

ContactZone

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

Unruly Bodies and Astral Corporealities in Science Fiction Cinema and Television Series

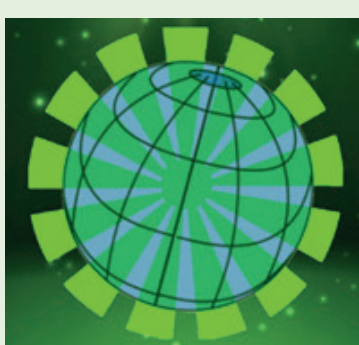
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ContactZone is an international double-blind peer-reviewed e-journal which publishes scholarly work on Science Fiction and the Fantastic connecting different languages, non-mimetic genres, and fields of study. It is the journal of the Italian Association 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

Shattering and Reshaping Corporeality in Science Fiction Film and Television

***Giuseppe Balirano and
Oriana Palusci***
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_001

Abstract

Few genres have explored the body as persistently as Science Fiction, where questions of embodiment, identity and human becoming have long provided a means of interrogating the limits of the human itself (Hayles 1999; Vint 2007). In film and television, corporeality often becomes the point at which questions of identity, technology and power are made visible. Through these media, the speculative body is rarely a stable object: it is exposed to processes of alteration that challenge inherited ideas of normality/normativity and compel viewers to reconsider how humanness is defined. This special issue examines how science fiction cinema and television represent forms of embodiment that exceed conventional models of identity. The essays collected here address bodies marked by technological mediation, altered materiality, disability, gender variance, monstrosity, affective unruliness, and cosmic displacement. In each case, the body becomes a critical surface on which cultural assumptions about value, vulnerability and recognition are inscribed. As Balirano and Parlati (2024) argue, corporeality should be understood as inherently plural, shaped by multiple forms of specificity that resist reduction to a single normative model. This perspective is particularly productive for science fiction, a genre that persistently reimagines embodiment through technological transformation, posthuman becoming, and encounters with radical alterity.

Immortality and the Body in Doctor Who

*David Beard, Clare Ford, Jason Ford,
Lisa Horton, Aaron Propes,
Peter Soulen*

DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_002

Abstract

The fundamental experience of every living body is death. The science fiction television show *Doctor Who* and its spin-off series *Torchwood* explore both the beautiful and the monstrous in our relationship with death in three ways. *First*, in *Doctor Who*, there is an assumption that violating the natural order – the inevitability of death – is a moral failing. *Second*, in *Doctor Who* and its spinoff series, *Torchwood*, there is a set of narrative arcs in which immortality is tragedy. *Third*, in the Peter Capaldi era and after, the show develops a perspective that can celebrate bodies that resist classification and gesture toward new forms of being in the universe. The implications of this subtle and powerful shift in the show's representation of bodies maps onto cultural norms. More recently, as the show has been willing to push on those norms (integrating queer representation, BIPOC representation, and deliberately casting BIPOC and women for the roles of the Master and the Doctor for the first time), it has been open to, and flirted with, new experiences of the body inside the text.

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial: A Symbol of Resistance Against Normativity

*Carmina Meola and
Emily Ferrone*
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_003

Abstract

The present study examines *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg 1982), as a key example for examining rebellious and critical approaches in science fiction cinema. Through the alien character, the film builds a physical presence that transcends standardised human criteria of gender, ability, and species, transforming the stereotype of the ‘dangerous other’ into an emblem of empathy and cosmic connection. E.T.’s bright yet fragile presence, which challenges these norms, suggests a posthuman relationship model rooted in feelings, care, and mutual reliance. This paper combines methodologies from Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis to examine the interconnection of language and visual discourse in representing non-normative characters. The findings are situated within the theoretical framework of posthuman and queer theory to reimagine E.T. as a deep metaphor for humanity. E.T.’s enduring cultural resonance also emphasises how science fiction can humanise the alien, and invites audiences to rethink the very boundaries of identity, kinship, and belonging.

From Human to Mutant Reject: X-Men's Mystique as a Subject of Intersectional Discrimination

Marina Niceforo
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_004

Abstract

The fictional character of Mystique, appearing since the 1970s in Marvel Comics books and later in the *X-Men* film series, is possibly the mutant figure par excellence, embodying a range of narrative topoi traditionally associated with mutants. Beautiful and deadly, sensual and cunning, Mystique has invariably attracted the attention of viewers with her blue-scaled body, ensuring a charming presence in all *X-Men* films. A mostly silent figure in the first trilogy (2000-2006), her storyline and characterisation are nonetheless powerful, showing her arc from human to mutant reject, and portraying her as an uncanny anti-heroine.

