

Logistics in Popular Culture—Three Perspectives on an Invisible System

Gilles Paché

CERGAM Lab, Aix-Marseille University

IUT Aix-Marseille, TC Aix & TC Marseille Departments

413 Avenue Gaston Berger, 13625 Aix-en-Provence Cedex, France

Tel: 1-33-(0)413-94-62-51 E-mail: gilles.pache@univ-amu.fr

Received: December 31, 2024 Accepted: February 22, 2025 Published: March 15, 2025

doi:10.5296/iss.v13i1.22748 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/iss.v13i1.22748>

Abstract

The purpose of this contribution is to examine how logistics is represented in popular culture, emphasizing its often underestimated and misunderstood role. While logistics is essential to the efficient functioning of businesses and public organizations, it is frequently depicted in a simplified or exaggerated manner in film, music, and literature. These portrayals tend to focus on elements such as speed, efficiency, and adventure, overlooking the complexity and sophistication that define modern supply chains. This fragmented perspective often reduces logistics to a series of dramatic actions, failing to capture its rigorous organization and significant strategic importance. Fortunately, some works in popular culture transcend traditional stereotypes, exploring the environmental consequences of logistics and its connections to consumerist excess. These works reveal the underlying tensions between economic progress and social responsibility, prompting critical reflection. By shedding light on often-overlooked aspects, this research note aims to analyze how popular culture shapes collective perceptions of supply chains, their pervasive presence in daily life, and their indispensable role in the intricate organization of today's world.

Keywords: Cinema, Literature, Logistics, Music, Popular culture, Supply chain

1. Introduction

At the heart of the invisible mechanisms that shape the contemporary world, logistics is omnipresent in the daily lives of billions. Whether managing products, information, or human resources, it plays a fundamental role in ensuring the smooth operation of businesses, public organizations, and global supply chains. Despite its crucial importance and widespread presence across various industries, logistics is often overlooked in popular culture, where it is frequently portrayed in exaggerated terms. In areas as diverse as film, music, and literature, logistics is often reduced to a simple narrative device, typically associated with efficiency, speed, or even adventure, as seen in science fiction (Paché 2024). These dramatic representations of logistics highlight its most immediate and visible aspects, while obscuring its more complex and hidden nature. Such depictions, often exaggerated or idealized, help to shape an image of logistics that contrasts sharply with its true character—far more rigorous, methodical, and structured—and whose influence extends well beyond the mere movement of goods, deeply impacting society.

The depiction of logistics in popular culture—particularly in film, music, and literature—has garnered increasing attention from researchers, who often interpret it as a metaphor for contemporary social and organizational dynamics. For instance, Storey’s (2024) work underscores how popular culture mirrors and represents societal concerns about work, organizations, and logistics, offering a critical perspective on the modern world. Similarly, Dixon and Bortolussi’s (2019) study explores the metaphor of transport in literature, highlighting the immersive experience of becoming so engrossed in a narrative that one loses awareness of their immediate surroundings. Furthermore, in response to escalating climate-related anxieties, a post-apocalyptic trend has emerged, especially in cinema. Koncz and Boas (2024) analyze films such as *Waterworld* (1995) by Kevin Reynolds, *Snowpiercer* (2013) by Bong Joon-ho, and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) by George Miller, emphasizing how these narratives depict the impact of supply chain disruptions resulting from environmental, social, and technological collapse. In summary, the significance of logistics in popular culture is undeniable and warrants further scholarly exploration.

In this vein, Le Goff (2024) recently analyzed the French series *L’Effondrement* (“The Collapse”), which aired on Canal+ network between November and December 2019. This series portrays the struggles of individuals, groups, and families as they endeavor to survive in a world unraveling due to unspecified causes. Throughout its eight episodes, totaling approximately 2 hours and 50 minutes, the narrative focuses on disruptions in supply chains, highlighting shortages of essential items such as sanitary products, medications, and food in supermarkets and nursing homes, as well as rapidly depleting fuel supplies at service stations. These logistical failures expose individuals to hunger and thirst and even jeopardize the safety of a nuclear power plant. As Le Goff (2024) notes, *L’Effondrement* effectively depicts a nation’s paralysis, featuring scenes of brawling and looting, rampant egoism, and, ultimately, the dominance of primal instincts for self-preservation. The series delves into the psychological and social impacts of a collapsing society, illustrating how individuals and communities respond under extreme stress. It portrays the breakdown of social norms and the

emergence of survivalist behaviors, offering a stark commentary on human nature when faced with logistical crisis.

