

Aesthetics & Anxieties: Contemporary Dystopian Television - Response

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Over the past decade, there has been a rise to dystopian television shows. But the fear represented in those shows is based on the fears of white liberalism. Many post-apocalyptic shows focus on white, cisgender, and often times straight main characters. Making the legitimacy of these fears and situations almost laughable to people of minority groups who experience these less dramatic but equally destructive atrocities on a daily basis. By sidelining the intersectionality of these fears to focus on more privileged groups, these shows create a “what could be” mentality that many oppressed people already experience. Comparing these Hollywood dystopian shows to shows made by marginalized groups it becomes obvious that what these shows fear is losing their privilege.

For this panel I will be focusing on four TV shows that show racial and gender differences of representation. First being *The Walking Dead* (2010), which focuses on Rick Grimes, a cisgender, straight, white police officer and his group as they try to survive in a zombie infested world. The message of the show is about the extent of human nature but the show protects white heteronormativity. During the 8 seasons of the show, much of the controversy has come from the brutal and frequent deaths of minority characters and their lack of character development. *The Walking Dead* is the pinnacle of white male fear and the lengths they'll go to protect what they consider important.

The second show is *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017). The show focuses on June Osborne, a handmaid for a high-ranking member of a religious fanatical group that has taken over parts of the United States. Based on literature, both the show and the book take real life injustices against women from around the world and weave them into the narrative. Most of the story of *The Handmaid's Tale* focuses on victimization of white women. June is constantly tortured, manipulated, and threatened in the show. And most of the other Handmaids she befriends are other white women even though there are women of color who are Handmaids. Even Moira, June's Black lesbian friend who is a former Handmaid, is sidelined for most of the narrative and the injustices done to her are mostly ignored. *The Handmaid's Tale* takes stories of injustices done to women of color and gives it the face of white womanhood.

Into the Badlands (2015) is the third show I want to discuss. The show is about an unspecified dystopian world where the use of guns has been outlawed and territories run by barons have the monopoly. The best way to describe the show is a futuristic Southern slave motif mixed with the Chinese narrative of Wuxia. The barons, similar to plantation owners, have assassins called Clippers who are loyal swordsmen devoted to fight and protect their barons. Sunny, an Asian American man is the lead Clipper for a baron named Quinn, a white straight man. The story is about Sunny's journey from complacent slave to freedom. Though the show does have an Asian American man as the lead, the influence of the show feels every white. The show is heavily based on Wuxia, which is a Chinese genre of fiction that focuses on martial artist heroes, but white men created the show, which begs the question, is it appreciation or appropriation?

The final TV show I want to discuss is the Brazilian Netflix show *3%*. In future Brazil, there is an impoverished inland where most of the population lives and a utopian island where 3% of the population lives in comfort and bliss. To get to this island, when a citizen reaches 20 years old they can participate in a test to prove they're

value to the islanders who run the test. The show addresses topics of class, colorism and disabilities, which is even more impactful with the highly diverse cast.

With everything we critique, we must look at the creators. Those who create are able to showcase their ideology and thus their perception of the world. If white creators are making these shows then the future is one they fear and those fears are often based on the lose of privilege. Minorities currently live in a system that actively tries to harm them. So if the system were to be broken then who really has the most to fear? These shows are the answer to that question.