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Dystopias: The Visual Imagination

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ContactZone is an international double-blind peer-reviewed e-journal which publishes scholarly work on Science Fiction and the Fantastic connecting different languages, non-mimetic genres, and fields of study. It is the journal of the Italian Association for the Study of Science Fiction and the Fantastic. The areas of research range from literature to cinema, from media to comics and video games touching a wide spectrum of critical approaches, which includes literary criticism, ecocriticism, film studies, gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, linguistics, translation studies, critical race studies, queer studies. The journal welcomes papers from scholars, authors, teachers, and librarians supporting an innovative insight into texts written in English, but also in other languages, in order to promote a lively dialogue among critics and other specialists on an international level. *ContactZone* will focus on themes and topics dealing with the representation of imaginative and/or alternative worlds in the realms of science fiction and the fantastic.

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Introduction

Shadows of Dystopian Nightmares

Oriana Palusci

DOI: 10.26379/2036

Abstract

Since the interwar era of the twentieth century (1920s and 30s), illustrations and moving images have been an essential element of the dystopian imagination.

The birth and development of popular science fiction – the younger sister of the utopian/dystopian tradition – gave a strong impulse to graphic representations of a menacing and out of joint future world. The so-called *pulp magazines* (starting from Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* in 1926) relied on usually rather naive white-and-black illustrations and a glamorous cover.....

Shadows of Dystopian Nightmares “Unavailable for Servitude”?: The Black Geographies of Krakoa in Jonathan Hickman’s X-Men Comics

Jeden O. Tolentino
DOI: 10.26379/2037

Abstract

I take the case of Krakoa to show how superhero comics and Black studies can together question binaries such as utopia/dystopia. In 2019, Jonathan Hickman began the story of the X-Men’s establishment of a nation-state for mutants on the sentient island called Krakoa. I use three theoretical interventions in Black geographies to argue that the leaders of this nation-state are using utopian facades to prepare their citizens for a dystopian future. First, I show that Krakoa upholds the right to “opacity”. Second, I contrast Krakoa from its sister-island Arakko, which has become a “demonic ground”. Third, I reveal the temptations that “dark sousveillance” faces from existing surveillance regimes. I then bind these threads together to conclude that the leaders of Krakoa only want to concentrate mutants in a small, manageable place and then keep them alive in servitude indefinitely to fight an eternal war against humans and machines.

A Black Prometheus: *Frankenstein's* Progeny in LaValle's *Destroyer*

Mattia Arioli

DOI: 10.26379/2038

Abstract

This paper explores the way in which Victor LaValle's comic book *Destroyer* (2017) uses Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* as a palimpsest through which to discuss racial inequalities, somehow retrieving and expanding W.E.B Du Bois' use of the Prometheus myth as a racial allegory. Through the intersection of critical race theory discourses, literary allusions, and Afrofuturists scenarios, America is here described as a gothic landscape. This sense of familiarity is generated by the "remediation" and interconnection of two well-known palimpsests: Frankenstein's monster story and the killing of unarmed African Americans by law enforcement officers in the United States. Indeed, Dr. Baker, inspired by Frankenstein, decides to revive her twelve-years-old son, Akai, using nanobots. Akai was returning home from a baseball game carrying his bat, when a cop shoots him after a neighbor call reporting an eighteen-to-twenty-year-old Black man with a rifle. Technology is here framed and interpreted as a response to personal grief, and (cultural) trauma. However, at a close glance, the racial utopia promised by technology hides some uncanny reality. Indeed, the hopes for tomorrow, for a Black person, are hindered by the past, as the technological enhancement is (also) enacted through the violation of a Black body, as in the case of Akai's father. Consequently, *Destroyer* attempts to make the country accountable for the injustices it has perpetrated throughout its history.

