

How do utopian dreams turn into dystopian realities? I explored this question through reading and dissecting *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. Where is our contemporary world heading in the future? How far off are we from a “brave, new world”? Is it too late to change? I want to understand the connections between utopian and dystopian worlds.

To explore the concept of a utopian world as a foil for dystopia, I built a small-scale room in a house. I placed objects in the room that represent dystopian messages. Then, I made a series of digital photographs to evoke an eerie, discordant mood within each vignette. I want to convey a world that looks normal in some ways, but extremely surreal in other ways.

Utopia can never really exist because a perfect place is different for everyone. Because humans are evil, there is only room for a dystopian world to exist. In this installation, I am representing the problems faced by the characters in *Brave New World*, a parallel to our world today. These two worlds are not that different. Why do people bother to dream about perfect worlds if they can never really exist? Is it too late to change the course of our society?

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I woke up from my sleep, struggling in my white fuzzy sheets, clenching them between my hands. I released the sheets and pulled myself out of bed, undoing the band around my head, tired of it being on. My feet slapped the ground of the children's ward as I ran to the dispensers to get water. The children's ward wasn't exactly a happy place, but it wasn't a sad one either. After mating day each year children are sent directly to the ward and kept until they're old enough to be given their own house. The room had bright white flooring and white walls. Twenty-three metal beds lined the big open room, which disappeared into a long hallway. At the front of the large room sat a long metal bar with twenty-three metal stools and twenty-three water dispensers in front of each seat. It was late, and nobody, not even the children's directors were awake. All twenty-three children lay asleep in their beds, with their sleeping bands on. We were ages eight through thirteen. Everyone from the time of birth wore the sleeping bands, a black band that wrapped around the head and had little tiny earplugs. We were never told why we must wear them. One time I heard they make us sleep better, but I'm not sure. The water cooled my lips as it spilled down my lips and onto my sleeping wear. I'm not sure why I awoke; something in my sleep was distressing me, but I can't recall what...

Over my breathing I could hear a soft mumbling, coming from the two lines of beds. I walked towards my friend Teddy's bed and the mumbling was louder. I put my ear next to his ear and tried to listen to what his ear-bud was saying, but all I could discern was soft mumbblings. I looked towards the window at the end of the room and everything looked eerie and still outside. The window sat closed at the end of the room, overlooking the Society Meeting place. Walking slowly forward towards the window, I made no sound; I put my hands to the glass and felt the cold rush against my fingers. The Society has only existed for two years, but I don't remember a time before it started. No one does. I remember sitting in Conditioning Class, and I asked why the memories were taken, and my teacher said we were "better off that way," and I believed her. I never had a reason not to.

A bee tapped the window helplessly and I slid the window open, allowing the bee to fly in. We weren't supposed to open the windows, but nighttime is the only time I can see the bees. It flew circles around my head. I hesitated before holding my arm out in front of my body. The bee slowed down and began crawling on my arm. Something inside me made me feel bad whenever I held the bees; it was severely frowned upon to play with the animals. But I have held them often at night, when I wake up like this; they make me forget the stress of my terrible sleep. Once, Jeffrey, a boy in my class, was caught playing with a fly and was taken to see the children's therapist. After that visit he said, "Animals are gross and touching one is shameful." A cloud began filling The Society, I looked up to the walls that acted as borders and saw a spray coming from the tops of each border; loads of men in white suits were outside with spray bottles, just spraying some kind of white mist into the air.

My thoughts were interrupted by a tapping on the window; more bees were on the outside, trying to get in. I quickly slid the window open and let the bees fly in the room. I shut the window after all the bees flew in and stared, mesmerized, as they flew around the room buzzing in disorganized circles. They flew in swift lines as if taking in their surroundings. I sat on the ground and crawled into the middle of the wind-tunnel they were creating and felt the air push past my face. My long hair was flying into the air and the mumbling of the other kid's ear buds were overtaken by the bee's buzzing. I laid down and stared into the eye of the tunnel. *Why don't people think its okay to touch these animals?* I wondered. But my thoughts were interrupted upon realizing the sound would wake the other children. So I ran to get something to contain the bees in.

