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SFRA REVIEW HISTORY

SFRA Review was initially titled *SFRA Newsletter* and has been published since 1971, just after the founding of SFRA in 1970. The *Newsletter* changed its named to *SFRA Review* in 1992 with issue #194 to reflect the centrality of an organ for critical reviews of both fiction and scholarship to the SF studies community. The *Newsletter* and *Review* were published 6 times a year until the early 2000s, when the *Review* switched to a quarterly schedule. Originally available only to SFRA members or sold per issue for a small fee, *SFRA Review* was made publicly available on the SFRA's website starting with issue #256. Starting with issue #326, the *Review* became an open access publication. In 2020, the *Review* switched to a volume/issue numbering scheme, beginning with 50.1 (Winter 2019). For more information about the *Review*, its history, policies, and editors, visit WWW.SFRAREVIEW.ORG.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Namárië

Sean Guynes

As the Fellowship departed Lothlórien, Galadriel recited a poem, a song of longing for the home she cannot return to. That poem is "Namárië," the longest text in *The Lord of the Rings* written in Tolkien's Elvish language Quenya. The title comes from a shortening of the Quenya phrase *á na márië*, or "be well," a common Elvish greeting and farewell. I invoke it here, now, as farewell to you and the *SFRA Review*, just as I invoked Klingon in greeting nearly three years ago. Namárië, friends.

Over the past few years, since my first issue in the summer of 2018, things have changed quite a lot—in our geopolitical lives, in my personal life, and here at *SFRA Review*. New editors have come on and old editors have left. The *Review* changed format, leveled-up in terms of professional visibility, to look like a real journal: and damn straight, it's been here for 50 years with scholars young and old contributing reviews, essays, and more. Why not treat it with the respect it deserves? If anything, the authors publishing here deserve to be contributing to a publication that takes itself seriously, I thought. And so I worked hard to professionalize the look of the journal and how things work behind the scenes. Moreover, we transitioned to a more secure digital home, bringing the journal to readers in a way that meets the basic standards of digital distribution for academic scholarship. No longer do *Review* articles linger in a PDF downloadable from an obscure SFRA webpage. Now, each article has a link, its own home on the web, and is fully text-searchable by search engines, optimizing the work our contributors have done for greater discoverability. Boring, time-consuming, subservient to neoliberal academia's demands for digital presence? Yes, yes, yes, but necessary. Fight me or sue me, I'm right.

My editors have worked hard and now it's time for me to move on. I have no doubt that the next editor (not yet chosen) will continue the work we've done, and then some. (I'll be watching you, so don't screw it up!)

Thanks for all your labor, editors, and for your words, contributors. And, if anyone reads this, thanks for doing so, but surely you've got something better to do! In the meantime, you can find me on Twitter (@saguynes) and at my website (www.seanguynes.com). Take care of yourselves, gentlefolk.

Be seeing you! / Namárië!

FROM THE SFRA
EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE

From the President

Gerry Canavan

A formal announcement will be forthcoming, including registration and participation logistics, Guests of Honor information, and a proper CFP, but for now I wanted to announce informally that SFRA 2021 will be an all-virtual event. Our host, Seneca College, has already announced its plans to be all-virtual in Spring 2021, making conference planning for the summer impossible—and the reality of the ongoing pandemic and of mid-pandemic college travel budgets makes an all-virtual format our best option regardless.

A virtual conference offers both challenges and opportunities; we eagerly look forward to participation from people who normally might not be able to travel to SFRA and fully expect this will be, by far, our biggest and most global conference ever. Some in our membership have already suggested that SFRA, like other professional organizations, might look to making some of these virtual structures permanent, in the pursuit of both access equity and ecological rationality—and these questions are definitely on our mind as we pilot this new format. I suspect these will be conversations we in the academy continue to have for a very long time.

We are very interested in discussing format for the virtual conference with the membership, including discussion of access and logistical issues we may not have thought of. The current plan—subject to change, like everything else in 2020!—is to use precirculated papers/presentations in thematic "streams," along the lines of seminar format used by ACLA, alongside synchronous Q&A on a virtual conferencing platform. We think this targeted format can help manage people's time and attention and help prevent Zoom fatigue, as well as limit conference hours to times that the largest swath of people in the most time-zones can attend. We are also looking into options for more informal socialization using rotating, bring-your-own-cocktail breakout rooms, to replicate the most important part of any conference.

This was not our first choice, but like ICFA before us it seems difficult to imagine that we will be able to plan a successful, well-attended international conference to take place just seven months from now. There is just too much uncertainty. If you have ideas or want to help plan, please, write me! If the conference has to be virtual, we want it to at least be the best virtual conference ever held. My thanks to Graham

Murphy for his continued leadership as the now-virtual host for this event, my best to literally everyone everywhere, and my sincerest hopes that 2020 doesn't have any secret months after December we don't know about yet.

From the Vice President

Sonja Fritzsche

The SFRA Support a New Scholar Grant deadline has just closed on November 15, 2020 for the graduate student competition. For those interested in the non-tenure track scholar competition look for that call in the early fall of 2021. Since we weren't able to host a conference, the Student Paper Award has been suspended for this year. But graduate students who present at our conference in summer 2021 - make sure to submit your paper for consideration for this award in in response to the e-mail call that will go out in fall 2021.

We are excited to be discussing plans for an all virtual conference 2021 hosted by Graham Murphy and Seneca College in Toronto. Dates will be announced soon so keep a look out! This will no doubt be one of our most international conferences yet due to the virtual format.

The SFRA Country Representatives have met twice now since the beginning of the fall and are busy sharing information, ideas, and expanding the global network of scholars working on science fiction. We are still looking for representatives as many countries have yet to be represented so don't be shy and please e-mail me if you are interest (fritzsc9@msu.edu). The current rep list is: http://www.sfra.org/Country-Reps. The job description is as follows:

> A *SFRA Country Representative* facilitates academic communication on science fiction for their specific country to SFRA members, and also passes on SFRA news/events to their own colleagues in country. Such activities include taking flyers to conferences, posting on SFRA social media (Facebook, Twitter, or Listserve) about conferences, symposia, publishing opportunties, etc. The *SFRA News* will include a column that will be written by country representatives on rotation. Must be a member of the SFRA.

Look for the information that these country representatives will be sharing so that you can become aware of opportunities near you or on the other side of the globe. The virtual spaces that we occupy now make this type of sharing possible in ways that we could only have imagined just 6 months ago. Our next meeting is in early January 2021. Country representatives will also be writing a contribution for

the *SFRA Review* so look for this new addition to find out a more detailed account of work going on in a particular country. Also don't forget to pass on information to me if you want me to post an event or cfp for you on Facebook and Twitter. I'm always open to other suggestions and ideas as to how we can help to promote the work of our colleagues in the SFRA.

FEATURES

The Modern High Fantasy Novel was Born in France: An Essay on Reverse Literary History

Mariano Martín Rodríguez

Independent scholar and co-editor of journal *Hélice*

BIBLIOGRAPHIES, encyclopaedias and literary research by both fans and scholars are increasingly revealing the international wealth of science fiction's past and present. In contrast, the other great branch of speculative fiction, fantasy, has still a long way to go in this respect. Andrzej Sapkowski's "Witcher" series is virtually, and exceptionally, the only international fantasy works well known in English. This contention could seem far-fetched if we consider that Gabriel García Márquez's magical realist works, as well Italo Calvino's post-modern fancies are widely read and praised world-wide, and that Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* (*Die unendliche Geschichte*, 1983) has previously taken the world by storm. The European "fantastique," from E. T. A. Hoffmann to the French "Décadents," not to mention Franz Kafka's symbolic parables, enjoys high critical consideration. My contention stands, however, if we consider how fantasy, and high fantasy in particular, can be defined. This task of defining is not an idle one even from the historical perspective here adopted. Without exactly knowing what we are talking about, namely the high fantasy novel and its origin in French literature, any contention about this matter would probably lack a solid scientific foundation. A prior specific theoretical description of high fantasy seems, therefore, necessary to escape the vagueness that affects all too often academic approaches to this kind of fiction.

Whereas science fiction is, despite its range of definitions, a clear literary entity, the English word 'fantasy' is so all-encompassing that it has virtually lost any taxonomic value. Putting Edgar Allan Poe and J.R.R. Tolkien under the same heading because both use the supernatural amounts to a complete disregard of the specific nature of fantasy, and namely of high fantasy. Faster than light travel is as supernatural as ghosts appearing to the living. Narrative omniscience in the realistic novel looks like a godlike, supernatural power as well. On the other hand, fantasy, especially high fantasy, is a literary species with distinctive fictional features that can be inferred from even a superficial reading of its classics. High fantasy is about

the realistically consistent building of a fictional secondary world fully independent from the mundane one (past, present, or rationally anticipated). Whether it is specifically named or not, high fantasy hardly stands intrusions from our world without losing its ontologically autonomous status, if we are to follow the definition of 'secondary world,' as it appears in this genre, proposed by Waggoner: "A fantasy world is a secondary reality whose metaphysical premises are different from those of the real world" (4). Using a more precise narratological language, Trębicki contends that fantasy follows:

> a strategy aimed at the creation of a secondary world model with its own precisely described spatial and temporal parameters, its own social and ontological order, and its own causality, unusual from the point of view of mimetic reality but perfectly coherent and logical within the fictional universe (2014: 488).

Therefore, I would exclude from high fantasy those works in which modern characters intervene in the secondary world, thus depriving it of the illusion of completeness in its own legendary, far-away setting in place and time, as well as distracting readers from a fully immersive experience. C. S. Lewis' Narnia is a wide and sophisticated secondary world but the children's access through a cupboard during World War II implies that it coexists with modernity, instead of remaining impervious to it as it would be the case in the true exercises of sub-creation in the Tolkienian sense. Portal fantasies (Conkan, 2017) such as Lewis' (and Ende's), to which one could add the weird awakening of alien gods in modernity in H. P. Lovecraft's horror stories, are enjoyable in their own right but they cannot be considered genuine high fantasy.

High fantasy eschews implausible contacts between ontologically different kinds of fictional worlds (the mundane and the fantastic) in order to offer the complete result of a speculative process of world building akin to that of science fiction (since it is rationally created on the basis of a particular set of premises). These appear to be scientific in science fiction, as its name implies. They are rather mythical in high fantasy, thus warranting the presence of supernatural beings, magical powers and extraordinary occurrences in the framework of a plausible pagan and pre-technological society.[1] In this kind of imaginary society godlike forces intervene, or are believed to intervene, in human affairs in the same way as they do in the true mythological lore that modern archaeological, philological, and ethnological research have revealed to us using rational methods from the Enlightenment Age

onwards. However, unlike mythological and legendary fiction based on existing matter (Greek mythology, Arthurian legends, *Arabian Nights*, etc.), as well as fairy tales, where narratives follow traditional and stereotyped settings and motives usually borrowed from folklore, high fantasy is 'created.' Its worlds are essentially personal artistic inventions by a particular author, although fantasy writers often find inspiration in existing mythologies as well as in ancient history for their creations. As Braga notes, "la littérature *fantasy* actuelle … est une pseudo-morphose, modelée par l'esprit positiviste et réaliste, par la sensibilité et le goût contemporain, de la littérature magique et féerique traditionnelle" [current fantasy literature … is a pseudo-morphosis, shaped by the positivist and realist spirit, by contemporary sensibility and taste, of the traditional magical and fairy-tale literature (my translation)] (2018: 44).

High fantasy writers, however, treat features borrowed from the ancient lore yet revealed by the modern human sciences as mere elements in their free world building, the consistency of which is internal, and which need not to be externally consistent with previous mythological, ethnographical or historical knowledge. For example, while Robert H. Howard uses names and peoples from the true ancient history of our planet, his work does not constitute archaeological fiction, because his history is invented, as his fictional historiographical account of the Hyborian age shows. Lord Dunsany was probably inspired by Japanese mythology but his mythology of Pegāna was his own.

These features are common to all high fantasy worlds now considered canonical in the Anglosphere, such as Lord Dunsany's Pegāna, Robert H. Howard's Hyboria, Clark Ashton Smith's Zothique, Tolkien's Middle-earth, Fritz Leiber's Nehwon, Fletcher Pratt's Dalarna, L. Sprague de Camp's Novaria, Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea, Samuel Delany's Nevèrÿon, Terry Pratchett's Discworld and George R. R. Martin's Westeros. A similar mythopoetic imagination already appears active in William Blake's narrative poems where his personal mythology is, rather confusedly, presented to the world as an alternative to Christianity. Regarding prose narratives, John Sterling's short story "The Sons of Iron" (included as an independent narrative in the novel *Arthur Coningsby*, 1833) explores the customs and history of an ancient race of men made of iron with a sober speculative tone similar to that adopted by later fantasists such as Giovanni Papini and Jorge Luis Borges in their imaginary ethnographies.

Actually, the first high fantasy novels are believed to have appeared relatively late in the 19th century. If we do not consider the portal fantasies and fairy tale novels by Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald, as we should not do if the above descriptive definition of high fantasy stands, the high fantasy novel is to be found fully in Laurence Housman's "Gods and Their Makers," published in a collection of the same title in 1897. This appears as the first significant landmark[2] in a long tradition of high fantasy novel that blossomed in Britain in the interwar period alongside with works such as Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924), Margaret Irwin's *These Mortals* (1925), Norman Douglas' *In the Beginning* (1927) and Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937). Together with the high fantasy stories written by Clark Ashton Smith and Robert H. Howard, and published during the same period in the US pulps, these narratives helped to elevate high fantasy to an inescapable feature of the contemporary literary landscape. It is easy to see that high fantasy novels not written in English are conspicuously absent from this list of early acknowledged classics, in the same way as they are hardly to be found in most surveys of fantasy, either in English (for example, Barron, 1990; Mendlesohn and James, 2009; Wolfe, 2011; Moran, 2019) or in other languages (Pech, 1990; Pato, 2019). Why is this so? Do other literatures lack writers who have created their proper speculative fantasy worlds long before Tolkien's success and his countless global imitators? How is it possible that French, Italian, Spanish, German and Russian scientific romances have already been translated into English and taken into account in histories of world science fiction at this time, but no early continental high fantasy novels seem to exist according to present knowledge on the matter?

In literary history, as in archaeology, one can hardly find anything without looking for it where others have not, for instance in French Literature. Since high fantasy scholars are rarer than science fiction ones even in the Anglosphere, let alone in other cultural areas of the world, it is a small wonder that some of the few hints of the existence of early, pre-Tolkienian high fantasy novel in French has been revealed at all by Brian Stableford, a writer, researcher and translator whose main field of work is science fiction. However, he has also translated other kinds of speculative works. For instance, two novels translated by him, André Lichtenberger's *The Centaurs* (*Les Centaures*, 1904) and Han Ryner's *The Superhumans* (*Les Surhommes*, 1929), are perhaps better understood as high fantasies. The latter is a rhetorically sophisticated work[3] of its prospective brand, consisting of fantasies set in a future

that looks like a mythic past, including the presence of supernatural entities and the absence of modern technology and science. Following its rediscovery in France thanks to Stableford's English translation, the former has tentatively been considered there as the first French high fantasy novel.[4]

Stableford has also translated shorter narratives by Remy de Gourmont, Gabriel de Lautrec, Bernard Lazare, Camille Mauclair, Victor-Émile Michelet, Éphraïm Mikhaël and other French *Belle Époque* authors. Most of these authors wrote in the so-called purple prose typical of Symbolism. French purple prose was widely imitated by British and American high fantasists from the Aesthetic Movement such as Lord Dunsany, Kenneth Morris and Clark Ashton Smith, and its influence can still be seen in Tolkien's style. Rhetorically at least, modern(ist) high fantasy owes much to French *Décadence*. This style encompasses the high fantasy tales by those writers, as well as by Marcel Schwob and Remy de Gourmont, just to mention the ones whose work has acquired some canonical status in French literature. Now their contribution to the high fantasy short story should certainly be re-appraised, but it is also to be acknowledged that no high fantasy French novels written in this period or earlier other than Lichtenberger's *The Centaurs* seemed to exist, except maybe for a short one by Mauclair entitled *Le Poison des pierreries* (1903), later collected in his collection *L'Amour tragique* (*Tragic Love*, 1908). This is indeed a beautifully decadent and weird high fantasy that was translated by Stableford in 2016 as *The Poison of Precious Stones.*

French high fantasy novel would seem then to have appeared later than, for example, Housman's "Gods and Their Makers" (1897) if it were not for a famous mother and her less renowned son. They were Aurore Dupin (1804-1876) and Jean-François Maurice Arnauld (1823-1899), better known as George Sand and Maurice Sand, respectively. The latter inaugurated modern fantasy novels about Atlantis with *Le Coq aux cheveux d'or* (*The Golden-Haired Rooster*, 1867 in book form). Although it is set in the mythical ancient city-empire described by Plato, complete with its end by the gods' wrath, Maurice Sand's novel reads as a Howardian sword and sorcery story, with its barbarian protagonist, the blond 'rooster,' endowed with virtually supernatural strength and panache negotiating his way among the intrigues and decadence of ancient sedentary kingdoms. This hero rescues his romantic interest from her scheming father the king, as well as from her religious and marital duties as high priestess and wife of the volcano god worshipped in Atlantis. He even saves

her from the eruption and the deluge that destroy the mythical world of Atlanteans, Scythians and other ancient peoples. These coexist in that legendary place and time without regard for archaeological findings, but according to the artistically controlled freedom of high fantasy. Maurice Sand's style, with his short sentences and narrative conciseness and dynamism combined with colourful descriptions capable of generating the desired atmosphere of decadence, looks exactly like that of Howard's Hyborian stories. Having arrived a century too early, Maurice Sand's novel unfortunately went virtually unnoticed.[5] Its existence is thus rather an anecdote in the history of (high) fantasy.

By contrast, George Sand's *Évenor et Leucippe* (*Évenor and Leucippe*, 1856), afterwards re-titled *Les amours de l'âge d'or: Évenor et Leucippe* (*Loves of the Golden Age: Évenor and Leucippe*, 1861), is arguably the first high fantasy novel, at least the first subject to some academic attention[6] and re-issued. Its author achieved fame as a writer throughout the Western world. Although this particular work did not enjoy the popularity of her novels of manners, and it was not translated into English, it was known in Anglophone intellectual circles, where French was widely read. This "Légende antédiluvienne" ('antediluvian legend') was anonymously commented upon, for example, in April 1862 in *The North American Review*. The unknown reviewer mentions its models, namely the Biblical account of the fall and the Platonic Atlantis myth, but only as the basis for a fully new mythology created by Sand about the origins of humanity, love and civilization. Both the Hebrew single god and the panoply of Greek deities are absent from the narrative, which tells the life as well as the emotional and philosophical growth of Évenor, a human child living in a balanced primitive society. The seeds of selfishness and evil already exist among humans, however, and the little protagonist is happy to find, after getting lost in the forest, a secluded, paradisiacal valley where he decides to stay. He meets there another child, Leucippe, who is being raised by Téleïa, the last of the 'dives,' a species of beings "half humane, half divine, – rather at once divine and human, having the heavenly soul and knowledge, with an earthly body and needs," according to the American reviewer of the novel (558). The 'dive' (name adapted from 'diva,' the Latin and Italian word for 'goddess') teaches them morality and true love as the main inheritance from her race to this couple of children, then teenagers and married couple, so that they can deliver it to the successor sentient race, the humans. They fail, however, in their mission. Evil has already grown deep roots in human society.

Évenor, Leucippe and their followers are forced to escape from their tribe. Only the dive's supernatural intervention finally saves them from their pursuers, allowing them to return to their paradise in the valley, called Éden. This parts them from their fellow humans and therefore from the course of human history. Their fate is lost in the mist of myth and legend. Despite the echoes of their names and place in later traditions, namely the aforementioned Biblical and Platonic ones, their internally consistent world is a closed one, having nothing to do either with sacred or secular history.

Évenor et Leucippe is not a fictional reconstruction of prehistory as it could have been but rather a symbolic narrative intended to convey, for a grown-up readership, an ethical and philosophical meaning through mythopoesis. The fictional world created there by George Sand fulfils all the requirements of high fantasy. It has "its own precisely described spatial and temporal parameters, its own social and ontological order" (Trębicki, 2014: 488) with its own beliefs and customs, which are all realistically shown. Its characters are individualised, and are radically different from those typified in fairy tales,[7] as it is its plot, where the folktale motifs inherited by the literary fairy tale are also absent or, at least, they do not define the structure of the novel. Moreover, it has further features usual in later high fantasy literature, such as the presence, as well as the agency, of a supernatural category of beings independent from any previous lore and mythology, the 'dives.' Even Sand's use of expressive invented anthroponyms (Le Guillou, 2013), similar to the ones typical of high fantasy is witness to her pioneering high fantastical approach. Nothing of this sort existed in the European and American novel at that time, at least as far as we know given the current state of research and translations, and there would be virtually nothing similar until the Symbolist/Decadent experiments in creative mythography and ethnography a few decades later. Therefore, unless further comparative research proves it wrong, there are solid grounds to maintain that the modern high fantasy novel to have been born, indeed, in France. It would can be claimed that two women, Mary Shelley and George Sand, invented in the Romantic age, most likely without knowing it, the science fiction and the high fantasy novel, respectively. Shelley has been given her due credit for it. Sand awaits hers.

Notes

1. Trębicki has proposed a further definition of high fantasy that takes into account the pre-modern technological level of its secondary worlds. Actual supernatural agency is taken for granted in them following a posited pre-modern and pre-scientific world-view: "The basic structure of SWF [secondary world fantasy] is … placing the plot in a world whose technological level is rather low and spatial parameters closed, and which is presented as a reality not connected with the mimetic universe either spatially of temporally" (2011: 45).

2. Histories dealing with high fantasy usually mention the late romances by William Morris published in the 1890s as pioneering works. Christian institutions and real place names (for example, Rome) appear in these romances, which have a quest structures borrowed from medieval chivalric narratives. These features trouble their high fantasy status, since Morris' fictional worlds would not be then full-fledged secondary subcreations in the Tolkienian sense here adopted (Tolkien, 2001). Moreover, they often lack an easily recognizable usual landmark of high fantasy, namely what Lin Carter called 'neocognomica:' "In creating an imaginary world with words, the author is thrust into the role of Adam. Everything must be named" (1973: 192-193). What kind of secondary worlds can be the ones in Morris' chivalric romances when their characters are named Ralph or Arthur?

3. In my essay on this work which accompanies its contemporary edition, I describe it as follows: "Les Surhommes semble être un « monstre narratif », où le roman doit cohabiter avec d'autres genres, comme la poésie (en prose) dans ses manifestations tant sapientielles qu'épiques, ou l'historiographie, faisant fi de l'illusoire psychologie des personnages, collectifs par ailleurs, et des exigences d'une action conventionnelle" (2016: 125). My translation: "The Superhumans appears to be a 'narrative monster,' where the novel must cohabit with other genres, such as (prose) poetry in its sapiential as well as epic variants, or historiography, ignoring the illusory psychology of the characters, which are collective for that matter, as well as the demands of conventional action."

4. In the preface to its contemporary edition, Fraysse contends that it could be considered to be the "« premier roman de fantasy français »" ('first French high fantasy novel') but with a possible caveat: "mais rêvons plutôt qu'il existe de nombreux textes antérieurs dignes d'endosser ce rôle" (2017: xiii). My translation: "but let us rather

dream that there are many earlier texts deserving this consideration." These earlier French high fantasy novels are precisely the matter of the present essay.

5. The most detailed review of this novel was written by his mother (Sand, 1867). In contemporary times, only a book devoted to Maurice Sand briefly comments on it (Bissonnette, 2017: 228-235, 331, 380-381). There is no contemporary edition of this significant work.

6. It is to be noted that none of the recent academic studies on this novel that I have been able to read (Gillet, 1977; Le Guillou, 2012, 2013, 2016; Mathias, 2018) clearly mentions its high fantasy features. French academic study of this kind fiction is still in its early infancy, though (Bougon, 2019).

7. Matthew David Surridge argued in a blog entry from 2010 (https://www.blackgate.com/2010/09/19/worlds-within-worlds-the-first-heroic-fantasy-part-iv/) that Sara Coleridge created in her novel Phantasmion (1837) the first fantasy secondary world. However, this novel's subtitle, "A Fairy Tale," is very clear regarding the particular kind of fiction it belongs to. Although the fairy tale is an important predecessor of high fantasy, their secondary worlds are different, even in the many instances, before and after Coleridge, where fairy tale worlds are fully independent from our mundane one. In high fantasy characters are individuals whereas those of the fairy tale are "occupational labels" (Waggoner, 23). Moreover, in the fairy tale magic and supernatural occurrences are taken for granted; in high fantasy they "must be realistically established" (22) following the posited rules of the (sub)created world. Following Tolkien, Nikolaya states that "genuine and skilful fantasy creates Secondary Belief (unlike the Primary Belief of myth or religion), putting the reader in a temporary state of enchantment. As soon as suspension of disbelief is disturbed, the spell is broken" (153) whereas "the addressee of a fairy tale knows that the story is not true" (153). Furthermore, the intrusion in fairy tales of elements from the phenomenological world also disturbs the suspension of disbelief or secondary belief. On the other hand, high fantasy stories "take place in a closed, self-contained Secondary World without any connection with reality. However, unlike fairy tales, they are definitely based on Secondary Belief" (154). Last but not least, 'fairy-land' "is a space where things happen, not a place of itself" (Hunt, 12) as Sand's Éden is.

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Bio

Dr. Mariano Martín Rodríguez is a translator and independent scholar based in Brussels (Belgium). He obtained his Ph.D in Philology at the Universidad Complutense (Madrid) in 1994. Since then, he has published numerous studies in different languages related to modern drama, scientific romance, and utopian, speculative (including high fantasy and theological fiction) and science fiction, in Spain and in Europe, as well as several critical editions of translations from different Romance languages and English into Spanish. He has also published several critical editions of Spanish works of utopian, fantastic, speculative and science fiction. He is currently co-editor of the online journal on speculative fiction Hélice (www.revistahelice.com).

The SF in Translation Universe #9

Rachel Cordasco

Welcome back to the SF in Translation Universe! It's certainly been a hell of a year, but if you're reading this, that means that you've made it through and you can start dreaming about how much better 2021 will be.

Of course, 2020 wasn't bad at all if you think about it in terms of books and stories, since I'm going to tell you about some fantastic SF in translation that came out between September and the end of the year. It's certainly been a good fall/winter for collections, including Clelia Farris's *Creative Surgery* (tr from the Italian by Rachel Cordasco and Jennifer Delare), Christiane Vadnais's *Fauna* (tr from the French by Pablo Straus), *The Beast and Other Tales* by Jóusè d'Arbaud (tr from the Provençal by Joyce Zonana), Cixin Liu's *To Hold Up the Sky* (various translators), Aleksandar Žiljak's *As the Distant Bells Toll* (tr from the Croatian by the author), *Okamoto Kidō: Master of the Uncanny* (tr from the Japanese by Nancy H. Ross), and Jean Ray's *Circles of Dread* (tr from the French by Scott Nicolay). That's right—seven collections, translated from six different source languages, from seven distinct publishers. Ranging from the fantastic and surreal (*Fauna, The Beast*, and *As the Distant Bells Toll*), to horror and the uncanny (*Okamoto Kidō* and *Circles of Dread*), and finally to intriguing blends of science fiction and surrealism (*Creative Surgery*, *Fauna*, and *To Hold Up the Sky*), these collections will whet any reader's appetite for more stories by these authors who should be much better known.

The one anthology that came out this season was *The Valancourt Book of World Horror Stories*, which includes tales from Spain, Norway, Hungary, Italy, Quebec, Mexico, and everywhere in between. Many of these authors have never appeared in English before, and will greatly enrich our understanding of the modern horror genre, which has been and always will be an international one.

We got two Japanese novels and one Polish novel in October, along with a standalone novella by the great Polish surreal fantasist Bruno Schulz. His story, *Undula* (originally published in Polish in 1922, tr in 2020 by Frank Garrett) is one of dreams

and nostalgia, cockroaches and masochism. Similarly, Hiroko Oyamada's *The Hole* (tr David Boyd) takes us into a region between reality and dream, where a woman who has recently moved to the countryside falls into a hole that seems to have been made for her (makes me think of Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*). What follows is a series of strange characters and creatures that destabilize her understanding of her world. Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings* (tr Ginny Tapley Takemori) also begins with a character's shift from the city to the country and her growing belief that she is an alien (with all that that word might mean). Finally, Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Tower of Fools* (tr David French) introduces us to a new fantasy world (not connected to the *Witcher*), in which a magician and healer is caught up in a war and thrown into an asylum filled with people who are either insane or iconoclastic.

Rounding out the year is a short novel that seems to capture the dislocation from reality that many of us have felt in 2020. Guido Morselli's *Dissipatio H. G.* (tr from the Italian by Frederika Randall) takes as its starting point one man's realization (after abandoning a suicide attempt) that every single person, except for him, has vanished off the face of the Earth. What follows is a series of philosophical speculations about the place humans had held in the world, what their absence means for animals and the natural landscape, if time and history have any meaning when almost everyone is gone, and what a lone man should do when he has only his memories and human detritus for company. This is a strange, melancholic, yet strikingly touching story, and one I highly recommend.

In terms of short fiction, September and October have brought us a richly diverse group of stories from Bulgaria, Germany, Russia, Korea, Mexico, China, El Salvador, and elsewhere. We have magazines like *Clarkesworld*, *World Literature Today*, *Samovar*, *Future Science Fiction Digest*, *Asimov's* and others to thank for this treasure trove (most of which is freely available online- check the "SFT on the Web" tab on sfintranslation.com).

Thanks for reading, and I'd love to hear what you're reading now and/or looking forward to: rachel@sfintranslation.com.

Until next time in the SFT Universe!

Meet the Future: An Interview with Nichole Nomura

Nichole Nomura

PhD Candidate, Stanford University

Hi, Nichole, could you tell us a bit about yourself?

Hello! I'm currently a PhD candidate at Stanford English, and I've just wrapped up my M.A. in Education from Stanford's Graduate School of Education. I grew up in and did all my schooling in California, and somewhat stereotypically love the beach, the desert, swimming, and any form of being on the water (in all seasons). I collect (not hoard) books, tools, and blazers.

How do you describe yourself professionally?

I work and teach in the digital humanities, education, and literary studies in order to study the way science fiction teaches and is taught. I'm a researcher in Stanford's Literary Lab, a digital humanities (DH) research collective. Being a part of the Lab is such an incredible experience—I love the collaborative structure of project-based inquiry, the chance to explore questions outside my area of expertise, and the way DH methods estrange me from my own work and assumptions—it's a science-fictional way to work on SF, but that's not the only reason I use DH methods. DH's ability to move to different scales is really useful when working on something as massive as science fiction or something as small as syntagmatic spaces between words. My research and teaching in the school of Education gives me the critical tools to see the lesson plans and curricula embedded in SF, and to analyze SF as embedded in lesson plans and curricula. The sociological methods I use, such as qualitative coding, come from my training in the Ed school, and help me approach questions that deal with real readers in ways that I choose for their respect and rigor. And literary studies, perhaps the most traditional home of the SF scholar, provides the theories that are at the core of my research and are the foundation of my personal reading habits and

inclinations.

Why does SF matter to you?

SF matters to me because people read it. People watch it. People write it and dress up in it and live in it. A lot of people. We would be fools not to study it.

That's the short version of the manifesto. The longer version is built on a collection of anecdotes—students who have told me my class was the first one where they read books they *liked*; an engineering student who made his career decision as a kid watching Iron Man suit up for the first time; the way either Picard, Janeway, or Sisko seems to have a quote for any difficult occasion; or the time I watched a 6th -grader carefully hide a copy of *The Hunger Games* under his desk while we were watching a documentary. SF matters to me not only because people read it, but because people love it. These stories shape our lives because we choose to let them.

What brought you to SF studies?

I got my first dose of SF theory in a creative writing class (specifically, for all you teachers out there, Langer's "Case Studies in Reading 2: Key Theoretical and Critical Texts in Science Fiction Studies" from *The Science Fiction Handbook*), and while I had been exposed to some theory elsewhere in my undergraduate program, it had never clicked. For the first time, I understood what other people saw in theory. Somebody had tools for thinking about texts I cared about, in ways that changed how I thought about them—and I could use them as tools, choosing between them, refining them, setting them aside when they didn't serve me anymore. The clichéd lightbulb turned on, and I don't think it was a coincidence that it was the science fiction theory that excited me—there's something special about it. I probably bored all my friends and professors with endless papers and discussion posts on cognitive estrangement, but they were supportive, excellent educators and collaborators who pushed me to read more, deeper, and better.

What project(s) are you working on now, and how did you get there? What question(s) really drive your work?

I'm fascinated by the explicitly didactic—by the attempt to convey theoretical

information directly in the context of a largely experiential narrative. Much of my work is driven by a desire to account for the giant lecture, the book within a book, or the equations that we commonly dismiss as sloppy worldbuilding or too heavy-handed. This interest in the explicitly didactic comes from a deeper pedagogical interest in what "theory" is and how we distribute it.

My dissertation examines the relationship between didacticism and science fiction. I argue that science fiction has an outsized pedagogical potential compared to that of traditional realist fiction, as a result of its more frequent movement between model and simulation and its investment in models as such. The model, in fiction, is a claim about how a system works—a theory of capitalism, family, physics, politics, biology, school, class, etc.—that the simulation then enacts over narrative time. Taking an interdisciplinary approach—combining traditional literary criticism, digital humanities methods, and qualitative social-science methods—the project seeks to understand how and what science fiction can and does teach.

In the Literary Lab, I've been working on a project called "Novel Worldbuilding" with Mark Algee-Hewitt that investigates science-fictional worldbuilding using computational methods. We're able to detect passages that grammatically resemble scientific writing, using methods developed for the Microgenres project, as well as compare the probabilities of syntagmatic word combinations in SF novels against "real-world" scientific discourses, like that found in *Scientific American* and medical journals. These two methods proxy very different kinds of worldbuilding—and so the project's next steps are to explore the relationships between them, as well as their relationship to the relative prestige, award-status, and scientific domain of novels that use them.

What do you envision for the future of SF studies and SF scholars? What do you want to see us accomplish?

We've spent the last however-many years fighting for the legitimacy of our field—now that a moment has come where SF is no longer relegated to the corners of "nerdy" and "unacademic," I hope we do not squander it. I hope we guard against gatekeeping of all kinds, both directed at us and facilitated by us.

The line between scholastic and artistic work has always been blurry in SF studies—I hope we can not only keep it blurry, but develop better protocols for

working within and across that blurry space. This is a question our field has to come to terms with at a variety of scales, from the citational practices of our own work and teaching to the CFPs we produce and the people we choose to fund. Is "critical" a stance or form? Are you introducing works as "primary" or "secondary" sources? "Theory" or "fiction"? How can we strengthen the critical praxis of SF, across and within this boundary space? How can we train future practitioners that feel equally at ease in critical and creative spaces, and how do we institutionalize and support those interdisciplinary spaces? We've already started—I think it's imperative that we continue, and then share our theories of how to work in the blurry space with our respective home disciplines.