The present study investigates Mystique as a subject of intersectional discrimination against non-conforming identities and bodies. Drawing on critical approaches to multimodal and film discourse analysis (Wildfeuer 2014; Jancsary et al. 2016), social actor theory (Van Leeuwen 2008), and intersectional analysis (Edwards and Esposito 2019), the analysis considers narratively relevant appearances of the character, played by Rebecca Romijn, in the first cinematic trilogy – which includes *X-Men* (2000), *X2: X-Men United* (2003), and *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006). Across the films, all narrative and discursive elements revolve around Mystique's shapeshifting body to construct her controversial personality: this paper aims to highlight the loci of intersectional discrimination against Mystique as conveyed by both verbal and visual cues.

Affective Unruliness and Posthuman Corporealities in the film Never Let Me Go

Eugenio Vecchione
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_005

Abstract

In recent decades, scientific and technological developments have increasingly challenged the boundaries of the human. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) offers a compelling representation of posthuman corporeality through the figure of the clone, reared for organ donation. This paper examines how posthuman bodies are constructed as affectively unruly in both the novel and its 2010 film adaptation directed by Mark Romanek. Drawing on insights from Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), the study analyses recurring lexical patterns in the novel alongside visual and auditory strategies in the film, including colour, framing, camera angles, and strategic silence. The findings indicate that, although the clones are subjected to biopolitical regulation and constrained agency, they are represented as relationally and affectively complex subjects. Rather than emerging through overt resistance, unruliness is articulated through subtle forms of affective engagement, interpersonal attachment, and embodied vulnerability.

Cybernetic Bodies as Counter-Narratives: Reimagining Agency and Identity in Black Mirror

Gigy J. Alex
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_006

Abstract

The *Black Mirror* series explores the ethical and emotional ramifications of life shaped by technology. This analysis focuses on three episodes – “The Entire History of You” (2011), “Arkangel” (2017), and “Beyond the Sea” (2023) – to investigate how memory technologies operate as prosthetic extensions, thereby reshaping intimacy, surveillance, and identity. Employing Alison Landsberg’s concept of prosthetic memory, Judith Butler’s ideas on precarity and grievability, Lauren Berlant’s notion of cruel optimism, and N. Katherine Hayles’ posthumanism, this article posits that *Black Mirror* illustrates a transition from lived, interpretive memory to archived, surveilled, and ethically compromised memory systems.

These narratives illustrate how technologies, initially presented as instruments of care and security, exacerbate relational vulnerability, undermine ethical accountability within human relationships, and give rise to posthuman conditions where consciousness can be transferred, yet affect remains physically situated. The series, in its entirety, offers a critique of the institutional and interpersonal acceptance of surveillance, thereby revealing the inadequacies of technological interventions in addressing core human challenges related to trust, grief, and intimacy.

The Female Body beyond Materiality: Towards a Pluralistic Reading of Lucy

*Badrine ben Kamla,
Jihen Fadhlaoui, Hamdi Doukali
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_007*

Abstract

Lucy (2014) is a French science fiction movie that can be read as a twenty-first century example of corporeal disruption. The film portrays the transformative journey of Lucy, starring Scarlett Johansson, from flesh to a digital data container, problematising the essentialist categorisation of the female body in cinematic depictions. Lucy's portrayal transcends gendered frameworks to evolve into a hyper-intelligent 'quantum being', epitomising the process of body reconstitution into pure knowledge. This research explores the cinematic representation of Lucy's body as a contested terrain within scholarly discourse. Through the triptych of multimodality, quantum feminism and posthumanism, the article seeks to investigate the destabilisation of the biological, probing into how Lucy's uncanny metamorphosis is communicated across multifarious modes – the visual, the aural and the gestural. It also redefines the female body as a quantum entity, entangled with matter, power and technology rather than anchored in stasis. The article equally showcases the fluidity of the female identity, often resisting normative boundaries of sex vs. gender, human vs. machine. The findings reveal that the multimodal, quantum and post/transhuman examination of *Lucy* unfolds the female character's shifting identity and transcendent consciousness, embodying a posthuman vision of matter re-configured beyond embodiment.

