

## (RE)CREATING POSSIBLE FUTURES OR ALTERNATIVE PRESENTS THROUGH THE ARTS

Ildney Cavalcanti<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universidade Federal de Alagoas, Maceió, AL, Brasil

Matias Corbett<sup>2\*\*</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil

Raffaella Baccolini<sup>3\*\*\*</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Università di Bologna, Forlì Campus, Italy

We – the three editors of this special issue, who are based in different parts of the globe – are pleased to offer a selection of original papers that deal with the crossings between past, present and future as envisioned in literature and the arts which is now materialized in this thematic issue. The first thing we wish to register is a warm thank you to the Head and Associate Editors of *Ilha do Desterro*, professors Anelise R. Corseuil and Magali Sperling Beck, respectively, who believed in and kindly accepted our proposal focused on possible futurities or alternative presents seen as a way to defy the paralysis that – only – seems to block our imagination. We are also very thankful to the whole staff of this academic journal, especially to its Executive Secretary, Paola Nichele, who were so kind and helpful, promptly dealing with our questions and urgencies. Last, but not least, our gratitude also goes to all the authors who contributed pieces, whose approaches vary in amazingly diverse ways, but were always treated by the scholars with a view to consider some of the most pressing issues in our times.

The sheer number of submissions we received throughout the process actually functions as a proof that, beyond providing a critical account of human

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<sup>\*</sup> Associate professor at the Faculdade de Letras (Fale) of the Federal University of Alagoas (Ufal), where she coordinates the research group *Literatura e Utopia*. She holds a PhD in English Studies from the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland, and has carried post-doctoral studies at the University of Cardiff, Cardiff, Wales. Her main research interests are speculative fiction by women, gender, queer and decolonial studies, utopianism and dystopianism. E-mail [ildney.cavalcanti@fale.ufal.br](mailto:ildney.cavalcanti@fale.ufal.br). Orcid: 0000-0001-8932-6207.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Associate professor at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), where he coordinates the research project *Poéticas do Texto*, and the extension project *Texto e Performance*. He teaches literature and drama and holds a PhD in Literature and Cultural Studies from UFSC (2015). His main interests are performance, poetry, poetics of resistance, theater and drama studies, and literature as an educational tool/technology. E-mail: [matias.corbett@ufsc.br](mailto:matias.corbett@ufsc.br). Orcid: 0000-00015346-4587.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Professor of British and American Literature and Gender Studies at the Department of Interpreting and Translation of the University of Bologna, Forlì Campus. She holds a PhD in English from the University of Wisconsin, Madison (US). Her main research interests are women's writing, feminist criticism, dystopia and science fiction, trauma and memory, modernism, and Young Adult literature. E-mail [raffaella.baccolini@unibo.it](mailto:raffaella.baccolini@unibo.it) Orcid: 0000-0002-8380-7867.



and other-than-human life in what has been recognized lately as life in planet Earth during the crisis of the Anthropocene – as well as its corollaries and affluents Capitalocene and Plantationocene –, or of living in the ruins of a nearly fully devastated Earth, scholarly work has been looking around for traces of refuge, resilience, resistance, reversals, rebellion, revolt, revolution, and resurgence in face of the patriarchal, racist, capitalist, neo-liberal, class-stratified, ecologically devastating and all-pervasively sick system our globalized planet has become. The four last r-words are inspired by the radical collective action that “could ferment a turbulent but generative time” as a reaction in face of the devastated world portrayed in the fictional piece entitled “The Camille Stories” that closes Donna Haraway’s *Staying with the Trouble* (2016, 145). For an overview of these categories, see in particular Chapter 2. According to her vision, the Anthropos should not, by itself, name our era, which has also been influenced by a capitalistic logic under the colonial system of plantations. Her critique is followed by the counter proposal of the Chthulucene as a more suitable framework to reflect on life in our dystopian times. For a brief and clear account of the Anthropocene as a concept, see Crutzen (2002). For studies examining the interconnections between the notion of the Anthropocene, the arts and literatures, see the thematic issue of *Ilha do Desterro* “On Posthumanism” (Costa, Cavalcanti, and Haran, 2017), which anticipates some of the issues, and will be further discussed below; and Torres and Penteadó (2021), who offer a glossary of concepts and relevant cross-references. Such metaphors of alternative presents and of future-oriented figures act as the starting points for the reflections that we have brought together in this issue. The world around us is thriving with figures of hope suggestive of an anticipatory consciousness, argues philosopher Ernst Bloch in his *magnum opus* (1995 [1951]) on utopianism, and it is urgent that we deal with them if we wish to postpone the end of the world, to use Indigenous leader and activist Ailton Krenak’s (2020) fitting expression.<sup>1</sup> Taken as a whole, the set of studies collected here converge in their drive to analyze some of the materializations of such figures as they illuminate the initial decades of this millennium, shedding some light upon our dark times by allowing some glimpses on contemporary utopias.

