what is experienced belongs to the game. The TV series *The Peripheral* (Nolan *et al.*, 2022-present), despite having more action content and eliminating the caustic interpretation of technology, has been compared to *Black Mirror*, and the presence of an immersive virtual world in which characters interact beyond the expected is once again present in an admittedly dystopian and socially oppressive future.

## 2. *Don't Worry Darling*: background and case study of an example of paradigmatic evolution. "I've been waiting for someone like you, someone to challenge me... like a good girl"

In the film *Don't Worry Darling* (Wilde 2022), the ideal established in 1950s America is simulated, an exploitation of the American Way of Life, clearly outdated today. The sexual and patriarchal organization of work in the social project, with assigned gender roles, as well as the predominant heterosexual construction in the form of a nuclear family of the couples accepted into it, would constitute a rather simplistic metaphor for the current yearnings of the most reactionary part of today's society and the old, repeated mantra that all times past were better.

This initial situation is presented to the audience without a minimum of temporal contextualization. As mentioned before, choosing this film as an example to expose the links between dystopia and VR is due to the fact that in it, unlike the vast majority of contemporary cases observed, virtuality is integrated into the reality that the main character (Alice) inhabits, hidden from the audience itself, the external observer. This means that the audience must gradually realize that what is presented to them is constructed and false by means of different film mechanisms that have been identified in the footage.

The film is set in a small town in the desert, the main headquarters of Project Victory. The sexual division of labour and gender roles are presented as a matter of course: a group of women who must keep their identical terraced houses clean, dinner cooked for their husbands' daily arrival and maintain high sexual capital (Illouz & Kaplan 2022) within normative corporeality. Their husbands work all day, outside, for the project. The inspiration from the book *The Stepford Wives* by Ira Levin (1972), as well as the film of the same name (Bryan Forbes 1975), or the terrible black humor remake of 2004 directed by Frank Oz, is evident. The evolution from android housewives or women with behaviour-modifying brain chips to VR hostages is a logical evolution in the contemporary world and its aforementioned liquid reality.



However, this supposedly classic happiness – a nightmare for many of today's women – one might say, is truncated and perverted unraveling around corners as the protagonist, Alice, one of the perfect wives, progresses through the plot of this quiet, isolated community. With a retro aesthetic, the film bases its action on the helpful and subjugated role of the group of women: sex, cooking and cleaning, support and strength (“you are my pillar, I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you”, says Fran to his wife). A homogeneous, white, highly erotic and bourgeois group that spends its days in the golden cage prepared for them that Olivia Wilde shows through the mechanisms this article will analyse.

Women are asked to be discreet above all else, to renounce to wisdom and knowledge, not to know what their husbands are working on, and not to go out of the city (do the women even know where they are? Spoiler: no). The link with Genesis, as a shallow metaphor for reactionary Judeo-Christian morality, is present. Alice's quest for knowledge jump-starts this story in which all the characters who surround her will gaslight her to avoid the non-existence of such a project, an alternative virtual world in which men who feel that the modern world has robbed them of their strong and nurturing masculinity forcefully take their wives while keeping them literally tied to the bed with VR devices hooked to their eyes. In this film, Project Victory does not exist, but the dystopian patriarchy that binds and locks women up does.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology of analysis is a case study of *Don't Worry Darling*. Its construction in this paper resembles other examples of VR analysis in science fiction filmmaking, such as the aforementioned works by Merás (2014) or Lencina (2019), and of particular interest is *Análisis textual comparado entre dos versiones fílmicas de The Stepford Wives (1975-2004) el género como dispositivo biopolítico* (Escribá 2016). This research employs a qualitative analysis by means of a dual approach: the audiovisual language and the signs of gaps created in the film reality that gradually demonstrate to the viewers and to the protagonist herself the glitches in VR. Firstly, the audiovisual language will be analysed using the decoupage technique, which is a method of film analysis that consists of breaking down the sequences of a film into shots in order to subsequently analyse them in greater detail. Etymologically, the term *decoupage* comes from the French word *découper*, which means ‘to split’. Several viewings of the film have been carried out, resulting in a complete analysis of all the sequences it is comprised of. On the other hand, connotative or denotative elements of jumps, imperfections that are, it could be said, not real in this world and already known to be virtual, have been identified. By contrasting these selected sequences to identify such elements with the list, the representative clips of each case are detected and a complete decoupage of these sequences is performed (see [Appendix I](#) for more information).

