

ContactZone

Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della fantascienza e del fantastico

Non-human Narrators in Science Fiction

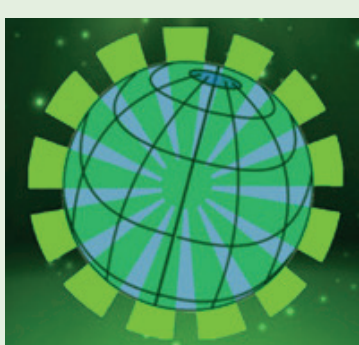
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PUBLISHER

Paolo Loffredo Editore srl

via Ugo Palermo 6

80128 Napoli - Italy

P.IVA 05014040876

R.E.A. NA 931959

+39 3248382362

www.loffredoeditore.com/it/

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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.

Director: Luca Sarti

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Introduction

Non-human Storytelling in Science Fiction

Oriana Palusci and Valentina Romanzi
DOI: 10.26379/1731

We live in anxious times, driven by changes of such a scale that we struggle to take them in – mutating hyperobjects of sorts, to borrow Timothy Morton’s term (2013). War and political upheaval feature daily on the national and international news. Deadly viruses spread globally. The consequences of climate change are perceived worldwide. As humans, we cannot avoid considering the impact of such tremendous upheavals on our species. Yet, we are not the only inhabitants of planet Earth. The great metamorphoses caused by the Anthropocene have a devastating impact on the ecosystem: on animal and vegetal species becoming extinct at the highest rate in history, and on non-living entities, bearing the brunt of erosion, deforestation and reckless exploitation of resources. In the 1970s, James Lovelock formulated the Gaia hypothesis, which construes the earth as a complex selfregulating system: the theory “proposes that the responses of living organisms to environmental conditions ultimately bring about changes that make the earth better adapted to support life; the system would rid itself of any species that adversely affects the environment” (Martin and Hine 2016). Lovelock’s view of a holistic self-preserving mechanism for our planet is a beacon of hope in the darkness of our times.

Sentient Asteroids and Too Human Aliens in Fredric Brown's Fiction

Simone Pettine
DOI: 10.26379/1732

Abstract

Not infrequently the choice of a futuristic context has allowed to highlight some distortions in human behavior, proposing notable reflections within an underestimated “escape literature”. This is the case of numerous science fiction works by the American writer Fredric Brown (1906-1972), in which the alien unexpectedly becomes the narrator: in Brown's novels and short stories the voices of the non-human characters are often so good at sharing points of view, lifestyles and defects of the opposite (human) species that they are confused with it. This essay aims to answer at least two fundamental questions: what precise aspects does social criticism consist of in Brown's stories? To what extent does it prove to be indebted to the adoption of non-human narrators? We will proceed through the analysis of novels (*The Mind Thing* and *Rogue in Space*) and selected short stories (*Sentry* and *The Last Martian*).

Desire for Human Nature in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Amalia Călinescu

DOI: 10.26379/1733

Abstract

This theoretical study aims to show how clones portray humanity while outlining the therapeutic quality of Kazuo Ishiguro's sixth novel *Never Let Me Go*. The world depicted accepts human cloning as a form of preserving the human body. Although the narrating character Kathy and her friends, Ruth and Tommy, seem at peace with their destiny as donors, their burning desire to be treated as human beings underlies the dystopian nature of the novel. In the first part, social distortion is explained in connection with nature's golden ratio. Clones' interaction is then analysed with the help of Eric Berne's transactional analysis and the three ego states of each human personality. Kathy, Ruth and Tommy's lack of reaction towards the (ab)normality of genetic modification is identified as a form of the Daoist *Wu wei*, in the third part of the study. By learning to master her unfulfilled desire for human nature, Kathy will eventually let go.

