In this critical reflection I will create a dystopian vision of the future, examining the waste economy that the Western world has created, fueled by Capitalist principles that led to mass consumerism. We stripped the world bare in our search for happiness in material goods. This piece looks at the effects of our greed.

**Christmas, 2999**

On the eve of his tenth Christmas, Fukushima sat next to his mother, beside a table groaning under the weight of food. As he took the travelator down the hallway to the third comfort room, a Christmas tree, twice the size of last year’s, stood surrounded by piles of elegantly wrapped presents, in the new state of the art snow, with snowmen that danced incessantly. The snow remained frozen even with the nuclear heating this house possessed. Fukushima stood next to the presents that rose to his rotund waist, which he blamed on that silly medication that the robot gave him to cure his diabetes. And all this for only two people! The boy thought he was lucky, but not as lucky as little Electron down the road; his pile of presents came up to his shoulders! After filling his body with as much food he could eat, throwing the vast remains into the rubbish chute, he was carried to the library by the travelator, where he gazed at the holograms of books hovering in the air. He liked to just look at them, and if one caught his eye, he would touch it lightly and the information would be transmitted into the chip in his arm, which everyone now had to have. Tonight, a title by Bocock (1993), attractive due to the images on the front, would be briefly considered. His voice danced around the room as the hologram opened, talking about how consumer goods are used as symbols of social status and wealth; consumption can be seen as a way of establishing differences between different social groups (Bocock, 1993). He listened; bored, realising it was on a topic his mother ridiculed. Just because we have toilets that massage and moisturise, whilst those poor people down the road only have toilets that use mineral water, does not mean we feel the need to differentiate ourselves. After the chip absorbed the information, he travelled up to his rooms, stopping only to gaze at the beautiful nuclear reactors that pulsed before him. They were everywhere now, the world’s only source of power since those dirty trees had been consumed. He sank into his marshmallow bed, ordered his breakfast from the robot to be brought to his room, and dreamed about money.
Christmas, 3069, seventy years later

On the eve of his tenth Christmas, the boy sat next to the portrait of his mother, beside a carrot and a slice of donkey, balanced on a broken television. Luctus gazed around the cave that he had made his own, built out of disused electronics and slabs of plastic. Outside, his world was a wasteland, islands of consumer goods that were the remnants of planet Earth. Five years ago, a wave of typhoons had destroyed the ravaged earth, causing nuclear reactors to meltdown, leading to the deaths of billions of people, and the end of life as it was known. The destruction of the world through environmental degradation and resource consumption had been occurring for a long time (Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2001; Faraclas & Werlhof, 2001) prior to the catastrophe, resulting in a deficit of fresh water, food and energy resources. Now, most of his family had been killed, his home gone. When it first happened, all he had left was his grandpa, who taught him all the knowledge he could remember. At night, to chase away the hunger, he told the boy stories of Christmases past, when he had a library that was filled with information. How he had multiple escalators to take him around his house, and all the presents a little boy could dream of. Now even his grandpa was gone, poisoned by contaminated fish; the toxins another consequence of nuclear waste. Since then, Luctus spent his time foraging for food and knowledge, trying to understand what had led to the destruction of his world.

Diary Entry: 24/12/3076. Seven years later

I sat amongst the waste of generations upon generations of humans, ruminating on what possibly could have led to this catastrophe. Some years ago, I managed to salvage a hologram that talks about consumer society, and some theories around it. It is one of my most treasured possessions, mostly because it reminds me of my Granddad. He had spent most of his life researching this topic, and he passed his knowledge onto me. Now he is gone, I am curious to discover why my life has become a struggle for survival, hunting for food amongst worthless “luxury” goods. A phrase my grandfather used to repeat sarcastically, written in another world by Featherstone, came to mind; “The new consumption ethic... celebrated living for the moment, hedonism, self-expression, the body beautiful, paganism and freedom from social obligations” (Featherstone, 2007: 112). Well if only they could see where their hedonism and living for the moment have got us now I thought bitterly, using a rusted broken Dolce & Gabbana headpiece, made out of the tears of orangutans, to pick the dirt out of my improvised shoe. Their consumption and lack of consideration for their waste ensured the taxing of future generations; I was paying for their selfish self-indulgence. All that remains are a waste ground of brands; the previous symbols of happiness were now symbolic of humanity’s destruction.

