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Aestheticizing Politics and Politicizing Aesthetics: The Dialectic of Power and Resistance in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*

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aesthetics, politics, power, resistance, dystopia, The Hunger Games

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamic interplay between aesthetics and politics in Suzanne Collins's dystopian novel The Hunger Games. It examines how the Capitol's construction of spectacle and propaganda aestheticizes violence and control, while the resistance movement led by Katniss Everdeen politicizes aesthetics to challenge hegemonic power structures. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord, the study investigates how aesthetics function as a medium of both domination and resistance. The analysis focuses on the Capitol's use of visual and performative elements—from the luxurious costumes of its citizens to the meticulously orchestrated pageantry of the Games—to reinforce its authoritarian rule and legitimize systemic violence. At the same time, characters such as Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark subvert this spectacle through acts of defiance and self-representation that politicize beauty, performance, and symbolism. By weaponizing aesthetics, the protagonists transform tools of oppression into instruments of dissent, destabilizing the Capitol's narrative and inspiring collective resistance. The paper ultimately demonstrates how art and politics intersect to shape perception, ideology, and social change in contemporary dystopian fiction.

Introduction

The fusion of aesthetics and politics for ideological purposes has been around since ancient Egypt and Rome. Throughout history, aesthetics has been a powerful tool used to both legitimize and challenge political power. On one hand, we have powerful regimes employing the aestheticization of politics, a concept coined by Walter Benjamin (1969), to warrant their authoritarian rule, intimidate the population, and distract everyone from their oppressive tactics. On the other hand, marginalized communities and oppressed groups have politicized aesthetics as a means of resistance to expose injustices, subvert dominant narratives, and make their presence visible in the public sphere. With the advent of mass media, this manipulation of aesthetics has become more widespread and effective in the contemporary age. The current study explores the intersection of aesthetics and politics in Suzanne Collins' novel *The Hunger Games*, the first part of the trilogy. By applying Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord's theoretical frameworks, this paper highlights the transformative potential of aesthetics in contesting and reconfiguring power structures in the dystopian society of *The Hunger Games*.

Suzanne Collins's widely acclaimed dystopian series, consisting of *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*, is set in a place called Panem, a post-apocalyptic nation governed by a totalitarian regime under the leadership of President Snow. At the heart of the trilogy is the annual event called the Hunger Games, a competition broadcast live across all twelve districts of Panem, meant to pacify, entertain, and instil fear in the populace. As Wright (2012) describes them, "[The games] represent a media event much like the Olympic—but combined with the horrific spectacle of a tragedy like 9/11" (p. 98). Through various theatrical, artistic, and dramatic components, Collins highlights that aesthetics are not mere accessories to power but have become intrinsic to its construction and perpetuation.

The current study highlights how President Snow's iron-fisted governance serves as a tangible manifestation of Benjamin's (1969) concept of the aestheticization of politics and Debord's (1983) idea of a spectacle. The opulent extravagance of the Capitol, with its luxurious costumes, grandiose events like the Hunger Games, and carefully curated media narratives, all serve to create a facade of prosperity and order. However, beneath this veneer of glamour lies a brutal reality of oppression and exploitation. By aestheticizing his rule, Snow not only masks the inherent violence and injustice of his regime but also legitimizes it in the eyes of the citizens. This manipulation of aesthetics in the service of politics underscores the insidious nature of authoritarianism, where the spectacle of power becomes a tool for subjugation.

This paper further posits that while Capitol carries out its aestheticized oppression, resistance emerges through the act of politicizing aesthetics by characters Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark. They use the same sites of aesthetic engagements on which Capitol has built its power and ideology to work in their favour. By transforming the games and other visual symbols into emblems of their rebellion, Katniss and her allies challenge President Snow's dominance. Therefore, this paper demonstrates the dual role of aesthetics in *The Hunger Games* as both instruments of domination and catalysts for resistance. By engaging with the philosophies of Benjamin and Debord, this research highlights the defining characteristic of the dystopian genre: the complex relationship between art, politics, and power.