If you could write a dream book, or teach a dream course, what would it/they be?

I'm itching to spend time thinking and writing about the way we learn to craft and be crafty through fiction. Dystopian worlds with instructions for survival, Engineering debates in *Star Trek*, prepper novels with lists of supplies, fantasy swordsmiths and healers, and *Little House on the Prairie*. Too broad for a dissertation, but I've been working on it for fun whenever I find a wonderful example of it.

Although it doesn't look like a traditional book project or course, I've been building a database of SF award winners that allows for digital humanities methods like text-mining to be analyzed alongside qualitative coding methods and metadata like award-status or the pronouns used on an author's Wikipedia page. The database has been an ongoing project of its own—it definitely started as a part of my dissertation (I just wanted to answer one small question about "hard SF"!) but then quickly became, with the support of undergraduate research assistants in the Literary Lab and the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis, a project that far exceeds the scope of my dissertation. I'm excited to get to dig into it once the dissertation is done—whether that's in a (somewhat untraditional) classroom space, a lab space, or as part of a book project remains to be seen. Most likely—all three!

Thank you! Your labor and thoughts are valued and appreciated.

Introducing the 2020-2021 Support a Scholar Grant Recipient

Ida Yoshinaga

2020-2021 Support a Scholar Grant Recipient

HI everyone, I was asked to introduce myself and my work. I guess you could say I am a narrative analyst, content producer, and labor scholar working at the odd intersection between science-fictional praxes, genre theory, and postcolonial folklore studies. I want to help diverse community people tell meaningful stories in mass media and thus try to contribute to the field of transmedial creative writing and the cultural politics of storyworld construction.

I have a couple of projects during this pandemic. First, I study the complex dynamics between labor and leisure within the political economy of corporate-transmedial (i.e., "franchise" or "IP") speculative and fantastic storytelling (this is the stream of research I refer to as my Disney scholarship). I deploy cross-platform narratological analyses to evaluate the productive value of gender, class, racial, and colonial content across narrative and non-narrative media. Then, working with this sense of value, I focus on the digital-age technologies of creative-labor extraction from cultural communities used by Disney and the relationship of these media-tech extractive practices to diverse female consumer subjectivities produced to create Disney's worldwide sf/f lifestyle empire. I analyze data from my passive and participatory observation conducted at Disney Parks and Universal Studios Parks (and resorts) alongside those from fieldwork done at alternative fantasy franchise and non-franchise leisure sites within the community, framing those findings against the scripted production of fantasy narrative by Disney writers (i.e., the company's ideological representations).

Second, I am developing ideas on the ways that non-Native allies of global Indigenous peoples can aid pragmatically in the production of Indigenous sf/f mass-media narratives reflecting community storyworlds and survivance. As a settler ally of Indigenous creative artists, I look specifically at the workplace dynamics of commercial, academic, nonprofit, and artistic institutions where the enervating navigation of liberal institutional racism/settler colonialism, often gets in the way of Native media expression of cultural histories, ethics, and values. (This is an

extension of my dissertation on the politics of sf/f genre blending as a means of expressing minority-community spiritual worldviews, via teleplay writing and TV producing.) Today, I am learning to produce Indigenous sf/f films, the daily, difficult, sometimes high-stakes making of which I am reflecting upon so as to figure out a sort of playbook for media allies. I am interested in problem solving the intimate and dysfunctional institutional relationships born of settler colonialism and imperial racism, in light of the immediate workplace stakes of decisions over textual representation but also of how to optimize (in practical ways) creative autonomy for Indigenous mediamakers and storytellers working in contemporary mass-expressive forms which might be co-created or co-produced by non-Native creative workers or bosses. Specific interpersonal practices of patience and empathy especially become affective technologies with which to bridge sometimes seemingly non-reconcilable gaps in historical difference, functioning both as decolonial education and harm reduction.

Hoping everyone is healthy and well these days, as we head into the holiday season!
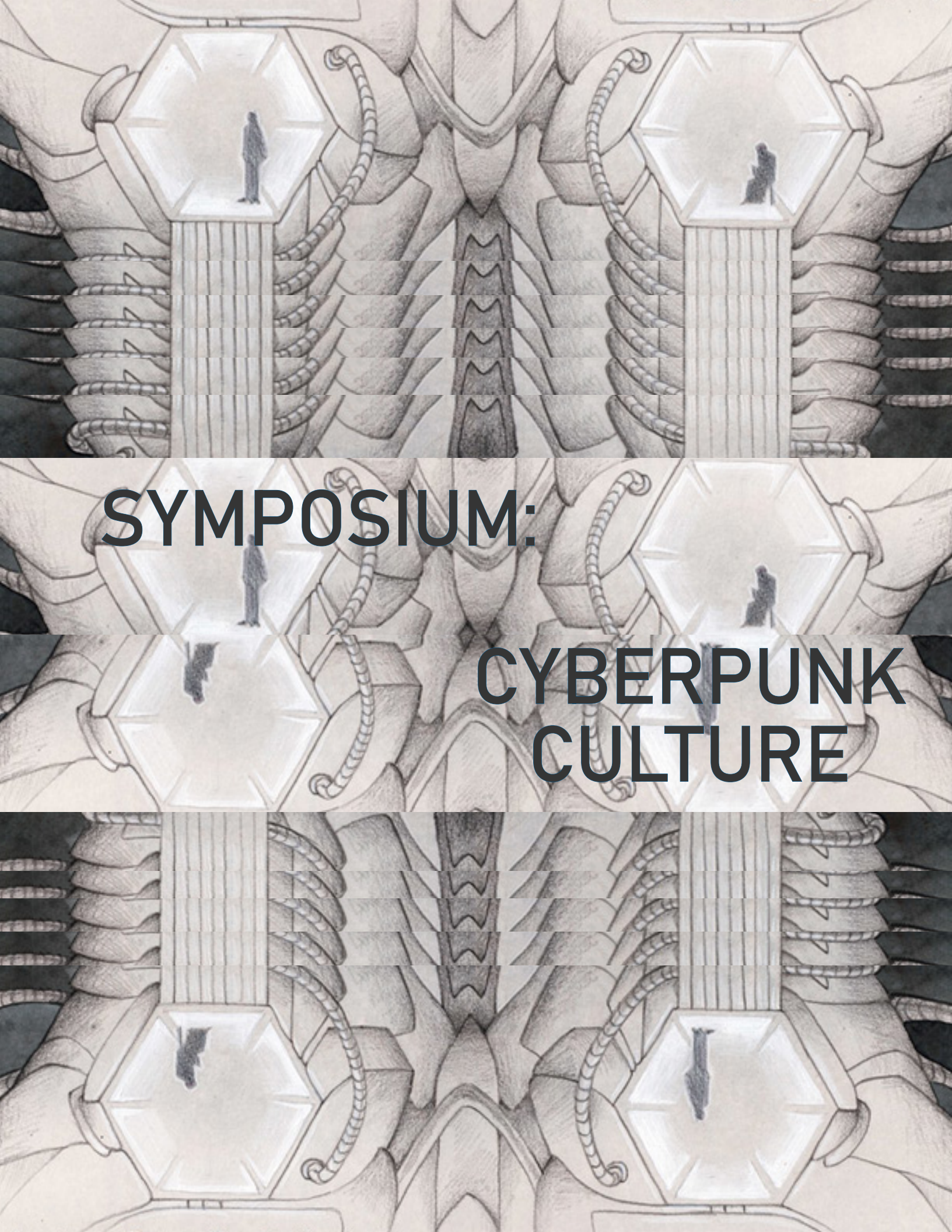
SYMPOSIUM:

CYBERPUNK CULTURE

The CyberPunk Culture Conference

Lars Schmeink

HafenCity University, Hamburg (Germany)

WITH COVID-19 taking center stage in our lives in 2020, we are all faced with new perspectives on our jobs and the resurgence of old inequalities. On the one hand, the coronavirus jumpstarted a digital transformation in our work and research that no one really anticipated. Prejudices against the digital and lacking technical infrastructure be damned, this virus dragged us all into the virtual realms of cyberspace whether we wanted to or not. While some cling to the minimum translations of analog to digital and hold fast to the ideal of face to face human interaction (hello, to all those administrators who thought Fall 2020 was going to be just another day in HE), others opted to become more creative. We have seen orchestras play virtual concerts from hundreds of different living rooms, world leaders convene in digital meetings, people take digital vacations, and we got Captain Picard (yes, I know) reading Shakespearean sonnets so that we would be inspired. The possibilities of virtual worlds seem as endless as Vernor Vinge, William Gibson, and Neil Stephenson predicted in the 1980s and 90s.

And yet, on the other hand, we also saw that our world had become more entrenched in its inequalities, that some were disproportionately more effected by the virus, as we experienced "the divide between a managerial class that can be shifted to work from home and a worker class, low-paid, without significant savings, and (in the United States) even lacking health care benefits that must nonetheless put itself at daily risk of infection," as Gerry Canavan noted on Facebook. Technology is a dividing factor between those who have access to it and those who control it. This is a claim that Karen Cadora had noted 25 years ago, when writing about cyberpunk, which imagines a world where technology is a tool of both oppression and liberation. Poverty is pervasive in cyberpunk, and technological resources are expensive luxuries. Those without access to […them] are effectively kept in the underclass" (359). Well, in corona-times it works both ways and then some. Not having a job that allows you to self-isolate and work remotely, not having access to stable internet, to high-end computers, to technological systems that replace physical interactions with the world comes at a high price in a pandemic, a price that black and brown communities pay

doubly. Intersectional discrimination is enhanced through technological inequality.

So, when Veronica Hollinger wrote in a testimonial for the first CyberPunk Culture Conference that she believed the CPCC was "an opportunity to test-drive our critical posthumanism, to be aware of the intriguing complexities of our material participation" I understood this to speak to both of these described effects of the coronavirus on our academic realities. We are becoming-with the machine, scarily so in E. M. Forster's sense but also as Donna Haraway means it. Our technologies become surrogates for our interactions with each other. A digital-only conference on cyberculture, then, seems 'meta' in that it addresses issues that influence its own materiality. And, not to forget, our material participation is dependent on our social and political circumstances. While many would have loved to come to the SFRA conference (or any other physical meeting), not only the virus but also financial, social, or political obstacles stood in the way of this. And this is true even without the virus at work.

When all plans were cancelled this summer, I wanted to organize an event that takes a different approach, not just out of necessity of a raging pandemic, but as a chance to critically reflect our material participation and our posthuman existence. The CyberPunk Culture Conference was that event, morphed from a planned roundtable discussion and book launch of The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture that I co-edited with Anna McFarlane and Graham J. Murphy. Building from the idea that cyberpunk is not only an important genre of sf literature, but a cultural formation that speaks immensely to our moment in time and is ideally situated to map our realities, I started to think about what would make the CPCC.

In terms of theme, the conference was open to all interested in cyberculture and the 32 papers presented show an amazing breadth of scholarship, from fashion to music, from holograms to social media, from classics to brand new works of culture, from Turkey to Japan. In addition to the 32 individual papers, we also had a keynote by the fantastic Pawel Frelik, whose musings on the political myopia of cyberpunk are worth a longer discussion, and the above-mentioned roundtable with the editors of the Routledge Companion and two contributors, Sherryl Vint and Hugh O'Connell. We had a lively discussion of how "Living in Cyberpunk Times" and all the utopian and dystopian moments that go with it. If you have not had a chance to look into it, read up here in this symposium issue of SFRA Review, or head on over to www.cyberpunkculture.com where all of the papers are still available to watch and read.

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The Horror of Direct Experience: Cyberpunk Bodies and "The Machine Stops"

Rachel Berger

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1. Machine

"THE Machine Stops," E. M. Forster's masterful science fiction novella from 1909, has long been lauded for its prescient descriptions of electronic communications technology. With its early vision of the allure and danger of global, networked communication, the story is in direct conversation with classic cyberpunk literature.

Cyberpunk culture and the critical discourse that surrounds it tends to be concerned with the interface between technologies and bodies. The following paper largely leaves technology to the side to meditate on the cyberpunk body itself. When a person pursues "the bodiless exultation of cyberspace," who or what is left behind (Gibson 6)? How is their relationship with the empirical world changed? Today, as coronavirus sweeps the globe and citizens everywhere struggle in and out of pandemic-imposed lockdowns, such questions take on fresh urgency.

2. Milk

"The Machine Stops" is Forster's only overtly science fictional story, sandwiched in time between *A Room with a View* (1908) and *Howards End* (1910), two better-known masterpieces. Though "The Machine Stops" is undoubtedly a work of science fiction—set in a distant future and brimming with descriptions of hypothetical technologies—it is redolent of Forster's favorite themes: the struggle for human connection and the tension between freedom and restriction. It also represents Forster's rebuttal of the euphoric view of science and progress espoused by contemporaries like H. G. Wells, as well as his critique of aestheticism, a late-nineteenth century art movement that promoted experiencing the world through the mediation of art (Seegert 34–35).

Forster's narrative hinges on a future humanity's radically changed relationship to the body. He imagines a world where technological advancement and environmental necessity have caused people to isolate themselves in underground cells, communicate via videotelephony, and rely on a giant machine for all their needs.

The story focuses on a woman named Vashti and her wayward son Kuno. The Machine provides Vashti with everything she needs, so she rarely leaves her chair, much less her room. She lives a life of "pure mentality" (Seegert 37), using the Machine to study obscure subjects and keep up with thousands of friends. Forster's descriptions of Vashti's body dehumanize her and emphasize her sunless, stationary existence. In the story's opening paragraph, the narrator describes Vashti as a "swaddled lump of flesh" (133), before identifying her as a woman. Scholars have variously interpreted Vashti's swaddling to suggest infantilization and straightjacketing (Seegert 40) and cocooning and mummification (Caporaletti 35 and 41), but such analyses don't go far enough. She's not a baby, she's a lump. Her Machine-worshiping body has transformed into a doughy, boneless bundle of cells.

Whether one considers Vashti's transformed body to represent evolution or devolution depends on where one situates the boundaries of her body. In her foundational "Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway asks, "Why should our bodies end at the skin" (61)? N. Katherine Hayles answers, "The boundaries of the autonomous subject are up for grabs" (2). Anne Balsamo connects this line of inquiry to cyberpunk's "vision of posthuman existence where 'technology' and the 'human' are understood in contiguous rather than oppositional terms" (136). Alf Seegert applies it directly to Vashti: "Vashti's mechanically-mediated body is... extended through such external prosthetics and becomes thereby enhanced, not diminished" (43). Vashti never claims the Machine as an extension of her body, but she does view herself as highly evolved. She is "civilized and refined" (Forster 139) and an "advanced thinker" (148). She has no use for the "clumsy system[s]" of previous civilizations (136).

It seems, however, that Forster aims to cast Vashti's body as devolved, particularly in contrast with her son Kuno. Forster describes Vashti's physical ugliness: she is toothless and hairless, with "a face as white as a fungus" (133). He emphasizes her frailty—she "tottered" rather than walked (138)—and her primitivism—she "fed" rather than eating (136). In the age of the Machine, Vashti's physical weakness is not disadvantageous. Instead, "it was a demerit to be muscular," and infants "who promised undue strength were destroyed" (142).

Vashti's son Kuno, cursed with physical strength, is his mother's opposite. If she is pure mentality, he is pure physicality. He repudiates the Machine. He exercises until his flesh aches, until he can run and jump and climb. Kuno dreams of a humanity free of the swaddling garments of the Machine. He believes the "body is the measure for

all that is lovable and desirable and strong" (142). Vashti's son disgusts and saddens her. When she notes the hair growing above his lip and fears it signifies his descent into savagery, Forster's text suggests she considers her own hairlessness a sign of evolutionary advancement.

In the story's closing scene, the Machine breaks down, wiping out humanity. Vashti's spirit reunites with Kuno's, and together they mourn their society's dependence on the Machine at the expense of the body. Their fate is a warning: in the pursuit of evolution, humans "sin[ned] against the body," allowing their muscles, nerves, and sense organs to atrophy (153). In a final, damning image, Forster equates humanity's abandoned body with "white pap" (153). Pap is a soft food, fed to infants and invalids. Forster couldn't have chosen a more offensively inoffensive and emasculating substance. That pale lump from early in the story has transformed still further into a bland, milky mush. In Forster's dystopian view, the cyberpunk body isn't just a baby, it's baby food.

3. Meat

Vashti's body is a forward echo of the cyberpunk body. Like Vashti, cyberpunk heroes find freedom and fulfillment in the virtual realm. Like Vashti, their physical bodies pay a price. Due to the affordances of the Machine, Vashti seems largely unaware of her physical body. This sets her apart from cyberpunk heroes. Because they move between the real and the virtual, they are more conscious of the limitations of the flesh. They view their bodies as prisons tethering them to the physical world.

In *Neuromancer* (1984), cyberpunk's urtext, William Gibson famously refers to Case's cyberpunk body as "meat" (6). This has become an enduring and indelible metaphor in cyberpunk culture, perhaps reaching its fullest expression in Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991). In Synners, the character Visual Mark gets brain implants that enable him to achieve total immersion in cyberspace. After Visual Mark's consciousness abandons his body, "He lost all awareness of the meat that had been his prison for close to fifty years, and the relief he felt at having laid his burden down was as great as himself" (232).

Meat and pap are both foods, but their resemblance ends there. Pap is feminine. Meat is masculine. Meat is heavy, dark, bloody, animal. It is a dead, inert thing. Meat is carne, carnage, carnal. To call the body meat is to reify the crude appetites of

the flesh. In *Neuromancer*, Case's sexual desire "belonged...to the meat;" his lust is an "infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever read" (Gibson 239). Forster would agree. In *A Room with a View*, published the year before "The Machine Stops," he opines, "Love is of the body; not the body, but of the body" (189). Case's bodily urges are so strong that they supersede vision, the sense that predominates in the virtual realm (Lanier 127). Meanwhile, in "The Machine Stops," Vashti is sexless. Her sense organs are blunted, not by her corporeality, but by her reliance on the Machine.

In *Technologies of the Gendered Body*, Anne Balsamo uses four characters from Pat Cadigan's Synners to map "four different versions of cyberpunk embodiment: the marked body, the disappearing body, the laboring body, and the repressed body" (140). Visual Mark represents the disappearing body. The repressed body is Gabe, a character who is addicted to the safety of cyberspace simulations and fearful of the consequences of embodied experience. Gina represents the marked body. She is marked by her Blackness, her doomed love for Mark, and her wrath. The laboring body is Gabe's daughter Sam, a hacker who builds a chip reader that runs on her own bodily energy. Balsamo argues that the four types of cyberpunk embodiment are gendered. The male body is repressed or disappearing. The female body is marked or laboring. She then invokes Donna Haraway's "cyborgian figuration of gender differences, whereby the female body is coded as a body-in-connection and the male body as a body-in-isolation" (144).

Vashti and Kuno invert the gender roles Balsamo identifies in her analysis of *Synners*. Vashti displays both Mark and Gabe's versions of cyberpunk embodiment. Materially, she is the disappearing body, disregarding her physical form in favor of complete immersion in the Machine. Behaviorally, she is the repressed body, disgusted by her son's physicality and terrified of direct experience. Conversely, Kuno has more in common with Gina and Sam. He is marked by his physical strength and his hair. He labors to escape the bonds of the Machine.

Whether Vashti and Kuno confirm or confound Haraway's own cyborgian coding of gender is another matter. Which of them is more connected? Which is more isolated? According to Seegert, "The Machine Stops" is fundamentally about the battle between rival modes of connection: "that of machinery and tele-technology" and that of "gross bodily connection through the flesh (34). By virtue of her connection with the Machine, Vashti is in constant contact with thousands, yet

lives alone in a featureless cell. Kuno seeks and finds physical connection outside the world of the Machine, yet he is a social pariah.

The gender subversion of "The Machine Stops" does not end there. As a woman, Vashti is an unlikely cyberpunk progenitor. Andrew Ross describes classic cyberpunk as a "baroque edifice of adolescent male fantasies" (145). Fred Pfeil argues that most cyberpunk literature is "stuck in a masculinist frame" (89). According to Veronica Hollinger, cyberpunk fantasies primarily speak to "young white males with access to computer hardware" (126). Classic cyberpunk heroes are marginalized, alienated loners who live on the edge of society. In that sense, Kuno is more cyberpunk than his mother, who is achingly mainstream. Yet Kuno spurns all things cyber. Silvana Caporaletti notes that the character of Kuno has been credited with inspiring a different science fiction archetype, that of the alienated hero who rebels against a totally mechanized or automated society, as in *Logan's Run*, *THX 1138*, and *Metropolis* (44).

4. Mirror

Forster's descriptions of Vashti's body and physical environment are much more vivid than the images conveyed by the Machine. When Vashti speaks to Kuno through the Machine, his image is not clear enough for her to discern his emotions. The Machine mediates everything Vashti sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches. It provides a "good enough" but unnuanced facsimile of the real. Her cell is "flooded with radiance and studded with electric buttons"—buttons for food, medicine, clothing, music, and calling friends. She has a "hot-bath button, by pressure of which a basin of (imitation) marble rose out of the floor, filled to the brim with a warm deodorized liquid" (135). Vashti can access everything she wants without leaving the comfort of her room. Living this way, she develops a "horror of direct experience" (138). She finds the prospect of actually seeing, hearing, or touching another person unbearable. In a pivotal scene, she loses her balance, then angrily scolds a woman for "barbarically" putting out a hand to keep her from falling (140).

Classic cyberpunk stories like *Neuromancer* and *Synners* brim with drugs, sex, and danger. Their real worlds are comparably hypersensory and hallucinatory to their virtual worlds—if less consensual (Gibson 51). In Ernest Cline's post-cyberpunk book *Ready Player One* (2011), the veracity gap between the virtual and the real

in "The Machine Stops" is inverted. Cline's protagonist Wade finds the real world "washed out and blurry" compared to the virtual (299). Wade is more self conscious than a true cyberpunk hero. Anxious that spending so much time in virtual reality is negatively impacting his physique, Wade avoids mirrors and adopts a punishing fitness regimen. He reflects:

> Standing there, under the bleak fluorescents of my tiny one-room apartment, there was no escaping the truth. In real life, I was nothing but an antisocial hermit. A recluse. A pale-skinned pop culture-obsessed geek. An agoraphobic shut-in, with no real friends, family, or genuine human contact. I was just another sad, lost, lonely soul, wasting his life on a glorified videogame (309).

Pale and alone, jacked into a virtual reality from a small, brightly lit room, Wade is a neurotic after-image of Vashti.

5. Me

When I first read "The Machine Stops," I found Forster's notion of a future humanity's radically changed relationship to the body to be less credible than his visions of videotelephony and the internet. I could not relate to Vashti's horror of direct experience. Of course this was before the coronavirus pandemic.

Today, reeling through the endless autumn of 2020, I identify with Vashti all too well. As I absorb and enact shelter in place orders and epidemiological guidance, I find my relationship to my body and the bodies around me changed, perhaps forever. A stranger's proximity, let alone touch, has become intolerable. I can't bear the thought of resuming my packed commute. When I go grocery shopping, I shy away from anyone who comes near. If someone were to touch me, even by mistake, even to help, I might scream. To protect my body and those of others, I have blunted my senses, by wearing a mask and gloves, by maintaining social distance, and of course by machines.

Writing about "The Machine Stops" in 1997, Silvana Caporaletti describes the fluidity of utopian literature's connection to reality: "The relation of the utopian text to reality can vary, indeed, with time, because human history and science may develop in directions that narrow the gap between imagination and reality" (32). She then asserts that "The Machine Stops" has become more relevant and

significant with time. Writing in the same year, Marcia Bundy Seabury observes that totalitarian dystopias like 1984 now seem "less imminent than Forster's of satisfied individuals sitting before their personal computers" (61). Of course, this was before the coronavirus pandemic.

Cyberpunk and virtual reality arose a generation ago, during a period of extreme anxiety about our bodies' vulnerability to the "unprecedented threats of AIDS, cancer, nuclear annihilation, overpopulation, and environmental disasters" (Springer 27). In the 1980s, techno-utopian "beliefs about the technological future 'life' of the body [were] complemented by a palpable fear of death and annihilation from uncontrollable and spectacular body threats" (Balsamo 1–2). In such a moment, the opportunity to escape into Vashti's world, with its absence of discrimination, crime, hunger, illness, labor, and injustice, might have seemed tempting.

In the real world of 2020, the gap between Forster's imagination and the reality of those with privilege has narrowed considerably. In small, wired-up rooms all over the world, the fortunate have donned cyberpunk bodies. They have abandoned the hazards of meatspace in favor of cyberspace. At the touch of a button, they can summon a delivery service to bring anything they want without leaving the comfort of their room. They continue their work and life by virtual means, attending virtual meetings and happy hours and lectures and birthday parties. They have learned the profound unsexiness of a day spent jacked into endless video conferences. They are increasingly pale and physically weak. They have the illusion of control. And they would do well to remember that their minds belong to the meat, not the Machine.

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Fabulation of Alternative Parallel Universes: Queertopia in Turkish Science Fiction

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Introduction: Feminist Cyberpunk

WHAT if there are other universes just like ours where we can meet uncountable versions of our beloved ones who have passed away from this world? A mirror or a reverse version of our reality is not so far and may, in fact, be right here. In recent times, interdimensional travel and alternate reality have gained increasing prominence in science fiction film series like *Stranger Things*, *Travellers*, *The OA*, *Black Mirror*, and *Fringe*. However, the parallel universe or multiverse concept traces back to Margaret Cavendish's 17th century The Blazing World. It reached its peak with the cyberpunk tradition in the 1980s. Cyberpunk's white masculine and heterosexual forms are reimagined by a parallel universe of feminist cyberpunk writers like Pat Cadigan, Kathy Acker, Melissa Scott, and Marge Piercy, all of whom focus on diverse forms of feminist and queer perspectives. Feminist cyberpunk writing focuses on queer communities, reproduction, motherhood, mythology, and religion. Feminism's political notions meet with science fiction's narrative concepts such that feminist sf authors explore non-binary gender-fluid identities. Queer theory "converge[s] with science fiction's imaginative production of 'sometimes-utopian futurities'" (Lothian, 17), and we can regard such feminist utopian novels as queer utopias (queertopia) with their non-binary single-sex female relations and asexual reproduction by women like in Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *Herland* or Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite*.

Şeyda Aydın (Sheida Aiden) is the first Turkish feminist and queer science fiction author who speculates neo-futuristic utopia and cyberpunk anti-utopias/dystopias. Her novels cannot be considered in the category of lesbian separatist utopian fiction but, rather, fall under the umbrella of utopian queer fiction. Aydın's *The Woman in the Other Universe* (2019) initially begins in a green queertopian techno-universe called Netta (meaning "worth"), a peaceful utopic world, but eventually shifts to a retro cyberpunk dys(queer)topian parallel universe called Antero (meaning "male"), which is a dangerous reversal of Netta. As Wendy Pearson claims, "sf and queer

theory frequently share both a dystopian view of the present and a utopian hope for the future" (59), so Aydın portrays both dystopian and utopian views of queer sf in her novel.

Departing from Donna Haraway's note that "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (148), I argue that science fiction explores "queer worlding" by offering alternate sexuality in the utopian portrayal of gender-friendly universes. As Lisa Yazsek claims, "feminist cyberpunk reject[s] the alienation, isolation, and nihilism typically associated with masculinist cyberpunk and replace it with an emphasis on creative self-expression, community, and sociopolitical change" (32). In this respect, Aydın's novel depicts tgenderless eternal love by queer women who travel between parallel universes through opening a gate portal with a triangle machine as a social norm.

My aim is to discuss the intersections between feminist cyberpunk and queer theory to explore how queer Turkish science fiction speculatively represents alternate constructions of gender identity in cyberpunk future by breaking sexist walls in a culture constructed around gender. Aydın focuses on the impact of gender on the lives of women by rethinking the problematics of Turkish science fiction's straight heteronormative discourse. Thus, I examine how queer sexualities and homonormativity in a genderless utopian universe challenge racial and discriminative orders constructed by the homophobic and transphobic society represented in a dystopian cyberpunk universe. Aydın's novel demonstrates how non-Western alternative feminist futures offer new forms for bothfamily and gender by questioning the importance of what it means to be a genderqueer human being in a utopian universe, as well as its reversal in a reflected dystopian parallel universe.

Gateway to a Parallel Cyberpunk Universe

The novel starts with film writer Veera Virtanen's mourning for her partner of 13 years, Eeva Van Rooyen, who died due to cancer in Netta, where non-sexist, queer, transgendered individuals and all other sexes live together in peace. Vera searches for the reflection of Eeva, who continues to exist under another identity in a place called Antero. So, to find her lover, Veera travels to Antero, where people are accustomed to living in a capitalist and imperialist world filled with viruses, contagious illnesses, homophobia, femicide, child sexual abuse, animal torture, hunger, anger, hatred,

wars, environmental and economic collapse, and gender inequalities. In this other dimension, a different reflection of Eeva continues to exist as a famous actress and a movie star dedicated to saving children from AIDS.

Şeyda Aydın explores what would happen if we could open a portal to a parallel universe that is completely opposite to our reality. The novel echoes Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, which offers four different parallel universes centered on the same woman (professor Joanna and Jeannie are the closest to our world, with Janet hailing from an alternate future all-female world of no men and Jael from a world in between ours and Janet's in which men are killed as a result of a war between men and women). Aydın's novel, in fact, makes a harsh criticism of our own world, portraying it as a dystopian parallel universe in which queer people fight to survive. So, we can say that by creating a dystopian cyberpunk parallel universe in tandem with a utopian one, she depicts how pure and genderless love can overcome all struggle and rage.

A group of scientists in the novel tries to open a *Stranger Things*-style gateway to a parallel universe. Physicists open "a triangular door hung in the air on the front of the three-meter machine; it was floating like a sea of mercury, it was like a mirror when it appeared completely, and when Veera looked at the door, she could see multiple fluctuating reflections of her" (Aydın 132). The novel depicts the fact that "[f]or some reason, the person who will pass through the door must be women; the door only allows if a woman is standing in front of it, and it works like that and the door only opens to a single world dimension" where the person does not exist (105). This shows that, like in science fiction movies, we are not likely to sit and chat with our reflection in another universe (108).

The gate resembles a pyramid that allows the transition to the alternative dimension, which is dark and dangerous. Veera deeply feels sad when she meets her lover, Eeva, who is oppressed, repressed, and changed by the patriarchal society. Eeva is able to upload her previous memories and identity from the Netta universe through a consciousness transfer when she falls in love and remembers Veera again. However, in homophobic Antero, the media and news start a defamation campaign against Eeva for her lesbian affair. Eeva is on the verge of losing her career and even suffers from harassment and violence perpetuated by the public. Veera can't stand seeing her successful Eeva like this and decides to return to Netta in order to save her life from society's lynching attempts. Then, thanks to Veera, who provides a curative vaccine that she brought from Netta, Eeva devotes her life to protecting children

from AIDS. The couple lives in separate universes until they reunite in Antero on Eeva's 60th birthday with their daughter, EB.

Cyberqueertopian and Dis(queer)topian Parallel Universes

Following Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" and the cyborg world it describes, Aydın's queertopian universe is itself a kind of cyborg world "about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of the joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway 154). So, as Hollinger comments, "queer marks a utopian space, which is, perhaps, also an ironic space, inhabited by subjects-in-process who are not bound by reifying definitions and expectations, and in which bodies, desires, and sex/gender behaviors are free-floating and in constant play" (33) Thus, Haraway's cyborg figure offers queertopian potential. Aydın, by creating such two opposite parallel universes, a cyberqueertopia and a dis(queer)topia, criticizes the homophobic attitudes of our world by creating a beacon of hope with her queertopian Netta, which resembles Haraway's own cyborg world in which "gender might not be global identity at all" (180). So, Aydın depicts a queertopian future in which we become "fluid, being both material and opaque" (Haraway 153).

Also similar to Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Aydın's queer utopian Netta welcomes gender equality where there is no sexism, racism, homophobia, or transphobia. Like in Le Guin's *The Disposed: An Ambigious Utopia*, Aydın contrasts two universes: Antero—an oppressive and exploitative dystopian universe ruled by the worst of capitalism and patriarchy—and its parallel universe, Netta—a perfect genderqueer utopia ruled by peace and equality. The inhabitants of Netta call each other by non-gendered words such as "Dear" or "Beloved." Aydın also anticipates a counter-alternative future in Netta in that the most culturally and economically developed country is "the State of African Continental Integrity" which, with its best doctors, finds treatments and cures for all diseases and viruses (Aydın 73). She also locates futuristic alternatives in the fact that this universe ends world wars by closing the last "arms factory" in the world (73). That is, Aydın's queer future is no longer "curtailed, whether through death from AIDS or via the policing and delegitimization of deviant desires" (Lothian 5). However, the depiction of Africa in the Antero universe depicts Africa much worse than now, surrounded by AIDS

(which is identified with homosexuality and other diseases) and having been witness to four great world wars, ecological collapse, and economic collapse.

As Lee Edelman says, "queer is a zone of possibilities" (114), and as a third-wave feminist and cyberpunk writer, Aydın offers "another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual" (de Lauretis, iv) with her lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender characters. Aydın creates genderqueer families without a nuclear family bond: Veera and Eeva neither have a heterosexual family unit nor live under the same roof, and in fact inhabit totally different universes. Eeva's egg transportation allows Veera to have a daughter in a more beautiful, modern world, where transgender, gay, lesbian, and other kinds of queer people can have children by technologies that free women "from the tyranny of their sexual reproductive roles" (Firestone 31) and also free men from their boundaries of reproduction within the nuclear family unit. That is, Aydın's queertopian alternative world offers a beacon of reproductive hope for queer and transgender people. Meanwhile, however, in the homophobic and transphobic Antero, where sex-change surgeries were banned years ago and homosexuals and transgender people are excluded, beaten, and even killed if they do not hide their sexual orientation, Veera's manager, Siiri, a black transgender woman, is reflected in an unhappy male body (98). The novel depicts the fact that, in a dystopian cyberpunk universe, gender equality cannot be achieved until the "one-sided domain of power ends in all spheres of life" (Buran 2020).

Conclusion: From Myth Towards a Goddess-like Posthuman

Feminist cyberpunk writing focuses on queer communities, reproduction, motherhood, mythology, and religion. As Carlen Lavigne claims, women's cyberpunk novels reflect "the problematic positioning of mythology and folklore with feminist thought— feminists, in general, do not seem happy with either mythology or religion, but no alternative language has yet been produced; the cyborg has not yet truly risen as an iconic image, and within cyberpunk there is little room for the goddess" (130). Aydın criticizes patriarchal mythologies by creating her own mythological figure, a giant raven that represents a goddess of nature, the universe, and memory who watches over the two mourning queer lovers, Eeva and Veera, and changes the rules of physics in the universe to reunite them at the end of the novel.[1]

The novel concludes when the couple reunites and begins to live in Netta with

their posthuman daughter, EB who, like a mythological goddess Lofn, a Norse goddess of forbidden love, reunites the couple. Born from the two eggs of two mothers from different universes, EB becomes a time- and dimensional traveler and, like a goddess-like posthuman, changes the ugly consciousness of human beings. In Aydın's third novel, Fragmented Reflections (2019), she even ends the gender bias in Antero forever.

