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Introduction

Modern American cities have inspired imaginings of ruin since their inception. In all forms of fiction, across print, visual, audio and digital media, there are texts depicting American cities in varying stages of post-apocalyptic deterioration, their familiar skylines and recognizable landmarks bearing the effects of any number of potential apocalypses, both natural and human-made. These depictions seem to transcend traditional boundaries, with post-apocalyptic urban spaces appearing in popular and 'literary' works of fiction, in texts with a range of tones from the sombre to the comedic, and intended for wide audiences, from adults to young children. Despite the number of these fictions and the frequent similarities between the visions they present, their production and popularity show few signs of decline. Instead, as media formats have emerged, developed and risen in importance, post-apocalyptic science fiction (sf) has often been one of the first types of fiction to utilize and test the boundaries of these cutting-edge representational forms, while simultaneously proliferating in established media.

The popularity and persistence of visions of urban destruction in possible futures and alternative realities raises several questions. Why do we choose to repeatedly envisage, encounter and spend time within the environment of the fictional post-apocalyptic city? What about such a space is valuable for creators of fiction? And what is enticing or even pleasurable for audiences about our exploration of fictional post-apocalyptic urban space? These questions do not suggest easy answers. Compared with other sf visions of potential urban spaces, the post-apocalyptic city seems, at least on its surface, a grim, bleak, possibly even hopeless environment. Rather than a creative destruction, a concept derived from Karl Marx which proposes that new capitalist economic orders arise from the ruins of the old, the urban destructions of post-apocalyptic fiction frequently appear total and lasting, beyond repair or reclamation. Faced

with this seeming finality and futility, what makes the post-apocalyptic city such fertile ground for fiction?

This book explores these questions through analysis of texts in a variety of media, including literary and pulp magazines, radio drama, cinema, comics, video games and the transmedia franchise, to identify how and why very different texts, released over the course of more than a century, have presented us with visions of the American city in ruins. The book argues that these fictional post-apocalyptic urban spaces have enduring appeal within American culture due to the unique opportunities they offer to explore complex, contemporary urban issues, especially when their creators utilize the unique affordances of the cutting-edge media of their day. In each of the sf texts and franchises analysed over the six chapters of this book, the post-apocalyptic American city, presented using the singular affordances of their new or developing media, is shown to create a space for confronting and tackling urgent urban issues in unique and provocative ways.

Modern cities and ruin

The modern American city has always been a space evocative of both life and death. Since their rise in the rapid industrialization, innovation and urbanization of the early nineteenth century, modern cities have displayed the dazzling reach of architectural imagination, the power of human ambition and technology to sculpt the physical landscape, and modernity's clockwork efficiency in converting human labour into capital. Informed by enlightenment ideals, these cities exhibited the vaunted heights of the modern age, standing as vibrant showcases for the new. Yet these spaces have, since their very creation, been haunted by the inevitability of decline. Constructed from the violent plundering and reshaping of the natural world, every element of the built environment requires continual maintenance and replacement to prevent it being reclaimed by nature, through the erosion of weather or the gradual encroachment of foliage. Were cities to be constantly upkept, they would still face the threat of being overcome by the natural world through floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural cataclysms. Ultimately, it may not be possible to undertake further repair and upkeep of the city, either because of fundamental structural decay or, in a distant, post-apocalyptic future, because there is no one left to perform the work. Structures also face the threat of sudden destruction caused by their own inhabitants, whether controlled demolition to make way for the new, or unanticipated, violent demolition – either accidental or malicious.

Scholars have long described the modern city's inherent pull towards destruction. Georg Simmel, in his essay 'Die Ruine' (1911), argues that destruction is 'not something senselessly coming from the outside but rather the realization of a tendency inherent in the deepest layer of existence of the destroyed'.¹ Urban theorist and historian Lewis Mumford, in *The City in History* (1961), suggests that the spectre of ruin is a result of the violence inherent in the creation of architecture. As Mumford writes, all historic civilizations begin with 'a living urban core, the polis', and end in 'a common graveyard of dust and bones, a Necropolis, or city of the dead: fire-scorched ruins, shattered buildings, empty workshops, heaps of meaningless refuse, the population massacred or driven into slavery'.² More recently, in *Buildings Must Die* (2014), Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs present a memento mori for the built environment, reminding us of the inevitability of ruination and its potential beauty if we could embrace the fact that buildings, too, have their own lifecycle. Cairns and Jacobs argue that architecture tends to repress any acknowledgement of the inevitability of destruction, much as the species responsible for its creation tends to shy away from accepting the inevitability of our own endings. Whether they occur through decay, ruin, obsolescence, disaster or demolition, they argue, the deaths of buildings should be factored into architectural design, not resisted through 'natalist fantasies' or the 'delusions of permanence'.³ Studies such as those by Simmel, Mumford and Cairns and Jacobs show that the ruin of the built environment is always already present in its creation, whether or not we are content to acknowledge it.

Cities have weathered decay and damage, fallen into ruin and disappeared for as long as humans have been building them, but the crumbling of the modern city is a relatively recent and singular phenomenon. There is a distinct contrast, for example, between the sensation of visiting the weathered ruins of the Colosseum in Rome and visiting the modern ruins of Pripjat, a town abandoned in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown and left to decay. While both locations attract international tourism, one is undoubtedly a more family-friendly holiday destination, to put it mildly. Tourists of the latter are even said to be engaging in so-called 'dark tourism', a term put forward by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley in 1996 to describe the visiting of places associated with the macabre, such as battlefields, prisons and the sites of atrocities.⁴ Scholars who have visited the 'Zone of Alienation', the still-radioactive region of Ukraine which includes Pripjat and the Chernobyl nuclear reactor, note the peculiar effects of modern urban ruins on the psyche. Paul Dobraszcyk recalls having felt an 'uncomfortable sense of being a

voyeur to an ongoing tragedy',⁵ along with 'a sense of being overwhelmed' by the stark contrasts of newness and decay.⁶ Nick Rush-Cooper, in his role of tour guide for the Zone, spoke with visitors who likened their trip to experiencing fictional representations of post-apocalyptic ruin, specifically watching the film *I Am Legend* (2007) and playing the video game *Fallout 3* (2008), and found their encounter with modern urban ruins 'unsettling; "like a horror movie"'.⁷

The unique and discomfoting nature of modern ruins like Pripyat can be characterized in their status as what urban historian Nick Yablon terms 'untimely' ruins, recently constructed architectural forms prematurely breaking apart, never to reach the antiquity of the ruins of ancient civilizations.⁸ So familiar are we with the aesthetics and functions of these spaces when inhabited, given their similarity to our contemporary, everyday urban landscapes, that the sight of their abandonment and ruination can conjure an uncanny, captivating sense of awe. A reason Pripyat is unique is that its ruins have been allowed to persist, rather than meeting with the typical fate of modern structures, being demolished. Modern buildings are intentionally conceived as ephemeral, disposable and replaceable, with all that stands between a functioning modern structure and a pile of meaningless refuse being the wrecking ball. Without the imperative to bulldoze Pripyat to make room for something new, given its position deep in the still-radioactive Zone, the town offers us a glimpse of what other modern urban spaces might look like if left to fall into ruin.