This study aims to investigate how the Capitol in *The Hunger Games* employs aesthetic elements within political discourse to consolidate and sustain its totalitarian rule over Panem. It further seeks to explore how characters such as Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark engage with and manipulate aesthetics as a means of resistance against the authoritarian regime. Finally, the research examines how aestheticization of politics and politicization of aesthetics contribute to the construction of dystopia in the novel, revealing how visual spectacle and symbolic performance function as both instruments of oppression and tools for subversion.

This research adopts a qualitative methodology rooted in textual analysis to examine *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. Through close reading, the study analyzes key narrative elements, character developments, and symbolic representations to reveal the ways in which aesthetics function as both instruments of control and weapons of resistance within the text. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord, the analysis focuses on the relationship between spectacle, visual culture, political authority, and subaltern revolt. Specific attention is given to the Capitol's use of pageantry, fashion, and performative media as mechanisms for reinforcing authoritarian power, as well as to the aesthetic strategies employed by characters such as Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark to resist the Capitol's totalitarian rule. This interpretive approach enables a critical exploration of how aesthetic forms mediate power relations, support ideological narratives, and provoke acts of rebellion within a dystopian setting. By situating the novel within broader discourses of political aesthetics and critical theory, the study aims to contribute to scholarly conversations on the role of art, media, and symbolism in shaping sociopolitical consciousness in literature.

Theoretical and Critical Background

Benjamin (1930) reviewed a collection of essays entitled *War and Warriors*, edited by Ernst Jünger, a prominent figure in the Conservative Revolution movement in Germany. Benjamin, who leaned towards left politics and Marxist notions, was apprehensive of the ideas presented in the collection, particularly the glorification of war and the militaristic ethos promoted by Jünger and his contemporaries. He commented that this romanticization of war and death is "nothing other than an uninhibited translation of the principles of *l'art pour l'art* to war itself" (1930, as cited in Jay, 1992, p. 41). The remark reflected Benjamin's critique of stripping war of its real-world consequences and ethical considerations and transforming it into a pure, autonomous experience, much like a work of art, a phenomenon quite visible in Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy.

Six years later, in his essay "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin (2020) expanded this analysis beyond war to politics and introduced the concept of the aestheticization of politics. According to him, fascism tends to turn politics into a spectacle, offering the masses the illusion of expression and participation but refusing to acknowledge their rights (p. 19). Through these measures, fascist regimes ensure that the proletariat cannot challenge the existing power structures. Benjamin's complex notion of the aestheticization of politics sparked and accumulated a rich and diverse body of literature. As Jay (1992) notes, "The fateful link between aesthetics and politics was eagerly seized on in many quarters as an invaluable explanation for the seductive fascination of fascism" (p. 42). Kinser and Kleinman (1969), in their book *The Dream That Was No More a Dream*, connected Benjamin's ideas with Nazism, stating that the "German consciousness treated its own reality-developed and lived its history-as though it were a work of art. It was a culture committed to its aesthetic imagination" (p. 7). Commentator Stern (1976) highlighted Hitler's history as a failed artist in the Nazism context, and

critics like Sontag (1980) saw the blurring of reality and fantasy in films such as Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* as symbolic of the deceptive spectacle central to fascist politics. Friedlander has accused even modern representations of the fascist past of being excessively aestheticized, though in the form of kitsch art (Jay, 1992, p. 42).

Other accounts raise questions over Benjamin's stark and seemingly simple distinction between the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of art. Hansen (1987) contends that the descriptive tone of the essay and its "one-sided and reductive gesture . . . cannot be taken at its face value" (p. 180). Similarly, Buck-Morss (1992) proposes that although Benjamin advocates for communism to counteract fascism's aestheticization of politics by politicizing art, he reduces it "...merely to make culture a vehicle for Communist propaganda" (pp. 4–5). Azoulay (2010) defines Benjamin's ideas as misleading because "the aestheticization is of the political, while the politicization at hand is of art, not of the aesthetics" (p. 245). This, in turn, triggered further debates about the practice of art within the academic milieu.