Beyond a Strictly Anthropocentric Vision of the Nonhuman: Body Language in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*

Lena Crucitti
DOI: 10.26379/1734

Abstract

In the dystopian science fiction novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021), Nobel Prizewinning writer Kazuo Ishiguro gives a voice to a non-human narrator called Klara, an AF (Artificial Friend) who was bought to become the companion of a child called Josie. Through her narration, Klara demonstrates that she has superior observational abilities: she reads people through their facial expressions and gestures, and actively uses her body to communicate. Interestingly, human language, which is traditionally considered as “man’s identifying characteristic par excellence” (Agamben 2004: 37), is relegated to the status of a less efficient communication tool. As I will argue in this article, the questioning of the power of human language and the emphasis on body language as a major means of expression in the novel allow to escape from a strictly anthropocentric stance on the nonhuman.

The novel suggests that going beyond words is a necessity to displace the human perspective in the representation of other forms of being. *Klara and the Sun* features a wide range of different ontological categories: humans (in the traditional sense of the term), genetically engineered humans (children who have been ‘lifted’), traditional animals (dogs, birds, insects, etc.), posthuman animals (drone birds), different generations of AFs (B2s, B3s), etc. My article will approach the novel as a work that does not only blur the boundaries between the traditional categories (animals, humans, machines) but that questions the existence of such groups. Based on Joanna Bourke’s concept of ‘negative zoology’, I will demonstrate that the novel – mainly through Klara’s unique way of expressing herself and understanding the world – promotes the acknowledgement of the radical singularity of every single being, be it what we call a ‘human’ or a non-human entity.

Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Trilogy* and the Revolutionary Potential of Care

Wendy L. Wright
DOI: 10.26379/1735

Abstract

This article uses Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Trilogy* to explore the possibilities and limits of care as a means to liberation and a just world order. The narrator of the trilogy is Breq, the last remaining ancillary segment of the vast starship *Justice of Toren*. By exploring the connection between the deep knowing of the AI, the role of care as a mandate and a norm is explored through the frame of care ethics, a feminist theory of political order. Read through care ethics, the trilogy offers an imaginary in which care can transform individuals, create new worlds and new peoples. This generates space to reflect on the possibilities and limitations of care in the contemporary context of status, social inequality, and anti-democratic structures.

The Narrator Is(n't) Human: The Presence of the Human Body in the Nonhuman Narration of *Twin Peaks* and "The Metamorphosis"

Emily Scarrott
DOI: 10.26379/1736

Abstract

This paper explores the cross contamination of human and non-human voices in absurdist science fiction. Primarily, I will interrogate the collaborative humanto- non-human relationship of Margaret Lanterman and her Log in *Twin Peaks* (1990-1, 2017), in comparison with Gregor's experience as newly "other" in Kafka's "Metamorphosis" (1915).

The Log Lady is representative of the collision between the human and nonhuman. In her ongoing role as carer for her log, the Log Lady literally carries the capability of communicating with supernatural realms. Whilst the Log is, arguably, more informed about the occurrences in *Twin Peaks* than any key character, it is reliant on its human collaborator to become part of the conversation. Comfort (2009: 63) recognises how "unelaborated" their collective identity is: the community do not feel the need to provide any justification or explanation to the Log Lady's behaviours. Without sound or gesture, the Log's input leads the narrative, providing knowledge to human investigators which opens the pathway towards conclusion.

In contrast, although Gregor internally retains his human sense of self and understanding of the world, his newly physical otherness provokes a need to rethink the nature of the narrator. While the non-human Log relies on an intimate relationship with a human vessel to communicate, Gregor is able to express himself as an individual to close family members, he loses validity based on the nonhuman vessel which he inhabits.

Critically drawing on patriarchal understandings of the able human body as capital, this discussion explores the value assigned to narrators by their peers, based upon the humanness of the body through which they communicate.