Aydın shows that, until the divisions between different sexes end, women, lesbians, gays, queer and transgender people cannot escape from the constructed binary conflicts of gender even in alternative universes in the future. Thus, I conclude that in order to live in a borderless, gender-free future, we should recognize new kinds of gender and identities outside the binary gender markers of women/men.

Notes

1. The genus Corvus represented by the raven preserves all its mystery throughout the story. The raven was inspired by the raven goddess Muninn the memory in Norse-Scandinavian mythology, and it protects the love of queer women throughout the novel. According to the old religion of Turkish Shamanism which includes the 500 years of journey from Central Asia to today's Turkey, the past, present and future are related to the stars in the universe. After converted to Islam, some Turks continued to believe in extraterrestrial life and highly intelligent creatures from the other stars in different multiple layers of the universe. One of the mythological creatures in Turkic-Shamanic Myth is raven which symbolizes healing and protection.

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The Fractal Subject and the Hologram Rose: On Baudrillard and Cyberpunk as Media Theory

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AT the conference "Philosophy of new Technology," which took place at Linz in 1988, Jean Baudrillard stated:

> The whole of the human being, his biological, muscular, animal physicality has been transferred to mechanical prostheses. Not even our brain has remained within us, but is now floating in the countless Hertzian waves and networks that surround us. This is by no means science fiction but merely the generalization of McLuhan's theory about the 'extension of man.' (Baudrillard 1989, 114)

In the mid 1970s, Jean Baudrillard started developing his theory of simulation, which began with the assumption that modern societies experienced a drastic disruption through the appearance of new media technologies. In this context, Baudrillard proclaimed the dissolution of the subject, of the political economy, of meaning, of truth, and of the social formations of current societies. In order to describe and analyze these processes, new theories, terms, and narrations were needed. Baudrillard's own contribution to the theory of media thus started with the statement: "The real radical alternative is somewhere else." (Baudrillard 1978, 83). Indeed, this alternative approach, one which asks to reflect on the implications of new media and technology, is to be found somewhere else: in cyberpunk literature.

I argue that cyberpunk should be seen as an important companion to media theories, both in terms of artistic expression and in terms of a method of knowledge production by itself, including its theorization. When I speak about cyberpunk literature I refer to a specific body of work written by authors who gathered in the late 1970s in Austin, Texas (Gözen 2012). Thus cyberpunk literature implies a body of work that revolutionized science fiction writing. This revolution was spearheaded by authors such as Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, John Shirley, Lewis Shiner, Rudy Rucker, and Pat Cadigan. This group published their criticism of the science fiction of their time in the fanzine Cheap Truth and in the preface of the cyberpunk anthology

Mirrorshades, which could be seen as the cyberpunk manifesto – the discursive foundation for a newly forming movement.

At the time, 'technical culture' began sprawling into everyday life due to advancements in computers, media, and bio- and medical technologies. This formed the basis for the movement. "Technology [...] has slipped control and reached street level," states Bruce Sterling. "For the cyberpunks [...] technology is visceral. It is not the bottled genie of remote Big Science boffins," he continues, but is rather "pervasive, utterly intimate. Not outside us, but next to us. Under our skin; often, inside our minds" (346).

The aim of cyberpunk was to reflect on these technological advancements in an artistic way, and to engage with the way they alter the human being and society at large.

These kinds of thoughts and observations are also the basis of many theoretical media approaches. Marshall McLuhan, one of the founders of media theory, claims in his writings that media and technology are interfering with our perception, senses, psyche, and identity. By doing so, they change our behavior, our culture, our societies, and our politics. The basic architecture of electronic media mimics our own central nervous system, and hence technically extends it. It is now very interesting to see that cyberpunk incorporates this idea when drafting future worlds and, by doing so, pushes it further.

By designing fictional virtual worlds that are accessed through an interface with the human brain, the extension of the human nervous system through an electric central system becomes as much a reality as the McLuhan-postulated dissolution of the subject-object-relation between man and machine.

McLuhan's category of implosion also plays a significant role in the extrapolated worlds of cyberpunk. Virtual realities as a "medium for the meeting of our minds" (Cadigan 243) not only allow its users to take part in the dreams, memories, and fantasies of others; the connection between the human mind and the machine is also used to create entertainment devices, such as, for example, Gibson's ASP, Cadigan's madcap, or Effinger's moddy, which make it possible to experience the neuroses and psychoses of others. This way, seasonal bestsellers allow societies to experience all kinds of collective madness. This inability to comprehend the difference between the inner world and the outer world, the sense of time and space and between you and me that comes with the madness of a collective psychosis is a manifestation of

McLuhan's implosion in the electronic age.

Furthermore, the main categories of Jean Baudrillard's theory—hyperreality, simulation, and implosion—are omnipresent symbolizations in the worlds of cyberpunk. This is especially the case in the superimposition of reality by simulation. In cyberpunk, physical presence has lost its relevance. Instead, virtual worlds frame a new realm of hyperreality that offers a new home to humankind. In this context, Greg Bear's Eon is a very impressive example. In the world of Eon, Bear describes an asteroid from a parallel universe that found its way to our world around the turn of the millennium. The hollowed out asteroid contains various artificial chambers that used to be the habitat of a future humankind. In each chamber, we find a future city from a different era of the future humankind. Interestingly, the change of the interiors and architectures of the cities of the different eras demonstrate the different states of the Baudrillardian simulation. The advanced media technologies in one of the older future cities enables the contemporary peoples of Eon to immerse themselves within a virtual world that creates a simulation of the abandoned city in its former state with its inhabitants that can't possibly be distinguished from reality

"She called up a student's basic guide to the second chamber city. In an instant, Alexandria surrounded her. She appeared to be standing on the portico of an apartment in the lower floors of one of the megas, looking down on the busy streets. The illusion was perfect – even providing her with a memory of what "her" apartment looked like. She could turn her head and look completely behind her if she wished – Indeed, she could walk around, even though she knew she was sitting down." (Bear 1998, 339)

The sequence unfolding before the eyes of the user shows recordings from a future that did not take place in the user's reality and which probably will also never take place in her future, but still insist in representing a history that has already passed by. Hence, we have here a model that is both true and an illusion—in both cases, truth dissolves into simulation. In this mediated reality, sensual experiences are perfectly superimposed by the virtual, as shown by the divergence between real and simulated experiences of space and body. Digital signs replace the tactility of reality with a field of tactile simulations.

In the final city of the future there is no longer a medial environment, but rather a humankind that has itself become a simulation: The whole of humankind is digitalized and lives in a computer called City Memory.

Death and natural birth are no longer present in this digitized world. A new person or subject is created by the merger of various parts of digital personalities – which means that every new being is a simulation based on the code of already existing models. While these models in the analog world used to be DNA codes, in the digitalized world of Eon, the models consist of bits and bytes. Nevertheless, it is still possible to live outside the City Memory. The 'outside' environment of the city memories' virtual world is composed of a space without contours so that landscapes, apartments, objects, and even climate features can be projected onto it. If one wants to move in the outside parts of the city simulation, bodies could be created and used.

However, these bodies have nothing to do with "natural" human bodies. These bodies are equipped with an implant that records all experiences and memories, just in case something might happen to them. Hence, even death does not have a significant impact on the physical or the virtual existence of a person. In Baurillard's words, this means that in the world of cyberpunk, even death, fails to serve as a distinction between the real and the imaginary.

The future shows that the difference between illusion and truth lost ground to the play with reality. The simulation is omnipresent; even if there is a body, it only contains digitalized and uploaded minds.   The Baudrillardian dictum of self-referential signs finds itself radicalized here: A humankind based on digital bits and bytes that have merged into the endless circulation of signs referring to themselves becomes a model without an origin and eventually a sign in and of itself. In its final stage, the future society of Eon could be understood as the ultimate reign of the technical as humankind itself becomes the most radical form of simulation.

In his novel *Halo*, Tom Maddox not only processed aspects of Baudrillard's idea of simulation, he even opens his book with a quote from America by Jean Baudrillard: "Everything is destined to reappear as simulation" (8).

Similar to Gibson in *Neuromancer*, Maddox describes an omnipresent and almost omnipotent artificial intelligence. This artificial intelligence, known as Aleph, has used its inherent potential to control all transmission systems to build a city in orbit, whose reality it will henceforth simulate. The initial reality of the dark orbital city without contours and atmosphere disappears through Aleph's simulation behind a constantly repeating spring and a media-generated blue sky. In Halo City, therefore, the technically mediated experience of the world has quite obviously become a new reality, and the entire system created by Aleph represents a gigantic simulacrum in

the Baudrilliardiansense.

In many cyberpunk worlds, the advanced merger of technology and nature also shows itself in the fact that natural phenomena can no longer be perceived and conceptualized separately from technology. Gibson opens his debut novel with a highly significant sentence: "The sky above the port was the colour of television, tuned to a dead channel" (Gibson 1984, 9).

With this description of a technical condition, used as a metaphor to describe nature, the reader is introduced to a world where a total implosion between nature and technology had taken place. In the highly technical worlds of cyberpunk literature, nature is understood as part of the technologies surrounding man. The American literary scholar Lance Olsen describes the frequent use of technological images as a metaphor for describing nature as follows: "If the romantic metaphor makes nature familiar and technology unfamiliar, these postmodern metaphors make nature unfamiliar and technology familiar." (Gözen 293)

Now the question arises—is cyberpunk simply a literarization of the media theories of McLuhan and Baudrillard, or is there more to it? A close reading of Baudrillard's lecture "Videoworld and Fractal Subject" and William Gibson's short story "Fragments of a Hologram Rose"—which can be seen as the prelude to cyberpunk as a genre—might reveal an answer to this question.

Baudrillard describes the subject in the simulation of hyperreality as having been fragmented and disintegrated into its component parts. Hence, difference does not mean the difference from one subject to another, but rather, the differentiation of the subject from itself—the subject becomes fractal and is held together by a network of body prostheses. In his own words:

> transcendency disrupted into thousands of fragments, which are like pieces of a mirror, in which we fleetingly can grasp our reflection before it disappears completely. As in the fragments of a hologram each piece of the mirror contains the whole universe […] The others have practically disappeared as a sexual or social horizon […] Humankind itself became ex-orbiton, a satellite. There is nowhere to be local anymore, he is crowded out of his own body and his own functions." (Baudrillard 1978, 114)

The similarity to the imagery drawn by Gibson in his short story "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" is striking. In this story, the protagonist reflects on the events of

the day, during which his relationship has failed after he shredded a postcard with a holographic rose that was sent to him by his ex-girlfriend:

> Parker lies in darkness, recalling the thousand fragments of the hologram rose. A hologram has this quality: Recovered and illuminated, each fragment will reveal the whole image of the rose. Falling toward delta, he sees himself the rose, each of his scattered fragments revealing a whole he'll never know—stolen credit cards—a burned out suburb—planetary conjunctions of a stranger—a tank burning on a highway—a flat packet of drugs—a switchblade honed on concrete, thin as pain. Thinking: We're each other's fragments, and was it always this way? That instant of a European trip, deserted in the gray sea of wiped tape—is she closer now, or more real, for his having been there? She had helped him get his papers, found him his first job in ASP. Was that their history? No, history was the black face of the delta-inducer, the empty closet, and the unmade bed. History was his loathing for the perfect body he woke in if the juice dropped, his fury at the pedal-cab driver, and her refusal to look back through the contaminated rain. But each fragment reveals the rose from a different angle, he remembered, but delta swept over him before he could ask himself what that might mean. (Gibson 1977)

Not only is it remarkable that Gibson uses the hologram as a metaphor for a world steeped by hyperreality and its fragmented subjects, but also remarkable is that he did this in 1977—eleven years before Baudrillard. Hence, we can see that cyberpunk writers such as Gibson not only made similar observations about their current world as theorists such as Baudrillard, but also that the terms, symbols, metaphors, and aesthetics they use are practically superimposable. These writers use these concepts as a framework to illustrate their own understanding of the paradigm shift that took place at the end of the twentieth century. Although the concepts of McLuhan and Baudrillard appear in a mediated way, the future worlds described in Neuromancer, Mindplayers, or Schismatrix show understandable prognoses of futures based on these complex theoretical ideas. This goes to show that cyberpunk is capable of deciphering theoretical media concepts and of shifting them from the realm of theory into a world imagined.

Cyberpunk offers more than a mere fictionalization of theoretical media concepts; rather it opens up new perspectives capable of enhancing and expanding theoretical ideas. The fictional worlds of cyberpunk are as much a speculation

about the world to come as the theories themselves. But while Baudrillard was accused of having lost his focus as he began to draw a rather dystopian image of the technological future—an apocalyptic version of "Western civilization"—cyberpunk can be seen as more dynamic and differentiated. While Baudrillard's postmodern world seems plain, rational, and without surprises, the worlds of cyberpunk seem alive, mysterious, adventurous, and full of risks but also opportunities. That said, cyberpunk is not naively technophile, but instead manages to show both sides of the age of media technology, the negative and the positive. The acceptance of postmodern environments as exposed in cyberpunk literature is hard to come by in academic circles. Cyberpunk created a platform wherein the potentialities of a society strongly influenced by new technologies can be reflected and thought through. In this sense, writers like Gibson, Sterling, Shirley, and Shiner not only fulfilled McLuhan's demand for artists to elevate consciousness into life; rather, they went further than the theories as such. This is why cyberpunk should be seen as an important companion to media theories in the context of postmodern thinking—both as an artistic expression and as a method of knowledge production by itself, including its theorization.

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Cyberpunk in the Museum: Actuality, Future, and the Challenges of Exhibiting Movie Memorabilia

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THE young market of movie memorabilia is continuously growing, expanding on new thematic areas related to genre cinema and animation. A relatively short overview of this market highlights the lack of complete comparative price reports, as well as detailed academic analyses. The reports keep focusing on the most profitable auctions, such as the ones featuring the Delorean from *Back to the Future* (1985) or *Robby the Robot from Forbidden Planet* (1956) (Nevins, n.p.). Most of the accessible academic publications cover the initial wave of interest in movie memorabilia around the world, which was at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Chaneles; Heide and Gilman). However, it is possible to assess the scale of the success of the market browsing through soft data, for example by juxtaposing the prices of movie memorabilia with fine art auctions over the years.

Together with increasing sales of memorabilia, the collectors organize exhibitions, aiming at reconsidering the notions of art and the possibility of introducing popular culture to the museums and galleries. Also, the exhibiting movie memorabilia raises the question of the aesthetic value of popular-art-related objects. An example of such an exhibition is the DC Exhibition: Dawn of Superheroes, which was shown among others in Łódź, Poland, and London, UK. In this context, it is symptomatic that the objects connected to film and animation changed their functions. Once, they were parts of scenography and popular culture, but now, they are displayed in the museums, considered as legitimate art. I leave the question on the sources of interest in movie memorabilia open, as the answer needs thorough sociological research, which exceeds the subject range of this article.

This paper stems from the experience of designing a concept of cyberpunk movie memorabilia exhibition that I developed together with Marek Kasperski, the owner of the Art Komiks gallery located in Warsaw, Poland (Kasperski, n.p.). Art Komiks administers the collection of over 300 objects classified as cyberpunk art, gathered by Polish collectors from auctions around the world. The collection contains objects

related to cult titles, such as Ghost in the Shell (1995-2017; both animation and live-action film), as well as less-known titles from world cyberpunk—among the plethora of titles—*New Hurricane Polymar* (animation, 1996), *Magnus, Robot Fighter* (comic books franchise; 1963-2014), or *Eat-Man* (1997).

In this article, I am going to present the substantive issues related to the process of designing a cyberpunk movie memorabilia exhibition, as well as comment on the intermedia relations between the objects in the context of the overall concept of the display. It is worth adding that some of the ideas related to the exhibition narrative path were based on the findings presented in my book *Japanese Cyberpunk: From Avant-garde Transgressions to Popular Cinema*.

New Museology and Cyberpunk Movie Memorabilia

Modern museums search for unusual objects to gain a contemporary audience's attention and, at the same time, create an interactive experience with (potential) educational values. It creates a situation in which the exhibitions are planned under measurable factors, such as potential income from tickets sold, attendance, and media response (i.e., journalists' or bloggers' reviews, number of views of the photo galleries published on Facebook and Instagram). Barron and Leask observe that museums are significant elements of cultural tourism, designed to be effective in gaining recognition and publicity. Researchers underline that institutions often ensure their future by, among other factors, enhancing the viewer's engagement (Baron and Leask, 1-2). The value of novelty and shock, as well as the visible and easily recognizable connections to popular culture, diversify the audience, inviting to the exhibition space those who are not usually engaged in fine art displays. This wave of interest in expanding the notions of traditional art opens up an opportunity for movie memorabilia, comic art, and popular culture-related objects, such as bootleg art.

In this context, cyberpunk movie memorabilia and other art (comic book sketches, animation frames, photos, bootleg art, etc.) once perceived only as parts of cyberpunk narratives, changed their function. Now, away from the film scenography, the objects can be recognized by the contemporary viewer as sources of prophetic memory about the future and simultaneously gaining cult status because of their universal message. Movie memorabilia depicted in an art gallery can also be considered as a

legitimate art, encouraging philosophical reflections about social development. It opens new research perspectives on the functions and objects exhibited in modern museums, expanding the definition of contemporary museology.

Collecting Cyberpunk Objects

Situating cyberpunk objects in the broader context of popular culture art collections, it should be noticed that they can be classified as movie memorabilia, comic art, game art, video games, books, autographs (i.e., autographed objects) and bootleg art. The collectors can reach a variety of forms through obtaining the objects from several different sources, such as auctions, directly from the authors, or the other private collectors. The uniqueness of the collection administered by Art Komiks stems from the model of support of the project, which is based on the contributions of the Polish private collectors, willing to lend the objects for the exhibitions.

As Marek Kasperski pointed out in a podcast about popular culture recorded for Deloitte (Kotecki), the process of building a collection of cyberpunk objects is related to a broader trend of collecting movie memorabilia, which is connected to the dynamics of income distribution between fans of popular culture narratives. Popular culture artifacts associated with nostalgia and trending superheroes universes for younger generations are gradually replacing the need of collecting fine art. Also, in the case of popular culture art, the act of building one's own collection is less associated with gathering valuable possessions and increasing one's material status. Instead, obtaining such objects is related to the need for the embodiment of passion towards particular narratives, heroes, or themes. Accordingly, the interest in the specific kinds of memorabilia varies – from the higher interest of the foreign customers in transnational cyberpunk narratives to the lower interest in local cyberpunk (for example the comic art created by Polish artists brings most attention from Polish fans and collectors).

Cyberpunk Exhibition Design

While designing the exhibition on cyberpunk, we found it essential to group the objects according to themes they covered, to provide the viewer with a clear, understandable path. Consequently, we divided the objects according to three main themes that reappear in cyberpunk narratives.

The first one revolves around the depictions of machines, androids, and cyber bodies, focusing on the protagonists under and after transgressive body metamorphosis. The impact of technology on human life, both in the context of the physical changes and the possibility of mental immersion in the virtual world, was the issue reappearing in the first literary cyberpunk narratives. The connection of the body to the machine, which became the basis of the intermedia genre, took various forms: from mechanical prostheses, replaceable organs, and under-skin hardware to interference in the brain. Cyborgizations were also a perfectly personalized, fancy arsenal of weapons attached to the user. In cyberpunk, the fusion of the body with the machine exceeds the limitations imposed by the imperfection and instability of biological tissue. The user strives for the ultimate defeat of death by improving physical capabilities or diving into cyberspace, thus leaving the imperfect body behind. Cyberpunk's technology penetrates the biological tissue and leads to the disappearance of what the viewer recognizes under the concept of humanity. The protagonist of cyberpunk narratives uses the benefits of technological development, knowing that by bonding with the machine at the same time, he moves away from society, alienates from reality, and becomes the Other. An integral element of the fusion of man and machine is the terror of metamorphosis, the pain that accompanies the act of attaching the technological extensions to the biological organism. The appearance of an android reflects the possibility of comparing the determinants of human and machine existence, i.e., recognizing the features that distinguish an organic being from a mechanical one. This comparison also arouses the obsessive desire of conscious androids to confirm their existence by understanding what the soul is and whether an artificial creature can discover it.

According to the specter of works we (ArtKomiks gallery) have in the collection, we mostly focused on the terror of connecting biological tissue with mechanical cyber-improvements, at the same time discussing the new possibilities and powers gained by the characters. In this section, we also highlighted the place of the mechanical Other (android) in society. Here, among the objects we displayed, there is the head of the post-exploded android from Ghost in the Shell live-action film (2017) and animation art referring to this universe (i.e., the frames depicting the main character, Major Kusanagi's mechanical body disintegration), Eric Canete's covers from Cyborg comic books, Genocyber (1994) animation art or Tetsuo the Iron Man bootleg art created by Jaibantoys.

CYBERPUNK IN THE MUSEUM

The second thematic area is focused on cyberspace and the world inside the computer. Here the narrative path followed such themes as the escapist nature of virtual surroundings or the moment of entering cyberspace and separating an imperfect biological body from an immaterial personality, thus introducing the dilemma of the existence of the soul and the Absolute. The division of the world into real and virtual has its roots in Jean Baudrillard's reflections on a society immersed in simulations, wandering in hyper-reality, and manipulated by the media. The cyberpunk concept of cyberspace, inspired, among other things, by Baudrillard's thoughts, was formulated and presented for the first time in the story "True Names "(1981) by Vernor Vinge. Since then, the vision of a cyber-world inside the Net has evolved, being successively developed with new plots showing the immaterial existence of a future man. The objects displayed in this section are, among others, photos from *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) signed by Keanu Reeves, photos and the Atari game from *TRON* (1982) or comic art related to such titles as *Magnus Robot Fighter* (1963, reintroduced in 2010), *Barb Wire* (1994-1995), *Godzilla: Cataclysm* (2014) and *Gall Force* (1995).

Furthermore, the third section was dedicated to the depictions of a dystopian, futuristic city, including interior design. We underlined that a cyberpunk dystopia is a place of confrontation of corporations, subcultures, and residents of the criminal underworld. Despite technological development, a large proportion of the city's future residents exist under challenging conditions, struggling with addictions and poverty. It turns out that advanced cyber implants only improve the lives of the privileged. Postindustrial dystopia, in which governments have fallen, and corporations have gained most of the decisive power, shows visible similarities to the reality behind the screen. As the plot of cyberpunk narratives takes place in the near future, the viewer recognizes fashion, architecture, and digital solutions, which they know perfectly well. The fall of order and social structures frightens, but also attracts with the mysterious beauty of the dark streets inhabited by the future man. The design of dystopia is a combination of space settlements, underground cities, and a vision of post-apocalyptic Earth after an atomic disaster, which is perfectly depicted by Severio Tenuta in his comic art from Heavy Metal, Dublin 2077 or by Syd Mead's art.

Those three themes can be found in most cyberpunk narratives, though they function as a core for further thematic developments in the context of more prominent

exhibitions. For example, the section about future landscape can be accompanied by insight into a dystopian fashion, not only highlighting film costumes from *Ghost in the Shell*, which we have in the collection, or weapons (i.e., a machine gun from *Aeon Flux*), but also depicting the comic sketches of the inhabitants of future cities.

Cyberpunk Brands and Exhibition Path

On the level of recognition, cyberpunk artworks can be divided into those classified as big names, such as *Ghost in the Shell* or *RoboCop*, and less-known cyberpunk TV series or local comic art. Having in the collection examples of both categories, it is crucial to successfully merge the interest that the viewer will express towards the recognizable names with the artistic value that less-known narratives often offer. However, the big names will bring the most media attention and can serve as an incentive for potential media partners.

The appearance of big cyberpunk names should be considered while designing the narrative path based on the relations between the chosen objects and highlighted themes. For the viewers with partial knowledge about the genre, the media narratives (or the plots) associated with particular objects seem less important than the overall aesthetics of cyberpunk and the balance between the recognition of big names and the act of discovering less-known objects. Analyzing the practical implementations of exhibition design in several new media museums (i.e., in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, and Poland), we contend that it could be discouraging for the viewer to read and learn every narrative separately and with a detailed plot. In this case, we adopted the approach in which the objects themselves tell the stories according to their placement in relation to each other.

Intermedia Relations

It is worth underlining that media franchise titles such as *Ghost in the Shell* are accompanied by various kinds of objects (costumes, photos, drafts and sketches, props), whose presence underlines the intermedia relations within cyberpunk productions. Accordingly, we suggest that a narrative path should be based on clear connections, revolving around the variety of forms. For example, a cyberpunk weapon (accessory) and a sketch depicting this weapon or a frame showing a scene of using it can be showcased together.

We listed two elements that can underline the intermedia character of cyberpunk narratives, at the same time fulfilling the need for a clear exhibition path and creating a unique 'cyberpunkish' atmosphere. The first one is the influence on the audience and recognizability of a particular object. Mostly, it is the costume or a prop that appeared in the well-known film, which can be associated with the viewer with cult status. Also, the presence of 3-D objects (together with sketches and photos) draws attention to the production process. Furthermore, the second element is the meaning of the prop and its actual value, often enriched by an author's signature or a certificate of authentication. We for example have *Blade Runner*'s script signed by Rutger Hauer in the collection.

The Viewer

We are aware that the contemporary viewer, if they are not a fan of the cyberpunk genre, may not recognize all the authors, connections, and themes presented at the exhibition. Therefore, more than focusing on teaching people about cyberpunk's visions in different media, we count on building a unique mood.

In this case, the cyberpunk movie memorabilia exhibition becomes a physical implementation of the conception of media diffusion in cyberpunk discourse. The variety of the gathered objects encourages the meditation on the character of modern times and the futuristic visions that became a palpable reality. For the viewer, cyberpunk narratives will function as the points of reference to fulfilled prophecies about the future. Entering the exhibition space filled with the artifacts from the cyber-world, the observer experiences the embodied futuristic dreams, or, referring to Baudrillard's terminology, a heterotopia – an area on the verge of reality and imagination. In the optics of cyberpunk narratives, the technological solutions and aesthetics familiar to the viewer through their daily experiences are distorted, monstrous, and derived from their original context.

Cyberpunk movie memorabilia exhibitions show the manifestation of various names and media in cyberpunk discourse. The diversity of the collected objects allows the viewer to reflect on the nature of our times when visions of the future became a tangible present. Entering the exhibition, the observer gets familiar with films, comics, and game narratives currently functioning not only as a record of the creators' imagination but also as a reference point to the prophetic visions of the development of modern societies. Futuristic objects and mechanical creations appropriating the body and perception of the individual reflect the everyday experiences of the observer, creating comparisons between the contemporary world

and cyberpunk narratives. The exhibition of film memorabilia allows the viewer to confront the designed shape of futuristic visions by comparing it with what is known and familiar to them. Emphasizing the terror of transformation into a mechanical being, or recalling the post-apocalyptic character of the future, the creators of cyberpunk narratives are forcing the observer to verify contemporary social changes. Approaching cyberpunk aesthetics, we are balancing between technophobia and technophilia, unable to free ourselves from the need for creating comparisons.

Conclusion

The objects gathered within the collection, once treated as integral elements of cyberpunk narratives, have become records of the memory of the futuristic visions, striking the viewer with their universal character. At present, the fact of viewing the cyberpunk set of objects in the art gallery allows us to perceive them as a legitimate part of contemporary culture.

The successful merge of the exhibiting patterns reserved for fine art with popular culture objects opens a new field for discussion about the archiving and preservation of memory about contemporary media products. Also, the actuality presented in cyberpunk narratives, together with the excessive interest in the genre, expanded by the upcoming premiere of the *Cyberpunk 2077* digital game, creates a need for revising the exhibition concept. The fact of showing cyberpunk movie memorabilia on display is a proposal addressed to two generations of viewers: those who seek for a nostalgic journey into the narratives from the beginnings of cyberpunk and those who have already started discovering the genre, encouraged by the newest productions.

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Ontology of the Hologram: Gothic Tropes and the Ontological Transgressions of Technoscience

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SCIENCE fiction often provides the lexicon through which we make sense of the novel and the unfamiliar. Damien Broderick has expertly written about science fiction "icons," such as the robot or the spaceship, which recur frequently in science fiction but whose valences change with each appearance. These icons also enter into popular culture, where they serve as reference points for the unknown, and cyberpunk has furnished some of the most recognizable images among them: its futuristic cityscapes, neon lights, and holograms are among the most familiar of visual aesthetics.

It has been striking, then, to trace the discourses around modern-day hologram technologies in light of this fact. Today, holograms proliferate swiftly in the music industry to bring musicians back from the dead and send them on tour. Or, rather, what is created in this way are simulacra: motion-capture photography is used to record the movements of a body double that forms the basis for a 3D digital model, which is then overlaid with a likeness of the artist in question taken from videos. During a "live" performance, this simulacrum goes through a set of pre-programmed motions, lip-synching to recordings of the artist's voice. Science fiction, and cyberpunk in particular, offers no shortage of reference points to describe this technology; *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Altered Carbon*, and *Blade Runner* are but a handful among dozens. So why is it, then, that contemporary media tends to speak of holograms in terms of ghosts and resurrections, describing, for example, the "uneasy pallor" of a hologram "insubstantial like a ghost struggling to fully materialize"? (Binelli) That is, why are the registers of the Gothic, rather than allusions to science fiction, drawn on?

While the absence of science-fictional references in texts about such an "obviously" cyberpunk technology at first seems incongruous, historically the Gothic has often offered a set of conceits and tropes for exploring the distinctions between the categories of life and death, presence and absence, identity and imitation, which

cyberpunk continues to interrogate. Scholars have noted that the similarities between Gothic and cyberpunk fiction go "far beyond the perceived surface aesthetics of both narrative modes to the core questions of being human and becoming posthuman," (Heise-von der Lippe 265). But more than just a shared interest with cyberpunk in metaphysical questions and the production of emotional affect, however, the Gothic also has a history of engaging with these metaphysical questions specifically as a response to new technologies or scientific discoveries that challenge the distinctions between fundamental ontological categories of life, death, and identity. And holograms, in creating the illusion of bringing the dead back to life with perfect precision, seem to transgress our most fundamental ontological categories, pushing against the boundaries between life and death, and the idea of the unique self, that form the foundational truths of our reality. Modern-day coverage of this technology that mines Gothic tropes of ghosts and hauntings, grotesque reanimation and soulless revenants, then, inscribes itself into this history. In this article, I'm interested in more brightly illuminating that history and, in the process, shedding light on another facet of Gothic's close relationship with cyberpunk, and the sources of the significant intersections between the two forms.

Frankenstein

I begin at an obvious beginning: *Frankenstein*, which has been heralded as the text that invented science fiction and given the genre a number of its fundamental icons and tropes. It forged these, however, by drawing on the Gothic to deal with metaphysical questions on the nature of life and death. Gothic monsters, by their very nature, push against neat ontological categories: ghosts and revenants of all sort challenge the neat delineations between life and death, while doubles and doppelgangers challenge distinctions between self and other, presence and absence, and the uniqueness of human identity. Frankenstein's monster fits into this lineage: the genesis of the fiction goes back to a storytelling contest among Mary and Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, John Polidori, and Claire Clairemont at the Villa Diodati—a contest in which they were challenged to write a ghost story, a popular genre in the nineteenth century.

Of course, Frankenstein's monster is no ghost, but he is something of a revenant, and Shelley's inspiration was the question of the source of life; as she recounts in an introduction to the novel, at the Villa Diodati "many philosophical doctrines were

discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life" (293). She alludes, too, to galvanism, a scientific practice of the day that explored the source of life by pushing at the boundaries between it and death. At its simplest, galvanism refers to the stimulation of muscles with pulses of electrical current. Supposedly, in the 1780s, Luigi Galvani discovered that he could make the muscles of a dead frog twitch by applying electricity. This discovery took off, with many scientists replicating Galvani's experiment upon the corpses of both animals and humans, including a famous public demonstration by Galvani's nephew Giovanni Aldini in 1803, during which he electrically stimulated the limbs of the executed criminal George Foster at Newgate in London. The application of electrical current made the cadaver move and twitch, giving an impression of life and vitality where there was none. Through such experiments, Galvani, Aldini, and their followers were raising the question of the vital force that animates human beings by pushing at ontological boundaries and creating uncanny visions of corpses animated by some kind of unearthly force.

This was Shelley's first vision for the novel: a "student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together," which stirs "with an uneasy, half vital motion" (293). Consequently, like the surgeons and galvanists of the period, and like the group discussing "philosophical doctrines" at the Villa Diodati, Frankenstein investigates the source of life. He "collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame," (80) and upon discovering that secret, the monster is literally animated by that knowledge. The creature thus incarnates—again, literally—Frankenstein's transgression, through science, of the boundaries between life and death, and is defined by his duality. He is technically a cyborg, an organic body artificially brought to life through scientific practice, a fact made explicit by Shelley's extensive references to the discoveries of the day and which situate Frankenstein as a scientist, not a magician, and render his creation an enduring icon of science fiction. But the creature is also a Gothic monster. He has the grotesqueness of one: "dull yellow eyes," a "shriveled complexion," and pearly teeth that form a "horrid contrast with his water eyes," such that Frankenstein, "unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created," is filled with "breathless horror and disgust" (85). But mostly, the creature is monstrous because he is a corpse brought to life, a walking and breathing transgression of the categories of life and death, not unlike the bodies that populate Gothic fiction, which are "intrinsically uncanny . . . threshold phenomena precariously suspended between materiality and

immateriality" (Cavallero, 270).