As well as describing the sensation of encountering modern urban ruins, the uncanny is an apt means of conceptualizing architecture's innate propensity towards ruin. According to Nicholas Royle, the uncanny 'entails another thinking of beginning: the beginning is already haunted'.⁹ The double, in particular, as described by Sigmund Freud, having in ancient societies 'been an insurance of immortality' in the creation of images of the 'immortal soul', now 'becomes the uncanny harbinger of death', a projection of future destruction and annihilation.¹⁰ The uncanny double is not just a vision of a possible world that is an inverse of our own but the herald of a world already germinating in the present. Leo Mellor writes that the urban ruins realized by bombsites, for instance, contain 'absolute doubleness', being 'inherently both a frozen moment of destruction made permanent . . . [and] a way of understanding a great swathe of linear time previously hidden or buried, offering history exposed to the air'.¹¹ Brian Dillon writes similarly that 'ruins allow us to set ourselves loose in time, to hover among past, present and future'.¹² Sites of urban ruin can thus provide evidence of the inevitability of destruction and decay, and serve as reminders of the

double of the living city that is always already present in the built environment. Fictional portrayals of cities in ruin can fulfil a similar role. As Freud writes, an uncanny effect is generated 'when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary'.¹³ Sf has long been associated with this kind of technique. The estrangement effect common to sf is, as Matthew Beaumont suggests, especially potent in works that infer that the apparently solid structures of the present are, incipiently at least, already different: 'Effective sf can demonstrate that an inchoate future is already germinating in the present, changing it, and making it other than itself.'¹⁴ Post-apocalyptic sf, in particular, often engages closely with these methods, following present-day urban concerns to their possible conclusions to imagine what might follow, and presenting these imaginative visions as potential versions of our familiar urban landscapes.

A brief history of the end of the world in sf

Where modern cities have grown and flourished since the late nineteenth century, so too have artistic imaginings of their downfall. Many of these found expression in a form of fiction that emerged concurrently with the expansive industrialization, modernization and urbanization of late nineteenth-century America. This speculative form was focussed on fantastic futures and was closely entwined with contemporary technological and scientific innovation, and would later come to be known as sf. Post-apocalyptic themes have featured frequently in sf since the beginnings of the genre, but post-apocalyptic fictions significantly predate the genre of sf. Tracing the origins of the post-apocalyptic mode as it arose in sf thus requires us to go further back, far beyond the formation of the modern American city.

Broadly defined, apocalyptic (and its subset *post-apocalyptic*) fictions involve imaginings of catastrophic change on a societal, hominal, environmental or celestial level.¹⁵ As Claire P. Curtis describes, apocalypses need not require 'the destruction of all humans or even the destruction of all potential conditions of human life', but are nonetheless characterized by 'a radical shift in the basic conditions of human life'.¹⁶ Many critics frame the history of apocalyptic literature as emerging from the foundations of Judeo-Christian theology but, as one might expect, apocalyptic stories arose in written and oral texts much earlier and are far more global than such a framing suggests. Elizabeth K. Rosen notes that the influences of the biblical apocalypse can be traced 'to the ancient civilizations of the

Vedic Indians, Egyptians, Persians, Mesopotamians, and Greeks'.¹⁷ Abbas Amanat writes that recent scholarship has traced visions of the end of the world 'in cultures as far and wide as Chinese, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Pre-Columbian American, indigenous African, Latin American and Pacific Islands'.¹⁸ The word 'apocalypse' in its contemporary usage in English has its etymological origins in the Greek 'apokalypsis, meaning "unveiling" or "uncovering"', and, through its use in Judeo-Christian and Islamic contexts, was historically applied to revelatory endings characterized by the ultimate judgement of a cosmic power.¹⁹

Lois Parkinson Zamora notes that biblical apocalyptic visions, especially the Revelation of St John, 'began to inspire a significant body of imaginative literature and visual art in the later Middle Ages, and have continued to do so, variously and abundantly'.²⁰ The Judeo-Christian apocalyptic imagination reached North America with the first settlement by Europeans, leading Douglas Robinson to assert that 'the very idea of America in history is apocalyptic, arising as it did out of the historicizing of apocalyptic hopes in the Protestant Reformation'.²¹ By the early seventeenth century, a body of what Paul K. Alkon describes as 'futuristic fiction' had begun to emerge in Europe and America, though these did not proliferate until the early nineteenth century. These fictions were 'prose narratives explicitly set in future time' but which, in contrast to earlier literary and artistic representations, marked a move away from strict interpretation of biblical prophecies towards more original imaginings of futurity.²² An influential example of the apocalyptic in such future fictions is Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville's *Le dernier homme, ouvrage posthume*, first published in France in 1805 and translated into English as *The Last Man: or Omegarus and Syderia, a romance in futurity* in 1806. Originally intended as an epic poem, *Le dernier homme* was published as a prose work divided into the poetic structure of cantos. Its story is, according to Alkon, 'an unmistakable analogue to the Book of Revelation',²³ but Grainville's translation of biblical apocalypse to a creative imagining of the future inspired several early writers working in the genre that would become sf.

Brian Aldiss, in his history of the genre *Billion Year Spree* (1973; revised and expanded in 1986 as *Trillion Year Spree*), famously proposed Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to be the first example of sf.²⁴ While this claim has been the subject of much discussion and disagreement by scholars of sf, *Frankenstein* is today often taken to be a key text in the formation of the genre, with many works of scholarship accepting Aldiss's claim. Numerous attempts by sf scholars to settle on a single, comprehensive definition of the genre, however, led Paul Kincaid to declare in

2003 that ‘There is no starting point for science fiction. There is no one novel that marks the beginning of the genre.’²⁵ The failure to develop a single and unifying definition of sf, despite noble efforts by scholars over many decades, necessitates working with definitions and histories which are always incomplete and imperfect.²⁶ For the purposes of this capsule history, I will follow the commonly agreed upon claim that *Frankenstein* marks a beginning in the development of sf, a genre which would coalesce into a generally recognizable form by the mid-twentieth century. For a working definition of sf, I focus on elements common to most definitions of the genre proposed by scholars: that sf is a speculative genre concerned with possible futures, alternative presents or reimagined pasts, which defamiliarizes or reorients our relationship to the everyday through an imaginative conceit, and which is grounded by a focus on what is generally seen to be scientifically possible.