While cinema often provides the backdrop for thrilling stories where logistics management is reduced to spectacular transport scenes or an irreparable civilization collapse, music and literature take a more nuanced approach, embedding logistics within social, ethical, and philosophical contexts. From songs that critique the environmental impact of supply chains to novels that explore themes of control, consumption, and sustainability, logistical stakes are presented in a new light, offering a valuable lens for reflecting on the evolution of contemporary societies. This research note examines the representation of logistics through three artistic perspectives within popular culture—cinema, music, and literature—building on Boyle’s (2024) analysis of the role of logistics in the production of art. It begins by analyzing the dramatic and sensationalized portrayals of logistics in film, then explores how music highlights the social and ecological consequences of supply chain systems. Finally, it investigates the depiction of logistics in literature, where it often serves as a metaphor for power and control. This interdisciplinary exploration provides deeper insight into how popular culture shapes our perceptions of logistics and reveals its broader implications for contemporary society. By examining these artistic representations, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role logistics plays in our world, influencing not only the movement of goods but also the narratives and values that define our culture.

2. Cinema and Logistics: Between Dramatization and Realism

Cinema, as a reflection of society, often captures various aspects of our reality, including its logistical dimensions. However, these dimensions are rarely portrayed accurately, often being reduced to dramatic or symbolic representations. Popular franchises like *The Transporter* and *Fast & Furious* perfectly illustrate this trend. The series, known for its thrilling chases and high-risk transport operations, emphasizes qualities such as speed and efficiency (Comanducci, 2021). However, this represents a hyper-stylized view that distorts the perception of logistics, masking essential elements like safety, sustainability, and meticulous planning. In several *Fast & Furious* films, for instance, viewers witness scenes that are physically impossible to organize in real life. The characters often drive at speeds that defy not only the laws of physics but also the principles of logistics. In *Fast and Furious 8* (2017) by Gary Gray, for instance, during a chase on a frozen lake, a submarine surfaces and blows up everything in its path. Filmed in Iceland, the scene involved 16 vehicles equipped with steel crampons, each carefully weighed to prevent breaking the ice (see Figure 1). These performances reflect a theatrical and sensationalist portrayal of logistics, presenting an image where adventure takes precedence over the daily reality of a sector governed by rigor, coordination, and caution.



Figure 1. Fast & Furious 8: A dramatized logistics

Source: © Universal Pictures (2017).

However, it is not all spectacle, as some films explore logistics in a more realistic and nuanced way. One of the most striking examples is Ridley Scott's *The Martian* (2015), in which the protagonist, Mark Watney (Matt Damon), stranded on Mars, faces a monumental logistical challenge: surviving alone on an inhospitable planet with limited resources. Watney carefully plans every step, from food production to oxygen management, demonstrating that logistics is primarily a science of optimization and resilience. This realistic portrayal underscores logistics as a crucial pillar of innovation and survival in extreme environments. *The Martian* also highlights a fundamental truth often overlooked in dramatized narratives: logistics depends on a rigorous understanding of physical constraints, much like the surface transport challenges discussed by Rossi (2024). It is not just about speed or efficiency, but about finding viable solutions in situations where any mistake could be fatal. More broadly, *The Martian* serves as a reminder that logistics plays a key role in humanity's major achievements, from space exploration to managing humanitarian crises.

Beyond purely fictional accounts, war films provide a valuable perspective on the crucial role of logistics. In *Dunkirk* (2017) by Christopher Nolan, the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of British soldiers hinges on flawless logistical coordination (Sturgess, 2017). The film emphasizes how managing resources, ships, and time become a matter of life and death. Similarly, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) by Steven Spielberg illustrates the importance of logistics in the success of military operations. From the Normandy landings to troop organization, every detail depends on meticulous planning. These two box-office hits remind us that, even in chaotic and unpredictable environments, logistics is a key factor in achieving success. It is not merely a practical tool, but an invisible force that underpins and structures major human endeavors. As discipline, logistics overcomes the most complex obstacles and equips the military with the resources to carry out their missions, often under extreme conditions. It transforms ambitious strategies into tangible realities, highlighting its

fundamental role in modern warfare.

