

Introduction

Abstract: The introduction starts from the assessment of the main concern of the text: the overabundance of apocalyptic and dystopian narratives in contemporary screen culture and their connection to fears and anxieties of the present; what is more, it tackles the role and function of horrific and dystopian fiction in relation to a particular State of the Arts. The purpose of the text is to advance a new theory/approach to investigate particular recurring figures in contemporary cinema and television (cyborgs, witches, and zombies): that is to use them not exclusively to investigate fears and anxieties, but also subversive potentialities and tensions they enact.

Keywords: Film Theory; Horror Theory; Aesthetics

Inside us, there is no original evil, nothing to fear, no reason for regret. Our bodies contain everything. Let the world rise gently from them
(*The Living Dead*, George A. Romero and Daniel Kraus, 622)

Introduction

Horrific images are everywhere. Catastrophes, disasters, tragedies, endless series of absurd loops of systemic violence, exploitation, and segregation overwhelm our everyday experience up to the point of making us question our ability to fully comprehend them. We mourn for such pains and horrors. We may adopt all the possible strategies to detach from them. We feel impotent and inadequate if we are lucky enough to live at a certain level of distance from them. We may welcome them as further evidence of our desire for resignation and acceptance of an unavoidable fate, and thus linger in melancholic and annihilating fantasies, but we have learned to coexist with them to the point of making of such horrors our everyday imaginary bread. Indeed, if news related images pervade our experience with consistent sense of turmoil and crises (in all their ambiguities), so

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do fictional images and storyworlds. Maybe their pervasiveness tells us also something about their vacuity or lack of intensity. Mark Fisher, for instance, notably stated that apocalyptic fictional scenarios—in the age of very real ecological and systemic collapses and global warfare—have become the substance of our audiovisual dreams (Fisher 2009, 1–8; Fisher 2018, 93–98). This, however, happens for the very simple reason that they confirm, reassert, and, in an ambiguous way, comfort us of the fact that there is no alternative to the current state of affairs. The problem, then, to paraphrase the famous Jamesonian formula: “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (see Jameson 2005, 199),¹ becomes not if we can imagine the end of the world, but if we are able to imagine, at all, a non-catastrophic alternative to the alleged order of things. It is the end of the world again; it is a fascist dystopia, again; it is nuclear warfare (driven by the exacerbation of international competition for supremacy) producing an eternal winter, again; it is excessive consumerism leading to mass deforestation and biodiversity genocide or biocide, again.

Expressions like Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene, Sixth Mass Extinction have also become quite conventional terms used to give a comprehensible form to the current predicament. These concepts, in fact, not only address ecological crises, but aim to ground their overarching causes in systemic relationships between the human and its habitat, thus stripping the understanding of anthropological formations away from their alleged separation from nature and from any supposed progressive and linear notion of historical development. By inserting the human in larger geo-social assemblages, for instance, the paradigms of Anthropocene and Capitalocene help us examining the significant shift produced by Industrial Revolutions and, more specifically, by the advent of Capitalism itself, which, by definition, turned nature and life into the realm of pure extraction. According to Jason Moore, indeed, to indicate in “The Age of Man” the root cause of the current predicament, apart from relying on a very vague idea of the human, undermines a more precise political analysis of ecological crises and, simultaneously, of the most effective way to address them (2015, 174–85). The Great (capitalist) Transformation, to use the apt phrase by Karl Polanyi, structurally mutating the natural, together with labour power, into a property to be both enclosed and accumulated, is the same force exhausting the possibility for biological reproduction, for proper conditions of existence to persist (see 2001, 37).

1 Though the phrase was not originally formulated by Fredric Jameson (see Ciccarelli 2022, 288–89). Jonathan Crary highlighted the exhaustion of the very same formula (see 2022, 29).