Narrazioni post-apocalittiche a fumetti: *graphic novel* italiani sulla fine (e l'inizio) del mondo

Dalila Forni

DOI: 10.26379/2039

Abstract

The paper explores the post-apocalyptic genre in a selection of Italian graphic novels published in the last ten years. The essay employs the methodologies of comics and literary studies to investigate how contemporary Italian graphic fiction interprets this genre. Three specific case studies will be considered: *La terra dei figli* (2016) by Gipi, *Celestia* (2019) by Manuele Fior, and *Troppo facile amarti in vacanza* (2021) by Giacomo Bevilacqua. The study investigates the narrative themes belonging to the post-apocalyptic genre to the selected graphic novels in order to identify both innovative elements related to the use of comics codes or to the specificity of the Italian literary context. The essay provides an initial overview of the post-apocalyptic in graphic novels, laying the groundwork for further examination of the topic.

Prospettive fungine videoludiche: il fungo come agente distruttore e creatore in scenari distopici, horror e post-apocalittici da *The Last of Us* a *In Other Waters*

Giulia Martino

DOI: 10.26379/2040

Abstract

Mushrooms have been perennial agents in the development of the plot, whether in folklore or literature or cinema or even in legal cases. Over the past two decades, scientific advancements in mycology have provided us with new insights into interpreting the influence of mushrooms within diverse ecosystems, viewing them not solely as agents of destruction and decomposition but also as world-makers.

Nevertheless, mainstream media, including video games, largely perpetuate a perspective on fungi primarily rooted in fear. This paper aims to scrutinize the dystopian, horror, and dark fantasy realms depicted in video games such as *The Last of Us*, *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*, *Resident Evil Village*, and *Elden Ring*, where fungi significantly contribute to crafting atmospheres made of deteriorating landscapes, bodies, and psyches. Subsequently, an analysis will be conducted on *In Other Waters*, a video game that adeptly introduces novel perspectives of symbiotic existence within a damaged world, exploring both narrative and gameplay aspects.

Disobedient Children in the Dystopian Past: Empowerment Through Liminal Futurity in Guillermo del Toro's Films

Jeannine Ortega and Stephanie Austin

DOI: 10.26379/2041

Abstract

Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *Pinocchio* (2022) blend the fantastical themes of children's narratives with the frame of a dystopian background.

This historical space offers no room for fairy tales, autonomy – let alone that of a child –, or individuality. Indeed, controlling adult figures in both films only value the protagonists as what theorists such as Lee Edelman describe as the social child. The aspirations of the mainstream public elevate the child's potential to perpetuate the political ideals of extreme political conformity.

However, Del Toro's historical frame enables his critique of such a rigid understanding of children's capabilities. Ofelia and Pinocchio learn to move in spaces beyond the control of fascist regimes, gaining autonomy rather than conforming, becoming neither subject nor object, but abject protagonists who flourish within fantastical liminal spaces. As a result, these films invite the audience to speculate about the power of a child's imagination.

Circuses without the Bread: The *Hunger Games* Films as an Allegory of the Alt-Right

Milo Sweedler

DOI: 10.26379/2042

Abstract

This article argues that the *Hunger Games* films (2012–2015) give audio-visual narrative form to the rise of the alt-right in the early twenty-first-century United States. Examining film form as well as plot and dialogue, it shows how the film series represents a level of poverty not seen in the United States since the Great Depression yet offers viewers a spectacle of revolt in the place of class warfare. When Katniss Everdeen, the series' protagonist, foments a rebellion against the Capitol, she refracts the cultural right's assault on the so-called "liberal establishment". In sum, Katniss is an alt-right heroine, leading a revolt that prefigures the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, and fostering an ideology of reactionary right-wing politics.

Special Collections and Archives: the Science Fiction Collections at the University of Liverpool

Thomas Dillon

DOI: 10.26379/2044

Abstract

Libraries are science fiction, and none more so than a science fiction library. To be more precise, libraries and science fiction function in analogous ways, for better or for worse. Both are structured by Western ideologies of domination and order – science fiction is structured by colonial narratives of exploration and othering of the alien (Chattopadhyay 2021: 8); libraries are premised on hierarchies of knowledge which work to exclude certain voices (Alexander and Baker 2023: 3).

Yet at the same time, they function as Other Spaces –imaginary or concrete – from which vantage point readers can critically reflect on society. Michel Foucault named these concrete spaces ‘heterotopias’ and used libraries as one of the key (1986: 26). For Foucault, such heterotopias hold up a mirror to our society and in doing so offer a “contestation of the space in which we live” (24).....