Benjamin's hypothesis about fascism's introduction of aesthetics into the political realm has been expanded upon by many thinkers. Guy Debord's (1983) concept of a spectacle, outlined in his book *The Society of the Spectacle,* converges with the discourse of aesthetics and politics. As Cooper puts it:

> how the spectacle [i.e., a commodified worldview conveyed mainly through the mass media and other forms of ideological control] affects our understandings of time, history, the operations of power and the media, the built environments in which we live, our social relations and our subjective experiences. (as cited in Kujawska-Lis, 2018, p. 12)

His ideas provide critical lenses through which scholars analyze the multifaceted roles of photography, film, artificial intelligence (AI), and print within media landscapes. Sanders (2020), in her article "The Relationship Between Image and Spectator: The Case of the Advertisement" explores the relationship between consumers and advertisements through Debord's theoretical framework. She argues that since advertisements are proven to influence societal attitudes and behaviors, "A de-emphasis of the power of the image ignores this persistent effect on society, and the mechanism by which an image persuades not just individuals, but masses of people, is clearly at play in the case of the advertising image" (p. 3). Her study depicts the dangerous potential of advertisements in shaping the masses as proposed by Debord.

Debord's ideas have also been utilized in the literary sphere. Kujawska-Lis's (2018) article, "Conrad and the Society of the Spectacle," discusses Debord's and Joseph Conrad's conflicting views on the spectacle. According to her, Debord saw the spectacle as a stultifying commodity, while Conrad viewed his literary spectacle as a way to engage readers actively with the complex mysteries of humanity and the universe (p. 12). Kujawska-Lis is concerned with how complex literary works like Conrad's are being reimagined and transformed within a culture increasingly dominated by media.

Extensive research has been conducted on *The Hunger Games*, exploring the series from multiple perspectives. Burke (2013) discusses in her article how the novel sheds light on the pressing social and environmental issues of food and hunger. The book illuminates how the rich have monopolized the food system, denying the poor access to the food they produce. Burke observes that the book suggests that compassion and selflessness have the potential to challenge global exploitation, resonating especially with millennials. The scarcity of compassion in Collins's dystopian world makes it revolutionary, igniting societal change. Like many others, Tompkins (2018) carries out a Marxist analysis of the books. He states that the series can be viewed as a "...melodramatic fantasy that, on the one hand, bids spectators to enjoy the act of desiring class revolution in the films while, on the other hand, deploying various textual and paratextual strategies that invite audiences to be cynical about such desire" (p. 70). His article highlights how *The Hunger Games* franchise exemplifies capitalist media exploiting revolutionary sentiments for commercial gain.

The series has also been of great interest to queer studies. McGuire (2015), in her article, reassesses "Lee Edelman's work on the futurism of "the Child" by examining contemporary cultural spectacles of dead children, exemplified in The Hunger Games" (p. 63). She analyzes the convergence of queer children with killer children in the text. Rigsby et al. (2019) also draw

on Lee Edelman's work alongside Judith Butler in their article, "To Kill a Mockingjay: Katniss's Corrosive Queerness in the Hunger Games Trilogy." In the third book, Katniss rejects both the dystopian political alternatives that President Snow and Coin presented to her. She chooses her future over the future of the state. The article interprets her decision as a manifestation of "a community that is constituted by shared work, mutual interest, and memorial rather than futurity" (p. 403). The authors suggest that the trilogy's ending can be seen as a utopian response to oppressive regimes.

Ruthven (2017) examines the book from a feminist angle in her article "The contemporary postfeminist dystopia: disruptions and hopeful gestures in Suzanne Collins' "The Hunger Games." She examines the trilogy to explore how contemporary post-feminism can be interpreted as a dystopian narrative. She claims that "The protagonist of the novel...through an ethics of care, disruption of the heteronormative script, and a critical posthuman embodiment offers an alternative to the dystopic present offered by postfeminism" (p. 47). Ruthven posits that Collins, through Katniss' dystopian society, emphasizes the ongoing necessity of feminist politics rooted in activism, countering narratives of neoliberal individualism.