Ultimately, the representation of logistics in cinema swings between two extremes: the spectacular and the pragmatic. These cinematic portrayals, whether exaggerated through thrilling chase scenes or grounded in realistic depictions of survival and war, reflect our collective fascination with a system that, while omnipresent, often stays in the background. Logistics touches nearly every aspect of our daily lives, from the distribution of goods to the management of public services, yet it rarely receives attention for its systematic structure and the profound impact it has on modern society and our interconnected global economy. Many films remind us that logistics, far more than just a practical mechanism, is a cornerstone of modern civilization, both in times of peace and conflict. It supports the complex framework of contemporary societies, facilitating the movement of products, people, and information on a global scale. Without logistics, life as we know it would be radically different, and the economic and social order would collapse—but its role often remains invisible to the public eye.

3. Music and Logistics: A Subtle Connection

Although music may seem distant from logistical concerns, it is, in fact, closely connected through themes explored in songs, the socio-economic realities faced by artists, and the inner workings of the music industry. These connections reveal how logistics management shapes not only the creation and distribution of music but also the social dynamics it reflects in an increasingly globalized world. A striking example of this is Joni Mitchell's iconic song *Big Yellow Taxi*. In this song, Mitchell critiques the consequences of unchecked urbanization and mass consumption, condemning the destruction of the environment for the sake of economic progress (Yaffe, 2017). She subtly reminds us that every product we consume is part of a complex logistical system, the environmental costs of which are often hidden from view. By enabling the large-scale extraction, transport, and distribution of resources, modern logistics plays a role in the depletion of ecosystems. Through this lens, Mitchell raises a critical question: What price are we paying for efficient supply chains, and to what extent are consumers responsible for the negative impacts they cause?

In a completely different context, hip-hop highlights how logistics is deeply rooted in the social realities of underprivileged communities. Many artists within the genre address themes such as the distribution of goods to marginalized groups, access to resources, and economic inequality. For instance, songs by Jay-Z and Kendrick Lamar frequently reference the hustle economy, where disadvantaged communities rely on informal networks to engage with consumer society (McMillan Cottom, 2020). This phenomenon represents an alternative form of logistics that operates alongside official distribution channels. These artists showcase the resilience of individuals navigating systemic barriers that make access to resources more challenging. More broadly, these narratives reflect how logistics shapes people's lives and trajectories—not just as a matter of efficiency or technological innovation, but as an essential tool for survival and adaptation. These representations also expose the limitations of supply chains that often perpetuate social injustice by concentrating resources in specific regions or within certain social classes, while depriving others, thus reinforcing structural inequalities.

Moreover, the music industry itself depends on advanced logistical infrastructures that have evolved over the years (Moloney et al., 2019). In the era of vinyl, cassettes, and CDs, the production and physical distribution of music required close coordination between factories, warehouses, and retail outlets. The rise of digital distribution has significantly transformed supply chains by removing their material aspect (see Figure 2). While streaming platforms have become central to the industry, they rely on sophisticated digital logistical systems to manage data flows and ensure instant global availability. However, the material aspects of supply chains are still evident during world tours, another critical facet of the music business. Transporting heavy equipment and coordinating the movements of artists and technical crews while adhering to tight schedules presents a significant logistical challenge (Paché 2023). These tours generate massive logistical operations, involving air, sea, and land transport across the globe. These operations showcase logistics' ability to adapt to cultural needs, while also emphasizing their environmental impact, particularly the carbon footprint associated with frequent travel and show production.