In other words, the original cyborg is a Gothic monster, and with this lineage in mind, we might read cyberpunk as a high-tech Gothic – as a kind of translation into a different mode of a gaze already turned onto the scientific investigation of questions of life and death.[1] In fact, Veronica Hollinger has argued that *Frankenstein* "has been transformed into a precursor text of cyberculture" (192); it "draws attention to how the infinite possibilities of technoscientific creation tend to destabilize human individuality and our sense of self, origin, and purpose" (270). Cyberpunk, with its visions of uploaded, downloaded, and duplicated consciousnesses, artificial intelligences, fragmented identities, holograms, and interchangeable bodies, deals with the transgression of normative categories and ontological boundaries that the Gothic has long investigated with its ghosts, its hauntings, its resurrected corpses and reanimated beings. To upload a consciousness is another form of animation, in the literal sense of the word: to breathe life into a being, to ensoul it, and just as Frankenstein became "capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter," (77) the question of whether an artificial, uploaded, digitized, or copied consciousness possesses a "soul," or something of the essence of the original, is a metaphysical question cyberpunk frequently wrestles with.[2]

This lineage illuminates the rhetoric used around holographic technologies today; the ghosts and revenants we find in it are like Frankenstein's monster, a reaction to metaphysical questions raised by technoscientific discoveries. The *New York Times Magazine* article quoted above, titled "Old Musicians Never Die. They Just Become Holograms," bluntly acknowledges this fact, stating that "using technology to blur the line between the quick and the dead tends to be a recipe for dystopian science fiction." This is the one reference to science fiction throughout the article, and it draws attention to the transgression of ontological categories inherent within holograms, a transgression that also resides within Frankenstein's creature. Later in the article, Mark Binelli describes the process of creating holograms: "motion-capture photography records the performance of a body double, which becomes the basis for a three-dimensional digital model, a block of clay animators proceed to modify." "Animator" of course refers here to the digital animation industry, but the word's original root is the Latin anima, meaning soul; to animate is then to ensoul, or, more metaphorically, to breathe life into. This is Frankenstein's original power: he describes his ability to bring a being to life by stating "I possessed the capacity

of bestowing animation," (78) and he proceeds to "animate the lifeless clay" (80). The word clay, of course, has multiple religious connotations, harkening back to the creation of Adam; it casts Frankenstein in the role of a man playing god, attempting to ensoul an inanimate being. As Binelli refers to the "block of clay animators proceed to modify," then, he harkens back to this lineage of Gothic monsters and re-animated corpses responding to galvanism's transgressive practices.

Another evocative description is that of "the lifeless eyes of a corpse propped up between living people," offered by Binelli to describe a holographic Frank Zappa concert. Again, the reference to a lifeless corpse recalls both galvanism and Frankenstein's creature, as a cadaver is forced to move and act unnaturally through electricity (though, in this case, it is not electric current stimulating the muscles, but it is electricity enabling the projection of the hologram). But it is also reminiscent of the fictions of Edgar Allan Poe, who was familiar with the practices of galvanism and mesmerism and drew on them for his Gothic fictions of reanimation and resurrection. A handful of years after Frankenstein's revised edition (1830), he published "The Fall of the House of Usher," (1840) in which the dead Madeline Usher literally rises from her coffin, and "Ligeia," (1838) in which the spirit of the narrator's eponymous beloved appears to animate the corpse of his second wife; in "The Strange Case of M. Valdemar," (1845) meanwhile, a dead body is kept from decomposing for months through mesmerism. Poe, who struggled with death and loss throughout his tragically short life, was obviously fascinated by the distinctions between life and death, and his fiction repeatedly pushed at those boundaries with hypotheticals that toed the line between scientific and supernatural. Contemporary rhetoric around holograms reveals a similar oscillation between technical explanation and Gothic modes of description in its interrogation of similar boundaries.

The Castle of the Carpathians

The second text I examine is not a work of science fiction, but a Gothic one with close ties to the genre. Penned in 1892 by Jules Verne, who by that point had gained widespread fame for his *Extraordinary Voyages*, which laid the groundwork for much science fiction to come, the Castle of the Carpathians is one of those tales in which supernatural effects turn out to have rational explanations—not unlike Frankenstein's monster, whose grotesque and uncanny being is made possible by

scientific research. And in this novel, as in Frankenstein, a Gothic trope—this time of the ghost in a haunted castle—is used to explore what was understood at the period to be an ontologically transgressive technology: the phonograph.

Invented in 1877 by Thomas Edison (though Charles Cros has also been given credit, but he did not provide a working model), the phonograph was articulated as a technology that could allow the dead to speak. The New York Sun, for example, upon a demonstration of the phonograph published an article titled "Echoes of Dead Voices," writing that "Nothing could be more incredible than the likelihood of once more hearing the voice of the dead, yet the invention of the new instrument is said to render this possible hereafter…." In other words, the phonograph was an ontologically transgressive medium, giving voice to the dead and thus allowing them to appear and speak as if alive, and The Castle of the Carpathians realizes this vision of the new medium. The story begins by fully embracing Gothic convention, with Count Franz de Telek finding himself in a mysterious, secluded castle, where he first sees the apparition of his former lover, the dead singer La Stilla, and then hears her voice with "all of its inflections, its inexpressible charm, its modulations – in a word, her voice that was the instrument of that marvelous talent that seemed to have died with the artist herself" (179).[3] Her first appearance is described as a "vague form," (161) then an "apparition," (162) dressed in the same clothes she wore upon her death. Consequently, Franz is convinced that Stilla is somehow, inexplicably, alive, but as it turns out, the inventor Orfanik has been projecting her image and playing a high-quality phonograph recording of her voice. In other words, in a tale that participates fully and explicitly in the conventions of the Gothic, the phonograph is used to realize the genre's trope of the ghost and the haunting; moreover, because the illusion is so realistic that Franz believes that Stilla is alive, the phonograph is able to explode the distinction between alive and dead.

This, again, strikingly resembles how holograms are represented today: just as the New York Sun wrote of being able to speak "long after we have turned to dust," the New York Times describes artist Ronnie James Dio's preparations for his first tour in a decade even though he "has been dead for almost 10 years" (Binelli). Rolling Stone writes of a hologram of Frank Zappa that "the apparition truly looked like an otherworldly version of Frank" (Grow); The Guardian titles their article on the subject "Back to Life," and NPR uses the similar title "Raising the Dead – and a Few Questions – with Maria Callas' Hologram." Wired, in a lengthy piece on

bringing celebrities "back to life," uses the word "resurrection" nine times. There is an obvious history here: as the Vox piece on the hologram "controversy" about bringing dead artists back details, modern-day holograms are really a version of the "Pepper's Ghost" technology, which uses a sheet of glass and reflections to create a spectral-looking figure which was used to add a ghost to a nineteenth-century staging of a Dickens play. As *Wired* points out, this technology "provided a vehicle for the Victorian-era obsession with the supernatural" (Famurewa) at a time when Spiritualism was at its height, but I argue that the story behind the rhetoric used in these pieces goes far beyond the explicit allusions to this tellingly named technology. It is, once again, an attempt to call on Gothic tropes to theorize a medium that explodes ontological categories and distinctions, as was done a century earlier to articulate the uncanniness of the phonograph.

Conclusion

Today, recorded sound (and its twin, photography, which in the nineteenth century was seen as uncanny for its ability to produce a perfect double of an individual) have seeped into our lives so profoundly as to become unremarkable. Neither old photographs nor vinyl recordings provoke extreme feelings of existential anxiety. This is due, in part, to technical improvements: shorter exposure time in photography, for example, means there is no longer the appearance of ghosts due to motion blur. But it is also familiarity: we inevitably adapt to the transgressive ontologies of new technologies and mediums even as we maintain a commitment to the distinctions between fundamental categories such as alive and dead. So, as we wrestle with what it means to reincarnate someone via hologram, I suggest that this technology, too, will one day cease to seem so uncanny, and soon enough, Gothic registers will fade from mainstream discussions of it to be marshalled, instead, in service of articulating the newest ontologically transgressive technology or medium —such as, for example, brain implants that replace our smartphones. In this sense, cyberpunk is already ahead of the curve (as science fiction often is), drawing on the Gothic to engage with technologies and mediums that are far ahead of our present capabilities: cloned bodies, uploaded consciousness, and copied minds are its uncanny doubles and ghostly resurrections.

Notes

1. In this respect, scholars have suggested the term posthuman Gothic, or alternatively cybergothic, to describe cyberpunk fictions that "destabilize ingrained readings and patterns, challenging our understanding of what it means to be human" (Heise-von der Lippe 265).

2. There are other ways this translation might be seen as occurring: the duplication of consciousness and its insertion into multiple bodies is a high-tech version of the Gothic double. And, if posthumanism is about decentering the human, then nineteenth-century monsters, representing anxieties of atavism and evolutionary throwbacks to our more animalistic selves, are a lower-tech decentering of the human.

3. All translations of Verne from the French are mine.

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"The (Cyber) Center Cannot Hold": Futures, Bodies and Minds in William Gibson's *The Peripheral*

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IN *The Peripheral* (2014), William Gibson revisits in a dystopian, or maybe utopian, mode issues such as alternative communities, the possibilities that technology offers for transcendence (not least importantly that of the body itself), and the effect on individuals of hyper-technologized post-late capitalist societies. Gibson goes back to the familiar space of the über-modern city as a locale for his fiction, while also advancing ecological concerns and hypotheses on the effects of an environmental, economic, and political apocalypse. The move "from a predictive style of science fiction to contemporary fiction" in Gibson (Griffith 44) emphasizes the connection in his writing between the present and imagined futures, since as he has declared, "[w]ithout a sense of how weird the present is—how potentially weird the present is— it became impossible for me to judge how much weirder I should try to make an imagined future" (Dayal).

This move seems to contradict Gibson's association with cyberpunk,1 a genre which carries with it a "bleak perception of the possibility of agency" (Wilson 91). I would like to argue, however, that Gibson is still writing within the genre, and that the potential for connection between privileged and under-privileged individuals through technology is at the core of Gibson's novel. In this sense, *The Peripheral* does use what has been called the "sentimental endings" (Elias) preferred by Gibson, and as Paul Graham Raben suggests, it is a "standard Gibson . . . suggesting a benchmark of quality, certainly, but also that trustworthy familiarity of form that accrues to any consistently reliable brand." This familiarity, however, also suggests the possibility of change by allowing the disfranchised to be in charge of their own bodies and destinies.

The Peripheral is set in two different future times, seventy years apart, the first of which is the second's past. In the later one, early 22nd century London is an extreme late-capitalist society, a mixture of "post-humanism and globalized military-industrial technological complex ruled solely by the logic of finance capitalism" (Elias), after the

apocalypse known as the Jackpot has taken place. This Jackpot is a combination of "unchecked climate disaster, worldwide financial collapse, rampant disease outbreak, and ubiquitous social breakdown after the crackup of all nation-states" (Elias), and it has wiped eighty percent of the Earth's population. Those who have survived did so by using "assemblers" (advanced nanotechnology bots) to rebuild cities, which has provided for efficient, eco-friendly cities which are, nonetheless, mostly empty. In this 22nd century future, "peripherals" (remotely controlled enhanced cyborgs avatars) can be used as protection or disguise. These surrogate bodies are a commodity, and the most advanced models can only be afforded by the wealthy. Personal security can be ensured by using the peripherals to interact from the safety of a distant location.

In the second future we find a piece of rural America in the 2030s, which Gibson has defined as a "a more fully corrupt, third-worlded version of contemporary America" ("William Gibson"). There, bodies are less a commodity than a burden, with impoverished army veterans suffering constant neural pain from malfunctioning haptic implants or having very limited control of their bodies due to permanent physical disabilities. The inhabitants of this timeline (or "stub") are "dependent upon (and highly proficient using) advanced technology, but under-educated and futureless, scraping a living by working in tech-industry workshops, low-end merchandise superstores, and illegal black markets" (Elias). A so-called "singularity" temporarily allows both timelines to interact, but not reciprocally. The 2100s future can talk and listen to, but not physically manipulate, their past, while inhabitants of the past, projecting their minds into the peripherals and inhabiting them, can physically interact with the future. The control of the bodies of the future by the minds of the past promises to be of benefit to both. The people in the future can profit from mental capabilities (knowledge, information and skills) of the characters in the past, while the successful use of the peripherals allows disabled veterans both the exhilarating opportunity of escaping their own limited bodies and a hefty financial reward.

My argument when it comes to what I consider a recent shift in Gibson's texts will be two-fold: first, I will explore what Gibson does to the bodies in the book, beyond Cartesian traditional divisions of body and mind, as bodies can be analyzed as commodities to be used, bought, sold, or hired in the unequal economies of the two time-lines in the text, and secondly, I will analyze how the tension between center and peripheries works, and the potential for political and social change at the end of the book.

I Sing the Body Peripheral

The Cartesian divide between body and mind is one that has worried Gibson during his entire career. His work makes us reconsider the existence of the divide itself, and also the preponderance, dependence and/or equilibrium of one and the other.

The ambivalence of cyberpunk as a genre towards the body ("its integrity, its vulnerability, even its possibility as an idea" Gutiérrez-Jones 71), and more specifically Gibson's apparent rejection of the body as "dead meat" in Neuromancer, where we are presented with "characters who seek to reject the body" (Wilson 132) seems to stage the virtual world as one of exhilarating possibility, celebrating the "bodiless exultation of cyberspace" (Gibson, *Neuromancer* 3). However, as Sherryl Vint points out, Gibson's "critics and his imitators have overstated [his] rejection of the body" (107). The rejection or, rather, transcendence of the body often carries social and political commentary in his work, and this is the case with *The Peripheral.*

In the book, the bodies of people in the past, especially those of veterans, are a burden due the failed use of technology. Malfunctioning haptic tattoos are a constant source of pain and an example of how useful technology can go awry when it goes from being useful to the machinery of war to being abandoned inside the individual. Disabled veterans, maimed by technological violence and war, are constantly reminded of their subordination to economic and political spheres and also of the government "owning" their bodies, either for sacrifice, or by leaving invasive technology in them. The relationship that people in the future have with their bodies is, however, radically different: bodies are used as "art" based on "complex embodiments of technological accumulation" (Griffith 45). Bodies are also commodified instruments for protection. Peripherals can be operated remotely, while the mind maneuvering them stays safely elsewhere but is in complete control of the peripheral's physical surroundings, a combination of ultimate safety and total control of the environment for those who can afford it. The encounter of both timelines, with minds from the past being invited to inhabit cybernetic bodies of the future, allow those in the past the thrilling liberation of their constricting bodily "meat" into apparently limitless athletic shells.

While not in such traumatic or violent ways as in Cronenberg's films, there is in Gibson a constant menace of technology entering and transforming/transcending the body. In his texts, technology can enhance and liberate the mind, but it can

also destroy the body, create addictions to different drugs that desensitize the body to specific technology, or produce constant pain. Technology can also, however, fix bodies (such as the use of medical nanobots which travel through the body repairing tissue and internal organs in *The Peripheral*), even if that body-repairing technology is connected to its origins in military operations.

The use of different bodies and avatars in The Peripheral seems to eventually be mostly positive, as they ultimately serve each character's original timelines and their communities, i.e. their reality. The poor and disabled characters in The Peripheral whose minds are being projected into other bodies are able to access abilities they no longer have, and environments they could never walk in. But they do know, no matter how exhilarating the experience may be, that this is temporary and serving a specific purpose: the time inhabiting another body may be pleasurable, but eventually, it is their own temporal "reality" that they are responsible and accountable for.

People in the future in *The Peripheral* use these cyborg bodies as tools, but they are also willing to use the minds from the past (and their skills and knowledge) as a commodity. The people from the past enter this pact, this disembodied rental of their selves, knowingly and expecting to get something in return. What they are initially hoping for is money, something they are in dire need of, but towards the end of the book they get more than they bargained for, in the form of agency given to them by the ones apparently with the power, by the future.

Present Centers, Peripheral Pasts

Even if the peripheral in the title makes reference to the cyborgs avatars in the book, there is another way in which the title of the text could be analyzed: the 22nd century future could be constructed as the center, both economically and in the sense of power and agency, with the 21st century future being the margin, the periphery. The center has wealth and technology that are not available to the periphery, and said periphery is initially only given access to technology insofar it serves the center's interests. As Gibson has noted, in *The Peripheral* the past is "third-worlded" for the profit of First-World cities ("William Gibson"). As Amy J. Elias signals, in a way this relationship could be seen as a replication of "the Colonialism that gave First-World Nations their early-modern economic hegemony . . . now located not only in space but in time" (Elias). But while this "lending" or "outsourcing" of technology to the

peripheries is a reality in our world and in literary texts, there are a number of things in *The Peripheral* that complicate the relationship between center, margins and how outsourcing technology works.

First off, in *The Peripheral* the "Other," post-colonial subjects pose no physical risk, i.e. there is no danger of their uprising or taking over the center, since the only way they can communicate with the future is by the future allowing their using the technology they provide them with. Secondly, the relationship of center and periphery is not really one of exploitation, but one of collaboration, where the periphery is given notable agency both in how they use their (borrowed) bodies and in the reward for their help. In opposition to traditional constructions of center/periphery relations, the periphery that the past is in the book is given notable agency, by providing them, "the precariat that will be wiped out when the Jackpot is unleashed" (Elias) with both money and technology. They also get knowledge in exchange for their work: all of these things could potentially help them elude the Jackpot apocalypse. One could argue that there is deception initially as to the people in the future's interests (the protagonist, Flynn, thinks that she is just being paid to play a first-person videogame, while she is actually part of a real-life surveillance program), and that some rich people in the future do "use the past as a playground and hiring pool, soliciting people from the past to work for them as an underclass labor fare" (Elias). However, in the end, giving knowledge and power to people in the past could be considered to be an entirely selfless act, since due to time-travelling paradoxes (what Gibson has defined as "forking paths" ("William Gibson"), changes in the past's reality will not affect the future we see in the book.

Gibson understands that technology itself is neutral, and it is the use of it that makes it destructive or "a universal tool for countering hegemonic power structures" (Moorwood 178). As Esko Suoranta points out, Gibson does require that we think beyond the promises of these "embodied technologies of transhumanity," and to realize that "they themselves do not dismantle oppressive systems" (18). People in the past in the book are given access to these technologies and thus to using them to try and avoid the Jackpot, but Gibson himself has expressed his "alarm at the ending . . . [where] a situation is set up such that the fate of the world literally rests on the goodwill of a very few people who can easily be corrupted by the power they yield" (Elias). Since both futures are "caught on singularities," Elias seems to side with Gibson in seeing how the potential for improvement seems not to depend on

"collective action or democratic representation," and points out the visible tension between Gibson's "rather old-fashioned humanist ethics—for which the success of social structures depends upon private, ethical decisions by self-determining individuals—and his cyberpunk vision, which implicitly asserts that human ethics is irrelevant in a world of capital" (Elias).

It is possible, however, to present Gibson's ending and the agency given to the margins in the text under a slightly more positive light, focusing not on the lack of systemic changes that Elias seems to be distressed by, but on how systemic changes may start with individuals being given the agency and responsibility to implement singular, incremental changes. I would like to emphasize the possibility of a deep empathic connection of the two humanities in their respective social context that motivates the final mutual understanding of both futures. This can be achieved by applying the change in the idea of kinship suggested among others by Judith Butler, where kinship needs not be merely biological, but rather constituted by "a sense of relatedness, mutual responsibility, and collaborative creativity, all growing out of a presumption of shared origins" (Gutiérrez-Jones 72). Gutiérrez-Jones recovers ideas by Donna Haraway, N. KatherineHayles, and Butler to talk about the performativity of kinship, i.e. kinship seen as a process of creation of relations that exists in a material context and therefore "entails some aspect of embodiment" (72). Butler also identifies in her redefinition of kinship a "shared responsibility . . . a potential for coalition, and shared performance, which generates significant creative potential" (Gutiérrez-Jones 73).

In his analysis of Gibson's *Neuromancer*, Fredric Jameson asserts that "the utopian drive [can be] an impulse of collectivity and the human being … a collective animal, perhaps something of a biological origin might be adduced for it too" (306). Jameson also signals that characters in Gibson's text "complete each other," pointing out the "collective (and thereby utopian) act" at work in Neuromancer. Jameson immediately qualifies this collective effort by emphasizing that in that text the need for collaboration is "a ruse devised by . . . two mega-computers in the service of their alliance and transfiguration" and that therefore the "utopian dimension" is displaced (Jameson 307). There is not such a ruse at work, however, at the end of The Peripheral: the act of "giving" the past a better future could be seen as a factor of a re-imagined notion of kinship that is recognized in the time (dis)continuum, and as such, the ending could work as a powerful deconstruction of the center/periphery or

metropolis/colonies configuration set up at the beginning of the text.

Timo Siivonen has signaled Gibson's tension between "technological developments and the future of humanizing," often moving in between "two opposing forces, with one expressing pessimism regarding the future of the human race, and the other evincing a certain optimism regarding the possibility of the existence of intelligent life on some level facilitated by technological development" (231). I would like to argue that, by deconstructing traditional constructions of the periphery's minds and mostly bodies as being "used" by the center, and by providing the weakest part of the equation with technology that seems to promise a better future, Gibson seems to be moving towards a certain utopian optimism. I find this assertion to be in line with Jameson's argument that literature "can serve as a registering apparatus for historical transformations we cannot otherwise empirically intuit" (Jameson 312). In The Peripheral, there is the reality of those on the margins finding their corporeal suffering temporarily reduced through technologies of virtual labor, but also the possibility of a better future once the work has been done, by being given agency and knowledge by the center. This is a testament to how non-realistic literature, such as the cyberpunk mode Gibson uses, can be political by allowing us to imagine new configurations of kinship as the first step systemic changes beyond traditional models of center v. periphery.

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Pants Scientists and Bona Fide Cyber Ninjas: Tracing the Poetics of Cyberpunk Menswear

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A TRANSLUCENT plastic raincoat on the streets of a futuristic Los Angeles. A long leather jacket, swinging into an austere foyer just before a gunfight. Mirrorshades. Spiky hair, colored neon green. Chrome. The tropes of cyberpunk fashion are well established, and it is easy to see how the mode's general aesthetic has always influenced and been influenced by personal expression in various subcultures through clothing and accessories. The tokens of anarchist self-images, like piercings and leather clothes, readily lent themselves for cyberpunk at its inception as a new movement in SF, where a dystopian, unevenly distributed future would be played out not on spaceships or distant planets but in the urban realm, the streets of the sprawl, the megalopolis. For that struggle, the cyberpunk (anti-)hero needed the clothes to boot.

In this paper, based on my presentation at the Cyberpunk Culture 2020 conference, I provide a sporadic tour of men's fashion in cyberpunk art, from literature to film to games, and read it in relation to examples of real-life cyberpunk-inspired menswear. I argue, somewhat uncontroversially, that changes in dress as part of a mode's poetics reflect changes in its politics over time and between works. I focus on menswear, rather than cyberpunk fashion in general, in the interest of uncovering a specifically male-coded, and cis-heteronormative, relationship with fashion: as I hope will become clear, much of cyberpunk-influenced menswear justifies itself with function and utility as if such features were necessary for men to participate in fashion movements. I detect a change from the lone-wolf outlaws of original cyberpunk to militarized super-hero enforcers of the current mainstream, but also present a counterpoint to both in the guise of the cool, gray cyberpunk man: a "pants science" enthusiast who combines the fantasies of individualism and a low-key presentation to the hidden, almost science-fictional, functionalities of his clothing.

These three figures emerge as male cyberpunk archetypes with their distinct looks and politics with counterparts both in fiction and on the streets today. Where

the original cyberpunk man wanted his aesthetic to scream counter-culture and opposition to "the man" of Reagan's United States, the futuristic cyber-superhero needs form and function to aid him in militarized quests on mean, dystopian streets. Finally, the contemporary, unobtrusive cyberpunk wants his outfits to be techwear of the highest quality, but without drawing too much attention to himself. As such, all three point toward what Stina Attebery calls "fashion [as] a speculative practice: a future-oriented, constantly shifting set of speculative assumptions about the future of social expression and posthuman embodiment" ("Chrome and Matte Black," see also "Fashion" in The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture). Cyberpunk menswear experiments with expanding the scope of masculine self-expression and does in ways that can be both problematic and emancipatory, as I hope becomes clear from the examples addressed below.

To get started, let us consider a spoof image from Mondo 2000, the cyberpunk culture magazine (figure 1.). With the tongue-in-cheek query "R.U. a Cyberpunk" it showcases many of the features of classic cyberpunk menswear, providing an itemized list of what a stereotypical cyberpunk should have in his inventory from spy equipment to 1990s computer paraphernalia and media devices. The model is clad in all-black-everything, wears heeled leather boots and a pilot jacket, but notably the items of clothing are not on the numbered list of essential gear. They are to be read as incidental details, as self-evident, but they naturally betray the debt cyberpunk owes to punk and heavy metal cultures. In addition, the clothes ossify the look of a cyberpunk beyond his gadgets.

Despite being a parody image, the figure of the model is aspirational: standing out and standing up against abstract control and oppression is possible if one projects an in-your-face attitude, possesses everything in gadgetry the early 1990s have to offer, and makes that clear to everyone who dares look into the cold reflection of mirrored shades.

Importantly, the shades are the one exception where a fashion accessory is marked as part of the cyberpunk's essential gear. They are mentioned in entry number seven, where one meaning of "cyberpunk" is given as "someone who maintains mirrorshades never went out of fashion." It is indeed mirrored sunglasses to which the bad-ass counterculture ethos of cyberpunk fashion can be traced. Their significance is summarized by Bruce Sterling in his preface to the *Mirrorshades* (1986) anthology of cyberpunk stories: "By hiding the eyes, mirrorshades prevent the forces

Figure 1. Spoof image from Mondo 2000 magazine.

of normalcy from realizing that one is crazed and possibly dangerous. They are the symbol of the sunstaring visionary, the biker, the rocker, the policeman, and similar outlaws" (38). It is clear in retrospect that Sterling should have problematized this vision of visionaries outside the law as history keeps revealing how the lone rebel is rarely a force for progress or good, but the visionary individual against the "forces of normalcy" is central to the popular understanding of the cyberpunk hero. To look like a cyberpunk is to tell onlookers that one is a misfit, a potential threat to the status quo.

One later example emerges in *The Matrix* (1999), arguably the most successful cyberpunk movie to date. The outlaws of Nebuchadnessar face a force of totalizing normalcy, as machines seek to keep humanity lulled in virtual battery-acid dreams. The thematic resonance of the mirrorshades is clear in figure 2. Neo, making his choice between the red and blue pill, sees his possible futures and potential reflected back at him from the outlaw guru Morpheus's lenses. As such, the Stoic, mysterious, black-clad counterculture man with shades to hide his dangerousness remains a cyberpunk archetype.

Figure 2. Screenshot from *The Matrix*.

It is no surprise that the fringe-character Sterling describes, and, in a sense, Morpheus epitomizes is easy to co-opt for militant power-fantasies. Adam Jensen, the hero of the Deus Ex franchise of games and related products, is a case in point.

Starting out as a security officer, he is ripped apart by explosions and gunfire and fitted with a fully cybernetic body by his employer Sarif Industries, becoming a RoboCop with free will in a dystopian near future. In the games of the franchise, he works for Sarif Inudstries, gray-ops counter-terrorism units, and seeks to uncover actions of the Illuminati. His cybernetic augmentations allow him to see and punch through walls, employ hyper-reflexes, blades in his forearms, and invisibility, making him a Swiss-army-cyber-knife with only the most dangerous villains able to oppose him. Jensen is thus the cyberpunk as superhero, a vigilante fighting against terrorism with his incredible augmentations. He is part of the militarized world of enforcers, embodying extra-legal justice and distributing it through degrees of violence (it is possible to complete the games almost completely without killing, but Jensen still remains very much embedded in networks of violence).

In such a line of work, clothing and a functional style are essential. Jensen has sunglass implants in the style of William Gibson's Molly Millions from *Neuromancer* (1984), he speaks with a low growl, and wears a long dark coat worthy of any character from *The Matrix*. His trench-coat is adapted to stay out his way: his sleeves retract to make room for hand-cannons and arm-blades and the design is no haphazard accident. The launch trailer for *Deus Ex: Mankind Divided* (2016) shows, in a sequence lasting some two seconds, that Jensen has an ACRONYM coat. ACRONYM is a real urban techwear brand, based in Berlin, expensive, and aiming for the highest degree of functionality possible for clothing. Its founder and head designer Errolson Hugh appears at times almost indistinguishable from cybersuperhero Jensen.

Speaking of the design process for Jensen's coat for Gameinformer, Hugh said ACRONYM approached the project like any other, asking who is using the garment, for what purposes, and what specific challenges they might encounter (Cork). Focusing on function is a departure from the more detached aesthetic of mirrorshades and leather in classic cyberpunk discussed above. Jacked into the matrix, one's success is not dependent on what one wears, and virtual avatars can look like anything at all. Meatspace is thus always secondary to cyberspace and the leather-clad look mainly transfers a counter-cultural message rather than responds to functional needs. For the futuristic cyberninja, like Jensen, however, the street is his primary haunt and fashion choices must reflect that.

The ultra-functional cyberpunk like Adam Jensen remains, for most intents and purposes, a fictional character, but the influence of the archetype leaks into the

everyday. It should not come as a surprise, then, to find William Gibson and Errolson Hugh side by side in near-identical outfits (figure 3). Gibson is a self-proclaimed ACRONYM fan and his fiction from Pattern Recognition (2003) onward is laden with the author's fascination with brands, fashion, and techwear. The novel even prompted Buzz Rickson's to launch a product line in his name, inspired by a fictional jacket of theirs appearing in it. In an interview for *The Guardian*'s "The look I love" column, Gibson wore an outfit comprised entirely of ACRONYM clothes. In the headline, he is quoted saying that he is always striving not to be noticed (Marriot). The statement follows one Gibson made for the lifestyle site Heddel's, citing "gray man theory" as one inspiration for his choices in clothing. According to the theory, allegedly from the security industry, dressing in unremarkable clothes, like chinos, is a must for security personnel as anyone with combat pants will be shot first in any hostile encounter (Shuck).

Deb Chacra, professor of engineering at Olin College, makes a connection between Gibson's attempt to remain unnoticed and the so-called Great Male Renunciation of late 18th-century Europe, during which flamboyant designs and bright colors stopped being features of men's clothing ("Metafoundry 30"). The image of the dandy born then, seemingly uninterested in self-decoration and hence invested to black and white in his outfits, continues to inform much of men's fashion even to a fault. Gray cyberpunk men can be seen as contemporary takes on the dandy ethos: Beau Brummel, the chief architect of the Great Male Renunciation, and Gibson both wear outfits that appear unmarked, but are never coincidental.

The continuum from Adam Jensen to Errolson Hugh to William Gibson shows the paring down of the cyberninja outfit to the more quotidian streets of today. While the classic leather-clad cyberpunk screams counterculture with his fashion choices and Adam Jensen needs his retractable function-sleeves to blast future terrorists, the gray cyberpunk man remains unobtrusive, but knows in his heart of hearts that he is donning the most functional, technical, and exclusive gear known to mankind.

To illustrate this further, let us take a look at some brand-writing from the Brooklyn-based clothing company Outlier. Consider the following quotes:

Ultrafine Merino T-Shirt

A near perfect t-shirt made with a Mackenzie 17.5 micron Merino Jersey, nature's

Figure 3. Errolson Hugh (left) with William Gibson (right).

finest performance fabric. Beautifully soft and remarkably dry to the touch, merino's hygroscopic properties help cool you in the heat and insulate you in the cool.

Injected Linen Blazer

An unlined blazer that wears like air. The Injected Linen fabric combines industrial warp-knit weft-insertion techniques with natural linen to create a material that is incredibly open and breathable while holding an elegant opacity.

To me, that is the sound of science fiction and, more precisely, the poetics of estrangement applied to clothing. Outlier garments give a very ordinary impression and they are without visible logos or texts that would reveal their brand identity, but they are described so as to make them unique and strange, to have consumers know there is more than meets the eye. They thus combine the cyber-ninja ethos of functionality, hidden in patterns and materials, to the gray man aesthetic of unobtrusiveness.

There is a connection to be made between the Outlier product descriptions and Gibson's Bigend trilogy of contemporary novels. Specifically, the poetics of Outlier can be read as what Jaak Tomberg calls the "double vision of SF" where text registers as realism and science fiction not side by side or a passage after the other, but at the same time, "both plausibly everyday and plausibly cognitively estranging" (263). Tomberg's principal example is the following description of protagonist Cayce Pollard's outfit in Pattern Recognition:

[…] for the meeting, reflected in the window of a Soho specialist in mod paraphernalia, are a Fresh Fruit T-shirt, her black Buzz Rickson's MA-1, anonymous black skirt from a Tulsa thrift, the black leggings she'd worn for Pilates, black Harajuku schoolgirl shoes. Her purse-analog is an envelope of black East German laminate, purchased on eBay—if not actual Stasi-issue then well in the ballpark. (8)

In addition to the information-laden nominalization of articles of clothing, it should be noted that Cayce shares in the novel Gibson's attempts to be unnoticed, clipping logos and other brand-markers off her clothes, favoring black, simple garments. As a result, she emerges as the fictional counterpart to the cool, gray man in favor of Outlier. Lee Konstantinou discusses her as an archetypal cool character (*Cool Characters* 240–269) and finds in Pattern Recognition's "coolhunting aesthetics" an

attempt to "reconnect the free-floating brand to the hidden supply chains that make brands profitable in the first place" ("The Brand as a Cognitive Map" 95). As such, Cayce appears as a central inspiration for the gray cyberpunk man aesthetic (and it should be noted that much of what she wears can be construed as gender-neutral). Both are less interested in instant recognition of the excellence of their garments through brand semiotics, but rather in an insider knowledge of fabrics, technologies, and details of production.

The science-fictional poetics of a brand like Outlier coincide with the latest developments in cyberpunk literature that is not all too keen to focus on superheroes like Adam Jensen, but rather concerns itself with more naturalistic struggles under accelerating digital capitalism—a theme I deal with in my dissertation in preparation. Such fiction questions the possibility of fighting and winning against the powers that be, showing that, under contemporary capitalism, different means of resistance than those of the superhero vigilante are needed (for examples of analyses pointing to this direction, see Suoranta 2014 and 2020). The realization that transhumanist augmentation or the vigilantism of loners does not guarantee progress or resilience of any kind can be seen in the fairly toned-down characters of authors like Malka Older, Annalee Newitz, and Tim Maughan, among others.

To conclude, I want to point out how the techwear enthusiast who is into brands like ACRONYM or Outlier has already reached the archetypal, stock-figure status of the mirrorshaded hacker, emerging as an object of parody, specifically in the 2019 CRPG Disco Elysium. Here is an exchange between Cuno, a street kid, and the amnesiac cop protagonist. Consider the following, keeping the Outlier blurbs in mind:

YOU — 'Alright, entertain me -- what's so great about these pants?'

CUNO — 'Pig, these are FALN *Modulars*! Liquid fit, performance crotch, urban survival shit! Made in Mirova... by scientists. *Pants* scientists.

'Believe it, you *need* this shit…' He unzips his jacket to give you a quick peek at the plastic-wrapped pants. They are graphite-black and look brand new.'

In Disco Elysium, players can naturally collect a whole FALN outfit in the course of the game, ironically role-playing the pants scientist aficionado, functioning

optimally in his tactical urban environment with the clothes giving various bonuses and penalties to different skills. In fact, the skills of the player-character comment what goes on in the game as various inner voices, provided the relevant skill checks are successful:

SAVOIR FAIRE [Trivial: Success] — These could drastically improve your chances of survival in the urban wilderness.