Other noteworthy scholarship on *The Hunger Games* includes Günenç's (2022) Foucauldian analysis of surveillance and oppressive authority in the text, Muller's (2012) discussion of the risks of virtual entertainment, and Heit's (2015) examination of the political dimensions of the series. Turnbull (2019) reads the novel as a trauma narrative, whereas Ghoshal and Wilkinson (2017) investigate the portrayal of PTSD and its effect on teenagers in the novel.

While all of these studies offer insightful debates about *The Hunger Games* across multiple disciplines, none of the current academic works explicitly examine the relationship between aesthetics and politics in the novel. The existing literature fails to address how the aesthetic representation of rebellion and oppression not only reflects but also actively shapes the political discourse within the narrative. This research aims to fill this gap by examining how the interplay of aesthetics and politics in the first part of the trilogy intensifies the tension between power and resistance in the text, thereby providing new insights into the dystopian literature's engagement with contemporary socio-political issues.

Aestheticizing Politics and Politicizing Aesthetics in *The Hunger Games*

Suzanne Collins mentioned that her inspiration for writing *The Hunger Games* trilogy came from flipping through TV channels, where she saw young people competing for money on reality shows and deadly footage of the Iraq war in which people were struggling to survive (Muller, 2012, p. 52). The birth of the idea for this renowned dystopian fiction stemmed from the jarring juxtaposition of reality TV's frivolous entertainment and the harsh realities of war, and how casually and effortlessly these contrasting worlds are presented side by side on television. Collins recreates this notion in her trilogy to reflect how aesthetics and politics are deeply intertwined, simultaneously upholding and dismantling power hierarchies.

According to Benjamin (2007), "The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life" (p. 19). In *The Hunger Games,* the authoritarian rule of President Snow over Panem is a working model of Benjamin's concept of aestheticization of politics. His fascist regime strategically employs visual and performative elements, transforming his repressive governance into a theatrical performance that manipulates public perception and maintains control over the districts.

One of the ways through which Snow utilizes aesthetics to cater to his politics is by creating a spectacle of the whole of Panem. Debord (1983) states, "The Spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images" and "In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation" (p. 7). President Snow creates two types of spectacles: the Capitol and the districts. He also micromanages the relationship between these two spectacles by ensuring that they are worlds apart, creating a deep divide that prevents any mutual understanding or empathy between them. Therefore, the citizens of the districts and the Capitol are never able to see each other, instead, they just perceive one another in the form of distorted and manipulated images.

The Capitol, which is the world of President Snow, is a glittering city of excess, where the wealth and technologies are on full display. From flamboyant fashion and makeup to exotic food and majestic architecture, the

Capitol appears as a sort of utopia. This lavishness serves a dual purpose; it distracts the Capitol's citizens from the underlying cruelty of the regime and simultaneously reinforces the power disparity between the Capitol and the districts. The bizarre and often grotesque fashion choices, body modifications, and hedonistic behaviors of the Capitol's residents highlight the cultural alienation between the Capitol and the districts. To the district's people, the Capitol's citizens appear almost inhuman, embodying the ugly consequences of extreme power and wealth. As Katniss wonders, "What do they do all day, these people in the Capitol, besides decorating their bodies and waiting around for a new shipment of tributes to roll in and die for their entertainment?" (Collins, 2009, p. 64). By showcasing the Capitol's extravagant lifestyle, Snow creates an aspirational vision that keeps the Capitol's residents complacent and loyal, serving as a constant reminder of the inequality and injustice the districts suffer, which fuels their anger and hatred.

The spectacle of the districts is the complete opposite of the Capitol. The inhabitants of the districts live in terrible conditions; they face economic exploitation and limited basic resources like food, clean water, and medical supplies. Their working environment is extremely dangerous and they lack proper infrastructure due to constant neglect. However, none of this impoverished, wretched, and distressing situation of the districts is shown to the citizens of the Capitol. Instead, the dwellers of the districts are introduced as tributes of the annual Hunger Games.