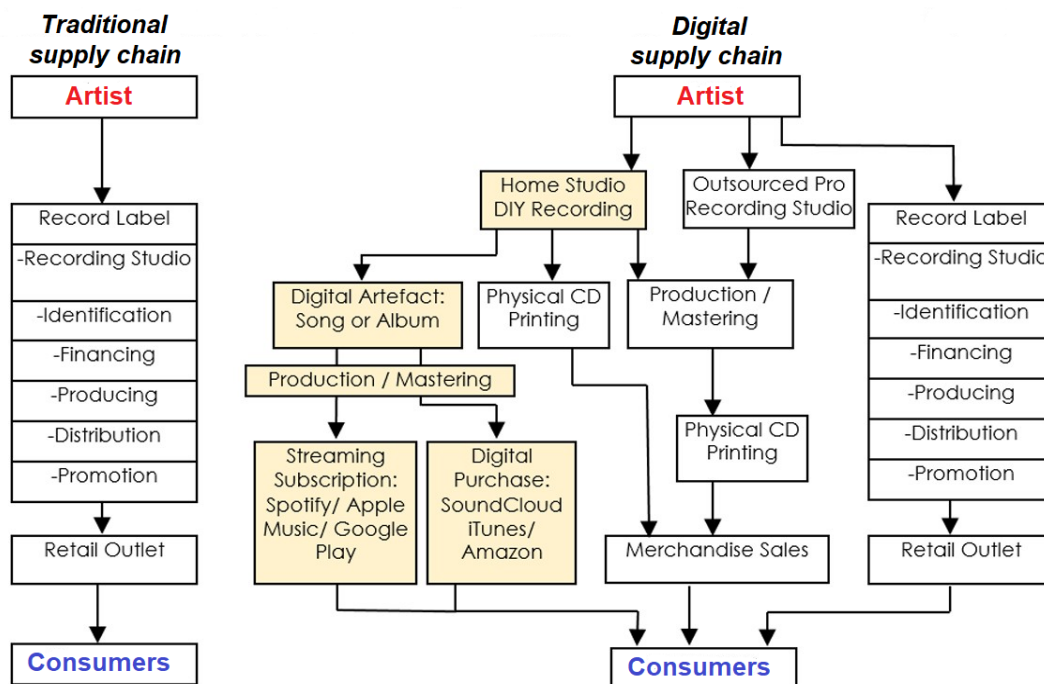


Figure 2. Music industry: From traditional to digital supply chain

Source: Adapted from Moloney et al. (2019).

Thus, music and logistics intersect from multiple and diverse perspectives. Whether critiquing global supply chains, reflecting the social realities of marginalized communities, or supporting the intricate workings of the music industry itself, logistics management plays a central—though often hidden—role. Artists subtly address the environmental impacts of logistics, as seen in Mitchell’s song, while exploring economic inequality through genres like hip-hop. The connections between music and logistics go beyond efficiency and

technological innovation, encompassing values such as social justice, ethical responsibility, and sustainability. They shed light on the profound impact logistics has on the creation, distribution, and consumption of music, raising critical questions about ethical issues, working conditions in the industry, the environmental costs of global supply chains, the exploitation of creative labor, cultural appropriation, challenges in digital distribution, fair trade in music production, barriers to market access for independent artists, and the effects of global touring on local communities, cultural practices, indigenous traditions, and natural resources.

4. Literature and Logistics: A Metaphor for Power

As a reflection of human concerns, literature offers a unique platform for exploring the implications of logistics, often through philosophical, political, or dystopian lenses. Far from being limited to its technical aspects, logistics emerges as a powerful metaphor, illustrating dynamics of control, consumption, and sustainability. In iconic dystopian works such as Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 2013 [1953]) and George Orwell's *1984* (Orwell, 2017 [1949]), logistics is portrayed through the control of information flows. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the logistics behind the systematic destruction of books serve as a tool for suppressing knowledge and critical thought. By burning books, the "firemen" do not merely destroy physical objects—they sever the channels through which information and ideas circulate, much like the Nazis did as early as May 1933 (Chauvet, 2017). Similarly, in *1984*, Orwell reveals another aspect of logistics: the manipulation of data. The Ministry of Truth controls the distribution and alteration of information to maintain the regime, reinforcing its three notorious slogans: "*War is Peace*," "*Freedom is Slavery*," and "*Ignorance is Strength*." These novels show that logistics, far from being neutral, can become a tool of political and ideological domination.