Following the meeting of gothic fantasy and emerging fields of scientific enquiry in *Frankenstein*, the nascent genre of sf gained momentum over the nineteenth century with the rise of fiction-focussed magazines such as *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (first published in 1817) in the UK and the *Southern Literary Messenger* (first published in 1834) in the US. Sf and the medium of magazines grew together gradually, and the relationship befitted the meeting of experimental narrative content and form.²⁷ The fragmented form of serialized magazine publication and the myriad styles encountered in individual issues made this an ideal medium to house a genre that was still indistinct and finding its identity, composed as it was from fragments of the conventions of gothic, detective and adventure stories. It also meant that the genre and its venues were highly suited to depicting fractured, ruined and repurposed fictional spaces in their narratives, spaces embodied through the embracing of post-apocalyptic urban settings in sf.

Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic themes came to sf early in its development. Perhaps the clearest early example of fiction which uses a scientific approach to representing the end of the world is Shelley’s tale of global plague *The Last Man* (1826), published only eight years after *Frankenstein*. In the two centuries since then, post-apocalyptic sf has become a substantial subgenre of sf, though again the struggle to define sf causes difficulties. As Diletta De Cristofaro writes, in the years since sf developed into a popularly recognizable genre, ‘narratives of a future in ruins are generally subsumed under the umbrella term of SF’, whether or not these works adhere to the realms of scientific possibility.²⁸ We ought, therefore, to distinguish between the continuation of earlier forms of post-apocalyptic fiction and post-apocalyptic sf. The former includes

works which involve elements of religious or otherwise supernatural apocalypticism, such as the long-running *Left Behind* series of novels (1995–2007) by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, which are based around the Christian rapture. The latter category, post-apocalyptic sf, is a subgenre of sf rooted in a world deemed possible by our current understandings of science. Post-apocalyptic sf may therefore reflect various contemporary issues affecting the modern city, such as the dangers of new technologies, overdependence on infrastructure, overcrowding, the spread of deadly diseases, pollution and damage to the environment, failure of municipal government and law enforcement, totalitarianism, terrorism, wars, and the spilling over of tensions between groups artificially divided by race, class, gender and sexuality. Such stories tend to depict catastrophic, cataclysmic destruction visited upon the city, and confront us with a vision of our world today, a version of the world which might have been, or a world which might still be, in a state of comprehensive ruin.

As sf in Europe and America developed and proliferated during the twentieth century, often being one of the first genres to test the capabilities and push the boundaries of new and developing media forms, post-apocalyptic depictions of cities in ruin spread with it. Permeating all forms of media, post-apocalyptic sf stories are now so well established as to be enjoyed around the world across generational and other demographic boundaries. As I write in 2021, this subgenre seems to be ideally suited to experimenting with emerging media, as creators can test their capabilities in worlds which by design are fragmentary, unfamiliar and new, in much the same way as early sf did in the magazines. Examples of this include the long-running and Reuben Award-winning webcomic *Stand Still. Stay Silent* (2013–present) by Minna Sundberg, the augmented reality (AR) mobile game for Android smartphones *The Walking Dead: Our world* (2017), and the critically acclaimed and popular virtual reality (VR) computer game *Half-Life: Alyx* (2020). In testing the capabilities of new representational technologies and in anticipating the desires of their audience, storytellers working in post-apocalyptic sf create worlds that are similarly disassembled and partially reconstructed into an unconventional and yet familiar form. As such these post-apocalyptic worlds symbolize both the genre of sf and the media through which it is produced and received, for both are the result of the reimagining of a combination of previous forms.

Since the 1980s, some scholars have characterized post-apocalyptic sf as demonstrating a postmodern tendency towards belief in a 'chaotic, indifferent, and possibly meaningless universe'.²⁹ This characterization

might arguably be applied to many examples of post-apocalyptic sf released in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, such as Paul Auster's haunting novel *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), the film *The Road* (2009), adapted from Cormac McCarthy's sombre 2006 novel of the same name, and the violent and emotionally devastating video game *The Last of Us Part II* (2020). Such a reading neglects the full range of purposes to which post-apocalyptic settings in sf have been applied, however. To take a handful of examples from video games alone, ruined cities provide an environment for social and political satire in *Beneath a Steel Sky* (1994) and *A New Beginning* (2010); the experimental problem-solving of the open-world 'sandboxes' of *Fallout: New Vegas* (2010) and *Metro: Exodus* (2019); the creative, challenging puzzles of *Portal 2* (2011) and *Bastion* (2011); and the cooperative, social experiences of the online multiplayer games *Left 4 Dead* (2008) and *Day-Z* (2018). With varied and creative depictions of post-apocalyptic cities across multiple media, it is no surprise that there has developed a strain of overt comedies set in or around cities devastated by apocalyptic events. Early examples include the films *Night of the Comet* (1984) and *Radioactive Dreams* (1985), and a notable recent example is the critically acclaimed American television comedy *The Last Man on Earth* (2015–18), which ran for four series on the Fox network. This strain even includes a lively subcategory, the zombie romantic comedy (sometimes abbreviated to 'zomromcom'), with prominent film releases including *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Zombieland* (2009) and *Warm Bodies* (2013). The accessibility and versatility of post-apocalyptic cities have made them popular as settings for young adult novels, such as the *Hunger Games* series (2008–20), the *Maze Runner* series (2009–16) and the *Divergent* trilogy (2011–13), each of which has grown into a highly popular cross-media franchise, and even in texts suitable for children, such as Pixar's animated film *WALL-E* (2008).

While comic and sometimes family-friendly texts represent one somewhat niche end of the spectrum, this book is primarily concerned with those texts which occupy the overwhelming middle of that spectrum: texts that readily engage with both real contemporary urban concerns and the desire to explore experimental, creative and sometimes hopeful post-apocalyptic urban spaces. Always in these texts, at least in the background, there is a continuous resonance of real-life tragedies, inequities and fears, but so too is there always in any cultural artefact which honestly engages with its historical moment. These are stories as much about our own worlds as they are fictions. As Margaret Atwood, author of several highly popular post-apocalyptic and dystopian novels,

recently put it: 'Prophecies are really about now. In science fiction it's always about now. What else could it be about? There is no future. There are many possibilities, but we do not know which one we are going to have.'³⁰ In post-apocalyptic sf set in cities, there are clear resonances of contemporary discussions around the lifecycles of architecture, humanity's relationship with the environment, and how people successfully live and thrive in urban spaces. While post-apocalyptic sf texts certainly engage with contemporary urban concerns, they can nonetheless simultaneously create spaces which are enticing for audiences and which encourage repeat encounters with dramatic visions of urban ruin.