Home Family Future: Authenticity, the Frontier Myth, and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*

Kara L. McCormack

DOI: 10.26379/1737

Abstract

This article explores the ways *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* utilizes the meanings of the American frontier and wilderness to get at questions of authenticity and renewal. The film's narrative is told through the eyes of nonhuman protagonists to allow for a reflection on humanity and those institutions grounded in traditional, conservative values: masculinity, family, and the natural world. While the use of nonhuman heroes may be at first destabilizing for audiences, the narrative cultivates an intense empathy with the apes of the film's title. Indeed, by placing audience empathy squarely with the nonhuman primates – presented as the more natural and authentic beings the imagined wilderness represents – the film is able to more clearly critique the human exploitation and greed that led to diegetic social catastrophe in the first place. The symbolic appeal of the frontier is ever present, with its promise of a translation of the self and society into something purer and more real.

Review Essay

Climate Cassandras

Valentina Romanzi
DOI: 10.26379/1738

Abstract

Mark Bould's *The Anthropocene Unconscious: Climate Catastrophe Culture*, published in 2021 by Verso, has been the talk of the past few months among scholars of science and, to an extent, mundane fiction – and for a good reason. In less than 200 pages, *The Anthropocene Unconscious* spotlights one of the most overlooked yet permeating features of contemporary fiction: the ubiquitous presence of climate change. In its brevity and simplicity, Bould's book makes narrative elements often buried in the background surface and manages to convince readers of something so macroscopically evident that, from our often too narrow perspective, has mostly gone unnoticed.

Artwork
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Claudio V. Coccoli
DOI: 10.26379/1739

ContactZone

Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della fantascienza e del fantastico

La marca del monstruo: cuerpos disformes en la ciencia ficción hispanoamericana

al cuidado de Paola Laura Gorla y Andrea Pezzè



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National and Kapodistrian University of

Athens, Greece

COPY EDITOR

Antonio Fruttaldo - afruttaldo@unior.it

Roberta La Peruta - rlaperuta@unior.it

PUBLISHER

Paolo Loffredo Editore srl

via Ugo Palermo 6

80128 Napoli - Italy

P.IVA 05014040876

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Introducción

Monstruos: patologías y normas de lolatinoamericano

Andrea Pezzè y Paola Laura Gorla

DOI: 10.26379/1771

En las postrimerías del siglo pasado y en los comienzos del XXI, la ciencia ficción latinoamericana, junto a otros géneros dichos populares cuales la novela de terror, el policial y la no-ficción, han ido paulatinamente imponiéndose en las renovadas letras del continente latinoamericano. Consecuentemente, se ha dado un incremento de los estudiosos y de las estudiosas que han dedicado sus intereses en definir las características del género en relación a los contenidos que estas ficciones ofrecen en la representación de la humanidad de entre los siglos XX y XXI.

Por supuesto, la ciencia ficción en América Latina no empieza a finales del siglo pasado. Desde el XIX, los avances y los desafíos de la Modernidad, el mandato sobre la formación de un nuevo orden y las nuevas tipologías de organización social, entre ellas el imperativo del positivismo en el pensamiento de las élites del XIX (Terán 1983), hicieron que los escritores (y las escritoras, como es el caso de Juana Manuela Gorriti o de la colombiana Soledad Acosta de Samper) empezaran a dedicarse a ficciones especulativas de carácter distópico o de curiosidad científica.

En todos los países de América Latina, los retos de la Modernidad, la necesidad de reflexionar sobre las medidas necesarias para alcanzar un desarrollo social y tecnológico conforme al anhelo de incluirse entre las naciones occidentales y sus patrones de desarrollo, hizo que la ciencia ficción se convirtiera en el closet de las aspiraciones o de las frustraciones (y de los miedos) de las clases dirigentes.

Máquinas de crear: creación, monstruosidad e imaginación prospectiva en la literatura latinoamericana

Adriana López-Labourdette

DOI: 10.26379/1772

Resumen

Partiendo de un doble enfoque (posthumanismo y estudios de teratologías) este ensayo propone indagar sobre las figuras artificiales y su relación con los humanos, en base a un límite entre unos y otros: la capacidad de (pro)creación. El foco del ensayo recae sobre lo que denomino “máquinas de crear”, ensamblajes entre organismo y máquina, que presentan una voluntad creativa. Son figuraciones de lo monstruoso que trabajan otras nociones de vidas y cuerpos significantes, lanzadas al futuro para repensar el presente (de ahí la idea de la ficción prospectiva).