Considering the new paths which artistic and literary movements have been opening that have been pedagogical regarding our abilities to imagine possible futures or alternative presents – as evidenced with Afrofuturism, Sertãopunk, critical dystopianism, neodystopianism, queertopias, environmental utopianism and dystopianism (for an overview on this theme within utopian works, see Anne Melano’s [2022] “Environment” ), among others –, this thematic issue of the journal *Ilha do Desterro* brings together articles and book reviews, in English and in Portuguese, that engage with literature and the arts as a means to create future scenarios to (re)construct presents, the arts as spaces of resilience, resistance and confrontation, the construction of anticipatory systems through the arts, among other tendencies<sup>2</sup> that we will explore below, with a focus on recurring themes that allow us to probe into a variety of cultural genres as a means of imagining possible futures and/or alternative presents. By bringing together

these diverse voices and theoretical perspectives, we aim to create alternative avenues of discussion concerning themes as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, class, identity, temporalities, utopias and dystopias, (post)humanism, (eco)feminism, climate change, considering the myriad ways in which these are intertwined in culture and trying to move away from rigid structures and binary thoughts. We urgently need different epistemologies, as Linda Alcoff (2011) reminds us, which can decolonize purportedly universal knowledge systems that make the claim for a master epistemology, to use her term. Moving in such directions, we open space for critical discussions which might map strategies of resistance and confrontation based on anti-racist, classless, non-normative, non-binary, non-Eurocentric, and non-patriarchal conceptual frameworks and references.

As many articles in this issue show, especially within the last decade, different arts and literary forms have been opening paths for the creation of possible futures or alternative presents. Probing into the kaleidoscopic map of the contributions, as proposed in the following pages, readers will find that most of the critical commentaries are about anglophone productions and examine a variety of genres. Among them, the film *Black Panther* (2018), directed by Ryan Coogler, is discussed vis-à-vis N.K. Jemisin's short story "Emergency Skin" (2021) by Millena Portela, who focuses on the ideal speculative fiction visions produced on both narratives by black people. Memorialistic literature is explored via *The End of San Francisco* (2013) and *The Freezer Door* (2020) in Ruan Nunes Silva's "Desfazendo os desesperançosos mapas heteronormativos do presente com Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore", an analysis that foregrounds the interfaces between queerness and non-hegemonic temporalities, acting to defy heteronormative straight time and "posing questions for new political movements for sexual and gender dissidents". Non-fiction literature is also analyzed through interspecies studies in Ewa A. Lukaszuk's article "Becoming (in)human. The search for an alternative present in Helen MacDonald's *H is for Hawk*", which develops an ecofeminist perspective aimed at promoting an alternative temporality for analyzing the cultural practice of keeping and taming goshawks, a critical discussion which questions categories as gender, class, and ethnicity, as well as human exceptionalism.

Science fiction literature serves as backdrop for Roberta Reis Bahia Tzesnioski's and Gilson Leandro Queluz's analysis of how the Afrofuturist work of Fábio Kabral uses the cyborg as a representation of the fragmentation of the self, as can be seen with the characters of João Arolê, from *O Caçador Cibernético da Rua Treza*, and also Jamila Olabamji, from *Cientista Guerreira do Facão Furioso*. Mateus de Novaes Maia discusses how the graphic novels *Ronin* (1983-1984), by Frank Miller, and *Cangaço Overdrive* (2018), by Zé Wellington and Walter Geovani, offer an aesthetic and theoretical blueprint for what became known as cyberpunk and sertãoopunk. André Cabral de Almeida Cardoso examines how Joca Reiners Terron's *A Morte e o Meteoro* (2019) reinterprets Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) as a means to expose the brutality of American colonization, by alluding to specific literary traditions, as gothic fiction, adventure novel, and science fiction. In "Subversion and satire: apocalyptic futures in *The World, the*

*Flesh and the Devil* and *Dr. Strangelove*”, George Ayres Mousinho expounds on the satirical imaginations of disaster and apocalyptic futures in both films, by discussing the movies’ narrative structures and technical aspects, while also shedding light onto the historical contexts they were produced and screened.