The pleasures of urban ruins

Ancient urban ruins have a well-documented history of capturing imaginations. As Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle write, 'To be seduced by the beauty of ruins is an experience as inescapable as it is old.'³¹ The terms *Ruinenlust* ('ruin lust'), 'ruin sensibility' and 'ruin gazing' have all been applied to the fascination with ruins as it has been observed through history. This fascination emerged prominently in the Romantic period, when Roman ruins in particular, through their treatment in works such as C.-F. Volney's *Ruines, ou Méditation sur les révolutions des empires* (1791),³² inspired many representations of ruins in poetry and prose. As Nicholas Halmi describes, such imaginings typically took the form of either 'allegorizing' or 'more purely aestheticizing' treatments, both of which arose from the 'imaginative appropriation of ruins by Renaissance artists'.³³ These treatments in literature of the Romantic period are often connected with the notion of the 'sublime', as developed by Edmund Burke in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). In Burke's words,

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.³⁴

Ruins, in the Romantic imagination, might be considered sublime in that they conjure ideas about the magnitude of destruction which temporal change inexorably brings about, and the relative insignificance of human endeavour in the face of history, even in the case of the mighty

Roman Empire. Such uses of ruins appeared frequently in creative works produced during this period, with lasting impact on culture in the years to come.

Art critic John Ruskin, writing in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, argues that ruins offer the visual art world the sublime qualities of the 'lower picturesque' in the depiction of structures such as the 'desolate villa – deserted village – blasted heath – [and] mouldering castle'.³⁵ These sights, he writes, delight the viewer with a certain beauty in their 'expression, namely, of suffering, of poverty, or decay, nobly endured by unpretending strength of heart' together with the 'variety of colour and form' afforded by ruins' mixes of tones and textures.³⁶ According to Ruskin, these scenes are, to the lover of the lower picturesque, 'joyful' sights, and through this joy,

there runs a certain under current of tragical passion, – a real vein of human sympathy; – it lies at the root of all those strange morbid hauntings of his; a sad excitement, such as other people feel at tragedy, only less in degree, just enough, indeed, to give a deeper tone to his pleasure.³⁷

Brian Dillon describes a similar tendency in visual art to see scenes of ruin as provocative, awe-inspiring and yet inherently playful spaces:

Consider what the ruin has meant, or might mean today: a reminder of the universal reality of collapse and rot; a warning from the past about the destiny of our own or any other civilisation; an ideal of beauty that is alluring exactly because of its flaws and failures; the symbol of a certain melancholic or maundering state of mind; an image of equilibrium between nature and culture; a memorial to the fallen of an ancient or recent war; the very picture of economic hubris or industrial decline; a desolate playground in whose cracked and weed-infested precincts we have space and time to imagine a future.³⁸

As Ruskin and Dillon both show, the many and varied roles of ruins in visual art, as in poetry and prose, especially since the Romantic period, indicate that they need not function merely as dour and sombre symbols of decline. Rather, ruins may offer various forms of pleasure, opportunities for contemplation and reflection, and even excitement. The history of our enjoyment of the sight of ancient ruins in the arts has been well covered by scholarship, with Rose Macaulay's *Pleasure of Ruins* (1953)

and Christopher Woodward's *In Ruins* (2001) standing as particularly significant interventions in this area.

Some critics have argued that individual sites of ruin within contemporary cities can also function as sites for play, as places freed to an extent from the constraints of the typically ordered urban environment. Tim Edensor, in his book *Industrial Ruins* (2005), explores how such spaces as abandoned factories and derelict lots can be viewed as both evocative spaces for contemplation of the impermanence of architectural designs and functional sites of play for the city's residents. Sites that might be designated 'blighted' areas by city authorities, Edensor writes, can nonetheless serve as 'alternative play spaces for children and adults'.³⁹ Urban areas which lack parks or other communal areas, for example, may possess ruined buildings or undeveloped wasteland, which can, at least temporarily, be transformed by local residents to serve as adventure playgrounds or venues for sports. A similar form of play in urban ruins is described by Dora Apel, in her book on the ruins of Detroit: the now global phenomenon of 'urban exploration' or 'urbex'. Urbex refers to the process of trespassing in areas of the city that are typically unseen and to which public access is denied. These locations often constitute ruined, abandoned or condemned urban spaces. Urban explorers, according to Apel, undertake such trespassings for the thrill of discovery and, in some cases, to preserve history and memory through photography. 'In this sense', Apel writes, 'urbex may be seen as a productive and educational form of play or leisure activity.'⁴⁰ Books such as Bradley L. Garrett's *Explore Everything* (2013) show how urbex takes multiple forms in cities around the world. As Garrett describes, while urban explorers are not all unified under a single mission, they share an aim – 'discovery and investigation' of places considered 'temporary, obsolete, abandoned or derelict' – and a motivation – 'simply for the joy of doing so'.⁴¹ The explorations through urbex of neglected or forsaken areas of the city can even inform geographical scholarship, as discoveries about the weathering and decay of such spaces allow for extrapolation of how geomorphological processes might impact human-made environments in the future.⁴² Examples such as these show that ruins can function as enticing, illuminating and even entertaining spaces for some city residents, offering unconventional ways to encounter the familiar built environment.

The exploration of urban ruins in fiction can be read in similar ways. Some scholars have made this connection already in the case of digital games. Emma Fraser, for example, notes that urban exploration of ruins is an activity frequently cast in terms of its 'intrinsically playful, as

well as subversive' qualities, and that it represents 'a form of play for both adults and children, affording pleasure in disorder, experimentation, [and] even danger'.⁴³ These ideas, she writes, can similarly be detected in our navigation of fictional ruins in games. Certain games set in ruined urban space, Fraser argues, 'can be read as products of our urban sensibilities, and our interest in tactical, unstructured adventures in urban space as a means to disrupt the usual ordering of the city without moving completely beyond a world governed by rules and laws, and without risk to ourselves'.⁴⁴ Given its applicability to digital games, this idea might be expanded, by considering fiction in other media, to describe our encounters and exploration of fictional ruined urban spaces across diverse cultural texts and in a range of formats.

Other theoretical approaches to interpreting our navigation and exploration of urban space might also offer ways to read our encounters with urban ruin in fiction. For example, creators of fiction and (through the affordances of participatory media, interactivity and fan paratexts) audiences could be said to use the fictionalized ruins of the modern city as sites for 'enunciation', to borrow the word used by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). According to Certeau, walking in the city creates 'a space of enunciation', comprising the 'appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian', the 'spatial acting-out of the place' and the implied 'relations among differentiated positions'.⁴⁵ By accompanying and even directing characters in their traversal of ruined environments in post-apocalyptic sf, creators and audiences can share in these forms of enunciation. In addition to facilitating the kinds of movements described by Certeau, such as the pedestrian's 'turns (*tours*) and detours' through urban space,⁴⁶ the modern city in ruins offers multiple possibilities for enunciation open primarily to the urban explorer, and not typically available to the pedestrian of our contemporary urban spaces; it invites passage between crumbling walls, over scrapheaps of mortar, through broken doorways and windows, amid abandoned and obsolete furniture and through decaying floors and ceilings, all while presenting familiar scenes inverted and defamiliarized by catastrophe and with the potential for inhabitants of these worlds to further destroy, reassemble or repurpose physical structures.

