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Nalo Hopkinson: New SFF Patron

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Reviews

Editorial

Paul March-Russell

'Hope begins with a hero' proclaims the trailer to *Captain Marvel*. Marvel are certainly 'hoping' to re-boot their seemingly endless series of superhero adaptations after laying waste to most of the characters in *Infinity War*. But hope is also doing the rounds elsewhere in science fiction.

Over the New Year period, Aja Romano, writing for *Vox*, proclaimed a new literary movement, 'hopepunk', derived from a two-line tweet by the writer Alexandra Rowland. Hopepunk, according to Rowland, was 'the opposite of grimdark' – the dystopian hell of *The Hunger Games* or the all-consuming zombie apocalypse – and a stand for 'a better, kinder world'. As expressed, hopepunk is no more coherent than the Occupy placard that read 'Capitalism should be replaced by something nicer'. Romano did little to substantiate hopepunk as an actual movement, rather than a sentiment, by citing such disparate authors and texts as Becky Chambers, N.K. Jemisin and *The Expanse*; decontextualizing the works of Lois McMaster Bujold, Octavia Butler, Terry Pratchett and Gene Roddenberry; and undermining her thesis further by including such dreadful fictions as Andy Weir's *The Martian* (2011) and the Wachowskis' *Jupiter Ascending* (2015). Writing in response, over at *Slate*, Lee Konstantinou criticised the creation of yet another 'punk' in sf, arguing that these sub-genres not only replicate the storytelling template of the original cyberpunk but that they also persist in the cultural logic of the 1980s, as opposed to offering a fresh alternative. As the headline to Konstantinou's article put it, hopepunk indicates that there is 'something broken in our science fiction'.

But wait – '*our* science fiction'? Whose science fiction? The science fiction published by the mainstream Anglophone presses? Apart from Romano's mention of Jeff VanderMeer, I could barely see in there the presence of the New Weird, let alone the British Boom (which maybe didn't 'boom' quite so loudly after all). But neither could I see in there the science fiction being produced by writers of the African and Asian diasporas, indigenous authors such as Rebecca Roanhorse, writers from Europe, Latin America or China, let alone the work of graphic novelists and independent filmmakers. What does hopepunk really indicate, but a localised frustration with the dead-ends of certain Anglo-American sf, which increasingly resemble a ghetto within the wider cultural spaces of sf production?

This anxiety, ill-expressed and only half-formed, was dramatized in the recent return of *Doctor Who*. Not unlike Brie Larson's Captain Marvel, much store had been placed by Jodie Whittaker's female Doctor, and although Whittaker's performance was generally well received, problems persisted with the series as a whole. Fans pointed to the over-crowded Tardis, with Bradley Walsh's Graham as the only rounded-out companion; the relative insignificance

of the Doctor herself (Whittaker's fragility seemingly channelling that of Peter Davison's Doctor); and the ineffective worldbuilding leavened by a welcome return to more historically inclined episodes.

But what I took from the series was the general air of dysfunction. Whilst previous incarnations of the Doctor had navel-gazed over being 'a good man', the galaxy it seemed had slipped into new troughs of slavery, racism and commercial greed. Everything just looked a bit, well, crap. Even the sole Dalek of the series had to cobble a casing together out of the odds and ends of space debris which, like the Doctor herself, had fallen to Earth. The lowering of expectations was registered tonally by the uneasy reconciliation of sf and fantasy elements with Chris Chibnall's new emphasis upon mundane realism. Not so much 'grimdark' as 'glumgrey', this was – despite, or because of, the series' unevenness – the ideal response to the twilight world of Brexit Britain where nothing, not even global ecological catastrophe, matters as much as 'taking back control'. (And, on reflection, didn't the vain-glorious Tzim-Sha resemble nothing so much as a preening Brexiteer?)

Yet, within this glumness, Whittaker infused her Doctor with an insatiable curiosity, pedagogical delight and, yes, undiminished hope that hadn't been seen in the series since, again, Davison's time. There were too many plot holes and intellectual inconsistencies to make more of this – but even, as such, the gaps within the series spoke to the ideological limits of 'our' science fiction. It would be beyond hope – but not imagination – for Chibnall to appeal to writers without these constraints. By addressing racism in the American South and the ghosts of Partition, he had at least made a start.