Las máquinas de narrar sirven, como veremos, para pensar lo artificial, pero también el artificio mismo. Su presencia en la literatura funciona como lente visualizador de las gramáticas literarias y culturales de nuestro tiempo y conforman un territorio atravesado por líneas de fuerza en las que se tensionan aspectos centrales para la literatura como la figura de artista, las nociones de autor y autoría, la creación como proyecto, así como la distribución y el lenguaje.

Abstract

Starting from a double approach (posthuman and teratology studies), this article proposes to investigate artificial figures and their relationship with humans, on the basis of a limit existing between them: the capacity for (pro)creation. I will focus on what I call “machines of creation”, assemblages between organism and machine, which have a creative will. They are figurations of the monstrous that work with other notions of lives and signifying bodies, thrown into the future to rethink the present (hence the idea of prospective fiction). Narrating machines serve, as we shall see, to think the artificial, but also the artifice itself. Their presence in literature functions as a visualising lens for the literary and cultural grammars

of our time, and they form a territory crossed by lines of force in which central aspects of literature such as the figure of the artist, the notions of author and authorship, creation as a project, as well as distribution and language, come into tension.

La tecnología monstruosa: seducción y castigo en relatos de Elena Aldunate y Samanta Schweblin

Macarena Areco

DOI: 10.26379/1773

Resumen

Más allá de las teorías críticas que entienden al monstruo como una figura de resistencia y emancipación, en este artículo me propongo ahondar en los mecanismos de captura y de castigo propios de lo que he llamado “tecnología monstruosa”, concepto que surge del análisis de dos narraciones, una de una escritora chilena y otra de una argentina –“Juana y la cibernética” de Elena Aldunate y Kentukis de Samanta Schweblin–, cuyas historias dan cuenta del carácter doble de los nuevos aparatos producidos por el avance científico: por un lado, utópico, con sus promesas de compañía, cercanía y conexión, su aura y seducción y, por otro, violento, pues su uso provoca un daño en los sujetos vulnerables que terminan siendo escarmentados y muchas veces destruidos.

Abstract

Beyond the critical theories that understand the monster as a figure of resistance and emancipation, in this article I intend to delve into the mechanisms of capture and punishment inherent to what I have called “monstrous technology”, a concept that arises from the analysis of two stories, one by a Chilean writer and the other by an Argentinean – “Juana y la cibernética” by Elena Aldunate and Kentukis [Little eyes] by Samanta Schweblin –, whose stories reveal the dual nature of the new devices produced by scientific progress: on the one hand, utopian, with their promises of companionship, closeness and connection, their aura and seduction and, on the other, violent, as their use causes harm to vulnerable subjects who end up being scarified and often destroyed.

El monstruo que se repite: teratología y posthumano en Rodrigo Rey Rosa

Andrea Pezzè
DOI: 10.26379/1774

Resumen

Este artículo investiga la relación entre control social, paranoia y ciencia ficción en la literatura de Rodrigo Rey Rosa. En particular, a través de los estudios sobre la representación (neo)colonial de la monstruosidad y la construcción ficcional de la biopolítica en América Latina, quiere relacionar la versión de la otredad monstruosa con el paradigma de lo normado y lo patológico en la sociedad guatemalteca.

Objetivo de este trabajo es, por lo tanto, demostrar el papel de la ciencia ficción en la relación entre imaginario de la marginalización científica y miedo a las experimentaciones tecnológicas sobre lo humano. Haciendo hincapié en la novela *Los sordos* (2012), el enfoque se centrará en la identidad de la componente indígena y su visión de las prácticas de gubernamentalidad en Guatemala.