Going in a different direction exploring the apocalyptic theme, Rejane de Souza Ferreira investigates how Danny Denton’s novel *The Earlie King & The Kid in Yellow* inserts itself within the ecocritical and dystopian traditions of Ireland, but at the same time challenges both. In Julia Urabayen’s and Jorge León Casero’s “No one came from outside: A critique of the abject-Lovecraftian foundations of dark ecology”, horror and weird fiction emerge as a strategy to access a radical anti-humanist/anti-species worldview known as dark ecology. In “Do centro à margem: Visões ecocríticas no pensamento contemporâneo”, Hiandro Bastos da Silva and Lauro Roberto de Carmo Ferreira investigate how animality has been broadening and problematizing our discussions within the fields of literary theory and criticism, by promoting alternative ways of defining humanity and what it means to be human, while also criticizing the production of bodies and subjectivities through state-controlled imaginaries. An intermedia analysis is proposed by Luciana Soares Medeiros and Alessandra Soares Brandão through “A mulher negra criada na ausência – dinâmicas de representação e a composição de elementos visuais de Rose Maxson em *Fences*”, which discusses how black female bodies are created and acquire meaning in textual and audiovisual productions through an absence of social presence, a lack of representativeness, and also via images of control, which maintain this body within racist and sexist social dynamics.

Contemporary critical dystopias as well as neodystopian fiction appear to be *the* most popular genre or mode in our scholarly realm when one comes to the subject of speculations regarding possible futures or alternative presents in the initial decades of this century. Since the 1980s, critical dystopianism has been a pervasive trend in this type of futuristic fiction deploying dark futures (cf. Baccolini’s “Gender and Genre” [2000], Moylan’s *Scraps* [2000], Moylan’s and Baccolini’s *Dark Horizons* [2003], and Cavalcanti’s “Critical Dystopia” [2022]. On the neodystopic as a fictional mode which has been predominant in the initial decades of the 21st century, see Benicio, forthcoming).

Margaret Atwood’s work features prominently in the discussions presented in this special issue. Her post-apocalyptic narratives are discussed in three articles. Suênio Stevenson focuses on the last novel of Atwood’s trilogy, *MaddAddam* (2013) in “Contação de histórias e aliança multiespécie pela sobrevivência em *MaddAddam*, de Margaret Atwood”, where, he argues, storytelling and an alliance between human and nonhuman beings are the survival strategy of species within a post-apocalyptic world. Atwood’s storytelling, together with Ursula K. Le Guin’s and Janette Winterson’s, is also at the center of Melissa de Sá’s article, “New Humanities in Twenty-First-Century Dystopian Novels by Women”. In these novels, storytelling, used to push the boundaries between what is human and what is not, becomes the human common ground used to

explore the manifold ways humanity can present itself. Marta Korbel, on the other hand, investigates the first one, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) vis-à-vis Dmitry Glukhovsky's *Metro 2033* (2005) in "What a splendid world we ruined': The precarious presents and posthuman futures of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Dmitry Glukhovsky's *Metro 2033*". Both texts are seen as critiques of late-modern neoliberal capitalism, highlighting the post-human alternative they present to the social order.

Environmental destruction is also at the center of two other contributions. If Chiara Xausa's looks at Young Adult climate fiction, Ana Tejero-Marín discusses the notion of the "good Anthropocene" in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* (2020). Both authors find that hope is present in these narratives. While the presence of hope at the end of Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries 2015* (2008) and *The Carbon Diaries 2017* (2010) helps readers come to terms with an imperfect world and suggests traces of resistance, Robinson's hopeful narrative proposes concrete actions to work towards more sustainable societies and can thus inspire change in the real world.