“I am also a we”. A Multimodal Stylistic Reading of Posthuman Subjectivity in Sense8

Roberto Esposito
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_008

Abstract

This article investigates the stylistic and multimodal strategies through which *Sense8* (2015-2018) represents posthuman bodies and subjectivity. The series builds its narrative around shared physical and emotional experience, staging eight geographically scattered characters who discover their psychic and sensorial connection as members of a different human clade. Drawing on the hybrid methodological framework of Multimodal Stylistics (Norgaard 2010; 2019), the study analyses a corpus comprising the series' twenty-four episodes. On a verbal level, the analysis foregrounds deictic choices as the primary stylistic resource through which *Sense8* destabilises the humanist assumption of a singular, bounded subject. On a multimodal level, visual mechanisms of gaze, salience, and framing are examined alongside the series' deployment of music, which functions not as soundtrack, but as a joining force of affective and sensorial synchronisation.

Findings are discussed through van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Actor Network for the discursive representation of agency, and Balirano's (2017) multimodal prosody, which accounts for the intermodal rhythms and patterns that prime audiences for collective attunement and social change. Taken together, the analyses present *Sense8*'s intersectional and posthuman vision of humanity as discursively and multimodally performed through language, image, and music, proposing that the series proposes a relationality that exceed the boundaries of the screen and remain available and necessary in the real present.

From Monstrous Voice to Female Agency: Language, Identity and Becoming in Poor Things

***Mikaela Cordisco and
Mariagrazia De Meo
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_009***

Abstract

The paper examines the role of language in the representation of embodiment and female subjectivity in Bella Baxter, the protagonist of *Poor Things*, whose linguistic development as a reanimated posthuman figure mirrors her process of becoming. Drawing on feminist linguistics (Lakoff 1975; Cameron 1995), theories of language and power (Foucault 1980; Fairclough 1989), interactional approaches to identity (De Fina et al. 2006), and posthuman theory (Haraway 1991; Braidotti 2013), the study analyses Bella's language in the film's screenplay (McNamara 2023), tracing her progression from fragmented to increasingly self-authorising speech as a form of discursive reappropriation within a framework of patriarchal control. In relation to this trajectory, it also examines male discursive regimes that seek to regulate and delimit her agency. Bella's emancipation ultimately emerges through linguistic negotiation, foregrounding language as a key site for the construction of power and subjectivity.

From Object to Agent: The Female Body, Technology, and Biopolitical Critique in Science Fiction Horror

Raffaele Pizzo
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_010

Abstract

This article explores recent science fiction horror films as sites where humanmachine interactions are imagined, negotiated, and contested, revealing how cinematic narratives mirror and shape emerging technological realities. Through Hall (1973; 1997), this study investigates how portrayals of female technoembodiment expose the paradox of advanced scientific practice: its capacity to reproduce sexist structures even as it inaugurates novel biopolitical regimes (Foucault 2008) embodied in the cyborg. Drawing on Mulvey (1975), this study initially investigates the reliance on scientific development for the enhancement of the female body as depicted in Caroline Fedger's (2024) film *The Substance*. It subsequently deepens the analysis by examining the intertextual relationship between the female body and robots as represented in the films *Companion* (2025) and *M3GAN 2.0* (2025). Cybernetics (Wiener 1950; Haraway 1991) serves as both a lens and a tool through which bodies can transcend the male-female binary to enact new biopolitics.

“Local” Becoming “Global”: The Growth of Malayalam Science Fiction

Sreelakshmy Mohanan
DOI 10.26379/CZ2026.1_011

Abstract

The recent international acclaim of *Lokah Chapter 1: Chandra* (2025), a modest budget film from Kerala, India, opens conversations about the popular appeal of local legends and mores in the global arena. Through “Lokah” which simply translates to “world,” director Dominic Arun and team suggest the creation of a world rife with ghosts, goblins, ghouls, and various other monsters central to the culture of Kerala. Chandra, the eponymous immortal vampire’s genesis story is traced through the contemporary, cyberpunk landscape of Bangalore. *Lokah*’s popular global appeal can be traced to the ongoing interest in local, ‘relatable’ superheroes such as *Minnal Murali* (trans. “Lightning Murali”) – a Malayalam science fiction and fantasy movie released in 2021. Since the local heroes such as Murali or Chandra embody familiar social struggles and cultural values, they are appealing to the global audience. Such unique stories of hope, resilience, and perseverance cater to both the local and the global audience. Additionally, international collaborations, strategic advertising, and subtitled releases especially through OTTs contribute towards the popularization of local media in global worlds.