Abstract

This article investigates the relationship between social control, paranoia and science fiction in the works of Rodrigo Rey Rosa. Through studies on the (neo-) colonial representation of monstrosity and the fictional construction of biopolitics in Latin America, he tries to link the version of monstrous otherness with the paradigm of the normative and the pathological in Guatemalan society. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to demonstrate the role of science fiction in the relationship between the imaginary of scientific marginalization and the fear of technological experimentation on the human. Emphasizing the novel *Los sordos* (2012), the focus will be on the identity of the indigenous component and its vision of the practices of governmentality in Guatemala.

Distopía nuestra de cada día: breve recorrido por la ciencia ficción puertorriqueña y la producción más reciente escrita por mujeres

Ángela M. Valentín Rodríguez
DOI: 10.26379/1775

Resumen

Este artículo propone un breve recorrido por la ciencia ficción puertorriqueña desde sus inicios en el siglo XIX, su presencia intermitente en las letras del siglo XX y sus manifestaciones escritas por mujeres, a partir de la segunda década del siglo XXI. Se subraya la importancia del trabajo pionero de las escritoras de la Generación del 70 dentro del ambiente predominantemente masculino de las letras puertorriqueñas. Ellas anteceden y abren el espacio para las escritoras de ciencia ficción contemporáneas. Se destaca particularmente la obra de Gretchen López y Ana María Fuster. López, por ser la primera en ofrecer una colección de cuentos enteramente dedicada a la ciencia ficción, y Fuster por publicar la colección de cuentos más reciente y de corte explícitamente feminista. Ambas proponen espacios distópicos y personajes monstruosos, críticas al fracaso del proyecto nacional cohesor, “la gran familia puertorriqueña”, la modernidad, el capitalismo neoliberal y el neocolonialismo.

Abstract

This article offers a brief overview of Puerto Rican science fiction from its beginnings in the nineteenth century, its intermittent presence in twentieth-century literature and its manifestations written by women, from the second decade of the twenty-first century onwards. The importance of the pioneering work of the women writers of the Generation of the 1970s within the predominantly male environment of Puerto Rican literature is emphasised. They preceded and opened the space for contemporary women science fiction writers. The work of Gretchen López and Ana María Fuster stand out: López, for being the first to offer a collection of short stories entirely devoted to science fiction, and Fuster for publishing the most recent collection of short stories with an explicitly feminist slant. Both offer dystopian spaces and monstrous characters, critiques of the failure of the national cohesive project, “the great Puerto Rican family”, modernity, neoliberal capitalism and neocolonialism.

Inadaptadxs-indaptables otrxs: monstruosidades disidentes en dos cuentos de ciencia ficción costarricense

Lucía Leandro *Hernández*

DOI: 10.26379/1776

Resumen

Este artículo busca generar nuevas formas de parentesco dentro de contextos hipersticionales pensados desde la ciencia ficción costarricense contemporánea.

Con lo anterior, se propone un análisis que entrevé en los dos cuentos seleccionados lógicas otras de relación que permiten poner en entredicho el statu quo de lo social, además presentan nuevos parámetros de interacción entre sujetos humanos, no humanos y el contexto que los rodea. “Yo, la criatura” de José Ricardo Chaves (2013) y “Los túneles de la memoria” de Laura Casasa Núñez (2009) desafían la definición de ‘persona’, ‘cuerpo’ y ‘comunidad’ con una propuesta que se resiste a las definiciones del sujeto, colocando a la otredad en ese espacio de lo no representable, produciendo seres que se podrían definir como ‘inadaptados/ables otros’ (Haraway 2019a: 46).

Abstract

This article seeks to generate new forms of kinship within hyperstitional contexts in contemporary Costa Rican science fiction. I will suggest an analysis that glimpses in two selected stories other logics of relationship that allow us to question the status quo of the social context, in addition to present new parameters of interaction between human and non-human subjects and the context that surrounds them. “Yo, la criatura” by José Ricardo Chaves (2013) and “Los túneles de la memoria” by Laura Casasa Núñez (2009) challenge the definition of ‘person’, ‘body’ and ‘community’ with a proposal that resists the definitions of the subject, placing otherness in that space of the unrepresentable, producing beings that could be defined as ‘Inappropriate/d Others’ (Haraway 2019a: 46).