PHYSICAL INSTRUMENT [Easy: Success] — Coach Physical Instrument endorses these pants. […]

CONCEPTUALIZATION [Medium: Success] — They will also make you look like an idiot.

The FALN aesthetic hinges on as-visible-as-possible branding on the products themselves and the designs hark to ACRONYM's futuristic gear (figure 4.). At the same time, the language of "pants science" aligns them with Outlier's SF poetics. Teenage Cuno's enthusiasm and Conceptualization's judgment take a gentle piss out of the speculative promises cyberpunk menswear can be seen to make. They let slip that, in fact, leather jackets do not make one a visionary, ACRONYM performance clothes do not make one a superhero, and wearing the results of Outlier's pants science does not make a man special. Or further, whatever aesthetic or functional effects these clothes might endow one with, they are easily overshadowed by disproportionate hype or aggrandizement. Still, like Attebery points out, the expression they afford does the speculative work of fashion, hinged on cyberpunk ideas.

I hope this smörgåsbord of pants, coats, and people real and fictional has shown that cyberpunk menswear flows in and out of fiction in various interesting ways and that its changing poetics are connected to the mode's politics over time and between works in different media. My examples chart a shift from Sterling's visionary outlaws to superhero fashionistas, and, finally, to the toned-down protagonists of contemporary cyberpunk literature and, in a natural dynamic, their parodies. Further explorations could be done with the help of the impressively curated Cyberpunk Clothing wiki on Reddit, where the brands featured here appear alongside suits, cybergoth wear, milspec, and high fashion. In a sense, the wiki appears as a similar contemporary inventory of essentials as the *Mondo 2000* parody image we started with, this time

for the expanded, contemporary world of cyberpunk that we inhabit, for better and worse. As with all aesthetic choices, cyberpunk fashion also engenders both toxic and wholesome politics from militarized looks that border on fascist insignia to unobtrusive normcore ideals home at a cozy startup. Both designers and consumers employ its semiotics and design ideals to strive toward the various potentials of expression associated with cyberpunk. It thus appears clear that of all science-fictional modes, cyberpunk is well on its way of influencing fashion and aesthetics.
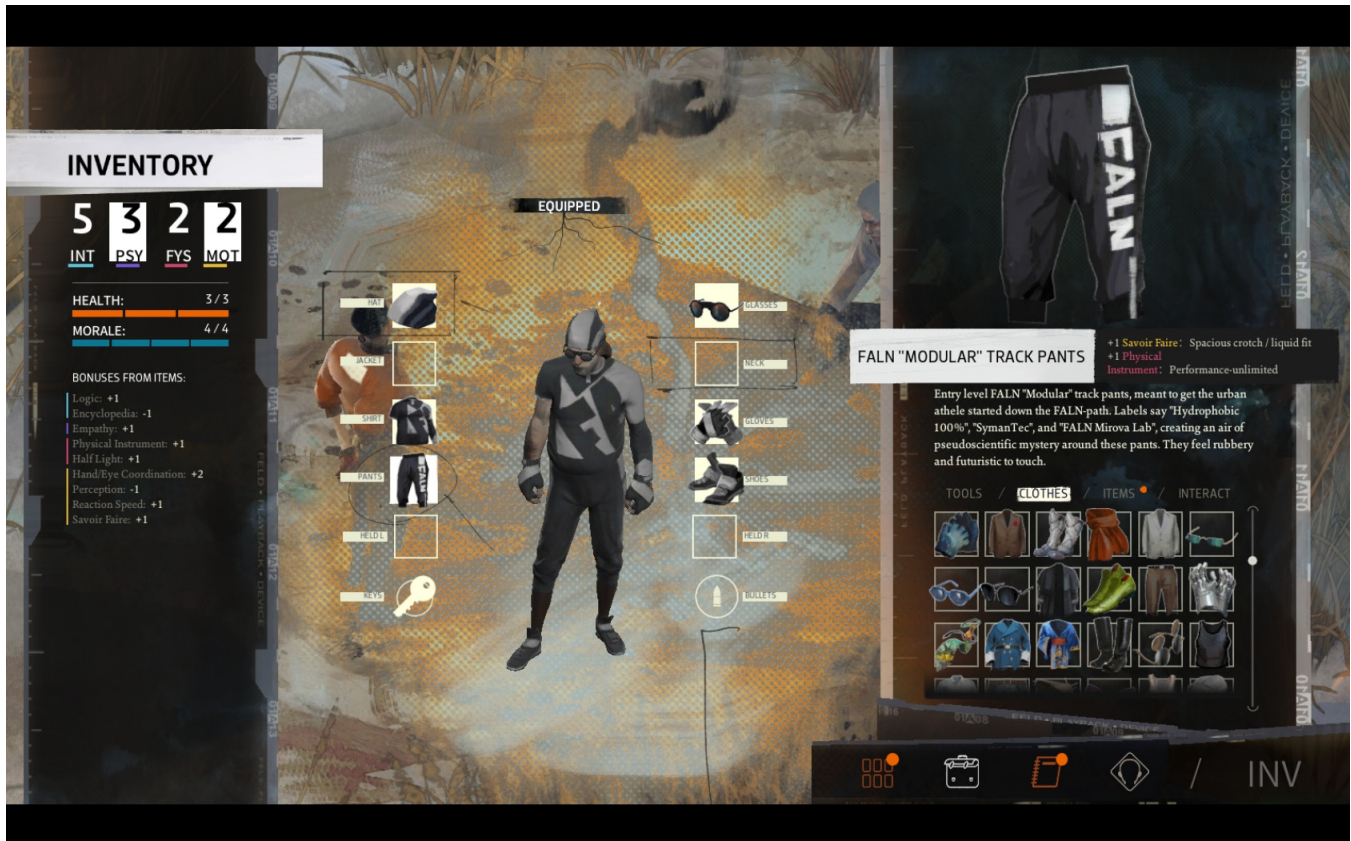

Figure 4. Screenshot of the inventory screen in *Disco Elysium*.

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Introducing the Symposium on European Speculative Fiction and the Political

Sabrina Mittermeier and Ashumi Shah

AUTHOR Ian McEwan's recent claims that Science Fiction is not political enough are not only elitist, but also could not be farther from the truth. After all, any Speculative Fiction has always been political in that they make it possible for us to imagine alternatives to the lives we live – whether it is the warnings of dystopian works such as George Orwell's *1984* or more recently, Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* and its adaptation into a TV series that have resonated at times of #metoo and Trump. Alternate histories such as *Man in the High Castle* continue to keep audiences similarly engaged, while *Harry Potter*'s allegory on fascism has served as inspiration for political protest against right-wing voices, particularly for the millennial generation that has grown up with it. *Star Trek*'s humanist utopia is still going strong after 50 years, and one of its most recent installments, *Star Trek: Discovery* may in many ways be its most political yet – particularly given the controversies its spiked for its strive for diversity, bringing to the forefront larger issues surrounding certain sections of SF fans that want to claim the genre(s) as mere escapism without political ideology.

SF has also been used for political (Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*) or religious (scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard's works or Tim La Haye's *Left Behind* series) propaganda, further showing the cultural capital of speculative fiction. *Jurassic Park* has warned us of the ills of consumerism driving science, Tolkien's works are not just ecocritical but also anti-fascist, and *Doctor Who*'s titular character continues to not only fight the Daleks, a thinly-veiled Nazi allegory, but has also recently visited Rosa Parks. Additionally, the recent surge in Climate Fiction, a genre originally advanced by hard SF writers, has built up optimism about the ability of popular culture to not only portray but also ignite eco-political engagement.

Based on the annual conference of the German Gesellschaft für Fantastikforschung (GFF) that had to move online due between May and September 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have compiled a selection of papers that all deal with European-based SF and its global political implications in a variety of ways. Amanda Dillon discusses the feminist implications of time travelling narratives and how science fiction can empower women to write themselves back into a history they

have been erased from. Samantha Lehman deals with prequels and what revisions of canon can mean for the politics of established fandoms of franchises such as the *Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter*. Aurélie Olivesi and Zoé Kergomard study the current French media landscape and the instrumentalization of George Orwell's *1984* by actors across the political spectrum. Ashumi Shah reflects on *Black Mirror* in times of Covid-19 and finally, Phevos Kallitsis and Martin Andrews present a case study of how Science Fiction can help students of architecture envision spaces. We hope that these varied papers showcase the continued cultural and political relevance of Speculative Fiction particularly in times of right-wing resurgence in many European countries, the US and beyond.

Unheard Voices: The Time-Travelling Woman as Writer of History

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THE intersection of science fiction and the political commonly occurs in the form of the alternate history or the far future dystopia: the Gileads, the Panems, the Burdekinian Reichs, the east-European inspired cities out of Miéville. But this is the science fiction politics of the outward, of the warning, of Kurt Vonnegut's "coal-mine canaries" (266). This paper argues for a different sort of politics to be seen in science fiction: that of the inward, metatextual politicking of the historian. Three postulates recur within this piece: the act of writing is a political act, history is a political construct, and being a woman is also a political act. Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book* (1992) and its time travelling history PhD student Kivrin Engle provide a clear argument about the gender politics of writing history, and the potential avenues that science fiction provides to undermine the traditionally male focus of history.

Broadly speaking, women writing history is a very new phenomenon. Women being a central concern for historians—male or female—is also relatively recent, with the obvious exception of figures like Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria. However, for decades the historiography in both cases presented these as important rulers in *spite* of their gender. Though this is improving, the gender politics of history writing continues to be a problem. As Joan Wallach Scott argues, "the subject of women has either been grafted on to other traditions or studies in isolation from them" (6): women historians were granted a room of their own, but then told to stay put. To write on women—or even just *as* a woman—is to invite criticism, particularly if this is to write in a field that is more typically about men: if there was ever proof that history has not managed to overcome the gender barrier, it is the reactions to Hallie Rubenhold's book *The Five* (2019)—a title with the temerity to focus on the victims of Jack the Ripper rather than the murderer.

The issue goes beyond—but also is intrinsically linked to—this issue of historical authorship. The very writing of history itself is only as good as its sources. Here I need to gloss a considerable amount of historical theory, but in brief: the decision of what to keep in an archive and what to lose, and what gets kept at all (due to archivist

care or the ravages of time and bookworms) tends towards the male and powerful. We have relatively little in terms of women and the lower class for the majority of human history, whereas we have relatively large numbers of sources from powerful institutions like monarchies and churches in more document-poor periods—and this is all before we even get to the narrative construction issues noted in Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973). Obviously women, the poor, and people of colour were alive during this time and important historical actors, but most of what they left were entries in baptismal records, a couple of pots, and, if they were lucky, some gravestones. It is not an exaggeration to say that, at least in the pre-modern era, we have more 'gaps' in the archives than we do archive itself. It is in this gap that historical fiction can work as historiography—and in this gap in particular that women can make an intervention in the historical narrative through the use of fiction.

Diana Wallace argues in her book *Female Gothic Histories* (2013) that women have used historical fiction as a type of "historiography which can simultaneously reinsert them into history and symbolise their exclusion" (1). Indeed, the popularity of the historical mode for the woman novelist and short story writer seems a direct attempt to redress the (white, upper-class, straight) male focus of much history—and this is true from canon-approved authors like Elizabeth Gaskell to populist favourites like Diana Gabaldon to Regency romance writers like Tessa Dare and the mostly self-published Courtney Milan. Such writers are fiction's antidote to the (thankfully no longer popular) "Great Man" theory of history, and instead provide myriad "what ifs" to the wealth of historical stories we may never know. It does not appear as a political act on the surface—the ripped bodices in Milan, Dare, and Gabaldon do not seem to obviously undermine any historical narratives—but the palimpsest of personal narratives (they are commonly first person testimonies) adds to a historical record *in potentia*. Meanwhile, time-travelling women like Willis's Kivrin Engle— and Diana Gabaldon's Claire Fraser, Kage Baker's Mendoza, and Deborah Harkness's Diana Bishop—become unmoored in time, simultaneously participant and observer but fully neither. Like their Gothic forebears (Punter and Byron 278-282), they sit between worlds. In time travel fiction, this takes on a further dimension: these women sit between *times*.

Bizarrely, there is relatively little work on the topic in existence: most analyses of women's historical fiction outside of that by Wallace looks at it in terms of its cross-modal connections—such as studies of the romance, the time travel narrative,

or the woman's novel more broadly, as in the case of Janice A. Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1991) and Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending* (1985). David Wittenberg's otherwise perceptive book on time travel also deals very briefly with this issue—but argues that "historicity per se" does not "tend to be immediately at stake" in these texts (26). And yet, surely the very fact a woman is reinscribing another woman into history is itself "historicity per se"—both in terms of subject and authorship. This is particularly the case when we consider questions of narrative voice in terms of gender: to give a woman a voice is to provide her with "power" (Lanser 3). Indeed, such a tactic is inherently postmodern:

> Women's marginal and excluded position has meant that they often understood that recorded 'history' is not straightforwardly 'what happened in the past' but has always been the result of selection, presentation, and even downright falsification based on particular ideologies and viewpoints (Wallace *Historical Novel* 2-3).

This is in effect Foucault and Lyotard in fancy dress: the breakdown of the historical record as the sole method of understanding the past. This approach means that historical novels written by women and based around the experience of female characters are *ipso facto* alternate histories of some sort—and this is where the writing of history and the science fiction text touch in a clear way. For the historical novel, Wallace calls this "the radical potential of the reconceptualization of history as plural and subjective" (*Historical Novel* 3); for science fiction, this is a "question[ing] of the nature of history and of causality" (Hellekson 4). What we see in women-authored and women-centred time travel fiction is a politicization of not only the historical novel, but of the writing of history itself.

Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book* provides a fascinating example of this, particularly given her main character's status as woman historian. Her main character, Kivrin Engle, travels back in time to pre-plague-era Oxford to aid the completion of her doctoral thesis with some in-situ observations. The relatively routine journey to the past goes revealingly awry. Engle finds herself not in pre-plague-era Oxford, but instead that she and the plague arrive in Oxford simultaneously. Her carefully constructed clothes are entirely wrong and the version of English she was taught does not help her understand the "contemps," rendering their speech a conlang until her interpreter adapts:

The interpreter is working now, more or less, and the contemps seem to understand what I'm saying. I can understand them, though their Middle English bears no resemblance to what Mr Latimer taught me. It's full of inflections and has a much softer French sound. Mr Latimer wouldn't even recognise his "*When that Aprille with his shoures sote.*" […]

The language isn't the only thing off. My dress is all wrong, of too far a weave, and the blue is too bright dyed with woad or not. I haven't seen any bright colours at all. I'm too tall, my teeth are too good and my hands are wrong, in spite of my muddy labours at the dig. They should not only have been dirtier, but I should have chilblains. Everyone's hands, even the children's, are chapped and bleeding. It is, after all, December (162-163, sic).

Indeed, almost nothing resembles what she was led to expect: "Only the church looked the way it was supposed to" (172). This throw-away comment reveals the novel's approach to the writing of history: the church, as the centre of information and education and an area with a considerable amount of surviving information for historians, carries with it a high level of accuracy. The quotidian, however, was often lost to disease and the ravages of time and illiteracy—but it is this area where Engle can work as a woman historian and not merely correct the historical record but add to it. This is underlined at the very end of the novel when Engle is rescued by male historians. Her male rescuers are incapable of seeing the subtle differences between the historical record and lived experience: "They said in the book it was like this […] Actually, I was afraid it might be a good deal worse. I mean, it doesn't smell or anything" (562). For these men, their lived experience does not rewrite the historical record, while Engle's clearly does.

This ability directly links not only to Engle's gender but also the concept of "slippage" that is so important in the novel. For the novel, slippage is "time's way of protecting itself from continuum paradoxes," and it "prevent[s] collisions or meetings or actions that would affect history" (29). In Engle's case, however, slippage lands her directly in the path of the Black Death. Some of this is put down to incomplete record keeping in the period, making dates less concrete (6-7), but I would argue that what happens to Engle suggests that slippage in this case pointed her to a place and time that allows her to act as a voice for the voiceless in this village, completely decimated by the plague. Slippage does not therefore avoid a paradox so much as

allow the completion of the historical record.

Yet, for Engle, her time in the past is characterised by endless grief and a total lack of agency. Instead of the slippage fail-safe providing her with greater agency, she is actually constrained by her lack of knowledge of what she can and cannot do to impact the historical record. Robbed of agency through her lack of knowledge, Engle is meant to only be an observer and to tread as lightly as possible on the past. The climax of the novel leaves her entirely frozen due to her grief, her alienation, and her knowledge that even if she could use her agency, it would not matter at all in the end: everyone in this village will die of the Plague (314). Engle's gender allows her to work in the unwritten parts of history—as her supervisors say, if she dies in the past, she will unlikely even be mentioned by name in the historical record (32)—and she is historically inert. As a time traveller, a historian, and a woman, Engle's complete lack of agency is underlined three times, haunting the novel's climax as she watches parish priest Father Roche dig his final grave, then lacing his bubo in a pointless attempt to save his life (550).

Engle's ability to impact history is not limited to saving lives, however. Engle goes back in time with a recorder to take notes with, and it is here where she really does create a 'record of life' (18)—and death—in this village. She begins to fill in the gaps in the historical record, for example, cataloguing the residents in Oxford who have fallen victim to the plague:

> All the steward's family have it. The youngest boy, Lefric, was the only one with a bubo, and I've brought him in here and lanced it. There's nothing I can do for the others. [...]
>
> (break)
>
> The steward's baby is dead.
>
> (break) [...]
>
> Ulf, the reeve, is dead.
>
> Also Sibbe, daughter of the steward.
>
> Joan, daughter of the steward.
>
> The cook (I don't know her name).
>
> Walthef, oldest son of the steward.

(break)

Over 50 per cent of the village has it. (472-3)

This is a record of names, of positions, of people who would otherwise be lost to history, and there are several other similar lists in Engle's record. She may be unable to help Father Roche or any of the other "contemps," but she can ensure evidence of their existence remains. The final chunk of entries in her record emphasises not only the need for lived experience, but what her presence has provided here:

Tell Mr Latimer adjectival inflection was still prominent in 1348. And tell Mr Gilchrist he was wrong. The statistics weren't exaggerated.

(break)

[…] I wanted to come, and if I hadn't, they would have been all alone, and nobody would have ever known how frightened and brave and irreplaceable they were (551).

Engle's record is a true "Domesday Book"—originally meant as a complete record of medieval life, which inevitably left quite a lot of information out if it did not directly relate to William the Conqueror's taxation system (18). Engle does not provide a total corrective to this imperfect survey, but she goes some way towards making corrections, both in terms of the technical aspects of history and the everyday lives of people in the past.

Where Engle's corrective—and Willis's novel—differs from the multitude of historical fiction that provides nuance to the historical record in thinly documented areas, however, is precisely in her status as time traveller in a piece of science fiction. She does not merely observe: she records, and she brings back. This recentring of historical attention onto the quotidian and everyday is itself a political act, one that science fiction and time travel narratives are themselves particularly well suited to. Indeed, history itself is *still* particularly behind the times in terms of how it "accept[s] these feminist challenges" (Bucur 12), and it is no mistake that social history— history that covers those who traditional diplomatic and political historians tend to ignore—and women's history "developed in tandem" (Scott 21). Science fiction texts like Willis's make an intervention in these inherently politicised approaches to history by foregrounding the authorial voice of the woman historian *and* these lost or silenced histories simultaneously. Indeed, there seems to be a suggestion that only women can provide access to these histories because as women they work

in the unseen parts of history to start with. The time travelling woman therefore has an extraordinary amount of agency in her ability to not necessarily impact the historical record, but to record it in the first place. As per Diana Wallace, historical fiction provides women with both "escape and political intervention" (*Historical Novel* 2)—but also a historiographical intervention when dealing with time travel. As a historian, Engle works within the historical "wiggle room" provided by the lack of existing documentation and provides not just new interpretations but new information, therefore allowing her to potentially change "the past" without actually impacting the future.

Given that women so commonly are greeted with karmic punishment when attempting to change the past in women-authored time travel narratives (Claire Fraser's miscarriage in *Dragonfly in Amber*; the repeated deaths of Mendoza's lover in *The Company* series; amongst others), such agency should not be ignored in the context of time travel narratives centred on and authored by women. The very telling of these narratives, fictional or not, is itself a political act. Women had an impact on the past, whether or not it is mentioned in the historical record: "those absent from official accounts partook nonetheless in the making of history; those who are silent speak eloquently about the meanings of power and the uses of political activity" (Scott 24). Though Scott here is speaking particularly about women in the past, Willis's novel seems to argue much the same is true for women historians— silencing women at either end of the historical record does not mean they did not exist nor that they had no impact on the past, either in its making or its telling. It is only through the very hypothetical structure of science fiction that Willis's novel can make this argument, though: it simultaneously provides that potential hidden history as well as a method for its discovery.

This suggests a number of broader considerations, particularly around the issue of the politics of women writing not just historical novels but time travel in particular. Despite it seeming as if women are suited for time travel for a number of ideological reasons, time travelling women *authored by women* are rare, even when the multitude of *Outlander* look-alikes are taken into account. The most famous are all centred around men: "By His Bootstraps," "All You Zombies," "The Sound of Thunder," *Back to the Future II* (the female character is unconscious!), *The Time Machine*, and so on. Women-focused time travel narratives are therefore not just in dialogue with history, but with the science fiction megatext in multiple ways, though not all of these

can be satisfactorily engaged with here and I have chosen to focus on questions of authority and agency. These texts provide one possible method of understanding the third wave feminist concept of the personal being political; these fictional women's experiences are inherently political. They change the historical narrative without changing history itself (whatever that can come to mean): they rewrite the past to be more inclusive and complete. Time travel fiction does something uniquely political in this sense, in that such texts provide a voice where there may well be none, and they help refigure the writing of history as something that may not merely focus on women, but also be written *by* women.

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The Problem with Prequels: Revising Canon is an Exercise in Authorial Control and Navigating Fandom Politics in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*

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THE offer to reshape history is a tempting one; it appeals to our desire to fix and explain, which is exactly what modern prequels offer their fans. Readers well-acquainted with both J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and Suzanne Collins's Hunger Games Trilogy have, over the last four years, received prequels that seek to rationalize the darkness of both fictional worlds. Both prequels, the screenplay for *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (*FBAWTFT*) and *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, written by Rowling and Collins respectively, reshape the worlds their audiences have spent over a decade reading about and watching. Both main franchises for each author have resulted in major motion picture deals along with merchandise. While their prequels vary in their content, both prequels attempt to project their purposes as a means of revelation even though what readers actually get is revision. Prequels are ostensibly meant to answer our unanswered questions, but instead they can cause problems, especially when they are written in an attempt to capture current political and social justice causes, which given the modern political climate, particularly in North America can easily fall into the realm of commodifying struggles rather than serving as a rallying cry. I will address the promises and problems with Collins and Rowling's prequels by looking at adaptation theory and revisionist history, focusing specifically on how these works revise history within their own canon (and sometimes our own reality). I will also highlight how the release dates point for these works seek to capitalize upon a desire for escape from our fractured world, without actually making room for the reader or viewer to exert control over their experience. While I will make brief references to additional prequels, the main works I address are those of Rowling and Collins.

The premise of a prequel is to provide a reader more information, be it about characters or general worldbuilding. But, the promises of prequels are more of a problem than their basic intentions. Prequels, particularly modern ones like those

written by Rowling and Collins, seem intent on providing context, but seemingly all of the wrong type of context. Each of these prequels is removed or distanced from their main franchises, with Collins's happening 64 years before Katniss ever entered the arena and Rowling's occurring in the early twentieth century, approximately 65 years before Harry Potter goes to Hogwarts. What is most interesting about the release of these two prequels is that they were both written after the conclusion of their main franchises (both in book and movie form). Instead of a sequel, Rowling and Collins both chose to write about a time before their characters occupied space in their fictional worlds; they chose the distance and I posit this is because they wanted a chance to stretch their creativity and embellish their canon. By declaring each work a prequel, the authors have a chance to change their canon, garner sympathy for unlikeable characters, and essentially, nudge your preconceived notions or disputations about their lore out the door because their prequels are canon now. Prequels seemingly hand back the control over characters and worlds to the authors that created them. Prequels situate themselves as ideal spaces for revision of the created spaces from a beloved and well-trafficked series. Rowling and Collins demonstrate an obvious intent to reconfigure or reinvent aspects of their canon, character backstories, and the like as their prequels unfold; these works appear to be as much for the authors as they are the fans.

While these stories and their contents do not map directly onto history as it unfolds in reality that does not mean that they are exempt from the ideas of historical revisionism. Within these works, authors rework their characters and their worlds, pushing and pulling established ideas apart in a seeming attempt to be both more palatable or relatable, and to shock and start conversations. Though the revisions of canon we see in these prequels do not fall explicitly within the boundaries of historical revisionism and the ideas of history as adaptation as presented by Laurence Raw and Defne Ersin Tutan, Tom Leitch, and Frans Weiser there is still room to discuss the act of revision in the sense of literary, not historical, canon.

The line between adaptation and revision might seem blurry, but within the scope of my discussion the latter implies overwriting past canon, whereas the former implies a shift, but not necessarily the erasure implied by the latter. Hutcheon notes that "sequels and prequels are not really adaptations" (9), which situates these types of works as removed but not wholly separated from their points of contact within the space occupied by a major series. Rowling's decision to create the *Fantastic Beasts*

and Where to Find Them world within the larger scope of the Harry Potter Universe she had already established likely corresponds to the desire Marjorie Garber points out as the motivation behind the creation of sequels, which is "the desire that [works] never come to a definitive end" (74). Though Garber specifically addresses sequels, the principle of the matter remains the same with prequels. Fans and creators always want more, although perhaps by now fans should know better than to actually make that type of request of a creator who might take that call to action as an excuse for a creative power trip or hold creations hostage until they see fit to release them. I will point out here how George R.R. Martin has released two prequels to his *Game of Thrones* series: *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* and *Fire & Blood* and yet the next installment of his series, *Winds of Winter* has yet to appear. Still, the chance to know more and spend more time within a world fans know and love is a siren call them, and any author with a successful series can probably count on at least initial support from their main series fans upon the release of any additional content, be it a film adaptation, a prequel, a sequel, or a companion piece.

For her prequel, Rowling took the route of building off of a companion piece, namely the textbook, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, which is for the Care of Magical Creatures class and assigned to students at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry in their first year (*Philosopher's* 53). Instead of continuing to build within the world she had already created, she jumped with respect to time and location (the first film in the franchise takes place in New York City, although the subsequent films will and do feature various other locations in Europe and South America) (D'Alessandro). Rowling was apparently not finished with playing in the magical world and she used *FBAWTFT* to keep creating. Initially, this decision makes sense, both from a financial gain standpoint and from a creative perspective. If we believe Garber's idea that subsequent installments of a series are what feed a fanbase by giving them a less than "definitive end" (Garber 74) then a new film and screenplay, plus the promise of a new franchise sounds like a solid idea.

The promise of *FBAWTFT* was that it would be more mature, meaning it would hopefully resonate with the children who had grown up with the Harry Potter books and movies. It would grant those children, now turned teenagers and adults, a space more suited to their age group to indulge in their adoration for the Wizarding World. As Rowling began creating and writing for *FBAWTFT* she also began providing context that fans had never had access to before, which was wonderful in theory, until

some of her context began to resonate negatively amongst fans, for good reason. On March 8, 2016 Rowling published a brief history lesson about magic within America ("Fourteenth Century – Seventeenth Century") on Pottermore, now known as the Wizarding World. On June 28, 2016, a video (Pottermore) and the written origins of a new wizarding school based in the United States named Ilvermorny ("Ilvermorny School") also appeared. Rowling's handling of brand new information for a part of her universe, that until that point, she had rarely mentioned, caused an uproar with regards to her cherry picking of traditional stories and lore from Indigenous People in the United States (for responses to Rowling see: Baldy, Keene, Lee, Lough, Reese). Her appropriations earned her ire from fans and scholars before the first *FBAWTFT* film even premiered. In an extremely half-hearted and under-researched attempt to balance out the lore of her new works by mentioning and appropriating mythologies, she crossed a line. Before and after this incident, Rowling showed herself to not be an ally to any member of the human race who does not conform to her standards of identity. What Rowling seemingly tried, and failed, to do was create or adapt, but instead she appropriated in the name of creativity and in the pattern of colonialism. In the wake of the justifiable outrage over her cultural appropriation, and her lack of response to or acknowledgment of the situation with her newly cemented lore, to took a few days for fans to notice that Rowling had also revealed a new term – 'No-Maj' as part of American wizarding society ("Fourteenth Century – Seventeenth Century"). The term itself makes semantic sense and is literal in a way that 'Muggle,' the Britishism for non-magic folk is not (*Philosopher's Stone* 43).

In the screenplay, and on screen in the film, the audience's introduction to the term 'No-Maj' comes in the form of an confrontation between Newt Scamander, the author of the *Fantastic* Beasts textbook and Tina Goldstein, a demoted government servant for Magical Congress of the United States of America (MACUSA). Newt, a British wizard on a mission in New York City, has just inadvertently revealed magic to Jacob Kowalski, the main No-Maj character in the franchise, and unfortunately, also let him escape without modifying the man's memory. Tina reprimands Newt for his handling of the situation and uses the term for the first time (*Original Screenplay* 33)Then, later on, after they locate Jacob together, Newt makes a speech about the absurdity of the American attitude toward non-magic people: "I do know a few things actually. I know you have rather backwards laws about relations with non-magic people. That you're not meant to befriend them, that you can't marry them,

which is mildly absurd" (*Original Screenplay* 64). This exchange between Newt and Tina positions British wizards, who fans are likely most familiar with, as somewhat more accepting and less prejudiced, although the original Harry Potter series would beg to differ on that point. Rowling's choice to highlight and emphasize this particular cultural difference speaks to a stereotypical assessment of the American mentality about anyone other than Americans (or, in this case, American wizards and witches). Is Rowling's focus on the prejudices of her American Wizarding Society meant to deflect from the classism and eugenic leanings of her British characters? Though she might not be explicitly erasing canon here, because canon for Wizarding America did not exist prior to the release of the screenplay and the film apart from her smaller-scale stories, she is likely trying to lay the groundwork for the following films that circle around the Hilter-esque rise to power of the franchise's main villain, Grindelwald. As the plots unfold in the films, as of 2020 only two have been released – *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016) and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (2018), it becomes clear that the fights between wizards are the ones that matter most on a global scale and the No-Majes are simply collateral damage. Within the space of these prequels, Rowling attempts to make her work more relatable by interjecting diversity (but without the research foundation or knowledge to back up her purported attempts at inclusivity) and by borrowing from history, then reshaping it to fit into the confines of her fictional world and attempting to explain it all away. As if the flick of a wand will or could solve the world's problems. I posit that Rowling's direction with the screenplay found motive in her desire to rewrite history; she wanted tragedy, terror, and horror—fantastic beasts and the exploration of her new magical world was never the goal with this franchise. She wanted to create something topical that fans could use to try and explain away the unbelievable times they have been living through over at least the past four years.

The year of 2020 is not one wherein we should be playing host to fictional dictators and authoritarian leaders. Actually, I think we would do well to extend this sentiment back four years, to the day Donald Trump was elected President of the United States of America in 2016. But 2020 is the year that Suzanne Collins released her prequel to *The Hunger Games* trilogy, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes.* The actual Hunger Games themselves are an attempt to revise history within the world of Panem, because they are supposed to be what protects the Capitol's citizens from

encountering war ever again (Collins 14). Except, it doesn't work, because people rebel and then a new world order comes to be in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. But, before all of that happens, Collins decided readers needed to have an inside look at one of the main trilogy side characters; apparently, she felt that the character who deserved more than a "definitive end" (Garber 74) is Coriolanus Snow, the villain of the later trilogy and a dictator in his own right. But why now? This novel seemingly sets out to prove to its readers that sympathy is due even to the most corrupt of characters. It's true, we had little knowledge of Snow except for what Collins revealed in relation to Katniss and her participation in the Games or the rebellion. But why do we need to know more? And why now, when a man who believes his own lies and overinflates his self-importance occupies the Oval Office? We do not need Snow's backstory; we've seen what the real-life Snow is doing to the United States, its enemies, and its allies.

While the book is already signed on for film rights (Liptak), I find it an unnecessary addition to the franchise as a whole. It seeks to unnecessarily humanize a villain. It also attempts to garner sympathy for the creators of the Games – many of whom are pitched as pawns caught up in the pageantry, the duty, and the loyalty affiliated with the Games, rather than people who take pleasure in the death matches they orchestrate amongst their fellow human beings. Collins's particular example of this put-upon, resigned attitude of being a pawn in a game larger than oneself is Dean Casca Highbottom, an administrator at the Academy Snow attends in the Capitol, who is credited with the creation of the Hunger Games (Collins 20). Highbottom admits in the final pages of the book that he never meant for his drunken outline of the Hunger Games to reach anyone's ears except for his and his best friend's, Crassus Snow, Coriolanus's father: "The Hunger Games. The evilest impulse, cleverly packaged as a sporting event. An entertainment . . . The next morning, I awoke, horrified by what I'd made, meaning to rip it to shreds, but it was too late" (514). While Snow encounters moral and ethical dilemmas throughout this book, from his decision to help Lucy Gray survive by cheating in the Hunger Games (Collins 324-325) to his work as a Peacekeeper and eventual Capitol snitch (Collins 446-447), his actions, even when helpful to others are motivated by self-interest rather than a desire to do or be good. So, what exactly is Collins trying to fix with this prequel? apparently our perception and judgment of President Snow. It seems like Snow deserves more attention, even though he is exactly the type of main character we're

(not) crying out to better understand right now – as he is a white, educated, male, born into wealth (although his situation does rapidly turn into one of near absolute poverty). The assessment of the Games, from an insider perspective is intriguing to some extent but the single-mindedness of Snow's character focuses more on himself than absolutely anything else.

The world of the Hunger Games is not unlike our own, much like the Wizarding World, although we have yet to commence with government orchestrated battle royales and, to my knowledge, magic does not exist, so we are not subject to divisions between those that wield it and those that do not. However, we do have protests meant to protect the vulnerable and the oppressed that turn into battles for survival and we are subject to divisions of race, class, and religion that wear away at the fabric of our world on a daily basis. Humanity does not have the chance to rewrite its history; we do not have the luxury of a prequel, which means we must confront our past and then move forward – for better or for worse. If only Rowling and Collins had understood this about human nature too, perhaps their prequels, though still flawed, would have fit better into the worlds they wrote.

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"Just as Orwell said": The Emergence of a "Dystopian Framing" in French Conservative Media in the 2010s

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Introduction: Unexpected Orwellian Apparitions

IN France, science fiction has long struggled to be recognized as a "serious" form of literature, and not just as a form of "paraliterature" (Langlet). Yet in recent years, we noticed a growing number of references to dystopian fiction in the French public sphere. Our aim in this paper is to understand the meanings and political implications of these increasingly frequent references to dystopian literature.

