

FROM THE EDITORS

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Ian Campbell



A point of inflection is when the double-derivative of an equation changes from positive to negative or vice versa: when the pace of change begins to slow or accelerate. The pace of technological advance has of course only continued to accelerate over the last year, but as more and more people begin to realize how bad for us all artificial "intelligence" is, even that might begin to slow.

SF writer Cory Doctorow coined the term "reverse centaur" when describing the effects of AI, or any technology: if the technology enhances human life or productivity, it's one thing, but if it essentially enslaves humans or otherwise makes our lives worse, it's still another. The tech world has run out of new ideas that enhance our lives, but since it's dominated by half a dozen firms all run by the same vampire squid of international capital, it must find new worlds to colonize, no matter the human cost. As SF scholars, we can all readily point to the likely consequences of colonizing "new" worlds. The only remaining question is whether the market can stay irrational long enough to keep Oracle and all the AI companies from bursting like a bubble and making the 2009 financial crisis look like a pleasant day in the park.

So, it's possible that an inflection point will be reached in tech, not because tech cannot do anything different, but because there's little further profit in it. They've bet literal trillions on AI, and it doesn't really work at scale, and there's not much else people really need or even want. I'm not claiming we're going to enter some utopia where six corporations don't control our entire lives—heaven forfend!—but merely making the observation that there are fewer worlds left to conquer than one might think.

The place where I feel we have reached an inflection point is politics. What people without decency never understand is that it's possible to be decent: the ICE thugs and assorted mutants, psychopaths, lickspittles, torturers and profiteers that surround the Mule cannot wrap their heads around the fact that they're wildly outnumbered by people with basic human decency. The murders in Minneapolis were the second half of the inflection point, but the first half was Greenland. When Golden Toilet started ranting about Greenland back in December, his remaining supporters who aren't cultists even sat up and took notice. Why Greenland, exactly? Nobody could answer the question coherently, and that's when the rate of shittification began, if only barely, to change.

Enjoy this issue of the SFRA Review, where among our usual suite of reviews, Quentin Skrabec gives us not just one but two long-form pieces on Jules Verne and 19th-century industry. His take on Verne's understanding of the problematic of coal will be especially useful to scholars whose work in SF touches upon climate change and the Anthropocene. Write me at icampbell@gsu.edu.