



## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



## SPECIAL SECTION: ABSTRACTS

Archibald, Diana

### MANY KINDS OF PRISON: CHARLES DICKENS ON AMERICAN INCARCERATION AND SLAVERY

When the famous British novelist Charles Dickens arrived in North America in 1842, he came at an ideal time to examine the effects of the first wave of penal reform and prison building. His eyewitness account offers valuable insight into American incarceration practices. Taking a stand on the debate over what form incarceration ought to take, Dickens lands squarely in the camp of those supporting the Congregate or Auburn System, a type of penitentiary that allowed inmates to be with each other by day, performing work silently but in proximity to other human beings. Dickens opposed the misguided Separate or Pennsylvania System which enforced utter isolation through almost perpetual solitary confinement. Dickens not only exposes the cruelty of this system but he illuminates the cruelty of American slavery, yet another form of imprisonment. Most importantly, Dickens exposes the special brand of hypocrisy born of American exceptionalism that he discovers on his trip and lambasts the young republic for its blind boasts about ideals Dickens thought were not being upheld: Freedom and Justice. Dickens's travel book, *American Notes*, contains markers that point toward the 20th- and 21st-century future of mass incarceration, and his powerful literary journalism is still relevant today.

Cagliero, Roberto

### DA THOREAU AL SUPERMAX

Starting from the canon of the nineteenth century (Melville, Poe, Thoreau) this essay looks at primary and secondary sources on the carceral universe in the USA. Transforming the condemned in an inmate and eventually in a proletarian is one of the goals of mass incarceration. It produces a space where guilt is automatically associated to sentences as a manifestation of social cruelty, to prison as human warehouse, to detention as progressive manipulation of the most fundamental qualities of a human being. Retaliation instead of rehabilitation, profit instead of compassion, long sentences instead of re-entry programs: such are the features of a revengeful legislation, which turns poverty in United States into a crime, following a political rather than moral pattern. The recognition of trauma as the key factor in generating crime (as seen in prison life itself, and in novels by Bunker and Kushner among others) opens up a chance for separating inmates from experiences that keep them tied to a tragic past. Far from punitive fantasies and political decisions, such a trauma-sensitive approach is progressively taking hold in American prisons, offering a reconsideration of human beings as separated from their crimes.



Ferrante, Antonia Anna

## BIOPOWER IS THE NEW BLACK: GENDER REFRACTIONS AND REFLECTIONS BETWEEN PANOPTICON AND TELEVISION

What can be visible of a queer body behind the bars? I will try to answer this question through the critical analysis of *Orange is the New Black*, a TV series produced by Netflix and based on Piper Kerman's autobiographical novel.

Imprisoned queer bodies are at the center of my analysis. Prison is the paradigm of the system of surveillance and confinement of bodies. Queer bodies are themselves a site of the exercise of power. In prison, gender non-conforming bodies are subjected to the consuetudinary discipline of sexuality and to arbitrary forms of discipline and punishment, such as the re-assignment to a non-desired gender, the duty of conforming to it, the administration of hormones, and a systematic exercise of violence.

I am allowed to see behind the bars through the lens of a fictional representation in a TV show. Despite the stereotypical representation of its characters, the show explores the tension between the inmates' desire of the inmates to escape the cage of heteronormativity and biopower's desire (and need) for discipline.

My critical reading will be framed in Angela Davis' s analysis on how gender structures prison (Davis, 2003). I will try to go further and understand how prison is a gendered institution, since gender and heteronormativity are themselves systems of surveillance and discipline (Stanley and Smith, 2011). Prison shapes bodies and disciplines gender, as well as gender informs and structures prison.

The screen offers yet another and more complex perspective, acting as a lens through which we can watch the Panopticon. Discipline impacts not only on gender politics, but also on the regime of visibility for queer subjects. I want to focus on how the show stages the interplay of refractions between what can be visible and tolerable in prison and what can be tolerable and visible in the society (Foucault, 1975).

Fusco, Serena

## PRISON PHOTOGRAPHY AS DIALOGUE

In this essay, I consider prison photography, in broad terms, as a rhetorical and social network that potentially or actually brings together agents from both sides of the prison walls. I attempt to discuss prison photography as a practice that exposes the stark border separating the inside and outside of prisons, while creating communication channels attempting to bridge such divide. If, on the one hand, photographic initiatives centered on prisons, and the increased visibility they entail, contribute to blur the divide between inside and outside, on the other hand, photography retains and amplifies the stark quality of this divide – both because of the inescapable realism and documentary value of photographic images and because photographic images make present, and materialize, the starkly uneven distribution of the technological means for crafting them. Because of its fluid, yet inescapably asymmetrical nature, prison photography requires, and simultaneously fosters, a nuanced reflection on what separates the world within prison walls from the world without.