First, a search of the keywords "dystopi*," "Orwell*," "novlangue" (the most common translation of Orwell's "Newspeak"), "Big Brother" (generally used in English in French media), "Winston Smith," and "Le meilleur des mondes" (the title of the French translation of *Brave New World*) in major French newspapers and news magazines confirmed our impression: the overall number of occurrences nearly doubled between 1999 and 2019, with a first peak in 2007, and a steady growth since 2012 (albeit with a slight decrease since 2019). These patterns correspond to political milestones (such as the 2007 and 2012 presidential elections) so that we wondered about the potential political significance of dystopian references in the French public sphere. Surely, the growing popularity of dystopia as a fictional genre in literature, television series and movies since the 2000s could in itself account for this growth. But the use of the words based on the root "dystopi*" (principally the noun "dystopie" [dystopia] and the adjective "dystopique") has only increased very recently (since 2010 and more rapidly since 2016). Moreover, among the references to specific well-known dystopias, while those alluding to Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) have remained relatively stable, references to Orwell's *1984* (1949) have increased the most (from 214 in 1999 to a peak of 504 in 2018, and 396 in 2019). No republication

or film adaptation explains this surge in the popularity of *1984* over this time period. In addition, in comparison to *Brave New World*, allusions to *1984* involve a more varied network of references: the characters of Big Brother and Winston Smith are regularly mentioned in their own right. Above all, the concept of "Newspeak" has become central (with occurrences increasing by 665% between 1999 and 2017).

"Newspeak" as a Framing Device

In order to better understand the meaning of these recurring references to Orwell, we began by exploring references to "Newspeak" in major French newspapers of different political orientations. While references to "Newspeak" remained relatively stable in left-wing media (*L'Humanité*, *Libération*), the growth from 2012-2013 onwards was driven by newspapers at the centre and towards the right side of the French political spectrum (*L'Express, Le Figaro, Marianne, Le Point, Valeurs Actuelles*). Moreover, an examination of the concrete uses of the word highlighted significant differences between left- and right-wing media. Left-wing media typically refers to "Newspeak" as part of a critique of capitalism ("Financial capitalism, as it is called in Newspeak, is only a stage of capitalism delivered to its own savagery, adapted to our time" [Anon.]) or corporate language ("the Newspeak of business schools feeds the abstraction of managerial discourse" [Giret]). As in other countries, left-wing political activists in France have also drawn on Orwell to condemn surveillance practices and infringements of privacy rights in the digital age (Krieg-Planque). Meanwhile, references to "Newspeak" in right-wing newspapers and news magazines are generally used as a synonym for "political correctness" ("And then, who knows why, but probably under the influence of a certain puritanism, Big Brother's Newspeak, imagined by George Orwell in 1949, insidiously appeared not in 1984, but in 2014 [political correctness was perhaps only an ersatz version]" [Chiflet]), "the current" (Fonton) or "dominant Newspeak" ("How could we not regularize illegal immigrants, who, by the magic of the dominant Newspeak, have become 'sans-papiers [undocumented people]' or, better still, 'migrants'?" [Anon 2003]), a general "modern Newspeak" ("It's entertaining to watch modern Newspeak being enriched with new concepts, day after day") or "socialist Newspeak" when the socialist François Hollande was president.

In these uses, the world depicted in *1984* does not only serve as a metaphor

or a comparison. References to this well-known novel also act as a sort of lens, suggesting a perspective on the present as a dystopia, or a dystopia to come (using the "slippery slope" argument). In this sense, references to *1984*, particularly through the neologism "Newspeak," serve as powerful "framing devices" aimed at promoting a particular problem definition and formulating grievances (Entman; D'Angelo). We thus refer to their use in this way as an "Orwellian framing." In this context, news articles condemned even small changes in the language of the French administration in the wake of same-sex marriage as "Newspeak." In this Orwellian framing, the replacement of "father" and "mother" with "parent 1" and "parent 2" on administrative forms meant that the former categories would simply disappear not only from official language, but from "reality" (Vaquin. et al.).

Invoking Orwell to Fight the "Gender War"

Orwell would have been puzzled to see how often his book was invoked in the context of tense debates over marriage equality legislation in France in 2012-2013, as we found out in the course of our attempts to reconstruct the genealogy of Orwellian references in the French public sphere. At the time, a social movement coalesced against this bill around the organization "La Manif pour Tous" ("Protest for all," a reference to "Mariage pour Tous," the slogan associated to the legalization of same-sex marriage), crystallizing both conservative opposition on issues of biopolitics (Béraud and Portier) and anti-elite and anti-media resentment. Within this heterogeneous movement, activists and intellectuals from conservative Catholic circles disseminated and thus helped to popularize dystopian references. Major conservative Catholic publishers such as *TerraMare* and websites such *Le salon beige* linked the reform to *1984*—a book that had in their opinion become a "frightening reality" (Boucher). A part of the movement expressed intellectual ambitions, notably through the practice of reading texts at night-time "vigils," including Orwell's *1984* (Bourabaa), and frequently quoting figures from Aristotle to—again—Orwell (Tudy). Often, "Newspeak" acted as an autonomous reference in its own right, requiring no elaboration or explanation of *1984* to be understood. But the movement also used more precise and varied dystopian references, particularly Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. In 2015, "Manif pour Tous" activists Eric Letty and Guillaume de Prémare published an account of the social movement entitled *Resistance to the Best*

of Worlds (*Résistance aux meilleurs des mondes*), referring to the title of *Brave New World*'s French translation, *Le meilleur des mondes*. With the legalization of same-sex marriage the movement dwindled, but references to *1984* continued to serve to crystallize multiple forms of opposition to the Socialist government, particularly around the politics of language. References now came not only from established intellectuals from the Catholic right, but also from broader political circles. In 2015, the philosophers François-Xavier Bellamy (who self-identifies as a Catholic conservative) and Michel Onfray (originally from the Left but now self-defining as a "popular sovereignist") converged on a similar critique couched in terms of the "thought police," a direct reference to Orwell (de Villers and Deveccio). Soon after, "sovereignist" essayist Natacha Polony founded an "Orwell committee" which vowed to combat "language manipulation," which she presented as a present-day "soft totalitarianism." In this instance, Orwell's rights holders protested, and the committee was forced to change its name to "the Orwellians" (Durupt and Guiton).

A Tool for a Gramscian Counter-Cultural Revolution?

The wide range of established actors actively promoting an "Orwellian framing" helps to understand its emergence in mainstream media throughout the 2010s. Not incidentally, many of the press outlets disseminating this Orwellian framing underwent a shift to the right at the same time, in line with structural changes in the French press under the pressure of digitalization. This is the case with the new editorial policy of the weekly *Valeurs Actuelles* since 2012, but also of *Le Figaro* which launched the polemical website *FigaroVox* in 2014. Both shared writers with the (originally centre-left but now) sovereigntist weekly *Marianne*, directed by Natacha Polony since 2018, as well as with the online-only right-wing outlet *Atlantico* (launched in 2011) and the magazine *Causeur* (launched online in 2007, and in a monthly paper version since 2008).

These recognized, professional, but increasingly right-leaning press titles were also frequently quoted by a series of conservative and radical right-wing news websites that had emerged since the 2000s, helping share this "Orwellian framing" across an ideological network that self-identified with the notion of "reinformation," a keyword for a collective cultural struggle against mainstream media (Stephan and Vauchez). As in other countries, radical-right movements and parties had engaged in

online activism from early on, beginning with the founding of *Novopress.info* by the Bloc Identitaire in 2005. The *Front national* (FN) was the first French political party to invest heavily in the use of online communication tools (Dézé), as it attempted to maintain its core political identity while pursuing its strategy of normalization (Hobeika and Villeneuve). Other websites were launched by activists who did not share this constraint, as they claimed independence from political parties. This was the case of *Le salon beige* ("The beige lounge/salon," evoking a neutral space for discussion), which came to play a prominent role in the opposition to same-sex marriage. Founded in 2004 by Catholic activists in their thirties and forties, often from traditionalist circles, it became the forerunner of a network of Catholic blogs and webpages (Blanc). It has since been bought by the activist Guillaume Jourdain de Thieulloy, who owns a number of other websites that take a similar conservative Catholic, economically liberal line, e.g. *Nouvelle de France* and *Riposte catholique*. Outside the conservative Catholic milieu, there was also the well-known blog and, later, news website *Fdesouche* (short for "François Desouche"). Its title is based on a play on words with the older phrase "Français de souche," an expression referring to having many generations of French ancestors, used by Jean-Marie Le Pen in particular to refer to an ethnically, a.k.a. white, French population. It was founded in 2006 by Pierre Sautarel, who worked closely with the Front national on communication in the late 2000s (Albertini and Doucet). Beyond their ideological differences (on economics and State secularism in particular), these websites are connected through their media practice: they relay articles from all kinds of media as well as opinion pieces and quickly began to relay articles from each other as well. Studies analysing their links to one another have shown how they merge around nodal points, each aggregating a sub-family of the radical right (Blanc; Froio).

This online activism among radical right-wing political activists is, of course, not unique to France. But French activists have explicitly referred to the "metapolitical" strategy of "counter-cultural Gramscianism" developed by the Nouvelle Droite (New Right) at the end of the 1970s as a way to turn the left's own weapons against it (Griffin; McCulloch). In fact, while many websites were launched by young activists and/or linked to new movements such as the *Bloc identitaire* (Identity Block), it was, in part, older actors who unified and connected them to one another around a common goal, by transmitting the strategies of the New Right and adapting them to the Internet age. In 2008, a key actor on the Nouvelle Droite, Jean-Yves Le Gallou, a

senior civil servant and former executive of the Front national, launched a manifesto for a "technological Gramscianism," which was widely distributed at the time on these emerging right-wing websites. In it, he urged readers to make use of new technologies to produce "re-information" that is "just," "non-conformist," and "pluralist," in order to win "the battle of ideas" (Le Gallou). A foundation launched by Le Gallou and other activists in 2002, the Polemia Foundation, also played a pivotal role in the emerging radical right-wing online sphere, with a ceremony ironically celebrating mainstream media lies (Bobards d'Or, "Golden Fibs") and the publication of pamphlets such as the *Dictionary of Newspeak* in 2009. All of these writings link the "counter-cultural" ambition to references to Orwell and particularly to "Newspeak."

Activists such as Le Gallou who made their political debuts in the 1960s and 1970s had read *1984* first as an anti-communist pamphlet and redirected it against the French socialist actors and governments of the late 20th century. But these references quickly spread more widely in the so-called "reinfosphere," extending beyond this initial reading in the process. Since its beginnings, the website Fdesouche has presented ironic thematic pages on language, including a page listing "Newspeak among us" with sourced examples "taken from the press or the media": the comparison of these media terms with more common and stigmatizing expressions is intended to reveal a violent reality marked by inter-ethnic conflicts that the media seek to describe euphemistically, e.g., "Don't say 'average Frenchman attached to his culture,' but 'racist' instead" (Fdesouche). The *Dictionary of Newspeak*, republished in 2015, also focused on words supposedly subverted by the Left: again in the context of same-sex marriage ("actors involved in the conception and education of children"), or when debunking what the authors saw as euphemisms for racialised groups: e.g., "Adverse events: Euphemism used by the RATP [Parisian Transport Authority] when supporters of the Algerian soccer team block bus traffic" (Le Gallou and Geoffroy).

Right-wing Orwellian references can thus be traced back to an older *Nouvelle droite* strategy of debunking "political correctness" through language. The 2012-2013 social movement against same-sex marriage was key in spreading this framing of gender politics beyond Catholic and/or radical-right circles, from fringe radical-right websites to newspapers of the mainstream right and the centre.

The use of this "Orwellian framing" in the context of new "cultural wars" served, explicitly and implicitly, as a unifying device for various movements opposing the socialist government in power until 2017, but also beyond. In the right-wing online

media and the traditional conservative print press alike, references to "Orwell," "1984," or "Newspeak" are still used on the one hand to oppose any societal reforms shifting the balance of power between majority and minority groups, particularly along gender and race lines, and on the other hand, without reference to current news, as a kind of an ideological anchoring point, in a long term perspective. In the end, progressive movements are not the only ones able to recognize the disruptive power of dystopia to reframe the present (Harrison); right-wing movements can do the same, in order to hinder different kinds of social transformation.

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Black Mirror Prosumers and the Contemporary Domain

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BY virtue of its name alone, "speculative fiction" is fiction that invites speculation. Authors such as Vonnegut, Le Guin and Atwood among others have vocally expressed their discontent with their works being labelled as "science fiction," which suggests genre-based limitations to the reading of the texts (Thomas 1-15). The term "speculative" is also the preferred choice for a significant number of individuals who engage with different media texts so as to emphasize their imaginative focus on current affairs. Speculative fiction involves a displacement of one's assumptions about the world one lives in. This displacement, however, relies on an "anchor": "Readers of any piece of fiction must find a touchstone, a place, person or emotion, where they can connect and engage in the story. . . . Fiction becomes a safer place for exploration and helps us resolve dissonance" (Thomas 39). The "anchor," I propose, is the link between the reader's reality and the speculative text that allows for cognitive estrangement, thereby enabling the reader to speculate about contemporary society. Charlie Brooker and Annabel Jones's techno-dystopian Netflix series *Black Mirror* invites speculation regarding the relationship between technology and society as each episode of the anthology series extrapolates familiar examples from current technological developments and presents the viewer with a society that shares aspects which the viewer may already be familiar with. For example, the episode "Hang the DJ" (Season 4 Episode 4) opens with one of the two protagonists getting information from "Coach," a virtual assistant not unlike Apple's Siri. As the episode progresses, the audience learns how the two protagonists attempt to rebel against the "dating program" that dictates the initiation and expiration of their relationship with each other. In this case, virtual assistants and online dating apps such as "Tinder" serve as the anchor, while it is the unexpectedness of how these technologies assume control in the episode that invite speculation concerning those very technologies. This invitation to speculate on how technological and scientific progress informs our view of society is characteristic of *Black Mirror*. The show tends to challenge preconceived notions about technology and society and serve as a mirror, as the

title suggests, to illustrate the darker undertones of the relationship between the two. *Black Mirror*, therefore, can be identified as an exercise in speculative fiction, with those involved in the storytelling processes of the text presenting an idea that challenges the viewer's reality or expectations and in turn forces speculation about the world around them.

In June 2020, metro.co.uk published an article about an advertisement that had been put up in Madrid, Spain (Kelly). The ad features the Netflix logo as well as the title of the show *Black Mirror* in its original font along with the slogan, "6th Season. Live Now, everywhere" (Kelly). This advertisement arguably can be seen as a product of prosumption and meme culture along with the characteristic feature of speculative fiction to engage in a dialogue with the contemporary social and technological climate. In early 2020, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world experienced a global shutdown. Governments all over the world urged people to stay indoors and maintain distance from friends and family members as well as wear masks in case they venture out. Businesses were also compelled to close shops to contain the spread of the virus and restrictions were enforced on restaurants, cafes, places of worship among other places where people could gather in large numbers. Concerts and events such as Coachella and the San Diego Comic Con were cancelled, too. One could certainly argue that most of the world's population was affected by the pandemic. The incredible spreading of the virus, which led to such drastic measures and restricted free movement among the masses, invited numerous analogies to the dystopian, if not outright apocalyptic scenarios that frequently feature as central themes in numerous works of speculative fiction.

The curtailment of freedom prompted by the pandemic had been mirrored in many earlier episodes of *Black Mirror*. For example, in the episode "Nosedive" (Season 3 Episode 1), a "social credit system" serves as a gatekeeper concerning an individual's socioeconomic status, barring them from certain events, opportunities or luxuries. The episode "San Junipero" (Season 3 Episode 4) also explores the theme of liberties being cut due to paralysis and death, as the episode details the simulation called San Junipero that is populated by the deceased who are "uploaded" to the simulation in the bodies of their younger selves, and who can be "visited" by the elderly. The episode "USS Callister" (Season 4 Episode 1) explores the theme of the clones of people being trapped in a simulation and their attempts to "escape" by breaching into the "real" world. Further episodes of the series also highlight limitations on one's

freedom and will as a result of technology, which constitutes an underlying theme in *Black Mirror*. It comes as no surprise, then, that some viewers of the show consider the impact of Covid-19 which resulted in a similar curtailment of liberties as a *Black Mirror* episode "gone meta." The ad acknowledges this by claiming that *Black Mirror* is "live" all over the world. This sentiment is also resonated by Charlie Brooker, one of the executive producers and writers of the show, who claimed that the global scenario was too bleak for another season of *Black Mirror* and that he chose to focus on other projects because, "At the moment, I don't know what stomach there would be for stories about societies falling apart" (Pearce). A shared meaning-making and interpretation process between the producers and consumers of media texts as reflected in how the two parties view the pandemic situation within the framework of *Black Mirror* thus constitutes a manifestation of the practice of prosumption.

In *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, Gajjala et al. claim that prosumption is a result of activity on the part of media consumers who actively engage with media content and allow for the "disappearance" of the "distinction between making and using media" (1). Prosumption is reflected in participatory culture that involves co-creation and co-production "whereby people make their own media content, as engaged amateurs instead of paid professionals" (Gajjala et al. 1). It is these "DIY" (do-it-yourself) activities that distinguish prosumption because of their ability to disrupt "the usual power relations between makers and consumers, often conflating and democratizing them so that lines are blurred and domination is usurped . . . making more obvious the productive power of people who create while also consuming" (Gajjala et. al 1). Since the advent of Web 2.0, software and hardware tools enabled the appropriation and (re-)circulation of media content. Technology, especially Web 2.0 applications such as social networking platforms became embedded in our everyday lives, including through digital native celebrities and influencers as well as politics. Applications such as Twitter and Tumblr allowed the everyday person to engage with media celebrities that would otherwise be geographically, socially and economically removed from the viewer. Web 2.0 applications led to successful and failed political campaigning, exposure of scandals and scams, and are often used by powerful figures to communicate directly with their audiences.

The Madrid *Black Mirror* poster employs the official Netflix logo and *Black Mirror* font to lend authenticity to this piece of fan art, leading to the question whether it

was actually created by Netflix, which the company denied. Authenticity, however, was not only achieved through the design of the poster, but also by the theme of the show being reflected in daily life. It enabled the reading of both, the show and the fan art, and its interpretation as mirroring "real life." As is evident in nearly every *Black Mirror* episode, technology took up a significant place in global society at large as well as specific aspects of particular societies, cultures and subcultures. The reliance on technology for day-to-day functions, especially during the pandemic, which involved work-from-home, online classes for schools, universities and other institutions as well as a surge in online media consumption, highlight the relationship between society and technology that is at the heart of *Black Mirror*. Therefore, it indeed seemed like *Black Mirror* had gone live, everywhere. The "ad" also reflects the prosumption practice in that it asserts dominance over the media text by exercising creativity and engaging in a labour of love to create the poster. Furthermore, this appropriation involves a certain degree of deciphering the themes and the overall tone of the show to be able to express an interpretation of not only the show itself, but how it relates to real-life events.

The Web 2.0 applications that enabled media engagement, appropriation and community formation also served as breeding grounds for online meme culture. Tracing the origins of the term "meme" in Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* (1976), Shifman identifies the meme in the digital age as "the rapid propagation of images, videos, and catchphrases on the internet" (199). Shifman further highlights that "a meme succeeds when certain social, cultural, psychological, and technological conditions expedite its uptake" (199). While *Black Mirror* as a media text was popular enough to be appropriated in memes—whether in the form of GIFs, screenshots from the show with text, dialogue from the show transposed onto images that may be deemed humorous or relevant—its propagation as a meme when combined with current events, specifically in relation to the dystopian nature of the spread of the Covid-19 virus in early 2020 led to an explosion of memes circulating over the Internet, which constitutes a comment on or interpretation of both the media text and the state of society. A significant portion of memes concerning the Covid-19 pandemic parodied the seemingly "apocalyptic" circumstances, often lending them a sardonic tone. As a steadily growing number of memes synonymised the pandemic with an apocalypse or a dystopian future, the underlying meaning enabled the making of the abovementioned *Black Mirror* ad created by a fan. Fig. 1, for example, employs stills

from an episode of *Black Mirror* and serves as the poster for an article titled "5 Signs That We Might Be Living In An Episode of Black Mirror" (Matthews). The article details the effects of the spread of the pandemic on daily life and how that is reflected as an episode of *Black Mirror*. The 5 titular signs include not being allowed to leave one's home or having a limitation on the places one may visit; socialising is possible only online; politicians engaging in unconventional actions; disinfectants and toilet paper have become extremely desirable goods; and people are being reported for "not following public health protocol." All of these signs from "real life" are mirrored in *Black Mirror*, and this kind of an interpretation of the contemporary situation enables viewers to make the comparison to the show.

Fig. 1. A meme related to the Covid-19 crisis with images from the *Black Mirror* episode "Nosedive" (Matthews)

Media and technology play a crucial role in the rapid spread of information. Through the website of newspapers, news blogs and analytical organizations, one could track the swift spread of the Covid-19 virus all over the world, and how governments and the populace reacted to the crisis in different places. There were numerous reports of people stocking up their homes or garages with "emergency supplies" and buying "essentials" such as canned food and toilet paper in bulk as if they were indeed preparing for an apocalypse. As Web 2.0 applications facilitated the spread of both the pandemic and the "preppers," there was a gradual rise in circulation

of memes concerning both. Fans of *Black Mirror* also made the connection between technology's hand in the panic caused by the pandemic and the underlying theme of the anthology series. Numerous episodes of the series—including "The National Anthem" (Season 1 Episode 1), "Be Right Back" (Season 2 Episode 1), "White Bear" (Season 2 Episode 2), "Nosedive" (Season 3 Episode 1), "Hated in the Nation" (Season 3 Episode 6) and "Smithereens" (Season 5 Episode 2) among others—highlight the role of social media in influencing public thought and set off a series of events that irrevocably change the lives of those involved. Owing to the importance of social media in these episodes, and its affordances that enable transmission of information and engagement in self-presentation that allows individuals to transform their social media presence into various forms of Bourdieusian capitals (such as earning fame, money, education, technical skills, etc.), the similarity between this underlying theme in the show and the "reality" of its viewers becomes apparent. Social media plays a crucial role in how a significant portion of the global population reacted to this pandemic, from hosting watch-parties and meetups on social media to sending memes and weblinks containing information to friends and family, to simply engaging in the process of physical social distancing while using the virtual platform to cope with these measures. In this context, social media can be identified as a reverse anchor, serving as a link that makes the real-life situation comparable to the fictional one in the show. By interpreting the relationship between the show and reality, fans engage in meaning-making processes of textual appropriation. Such appropriations of a text by fans can occur due to a number of reasons: as an assertion of their place in the fandom that highlights their affiliation to, for example, the fan fiction authors' community or the fan artists' community; as a collector of "special editions" or "Easter eggs" of a show; to showcase their ability to work with Web 2.0 applications and other software; or simply as a creative outlet for which they employ a media text of their choice. This appropriation, in turn, leads to a "bricolaged" project such as the fan-made ad in the sense of "the joining of separate media elements to form a different whole, a newly put together piece of media that orchestrates different meanings from those of the alleged original. It thus involves a notion of media users and audiences who actively make new meanings out of the different sources at hand" (Schmidt and De Kloet 1). The addition of the Netflix logo as well as the typography of the show added a certain "authenticity" to the ad, leading *Metro* to believe that it may have been created by Netflix. Apart from lending authenticity, however, it

allowed for an understanding of the contemporary situation in relation to the text, illustrating the meaning-making process of presumption and bricolage.

The interpretive process, which leads to a particular expression on part of the media prosumer, along with the information that the audience retains not only from the text itself but also from its creators and producers—such as Charlie Brooker admitting to "reality" being too dystopian to create a new season of *Black Mirror*—contributes to the overall understanding that an individual may have of a text, i.e. a blend of not only the contents of the text and the message as conveyed by the producers, but also its "popular" interpretation among audiences. The involvement of all these various parties—the producer, the consumer, and the prosumer—lean into the various subcultures associated with media texts and the politics surrounding them, all of which invite further examination to theorize the cycle of media give-and-take between these parties.

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Architectural Responses in Alternative Realities: The Politics of Space through Fiction in Architectural Education

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Introduction

IN a remark in "Exegesis," Philip K. Dick writes "[t]he core of my writing is not art but truth" and that his fiction writing is the creative attempt to describe what he discerned as the true reality, and that his fiction is "a creative way of handling analysis" (506). Based on this idea, this paper explores how science fiction can function alongside the various applications of storytelling in architecture, such as scenario-building to communicate design ideas (Thompson) or to allow non-specialists to express their spatial experiences through content analysis (Ro and Bermudez). In fact, Frascari argues that narrative in architecture is "a crucial condition for making sense of both the individual experience of architecture and social interactions that take place in it" (224). Frascari's approach on storytelling seems to respond to a fundamental quest of architectural education to include the individual, the social and the political in the design process and ensure that architecture is not limited to self-referential projects (Noschis; Brown and Moreau-Yates).

CJ Lim (19) combines architectural visions with speculative scenarios, seeing the prophetic nature of SF works in an effort to explore the climate emergency. However in this paper we base our exploration more on the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre's claim that science fiction has foreseen "every possible and impossible variation of future urban society" (160-61), not because of the writer's prophetic skills, but as a tool to understand their contemporary society and politics. The paper aims to discuss the introduction of SF narratives within post-graduate studies in architecture, aiming to stimulate students' analytical tools and creativity, while fostering the exploration of alternative ways of representation. We present links created between the possible futures for a city that the students create as part of their work and SF narratives in

comics, films and books. The paper presents the way the students created amalgams of otherworld images with familiar worries and disquietudes (Sobchack 109) and how this exercise enhanced their learning experience. By examining the work they produced from their initial explorations until the final resolution of their architectural proposals, the paper aims to contribute to a fruitful discourse of enriching analytical and creative tools, which support understanding but also help students to position themselves in the world and the political situation.

A Learning Challenge

Today in the UK, the most common way to become an architect consists of five years of studies split in two parts, 3 years of undergraduate studies and two years of postgraduate studies. Between the two parts, students work in architectural practices, which creates a big challenge upon their return for their postgraduate studies: the students come with more knowledge, but also trapped in practice routines, struggling to balance technical requirements and creative approaches. The structure of the Portsmouth School of Architecture consists of different design studios (groups) and each studio sets their own agenda in order to meet the learning outcomes required both by the curriculum and the professional bodies (RIBA and ARB).

The learning outcomes of the first year design modules can be summarised into (1) research and analysis (manmade and natural environment, cultural, social and economic context), (2) exploration of different options in response to the research and observations, (3) technical, environmental and functional resolution in detail, and (4) representation of these ideas (communication). The technical nature of the requirements of the project, combined with the experience in architectural practice, was limiting the explorative nature of the students and we needed to introduce a process of re-learning and re-discovering of their own creativity. In addition, we have noticed that students needed to regain confidence in making independent decisions, experimenting and to be willing to take risks.

A Scenario-Based Syllabus: The Assignment

Within this context, in order to stimulate an alternative approach to analysis and understanding a place and push the students to escape pragmatic constraints and be visionary we examined the possibility of science fiction narratives as tools that will

allow them to imagine their alternative realities. Students are required to explore the possibilities of existing sites and create proposals that respond to current issues. Student projects are speculative and in a way, the computer-generated images that they produce represent alternative realities for that place. However, these ideas will never become, they remain a fictional piece of architecture and an alternative reality for the specific site. The question then is, if these are imaginary alternatives that attempt to resolve today's problems, may should we ask future architects to reflect on probable or improbable future problems.

Borrowing from the Double Layered Asymmetrical model introduced by Goldschmidt (Salama 133-35), we divided the year in four interweaving parts. Part 1 consisted of group work on collecting and evaluating information about a given urban context (Liverpool, Newcastle, Belfast). The second part was a "What If…?" scenario where students had to take inspiration from SF texts (novels, films, comics) and apply these to the urban context they were working. Students were working on the first two parts in parallel, but the other two parts were revealed in stages. The third part required students to design a response to the scenario they have set-up on a city level, a strategy to survive the problems the scenario created and then to focus on a key building that they had to design in more detail. The final part, required from students to reflect on the probability of their scenario and reflect on what will be the function of the building in case the imaginative scenario does not work.

The fact the traditional stage of analysing the context was combined with the "What if…" scenario took the students outside of their usual routines. While there was a freedom in the scenario and their inspiration (natural disasters, scientific experiments that went wrong, zombies, animal attacks, asteroids, black holes, and dystopian post Brexit worlds), the students had to make the scenario site specific. The scenario had to be illustrated, enforcing students to situate their narratives within the specific city and to demonstrate their representation skills. This way their observation about the city was not a passive recording but an active process, as they had to incorporate these into their narratives. The last part of the story always led to a narrative about people surviving, showing their understanding of the nature of the problem and exploring the concept of architecture as a shelter (Ellin).

Once they had presented their disasters and dystopian visions, they would receive the third part of the assignment. Borrowing from Max Brooks's *World War Z,* students had to work within a "tenth man scenario" (Brooks 34); in other words, a

client (the council, an individual or a funding body) an architectural proposal which would ensure the safety of the citizens or some citizens in case of that unprecedented crisis. Once this part was completed, students had to explore the final stage of the project, which went back to reality and students had to rethink their designs to avoid a 'White Elephant' (Shariatmadari), a building that is costly to maintain but because the predicted attack is not occurring remains useless. Even in this case though, the building would need to be able to transform and retain its original function.

Drawing Alternative Realities

Students explored the imaginative through different mediums and a variety of representation techniques (hand drawings, physical and digital collages, sketch-up models), in order to present the experience of the destruction and survival of Liverpool-Birkenhead, Newcastle-Gateshead and East and West Belfast. The students adopted different points of view within these narratives, in some cases integrating themselves in these worlds and in others remaining a narrator. This type of narrative allowed students to "live" the dramatic implications of the disaster, but also to become part of the socio-political context of the different cities of investigation.

James Telotte (93) says that SF imagery becomes attractive to the spectator because it takes familiar elements and places them in an unfamiliar setting and students followed a similar strategy. Since the projects had to link to specific cities, the students went into depth to make sure that the imaginary alternative was linked to key elements of the city. to explore, identify and use the elements that constitute the image of the city according to Kevin Lynch landmarks, nodes, edges, districts, pathways in order to anchor the stories to the place. The Liverpool Guildhall, the Newcastle bridges, the river Lagan become elements of a wider narrative and are populated with activities. The analysis is not a collection of photos and statistics, but they become a vivid place where people run, gather, hide or try to define boundaries. In a similar way to SF films the students instinctively explored the macro scale of the city down to the microscale of the human factor and discovered the links of the two.

Beyond their understanding of the place, the change of scales shows how the SF narratives were an excellent tool for students to immerse themselves into the problem before imagining a solution. This was an alternative way of applying role playing in architecture, which, according to Anthony Jackson and Chris Vine, places

the learners "within the dramatic fiction" and requires them to interact with the various issues and "make decisions in the midst of 'crisis'" (6). This immersion supports a thorough understanding of the problems they 'experienced' and helps define solutions that focus on the people that will use the buildings.

Another important outcome in the exercise is the way the SF narratives provided a safer environment to explore difficult political topics. For example, when working in Belfast, the speculative nature of the scenarios allowed students to approach the religious division of the city and explore the visible and invisible segregations. Furthermore, the scenarios questioned utopian architectural visions and generated discussions on authoritarianism, and architecture's role of serving the ones in power. The speculative scenarios and the consideration of different characters in the narrative expanded the students' perception of the way architecture affects everyday life. Close to JG Ballard's position on science fiction, students were looking at their present, from Brexit and the social divisions because of the referendum, the tendency for fortification of cities, to the climate emergency and the need for alternative social structures, projecting their emotions into the future.

The visualisation of the crisis also becomes a medium of synthesising the brief for the architectural solution. The students understand that they are not just responding to a building typology—for example, a house, a hospital or a school—and that they need to escape the preconceptions linked to space and its use. They understand that they need to find solutions that not only protect people and communities from zombies and natural disasters. They create structures where people have to co-exist and they need to think of the possible tensions of enclosure, limited food supplies, and reduced energy sources. The understanding and the evaluation of the problems supports students in articulating a critical narrative for a given location and at the same time initiates a briefing process and determines functions.

The playful set-up of the scenario allowed many students to escape their preconception of what is a proper architectural drawing and project. The SF set up also initiated an exploration of new ways of representation, as they needed to escape traditional drawing techniques and create a spectacular, even if dystopian, new world, taking references from comics and movies. Furthermore, it provided the students with an opportunity to add to their final images the drama of the initial crisis.

An important challenge and limitation in the process has been that students

were not always open to the idea of stepping out of their routines, "squeezing the scenarios" within more traditional architectural means of representation. Despite the expected reluctance, even the weaker students produced their visually strongest work during this process. This was also evident at their comments for the evaluation of the module. This exercise has also been an opportunity for the tutors to discover an alternative way of approaching the topic, beyond our original conceptualisation. While in the beginning we saw this exercise as a warm-up, to help students to ease into the challenging years of operating in a post-graduate architectural environment, the realisation of the possibilities soon transformed the exercise as the spine of the project in our studio. In the second year, we expanded the part of the creation of the visual scenarios, requiring students to explore in detail their SF ideas.

Conclusion

SF narratives proved to be a valuable educational method to reintroduce students to exploration, speculation, discovery, and to them to explore their potential. Despite initially conceived as a warm-up tool and a confidence building operation, the narratives supported students in gaining a deeper understanding of the design process and the urban context that they were called to analyse and respond to. The students' evaluation provided evidence that students enjoyed the "what if…?" scenarios and working within these playful approaches.

This exercise had a dual effect. On one hand it looked relaxed and a warming up, on the other hand it was a step out of the comfort zone of students of architecture, who after three years in university and a year in practice realised that they could not go back to their usual working routines. Furthermore, the immersion into the narrative and the setup of these alternative worlds required from them the exploration of different scales at the same time. This also led to the use of alternative representation language early in the project and a greater attention to detail.

There are always limitations in these exercises, especially in the cases of weaker students who cannot see the value of the medium and they do not try to understand the process. While many of them found a way to create a narrative based on the resources provided, some remained reluctant to push the narrative to its limits and went back to default positions regarding architectural projects. However, looking back to the work of the past three years provides us with confidence that the students

who engaged with the process, regardless of their representational skills, managed to infuse new ideas into their projects.

We are still investigating the idea of requesting a graphic novel as the final submission instead of an architectural portfolio, in order to release students from the anxiety of typical drawings. This educational activity shows that SF narratives and architecture can work together to communicate ideas about a place and trigger the imagination about the future of our urban society. SF alternatives of existing cities becomes a transformative tool that stimulates exploration and enhances the learning process, because it becomes a tool to understand the complex process of the production of space, the spatial inequalities and the exclusions created by architectural interventions, while re-discovering skills and re-learning the creative processes of architecture. Strong visuals combined with a contextualised narrative lead to a deeper understanding of the city and the human experience, demonstrating that cross-medial learning can lead in many cases to an architectural educational happy end, despite the dystopian futures that initiate these ideas every year.