On the other hand, authors like Don DeLillo, in works such as *White Noise*, explore the logistical systems that underpin our daily lives in contemporary settings (DeLillo, 2009 [1985]). DeLillo portrays a world where logistics not only fulfills human needs but actively redefines them. Through descriptions of malls, supermarkets, and waste management, he highlights the omnipresence of procurement systems in modern life. In *White Noise*, mass consumption becomes a reflection of ubiquitous logistics, where every product bought, used, and discarded illustrates the logistical cycle that structures families' daily routines. From this perspective, the 2009 Penguin Classics edition cover of the book is particularly telling (see Figure 3). DeLillo questions how procurement systems shape people's priorities and behaviors: by facilitating instant access to products and services, logistics strengthens a consumer culture in which immediate satisfaction takes precedence over long-term reflection, while contributing to the standardization of modern societies and the anonymity of human experience. A similar vision can be found in the 2022 Nobel Prize in Literature winner Annie Ernaux's *Look at the Lights, My Love* (Ernaux, 2023).

The role of logistics in literature extends beyond critiques of consumption and control; it also addresses environmental, ethical, and social issues. Recent works, such as Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018), explore the tensions between modern logistics and sustainability.

While logistics is not explicitly named, it pervades the novel, which delves into themes of logging and ecosystem destruction. The industrial over-exploitation of natural resources, facilitated by sophisticated supply chains, symbolizes the conflict between progress and preservation. Powers emphasizes the devastating consequences of this conflict on fragile ecosystems. Trees, central to the narrative, represent not only nature but also an alternative to the relentless logic of “destructive logistics.” *The Overstory* ultimately encourages readers to reflect on the ethical implications of contemporary supply chains and their role in either destroying or protecting our environment. It also raises questions about the sustainability of societal choices and the long-term consequences of our collective actions. Through its intricate storytelling, the novel underscores the interconnectedness of all living beings and the profound impact of human activities on the planet. The narrative challenges the notion of human dominance over nature, advocating for a more harmonious coexistence. In doing so, Powers calls for a reevaluation of individual values and priorities in the face of environmental degradation.