Gennero, Valeria

## LA GABBIA È PIENA. *ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK* E IL COMPLESSO CARCERARIO INDUSTRIALE

Valeria Gennero's "The Cage is Full" focuses on the role played by the Tv series *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019), created by Jenji Kohan, in the dissemination of the term Prison-Industrial Complex in contemporary U.S. debates about racism and American identity. This essay argues that Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow* (2010) was a crucial influence on the intersectional framework of Kohan's TV project, which is characterized by an innovative reading of the growing privatization of the U.S. prison system.

Grande, Elisabetta

## POLITICHE DEL DIRITTO, POVERTÀ E PRIGIONI NEGLI STATI UNITI D'AMERICA OGGI

What is the purpose of prison in the United States today? It is about locking up the poor, as never happened before. That poor people abound in prisons is not a novelty of course. Anytime and everywhere, it is the poor who have been incarcerated. Yet today, in the United States of America, incarcerating them acquires the meaning of an end *in itself*. Poor people, who in a corporate capitalistic society are not profitable enough as free men and women, become profitable whenever incarcerated since they are transformed into forced consumers. It is not anymore about educating them to sell their labor power as it was in the nineteenth century. Nor is it about making legal an otherwise declared illegal black slavery, as it happened after the U.S. civil war. It is instead about extracting profit from their very incarceration. Thus in the U.S. today, on the one hand the legal system produces the growth of extreme poverty, allowing the rich to become even richer by stealing from their weakest fellow. On the other hand, it incarcerates the poor in mass, allowing the rich to profit even more from them. In the era of corporate sovereignty therefore, when the force of the law turns into the law of the strongest, the endless circle of growing inequality converts poor people in perfect bodies to incarcerate for the sake of the rich. How this happens, i.e. how the legal system engenders the incarceration of the poor, it is the aim of this essay to investigate and explain.

Rosso, Stefano

## I CARCERI FANTASMA DELLA GUERRA DEL VIETNAM. NOTE SUL MITO AMERICANO DEI PRIGIONIERI DI GUERRA

In the early 1990s about 70 percent of Americans believed that some 2,000 US Army soldiers were still being held captive in secret prisons in Vietnam, despite there being no proof that any prison camps had survived in South East Asia after the Fall of Saigon (1975). Elaborating on the limited bibliography available, this essay examines the strategies adopted by the Nixon Administration, some independent organizations, and the future Presidential candidate Ross Perot, to shift the focus from the people actually fighting and dying in the Vietnam War to these imaginary prisoners. These strategies involved politicians of both major parties, celebrities from the star system and the media. It will also be seen how a substantial part of American popular culture helped to disseminate the myth of the Prisoners of War (POWs) and the Missings in Action (MIAs) through fiction, cinema, TV



and comics (and later video games). Only the great works of literature generated by the Vietnam War (e.g. by Tim O'Brien and Michael Herr) abstained from taking part in this major falsification plot.

Sarrett, Jennifer

## INCARCERATING DISABILITY: HOW SOCIETY-WIDE STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE DIMINISHES JUSTICE FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

People with I/DDs such as autism, fetal alcohol syndrome, and general cognitive impairments are victimized by the criminal justice system, whether they encounter it as victims or as the accused. Although at drastically higher risk for being victimized, they are further victimized by the testimonial injustice that prevents the crimes against people with I/DD from being investigated, and so these victims rarely justice. In the aftermath of deinstitutionalization and growing economic disparity, people with I/DD are disproportionately represented in incarcerated settings. Once incarcerated, they often serve longer, harder sentences. This article provides an overview of what we know about people with I/DD in criminal justice settings and structures and what we need to learn. Based partly on preliminary qualitative research with adults with I/DD about their experiences with criminal justice settings and structures, I argue that this population is falling through the cracks in an already fragile and uneven justice system.

Scarpino, Cinzia

## I'M A FUGITIVE FROM A (GEORGIA) CHAIN GANG! VERSO FANTASIE DI EVASIONE COLORBLIND

American cinema and television have always been fascinated with prison stories, showing an enduring penchant for narratives derived from texts written by actual convicts.

In the 1930's, when the first prison movies were produced by Hollywood, the representation of the correctional system was informed by two main discourses, namely the assertion of a national policing power through a network of surveillance technologies under the newly-born FBI, and the historical and geographical contiguity of plantation enslaved labor and prison farms and chain gangs. Catering to white urban middle-class tastes for "lam stories" of fugitives, the most notable and successful motion picture belonging to the prison movie category of Great Depression (along with a handful of productions such as *The Big House*; *20,000 Years in Sing Sing*, *Hell's Highway*) was Mervin Leroy's *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932). The film, which told the story of a white convict leased to chain gangs in Georgia and of his two flights from prison, was based on Robert Elliott Burns' autobiographical account *I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* (1932).