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NONFICTION REVIEWS

Publishing the Science Fiction Canon: The Case of Scientific Romance

James Allard

Adam Roberts. *Publishing the Science Fiction Canon: The Case of Scientific Romance*. Cambridge Elements: Elements in Publishing and Book Culture Series, edited by Samantha Rayner and Rebecca Lyons. Cambridge University Press, 2018. Paperback, 82 pages, ISBN 9781108708890.

ADAM Roberts delivers exactly what his title promises: he uses the genre of scientific romance to explore canon formation in general and the development of the SF canon in particular, claiming that this "one iteration of SF's protean variety, known to critics as the 'scientific romance', is as much an artefact of a shift in the underlying logic of commercial publication at the very end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, as it is anything else" (8). His core claim is deceptively straightforward: "the material conditions of production of what is called 'scientific romance' determined key aspects of the form going forward, and therefore shaped important aspects of contemporary SF" (1). Roberts explores those conditions, from major changes in the production of texts to equally momentous changes in the contexts in which those texts were consumed, linking those conditions to the emergence and cultural impact of scientific romance, and then, ultimately, connecting that impact to the shape and scope of later SF, from the pulps to film. The result is a lucid, engaging, and provocative study of a crucial moment in the history of popular culture that manifestly, but never defensively, demonstrates the value of greater critical attention to the texts and contexts of popular cultures.

Roberts is at his best when interrogating the material conditions of canon formation. SF provides an important point of access to any consideration of canonicity: he notes that in "the case of science fiction there are distinct levels by which specifically SF texts fit into this larger critical narrative," since "SF has developed its own canon, both in the top-down university syllabus sense [. . .] and in the bottom-up sense of an active and engaged fandom" (12). At the same time, the historical moment when scientific romance was dominant—"after the older dominance of circulating libraries had become obsolete but before the newer

commercial restrictions of the Net Book Agreement had come into force" (8), or "the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth" (14)—sees a collision of emerging modernism and its aesthetic, philosophical, and political concerns together with shifts in print culture and the business of publishing:

> It is from the 1880s, and especially the 1890s, that we can date the expansion of SF, its shift from being a niche form of cultural production, with small print runs, limited readerships and a marginal place in publishing, through a rapid commercial expansion based around cheaper books, and (especially) magazines—"Pulps"—into cinema and TV and, finally, to our present state of affairs, in which SF and Fantasy, especially in "Young Adult" (YA) writing and superhero modes, has a greater cultural penetration, and flat outsell other forms of cultural production. The period under consideration here, in other words, figures as a hinge point in the larger narratives of genre. (2-3)

But more than locating the conditions that led to the emergence of a canon, Roberts stresses that this "state of affairs is not a coincidence" and "that the form of this type of SF actually directly expresses that underlying cultural-economic substrate," that "this window, shaped by a set of particular exigencies to do with the manufacture and sale of fiction, generated the 'scientific romance' as we now understand it" (8).

Roberts points to two key factors that had the most profound effects on the creation and circulation of scientific romance, and thus on the SF canon more broadly: first, substantial changes in publishing that saw the marketplace flooded with cheap texts of all sorts, displacing the circulating library as the primary source for reading material, and, second, the advent of easy rail travel. In terms of the former, Roberts demonstrates that a "combination of reduction in unit costs, greatly increased literacy in the general population, and relaxation of government controls produced a boom in publishing that in turn fed a new literary culture in which [. . .] some SF writers enjoyed success on a scale that launched the genre as a popular cultural mode" (29-30). But it's with the latter point that Roberts's book is most likely to make its most significant impact, and where it may provoke controversy, as he seems well aware. He notes that more than just "facilitating [. . .] movement," "railways were machines that generated new tranches of leisure" (37)—including, of course, leisure reading. But the real key is in recognizing how "iterations of the age-old science-fictional fascination with exploration" (43) that dominate scientific romance—from often

luxurious "Verneian *voyages extraordinaires*" (43) to the Wellsian tendency that "keeps his protagonist in one place and moves the world around him, or makes the exotic commute into the protagonist's world" (43)—"become increasingly figured [. . .] in terms of the sorts of convenience and comfort a commuter might expect" (43) from rail travel at the turn of the twentieth century. Roberts is, however, careful to state that "This is not to argue for a facile mapping of rail travel onto space travel, but it is to suggest that the determining logic of a new reading public, a public often literally in motion, and carried by the most advanced technology of the day, tended to revert back upon the material context out of which it was being disseminated" (39). Thus, if the railway both symbolizes and incarnates a new kind of mobility, demonstrating that "social mobility is not only about physical travel [. . .] [but also] about access to resources" (51), then scientific romance, in both form and content, as a set of generic conventions and a point of access into something bigger than itself, made it clear that "cultural resources" (51), like those supplied by the simple act of reading what many others were also reading, were as vital to survival as anything else.

Readers looking for a sustained treatment of the influences, themes, and politics of scientific romance may not find as much to chew on here as they might like—though those things are certainly discussed and in interesting and generative ways. But readers looking for a nuanced exploration of canons and canonization, especially the vexed relationship between 'high' and 'low' art, 'literary' and 'genre' fiction, 'academic' and 'popular' cultures, will find this book immensely rewarding. It makes bigger claims than we might expect from a slim volume of just over eighty pages (standard, of course, for the Elements series), but it also has the potential to make a much bigger impact than we might expect from a slim book, maybe especially one on some aspect of SF, and deserves serious attention from a great many readers, and not just those interested in early SF.

Posthuman Folklore

Peter Cullen Bryan

Tok Thompson. *Posthuman Folklore*. University Press of Mississippi, 2019. Paperback. 214 pg. $30. ISBN 9781496825094.

TOK Thompson's *Posthuman Folklore* endeavors to locate the future of folklore within the realms of speculative fiction and animal studies, offering an overview of paths forward for the discipline. The book is divided into two major sections: one focused on animal studies and one discussing the larger trends of folklore, with an eye towards how folklore studies might evolve to better engage with new media. *Posthuman Folklore* functions more as a broad review of the current literature than deeply-focused monograph, and should be broadly accessible to anyone with an interest in the future of the humanities. Thompson avoids getting lost in the weeds of scholarly debate, creating a text that offers a useful primer of the current field, as well as potential paths forward.

The first portion of *Posthuman Folklore* focuses on the application of animal studies to the question of artificial intelligence. Speculative fiction and folklore can help to bridge this divide, in Thompson's estimation, and Thompson makes the case for the humanities within the larger discussion: "postcolonial science opens itself up to the inclusion of considerations of other schools of thought, other epistemologies, and offers possible avenues of thought out of the dead-end of anthropocentrism" (55). By locating concepts within Native American approaches to human-animal relationships, for instance, Thompson views the solution to the problem as being more open to alternative modes of thought. He uses animal studies as a framework for deconstructing Western thought on sexuality: "sharing sexuality between humans and other species seems to similarly engage this same taboo of troubling human-animal binary division" (70). Thompson posits that the arrival of non-human relationships is likely inevitable with advances in artificial intelligence, and developing a framework for how to handle this will soon be necessary, a framework that can be found (in part, at least) within animal studies.

The second section of *Posthuman Folklore* explores the role of folklore in a digital (and perhaps post-digital) culture. In Thompson's argument, Western philosophy

is ill-equipped to respond to the arrival of non-human (artificial) intelligences, contending that there are approaches in folklore and transnational perspectives: "given that we have long studied ways that cultures perceive and predict future events, folklorists should not shy away from taking on the new role of futurists, bringing our insights to predict, plan for, and shape the swiftly oncoming future" (118). In this respect, this echoes the fears of figures like Francis Fukuyama (*Our Posthuman Future*) but offers an optimistic counterpoint and locates a place for humanities in a future of science and technology. Thompson echoes as well Marshall McLuhan, stating, "the digital realm is not only a place for communication, but is also, and increasingly, a contributor to the communication that takes place" (146). Thompson positions the humanities as especially well-equipped to respond to the needs of present-day citizens, arguing that the tools developed for comprehending the history of human civilization are just as applicable to new technology as rural folkways.

There is a lot of value in *Posthuman Folklore*, both as an overview of the current state of affairs in animal studies and folklore, as well as a potential roadmap for future research in those fields. Thompson's approach is often theoretical, more concerned with *possible* directions of future research than fully engaging with specific concepts, but that does also make this a more accessible text. He further makes the case for a more muscular humanities taking a more proactive approach with the broader public. Thompson poses questions for this approach, such as, "will culture's everyday artistic communication be increasingly free, or increasingly owned?" (108). In this respect, Thompson emphasizes the role of folkloric approaches in discussions of copyright or animal rights, for instance, locating a useful framework for engaging not only with future issues, but also with those faced in the modern digital world. Thompson does not offer specific remedies to the problems of the moment (the humanities in itself is not the solution to the effects of globalization and cultural hegemony), instead positing folklore as a piece of the solution that belongs within the deeper public conversation. Thompson concludes with a keen point about generational shifts: "[Alexa] is putting kids to bed with bedtime stories. Children very often believe she is a real person [...] we are increasingly raising our children as natively cyborg" (151). There is an inevitability to this conversation: technology will continue to evolve just as surely as its users will. Better engagement with folkloric traditions and approaches (particular non-Western traditions) allow for the more flexible thinking required for this historic moment, and Thompson presents an entry point to a conversation that will continue beyond the foreseeable future.

None of This Is Normal: The Fiction of Jeff VanderMeer

Thomas Connolly

Benjamin Robertson. *None of This Is Normal: The Fiction of Jeff VanderMeer.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018. Paperback, 208 pages, $19.95, ISBN 9781517902933.

DESPITE his long-standing critical and (following the publication of the *Southern Reach* trilogy) commercial success, scholarly attention to Jeff VanderMeer has so far been rather scant on the ground. *None of This Is Normal* comprises the first book-length study of VanderMeer's weird fiction—Robertson notes in his introduction that, at the time of publication, there were only two other scholarly articles on VanderMeer's fiction, both published in the same issue of *Paradoxa*.

This relative paucity of scholarly publications on VanderMeer is surprising: anyone who has attended a recent conference on a theme related to SF or fantasy will be aware of the popularity of, and evident critical consideration given to, VanderMeer's fiction. (Indeed, Robertson acknowledges this unusual imbalance.) This attention forms part of a wider scholarly interest in the political, literary, and philosophical ramifications of the "new weird," a literary genre which has proved to be both nebulous *and* subversive in its literary aims. Whereas the original weird, à la Lovecraft and M.R. James, sought to dramatize the insufficiency of human reason in the face of an indifferent and incomprehensible universe, the new weird, according to Robertson, stresses not indifference but *ab*difference, the rejection of difference altogether as a viable category for grappling with the challenges of the Anthropocene.

Such is the political impetus of Robertson's work, which comprises both a study of VanderMeer's fiction and an impassioned call for new modes of thinking that move beyond the humanist tenets of liberalism, environmentalism, and representationalist literary criticism. The political urgency behind Robertson's work is evident from the first page of the introduction, in which Robertson paints a grim picture of the spiralling political chaos—Brexit, Trump, the resurgence of right-wing xenophobic nationalism—of recent years. "None of this," Robertson remarks, borrowing a phrase from VanderMeer, "is normal" (2). Even liberalism, he later argues, is not free from the taint of humanist preconceptions, since such ideological worldviews

are underpinned by the assumption that all differences can be collapsed into a fundamental sameness, an "inside opposed to an outside" (140). Such an inside, Robertson remarks, is defined by arbitrary borders that delimit nothing so much as the incapacity of the human mind to exist *without* such comforting constructs.

The political value of weird and new weird fiction, then, lies in its ability to think outside such delimiting conceptions. Such works demonstrate "the possibility of other norms" (2) that may move us beyond the humanist tenets of western thought. This is achieved, Robertson argues, through the creation of what he repeatedly calls "fantastic materialities" (10 etc.), a key concept underpinning the study. One of the most profound insights of Robertson's work is also perhaps the simplest: that all texts, and all narratives, rely on materiality, which conditions all "patterns and modes of thought" (8). The question that VanderMeer poses in his fictions, according to Robertson, is likewise a relatively simple one: "How does this entanglement of materiality, subjectivity, situation and norms operate when the first term in this list is wholly other—when it is a separate or secondary materiality, a fantastic materiality?" (8).

Robertson's study here owes an intellectual debt to the recent "materialist turn" in critical theory, and in particular to the notion of "cultural geology" developed by Mark McGurl. Cultural geology aims at "crack[ing] open the carapace of human self-concern, exposing it to the idea, and maybe even the fact, of its external ontological preconditions, its ground" (McGurl 380). This "ground" can be understood, quite literally, as *the* ground, the fact of human material dependence on a planet that does not obey human laws. As Robertson puts it in a compelling passage, "[no] amount of power to declare borders will forestall the inert force of a nonliving *geos*" (142), and so there is an evident need to engage critically with the actually-existing fact of material conditions. This need informs the shape of Robertson's study: following an initial chapter outlining these theoretical and material frameworks, each subsequent chapter examines one of VanderMeer's fantastic materialities: the Veniss milieu, the Ambergris novels, and the Southern Reach trilogy. In each chapter, Robertson strives to demonstrate how VanderMeer's works must be understood as offering "other norms" (2)—ways of thinking and being conditioned by materialities radically other to the familiar materialities of the world of author and reader.

Considering the Veniss stories, Robertson critically examines the concept of setting, and the manner in which this concept "makes meaning by drawing

boundaries around heres and nows," and thus reconstitutes space and time within the limited parameters of human meaning (56). The Veniss stories, in contrast, comprise not a setting but a "milieu," an unbounded and discontinuous collection of spaces and times that do not cohere into a recognisable whole. For Robertson, this milieu invokes—without, importantly, allegorising—the experience of living in the Anthropocene, itself a material milieu that refuses to be collapsed down to human-centred frames of reference.

Regarding the Ambergris stories, Robertson turns to look at how the textuality of these novels, which deploy the self-referential techniques of postmodernist writing, invokes a materiality that such techniques often serve to deny or subvert. Robertson highlights how sections of *City of Saints and Madmen*, for example, require the reader to decode numerical sequences that refer to specific paragraphs and sentences earlier in the text. The textual meaning here depends on the physical materiality of the book itself—a "materiotextualisation" which, because it neither claims nor denies the possibility of representing the "real" world, avoids the pitfalls of both realist and postmodernist fiction (108). Ambergris is a secondary fantastic world whose material laws are created and conditioned by the very textuality of the Ambergris texts—impossibilities and contradictions occur in Ambergris, Robertson argues, precisely "because that can happen in books" (108). The novels thus confront the reader with a textuality not separate from, but fundamentally constitutive of, a fantastic materiality.

In the final section, Robertson turns to the Southern Reach trilogy, and to the question of borders mentioned above. The achievement of this trilogy, he argues, lies in its creation of a world without borders. Area X offers an example of a "weird planet," a material *geos* whose relationship to humanity can never be known, since to know such a thing would require the very act of bordering (defining a limited time and space in which to examine causes and effects) that Area X resists. Area X is not *in*different to humanity, as are the "Great Old Ones" of older weird fiction, but *ab*different, that is, existing "outside" (to use an insufficient spatial metaphor) the limits of humanist thought demarcated by such notions as "same" and "different." There is no "away" from Area X, Robertson argues, because it is already everywhere. To paraphrase Roger Luckhurst (quoted by Robertson), Area X does not "breach" the ordinary world—"*It is* (in) *Breach*" (114). The relevance of such fantastic materialities to the condition of humanity in the Anthropocene is clear: Area X is a "materiality ignorant of the rules by which humans measure themselves and their productions"

(142).

Following a discussion of *Borne* in the conclusion, Robertson ends the volume with the following: "VanderMeer teaches us that even if the production of such fictions will not save us, they may show us the planet saving itself" (158). If this seems like a rather pessimistic note on which to end, it perhaps reflects a broader pessimism regarding the capacity for humanity to actually deal with the challenge of the Anthropocene—how does one confront a problem that transcends even the possibility of setting, or of bordering? This is not a question that Robertson answers, nor would it be fair to expect such an answer—the value of Robertson's study is rather to be found in the manner in which it frames the issue. The "problem" of the Anthropocene, he notes in the conclusion, is only a problem within a humanist paradigm that recognises the relevance of such concepts as "problems" and "solutions." It is likely that much of humanity (and Robertson is at pains to stress the particular vulnerability of certain human groups—and the culpability of others—in this regard) will very soon find themselves confronted with a much different paradigm, one that, like Area X, will remain ignorant of human attempts to understand or control it.

Robertson's work provides us with a much-needed critical vocabulary for engaging with these and other challenges of the Anthropocene. For this reason, and for Robertson's intelligent and thought-provoking readings of VanderMeer's fiction, *None of This Is Normal* is required reading for those looking to better understand the new materialist paradigms with which we are—or are soon to be—confronted.

Works cited

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Other Worlds: Spirituality and the Search for Invisible Dimensions

Aga J. Drenda

Christopher G. White. *Other Worlds: Spirituality and the Search for Invisible Dimensions*. Harvard UP, 2018. Hardback. 384 pg. $35.00, ISBN 9780674984295.

IN *Other Worlds: Spirituality and the Search for Invisible Dimensions*, Christopher G. White explores the history and imaginative power of the idea that the universe has higher, invisible dimensions. To accomplish his goal, White assembles an unusual cast of characters: visionary mathematicians, fantasy writers like George MacDonald and C. S. Lewis, mystical physicists, spirit channelers, television producers, hippie scientists, New Age prophets, social reformers, indefatigable parapsychologists, and artists like Max Weber (3). White argues that the diversity of this group is dictated by the desire to make a larger point about science and religion, which are often seen as implacable enemies. He posits that scientific and religious ideas come braided together and influence each other to a degree that has gone unnoticed, and he strives to address it (13).

White treats the idea of the invisible dimensions historically and structures his book accordingly. He begins with the mid-nineteenth century mathematical discoveries of the idea of the fourth dimension and moves through the evolution of the idea across various disciplines until the modern day. This historical approach to the subject makes the structure of the book easy to navigate, especially as chapters are also thematically focused on areas of interest. For example, chapter one is focused on Edwin Abbott's life and career, with special attention paid to *Flatland* (1884), a text that has become a classic for scholars of science fiction, students of mathematics, and spiritual seekers alike. Chapter two discusses the turbulent career and private life of Charles Howard Hinton, the inventor of the four-dimensional cube called "tesseract." The ideas fleshed out in these two chapters are fundamental to the rest of the book, because White traces and refers to them consistently in every chapter that follows. Abbott's allegory of the world existing only on a two-dimensional plane and Hinton's conceptualisation of the "tesseract" serve as two points of reference throughout the history of invisible dimensions. These points

create a referential springboard which White applies to move seamlessly between chapters, from one discipline to another, one time period to another. The example of the transition between chapter four and five illustrates it well. White devotes chapter four to a detailed analysis of the life and work of an architect Claude Bragdon, a man described by his contemporaries as fully as great an architect as Frank Lloyd Wright but lacking Wright's talent for self-promotion (108). Bragdon incorporated higher-dimensional philosophy in architecture by designing hypercubes and other objects into otherworldly ornamentation. By showing the links between Abbott's and Hinton's ideas and Bragdon's work in the early twentieth century, White sets up a transition to chapter five, in which the same ideas are highlighted throughout the art of the period. In chapter five the main area of interest is the evolution of impressionism into cubism and the life and work of Russian-born American painter Max Weber. The philosophy of invisible dimensions is a consistent lens through which White shows the last two centuries to his readers.

My only criticism of *Other Worlds* is that in his analysis of many famous literary works, such as C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956) and Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962), White rarely engages with the abundant literary scholarship produced on the works so far, but rather focuses on the bibliographies and philosophical views of the authors. In this, however, White remains true to his analytical lens of invisible dimensions. When discussing genre literature, White also remains true to his speciality. As a professor of religion, he is interested in how the mythopoeic nature of genre literature influences belief. He argues that "the lesson of modern Christian fantasy and sci-fi is not just that belief takes practice but that objects of belief have to be made believable again for new generations" (228).

Other Worlds is a generous hardback, as it offers over 300 pages of material, along with bibliographical notes, credits, and a useful index at the end, all of which enhance the reading experience. It is a valuable resource for those interested in the intersection of science and religion. Scholars and students, fans and creators, specialists in science fiction, fantasy, popular culture and art will be able to find something of interest in this volume. Its historical structure offers the story of invisible dimensions and encourages the reader to treat the book as one would treat a work of fiction. However, the chapters are so diverse and holistic in their internal structure that they can easily stand up to selective reading. I can imagine chapters from this book being used selectively as reading material for a variety of teaching

modules. A science fiction scholar might, in the words of L'Engle, "tesser with joy" through a selection of short stories analysed by White (242), such as Algernon Blackwood's "Victim of Higher Space" (1914), Robert Heinlein's "And He Built a Crooked House" (1941), William McGivern's "Doorway of Vanishing Men" (1941), and Mark Clifton's "Star, Bright" (1952), to name only a few. *Other Worlds* achieves its goal of delineating how the scientific idea of a higher dimension has spread across popular culture. More importantly, in an impressive feat of scholarship spanning across several disciplines, White manages to revise the conventional way of writing about the modern "conflict between science and religion" by showing how scientific insights were used sometimes not to attack spiritual beliefs but to buttress them in unexpected ways (3).

Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature

Kelly J. Drumright

Sarah Hentges. *Girls on Fire: Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018. Paperback, 290 pages, $39.95, ISBN 9780786499281.

WITH *Girls on Fire: Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature*, Sarah Hentges offers a panoramic view of the literary archetype (turned multi-media cultural phenomenon) exemplified by Katniss Everdeen, the "girl on fire" protagonist of Suzanne Collins's Hunger Games trilogy. Hentges challenges common critiques of YA dystopia as one-dimensional and escapist by emphasizing the complexity of the author's worldbuilding and the protagonists' struggles for social justice. *Girls on Fire* builds on some of the ideas articulated in the edited volume *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (Routledge, 2016) as well as scholarship about the Hunger Games, with the important difference of centering the voices of more marginalized writers.

Despite the section's name, those looking for a theoretical deep-dive into young adult dystopia as a genre will not find it in "Part I: Excavating Theories and Legacies," but *Girls on Fire* has many other strengths. For one, Hentges commits to an interdisciplinary and intersectional critical framework that includes American Studies, Cultural Studies, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Additionally, Hentges excels at taxonomizing the formidable corpus of 140+ primary texts, illustrating connections between series with diagrams she calls "dystopia trees" (249), which help readers visualize the influences of the Girl on Fire (roots), the core texts (trunk), and the proliferation of diverse examples (branches and leaves).

While a helpful chart in the introduction provides an overview of the Girl on Fire's most salient characteristics, it is not until "Part II: Excavating Fiction, Imagination and Application," that Hentges unpacks the titular archetype more fully in the textual analyses that form the volume's core. With the exception of sections on the Hunger Games trilogy and Octavia Butler's *oeuvre* as precursor to the Girl on Fire archetype, Hentges carries out the analysis point-by-point. This approach has its advantages— namely, illuminating trends and highlighting connections between a massive corpus

of texts— but necessarily sacrifices in-depth explorations of a single character, text, or series. Standout sections such as the discussion of white supremacy's pervasive influence on YA dystopia in Chapter 6, "Othered Girls Towards Intersectional Futures," provide important reminders for other scholars and students to question "assumptions of whiteness" (8). Ultimately, Hentges has opted for the approach that most closely fits her final goal: to describe an archetype, mining the richness of its myriad iterations for insights into our present cultural moment.

One of the most refreshing aspects of *Girls on Fire* is Hentges's candid self-identification as a fangirl: "Fangirling shapes my relationship to this literature as a teacher, a scholar, and a critic" (75). Readers yearning for the distant, antiseptic tone that often characterizes literary scholarship will be disappointed by *Girls on Fire*. Rather, Hentges's dynamic voice, optimism, and transparent appreciation coupled with critique honor the characters she describes as "compelling and hopeful subjects" (3). In this way, form follows content, as Hentges argues that any textual analysis of YA dystopia is incomplete if it willfully ignores the affective dimension that makes these books so engrossing.

Hentges knowingly positions herself as a fan regardless of the possible pitfalls attendant in doing so, admitting that "Fangirls can be too close to our subject, but we can also provide insights that a reader without a passion for the texts might not" (75). *Girls on Fire* certainly benefits from Hentges's enthusiasm; after all, successfully wrangling a massive corpus into an accessible volume of scholarly critique requires passion and tenacity. To my mind, however, Hentges's proximity to the subject holds the book back in two ways. First, Hentges's encyclopedic knowledge can manifest in the tendency to list examples as support for claims, resulting in a frenzied pace that can leave the reader feeling unmoored. Furthermore, because of the thematic structure of her analysis and the extensive corpus, these examples often require a brief plot synopsis that interrupts the argument's rhythm. Secondly, Hentges sometimes revels in the exception— extensively analyzing outstanding books or characters that transgress the genre's norms— while her critiques of certain thornier trends (e.g., the focus on romance, heteronormativity), which she rightly identifies as central to YA dystopia, remain relatively superficial. However, these elements are not enough to discount the important contributions of the ambitious project that is *Girls on Fire*.

Accessing this book's content demands familiarity with the genre of YA dystopia, not expertise; even superficial knowledge gleaned from a casual viewing of the

Hunger Games film adaptations will suffice. The volume is accessible to audiences inside and outside of academe, although readers less familiar with the genre may find themselves in one of two positions: either overwhelmed by the scope of the project's primary corpus or invigorated by their growing TBR (to-be-read) lists. Fortunately for her readers, Hentges has included a rather unorthodox "Appendix 2: Something Like a Rating System," in which she shares "brief sketches of [her] 'likes' and 'dislikes' of these books as well as some of the main elements" (249).

Most importantly, *Girls on Fire* is a goldmine for educators. With her literary analysis, Hentges models how to engage popular texts with intersectionality at the fore, and these sections would make accessible readings for undergraduate students. Readers will notice that the book is structured with pedagogy in mind, moving from theory and methodology to application via textual analysis, and finally, to the classroom and beyond. In Chapter 7, Hentges generously shares resources such as "action projects" that challenge students to apply their knowledge outside of the classroom (209-214). Although the "action projects" Hentges details are tailored to YA dystopia, they could easily transfer to other fields. As educators, we would do well to follow Hentges's example when she states, "I have always encouraged my students to critique the thing they most love" (75). *Girls on Fire* certainly provides many tools and examples of how to do so.

"The Sweet and the Bitter": Death and Dying in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

Dominick Grace

Amy Amendt-Raduege. *"The Sweet and the Bitter": Death and Dying in J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*. Kent State University Press, 2018. Paperback, x + 160 pages, $30.00. ISBN 9781606353059.

AMY Amendt-Raduege's slim volume takes as its impetus the fact (supported by numerous sources cited by Amendt-Raduege) that those facing the risk or even the imminence of death, such as soldiers in combat zones or the terminally ill, seem to find J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* a text that helps them deal with their impending mortality. Her overt agenda is to argue that the novel "works like an *ars moriendi*—a guide to the art of dying well" (3), thereby filling an important need in this secular age in which such guides have largely fallen by the wayside. Divided into five chapters, the book deals with the good death in chapter one, "The Wages of Heroism"; the bad (though not necessarily irredeemable) death in chapter two, "The Bitter End"; the memorialization of the dead, via both literary and physical markers, in chapter three, "Songs and Stones"; the significance of ghosts and revenants in chapter four, ""Haunting the Dead"; and finally with how Tolkien's overall treatment of death acquires applicability (thereby adopting Tolkien's preferred term, in place of allegory, when readers attempted to find hidden meaning in his work) for the twentieth- and twenty-first-century reader, in the concluding chapter, "Applicability: 'Hope without Guarantee.'"

Despite its brevity, the book is well-grounded in Tolkien scholarship and in an understanding of relevant historical and literary antecedents for Tolkien's treatment of death. Amendt-Raduege uses not only Tolkien's texts (though she sticks primarily to *The Lord of the Rings*, she often draws in relevant passages from other works) but also the knowledge of history and literary history that clearly informs Tolkien's writing. Though some readers will no doubt already have some idea of the debts Tolkien owes to Anglo-Saxon, Icelandic, Norse, medieval English, and other literary/cultural sources and inspirations, Amendt-Raguege adds to our understanding of the importance of these antecedents thanks to her tight focus on how Tolkien's

representations of death and the trappings of death are often rooted in such materials.

While different readers might find different interventions most useful, for me the most insightful chapters were three and four, which document and analyze Tolkien's treatment of burial customs across the different cultures of Middle-earth, and how, especially, the restless dead—encountered in the Barrow Downs, the Paths of the Dead (significantly, themselves *beneath* the mountain Dwimorberg, a Tolkienian neologism that Amendt-Raduege argues persuasively has etymological links with "barrow"), and the Dead Marsh. Chapters one and two cover four significant "good" deaths—those of Théoden, Gandalf (acknowledging that her challenge here is significant, since wizards rarely are accorded noble ends—and in any event, Gandalf, unlike the others, is resurrected), Aragorn and, problematically, Boromir, whose "good" death is tainted by the corruption that precedes it—and that precipitates the breaking of the Fellowship—and, in parallel, four significant "bad" deaths—those of Denethor, Gollum, Saruman, and Grìma Wormtongue. While the structure is not schematic, Amendt-Raduege not only reminds us of the obvious pairings—Théoden/Denethor, Gandalf/Saruman—but also offers up intriguing intimations of ways to see the deaths of Gollum and Grìma in relation to the good deaths, as well. Notably, she makes a tempting, if not entirely convincing, case for Gollum as redeemable. Chapters three and four, however, do more to explore new (or at any rate less-frequently-travelled) territory.

Amendt-Raduege's exploration of the death and burial customs of the Elves, Dwarfs, and humans (which vary from culture to culture) offers useful insights into the sorts of cultures Tolkien imagines them as being, with their conceptions of and relationships to death revealing (or at least suggesting) significant aspects of their self-conceptions and preoccupations. Especially illuminating is her consideration of the contrast between Rohan and Gondor in this regard. Though she reiterates at least once too often that the way death is hidden away and suppressed in Gondor can be tied back to the Nùmenorean ancestry of the people of Gondor (indeed, despite its brevity this book would have benefitted from some tightening and closer editing), her exploration of Middle-earth's human cultures and of what death means to them is, for me, the most useful aspect of the book. Aragorn excepted, it would seem, the people of the West have forgotten the *ars moriendi*, whereas the Rohirrim have not.

Amendt-Raguege's focus on *The Lord of the Rings* as *ars moriendi* does lead her (perhaps unsurprisingly) into ideologically-grounded assumptions about death and

its meaning. Insofar as Tolkien was a Catholic, and despite leaving out almost entirely (Amendt-Raduege notes one significant exception, Tolkien's invocation of the idea of heathenism) anything smacking of explicit or even implicit Christian allegory in the text, his own beliefs clearly informed much of the novel, and one can easily find Christian "applicability" (if not allegory) in the text—most overtly, of course, in Gandalf's death and resurrection. Tolkien's underlying point, Amendt-Raduege argues, is that one can face death best only when one faces it with hope, without guarantee, that death is not the end. Tolkien may have believed this (and indeed, believing it for the soldiers and terminally ill who find comfort in the book may be useful for them), but at times the book seems to cross the line between analyzing Tolkien's ideology and (implicitly, at least) endorsing it. Her assertion, for instance, that "[d]eath is only meaningful if life is sacred" (111-12) seems to represent a given for this text, rather than simply a given for Tolkien's text. I am inclined to think her argument might have been stronger, or at any rate less tendentious, if it interrogated rather than simply accepting such a view. Nevertheless, this book is clearly-written (if under-edited), accessible, and insightful. It is probably of more value to the student than the scholar of Tolkien, but scholars will find much of use here, as well.

Alternate Worlds: The Illustrated History of Science Fiction

Donald M. Hassler

James Gunn. *Alternate Worlds: The Illustrated History of Science Fiction.* Third Edition. McFarland, 2018. Paperback, 336 pages, $49.95, ISBN 9781476673530.

BACK in 1976 when the master James Gunn won two major awards for the first edition of this work with its Introduction by Isaac Asimov, vision and youth and optimism ruled in the genre. *Star Trek* was fresh in our heads with all of its visuals and color. Asimov was working at the top of his creativity and was beginning to speculate autobiographically about "golden ages" that were coming to a close for all of us. Large picture books of the colorful, pulp genre were selling, so Gunn provided one. Just at the same moment, of course, with John Clute and Peter Nicholls working on the *SF Encyclopedia* (1979) and with Neil Barron's first edition of *The Anatomy of Wonder* (1976), the detail and the systematic accuracy in reference books increased to a new level for this literature. But the Gunn "illustrated history" was history with vision and purpose; it expressed the enthusiasm and sheer love for SF. There was a second edition that I failed to notice and, now, this handsome third edition. Much is still the same, but much has changed.

In the short space available here, I will describe what I see as changes as well as the ruling Vision and Purpose. In chapter one of both editions, Gunn uses the phrase "science fiction and the world." The phrase is Romantic and purposeful, and the Gunn vision and sense of purpose fit well with the trending Asimov focus in his career, his obsessive sense of self and its awareness of Golden Age potentials. Expansive heroism and the youthful loneliness of real adventure that become muted a bit in the many years between the first edition and the third edition can be seen represented even in the cover art for the two books. On the 1975 cover, we see a classic and lonely rocket resting on its tail fins. The resting point seems to be one of the moons of Mars, with the huge red planet looming before it and dominating half of the cover in its lonely redness. The Third Edition cover shows a complex and populated space station in orbit above Earth or some similar planet that sports clouds, indicating water, and varied colors, maybe Gethen even, but certainly not the

Romantic emptiness of mysterious Mars. In the latter, I sense the presence of much greater complexity and dystopia, but more on that below when I get to the text in the book, as well as more on the sense of predatory competition in the genre. The latter notion seems to be ignored by the gentlemanly Gunn. But basically, I think, he is a hard fighter in his work who hopes to survive in the not-so-visionary Darwinian competition.

Even though he has been dead now for more than half the interval of time between the First Edition and this Third Edition, Asimov still provides Gunn with the laudatory Introduction to his Vision history—an early sign of Gunn's Romantic denial of the possible predatory nature of death. The text has not been changed, of course. Gunn and Asimov have always seemed to me somewhat of an "odd couple," even though Gunn did write an early study of Asimov's work that was published by Oxford University Press (1982). But the men, about the same age, came from very different backgrounds. The males in Gunn's family were printers and hawkers of short pulps of the classics called "blue books" throughout the Midwest (see his own autobiography, *Star-Begotten: A Life Lived in Science Fiction,* 2017). Asimov was a New York fan who grew into the genre as part of the Futurians and by writing fan letters to the pulps of the thirties. Asimov learned his craft in this way and by talking with Campbell. What they shared was the great Romantic vision of the expanding "American" potential for speculative and adventure storytelling. His Introduction in both editions I have before me is actually one of his autobiographical pieces about the meaning to him of SF—"a love affair." He wrote this for Gunn a bit after his anthology *Before the Golden Age* (1974) and while he was working on his massive autobiography, the first volume of which appeared as *In Memory Yet Green* (1979). Note the rich color image in the Asimov title—so Romantic, so much Vision. The two editions of the Gunn history are rich in color.