The media event of Hunger Games is the biggest example of Snow's fascist regime establishing a connection between aesthetics and politics to continue its grip on power. As Wright (2012) states, "In The Hunger Games trilogy, the Games themselves structure the affective capacities of the citizens of Panem...the goal of the Hunger Games as they play out in the first two novels is to cultivate a public that is emotionally invested in the power of the Capitol" (p. 99). The game itself becomes a televised spectacle that mediates the relationship between the districts and the Capitol.

Through the event of The Hunger Games, President Snow transforms violence into entertainment. As Walter (2007) proclaims, "All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war" (p. 19), and "The games, in which children from this brave new world are forced to kill one another, function as miniaturized wars, held in times of peace, as a macabre and brutal sabre rattling reminder of the power of the government and the devastating outcome of past attempts to challenge it" (Muller, 2012, p. 51). By turning the games into a glamorous event, complete with elaborate costumes, dramatic narratives, and public celebrations, Snow hides the brutality that they represent.

The build-up to the games is highly beautified and glorified. As Katniss remarks, "The Capitol requires us to treat the Hunger Games as a festivity, a sporting event pitting every district against the others" (p. 19). From the reaping day to the parade and then the interviews, the tributes are stylized to such an extent that they become an object of fascination for Capitol's inhabitants, much like Edward Said's exotic other. As Cinna says to Katniss, "You see, Portia and I think that coal miner thing's very overdone. No one will remember you in that. And we both see it as our job to make the District Twelve tributes unforgettable" (p. 66). From this, we can see how the tributes are treated and viewed as fashion statements designed to impress the masses and not as captured animals on their way to the slaughterhouse.

The aesthetic presentation of the games, by making violence appetizing and enjoyable for the viewers, serves three main purposes. Firstly, they desensitize the Capitol audience to the real suffering of the tributes as they are shown as less than human. The violence is framed in a way that strips it of its horror and normalizes it as part of the cultural fabric, detaching the Capitol citizens from the moral implications of the event. As Benjamin (2007) explains:

> The distracted person, too, can form habits. More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their solution has become a matter of habit. Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception. Since, moreover, individuals are tempted to avoid such tasks, art will tackle the most difficult and most important ones where it is able to mobilize the masses. Today it does so in the film. (pp. 18-19)

The citizens of Capitol are Benjamin's distracted people, and The Hunger Games is the aesthetic film that keeps them engaged and entertained, subtly shaping their perceptions and habits. As Wright (2012)

explains, "The media event in The Hunger Games trilogy becomes a site of aesthetic engagement. More than a series of happenings or a raw feed of unedited footage, the live broadcast is highly constructed in order to evoke particular responses from the public" (p. 101). By normalizing his atrocities, Snow's regime keeps the Capitol dwellers in a state of passive acceptance, unable to question the underlying political and social injustices as their critical faculties are dulled by the continual spectacle and distraction provided by the Games.

The second use of the aesthetic is that *The Hunger Games* serves as a reminder of the Capitol's absolute power over the districts and a form of punishment for the districts following their defeat in the first rebellion. As Wright (2012) puts it, "Before each reaping, the story of the failed rebellion and creation of the Games acts as both a warning for everyone forced to participate and an unyielding demonstration of the Capitol's dominance over the entire population" (p. 99). The games instill fear and act as a warning never to attempt rebellion again.

Simultaneously, the event gives a false illusion of victory to the districts. The Games create a sense of heroism and honor around the tributes; winners are celebrated as heroes, and their violent acts are glorified as courageous. While they do receive wealth and fame for winning the show, it comes at a personal cost, like acting on the murder instinct to survive, seeing the death of peers, and experiencing lifelong psychological trauma. The victors are paraded as symbols of the Capitol's benevolence and are nothing more than pawns in Snow's propaganda machine.

These tributes and victors also provide a momentary and superficial sense of pride for their districts. Their triumph temporarily satisfies the districts' yearning to challenge the Capitol, creating an illusion that they have achieved victory through their representatives. Manipulative statements like "Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favor!" (p. 22) are used to perpetuate the idea that the Games offer a fair chance at conquest and a better life when in reality, they are planned and controlled by the game makers. The celebration of a victor gives the districts a false sense of accomplishment, pacifying their desires for genuine change as they experience rebellion through their tributes. This illusion of victory distracts them from the need for collective action against the Capitol's tyranny.