From the film analysis of *Don't Worry Darling*, it can be concluded that the 122-minute film is composed of a total of 76 sequences divided into scenarios of ordinary life (Project Victory) and visions (Alice's past life). Following an analysis of non-realistic space/time, a series of phenomena that occur throughout the film can be identified, and this patriarchal utopia is deconstructed throughout the story with the incongruities of physical laws such as gravity or with the dimensionality and distance of objects, typical of VR, so as to provide signals for questioning the veracity of experiences. The anomalies identified and inferred have been subdivided for analysis into: unrealistic space/time (synchronizations and repetitions, duplications, spatial incongruities, logical errors and perfections), mediated reality and the eye metaphor and, finally, diegetic technological analysis.

#### 3.1. Unrealistic space/time

In the film, even though most of the footage functions around a neat, retro and realistic aesthetic, there are moments where space/time does not correspond to human perception in natural conditions, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and indecision about reality. This cognitive dissonance is worked narratively in a peculiar way, as it does not allow the otherness of the external vision and always puts the public in the protagonist's shoes, with a variety of shots, from the wide and general long shots (LG) to details in big close-ups (BCU), focusing either on subjectivity or expecting her reactions, more exacerbated with each step. Perceived reality diverges between what is actually believed to be reality and the experience of simulations or memories, breaking down the gap between reality and imagination in a narrative in which different temporal and physical spaces coexist simultaneously.

##### 3.1.1. Synchronisations and repetitions

Real life is not perfect, rather, it is based on entropy and causality. So, the extreme synchronization of actions separates the spectator from the reality filmed and proposed by Wilde, like a pattern that lets us see the threads that connect the pieces. The elimination of the viewer's suspension of disbelief slips through the gaps of VR in its simulated perfection. As an example of this, the perfectly coordinated departure of cars and husbands every morning (s. 4, 21, 28, 60), children who dress alike and speak at the same time (s. 14) or the repetition through the radio that all women are one entity (s. 22). But it is not only synchronization that is present throughout the film; the repetition of actions such as breakfasts (s. 3, 44, 59) and housework (s. 6, 61) overwhelms the viewer and is a metaphor for daily oppression. The discovery, at dinner time (s. 47), that all the couples' stories have the same origin and development is a plot twist that makes Alice's mental castle crumble. The ballet scenes are of particular importance, both in the protagonist's reality and in her visions. The teacher repeats “There is beauty in control, there is grace

in symmetry.” The dance is a metaphor for synchronization and control over the bodies of the kidnapped women (s. 8, 26, 31, 76) [Figure 1].



Figure 1. Synchronization in *Don't Worry Darling* (Olivia Wilde, 2022)  
Source: New Line Cinema & Vertigo Entertainment

### 3.1.2. Duplications

The other, the mirror as a metaphor for the doubling-up of reality, the virtual and the kidnapped, both of which Alice experiences, is present throughout the film in the house-cleaning tasks (s. 61) [Figure 2], as well as, above all, in the ballet classes. In one of them, Alice sees her reflection as Margaret (s. 31), a woman from Project Victoria who is supposed to be losing her mind, the guilt falling on this racialized character, with all its weight and social ostracism, for the presumed death of her son while trying to escape from the Project. Alice sees herself as Margaret in one of her visions, trying violently to headbutt her way out of the mirror that traps her in a world that is not hers. Even the portal out of reality is a mirror that Alice uses unsuccessfully on one occasion and successfully at the end of the film (s. 75). In numerous films, mirrors are used to symbolize the inner search of the protagonist, the process of identification in this world and even to show a split in their personality.