We are honoured to be publishing in this issue a selection of letters from the correspondence of Ursula Le Guin and the sf scholar Robert Philmus. Their appearance coincides with the recent announcement of Nalo Hopkinson (our cover star) as our new patron alongside Neil Gaiman and Prof David Southwood. Valentina Salvatierra's 2019 prize-winning essay on Le Guin will feature in the next issue of *Foundation* alongside a special section, guest-edited by Thomas Knowles, on Philip K. Dick – one of the subjects in Le Guin and Philmus's correspondence. (See also in this issue the advert for the 2020 Foundation Essay Prize.) Now visible on the Net is the SFF's new website, available at www.sf-foundation.net (if you go to the old address you will be automatically sent to the new one). I would like to publicly thank Isabella Devani for making this wonderful new site. It better conveys both the aims and the objectives of the SFF, as well as our full range of activities, along with a series of membership and donating options for you to join and support what we do. There are still parts of the site under construction, in particular, contact emails will be changing, so in the meantime please contact me direct at my university address: pamr@kent.ac.uk

Triangulating the Dyad: Seen (Orciny) Unseen

Susan Ang (National University of Singapore)

As the acknowledgements to China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) make clear, his novel is suspended somewhere between the *roman noir* of Raymond Chandler and the European magical realism of Bruno Schulz. It is, though, less preoccupied by the intricacies of the whodunnit than with the mysteries represented by the world in which the crime takes place. Inspector Tyador Borlú's investigations *in* that world involve an investigation both *into* the nature of that world and the praxis of 'unseeing' that defines it; in effect, they constitute an enquiry into how the epistemological inflects the ontological. Through those investigations, the novel charts, performs, constitutes and catalyzes an evolution: of its protagonist, of socio-political awareness, of knowledge and, recursively, of itself and of its reader. *The City & The City* evolves generically from detective novel to metafictive *Bildungsroman,* breaching and bridging genre, becoming something rich and strange – or at least rich and weird – in a process announced by its very title.

&: The dancing worm

The emblem for this evolution is found in the figure of the ampersand, embedded and unseen, within the novel's title. Unlike the simple conjunction of the book within the book, David Bowden's *Between the City and the City*, Miéville's deliberate choice of the ampersand signifies more than mere linkage. Its usage is, as Gadlem, Borlú's boss, says of the case 'more convoluted than a dancing worm' (Miéville 2010: 137). A logogram which evolved from the Latin '*et*' as a shorthand symbol developed by Cicero's secretary Tiro (Houston 2015: 53), the ampersand is what is known as a ligature, that is, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Two or more letters joined together and forming one character or type; a monogram'. In its form as well as its meaning, it thus expresses a joining. Originally, the ampersand was the twenty-seventh letter of the alphabet, its name deriving from a corruption of '"and" *per se* "and"'. Letters such as 'a' and 'i', which are also words in themselves, were given as '"a" *per se* "a"' or '"I" *per se* "I"', to signal that when one said 'a', one was referring to the letter 'a' or the letter 'i' itself (and not the indefinite article or the self). Thus '"and" *per se* "and"' originally meant '"&", referred to as a letter in itself'. 'And *per se* and' gradually became phonetically corrupted, taking on its present form, 'ampersand', further blurring in Cumbria and Cornwall to become 'ampassy'.

What we encounter in the ampersand is thus a concealed metaphor and cognitive model through which the thematics and structure of the text are brought to life. While '&' is pronounced as 'and', means '*et*' and is in one sense equivalent