Such opportunities for enunciative navigation of the ruined environment might be connected to the argument put forward by Evan Watts who, in describing the prevalence of ruins in digital games, suggests that the fictional ruins of real-world cities can be interpreted as liberating spaces: 'The destruction of *physical* structures is paralleled by, and symbolic of, the destruction of *social* structures, thus associating ruin with

liberation and freedom.⁴⁷ The destruction of institutions symbolized in the ruins of built structures creates spaces that allow audiences to witness and explore, untethered by the constraints present in our contemporary urban landscapes, and to navigate these spaces with a greater degree of enunciative freedom.⁴⁸

Interiors and objects that possess specific functions in contemporary societies might simply become useless detritus in the fictional spaces of post-apocalyptic sf, or they may take on new value, prized for their constituent components or as artefacts holding forgotten knowledge. The post-apocalyptic city thus becomes a recognizable place transformed, requiring those who traverse it to reimagine, redevelop or revolutionize their relationship with the built environment. In the oft-used term of sf scholarship introduced by Viktor Shklovsky, post-apocalyptic visions of contemporary cities become sites of 'defamiliarization'. In Shklovsky's words, defamiliarization is the process in which 'perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of perception'.⁴⁹ As Shklovsky argues of art in general, I suggest that the ruined city of post-apocalyptic sf 'exists so that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things'.⁵⁰ What makes these post-apocalyptic urban spaces so compelling for audiences is this process of jolting our consciousnesses into recovering this 'sensation of life': familiar urban locations are turned on their heads in ways which prompt us to reassess our relationships with these spaces. This necessitates new and original forms of spatial articulation, making movement within post-apocalyptic sf cities a liberating, freeing 'space of enunciation' which utilizes the specific affordances that fictional urban ruins can provide.

State of the field

Notions of 'apocalypse' and 'post-apocalypse' serve various functions in literary criticism, but their application in the study of works which deal explicitly with the end of the world or the end of humanity has, until recent years, been very limited. Far more common has been the use of these words to describe *symbolic* endings, such as ends of eras or styles. Frank Kermode, in his influential *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), sees such an ending occurring at the turn of the twentieth century, an ending which saw expression in the modernist mode of literature. This modernist shift, according to Kermode, is a metaphorical 'apocalypse' in the Christian sense, a moment of significant transition resulting in revelation. Rather than an overt and explicit ending characterized by physical

destruction and mass extinctions, modernist texts provide the 'sense of an ending' in their emphasis on the new. James Berger in *After the End* (1999) and Teresa Heffernan in *Post-Apocalyptic Culture* (2008) have since built upon this idea by suggesting this symbolic transition occurred in Western civilization with the Holocaust and the use of the atom bomb, and that the mode of representation labelled postmodernism is thus 'post-apocalyptic'. This means, for example, that Don DeLillo's novel about the American family, media saturation and consumerism in the 1980s, *White Noise* (1985), could be described as a 'post-apocalyptic' novel. We are all, such critics claim, living in a post-apocalyptic world: 'We live in a time after the apocalypse, after the faith in a radically new world, of revelation, of unveiling.'⁵¹ Although they invoke the terms 'apocalyptic' and 'post-apocalyptic', Kermode, Berger and Heffernan are more interested in how notions of apocalypse have influenced culture in figurative ways, placing far less attention on texts that represent actual destruction in their settings and the aftermaths of life among the ruins. The use of the term in this way is suggestive of attempts to assess history as having a discernible trajectory, such as Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1993) and McKenzie Wark's *Molecular Red* (2015). This also reflects a wider trend in fiction of a fascination with supposed endings in the 'ages' of humanity, which has clear relevance to post-apocalyptic literature.

While these works of scholarship do, then, have some connection to truly post-apocalyptic texts, they are not as closely applicable as works like W. Warren Wagar's study of the apocalyptic trend in literature, *Terminal Visions* (1982), currently the most comprehensive book-length work to address the long history of apocalyptic sf literature, which looks primarily at works that Wagar describes as 'eschatological' (prose fictions which depict apocalyptic endings themselves rather than *post-apocalyptic* worlds). The book now feels rather outdated due to its having been published prior to events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the war on terror and 9/11, increased focus on the climate crisis, and other major historical moments in the four decades since its publication which have prompted a dramatic increase in apocalyptic fictions. Nonetheless, the thoroughness of Wagar's analysis means it remains one of the most substantive and influential studies of the modern history of apocalyptic fiction, and as such it informs some of the structuring decisions made in this book.

Over the course of *Terminal Visions*, Wagar finds that the dominant mode in fiction of the end times is not the 'dead end' that 'seems to foreclose hope', nor the story of cyclical renewal, but rather works

that might be characterized as future-oriented and even upbeat.⁵² In his review of more than 300 works of apocalyptic literature, Wagar finds that 'well over two-thirds foresee no blind alleys, and no return trips. In this great majority, there are survivors, with a future that may be better or worse than the era just ended, but a future that will be different, because the endtime came.'⁵³ While contemporary reviewers were divided over the strength of Wagar's conclusion, this argument seems to hold true not only for the years leading up to the publication of Wagar's book, but also for the decades that followed.⁵⁴ The popularity of texts dealing with the end times and their aftermaths has not dwindled since Wagar's book, and in fact creators are continuing to find new and inventive ways of using ruined American cities as compelling settings for fiction in the twenty-first century.

Recent years have seen a marked increase in studies of fiction that depict apocalypses and post-apocalyptic worlds. The majority of these focus on novels, and especially works currently considered 'literary', such as the novels of Jeanette Winterson, J.G. Ballard, Cormac McCarthy, Margaret Atwood and David Mitchell. Valuable contributions of this sort include Claire P. Curtis's *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract* (2010), Heather Hicks's *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century*, Andrew Tate's *Apocalyptic Fiction* (2017), Diletta De Cristofaro's *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel* (2019), Anna Hellén's *Apocalyptic Territories* (2020) and Susan Watkins's *Contemporary Women's Post-Apocalyptic Fiction* (2020).⁵⁵ Other key works of scholarship on the apocalypse and post-apocalypse have focussed on film and television, such as Barbara Gurr's *Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film* (2015) and Elizabeth A. Ford and Deborah C. Mitchell's *Apocalyptic Visions in 21st Century Films* (2018). Crucially, some scholarly work, such as Paul Williams's *Race, Ethnicity and Nuclear War* (2011) and Roslyn Weaver's *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film* (2011), has bridged discussions of post-apocalyptic worlds on page and screen, an approach which has inspired the cross-media analysis undertaken for this book. Almost entirely absent from the scholarship to date, however, are studies which take into account the vast array of media in which post-apocalyptic fictions exist. Examining the post-apocalyptic novel and film in isolation from the wider cultural history of post-apocalyptic fictions, which appear concurrently in media including radio, comics, video games and transmedia franchises, risks omitting important context for understanding our fascination with visions of the end of the world. A recent exception is Stephen Joyce's *Transmedia Storytelling and the Apocalypse* (2018), which goes beyond novels and

films to argue that post-apocalyptic texts are a distinctly post-Second World War phenomenon which arose in conjunction with the transmedia story. A more comprehensive study of post-apocalyptic sf in America since its beginnings, considering a range of texts across different media, is still a notable gap in scholarship.