Figure 2. Duplication in *Don't Worry Darling* (Olivia Wilde, 2022)  
Source: New Line Cinema & Vertigo Entertainment

### 3.1.3. Spatial incongruities

The errors regarding space are continuous, signifying the spatial incoherence of the suburb with the imperfection of the computer program that generates Alice's reality. Perhaps the most paradigmatic example

of this is the scene in which, as the protagonist cleans the physical space between the wall and the glass, it begins to shrink over her (s. 29), trapping her, drowning her. Instantly, everything returns to perfect normality [Figure 3].

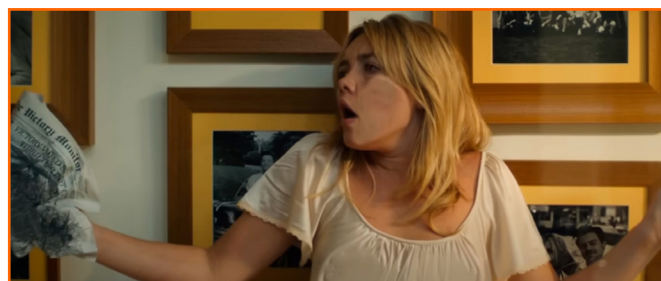


Figure 3. Spatial incongruity in *Don't Worry Darling* (Olivia Wilde, 2022)  
Source: New Line Cinema & Vertigo Entertainment

### 3.1.4. Logical errors

Such errors throughout the film underscore this counter-logical constructed VR, none of which could occur in the real world. A box of eggs, one after another, with nothing inside, is logically impossible in reality and animal sexuality (s. 11), this is one of the first triggers that Alice experiences in her home and her life as a housewife. A plane crashes in the mountains near Project Victoria (s. 23), an accident of which there is no trace. As for Margaret's suicide and miraculous recovery, as if this circumstance were not enough, when Alice decides to steal the papers from the doctor (s. 38) she cannot read them as they are pre-censored for her eyes for safety purposes in a world that is designed to keep her in darkness [Figure 4].

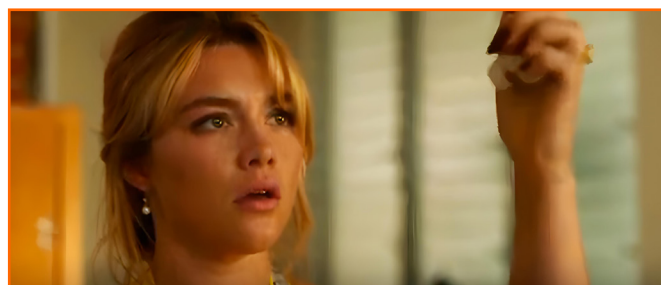


Figure 4. Logical error in *Don't Worry Darling* (Olivia Wilde, 2022)  
Source: New Line Cinema & Vertigo Entertainment

## 3.2. Intermediated reality, the eye metaphor

The continuous zenithal shots remind the audience of the visual organs, the ever-present eye as a metaphor for the designed and monitored control over Alice and the other women. As Roman Gubern would say: “Having eliminated the camera and the spectator, the synthesized

image is born of an eye without a body” (Gubern 1996). References to eyes are scattered throughout the film: circular placement of cars (s. 60), frying pans and boiling pots (s. 27), the model of the project (s. 14), architectural elements and the symmetry of the real and hallucinated dances (s. 35). The eye is what Alice pierces for the viewer to discover the cruel reality (s. 52, 53), that she is a professional surgeon and Jack a failed gamer who begins to take an interest in a website that states: “Modern society has stifled our true selves, our biological destiny.” After Jack’s death and the pursuit of the man in red, Alice goes through the mirror and the last eye that accompanies the story (s. 76), and she is finally heard waking up in her bed, but a black background no longer allows the viewer to accompany her.