“My will is as strong as yours and my kingdom is as great. You have no power over me” Jim Henson, *Labyrinth* 1986, Entrevista a Ramiro Sanchiz

Andrea Pezzè
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Andrea Pezzè: Ramiro, eres autor de una vasta y heterogénea obra literaria.

Vasta en el sentido de que has publicado numerosas novelas, cuentos y ensayos. Entre las primeras, recordamos *01.lineal* (2008), *La vista desde el puente* (2011) *Trashpunk* (2012) hasta llegar a *El orden del mundo* (2014, 2017) que ganó el Premio Nacional de Literatura en Uruguay y las últimas *El gato y la entropía #12&35* (2015), *La expansión del universo* y *Las imitaciones*, ambas de 2019. Tus cuentos se publicaron en diferentes antologías, recuerdo las coordinadas por Hugo Achugar, entre los nombres más representativos de la crítica literaria y cultural uruguaya contemporánea. Y finalmente tus ensayos, que son reflexiones sobre algunos músicos uruguayos (por cierto, la música es una de tus grandes pasiones, por ejemplo, eres también autor de un ensayo sobre David Bowie). De hecho, tanto *Caída libre/La trampa* (2017) como *Guitarra negra/Alfredo Zitarrosa* (2019) tratan de músicos y piezas o LP musicales. Asimismo, tu obra se presenta diversificada, decía, ya que publicaste en diferentes soportes editoriales y ensayaste medios heterogéneos –recuerdo *Trashpunk*, que se publicó online de libre acceso, o bien muchos de tus cuentos que salieron en antologías. La primera curiosidad, relacionada también con el género literario que practicas más asiduamente –la ciencia-ficción– concierne al propio escritor y al medio por el que se mueve: ¿cómo ves la relación entre escritura y tecnología? ¿cuál es la relación hoy entre un joven escritor latinoamericano, que escribe géneros definidos “populares”, y la circulación del libro a nivel continental o global?

Ramiro Sanchiz: La escritura, para empezar, *es* una tecnología, y, como toda tecnología, produce subjetividades. Quienes (y cómo, y dónde) nos decimos qué somos es un producto de las tecnologías en circulación por el espacio global del tecnocapitalismo; la literatura, sin embargo, se erige casi siempre en el lugar del sedimento o detrito de una serie de subjetividades perimidas, buscando fundar un lugar de lo humano-trascendente por fuera de los circuitos y del sistema de producciones. Así pensada, la literatura ha sido siempre una suerte de aparato ideológico del humanismo, agenciando un gnosticismo de la trascendencia de lo humano con respecto, entre otras cosas, a la tecnología. A la vez, los procesos que nos fundan como sujetos en relación a la tecnología producen la emergencia de una estratificación entre el primer mundo y el sur global, entre periferias y metrópolis o centros y periferias, que trazan el campo o circuitería de circulaciones y flujos; así, nos producimos como sujetos que ensayan su “resistencia” o su “oposición” a lo que percibimos como el gran movimiento del capital global, y muchas veces nuestra literatura se acomoda en esos lugares de producción de significado. A su vez (y además de las polaridades más eminentemente políticas), esto comporta una serie secundaria de estratificaciones, por ejemplo la de los géneros y sus canales de circulación, y esa suerte de codificación de un “mainstream” dado en oposición o en alguna forma de tensión. Esa oposición, en los noventas, producía la idea del escritor de género (particularmente de ciencia ficción) como un sujeto que resistía en su gueto mientras la “gran literatura” marchaba por la ciudad letrada, indiferente a la ciencia ficción o incluso malevolente. Ahora eso parece

estar cambiando, sobre todo en la medida en que escritores pensables como cercanos a ese mainstream incorporan la ciencia ficción o el horror a sus escrituras; por otra parte, tantas veces sus lectores no reconocen esa escritura como “de” ciencia ficción u horror.

Artwork

¡Cuidado con los monstruos!

Claudio V. Coccoli

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