In this sense, the concept of Chthulucene—of a new geological era—has been devised to imagine an alternative ecology or to move beyond the anthropocentric regime of exploitation and accumulation; thus, this notion allows for a dismantling and overcoming of the boundaries imposed by ownership and species related hierarchies with the purpose of envisioning new modes of relating to our environment and to rethink social bonds and structures in immanent terms, or, in other words, as horizontal and (dis)continuous processes (Brown and Fleming 2020, 13; Haraway 2016, 33). Whether we find these concepts effective or enough capable of capturing a particular conundrum, it is clear the effort they express in trying to bring together the analysis of the ecological and of the political planes (in the broad sense of the word) to reject pre-existing ontological systems while reshaping their foundations. Deborah Donowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, when critically engaging such eschatological trends—revealing a huge anthropological crisis in the mode of configuring and experiencing our collective existences—demand the possibility of imagining different ends of the world, of advocating a difference that is suffocated by an endless sense of stasis (2016, 95–97). Their argument is particularly relevant when considering that many populations across the globe who have endured colonial rule exist as survivors of the ends of their own worlds.

Roberto Ciccarelli defines the ethical impasse we are experiencing as a posthumous condition; neoliberal rationality has triumphed over our subjectivity in the form of a passive revolution, deforming habits, mindsets, and horizons of thinkability (2022, 78–109, 156–61, 289–91). However, the failure of individualised emancipation, the core myth of *free* market ideology, does not bring forth any automatic drive for renewal; on the contrary, multiplying catastrophic scenarios even seem to elicit another mode of accepting the current state of affairs (Ciccarelli 2022, 9–13), and to frame any alternative dream as another route to doom and existential failure. The crises of the present are, then, also crises of the imagination, of the possibility of communicating the existential weight, implications, and modes of relating to the dangers, challenges, and issues that inform our reality. Imagination and fabulation are not at all secondary elements in our experience of everyday life because they modulate, or give a shape and tangible expression to the different ways in which social assemblages form, organise, or may be put to test. The purpose of the book, in fact, is to emphasise the importance of storytelling in the construction of our political reality and of our agency within it, together with underscoring where monstrous cinematic narratives may play a role in subverting an apparently fixed order of things, and to move away from a regime of endless crises.

To start thinking about the centrality of fabulation one may consider that even the apparently rationalist and dry realm of capitalism is filled with cultish practices, religious and mystical images, and monstrous opponents (Greenaway 2020, 18–21; Hassler-Forest 2014, 116–49; Shaviro 2002, 281–90) that embody deviances to be fought and expelled. Apart from the classical connection, stressed by Max Weber, between capitalism and the ethics of Protestantism, Walter Benjamin's text "Capitalism as Religion" is another key case study (see 1996, 288–91) to consider. In this short essay, the regime of private property accumulation and value extraction is defined as an extreme cultic religion lacking a proper complex theology: "a cult that creates guilt not atonement"; more recently, even though in a maybe more traditionalist or conservative fashion, Byung-Chul Han has argued that the capitalist religion erases any distinction between the sacred and profane, putting both in service of value accumulation at the expenses of spiritual and communal creation (see 2020, 44–46). Contributing to the analysis of capitalist mythologies Isabelle Stengers and Philippe Pignarre, instead, talk more specifically about a form of *sorcery*: about strategies that mutably indicate in this social and productive system a natural, necessary, and eternal form of power (2011, 51–55).

Invisible hands of demented economic rationality² that act as transcendent forces providing precise reference points to evaluate and regulate the behaviour of all existing beings are there to remind us that the current state of affairs and its rules are ontologically correct, that they say to us something essential about the human condition. Some necromancer even evoked notions/spells like "human capital" to collapse subjectivity into an individualised and apolitical machine collecting credits, debts, guilt, punishments, and awards that are inscribed on the body of everyone. Elettra Stimilli, expanding on the connection between capitalism and religion, has examined the multifaceted elements and mechanisms driving this political theology, pointing out, in particular, the effects that these disciplinary strategies have on the political construction of subjectivity (2019, 89–92).