This leads us to the third political objective that Snow achieves through these aesthetic games. The Hunger Games ensures that the districts are not only divided but also see each other as enemies. They become so hyper-fixated on winning the games, especially the first four districts that train their children for this prestigious event, that they forget the harsh realities of their oppression. As Benjamin (2007) states, "[Mankind's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic" (p. 20). Consequently, the districts, by enjoying the loss and destruction of other districts, play a huge role in maintaining Snow's totalitarian rule.

Apart from the games, President Snow uses other methods to maintain the distance between the districts. A clear hierarchy exists among the districts, with District 1 being the Capitol's favorite and District 12 suffering the most mistreatment. Snow involves aesthetics to justify this hierarchy. For example, District 1 makes luxury items for the Capitol; they deal with expensive and beautiful gems like diamonds. District 12, on the other hand, mines coal. There is a clear aesthetic disparity between diamonds and coal that reinforces the systemic oppression and maintains the hierarchical structure that benefits only President Snow and the people of the Capitol. Through this, we can see how aesthetics is a powerful propaganda tool. We can also see how Snow's aestheticization of politics adds to the sense of dystopia in the novel. It helps Snow play god and render the subjugated completely helpless.

While Benjamin (2007) highlighted how fascist regimes aestheticized politics for their advantage, he also believed that "politicizing art" (p. 20) could counter these authoritarian tactics and serve as a powerful source of rebellion and liberation for the oppressed. In *The Hunger Games*, we see how Katniss Everdeen, Peeta Mellark, and others from districts politicize aesthetics to resist and challenge the hegemonic power structures.

One of the primary means through which they appropriate aesthetics is by subverting the spectacle orchestrated by Snow in their own favour. Debord (1983) believes that if working-class consumers can recognize the extent to which they are trapped and isolated by the spectacle, the closer society will come closer to overthrowing the spectacle (p. 69). Both

Katniss and Peeta recognize that they are being turned into spectacles for the entertainment of the Capitol. They understand their role as pawns in the Capitol's grandiose display of power. This awareness of their objectification as spectacles drives them to destabilize the Capitol's control of them.

The most prominent example of spectacle subversion is the fake love story orchestrated by Peeta and Haymich. Peeta is conscious of the fact that their every move, emotion, and interaction is being viewed and manipulated by the game makers, but instead of letting them take the lead, he utilizes that to create a visual narrative of his own. He declares his love for Katniss in front of everyone, knowing that this will bring them positive attention. As Haymitch says to an angry Katniss who is unaware of this scheme, "That boy just gave you something you could never achieve on your own...He made you look desirable! You were about as romantic as dirt until he said he wanted you. Now they all do. You're all they're talking about. The star-crossed lovers from District Twelve!" (p. 134). The primary concern of the game makers is to put on an exciting show, and usually, this is done through ruthless killing, but Peeta replaces that spectacle with the tragic lovers' story. Later in the game, Katniss recognizes the power of their pretend love affair when she receives rewards funded by the audience for her actions, like kissing Peeta. Their on-screen romance not only makes Capitol dwellers root for them but also shatters the murderous appearance projected by the game makers, making them appear more human. So successful is their love angle that for the first time in the history of The Hunger Games, the game makers changed the rule of a single winner.

Later, when Katniss and Peeta are the last ones standing and technically the winners of the seventy-fifth Hunger Games, the game makers attempt to revoke the rule change, demonstrating their absolute control. However, Katniss challenges that by refusing to provide the Capitol with a winner. As she thinks, "They have to have a victor. Without a victor, the whole thing would blow up in the Gamemakers' faces. They'd have failed the Capitol. Might possibly even be executed, slowly and painfully, while the cameras broadcast it to every screen in the country. If Peeta and I were both to die, or they thought we were" (p. 338). By being willing to eat the deadly berries on camera, presenting the illusion that she and Peeta possibly cannot live without each other, Katniss not only romanticizes death to make their love story more appealing but also defeats the gamemakers and Snow by using their own tactics against them.

