

ETHICS OF FEMINIST RESISTANCE AND POSSIBILITIES OF UTOPIA IN FILM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE TV SERIES *EXTRAPOLATIONS* (2023)

Asunción Bernárdez-Rodal, Ignacio Moreno-Segarra, Graciela Padilla-Castillo

Complutense University of Madrid (Spain)

asbernar@ucm.es; igmore01@ucm.es; gracielp@ucm.es

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The ecosocial crisis we are experiencing has begun to enter the mainstream cinematic universe of adult fiction, beyond the traditional genres linked to traditional Science Fiction (Bernárdez, 2021). In recent years, stories have begun to emerge that move away from the dystopian genre, and that feed the necessary fantasy of creating a new world based on ethical values that allow us to save not only human life, but also the entire balance necessary for the life of all animals and plants on the planet (Bruna Pérez, 2020).

This research is a commitment to film creations that dare to fictionalise new forms of life and human interaction, in which nature and animal life have a place. The difficulty of film production to talk realistically about the climate crisis is a symptom of the fact that, in the capitalist system, we are not allowed to imagine a world that is not based on savage competitiveness. Fredric Jameson (2005) once said that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism". Changing the world requires changing our mental frameworks, and film and fiction are the main tools our capitalist system has to reproduce itself. In the face of what we consider leisure, amusement or entertainment, we let our guard down (Montoro Araque, 2023; Dederichs, 2023).

The media and social networks have created a particular semiosphere in which neoliberalism and competitiveness permeate everything: from formal education to popular culture, from the world of work to leisure and recreational practices. This is not just a matter of political discourses undertaken by certain conservative figures, but rather of a diffuse mentality that makes it impossible to imagine a world that functions on the basis of cooperation and radical equality. It is this mechanism that allows hundreds of climate change documentaries to be made, while new fiction remains anchored in individualistic and heroic stories (Morto, 2016; Demos, 2017; Hameed, Gunkel, & O'Sullivan, 2022).

Secondly, our work is also a bid for anti-heroism. Mainstream cinema is full of great characters (almost always male) who save other people in dramatic situations caused by climate disaster, thus reducing collective issues to individual ones. Almost all the plots of fictional productions start from the moment when a natural disaster occurs and specific people struggle hard against the risk of death. They are adventure stories, many of them framed within the genre of science fiction with all its variants. In *Waterworld* (1995) the world has flooded and the land has disappeared; in the *Mad Max* saga (1979, 1981, 1985, 2015) the main resources such as water and petrol are scarce, and this triggers a merciless fight between human beings with no empathy for each other; in *Snowpiercer* (2013) the planet has frozen over and the only remaining survivors live on an eternally moving train; in *The Day After* (2004) there is a great storm that may end

civilisation; in *Interstellar* (2014) the earth's crops are destroyed, and a new planet must be found to inhabit.

Cinema is very good at imagining forms of collective death: diseases, natural catastrophes, rising sea levels, nuclear accidents, alien invasions, meteorites, genetic alterations... all of which can be seen in the film, genetic alterations... a whole panoply of disasters from which we manage to emerge triumphant thanks to sacrifice, audacity and, of course, competitiveness. Almost all these films are an exaltation of the fiercest individualism, even though, in almost all of them, there are nods to human transcendence as a whole.

All of them have at least one thing in common: they are heroic stories of people who wage a valiant struggle for survival once disaster has struck. This shifts the core of the problem: we are already experiencing the effects of global warming, and all that the film industry imagines on a massive scale are stories of how a few of us can survive? The suspicion is that, in creative circles, it is not considered "cinematic" to suggest that here and now we can do things to avoid rushing into disaster.

It seems easier to invent fantastic solutions in which the god of technology saves us as, for example, in the film *Geostrom* (2017), in which world governments unite to build a network of satellites that can control the climate, or in *A Large Life* (2017), the solution to pollution from human action on earth is to reduce the size of people to 12.7 centimetres through medical techniques. Why is there not a less spectacular approach? Why does fiction reproduce and reinforce the spectacularisation of the diseased egos of international politics and economics?

The impossibility of mainstream culture to fictionalise another possible world away from dystopias and fantastic technological solutions is the proof that we need to change our conception of the place of human beings on planet Earth. Thinking and feeling ourselves as animals among animals, as living beings among other living beings, is the only key to a peaceful future.

In our work we will analyse the TV series *Extrapolations*, an American production broadcast on the Apple TV+ platform this year, and created by Scott Z. Burns. It is an eight-episode miniseries that depicts a relatively near future in which the climatic effects that the scientific world has been predicting for more than twenty-five years are beginning to be felt. The first story takes place in 2037 and the last in 2070. The aim of our work will be to analyse the different ethical questions raised in the series and the relationship they have with the configuration of today's Information Society. To do so, we will analyse the issues that circulate in the press and see how they are reflected in the series, , with an integral perspective from an eco-feminist perspective.

This work has been supported by the Madrid Government (Comunidad de Madrid-Spain) under the Multiannual Agreement with Universidad Complutense de Madrid in the line Research Incentive for Young PhDs, in the context of the V PRICIT (Regional Programme of Research and Technological Innovation). Call PR/27/21. Title: "Traceability, Transparency and Access to Information: Study and Analysis of the dynamics and trends in the area". Reference: PR27/21-017. Duration: September 2022 - December 2024. Funding of 43,744.22 euros.

KEYWORDS: Mainstream cinema, climate crisis, Ethics, Social Change, Eco-feminism.

REFERENCES

- Bernárdez Rodal, A. (2023). *Ecoficciones. Cine para sentipensar la crisis climática*. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch.
- Bruna Pérez, P. (2020) Análisis del imaginario cinematográfico de posibles futuros ecosociales y alternativas narrativas especulativas. *Re-visiones*, (10), 1-22.
- Canavan, G., & Rovinson, K. S. (Eds.) (2019). *Green Planets: Ecology and science fiction*. Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Demos, T. J. (2017). *Against the Anthropocene. Visual culture and environment today*. Berlin: Stenberg Press.
- Dederichs, N. (2023). *Atmosfears: The Uncanny Climate of Contemporary Ecofiction*. Transcript Verlag.
- Hameed, A.; Gunkel, H., & O'Sullivan, S. D (Eds.) (2022). *Futures and Fictions*. London: Repeater.
- Jameson, F. (2005). *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopian and Other Science Fiction*. London & New York: Verso.
- Montoro Araque, M. (2023). ¿Hacia un fantástico ecoficcional? Dos lecturas de lo monstruoso vegetal en el cine contemporáneo. *Brumal. Research Journal on the fantastic*, 11(1), 211-229. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/brumal.959>
- Morto, T. (2016). *Dark Ecology. For a Logic of future coexistence*. New York: Columbia University Press.