At the same time, mythologies about the survival of the fittest, natural hierarchical allocation of resources on racialised and gendered lines nurture the Malthusian framework typical of neoliberal capitalism. Scroungers, cockroaches, and slackers (who should magically "pull themselves up by their bootstraps") become some of the implicit enemies of this moral system, with its police, inquisition, and priests fighting for the maintenance of its

2 Gilles Deleuze has addressed the dementia of capitalist rationality in *Desert Island and Other Text: 1953–1974* (2004, 262).

purity and perpetuity against those who, driven by unnatural envy, would threaten it. David McNally, in his insightful overview of the figuration of different phases of capitalist accumulation, constantly associates the dynamics of the market to monsters and nefarious creatures torturing and maiming the living flesh of the subjects alienated within its spires (2011, 3–5). The strategies of capital, according to the author, can be compared to occult and esoteric machinations aimed at expanding the reach of accumulation and, in particular when we think about the financial market, to settle always new and more twisted forms of speculation (see 2011, 156–71). It does not come as a surprise, then, acknowledging that Marx and Engels summoned, in the célèbre opening of their Manifesto, a spectre haunting these financial and political institutions, an errand spirit aiming to kill the vampire-capital, extracting blood, energy, life, and agency from each working individual (1988, 208). The act of becoming-class, of coming together of people producing consciousness about power relations and activating for the formations of new forms of living may, then, be compared to the awakening of a new monstrous agency responding to the immiseration produced by this regime of command and extraction (see also McNally 2011, 250–52; Read 2022, 364–79). Apart from the enjoyment that we may find in discussing the paradoxical religious and mythological attachment persisting in all forms of political imagination, it is not my contention to entirely solve and understand complex issues under the umbrella of some abstract cultural war of fabulation, opposing reactionary fantasies to liberating ones. What I aim to do is to present a small journey through the possibilities offered by monsters and dystopias for the purpose of navigating in the dark sea of our present, of observing the contradictions, ruptures, and hopes that hide in our recurring nightmares. In this, I aim to follow the analytical lineage recently traced by Jon Greenaway with his Gothic Marxist approach, by underscoring the role of storytelling for neoliberal governmentality, in its continued attempt to create and mould an appropriate productive subject (see 2020; 2024, 4–17); together with that, the focus on monsters and dystopias is essential to examine the “wars of subjectivity” (or also the strategies through which power produces willing slaves, see Lordon 2014, 7–10) launched by capitalist domination, and to find affirmative and emancipating imaginary instruments to fight and resist within them (Greenaway 2024, 165–80).

Approaching monstrous figurations (or media discourses around monstrousness opposed to notions of normality, see Cohen 1996, vii–xii) means carefully looking at the power and traps embedded in mainstream audiovisual productions, trying to evaluate where productive discursive

and imaginative tensions may emerge. This book, then, tries to contribute to the existing debate around storytelling and fabulation for our times, and, likewise, tackles the fascination for the dystopic and the *negative*, to be understood as possibly empowering or productive affects (see Bould 2021; Malvestio 2021; De Giuli and Porcelluzzi 2021). The focus on recent sci-fi and horror cinema is, then, motivated by the possibility of using these genre not as mere allegories and symptoms of contextual anxieties, but as tools for emancipatory imagination and counter-subjection. It is possible to argue, therefore, that this book, not unlike other recent publications (see, for instance, McNally 2011; Greenaway 2024), is written with a similar desiring tension and with a careful amount of nerdish hope. In fact, as further theoretical premise, I am to think about these cinematic experiences as concrete elements of a political struggle. Félix Guattari, in fact, in his work on aesthetics, insightfully warned against a traditional orthodox separation between infrastructure and superstructure, understanding such division as a dualistic simplification of the political and ethical realm (1995, 1–30). With his radical materialism Guattari addressed artistic experiences as immanent components of a dynamic and multiple infrastructure of power and productive relations, through which economic and monetary flows proliferate in the very same ways affects, subjectivities, and images do. Such realisation, of course, does not entail an unproblematic and univocal directionality of the “imaginary” flows, either doomed to reinforce hegemonic values and subjectivities, or, on the contrary, destined to indicate the magical “yellow brick road” of our collective liberation. The immanent infrastructure exists as a field of tensions, where articulate power relations operate to control the circulation of aesthetic and affective *codes* (among the many), to manage and administer them in ways functional for the reproduction of the hierarchies existing within it (1995, 90–92). Likewise, because of the dynamics and manifold nature of the infrastructure that we are describing, its internal tensions are never easily resolved or closed in their critical potential but can be tested, experimented, or simply connected to the point of finding new paths of transformation.