For the practical use as reference books, however, the color and vision may often serve as a mirage. In both his original conception and, especially, in the later editions, Gunn seems to me a little cavalier in his handling of the details of black and white fact, and these moves relate to his Vision. The actual text writing does resemble the verve and energy we read in *Billion Year Spree* (1973) by Brian Aldiss. That book is a history, of course, coming a little before Gunn, and Gunn does mention it. But the important hard historical and research work done especially by Clute and Nicholls and by Neil Barron that Gunn was immediately competing with in his own

historical work simply is absent from this Third Edition. Gunn had done his own "Encyclopedia" shortly after the Clute and Nicholls work appeared in 1979, and the Gunn efforts had been completely "eaten up" by the success of Clute and Nicholls that now has become a huge database. In fact, this is the hard, predatory world of competition that does not fit well with the youthful energy and vision that both Gunn and Asimov believe in; the wonderful color and pictures hold the Vision. It is a vision we still believe in, and we are delighted to hold and admire this more compact but still lovely Third Edition. The work of James Gunn over his 97 some years of believing is, indeed, inspiring. But even his editorial choices, it seems to me, indicate a somewhat less Romantic scenario that also drives our work. We are grateful for all that the literature of science fiction gives us, both in hard detail and in Vision, even if the Vision itself must be a little predatory in ignoring its competition.

Desire and Empathy in Twentieth-Century Dystopian Fiction

Adam Heidebrink-Bruno

Thomas Horan. *Desire and Empathy in Twentieth-Century Dystopian Fiction*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Hardcover, 212 pp, $99.99, ISBN 9783319706740.

THOMAS Horan's study of twentieth-century dystopian fiction is a recent addition to the Palgrave Studies in Utopianism series. This collection selects academic studies based on their broad subject appeal and their importance to the long history of utopian thought. Horan's text is no exception. In this study, Horan traces the role of desire and empathy in seven of the most popular dystopias of the twentieth-century (Jack London's *The Iron Heel* [1908], Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* [1924], Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* [1932], Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* [1937], Ayn Rand's *Anthem* [1938], George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [1949], and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* [1985]) to make sense of a key narrative trope that appears in all seven novels; namely, why does sexual desire always precede political subversion?

In each of the novels Horan examines, two characters meet, express unsanctioned desire for one another, and ultimately engage in some sort of illicit sexual activity. The sexual liaisons take place between a revolutionary thinker and a docile member of the totalitarian state resulting in the political awakening of the orthodox character. After seeing this literary trope appear time and again, Horan argues that sexual desire is "an aspect of the self that can never be fully appropriated by the totalitarian state" (1). Accordingly, Horan recognizes that sexual desire has a powerful political role. As he explains, desire serves as an effective means of political subversion that motivates resistance, humanizes the opposition, and produces empathy for people in situations vastly different than one's own. Among the dystopian backdrops of the narratives in Horan's study, desire is the only force strong enough to resist the allure of losing oneself to the false promises of totalitarianism.

Discussing the illicit sexual relationships in twentieth-century dystopia is not new. After all, the relationship between Winston and Julia in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, for instance, is one of the most recognizable displays of unsanctioned desire in the

English literary canon, and dozens of articles have been published on the significance of their relationship. Moreover, according to Horan's own research, arguments about desire and resistance in twentieth-century dystopian novels date back over a century to a time when the contemporaries of Jack London and Yevgeny Zamyatin contemplated the role of subversive desire in *The Iron Heel* and *We*, respectively.

Given the prolific and lasting interest in the subject, Horan's most difficult task in this study is making room for his contribution in a field that is already saturated with arguments about dystopia and desire. He accomplishes this not by adding something entirely new to any one specific novel, but rather by synthesizing the immense body of scholarship already published on the subject and comparing the details and nuances of sexual desire across some of the most iconic relationships in the genre. Horan approaches the study comparatively. While each chapter is purportedly about one novel, it never quite seems that way. At key moments in each chapter, Horan looks back at relationships he investigated earlier in the study to draw out connections and then gestures toward the relationships appearing in subsequent chapters. As a result, readers of this study will not only acquire a strong understanding of desire in seven specific dystopias, but also walk away with knowledge of how they all fit together as a genre convention.

The study's broad, comparative approach also makes this text a remarkable introduction to these seven important novels. Despite the focus on desire and empathy in the book's title, the study goes into great depth on topics as disparate as genre conventions, totalitarian politics, and religious rhetoric. As Horan is also the editor of critical editions of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* (1945), perhaps his survey of key themes is unsurprising. Nevertheless, this approach results in a thematic study of desire and empathy that also serves as a general overview of the major discussions surrounding these popular dystopias, making individual chapters from this study valuable for many students of dystopian literature.

Horan's meticulously comparative approach in an already saturated field has some limits, as well. The study's heavy investment in secondary scholarship detracts from the author's own reading of the texts and makes his argument feel marginal or even insignificant at times. In many chapters, Horan doesn't assert his own position on the use of illicit sexual desire in the novel until the very end of the discussion, summarizing the voices and arguments of previous scholars much more thoroughly than advancing his own. The majority of quotations Horan includes in the study,

for example, are from secondary sources rather than the novels under investigation. While this strengthens his claims about the genre's use of desire, it also restricts his ability to make definitive claims about the texts individually and makes it difficult for individuals unacquainted with the secondary scholarship to follow the thread of his argument.

The central value of this study is in Horan's ability to build connections between a wide range of dystopian texts. The variety of novels examined in the study allows readers to see how twentieth-century authors employed desire in a variety of ways depending on their own political position. Scholars rarely have the chance to see an author as conservative as Ayn Rand situated as part of the same tradition as Aldous Huxley or Margaret Atwood, and yet there is much to learn about how desire functions across political differences by reading these texts together. Moveover, the inclusion of both male and female authors as well as discussions about heterosexual and homosexual desire makes this study a valuable asset to feminist and queer scholars interested in dystopian literature.

In the end, Horan does contribute something new about dystopia and desire despite the abundance of scholarship already available on the subject, but it doesn't come from reading individual novels. Instead—much like the political awakenings in the novels themselves—this new understanding of the genre emerges from the surprising and sometimes troubling relationships between these seven authors. Alone, each of these authors envisions a totalitarian nightmare. But together, as Horan explains, they paint a more hopeful picture: one that speaks to the power of desire to create empathy and inspire action across profound ideological differences.

Thrills Untapped: Neglected Horror, Science Fiction and Fantasy Films, 1928-1936

Michael Pitts*

Michael R. Pitts. *Thrills Untapped: Neglected Horror, Science Fiction and Fantasy Films, 1928-1936*. McFarland, 2019. Paperback, 348 pg. $49.95. ISBN 978147667351-6.

* Editor's Note: The author of this review is not the same person as the author of the book under review.

THRILLS *Untapped* draws attention to serials, documentaries, and sound era films widely overlooked in current scholarship and in this way contributes significantly to science fiction film studies. Choosing to omit evaluations of largely celebrated works such as *Dracula* (1931) and *The Mummy* (1932), Michael R. Pitts instead examines those lesser known works likely to produce new, fruitful research into early genre films of the sound era. His research therefore spans the beginning of the sound era, 1928, to the year in which the British film ban went into effect, restricting the production of horror films, 1936. As Pitts states, the goal of his volume "is to chronicle these mostly ignored movies, providing the exposure they so rightfully deserve" (1). In presenting to his audience in-depth analyses of nearly 150 mostly forgotten films spanning the horror, science fiction, and fantasy genres, he provides an invaluable resource for researchers at the intersection of film studies and science fiction studies.

A particular strength of *Thrills Untapped* is the expansive quality of its analyses, which move beyond simple summations and evaluations of these films. While detailing the salient elements of each film's plot, for example, this collection presents invaluable extratextual information, including the cultural context within which each film was produced, important details related to its production, the origins of the cinematic project, its place within larger trends of the time, and popular and critical evaluations of it upon its release. In citing, for example, a review from the *Philadelphia Exhibitor* published soon after the release of the film upon which it focuses, *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste* (1935), Pitts both emphasizes the

technical, editing problems of the movie and presents the response of critics at the time to these weaknesses. The film review states, "this is pretty poor. The actors are positively hammy; the recording, the photography are awful; [Bela] Lugosi is an unbelievable, silly menace, the editing leaves out whole scenes so that the story is annoyingly choppy" (177). The works making up this collection, therefore, take into consideration myriad aspects related to the production, quality, and reception of these overlooked films. In this way, they assess the value of these films and emphasize the complex, interwoven evaluations of them by earlier and contemporary critics and scholars. Such a widened focus significantly strengthens and complicates the analyses making up this text.

Still, this collection, while otherwise an invaluable overview of this era of genre film, is somewhat problematized by its parameters, which are at times vague and inconsistent. While horror, fantasy, and science fiction films receive the most attention, and the inclusion of mystery films is successfully justified according to the horror elements they possess, those works representing the "B" western and broadly defined foreign genres appear to stray from the purpose of this research project. *Blue Steel* (1934), a conventional western starring John Wayne, is, for example, noted as a suitable inclusion to this collection due to scenes presenting a storm, a shadow-engulfed way station, and a particularly brutal murder. The analysis of the film and the critical responses of others that are woven into the analysis present the film, however, as predominantly a western typical of this era. Its inclusion and that of other western films seems at odds, therefore, with the overall purpose of the study.

Similarly, foreign films are included in the text, but the parameters determining their inclusion are at times vague and inconsistent. Though they, like their American counterparts, satisfy the requirement that they include "sound, be it dialogue, sound effects, or a music score," there is no additional justification for those selected since, among these foreign features, most but not all "received United States release" (1). While a valuable overview of science fiction, horror, and fantasy films in this era, the text could therefore be strengthened by its inclusion of further foreign works or their exclusion according to such a requirement concerning a United States release. Similar also to the issue plaguing the "B" western movies analyzed, there is an inconsistency concerning some of the foreign films included. While *Pandora's Box* (1929), with its dark visual elements and equally horrific plot involving Jack the Ripper, possesses qualities matching the purpose of this study, there are other foreign movies included

that venture from these parameters. The inclusion of the widely influential historical film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1929), for example, departs from the stated intension of the collection since it, while including violent depictions of public execution and mob violence, does not belong to the horror genre.

Though *Thrills Untapped* does, therefore, venture occasionally from its focus, it is a predominantly robust overview of overlooked horror, science fiction, and fantasy films. Besides the aforementioned depth and breadth of its analyses, the form and organization of the text provide additional strength to this publication. It is divided into five sections—preface, film analyses, appendix, bibliography, and index—that simplify efforts to locate particular films, references, and timelines. The film analyses section is organized alphabetically by movie titles, and each entry outlines key information, such as its production credits and cast members. Following this information is a summary and analysis of each movie into which is synthesized the voices of notable critics and scholars. An appendix is additionally included that lists the films in chronological order. The text contains a bibliography outlining books, periodicals, and websites germane to this research. Concluding the collection is an index listing the names of the reviewed films and individuals related to their production with corresponding numbers for the pages on which they are discussed. Ideally and logically organized, this text enables effective, timely research into its subject matter.

Suitable for scholars focused predominantly upon horror, fantasy, and science fiction films of the early sound era, *Thrills Untapped* continues the work of researchers at the intersection of genre fiction and film. Seeking to emphasize the value of these early motion pictures, it includes alongside original analyses valuable and in-depth information related to the production and reception of these movies. At times, the text ventures from its stated focus and evaluates films unrelated to the identified genres. Still, in illuminating widely overlooked movies and illustrating their importance for current film and science fiction studies, it fills a current gap in research and is therefore a valuable resource for scholars working in these fields.

Economic Science Fictions

Bruce Lindsley Rockwood

William Davies, editor, *Economic Science Fictions*. Goldsmiths Press, 2018. Goldsmith Press PERC Series. Hardback. 400 pg. $29.95. ISBN 9781906897680.

ECONOMIC Science Fictions is a diverse collection of essays and stories aimed at using science fiction tropes and examples to bridge the gap between conventional economic thinking and the unreliable nature of contemporary economic reality through a mixture of critical theory and unexpected, stimulating short fiction.

After a thoughtful introduction by William Davies, the book has 17 chapters by a variety of contributors divided into four Sections: (I) The Science and Fictions of the Economy; (II) Capitalist Dystopias; (III) Design for a Different Future; and (IV) Fumbling for Utopia. The goal of the collection, in the words of Mark Fisher, is to come up with "a multiplicity of alternative perspectives" for a post-capitalist society "each potentially opening up a crack into another world" (xiii).

William Davies's introduction rehearses the history of market economics, the challenges of planned economies and socialism, the rise of neoliberalism in the late 20th century, and the impact of big data on 21st century economies and societies. He asks how we can visualize viable alternatives to money, markets, and potential ways of simply living and valuing ourselves and our communities (1-11). He is troubled by "the various innovations in the monitoring of emotion and affect that have taken off since the 1990s. These include neuroscientific representations and techniques of 'affective computing,' which [. . .] allow computers to detect emotion via [. . .] machine learning, monitoring of bodily movement and data capture from online communication" (11-12). He contrasts the "avant-garde modernists of Mises' time" who believed the "future is to be imagined, invented, designed and planned" with von Mises and his followers who thought the market and the price system should suffice to mediate between "evolving visions, ideas and tastes"(14). The problem becomes the impossibility of "wholesale transformation of society" if all of your options for the future have to be channeled into a market, governed by "consumerism plus the mathematical rationality of risk" (14). Ideas can be as constricting as institutions,

and this collection of essays seeks to release some of those constraints.

Davies cites Fredric Jameson's critique of the post-modern (16) and argues that science fiction "enables us to imagine ourselves looking back upon the present, with a critical eye. It is thereby a political resource [. . .] to see the present as amenable to conscious transformation" (16). One concern with this essay is its failure to explicitly reference examples of science fiction which could support his argument – Philip K. Dick in his reference to Prozac, powerlessness and depression (16) for example, or Kim Stanley Robinson in reference to the role of SF in addressing a "*need* in the face of some *lack*" such as that posed by climate risk (18). Davies may be setting up the theoretical interdisciplinary context for the rest of the text to explore, making oblique references to phrases ("cool hunting" or "collapse of history" and "No past other than that which has been captured as data," all at 20). He argues that "economics deals in all manner of things that do not exist outside the economics profession" (24) and makes the same claim for lawyers who "see their role in terms of interpreting existing rules, but far less commonly in terms of inventing new ones," an assertion belied by the role of story in law making as well as in what he calls "partly imaginary" economic institutions (24). In short, engaging with this introduction requires a close reading but sparks many responses.

What follows in Section I is an overview of "Economics, Science Fiction, History and Comparative Studies" by Professor Ha-Joon Chang, who argues that much of neoclassical economics is already a kind of SF in two senses: it claims that economics is a pure science free of moral constraints, and that it can solve all problems if you give people the right incentives (31-32). He shows why both claims are false, first arguing that SF writers would be more effective if they had a sounder understanding of economics (34). For example, Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* (1953) has the "implausible premise" that the South could have won the American Civil War, when it could not have done so given the shift in economic development to industrial development in the North (34-35). On the other hand, economists would benefit from knowing more about SF because its portrayal of alternative realities and dystopias can enable economists to "rethink the assumptions" they usually take for granted (35).

Laura Horn's "Future Incorporated?" explores the portrayal of corporations as displacing, or merging with, nations as portrayed in SF, and their lessons for thinking about whether the future must indeed be dominated by corporate structures, citing

Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (1952), and films or television shows such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Mr. Robot* (2015-2019). She argues that by "mobilizing utopias [. . .] of worker cooperatives" we can conceive of a "future that does not necessarily have to be incorporated" (42). These may be "post-scarcity *Star Trek* fashion," "non-capitalist utopian visions" such as Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), or the "co-operative economic organization" in Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy (49-54).

In "Currencies of Social Organization: The Future of Money," Sherryl Vint explores the varieties of currencies deployed in SF, such as poscreds in Philip K. Dick's *Ubik* (1969), gold-pressed latinum valued by the Ferengi on *Star Trek*, or the "reputation-based currency of the whuffie in Cory Doctorow's *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* (2003)" (59). The world uses money, but no one is exactly sure what it is, how it works, or how tokens of value are supported. Vint argues that "as a genre that defamiliarises the present by exaggerating it into an imagined future, science fiction can serve a vital role in reminding us that money is a social technology, not a thing," citing Andrew Niccol's film *In Time* (2009) as an example, where "the unit of account is simply time" (63). Time becomes "capital" that the rich accumulate and the poor cannot acquire, showing the "fundamental injustice" of the economic system (64-65). She draws a parallel to the impact of austerity imposed by the IMF on the debt burdened world, calling for a cancellation of debt like the "Biblical Law of the Jubilee" (68-72).

The fourth essay is a close reading by Brian Williams of Robert Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966), "Automating Economic Revolution" (73-92). Utopian ideas of an automated, workless future with a guaranteed basic income in a decarbonized world are both "tropes of science fiction as potential signposts for a future economics" and unlikely to be realized if the future is seen as on "lockdown" with all options "subsumed by neoliberal strategies" (74). Citing Fredric Jameson's comment that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (75), Williams explores how economic change could be "automated" and "create utopia in the midst of [. . .] depression" (76) and argues that Heinlein's novel demonstrates how this can be accomplished, relying on the centralized computer AI personality of Mike, who creates the blueprint for revolution that the prison colonists on the Moon are able to implement with Mike's help (77-92). The "revolutionary cell group" with Mike as its center (almost like a god) is one version of how automated

revolution could occur (80). Williams shows parallels in Heinlein's novel to Norbert Wiener's cybernetics similar to the concept of "*performative economics*" seen in the Black-Scholes-Merton model of options trading's impact on the economy (81), and explores the role of computers in enabling high frequency trading (HFT), the rise of derivatives, options and collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) (87-92), all of which had unfortunate consequences for humanity in the financial crisis of 2007-2010.

Section II ("Capitalist Dystopias") includes Carina Brand's exploration in "Feeding Like a Parasite" of the "dystopian, expansionary drive of capitalism" through the concept of "extraction," including the harvesting of our digital data to "extract value from us during the full 24-hour day" (103). Next are two fictional pieces, one by the artists' collective AUDINT called "Pain Camp Economics" which hypothesizes a world in which corporations and nations are merged to address scarcity of resources by creating a currency based on human pain, followed by Khairani Barokka's story "AT392-Red" (139-146) in which a case study of an arson investigation explores how an inhuman scheme of "Biodiversity Credits" to ration and allocate disability benefits might be implemented and the resistance it would provoke. Davies suggests that this is a satire of the UK's "punitive welfare reforms brought in under austerity" (94), but it could equally apply to attempts to restrict social security disability in the Trump administration, or the abuse of carbon offset credits to excuse continued carbon pollution by industrial nations. Nora O Murchú's "The New Black" shows the depressing impact of "post-Fordist work" (94) where there are no boundaries between life and work, the passage of time is seized by management, and life is consumed by overtime and compliance with the system.

Dan G. Brady and James Pockson, writing as PostRational, conclude this section with a faux consultancy report: "Fatberg and the Sinkholes: A Report on the Findings of a Journey into the United Regions of England." Fatberg represents London, from which the rest of England has seceded to form the United Regions (URE), and the essay compares the concentration of wealth in London, where things "are going well. [...] Productivity and the economy are booming. Disrupt, capitalize, optimise, repeat" (167) with the more diffuse, cooperative and low-tech style of life that has evolved in the regions under the rubric of "absorbism." The premise is that the URE were exhausted and exploited by diversion of wealth to London, and developed an "interest in resilience, not growth" (176). Looking at infrastructure, architecture, and personal relations, the essay highlights the contrast between the individualism implicit in

capitalism with the cooperative decision-making of absorbism: "Absorbism means withstanding shock, a person is a member who forms relationships" (198).

Section III, "Design for a Different Future," begins with an illustrated historical piece by Owen Hatherley, "Prefabricating Communism: Mass Production and the Soviet City" (207-235). Next is Mark R. Johnson's essay "Megastructures, Superweapons and Global Architecture in SF Computer Games" with examples from games *Halo, Half-Life, Killzone* and *Mass Effect*. Johnson argues that "*in game* constructions [. . .] are serving as the site for experimenting with possible techno-economic futures [. . .]" (238). The games all posit megastructures left behind by a long departed super race, and they appear to rely largely on assumed techno-science solutions, abundance of resources in post-scarcity societies, or slave labor, none of which provides a plausible setting for actual possible futures. Focusing on games, the essay overlooks the classic example of Larry Niven's *Ringworld* (1970) and its sequels in the Known Space universe, though it does acknowledge the appearance of megastructures in the Star Wars and Star Trek franchises (252). The games create "entire worlds to be experienced by viewers and players" (255), and are both time-sinks and a source of fun. But it is implausible to think that they can provide insight into actual solutions for the here and now on Earth. Indeed, the proliferation of data miners and gold farming on-line in China and other developing countries to raise real-world cash, the tricks of some to curtail this by inserting "Free Taiwan" into data streams, and the political reaction to some game content on streaming sites shows that the impact of gaming may simply be to reinforce the existing system.

The two remaining essays in this Section focus on using design methods for thinking about "alternative economic paradigms" (Bastien Kerspem) and using speculative design to reimagine "economic life and realization of utopian plans" (Tobias Revell et.al.) (206). The latter cites the history of SF exploring diverse economic conditions, from *Star Trek's* "post-scarcity" to Margaret Atwood's free market in *Oryx and Crake* (2003) or the "calorie economics" of Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009) (281). It reviews a variety of projects aimed at challenging the underlying assumptions in designed objects, and suggests "changes in social, economic or cultural conditions" that can then be reflected in newly "designed material objects" and "challenge and disrupt" the assumed "techno-utopia" in objects as they exist today (282-283).

Section IV concludes with four distinct approaches for considering how to

work towards utopias. Tim Jackson's very personal essay, "Shooting the Bridge: Liminality and the End of Capitalism," explores the question of transformation from older more physically demanding modes of transport and exploration to the faster, more technological present by narrating a sailing trip with his children where it is imperative to drop sail and lower the mast at just the right point of tide to be able to get through the low arch of a Medieval bridge and cross the threshold to what lies beyond. His journey explores the concept of the liminal as a "fertile one in understanding [. . .] transitions of a social as well as a personal nature.[. . .] [W]hat happens as one social order begins to break down and before another is established" (301).

Anthropologist Judy Thorne creates a narrative based on interviews with students "struggling with day-to-day" realities who express both their concerns and their hopes for a better world (311). Miriam A. Cherry presents an alternative history of England's Luddite movement during the early 19th century and proposes how it might have led to a more cooperative, non-violent and creative future leading us to an earlier expansion into space.

Jo Walton concludes the volume with the story "Public Money and Democracy," which portrays a world where fake news is a given despite passage of the "I said, I'M SORRY" law (342); a free-lance journalist named Laing covers monetary policy reform with a commitment to evidence, and the government is seeking to control the money supply for its militaristic purposes. Preferable policy options are demonized and government gets the policy (and news coverage) it wants. An alternative more democratic monetary policy is designed as a hobby by Laing's friend Abiodun (an eternal intern) that supports a more hopeful future, through the design of "indie markets" he puts "up on KickMarket" as he "designs whole regional economies […] [and] makes up churning cities where everyone can be welcome and fed and safe, and wise and healthy and happy and free"(348). Walton concludes with a pitch for "Positive Money," https://positivemoney.org/ including the idea that when the Bank of England (or any central bank) creates new money, rather than channeling it through the usual banking institutions, it simply deposit it in individuals' accounts to use as they please, or give to charity. The only rule is it must be spent or given away within a certain time, to bolster the economy (357), but creating currency this way would be more democratic and socially beneficial. The various ways nations are responding to the COVID-19 virus economic downturn reflect competing choices

of this sort.

The book ends without a summing up or concluding essay by the editor. There is an index, and sources are well documented in footnotes, but there is no bibliography. The mixture of serious scholarship and unusual, intriguing and sometimes whimsical fiction and design theory makes for a pastiche or bricolage effect on the reader who will bear with the dense theoretical introductory material. It is aimed in part at getting economists to think about using science fiction to broaden their minds, and getting SF fans and authors to be more thoughtful as they design plausible and livable future worlds for their stories. I recommend this for library collections, editors and scholars, and in light of the current crisis, perhaps even for the general reader of SF.

MEDIA
REVIEWS

Outer Wilds

Jennifer Baker

Outer Wilds. Annapurna Interactive, 2019. Video game.

OUTER *Wilds* is a space exploration game developed by Mobius Digital and published by Annapurna Interactive in 2019. The player character is a newly-minted astronaut who ventures from their home planet of Timber Hearth to explore the surrounding solar system. The worlds of *Outer Wilds* recall the rich environments of the *Metroid* series in their compelling combination of dynamic, physics-driven planetary activity with the environmental storytelling of the Nomai ruins, remnants of an ancient alien civilization that disappeared long before the time of the Hearthians. Players can explore black holes, translate Nomai writing to uncover bits of history, and chase down quantum singularities-- until the solar system's sun goes supernova, destroying the solar system and killing everyone in it, including the player.

This apocalyptic event reveals the central conflict of the game: the player is trapped in a 22-minute time loop that spans from the moment the player character wakes up beside a campfire on Timber Hearth to the destruction of the known universe. The beginning of each loop sets in motion a sequence of events that occur across all planets of the solar system: one planet pulls the sand off of the other in the manner of a vast hourglass, another planet falls piece by piece into a black hole, and the sun expands to consume a small space station circling its outer reaches. The player's task is to observe and make sense of these events while searching for clues to discover how to escape the time loop, solve the mystery of the Nomai, and perhaps even prevent the end of the universe. However, even as the player is allowed to explore freely without much direction from the game, it becomes painfully clear that *Outer Wilds* is a cosmic on-rails narrative that the player merely moves through, an existential horror that the player can never truly prevent, but only make peace with.

Outer Wilds began as creator Alex Beachum's Master's Thesis at the University of Southern California. He had developed a number of planetary tech demos, small projects that model a particular game mechanic or physics simulation, but struggled to find a thread to bind them together into a coherent game. He then designed an

"emotional prototype", a project similar to a tech demo that would establish the game's mood. Beachum set the player on a planet next to a roaring fire, where the player character would peacefully roast marshmallows until they were consumed by the nearby sun going supernova. This set the tone for the rest of the project (Cameron). According to Beachum, there were three pillars that guided the game's design: curiosity-driven exploration, a world that changed outside of the player's control, and a deliberate centering of the "feeling of space … a camping in space aesthetic where you still felt vulnerable" (Wallace). Beachum has since stated that the intent was to "tell a story that only a video game could tell" through elements such as environmental storytelling and limiting the player's agency (O'Dwyer). As a video game that so self-consciously utilizes all elements of the medium to tell a speculative narrative, *Outer Wilds* is ideal for any number of theoretical interventions.

As a science fiction narrative told through a game medium, *Outer Wilds* grapples with a number of science fictional concerns that are both conveyed through and complicated by game mechanics. A reading of genre conventions, for example, suggests that *Outer Wilds* is a sort of space western with its banjo-heavy soundtrack, ramshackle spacecraft, and aliens in cowboy hats, but the game cleverly undercuts the self-aggrandizing and colonial positioning immanent in the genre though the player's relative lack of agency. In a similar vein, *Outer Wilds* engages science fiction's propensity for literalizing its metaphors by embodying Janet Murray's definition of a video game, "a kind of abstract storytelling that resembles the world of common experience but compresses it in order to heighten interest" (176). In *Outer Wilds*, this compression is realized in planets that are small enough to be thoroughly explored by the player within the 22-minute timeframe. Another potential research intervention is Aki Järvinen's framework for analyzing video games through emotional processes, which reveals the connection between the emotional effects of narrative and the paradox of player agency. The Rumor Mode system in *Outer Wilds* displays points of interest that the player has found as an interconnected web of "rumors". This interface "embodies the unknown," establishing curiosity as the game's driving force and primary source of pleasure (Järvinen 103). As players sate their curiosity, however, they also must come to terms with their complete lack of agency in the universe. The more points of interest the player uncovers, the more it becomes obvious that the player is not the center of the story, but one small, insignificant piece of it. Observation is a paradox that effaces agency each time agency is exercised.

Outer Wilds is ultimately an existential project that suggests modes of meaning-making in the face of a vast and uncaring cosmos. True to the creators' intent to create a story that could only be told through a video game, it is an exceptional example of a text that demands analysis in all aspects of video game modality, from level design to player agency and immersion, to narrative design, to visual elements. *Outer Wilds* is a model text for the necessity of interdisciplinarity in science fiction studies as it engages with video games as a new frontier of speculation.

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Devs, season 1

Miguel Sebastián-Martín

Devs. Season 1. Dir. Alex Garland. Hulu, 2020. TV show.

DISTRIBUTED by Hulu, *Devs* is an 8-episode, single-season series that has been written and directed by Alex Garland, already known for writing and directing SF films *Ex Machina* (2014) and *Annihilation* (2018). As a TV series, *Devs* is understandably more detailed and lengthier in its narrative development than Garland's cinematic works, but it also shares some of their contemplative-minded design and pace. Throughout its roughly 8-hours total runtime, *Devs* is wholly set between the city of San Francisco and the nearby R&D campus of Amaya, a high-tech capitalist Leviathan in the likes of Silicon-Valley companies such as Apple, Alphabet or Facebook. The series mainly focuses on the character of Lily Chan (Sonoya Mizuno), a talented computer engineer at Amaya who lives with her co-worker and romantic partner, Sergei Pavlov (Karl Glusman). In the first episode, Sergei is misleadingly presented as the protagonist, and we follow him as he joins Devs, the company's top-secret development program; however, upon his attempt to leak information, Amaya's head of security, Kenton (Zach Grenier), assassinates him by direct order of Forest (Nick Offerman), Amaya's owner. Thus, throughout the rest of the series, we follow Lily's arduous search for answers and her ultimate arrival into the Devs facility—a spy-movie-like storyline that is interspersed with Forest's and his staff's progress with the Devs programme.

On the whole, *Devs* raises a range of socio-philosophical questions, from specific dilemmas posed by the rise of surveillance capitalism, all the way to a grander pondering of the (im)possibility of free will in a seemingly overdetermined universe. Nonetheless, *Devs* also seems to be a site of numerous ideological ambiguities—which are not necessarily flaws, but rather provocative triggers for productive, deeper studies of the series. "What is Devs?" is the simple question that is constantly suggested by the series and explicitly asked by its characters, and it also seems to be the most fruitful question for potential scholarly examinations. At the diegesis's literal level, Devs is Amaya's grand ambition and Forest's pet project: specifically, an ongoing, partially successful attempt at both predicting the future and recreating

the past, doing so with the utmost wealth and preciseness of detail. Thus, thanks to Amaya's select team of coders and to a powerful quantum computer, the Devs machine proves capable of recreating reality in all directions of time and space, showing its results as a literal video-on-demand stream, eventually one with sound and colour.

On an immediate sociological level, the series appears as an anxious vision of the potential of predictive algorithmic/AI systems, which are currently the target of heavy investment by most surveillance capitalist corporations. Were these technologies capable of providing epistemic omnipotence, and were they concentrated upon the hands of such a secretive, cult-like few, would these be the consequences for our democracy and our individual freedoms? Relatedly, but on a more theological note, *Devs* (the Latin spelling of *Deus*, God) poses another set of questions, recently asked, among others, by Yuval Noah Harari's *Homo Deus*: What would the so-called singularity imply for humanity? Will technological development turn us into gods, or rather, will technology itself emerge as a new, mechanical God?

In parallel to *Devs*'s social and religious echoes, the series is also worth examining for its reshaping of numerous SF motifs: for instance, the series presents Forest as a Silicon Valley Dr. Frankenstein, given his life-defining obsession with resurrecting his daughter Amaya through the Devs system. *Devs* thus re-imagines the Faustian-Promethean figure as an almighty capitalist entrepreneur, a high-tech guru of the twenty-first century. On another line of enquiry, lead character Lily and her ex-boyfriend Jamie (Jin Ha) are both constructed upon cyberorientalist stereotypes, given their racially marked, seemingly innate ability for mathematics and coding—although there is a degree of ambivalence in this. On the one hand, Lily and Jamie's conformity to the stereotype could be said to reinforce cyberorientalism, but, on the other hand, there is a potential subversive quality to this, insofar as are Lily and Jamie dynamic, central characters, often with greater autonomy and self-awareness than their white counterparts.

Regarding visual aesthetics, *Devs* seems profoundly ironic, since the Devs system, the very source of the series' anxieties and fears, is shown as a beautifully designed, temple-like workplace—a connotation that is reinforced by the solemn, religiously themed music. The secret facility is a magnetically levitated, perfectly geometrical cube, with an organically shaped, tree-like computer at its core: a symmetrical machine, made of gold-seeming materials, with a "steampunk-ish" look. It is in this

aspect that *Devs* seems to ironically juxtapose its dystopian discourse with a utopian-seeming, awe-provoking setting—an aspect in which it may be comparable to the ambivalent aesthetics of Zamyatin's *We*. Moreover, because of the series' otherwise contemporary setting, it could also be argued that *Devs* blurs the limits of SF itself. Following Nilges's "The Realism of Speculation" and his interpretation of Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, I would contend that *Devs* seems symptomatic of a certain conflation of cyberpunk and realism within the context of a highly speculative, future oriented economy. In other words, because of the logics of contemporary surveillance capitalism, the series explores a classic cyberpunk theme—namely, the emergence of a sharply technocratic, extremely unequal society—without extrapolating towards the future, but by (so to speak) "extrapolating into" the present's logics.

Finally, the series can also be scrutinised as an overtly self-reflexive narrative. In a medium-specific sense, the Devs machine is ostensibly cinematic, the source of an endless stream of audio-visual materials, and its designers and supervisors are its constant spectators, especially the obsessively voyeuristic and nostalgic Forest. Moreover, in a genre-specific manner, the machine is also a machine for extrapolation: it is a reflection of the very mode of fiction that imagines it, although one that, contra SF, seems to seal off the possibility of alternative futures. In these ways, *Devs*'s pondering of free will may be linked back to a timeless metafictional and existential question, repeatedly asked by numberless time-travel and SF narratives: can the future (and the present) be changed, or is it already predetermined? Although this is absolutely not a new question, the series' merit is to ask it in an entertaining televisual format which does not renounce provoking critical reflections on the power of surveillance capitalism. Hence, media and SF scholars, as well as sociologists, theologians and philosophers, could take *Devs* as a fruitful ground for reflection.

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