When looking at the state of scholarship focussing on the post-apocalyptic city, we find fewer examples still. A rare example is Carl Abbott's 'The light on the horizon' (2006), though being an essay-length work it is limited to brief analysis of a few works of American literature. Recent books which look at the role of urban ruins in American society more broadly have included sections touching on post-apocalyptic fiction, such as a discussion of environmental realism in early British and American post-apocalyptic fiction in Mike Davis's *Dead Cities* (2002), a chapter on New York City's Metropolitan Life Building in post-apocalyptic literature in Nick Yablon's *Untimely Ruins* (2009), and a chapter on portrayals of post-apocalyptic London since Shelley's *The Last Man* in Paul Dobraszczyk's *The Dead City* (2017). These are each compelling and convincing studies of the post-apocalyptic city in fiction, but as part of books with a broader focus they are, by necessity, relatively concise.⁵⁶ The absence of a sustained analysis of the role of the city in post-apocalyptic fictions represents a further area in scholarship that is in need of development.

Parameters of study

This book addresses these gaps in scholarship, looking at representations of cities in post-apocalyptic sf across media, from the emergence of sf as a recognizable genre in the early twentieth century up to the expansive and highly popular sf transmedia franchises of the twenty-first century. Building on the valuable work of the scholars mentioned above, I propose a new way of reading ruins of the familiar environments of cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Chicago, New York City, Washington, DC and Atlanta in post-apocalyptic fictions, looking at their appearances not only in novels and films but also in the fictions of other prominent media from the beginning of the twentieth century to the twenty-first, and analysing how these media provide unique affordances in their representations of the post-apocalyptic American city.

The concentration throughout this book is on texts by American authors and set in post-apocalyptic sf visions of US cities. This geographical focus is in part practical, in that it allows focussed treatment of the

range of representations of modern urban ruin that can be found across American texts. As I hope to demonstrate, the variety present in this range makes American representations of modern urban ruin deserving of sustained analysis, for while they all contribute to supporting Yablon's argument in *Untimely Ruins* that America has its own specific history with urban ruins in fiction, one that constitutes far more than a 'belated foreign import' from Europe,⁵⁷ ruins have functioned in very different ways in the individual historical contexts of particular US cities and in relation to particular media formats. While I argue that analysis of the roles of ruins in post-apocalyptic sf American texts is deserving of sustained treatment, one which fills a current and pressing gap in scholarship, there is also a need to expand on the existing English-language scholarship to take in the wider international and transnational histories of the functions of post-apocalyptic cities and modern ruins in fiction.⁵⁸

This book is split into six chapters, each looking at a specific time period and focussing on a different medium which either emerged or significantly developed in that era. The choice to look at a different medium or mix of media in each period is informed by the idea that the emergence or development of media is connected to contemporary ways of thinking about the world. As Marshall McLuhan writes in *Understanding Media* (1964), for instance, there is an inherent social power wielded by any new medium: 'For the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.' McLuhan is writing broadly here of diverse technological advances from the railway to the electric light, but this idea is certainly true of media such as the magazine, radio, film, video games and the transmedia story: each of these could be said to, in McLuhan's words, 'amplify or accelerate existing processes' found in prior media forms.⁵⁹ These new media exploit their innovative affordances to adapt, repurpose and employ recognizable techniques of narrative and world-building, which serve to shape our developing relationship with fictional spaces. For sf, which is always pushing at the boundaries of what is realistically imaginable, the new or developing media of each era seem natural venues for imaginative exploration. While sf could be said to have begun in literary magazines in the early nineteenth century, it was only in the first half of the twentieth century that the nascent genre began to establish its identity and become more widely recognizable, through the work of authors such as Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle and Jack London. For that reason, the book begins by looking at an early sf story by London first published in a magazine in 1912, before moving through several distinct eras of the twentieth century, first in radio, then cinema, then a novel which came

to be developed into a transmedia narrative, then video games, and finishing by looking at a vast, serialized transmedia franchise that is, at the time of writing, still ongoing.

Media history is a trajectory that does not simply move in one direction: media forms undergo declines and resurgences in popularity, and are revitalized by new technology (such as with the recent popularity of 3D and IMAX movies); and cross-media franchises often utilize both new and more established media forms. Naturally, assessing texts from multiple media side by side raises difficulties, particularly when they may differ wildly in terms of their techniques, affordances and historical contexts. For this reason, the book uses media-specific criticism appropriate to the text addressed, whether print, celluloid, audio or digital, and with a historical approach to the specific medium. Likewise, where comparison of texts of different media forms is appropriate, such as with novel-to-film adaptations or with transmedia franchises, a combination of complementary criticism is used. This is especially the case in later chapters, where the rise of digital communication technologies, particularly those which are 'interactive, viral, and social' have led to media 'convergence', meaning that 'the boundaries between different technologies, practices, and ideas blur together to create something new'.⁶⁰ Analysis of digital texts uses criticism which takes this intermingling of media in the digital age into account.

The selection of texts analysed in the book is primarily influenced by their appropriateness as representative samples which reflect the contemporary urban anxieties displayed in many other texts of the time. Texts have also been selected on the basis of their contemporary popularity (such as with the TV show *The Walking Dead*, 2010–present) or later canonical status (such as with the film *Blade Runner*), though in some cases texts are selected which were unpopular or received mixed reviews, usually on the basis of the influence they had on works which followed (such as with London's *The Scarlet Plague*, 1912).

While the majority of research for this book has been undertaken in university libraries and online repositories, it is also significantly informed by unique archival collections. In particular the project draws heavily from the Jack London Papers at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, and various Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences collections available at the Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, California. While these collections contain extensive materials such as correspondence, financial records and authors' notes, they are incomplete, as of necessity all archives must be. In light of these inevitable gaps, archival research has been supplemented by digital sources and with

correspondence with librarians and archivists. When I viewed unedited documents and early drafts outside their original context, diligence was paid to interpreting archival sources according to the best information available and assessing their usefulness with care.

Structure of the book

Chapter 1, 'Urban apocalypse in the magazines', takes as a case study Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague*, a fascinating but little-studied novella by an author not generally known for sf in his lifetime or since. *The Scarlet Plague* is set in the ruins of California's Bay Area, 60 years after a plague swept across the world. London uses this post-apocalyptic setting for a story of adventure with an often humorous tone. The argument in this chapter is that the novella is emblematic of how the developing genre of sf functioned to imagine contemporary issues taken to their logical and satirical extremes, but that such early experiments in sf struggled to find a place in their cultural milieu of magazine publishing prior to the dedicated sf magazines of the late 1920s, such as *Amazing Stories*. The chapter shows how London's story draws from his journalistic writing on the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, a connection which has not previously been made in scholarship. Where London struggled to encapsulate the magnitude of destruction he witnessed first-hand in San Francisco, *The Scarlet Plague* shows how sf provided the space for London to address this in speculative, creative form. First published in a UK magazine in 1912, the novella saw republication as a book in the UK and US but sold in very small numbers. As magazine sf developed from the 1920s, the story gradually found an audience, repurposed and adapted in pulp magazines to speak to new societal concerns. Drawing on research undertaken with the Jack London Papers in California's Huntington Library, the chapter shows how Jack London, Charmian London and the Londons' editors discussed the potential resonances for this story alongside contemporary events, and how the story went on to resonate in new ways after the author's death.