Perhaps, in this ominous "age of nuclear weapons", as Suvin writes, you would like to start with a spice of hope in the horizon, which would make you begin where we end, maybe with "Staying with the trouble: other ways of inhabiting the world" or "Permanecer com o problema: outros modos de habitar o mundo em "Salmo para um robô peregrino", de Becky Chambers". Marina Pereira Pentead and Jade Bueno Arbo examine how Chambers's novel, and science fiction as a genre, propose different manners of inhabiting the planet, more harmonic, inclusive, and caring, and also alternative ways of living and dying in a world torn by crises. Tom Moylan, in "Cognitive (Re)Mapping: Superseding Utopian and Dystopian Space in *Notes from a Coma*", sees Mike McCormack's novel as an example of "stubborn hope" that challenges Irish complacency through both its form and content and opens the way to a new sense of possibility. Finally, Darko Suvin elaborates on a long hope by proposing a transhistorical discussion of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, and of the reinterpretations of the myth of Prometheus by Karl Marx and Percy Shelley, amongst others, as a way to counter tyrannical violence; a cataclysm which happened throughout our past, and still continues to ravage our present.

Following thematic threads, thus, may present another possible way of grouping the articles in this issue. We have noticed, for instance, that metaphors relating to the Anthropocene, to what it means to be human, to non-linear temporalities, to environmental issues and to the intersections of race, class and gender are recurring topics. Regarding the latter, the essays collected in this thematic issue give evidence to intersectionality as an analytical tool we have incorporated into our reading strategies. In "No one came from outside: A critique of the abject-Lovecraftian foundations of dark ecology", for instance, Julia Urabayan and Jorge León Casero discuss how influential people, such as Graham Harman and Eugène Thacker, have tried to gloss over the blatant and latent racism in the work of Lovecraft, by claiming that the author writes from

an epistemological position which purportedly would have no traces of ethnicity, class, or race. By contrast, Haraway's worldview assumes that there are no clearly defined insides or outsides in a post-apocalyptic universe. In "A emancipação do sujeito a partir da ressignificação da figura do ciborgue na literatura afrofuturista", Roberta Reis Bahia Tszesniosk and Gilson Leandro Queluz elaborate a critical analysis of race by intersecting it with a discussion about social classes and means of production in a capitalist society, which makes them conclude that, "racism is also structured by a political and economic logic."

Temporalities can and should be conceived in ways that move beyond the linearity represented by the past-present-future *continuum* predominant in Eurocentric thought. This is another layer of possible meanings explored in the articles collected here. In "Permanecer com o problema: outros modos de habitar o mundo em "Salmo para um robô peregrino", de Becky Chambers", for instance, Marina Pereira Penteado and Jade Bueno Arbo examine how Chambers' story develops multiple timelines which inevitably blur the distinction between past, present, and future; a technique which goes against our notion of progress and exponential growth. While in "Up the river, into the dark textual play and dystopian gloom in Joca Reiners Terron's A morte e o meteoro", Andre Cabral de Almeida Cardoso discusses how such notions as primitive and modern are "turned upside down when the origin becomes a consequence of the end." Another example is the already mentioned queer temporalities, that may be read as queertopias - i.e. queer ontologies emerging in contemporary times that destabilize heteronormativity (see Gomes, 2021) -, observed by Nunes Silva as he looks carefully at Sycamore's memorialistic works. These studies stress alternative temporalities that must be (re) cognized in ways that illuminate our existence and provide renewed experiences and relations between human and non-human others.

How we define what it means to be human should also be destabilized, decentralized, and decolonialized, so that we can better understand the multiple and interconnected social, political, historical, cultural, and economic layers that are to be found in such a category. For instance, for more than two hundred years, North Americans have repeated the constitutional mantra: "We the people", while at the same time affirmed that blacks were not people, thus should not have unalienable rights. Such acts of resistance, of raising our awareness concerning these layers, are also to be found in these texts. In, "New Humanities in Twenty-First-Century Dystopian Novels By Women", Melissa de Sá problematizes and questions some of our traditional understandings of humanity, which, she argues, define us in terms of the capacity for reasoning and emotion. Assuming that were to be the case, she questions, then if "machines can learn, represent, and have a consciousness, [...] are they not human as well?" Going in a different direction, Ewa A. Lukaszuk proposes an interspecies analysis which reorganizes the way in which we perceive the human condition and temporality, "indicating an original, queer way of being both female and human," or of becoming "birded", or one and the same being with a falcon. In addition to these, Hiandro Bastos da Silva's and Lauro Roberto de Carmo Ferreira's reflections also highlight that other