The Powers of Horror: The Monster as a Promise

If the fascination for cinematic horrors and critical dystopias never ceases to motivate viewers, this is due also to the differing possibilities embedded in the affective dimensions that these genres, as others, enact (Hanich 2010, 6–7). Julia Kristeva (1982) famously dedicated ample space to the studies

of the *powers of horror* by investigating the nuances and conflictual forces operating in myths, tragedies, and contemporary literature when facing and describing “the object,” the intolerable inscribed and casted out of any forms of order and organisation (psychological or political). Again, a more superficial and obvious function of these aesthetic codes (whether literary or in visual arts) remains that of externalising socio-historically specific and situated fears, to give them a recognisable form. In this sense, the arts may adopt and embrace horrific or dystopian/negative tensions with a conservative approach, reassessing and re-presenting conventions aimed to fall within an established canon and set of social roles. That said, the object, in the case of Kristeva, or the negative in the broad sense of the word, exists also a problematic experimental force, as an untamed power for ideas and values to be challenged, put to extreme consequences, and subverted (1982, 205–11). In this context, it is impossible not to mention the importance and role of the works of Eugene Thacker (2011) tackling “horror” as the route to the unthinkable, to the cosmic black (metal) matter from which life (even in a nihilist sense) originates and finds its forms. On a similar note, Frederic Jameson observes how critical dystopias (and horror films in our account) embody a progressive potential and tension because of their recurring use of near-future temporalities or cinematic “chronotopes” (time-space aesthetic and affective configurations, see Bakhtin 1981, 80, 243). This narrative and aesthetic strategy allows for the figuration of problematic dynamics of the present, providing a shape and form to specific political and social issues, re-imagined in a grotesque and deformed manner (Jameson 2005, 198–99). Darko Suvin, in his groundbreaking analysis of sci-fi literature, defined this *effect* and motif of the genre as cognitive estrangement (Suvin 2016, 15–19), as a distortion of the common understanding of the world for a more critical engagement of its overarching tensions. Similarly, for Mark Fisher, dystopic (and nightmarish) audiovisual experiences allow a thought experiment process based on mapping existential and political crises as already-happened manmade catastrophes whose roles can be that of removing any hope or lingering utopian trace to the imagination of current state of affairs (see 2014b, 10–17). As recently remarked by Marco Malvestio, building a rich imaginary around such events can make us humans aware of our ecological entanglement as a species (2021, 64) and of our precarious position in a transformed environment. By doing so cinematic experiences may facilitate the understanding and recognition of the crises of our wider ecologies and, maybe, elicit and encourage the affirmative imagination of ways to respond to them (Jameson 2005, 210–20). In this sense, the case studies discussed

in this book both epitomise specific contextual fears and anxieties and may provide routes and tools for the materialisation of new desires and aspirations against the stillness of the present.

The above-mentioned concept of chronotope remains central in the analysis as it puts at the centre the “material” affective and intellectual role of artistic experience. Instead of looking at the case studies as texts to be interpreted, the chronotope maps their experiential and experimental possibilities, it allows looking at films and TV series as the sites of a creative dialogue, where ideas form in relation to perceptual and bodily practices (see Hesselberth 2014, 10–14). To put it with Adrian J. Ivakhiv’s effective formulation, “images move,” they constitute affective storyworld, ecologies with their own rules, while, concurrently, practically dialoguing with a world existing outside of cinema itself (see 2013, 23–25). The arts, thus, play an affirmative role in relation to the world; they do not represent, but rather enrich our reality. This perspective, which Nietzsche identified as the power of the false, or a capacity in bringing together pieces of our reality through artistic expressions (see Deleuze 1986a, 102–3), however, does not provide cinematic experiences with a privileged status; similarly horrific tales and critical dystopias do not occupy a superior role in current media ecologies nor they embody, more than any other form of audiovisual expression, the potential for a critical reframing of our position in the world. These misleading arguments may both fail in accounting for the specific force of each case study and wrongfully simplify the complexity of viewers’ affective participation. On the one hand, it is easy to argue how horrific affects can be easily mapped and traced within storyworlds that have very little to do with specific genre conventions: for instance, the internationally acclaimed US HBO TV series *Succession* (Armstrong et al.³ 2019–23), with its wide array of dynastic struggle for corporate dominance, provides enough awe and disgust for the quite realistic horrors of contemporary rentier capitalism. Likewise, it could be highlighted how one of the traditional functions of “the horror,” from myths to fairy tales, and moving to modern fictions, has always been that of giving a monstrous face to the unconventional, to the alien, to the morally ambiguous or threatening so as to clearly trace and reinforce the existential boundaries of the possible. Furthermore, great sci-fi authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin have largely demonstrated how utopian narratives are likewise capable of mobilising our imaginary