Apart from this, Katniss also uses many other aesthetic and symbolic acts of defiance to resist the oppressive control of the Capitol. Katniss becomes the most significant spectacle of Panem and switches it to serve her intentions, reflecting Wright's (2012) claim that:

> She understands how the Games are constructed for a viewing audience because she has been part of that audience. Put another way, she recognizes the aesthetic value of the Hunger Games. Because the event occurs every year with the same basic structure, Katniss manipulates the Games in order to survive, incorporating the prior knowledge of the Games into her strategy as a tribute. (p. 102)

Her girl-on-fire aesthetic adds heavily to the resistance. Everyone is in awe of her after watching her play with fire, as she expresses, "No one will forget me. Not my look, not my name. Katniss. The girl who was on fire" (p. 70). Through this artistic costume, she signifies how the Capitol views the people from her district: as coal - hideous and static. However, they should be scared of coal when it catches fire, because fire is alive and dangerous, and once it spreads, it's hard to contain. Through her fiery image, she becomes a living symbol of defiance. Her manipulation of Capitol's aesthetics empowers her and sets her on a journey of rebellion.

Her Mockingjay pin is another visual expression of resistance. The Mockingjay is a species of bird created by the Capitol with the ability to mimic sounds produced by humans. Their original purpose was to eavesdrop on the rebels during the first rebellion. However, once the rebels discovered this, they started providing the birds with false information, sending them off with deceptive messages. The birds' very existence is a reminder of the Capitol's failure. Katniss continues to wear the pin regardless of President Snow's disapproval, turning it into a symbol of defiance. Later on in the trilogy, she becomes the symbol of Mockingjay, providing hope and promise that the fascist regime of Snow will fail.

The most powerful form of politicizing aesthetics in the novel is Rue's memorial. Rue is a twelve-year-old girl who becomes Katniss's ally in the arena. After a tribute kills her, Katniss decorates her body with

flowers to give her a proper memorial, followed by the three-finger gesture that means "thanks," "admiration," and "good-bye to someone you love" (p. 25). Through this act, Katniss humanizes Rue; she highlights her as a loss to mourn rather than another tribute who wasn't strong and violent enough to win.

The flowers arranged around Rue's body create a visual symbol of resistance. As Wright (2012) asserts:

> In this made-for-television moment, the tragedy of Rue's death (even though Katniss later finds out the scene is never broadcast in the way she intended) is made into something, well, beautiful. Katniss uses her knowledge of how the Games work to make a statement about their cruelty that is as aesthetically pleasing as it is politically relevant. (p. 103)

This image, when broadcast, resonated deeply with the viewers, especially those in the districts, who saw it as a silent protest against the Capitol's brutality and a call for solidarity and remembrance. Debord (1983) predicts that people will eventually use the very products that isolate them to band together and rebel against the spectacle that created them (p. 70).

This moment in the game kickstarts the rebellion in Rue's district when its inhabitants respond to Katniss's three-finger gesture. This initial spark of resistance gradually evolves into a full-blown rebellion that overthrows the totalitarian rule of President Snow, showcasing how the oppressed politicise aesthetics, using the same products that entrapped them, to gain liberation. Just like tyranny and persecution, resistance is a very dystopian concept, and politicizing of aesthetics enhances the dystopian landscape of the novel.

Conclusion

This research paper has demonstrated how aesthetics create tension between oppressive power and defiant resistance in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. It depicts how the Capitol's creation of spectacles and glamorization of violence plays a huge role in maintaining its dominance over Panem. Their policy of aestheticizing politics works as the strongest pillar upholding and strengthening their empire. Simultaneously, the study also demonstrates how the spectacle created by the Capitol is subverted as an act of rebellion by characters like Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark. These characters politicize aesthetics to hijack the stage, oppressing them and using visual narratives to broadcast their resistance to the Capitol. This study is significant because it sheds light on how aesthetics influence power dynamics and contributes to the understanding of the dystopian world depicted in *Hunger Games*.

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