understandings of the human are made possible as they examine the unfolding of animality in the contemporary theoretical-critical debate. From the perspective of cyborg identity, “(Post)Modernism and Cyborg Writing in George Egerton’s “The Regeneration of Two” (1894), by Jéssica K. Molgero Da Rós and Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes, looks at the anticipation of feminist cyborg identity - via Donna Haraway’s now classical manifesto - in the short story of their title, written in the 1890s, hence the parenthetical “post” before the reference to Modernism in their title.<sup>3</sup> In very general terms, becoming post-human is mostly perceived in terms of fluid identitary performances that are more open to and conscious of the interactions with their more-than-human others, in groupings represented by collective and multispecies beings.

Our climate crisis is also a prevailing theme of these selected articles. If global and local governments, backed up by multinational and transnational corporations, are deregulating and defunding more and more environmental and sanitary agencies and organizations worldwide, it is urgent that we fight back and propose alternatives. Chiara Xausa argues, amongst other things, that there must be a systemic change if we are to think about combating climate change. In other words, because climate change is the result of a myriad of factors, it is “a problem with no single solution.” Marta Korbel, on the other hand, also raises awareness to the potentially catastrophic environmental consequences of a conflict like the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, which seems to be at the brink of becoming a nuclear conflict, and which is creating the narrative of the West vs. Russia based on a rhetoric sustained by “uncritical endorsement of ideologies founded in divisions and exploitation.”

In tandem with these discussions about climate change, this issue also presents articles that address the Anthropocene. Humans have developed the necessary means to affect the climate, ecosystems, and biodiversity of the planet, yet our webbed interdependence with these elements is already acknowledged by international institutions and organizations, as the IPCC (see IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report). There are no simple, one-way solutions to solve this planetary equation, as has been mentioned, so instead of limiting our analysis of the Anthropocene to a geological perspective, we have preferred to broaden our scope and also discuss its cultural, economic, social, and political contexts. We also understand that hope is never to be lost, as we have the necessary means to combat the processes that have been creating climate change, and to deal with its consequences in intelligent and sustainable ways. As Ana Tejero-Marín discusses in her article, the Anthropocene does not have to be solely about (post)apocalyptic images within dystopian scenarios, we must also envision alternatives and new possibilities: utopias. We have not deteriorated to the point of no return, yet, for significant changes to take place we must stop thinking about heroic acts of individuals, as she writes, and start acting collectively; it is urgent that we rethink “how human societies function and relate to their environment.”

Still with regards to the Anthropocene, we would like to recommend to our readers *Ilha do Desterro*’s v. 70, n. 2 (Costa, Cavalcanti, and Haran, 2017), entitled

*Posthumanism*, which also features discussions about it, especially with regards to the role that language and representation have had in its construction. The issue also discusses the term in relation to its historical and cultural moment, understanding that it is a context marked by crises, as that of the idea of the human as an autonomous individual, whose actions, discourses, practices, beliefs, and ideologies are based on reason, as well as renewals, as the necessity to reconceptualize the human, in terms of its connectedness with nature and technology, and through different perspectives, as post-structuralism, post-colonialism, posthumanism, amongst others. It also argues that we must repudiate our human exceptionalism concerning the world, and start taking into consideration all life forms, human and non-human. Throughout the issue, more traditional understandings of what it means to be human are constantly destabilized through an interdisciplinary approach. The discussions and critical analyses present in that issue are as pertinent and urgent today as they were six years ago and this issue of *Ilha* extends some of the threads that were started then.