The hologram I examined yesterday talked about consumerism and capitalism being interlinked, as the capitalist system needs to generate profit to survive. Consumerism is a crucial component in this, as individuals need to work for little money to then buy products to fuel the system. What I did not understand, however, was why people work all their lives to buy goods they do not need? My life consists of enduring, searching for survivors and hunting for food. Any luxuries that I have are prized, like the wind-up toy car my grandfather gave me. Sklair (2002) talked about how there is an ideology of consumerism that motivates people to become consumers To try and understand, I found a hologram by Baudrillard, which told me that consumption has a symbolic level, and the acquisition of symbols motivates people to do paid work (Baudrillard, 1988).

So consumerism provides a sense of social identity, a coherent sense of who they are and how they want others to perceive them.
(Lyotard, 1984). Did people really need jewellery constructed from the feathers of extinct birds, hair designed to smell like opium, or to ski in the desert? Did their identity really need to be constructed around what they did and what they bought, could not they have been content with the sight of natural beauty, as I am, such as a golden sunset or a luminous moon?

I stumble on a sign; “Harrods” that is dusty and speckled with dirt. It is encircled by a plastic, life-size elephant, dressed in a Prada crocodile skin. I recoiled, shocked at the waste of an animal, slaughtered for its skin. Did not people realise that the continuous destruction of nature will lead to a catastrophe of paucity? An adored work by Featherstone provided a glimpse of knowledge on scarcity that baffled me. Apparently, the promise that the discipline and sacrifices needed in the process of production will lead to the overcoming of scarcity as consumer needs and pleasures are met (Featherstone, 2007). This was a cultural image within capitalist societies! Ha, I reflected. Maybe this explains how this happened. The overcoming of scarcity will happen as consumer needs and pleasures are met! Absurd. Of course, the very nature of a consumer culture ensures that consumer needs are never met; there is always an item that is shinier, slightly improved, an obvious must have. At least, that is what the adverts I have examined have told me. And when that item is deemed unfashionable, it is discarded, thrown onto the ever increasing mountains of waste that now engulf me, products that leave their poisons for thousands of years. Islands of rubbish that float on the oceans, smattered with baby birds and whales that have died from eating plastics, landfills that now fill the sky.

I was devastated by the concept of global food wastage; supermarkets would prefer to throw food away than send it to those in need! Through the depletion of ground water, Coca-Cola destroyed Keralan peasants’ crops! Pesticides and fertilizers that killed birds, bees and fish! (Evans, Campbell & Murcott, 2013). To think that people starved whilst food decomposed in rubbish tips! To think that instead of reusing and recycling goods, they were carelessly rejected! I climbed to the top of a mountain of waste, and gazed at the world. The sun glinted off electronics, broken robots, and items with names branded into their flesh. As far as the eye can see, there were masses of human production, once sold and adored. Now, everything is worthless. The people these goods belonged to are dead, any hope of their children and grandchildren living on are gone. If only they had opened their eyes. If only they had seen.

However, I think I have discovered why people attached symbols to goods; Adorno spoke of how goods are given a secondary-use value, so their original use-value is forgotten (Rose, 1978). What happens next is commodities are advertised, exploited and linked to images that satisfied minds, hearts and wallets; of romance, beauty, success, scientific progress and the good life. Apparently, this all links back to the capitalist system, which required infinite growth on a finite planet. The ideology that everyone can have everything led to the destruction of everything! How short sighted they were!

In trying to discover happiness and a sense of meaning, humankind destroyed nature, the only thing that is needed to sustain life. In their search to discover more, progress further, and possess all knowledge, they caused the annihilation of all human advancement and achievements. All that was solid, all they created, has melted into air.
Bibliography:


Picture 1:


Picture 2:


Picture 3:

http://www.nov.com/images/articles/epic_concept01.jpg