I couldn't let anyone find out I let the bees in; I didn't want to be the therapist's next victim. Grasping the large clear plastic bowl and the lid they used for snacks, I ran into the middle of the circle of bees. Slowly lifting my arm again, the bees softly landed on my arm and I guided them into the bowl with my other hand. I couldn't help but be captivated by the bees. The kids were never allowed to be close enough to really see any of the animals; they were given a spray-bottle of bleach and were instructed to spray them if they were close. After I got all the bees inside the bowl, I placed the lid on and held the bees in my lap, watching them buzz around and rest on the walls of the bowl. I watched bees carry non-moving bees to the bottom of the bowl, making a pile of them. I stared at their wings, imagining having ones myself and being able to fly. I shook these thoughts from my mind, remembering they could get me in trouble, and took the bowl and hid it under my bed.

The alarm rang the next day and all the kids got up quickly as usual, getting dressed in the same white skirts and white shirts. They walked in line outside of the building, heading across the street to the classroom. But the scene outside stopped them, despite all that was going on, it was unusually calm, and it smelled of candy. The Director was standing on the side of the platform of the meeting place in the middle of The Society, speaking into a microphone with all eighty-two people surrounded him. I stared at the faces of all my fellow people, we all knew each other's name and rank, but not anymore, no more was really important. The carcasses and dead insects and bugs littered the ground, but the people didn't avoid the bodies when they stepped. "Natural Selection," he said "Has taken its toll, all these *animals* were unfit to live any longer." The people nodded. "Don't worry about the grass and trees, we no longer need them either. Conveniently, our scientists have been working hard on completing a carbon dioxide intake system self-releaser of oxygen. This way we can allow all the plants to die and not need them to live. Since all the insects died, the plants will die off quickly too. And soon, we will be completely self-sufficient and independent from the earth. Its only purpose will be a ground for us to sit on." The people clapped and my hands rose above my head and I beat my hands together, joining the crowd.

I went to class trying to think of what to do with my bees and who would be able to help me. As I started into the hologram of my computer I tried to think of every person I knew who could help me. All my teachers and the therapists would just send me to the Director, and for some reason, I wanted to keep the bees alive. I remembered the time I saw Tom Wigg touching an animal from my playtime area. He was walking down the street and a bee was crawling around the telephone pole as he walked past it. The time was early and most people were at work. He stopped and set his hand against the dew on the telephone pole's surface and waited for the bee to crawl onto his hand. Then he slowly moved his hand so it was suspended in front of him and then continued walking with the bee. But he was a weird man. People mostly ignore him, for he doesn't fit in mostly. But I know he is the only person I can trust with this. I mean, he is the *only* one who likes animals openly. It will be hard to find him though, since he lives on the edge of town, and I will have to bring the bees. But he's the best I've got.

After making up my mind to see him, I turned to focus on the hologram in front of me; I am hoping to do well with this test. After class, as I sat in the fenced-in area with all the other children, the area was small and all the kids sat in a circle with interactive glasses on, watching or playing a game through them. Once all the teachers went in to get the snacks for the rest of the children, I took my chance. The cold concrete ground scraped my legs I jumped up and hopped over the fence. Not one kid noticed. As I was running inside the ward, my feet hit the pavement with force I wasn't accustomed to, seeing as we didn't run much. Once I got to my bed, I ripped

the sheet off and tied it in a series of knots around the bowl to keep the bees hidden. I walked outside of the children's ward, trying to blend in with walls.

Heading towards the outskirts of town, I dodged through alleyways and hid behind walls when I saw anyone. I was lucky most people were at work, and I made it a little ways without seeing a lot of people. I couldn't hear much besides the buzzing of bees, but something felt quieter the farther out I was. As I rounded the corner, I heard the voice of The President of School and I hid in an alleyway closest to me, slowly making my way further down into the shadows. I stopped walking and stood still as his voice sounded. I clutched the large bowl filled with bees, holding my breath. He stopped for a second, continuing to explain something in a hushed voice I heard as he mumbled to his friend. He kept walking down the street, speaking in a hushed voice still, and I waited a few minutes, before I took off once more.

When I reached Tom Wigg's house, I hid in the alleyway across from it for a bit. It was not like all the other houses; it was short. All the houses were tall. Once I mustered enough courage to walk to the door, I knocked softly at first, just brushing my hand against the smooth door in front of me. I didn't spend much time towards the outside of town. It smelled a little more like the trees, but I guess that won't be a problem much now that they are soon going to die. I knocked again, louder this time, and the door immediately swung open and I was met with a tall figure. He had a long brown beard and light eyes that made him seem harmless, despite his tall stature and muscular frame.