3 In this text I am going to adopt the wording “et al.” (as recommended by Karen Pearlman, see 2023) in addition to filmmakers’ surnames in order to highlight the collective and distributed nature of film authorship.

while disenchanting the mythical and immobile status of the magical and fantastical and, therefore, should never be dismissed as forms of facile wishful thinking (Jameson 2005, 279–80).

The fascination and attraction for negativity and its allures (see Fisher 2016, 17, 48, 74–75) has more to do with the appreciation of the radical and productive ambiguity and contradictions embedded in it. Mark Fisher, for instance, examined the ways in which affective dimensions of the weird and the eerie, when connected with popular and recurring allegoric scenarios, tropes (and chronotopes), and fictional figures, offer us insightful emotional and conceptual tools to explore the world around us, and mutate our position in it (2016, 8–13). Embracing monsters—far from attempts to domesticate the disturbing energy they embed or to turn them into innocuous and superficially rebellious figures (a bit like what Tim Burton seems to be doing on a regular basis these days)—means examining the ways in which they problematise the current status of our reality. Monsters, if we think about the etymology of the word (the Latin *monère* “to admonish” and *monstrum* as “divine omen” and revelation is considered one of the most plausible origins), display ambiguous tensions and signs of unresolved alterity, which can reinforce contingent discursive paradigms or help in building counter-images (Voto 2022). The monster, after all, lives in transition, as Paul B. Preciado would argue, it indicates a *queer* process rather than a fixed subjectivity: a movement of becoming coalescing unexpected challenges and opportunities that are not set once and for all (2021, 26). Therefore, the monster both polices the borders of the possible and expresses the desire to violate them: it displays a set of grounded and materialist strategies to get out of contextual deadlocks and failures (Cohen 1996, 3–25). Gaia Giuliani (2020) has recently addressed a corpus of monstrous cinematic experiences using them as vectors through which existential and political impasses can be challenged and possibly overcome by generating, for instance, new modes to understand and discuss our political and cultural identities.

In a certain sense, I am suggesting that, within many of the films and TV series that I am going to discuss, we can find a double tragic tension, in the Nietzschean sense and in the more posthuman Harawayan one. Indeed, on the one hand, in these audiovisual worlds we may identify the Dionysian aesthetic challenge Nietzsche associated with the traditional tragic canon. By exploring the uncanny and the various dimensions of the horrific, these case studies may also express a non-pessimistic form of *fatalism* or negativity; the vision of a world in which the flux of becoming and the challenge of transformation are never met by teleological justifications or supported by a transcendent look over reality (see Nietzsche 2007, 125–30)

and, therefore, even the absolute shock must be accepted in the frame of an “innocent” becoming of the world. The monster here constitutes an empowering challenge to be embraced, a transgressive and subversive force that may lead us to annihilation and, still, remains as the stimulus necessary to move beyond a sense of impotence and failure; it describes, therefore, the disturbing mask we need to wear in order to rethink reality. On this note, through the refusal to resolve an embedded terrifying tension, these films and TV series provide the affective and conceptual tools required to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway 2016, 12, 101): to avoid a praxis that separates us from the rotting, flourishing, producing, and tumultuous matter composing our ecologies (whether environmental, social, or psychological). Such dimensions of horror enable us to put together and observe the coexistence of spaces, places, and forms of life that are complexly integrated within the manifold and frightening unknown world in front of our eyes, and reveal unexpected promises of an alternative existence (Haraway 2020, 505–8).