This paper will explore the seminal significance of *I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* in a twofold analysis. On the one hand, it will show how by both exposing chain gangs as direct descendants from plantations and by framing his narrative against the rule of American law through the use of the slave narrative genre, Burns' "true story" and its movie adaptation can be read as straddling the racial divide within the U.S. penal system in the 1930's. On the other, it will argue that *I Am a Fugitive* can be seen as initiating a lineage of prison narratives based on the autobiographical/memoiristic accounts of ex-convicts that would thrive well on the big screen



throughout the 1970's and 80's (*Escape from Alcatraz*, 1979; *Attica*, 1980) and would then transition to quality Tv series beginning from the 1990's.

Schrag, David

## VISIBILITY AND OBSCURITY WITHIN THE SURVEILLANCE REGIME OF THE U.S. PRISON

Prisons are physical and imagined objects of fascination. Dramatic images of prison life are highly available in the public imaginary, yet the lives of typical prisoners remain obscure from public view. Through media portrayals—both fictional and 'real'—the public is led to visualize the prison primarily in terms of dramatic physical violence. At a different level of public visibility, the external physical features of the prison facilities themselves project a message of violence (e.g. through razor-wire fences and gun towers) and thus an implicit message about the publicly-unseen population secluded within its walls. This essay examines issues of visibility and obscurity in regard to the present-day "control prison" (Rhodes 2004)—a regime that functions primarily as a means of punitive social exclusion. Kleinman's (1997) anthropological concepts of social violence and social suffering will be used to discuss the diffuse, less-readily-visible, forms of violence which are the product of the social separation created by the prison regime, and help us to more critically engage with representations of the prison.

## GENERAL SECTION: ABSTRACTS

Aji, Hélène

## ARCHIVES OF LOSS: DAVID ANTIN, SUSAN HOWE, VANESSA PLACE

Through considerations about poetic work, from three very different authors, David Antin, Susan Howe and Vanessa Place, the article reconsiders the significance of the archive in contemporary poetic creation.

Archival preoccupation signals a concern with the present, and its flitting quality: the modes of improvisation in Antin thus offer formal options for a recording of the present as the locus of loss. In Howe, the archival impulse seems to stem from a desire to rewrite history and put forward the issues of historiography: manuscript material from intractable archives generates poetic constructions that become archival material in turn: chaotic typographies evidence what is lost in archivization, rather than focus on what is preserved. Archival gestures might eventually emerge as part of our (lost) fight against radical loss and death: Place's expansive work on documenting death and the morbidity of social practices is nodal, reaching a paroxystic dimension in *Last Words*, a project centered on the death penalty, and the electronic archive of the last words of the executed inmates of Texas.

In the dialectics outlined by the works of these three poets, the paradox of the archive unfolds as it grows exponentially while remaining incomplete and defective, a sign of the fault in the dialectics of "archive fever" as it inexorably fails to counter our mortal condition.



Bernardi, Debra

## “YOU’RE NOT GOING TO LET SOME SILLY OLD RULE STAND IN YOUR WAY!” ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF THE MODERN IN MID-CENTURY AMERICAN-WOMEN-IN- ITALY FILMS

US popular culture was especially fascinated by the idea of visiting Italy during the post-World War II years, with numerous films of the period featuring American visitors to the peninsula. Playing off long-standing British and US images of Italy, such films frequently tout modern masculine American know-how aiding a primitive, if beautiful, nation. Thus, such narratives support US aid to defeated Italy during the years of the Marshall Plan. Think, for example, of *It Started in Naples* (1960), where Philadelphia businessman Clark Gable visits Capri and ultimately takes charge of gorgeous, if disheveled, Sophia Loren and his loveable “street urchin” nephew. Yes, Gable is seduced by the beautiful, if disorderly, place, but in the end his manly American savvy gives both his nephew and Loren a better life: the nephew will attend school regularly and Loren will stop dancing in nightclubs. Gable becomes the icon of the modern world: the 1950s “Organization Man,” who saves the day for poor old-world Italians in films like this.

But this essay finds another strain of films that competes with this vision of a modern masculine American world. In a genre of US films I term “American-women-in-Italy films,” produced from 1953 until the early 1960s, travel to the Italian peninsula inspires white middle-class US women to rebel against the rigid structures, rules, and rationality of the modern “organization man” – a symbol of the patriarchy. “You’re not going to let some silly old rule stand in your way!” one young secretary in Rome urges another in *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954). The genre also includes the famous *Roman Holiday* (1953), *Summertime* (1955), *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1961), *Gidget Goes to Rome* (1961), *Rome Adventure* (1962), and *Light in the Piazza* (1962). While there are some differences in the post-1960s films discussed here, on the whole these films establish white middle-class US women in Italy as icons of an alternate modernity: one that is chaotic, rather than orderly; free, rather than rule bound; and feminine, rather than masculine. Taken together these films reveal a surprising anticolonial, feminist strain in 1950s/early 1960s popular culture.