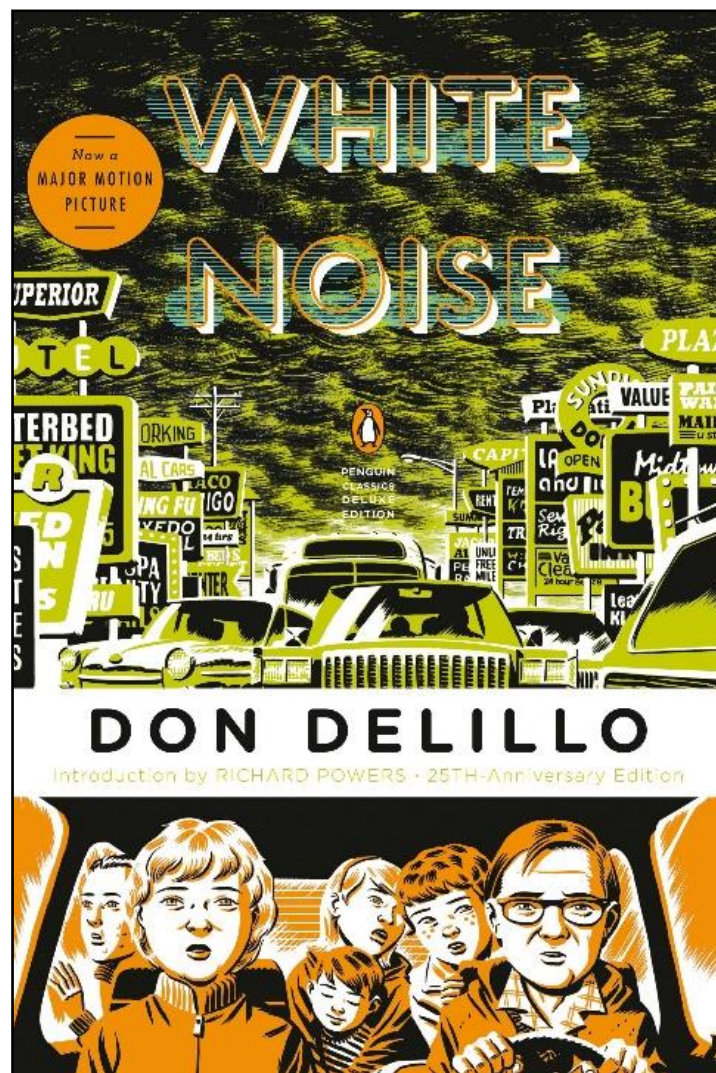


Figure 3. White Noise: Consumerism and logistics

Source: © Penguin Classics (2009).

Through a range of iconic works, literature emphasizes that logistics is more than just a management tool—it is a profound structuring force within society. It influences human relationships, economic decisions, power dynamics, and prevailing cultural values. In a world where the flow of goods, information, and resources defines daily life, literature acts as a “revealer,” shedding light on the often-invisible dynamics underlying procurement systems. By examining logistics through a literary lens, we can uncover its far-reaching societal implications. Whether it involves controlling information, meeting material needs, or addressing environmental challenges, logistics emerges as a compelling metaphor for both collective and individual struggles. This perspective aligns with Chua et al.’s (2018) critical view of logistics as a privileged domain for the exercise of power and the enactment of violence. This theme is particularly salient in dystopian narratives, where logistics management reflects our aspirations, fears, and contradictions. Literature thus reminds us that behind every supply chain lie ethical and political choices that sustainably shape the world we live in, while prompting reflection on justice and social responsibility.

5. Conclusion

Although often relegated to an operational role, logistics is omnipresent in popular culture. Whether in blockbuster films, protest songs, or dystopian novels, it reflects the values, challenges, and aspirations of contemporary society. By examining these representations, the research note suggests that we can better understand and assess the impact of logistics on daily lives, as well as the ethical dilemmas it raises. Indeed, portrayals of logistics in popular culture mirror the dominant values of the modern world: speed, efficiency, and convenience. While these ideals are appealing in terms of performance, they are increasingly criticized as sustainability is a key priority in protecting the Earth for future generations. It is notable that Richard Fleischer’s 1973 masterpiece *Soylent Green*, released just after the publication of *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972), addresses this issue. Thus, who can deny that logistical concerns, even the most dramatic ones, are central to popular culture, offering valuable insights into the challenges we will face in the coming decades?

However, this exploratory investigation has three limitations. First, the selected corpus does not encompass the full range of works available across the three artistic fields studied. While illustrative, the approach introduces bias into the interpretation of results, as it excludes certain lesser-known or non-Western works that could provide fresh perspectives. Additionally, some contemporary pieces that explore emerging themes, such as ecology or technology, are omitted, narrowing the scope of the analysis. Second, the interactions between logistics and popular culture discussed here relate predominantly to symbolic or metaphorical interpretations, which limit their practical applicability in more operational contexts. Moreover, the research note overlooks other forms of media, including video games and social media platforms, all of which play a significant role in transmitting cultural values today. Third, the methodological framework requires further development. A comparative analysis across diverse cultural contexts or a more quantitative approach to measure the actual influence of these representations on perceptions of logistics would meaningfully enhance the conclusions presented.

These limitations emphasize the need for further research to deepen our understanding of the connections between logistics and popular culture. One promising research avenue is expanding the scope to include other forms of media, such as video games, which are especially popular among younger generations and may offer new insights into how logistics is perceived and represented. For instance, analyzing games with narrative or immersive elements centered on supply chain management—like *Heavy Truck*—could provide valuable perspectives. A second research avenue involves comparative analyses across different geographical and cultural contexts. Representations of logistics likely vary widely between regions, shaped by specific economic, social, and environmental factors as well as local artistic traditions. Finally, a third research avenue could delve deeper into the societal impacts of logistics representations. Surveys of logisticians or sociological analyses of consumers could illuminate how popular culture influences perceptions of supply chains. These perceptions, often grounded in shared mental concepts, may perpetuate the view of logistics as a management practice with sustainability challenges that remain deeply rooted in the collective consciousness.