### 3.3. Technology

In the Victoria project, technology is a retro proposal in consonance with the rest of the community. Tube TVs (s. 34) with programmes intended for idle housewives, the radio (s. 22) playing and accompanying the women in their daily chores while bombarding them with reactionary slogans: “Thank you for being quiet, thank you for supporting your husbands, thank you for knowing how to keep yourselves in second place, etc.” Also, landlines hanging on the wall, like the one from which Alice receives Margaret’s desperate call (s. 30) [Figure 5, left].

In contrast, the virtual reality devices attached to the faces of the abducted women (s. 65) as they lie in their beds have a counter-presence; small, ultra-technological, modern for the contemporary era [Figure 5, right]. This technology is only useful to the subjugated women, it will never be at their disposal throughout the film, and the public will not be allowed to view it until the source of the inconsistencies observed in the footage is revealed.



Figure 5. Comparative Technology in *Don't Worry Darling* (Olivia Wilde, 2022)

Source: New Line Cinema & Vertigo Entertainment

## Conclusions

The perception of reality is the common thread that runs through the narrative analysed. While technology paradoxically increases personal interconnectedness and, at the same time, the isolation of the individ-

ual, virtual reality would be one of its most notable expressions in the contemporary liquid world and its filmic expressions. In relation to the objective of the study, different conclusions can be drawn from the representation in contemporary science fiction cinema and the repressive ideologies represented therein, as well as the protagonist’s yearning for liberation as a current trend in science fiction.

In the specific case of *Don't Worry Darling*, immersion in simulated reality reduces the critical thinking and curiosity of the women who inhabit the Victoria Project, focusing their existences on the superficiality of content, being a literal blinder to the real environment in the form of the optical device that their male partners place on them after their abduction and rebirth. All this in order to physically represent the reactionary patriarchal nostalgia for the solid reality and nuclear structure of the old values generated in this dystopia.

However, minor or major signs of incoherence in actions or events (synchronizations and/or repetitions), natural behaviours (duplications), spatial incongruities or outright impossible errors, added to the purely gaslighting responses and interactions of the characters surrounding Alice, are a wake-up call to the viewer as a turning point in the veracity of the perceived reality, as well as a metaphor for the struggle for emancipation in the protagonist’s awareness of her own repressive situation in an archaic society, like an island in the modern world.

Likewise, Olivia Wilde proposes to the audience a symbolic game with music and references to the watchful eye, continually mediating the reality experienced by the protagonist and accompanied by the spectator. It is relevant to highlight how the degree of immersion in virtual reality increases chronologically in science fiction cinema as the technology itself advances in parallel. That is to say, the characters go from having an experience in front of a screen simulating television to being, in this case, totally immersed in an environment created with narratives in different space-time scenarios. However, the degree of willingness to evade reality, represented as crude and indifferent, diminishes; it becomes involuntary, with the kidnapping, plotted unilaterally by the romantic partners and failed men from the conservative patriarchal vision of the male provider, of the women who comprise the Victoria Project.

The interest in lived experiences leaves the physical world aside to evolve toward the mental world, constituting the predominance of mind over body. The passivity of the female body lying in bed and, in turn, active in the more traditional role of caregiver, housewife and provider of sexual relief, constitutes the dystopia of technology and the lack of limits between reality and fiction all of which draws our attention to the role and capacity of humanity in a markedly technological future.

In conclusion, *Don't Worry Darling* differs from most current or past films that integrate VR into dystopia by masking VR itself, its technologies and its elements while gradually revealing its imperfections in the creation of immersion, which generates the original approach of this study. Technological evolution in today’s liquid society is integrated into the immersive concealment throughout the film, generating a specific contemporary case where new technologies and retro aesthetics, as



well as the archaic, its traditional and patriarchal longing and its liquid evolution are intertwined. It is certainly difficult to anticipate the new narratives of emerging science fiction cinema, nevertheless, the immersive technological dystopia will be increasingly present

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