Bidlingmaier, Selma Sew Li

## “I HAVE HEARD THE LAND SING:” (RE)READING AMERICAN LANDSCAPES IN SHAWN WONG’S *HOMEBASE* AND MAXINE HONG KINGSTON’S *CHINA MEN*

The myths of North America were born out of the imaginaries of the American landscape—the wilderness, the Frontier, the West, the Cultivated Garden. From Washington Irving’s New World folktales, the adventures of Davy Crockett, the landscape artists of the Hudson River School, Concord’s transcendentalists, to Jackson Turner’s thesis, Nature was conceived/perceived as a constant given, as an object, a resource bestowed to the White, Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual male. The project of nation-building required the creation of national narratives and an American consciousness of progress, advancement, strength, and regeneration—through violence, to distinguish itself from the Old World and gain position within a geopolitical-geo-economic colonial world order. These myths, imagineerings, and historical documentation of the American landscape have systematically silenced and erased the histories of Native Americans, Black slaves, Latino ranchers and Chinese coolie workers and at the same time dehistoricized and depoliticized the



history of the material, natural world. This paper discusses Chinese American story-telling in Shawn Wong's *Homebase* (1979) and Maxine Hong Kingston's *Chinamen* (1980) as a means of (re)imagining a material history of the American landscapes in the negotiation of agency. Approaching the history of land(scaping) as material-cultural history formed during the colonial and industrial era, it seeks to understand and complicate the dialectic relationship between the material space of land and the body, the discursive space of American landscapes and identity, and the lived space of experience and memory.

Facchinetti, Roberta and Jane Lu Hsu

## WESTERN POWERS IN 1920-1930 CHINA: FOCUS ON THE MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF SHANGHAI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

The paper focuses on the Minutes of the Meetings (MoMs) held by the Council of the Municipality of Shanghai between 1920 and 1930. The study has a two-folded aim; in the first place, by focussing on Shanghai MoMs from the early 20th century, we delve into the evolution of the Western (largely British) management of municipal affairs on Chinese territory, paying special attention to the relations between such Western powers and local Chinese citizens at the time. Secondly, the linguistic analysis of the MoMs allows us to shed light on this textual type, with special reference to their structural and linguistic distinctiveness.

From the socio-historical point of view, the data testify to the evolving relations between the West and China; indeed, the Western 'colonizing' interest for China—which led to clashes between languages, cultures and powers—gradually gave way to a more collaborative attitude, increasing respect for the Chinese population and a growing sense of shared collectivity. From the linguistic point of view, the data give account of MoMs as a textual type that at the time under scrutiny had grown to be very similar to present-day MoMs, with lexical and structural specificities that position this textual type halfway between legal writing and news reporting.

Santini, Laura

## THE SHORT FORM RESHAPED: EMAIL, BLOG, SMS, AND MSN IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY E-PISTOLARY NOVELS

By borrowing from computer coding strategies or computer-based communication tools and rules, by re-thinking typo-graphic and layout strategies, the digital or electronic short forms of twenty-first century e-pistolary novels are made of are crossbreeds that expressively capture and mirror the fragmented, often simultaneous and multi(p)layer, nature of the contemporary conversation threads within a pervasive communicative environment. The result is that e-pistolary fiction revises correspondence typologies, thematic patterns, conventions, techniques and rules at various levels, namely narrative, symbolic, linguistic while disrupting the linearity of the book form through high discontinuity as well as refashioning and jeopardizing one of the strongest assumptions of epistolary novels, i.e. materiality. Not intended as an investigation of traditional letter novels, the aim of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, it intends to provide a preliminary mapping of some of the computer-mediated short forms and their re-shaping in literary works in book form: to this end, some



narratives are briefly introduced as specimens of twenty-first century e-pistolary novels and some of their salient features highlighted - a question that has as yet received little critical attention. Four are the examples that have been selected: *Microserfs* (1995) and *J-Pod* (2006) by Douglas Coupland; *The PowerBook* (2000), by Jeanette Winterson; and *Black Box* (2012) by Jennifer Egan. On the other hand, this paper discusses *e<sup>2</sup> A novel* (2010), the second e-pistolary novel by British author Matt Beaumont, as a case study of a remediation in print of some born-digital short forms compiled through an almost filmic montage: an effective rethinking of the letter novel that cleverly combines a multitude of characters, several subplots, and a variety of text types that are a collection of electronic messages emerging from the contemporary digital environment rather than from literary history or tradition.