Chapter 2, 'Listening to ruins on the radio', looks at the emergence of sf in radio 'theatres' (series of self-contained episodes), particularly during radio's 'golden age' in the 1950s. The chapter begins by surveying scholarship on the affordances of radio fiction in creating immersive worlds in the imaginations of listeners, an area which has received little attention in comparison with the affordances of media such as film and television. The chapter then looks at the origins of radio's post-Second World War golden

age in the significant interventions of the 1930s, especially Orson Welles's infamous 1938 radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*, which moved the action of H.G. Wells's original story from southern England to urban New Jersey. I argue that the myth that has since developed, that Welles's broadcast led to panic across the nation, speaks to the power radio has been said to hold and the singular qualities of the medium. The chapter then looks in depth at several broadcasts of post-apocalyptic sf stories, specifically broadcasts of Wyllis Cooper's original story 'Adam and the darkest day', set in post-apocalyptic Chicago; an adaptation of Fritz Leiber's 'A pail of air', in which characters shelter in the ruins of the built environment before moving to the repurposed nuclear city of Los Alamos; and adaptations of Ray Bradbury's 'There will come soft rains' and 'Dwellers in silence', which are set in unnamed American suburban and urban locations, respectively. These sf texts have received very little attention from scholars, and radio fiction in general is largely ignored in scholarship on the history of sf. I argue that the specific affordances of these radio dramas – such as sound effects, voice acting and music – when paired with the imaginative content of the stories create uniquely immersive and evocative aural imaginings for exploration of speculative urban ruins.

In the [third chapter](#), 'Cinema and the aesthetics of destruction', I focus on post-Second World War US film adaptations of works originally by H.G. Wells, specifically two films connected with the blockbuster filmmaker George Pal: 1953's *The War of the Worlds* and 1960's *The Time Machine*. I argue that these adaptations show the filmmakers playing with the technical affordances of film special effects to repurpose these well-known stories for exploring prominent contemporary urban issues in the US. Particularly noteworthy among the themes of these films are an increasing awareness of the potential threat posed to the city by the wider world, the fear of destruction through aerial bombardment and nuclear weaponry, and the consequent end to the notion of the city as citadel. The adaptations of these two nineteenth-century British stories drew on the technical experimentation of early film, utilizing techniques such as time lapse and montage, together with more recent technological advancements including colour and widescreen, to present vivid spectacles of the city in ruins. As these are both adaptations, particular attention is paid in this chapter to the changes made to the stories and how the technological affordances of film are used to emphasize certain aspects of the plot. In the case of *The War of the Worlds*, for instance, the story is moved from London to Los Angeles, and the chapter addresses how the story is adapted to suit its new setting and speak to American fears of attack from the air during the early years of the Cold War.

Chapter 4, 'Urban decay in the transmedia universe of *Blade Runner*', looks at the texts that form the *Blade Runner* fictional universe, with emphasis on the 1982 film *Blade Runner* but also looking at its 2017 film sequel *Blade Runner 2049*, the 1968 source novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick and the 1997 video game by Westwood Studios. By analysing the fictional Los Angeles and San Francisco of these texts, the chapter demonstrates how their shared themes and ideas reflect their respective urban contexts. In their depiction of the struggle between municipal forces and the outlawed 'replicants', and in the depiction of the world's rigid class hierarchies, this chapter argues that the texts of the *Blade Runner* universe can be read as a reflection of contemporary urban issues and the ways people are categorized, marginalized and criminalized by both society and the state. More than simply suggesting a connection between these texts and contemporary anxieties, however, I argue that the replicants of the *Blade Runner* universe are depicted as traversing the built environment in unconventional, experimental ways, resisting attempts to define and enforce the parameters of their existence, expressive of the futility of policing arbitrary social and legal lines. The persecuted antagonists and marginalized characters of the *Blade Runner* universe repurpose the broken world around them, breaking through literal walls and even defying physics in response to being portrayed as symptoms of urban decay. Urban decay in these works, in both the literal decay of the built environment and the supposed moral decay of the replicants and lower-class citizens, forces characters to break down these cities further and find voice and autonomy in their movements through ruined urban space.

Chapter 5, 'Playing in virtual ruins from *Wasteland* to *Wasteland 2*', surveys the role of the post-apocalyptic city in video games, of which a key early example was 1988's *Wasteland*, which saw its long-awaited sequel released in 2014. Set in a post-apocalyptic Southwestern United States, *Wasteland* offers players the chance to explore several ruined and repurposed cities, and to interact with the social environments of these spaces with a strongly humorous and satirical tone. The game inspired many other post-apocalyptic virtual worlds that took advantage of the significant technological breakthroughs of 1990s–2010s gaming systems, including the enormously successful *Fallout* series, beginning in 1997 and originally helmed by members of the production team behind *Wasteland*. This chapter places particular focus on the *Wasteland* and *Fallout* series, while also drawing comparisons with other prominent American titles such as the *Half-Life 2* series (2004–7). While these series have been enormously influential, scholarship tends to focus on

individual games, especially *Fallout 3*, ignoring the broader history into which they fit. The chapter argues that the medium of video games offers uniquely immersive opportunities to explore post-apocalyptic cities. Video games like those in the *Wasteland* and *Fallout* series which are non-linear or 'open world' encourage treating the post-apocalyptic landscape as a 'sandbox' for interactive play and exploration, allowing players the chance to try out ideas with the safety of the 'save' and 'load' functions and with the freedom to push the technical allowances of the texts to their limits. The action of these games is centred in cities, including Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Las Vegas and Boston. They often foreground the role of the player in interacting with these fragmented but familiar urban environments, sometimes participating in the rebuilding and sometimes engaging in further destruction. The chapter argues that part of what makes the *Wasteland* and *Fallout* series so influential is how well suited their settings are to their satirical and, at times, light-hearted tone. The virtual exploration of physical urban spaces in these games is mirrored in the exploration of narrative choices players can make, which, when the games are at their most immersive, ripple through the plots in a way that can make each play-through unique. Through engaging with these spaces, whether constructively or destructively, the player is invited to be playful in their interactions with post-apocalyptic visions of the future in recognizable forms of contemporary cities.