In commemoration of a century of Modernism, the present issue also features comparative analyses between the *avant garde* movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and now. In this trend, we highlight the articles “(Post-)Modernism and Cyborg Writing in George Egerton’s “The Regeneration of Two” (1894), by Jéssica K. Molgero Da Rós and Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes, and “Virginia Woolf em Outra Cena Modernista: Por Novas Leituras de Freshwater: a Comedy”, by Victor Santiago and Davi Pinho. While the former deals with a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Irish short story, “exploring two main aspects of cyborg imagery present in the short story: the fractured identities and the community of political kinship, resulting in a subversive ‘cyborgian epiphany’”; the latter offers a reading of a play which is a somehow neglected piece by Virginia Woolf and stress that “the mentioned play can contribute to contemporary rereadings of modernism, especially if read as one of her avant-garde interventions, marked by the post-Victorianism (ELLIS, 2007) of her literary project”.

The issue also features two book reviews. In one of them, “The “I” and *Life Writing in the Posthuman Anthropocene*”, Raphael Albuquerque de Boer discusses the significance of the book, as it explores central questions of the climate crisis we are going through, but also acknowledges that there is a paradoxical element behind the parallels between the genre and the Anthropocene, namely the human-centered I that writes, and the self-centered I as main cause of the ecological disasters we are creating. In the other book review, “Furos no futuro: psicanálise e utopia”, Cleyton Andrade and Nathália Bezerra discuss how Edson Luiz André Sousa creates an organic articulation which traces correspondences between psychoanalysis and utopia, not merely in conceptual terms, but also as research methodology.

We feel it is important to mention that these - genre-focused and thematic - structuring of our selected texts are by no means the only possible ways. Other groupings are encouraged<sup>4</sup>, as more than fixity we prefer fluidity, and instead of giving directions we would rather saunter together through these paths, hoping



readers will challenge us regarding our blind spots and make up for them. As we have shown, the present issue encompasses articles and reviews which discuss literature and the arts as literacy tools for possible futures or alternative presents. It is our hope that, just like the characters and readers of dystopias move from “apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance”, readers of this issue will also experience what Moylan, in *Becoming Utopian*, has recently called a “break” or “gestalt shift” that will move them toward utopian agency (Baccolini and Moylan 5; Moylan 7). The critical interpretations of literary (novelistic, graphic, memorialistic), theatrical, cinematographic works we have brought together share a deep concern with major problems still to be overcome if we are to move towards a more harmonious, just and ecologically balanced world. Under a generative perspective, we hope the studies collected here will trigger readers’ response-ability and foment intercultural work so that new networks may be built in scholarship and beyond. Finally, we would also like to stress the relevance of reading these pieces in their potential functions as denunciation and annunciation, to borrow Moylan’s apt metaphor in his contribution to this issue: both as critiques of a capitalistic, patriarchal, neo-colonial nexus which we still witness as hegemonic, and as utopian projections of better futures to be. We are witnessing extreme events which threaten our very existence, environmentally speaking, but also in terms of geopolitics. Therefore, new possibilities and alternative futures will not come easily, as we need systemic and structural changes. But if we accept our intertwined existence with the planet as a whole, its environments, living organisms, rich diversity, and complexities, as well as our intertwined existence between ourselves, me we, to borrow a line from Muhammad Ali, we can reconfigure our presents to project better tomorrows. Our climate is changing, and so must we. Through the publication of this issue, we hope to mobilize our readers, so that they own the discomfort of dystopian literature, its critique of the societies we live in, and embrace hope for change.

### Notes

1. This thinker’s ecological ideas are also explored and mentioned from different perspectives by some of the articles, such as Suênio Stevenson’s “Contação de histórias e aliança multiespécie pela sobrevivência em MaddAddam, de Margaret Atwood”; “Do centro à margem: Visões ecocríticas no pensamento contemporâneo”, by Hiandro Bastos da Silva and Lauro Roberto de Carmo Ferreira; and in “Up the river, into the dark: textual play and dystopian gloom in Joca Reiners Terron’s *A morte e o meteoro*”, by André Cardoso.
2. In Brazil, in a response to our dystopic present, especially when one considers our recent fascist government - and the threat it posed to democracy -, but also demonstrating positive expectations, similar tendencies have been evidenced in two recent art exhibitions: *Brasil Futuro: As Formas da Democracia*, in Brasília January, 1st - February 26th, now itinerant; and *Especulando Futuro*, Belo Horizonte, June, 23rd - July, 7th.
3. More on the (post-)modernist quality of Edgerton’s short-story below.
4. In terms of the geopolitics of the authors studied, or of conceptual insights featured in the essays, for instance.

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