

New forms of authoritarianism, populism, and inequality have sprung up from the core of our contemporary techno-capitalist society—from the US and Europe to China. The corporate capitalist dynamic has, further, generated an unprecedented crisis of the environmental conditions of society itself, which has led scholars to characterize the current age as the “capitalocene.” The permanent revolution of technological capitalism is throwing into question the very concept of the human, pointing towards a post-human society. The specter of dystopia is haunting our social imaginaries engendering new apocalyptic myths and narratives that have become even more relevant due to the current global pandemic.

And yet, the landscape of social imagination is plural and divided: AI, robotics, neuroscience, biogenetics, and evolutionary theory are breathing new life into eschatological and salvation myths. In this situation of historical crisis and openness, filmic imagination and its capacity to read possible futures into the “signs of times” is a privileged site of experience and reflection. After the fashion of postmodern fragmentation and playful fictionalization, there has been a flourishing of (grand) narratives drawing on scientific-technological inventions and socio-historical ideas in order to anticipate and reflect the coming post-human society. In particular, the predicament of capitalist society has generated a wave of filmic insights and

interpretations that envision possible future developments from the seeds of the present—e.g. *Black Mirror* (Charlie Brooker, 2011–present), *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2014), *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014), *Humans* (Sam Vincent and Jonathan Brackley, 2015–18), *Westworld* (Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan, 2016–present), *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Bruce Miller, 2017–present), *3%* (Pedro Aguilera, 2016–present), or *Dragonfly Eyes* (*Qingting zhi yan*, Xu Bing, 2017).

The aim of this special issue is to use the tools of cinema to engage some of the questions regarding the diagnosis of the current crisis of techno-capitalist society and its consequences: what forms of narrative and representation are used today in cinema and television to account for the present crisis of techno-capitalism? How do technological developments shape (human) relations? How are current myths (apocalyptic, salvationist, etc.) interpreted and constructed through film, and what is the role of techno-scientific narratives? How do technological developments shape the use of power in contemporary societies?

In her article “When Your Motherboard Replaces the Pearly Gates: *Black Mirror* and the Technology of Today and Tomorrow,” Rebecca Anne Peters considers five episodes from the anthology series *Black Mirror*. The article lays out an argument for reading the use of the

technology within the series as a reflection of Christian concepts that haunt Western culture, positing that the specters of these ideas linger in our idealized thinking of the god-like powers that technology might give us. Likewise, these concepts endure in the persecutory role that technology might play as a moral enforcer, echoing one of the dimensions of the church throughout history. To construct her argument, she considers the episodes in relation to one another and in the context of the biblical concepts they mirror—drawing from Christian theology as well as from historical and contemporary events.

In “Blaming the Poor: The False Allure of the Capitalist Critique in the Age of Postmodernism,” Joseph Walderzak discusses the question of the crisis of capitalism by focusing on three class-conscious films from recent years: *The Dark Knight Rises* (Christopher Nolan, 2012), *Killing Them Softly* (Andrew Dominik, 2012) and *Snowpiercer* (Bong Joon-ho, 2013). These films address contemporary inequality using explicit Marxian imagery. However, as Walderzak argues following Fredric Jameson, in treating those issues as mere narrative devices, they display a postmodern aesthetics that ends up reducing antagonistic discourses to residual forms of history, preventing any truly transformative discourse oppositional to ruling class values.

In her article “Loving the AI: Captivity and Ownership in Unbalanced Dystopian Relationships,” Ida Marie Schober analyzes what she argues has become a trend in the dystopian and science fiction genre of the last years, namely, the depiction of a relationship between a lonely male human character and a female man-made AI one. She concentrates on the spatial restrictions that these AI female characters endure, resorting to recent psychoanalytic theory applied to the visual arts, as well as to Judith Butler’s developments on the institution of gender through the stylization of bodies, seeing the captivity depicted in these films as the blatant objectification of the female body. While these films are counterhegemonic in that they warn us of unsupervised creation of AI, they also reproduce the patriarchal distribution of space that has primordially functioned in the past.

“Foreshadowing the Future of Capitalism: Surveillance Technology and Digital Realism in Xu Bing’s *Dragonfly Eyes* (2017)” by Ling Zhang deals with surveillance images as they are used in Xu’s film without any manipulation, but not without editing and anesthetizing them. The result, she argues, is a new model of filmmaking only possible with contemporary developments of digital technology and media. Zhang reflects on the technological mediations of informational capitalism’s present and future. Her goal is to show that the

film delineates the contours of the social imaginary of today's capitalism, as well as its temporal coordinates. Surveillance not only connotes the idea of controlling the future, it also affects our relation to the past, to history. As the current pandemic indicates, the confrontation between the Chinese model of authoritarian capitalism—based on AI and comprehensive surveillance

strategies—and the Western liberal-democratic model of capitalism will be part of the debates on the future of our societies. This crisis will most probably nourish a new wave of cinematic dystopias and utopias.¹

Camil Ungureanu, Sonia Arribas and Rebecca Anne Peters

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