Acknowledgments

The author extends his deep gratitude to the CERGAM Lab for its invaluable support in advancing his work in business logistics over the past forty years. He is especially thankful to Professor Jacques Colin for his continued collaboration on various research projects, which have been instrumental in shaping the developments presented in this research note. Feedback provided by two anonymous reviewers of *Issues in Social Science* also helped improve several points of the initial draft.

References

- Boyle, M. (2024). *The arts of logistics: Artistic production in supply chain capitalism*. Redwood City (CA): Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503640443>
- Bradbury, R. (2013 [1953]). *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Chauvet, D. (2017). *Les autodafés nazis: Mémoire du 10 mai 1933* [Nazi book burning: A memoir of May 10, 1933]. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Chua, C., Danyluk, M., Cowen, D., & Khalili, L. (2018). Turbulent circulation: Building a critical engagement with logistics. *Environment & Planning D: Society & Space*, 36(4), 617-629. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775818783101>
- Comanducci, C. (2021). How fast is furious? The discourse of fast cinema in question. *Panoptikum*, 26(33), 39-60. <https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.02>
- DeLillo, D. (2009 [1985]). *White noise*. New York: Penguin Classics.
- Dixon, P., & Bortolussi, M. (2019). Readers' processing of perceptual perspective and stance. *Discourse Processes*, 56(7), 513-529. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163853X.2018.1512829>
- Ernaux, A. (2023). *Look at the lights, my love*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300272833>

- Koncz, L., & Villas Boas, A. (2024). Climate migration in post-apocalyptic narratives on the mainstream screen. *Religions*, 15(2), Article 231. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020231>
- Le Goff, J. (2024). Qui a peur de *L'Effondrement*? La série, vecteur politique hors de contrôle [Who's afraid of *The Collapse*? The series as an uncontrolled political force]. *Saison: La Revue des Séries*, 8, 5972. Retrieved from <https://classiques-garnier.com/saison-la-revue-des-series-2024-2-n-8-management-en-series-qui-a-peur-de-l-effondrement.html>
- McMillan Cottom, T. (2020). The hustle economy. *Dissent*, 67(4), 19-25. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2020.0094>
- Meadows, D., Meadows, D., Randers, J., & Behrens III, W. (1972). *The limits to growth: A report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind*. New York: Universe Books. <https://doi.org/10.1349/ddlp.1>
- Moloney, B., Cybulski, J., & Nguyen, L. (2019). A phenomenological perspective on value creation and perception in music information systems. *Proceedings of the 17th International Conference on e-Society* (pp. 97-104). Utrecht (The Netherlands). https://doi.org/10.33965/es2019_201904L012
- Orwell, G. (2017 [1949]). *1984*. Boston (MA): Mariner Books.
- Paché G. (2023). Managing rock/pop tours: An exploration of logistical dimensions. *Journal of Applied Business & Economics*, 25(1), 234-246. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jabe.v25i1.5919>
- Paché G. (2024). Behind the scenes: How logistics shapes space fantasy science fiction narratives. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 62, 159-169. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v62i1.11714>
- Pitt, J. (2019). 1945: Nineteen forty-five—A fictional schooling short story inquiry. *Issues in Social Science*, 7(2), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.5296/iss.v7i2.14860>
- Powers, R. (2019). *The overstory*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Rossi, I. (2024). Logistics and transport systems for Mars: Designing infrastructure for human colonization. *Journal of Engineering & Technology*, 6(2), Article 404. <https://mzjournal.com/index.php/JET/article/view/404>
- Storey, J. (2024). *Cultural theory and popular culture: An introduction* (8th ed.). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003388890>
- Sturgess, G. (2017). The Dunkirk stories. *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 69(3), 40-45. Retrieved from <https://ipa.org.au/ipa-review-articles/the-dunkirk-stories>
- Yaffe, D. (2017). *Reckless daughter: A portrait of Joni Mitchell*. New York: Sarah Crichton Books.

Note

Note 1. An excellent dystopian narrative on the evolution of education systems, indirectly inspired by Orwell's *1984*, is suggested by Pitt (2019).

Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).