"Aren't you supposed to be at school?" he asked, his expression unamused. He wasn't known as the most polite man. I opened my mouth to speak, but stopped to allow him to hear the sound of the buzzing. He stared for a little more but once his eyes opened wider and his expression softened, I simply undid one of the knots of sheets and slid the sheet off a little to expose the busy cluster of bees inside the bowl. He looked amazed as he softly laid his hand against the side of the bowl and felt the buzzing.

"Come inside," he said, "Quickly."

I walked inside and was faced with an empty room with only a staircase in the middle. The walls and floors were green and the stairs white. Tom set off down the stairs and motioned for me to come with him. I followed him down the stairs, still gripping the bowl full of bees. Once I reached the end of the stairs I stood in the middle of the room unsure of where to go. I had never seen a room like this. There was a green rug in the room and the walls were painted a deep purple. It smelled of lemon cleaner and Christmas trees and the floor's plastic shone brightly even though there were no windows. A spiral staircase led to another even lower room, and I could see that the walls were covered with books and many computers. *That's odd*, I thought, *why would he keep books? They are so outdated; no one uses them anymore.* I had never been in someone else's home and I hadn't reached that section of classes yet, so I stood still. Tom walked into his kitchen and held out a chair for me at the table. I sat down quietly and placed the bowl on top of the table while he sat across from me. The kitchen was different too, it was bright yellow with light blue cabinets and the flooring was once again bright white.

"Sam," he questioned, "How did you get these bees?"

My legs bounced up and down and I scuffed my feet against the ground as I explained opening the window the night before and the amazing display the bees put on when entering the room. I was lightly afraid that he would turn me in for keeping the bees, but given his reputation, it wasn't likely. Once I stopped talking, my eyes drifted back to the floor and I could see dirt, another Society rule broken.

He smiled and said, "I was hoping someone like you, who felt the bees, would end up saving them." "Now," he continued, "How about we keep them here where they won't be found? I can build a structure to keep them in and..."

He was up from his chair in the kitchen and ran down the spiral staircase. His brown boots clunked loudly as he searched for a book. Before grabbing a large black book and running back upstairs, he opened and flipped through it roughly while looking up only to stare intently at the bees before quickly looking back at the book. My feet were shuffling faster now, and I was playing with my hair.

"These, are honey bees, so we must feed them pollen from the flowers." He finally spoke. "Why didn't you just use the computer?" I asked.

Tom shook his head, "Never look up anything you don't want The Director to know you are looking up." Feeling he needed to further explain, Tom went on, "Look, you can't tell anyone we have these bees, or else we won't have them anymore—not anyone, not your teachers, friends, I don't care, no one."

I understood and nodded, "Okay, but I want to help."

Tom took a piece of paper and a pen from the cabinet, "Of course you can help, they came to you," he said and sat back down at the table and began drawing sketches.

He drew for a while, crossing things out and re-drawing them. Eventually he held up a sketch. It showed a large box made of windows, with another small box hanging inside of it. Flowers and dots filled the box and cans hung from the outside of the structure.

"What are those cans? And those dots?" I questioned.

He laughed, "Those dots are supposed to be the bees, and those cans are spray-bottles. We can fill them with a spray that calms the bees so we can check in on them."

I agreed, knowing he wanted to keep the bees alive just as much as me, but I was still hesitant, knowing society's rumors about him. They say he didn't get the proper conditioning as a kid. And if that's true, does he have any idea what he's doing to help the bees? The books threw me off a little too, people don't use those anymore, but I guess I'm just going to have to start trusting him, whether I want to or not. As he handed me the black book of bees across the table he said, "Don't show this to anyone and make sure to bring it tomorrow when you come back." I walked up the stairs with the book wrapped in my sheet and tucked under my arm.

Over the past few weeks, Tom and I worked together to build the structure. Every few days I returned to the outside of town to help him gather supplies and see the bees.

The bees were interesting to just watch; they were very weird to each other. They could have their own babies and then all work together to take care of them. I wasn't used to this sort of thing. As I snuck off from the children's ward once more, I ran as fast as I could until I was at the front door. Before I slung it open and slammed it shut and ran down the stairs. Tom was standing in the middle of the room admiring the contraption we built to keep the bees in. We made a mix of sugar water to calm the bees enough to get them inside the box and we picked all the flowers left in the entire compound before they died. They now filled the box. It was large, about six feet high and five across, and made of clear panels. Inside, the floor was filled with flowers that were growing up. We read a book on how to grow flowers; I never realized how much information we actually didn't have access to, or rather, didn't know existed. In the top middle, we hung the bowl of bees from the ceiling and before we entered, we turned on the sprayers that covered the tiny room in sugar-water so the bees would be calm. But while we were building the perfect place for the bees to live, our Society was falling apart.