Methodology: A Cyberpunk/Neuropunk Cinematic Experience

The ideas discussed so far would not seem to move far away from Noël Carroll’s extensive account of the paradoxes of horrors, of its pleasures and sublime challenges, and of its intrinsic connection with tragedy for its providing an emotional avenue for expressing and dealing with negativity (1990, 60–92, 159–85). Similarly, Robin Wood’s classical work on the return of the repressed embedded in horror amply answers for the ways in which this canon is connected with subversion and transgression (2018). However, these accounts remain very much grounded on the symbolic nature of artistic expressions, or rather stress the fictionality and representational nature of horrific and dystopian cinematic experiences. What is more, it is essential for me to underscore the ways in which monsters and horrific narratives produce and affirm their own alternative desires and subjectivities, rather than simply giving a shape to fear and anxieties (see MacCormack 2020, 533). In line with the previous points on the infrastructural nature of affects and moving images, I am working from a pragmatic, “enactive” or ecological standpoint to analyse my case studies (see Ivakhiv 2013, 70–75; Hven 2017, 20, 128, 204; 2022, 9–10), directing my focus on their operational functions. My intention is to stress how affective power of movies is not centred around the assemblage of separated images that we, as viewers, signify through higher intellectual activities. Our engagement is, on the contrary, grounded on intricate bodily processes, with images producing

and operating case-specific affective and conceptual dynamics; thus, films and TV series make us experiment through them; we can construct and reconstruct, or negotiate our subjective positioning at every turn because of the experiential coordinates that they put in place. The style defining a particular storyworld, its *mise-en-scène* and specific aesthetic characteristics are what define these trajectories and visual strategies by laying the foundations of an interactive dialogue with the audience. The cinematic medium is so considered as a *cybernetic* system, where viewers' subjectivities and their entanglement are not informed in terms of isolated or pre-existing characteristics, but by the relational possibilities (or virtualities) generated by a particular storyworld (Hven 2022, 21–24). When thinking about the issue of consciousness in cinema, Gilles Deleuze, for instance, did not describe an atomised subjectivity negotiating with the reality and characters on screen, but presented the case for an impersonal and moving one:

The sole cinematographic consciousness is not us, the spectator, nor the hero; it is the camera—sometimes human, sometimes inhuman or Superhuman []... The shot, that is to say consciousness, traces a movement which means that the things between which it arises are continuously reuniting into a whole, and the whole is continuously dividing between things (the Dividual). It is movement itself which is decomposed and recomposed. (1986b, 33–34)

The process-oriented or cybernetic immanence described by Deleuze makes us observe the cinematic experience as a body (see Shaviro 1993), or a set of bodily relations: as a composite we interact and blend with by navigating through the various imaginary flows it produces and generates. Therefore, we can think about viewers' participation as a sympoietic process, Haraway would say (2016, 33–36): a transforming and mutating dynamic identifying all existing organic and non-organic beings as ecological systems, which are never self-sufficient and static. What sympoiesis implies is that even though we may think about ourselves or any other feature of reality as apparently stable and fixed, we, nevertheless, interact and transform beyond any mechanistic stimuli-response mechanism or transcendent rationality. We mutate and explore when watching films, although the results and effects of this entanglement are never pre-determined. As the disturbing visions of flesh, wires, and metals moulding together in *Videodrome* (Cronenberg et al. 1983), *Akira* (Otomo et al. 1988), or *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (Tsukamoto et al. 1989) remind us, cybernetics does not figure a clean or linear interaction. In fact, a sympoietic/cybernetics of cinema is also a cyberpunk/neuropunk

one (to use an imaginative formulation by Mark Fisher), a composition through which our immanent embodied minds can always be rewired in relation to contingent ecological assemblages (2018, 695–98), and collective agency is discovered and tested within such entanglements. However, as previously argued, the transformative power embedded in the medium is always an experimental one and can feature conflictual or non-univocal directions. Technological updates of all kinds or extended uses of CGI are not by themselves sources of disruptive innovation; they do not necessarily complicate and enrich the experience of a storyworld. Likewise, the abstract “thematic” complexity of narrative does not constitute its experiential richness and density. Tensions and creative instances are generated and can be properly evaluated only as experiential dynamics and processes. Consequently, we experiment them by putting the various elements of films/TV series (narratives, characters, camerawork, editing, architectures, etc.) in relation to one another, and by observing the possibilities embodied in the polyphonic interaction between their features (see Bakhtin 1981, 400).