The [final chapter](#), 'Cities and sanctuary in *The Walking Dead*', looks at the vast, serialized, transmedia franchise of *The Walking Dead* and its treatment of several Southern cities, principally Atlanta, but also Washington, DC and Alexandria, Virginia, as well as their suburban, exurban and rural surrounds. While the franchise has already stimulated a wealth of scholarship, studies have tended to view individual parts of the franchise in isolation, with only a few addressing it as a cohesive transmedia story.⁶¹ This chapter takes a wide scope in assessing the franchise, placing focus on three highly popular components: the first 96 issues of the comics series (2003–12), the first six series of the television show (2010–16) and the four main video games in the Telltale/Skybound series (2012–19). Cities in these texts are overrun with the living dead but are essential to the characters as sources of food, supplies and information. In their attempts to establish a safe refuge, the survivors have an uneasy relationship to the cities, attempting to strike a balance between urban convenience and the comparative safety of the countryside. This chapter argues that the characters' continual movements between settlements across the franchise offer the creators and audience the chance to see different forms of urban living tested against potential catastrophe,

effectively an exploration through fiction of disaster ‘prepping’ scenarios. The most prominent and successful form of living addressed in the franchise, despite its often progressive and inclusive messaging, is analogous to the gated communities that have emerged around US cities in recent decades. This, together with the lead character of the comics and TV show having been a police officer and the franchise’s frequent dwelling on the problems of post-apocalyptic law and justice, means that *The Walking Dead* resonates with recent discourse concerning safety during the pandemic, crime and policing in the US. In depicting such issues, *The Walking Dead* makes use of the franchise format to present a post-apocalyptic world that rewards fan engagement, encouraging a kind of transmedia exploration through its texts. The rich details of the post-apocalyptic Deep South in *The Walking Dead* and the points of contact between the different texts in the franchise allow for a kind of fan experience that was much harder to achieve before the advent of on-demand digital streaming video, game downloads and online comics subscriptions.

Notes

1. Simmel, ‘Two essays’, 382.
2. Mumford, *The City in History*, 53.
3. Cairns and Jacobs, *Buildings Must Die*, 29.
4. Lennon and Foley, *Dark Tourism*, 3.
5. Dobraszcyk, ‘Petrified ruin’, 372.
6. Dobraszcyk, ‘Petrified ruin’, 379.
7. Rush-Cooper, ‘Chernobyl and *Stalker*’.
8. Yablon, *Untimely Ruins*, 12.
9. Royle, *The Uncanny*, 1.
10. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 142.
11. Mellor, *Reading the Ruins*, 6.
12. Dillon, *Ruin Lust*, 6.
13. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 150.
14. Beaumont, ‘Red sphinx’, 230.
15. Here I borrow from the definition outlined by Heather J. Hicks, who treats post-apocalyptic literature ‘as a subset of apocalyptic literature, since the former relies on the premise of the latter’ (Hicks, *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century*, 6).
16. Curtis, *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract*, 5.
17. Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation*, xiii.
18. Amanat, ‘Introduction’, 11.
19. Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation*, xiii.
20. Zamora, *Writing the Apocalypse*, 1.
21. Robinson, *American Apocalypses*, xi.
22. Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction*, 3.
23. Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction*, 163.
24. Aldiss, *Trillion Year Spree*, 19.
25. Kincaid, ‘On the origins of genre’, 409.
26. For definitions of sf, in addition to Kincaid, see Wolfe, *Critical Terms*, Latham, *Science Fiction Criticism* and Rieder, ‘On defining SF, or not’.
27. For more on the origins of sf in the magazines, see Ashley, *The Time Machines*.
28. Cristofaro, *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel*, 3.

29. Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation*, xiv.
30. Quoted in Allardice, 'Interview'.
31. Hell and Schönle, 'Introduction', 2.
32. Translated into English in 1796 as *Ruins, or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*.
33. Halmi, 'Ruins without a past', 10.
34. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 13.
35. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 25.
36. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 20–1.
37. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 27.
38. Dillon, *Ruin Lust*, 5.
39. Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 10.
40. Apel, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins*, 59.
41. Garrett, *Explore Everything*, 4.
42. Dixon, Viles and Garrett, 'Ozymandias in the Anthropocene', 118.
43. Fraser, 'Awakening in ruins', 180.
44. Fraser, 'Awakening in ruins', 181.
45. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 97–8 (emphases in original).
46. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 100.
47. Watts, 'Ruin, gender, and digital games', 247 (emphases in original).
48. Similarly positive language to describe the liberating effects of urban ruins can be found in scholarship on a range of texts. To take three examples, Michael Hollington suggests that ruins in the works of Charles Dickens function to provide 'relief' to characters that the tyrannies they symbolize have collapsed (Hollington, 'Dickens's animate ruins', 50); Paul Williams, writing about *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), argues that the film's depiction of a post-nuclear wasteland is an expression of 'the exhilaration that this blank canvas is the stage for feats of adventure and heroism' (P. Williams, 'Beyond Mad Max III', 301); and David Chandler suggests that ruins in video games empower their players, providing 'an aesthetic setting that matches the core idea behind most games: to interact with a broken world and change it through play' (Chandler, 'Video games and the aesthetic of ruins').
49. Shklovsky, 'Art as technique', 25.
50. Shklovsky, 'Art as technique', 24.
51. Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, 6.
52. Wagar, *Terminal Visions*, 186.
53. Wagar, *Terminal Visions*, 195.
54. David Ketterer, for example, takes issue with the basis of Wagar's conclusion, arguing that fiction that truly imagines a 'dead end' is 'impossible to imagine', and it is thus to be expected that what most interest writers of terminal fictions is 'what happens next' (Ketterer, review of *Terminal Visions*, 494). Howard P. Segal, on the other hand, writes that the conclusion constitutes a 'major revelation' (Segal, review of *Terminal Visions*, 905), showing that 'one can, like Wagar, be as much cheered as saddened by reading [apocalyptic fiction]' (906).
55. Other scholarly texts on apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic British and American novels from the last decade include Manjikian, *Apocalypse and Post-Politics*, Germanà and Mousoutzanis, *Apocalyptic Discourse in Contemporary Culture*, Mazurek, *A Sense of Apocalypse*, Yar, *Crime and the Imaginary of Disaster* and Bellamy, *Remainders of the American Century*.
56. Several works on the city in fantastic fiction more broadly have appeared in recent years, with some featuring chapters on examples of the apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic city. Noteworthy examples include Dobraszczyk, *Future Cities*, and Rabitsch, Fuchs and Brandt, *Fantastic Cities* (forthcoming).
57. Yablon, *Untimely Ruins*, 13.
58. Recent English-language studies which have made important interventions beyond British and American texts include Archer and Stuart, *Visions of Apocalypse*, Tanaka, *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction*, and Trotta, Filipovic and Sadri, *Broken Mirrors*.
59. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 20.
60. Reinhard and Olson, 'Introduction', 8.
61. A notable example of studies of the franchise as a transmedia story is Matthew Freeman's *The World of the Walking Dead*.