People were dying, and no one was sure why; half the population had died off by now. We only have twelve kids in the children's ward now, and they all left the same way. The kids starting losing weight, and walking slower, and then breathing weirdly, and then they wouldn't leave their beds, and by then he or she had only a few days before they were shipped off to the graves.

We flipped the switch on the sugar-water and watched a cloud cover the tiny house through the clear walls, then opened the door and walked in. It smelled sweet inside, and the bees flew around us, avoiding us in their path towards the flowers. When I left Tom's house that day, I skipped back to the children's ward, happy that our plan worked, and Tom sat inside the bee sanctuary still, admiring them.

It was about mid-afternoon by the time I snuck back inside the play area and moved my way into the circle, putting on my interactive glasses, pretending I had been there the whole time. One of the teachers tapped on my shoulder and said I needed to go the doctor's floor for a check up.

I was not accustomed to going to see the doctor without all the other children accompanying me, so I walked to the ward slowly. Once I got there, they checked my breathing, my bones, my vitals, everything. When I was finished, the doctors looked dumbfounded, but told me to come back next week at the same time. As I left the strange doctor's appointment, my white dress swayed around me, the sun shining through the windows, and all I could smell was sterile surfaces and chemicals. The Director passed me in the hallway and he stopped for a minute to look at me, and then continued on his way into the children's doctor's office. After another odd interaction, I decided it best to not go back to Tom's until after my next doctor's appointment. I sat back in the play circle and put on my glasses and, still, none of the kids looked up.

As the week passed, I couldn't think of much besides the bees. As I sat on my stool drinking water from the dispenser at mealtime, my legs twitched towards the direction of the door when I thought of the bees. I was lagging, my mind elsewhere. I was having trouble in class and keeping up with the other kids. When it was time for my second doctor's appointment I practically ran to the office, anxious to get it over with.

This time, as I walked up to the office, it was raining, and the rain covered the sound of my shoes hitting the ground. When I got to the doctor this time, the Director was already there, and his eyes widened when he saw me. The nurse took me into another white room and I sat on a metal bench, and breathed in the smell of alcohol and bleach. The doctors came in and pricked my finger and I stayed still to have my bone-scan, as they performed all the tests they did last time. When the doctor left the room, the door slid shut behind him and, I saw the face of the Director. I stood up and pressed my ear against the door to listen to the director and my doctor.

"She's dying now?" asked the Director.

"Yes, after she and one more are gone, all the left genetics will have died off. The experiment worked, only the right side can live with these new fumes in the air," the doctor answered proudly.

"Why are the two living longer than anyone else? All the other lefts died weeks ago," he Director inquired again.

"I've sent a team to check on the other one and I think we found why these two have survived; it shouldn't be a problem anymore," the doctor said as his voice became softer as he and the Director walked down the hallway.

Sweat was dripping down my face and my breaths were short. I had to see Tom. I opened the door to the doctor's office slightly and peeked through the opening. No one was in the hallway, so I ran. My feet were pounding against the floor, keeping time with my heartbeat. I didn't bother running through the shadows; I was running on the sidewalk in the open mid-day sun.

Once I made it to the outside of town, I knocked on Tom's door, but he didn't answer. I knocked again until I was eventually pounding on his door before just opening it and going straight in. I raced down the stairs, yelling Tom's name.

The bee sanctuary was in pieces on the floor and all the flowers and bees lay dead on the ground mixed with the glass.

"Sam," a soft voice said from below the spiral staircase. I ran down the second staircase. The room was dark red, and the ceiling and floor black. There was a large, dark green bed in the middle of the room and, in the middle of the bed, lay Tom.

Tom looked pale and his breathing was loud and his chest rattled with each breath he took. The smell of cleaning supplies faded and left an odd smell I never smelled before, and hoped never to smell again. I walked towards Tom's bed and vomited the words I had wanted to tell him, stopping only to breathe heavily. He stayed unmoving and listened quietly until I was done.

"They got the bees," is all Tom said. His breathing continued to slow as he kept eye-contact with me. "I am heading to the graves tomorrow," he continued.

"I heard them talking. We were meant to die a long time ago!" I said.

"You seemed surprised," was the last thing I remember him saying before I left the house that day.

## Bibliography

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