Through cinematic experiences worlds can be reassembled (these stories do not simply talk about the world but to it, see this notion in Malvestio 2021, 3), ideas of personhood put to the test and new constitutions of individual and collective subjectivities discovered and activated. New communities are there waiting to be liberated as soon as we accept that our skin is not a closed border, but a porous and everchanging surface to be remapped. With these premises in mind, we can proceed to our gallery of monsters and catastrophes, and address the challenge they present in relation to notions of self/ownership, reproductive crises, work/subordination, the creation of alternative communities, and related “ends of the world.” These major thematic areas, each of them acting also as the focus of various chapters of the book, are not separated issues, and will be explored through interrelated and dialoguing sections. Chapter 1 will be dedicated to cyborgs and to the ways they reframe subjectivity as an ecological composite; from the acknowledgement of the human existing as part of nature we will move to reproductive crises and apocalyptic scenarios in chapter 2, highlighting their multiple functions in connection to the catastrophic dynamics of contemporary capitalism. Witches in chapter 3 will provide us with nightmarish experiments to respond to these contextual crises of social and biological reproduction, while chapter 4 is dedicated to the living dead, and to their unconfessed promise, as wretched and exploited of the Earth, to take back the planet. All these topics are used as reference points to discuss problematic centres of the “capitalist machine” dominating our present and, consequently, the case studies examined in each chapter operate as tools to creatively respond to

it, or to open fractures in its organisation. I would also like to remind of the limitations implied in the author's selection of the case studies, which, in large majority (though not exclusively) are films and TV series produced in the North of the world. I recognise the Eurocentric standpoint that informs the analysis and the direction of the discussion; nonetheless, I think this same arrangement is effective in providing a cohesive discursive structure, in particular when emphasising the recurring presence of specific concerns and tensions. It may be possible to consider this text, therefore, as a simple starting point of a long-term research work dedicated to the effort of bringing together global monstrous figures and investigating the ways in which these abject communities can, in different forms, open new existential horizons against the limits of a disempowering apocalyptic imagination.

As previously highlighted, the methodology of the discussion is grounded in a mixture of enactive *mise-en-scène* and film-philosophical analysis, with a particular focus on the role of negative affectivity and horror-dystopian related emotions (a paradigmatic example of this analytical praxis can be found in the work of Steven Shaviro, see 1993). Case studies are considered not as texts but as operational affective and conceptual *environments* capable of producing systems of ideas (see Ivakhiv 2013, 5; Hven 2022, 12). Cinematic stylistic motifs are closely tied with their thematic and political discourses, even though this relation is not to be limited to a cause-effect connection between the two. It would be more functional, in this sense, to think about a dialogical production of meaning, one that does not ground itself around correspondences and representations, but puts in place or enacts interactive perceptual and intellectual systems. These affective cinematic storyworlds, therefore, are materialist (part of nature themselves) tools to be used to explore a larger social and political ecology while building a new critical consciousness and related agency. The act of mapping, however, is not a simple recollection and abstract categorisation of atomised objects existing in the world in front of our eyes; it is a process of discovery through assemblage and re-assemblage, essentially tied to the experimentation of new relations, providing different and always remodulating meanings to every component of the real. Mapping means challenging and recreating, more than anything else, our own status as “humans” in the world. Indeed, if our imagination seems to be stuck in an eternal “end of history” it is also because we keep dreaming the masters' dream. It is not enough, paraphrasing Hegel, to recognise that the master is nothing without the slave if the latter keeps thinking about themselves only in the former's terms. Therefore, in the absence of better dreams, nightmares can be very liberating and revealing, so let's welcome cyborgs, witches, and zombies in our sleep.

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