to the word ‘and’, it is not identical. It is a refraction, a slippage, a translation. The original palindromic structure of ‘And | per se | And’ slurs into ‘Am | pers | And’, the origins of the word ‘ampersand’ becoming obscured in the same way that the origin of the two cities is obscured. ‘And’ | per se | ‘and’ is, structurally speaking, a fractal of ‘*The City* | *&* | *The City*’, emblematically expressing the original identification of Besźel and Ul Qoma, in the same way that ‘Am | pers | and’ emblematically expresses the current similarity-but-difference between ‘Besźel | Copula Hall | Ul Qoma’. Once identical, the cities are now cloven into two, their separation maintained by both a legalistic and grammatical structure. Conversely, ‘e’ and ‘t’ were once separate and then coupled to form ‘*et*’, producing the single ‘&’, a (con)fused double tale of cleavage, ‘cleave’ itself a word whose etymological history tells of two different words evolving to take on the same form. ‘&’ therefore varies from ‘and’ in not being merely a (con) junction, or that which enables conjunction, but that which performs it.

The ampersand, however, as that icon whose form is both a registration of its history and that history’s erasure, of both sameness and difference, both doubleness and singleness, is also a figure of ambiguity. But the capacities and possibilities of that ambiguity with respect to Miéville’s novel are heightened if we consider a phenomenon which Garrett Stewart calls ‘transegmental drift’: ‘the possibilities of other words that are *almost* present in the sounds of that word […] an acoustic ghost or echo that attends each word in a script and undoes the seeming fixity of sounded words’ (Smith 2006: 249). In a given word or phrase, the listener hears not just a word but the possibilities of other words that are *almost* present in the sounds of that word in the same way that Borlú hears in the name ‘Byela Mar’ the phonemic approximation of ‘the phrase *byé lai mar*, literally “only the baitfish,” a fishing phrase to say “nothing worth noting”’ (Miéville 2010: 57). In the narrative of slippage and variation that constitutes the history of the ampersand – and its cognate, ‘ampassy’ – we note not just phonic corruption or blurring but also, through transegmental drift, the almost-present, almost-unseen but not quite unheard ‘impasse’ and ‘embassy’. The ampersand, the ampassy, is thus the figure of the ‘impasse’: ‘A road or way’, according to the *O.E.D.*, ‘having no outlet; a blind alley, *cul-de-sac*. Also *fig.*, a position from which there is no way of escape, a “fix”.’ But it is also, simultaneously, the ‘embassy’, once spelt as ‘ambassy’, a place of diplomatic negotiations. ‘&’ is therefore also equivalent to Breach, which polices the boundary between the two cities, and is the living memory of the cleavage that both forced the cities apart and maintained their uneasy alliance. Breach is its own antithesis, both policing the impassability of the boundary while constituting a breach in that boundary. Breach, like the ampersand, is thus a figure of ambiguity and paradox.

The ampersand is not only a metaphor but also, what might be called a 'meta-metaphor', in that it stands not just for particular meanings but for the properties of metaphor itself: polysemy, the capacity for unresolved ambiguity, the expression of a oneness between disparate things and a doubleness in one thing, given that metaphor embodies, as I.A. Richards has it, 'two thoughts' made 'active together' (Richards 1976: 93), not the suppression or subordination of one to the other. The metaphor is also generative, as Miéville sees it:

> I'm always much happier talking in terms of *metaphor*, because it seems that metaphor is intrinsically more unstable. A metaphor fractures and kicks off more metaphors, which kick off more metaphors, and so on. In any fiction or art at all, but particularly in fantastic or imaginative work, there will inevitably be ramifications, amplifications, resonances, ideas, and riffs that throw out these other ideas. (Manaugh 2011)

A metaphor is what Miéville has elsewhere described as 'fractally begetting' (Shapiro 2008: 65), in that fecundity constitutes not an impasse, a blockage, a cul-de-sac but, conversely, a house of many ways, an embassy. As Geoffrey Hill has pointed out, metaphor is an '"*entrata*", an entrance, a passage through to "the new matter that cometh after" […] a leap – out of and into strangeness' (Hill 2002: 326) and thus, a venturing into the realm of unpremeditated, unanticipated, meaning.

The ampersand as meta-metaphor stands as an expression of a complex relation between two entities that can be clarified by means of the German word '*Aufhebung*'. It is sometimes translated as 'sublation' within the work of G.W.F. Hegel, referring to the seemingly contradictory notions of cancellation, preservation and transcendence suspended in tension with each other. Metaphor depends on the dialectical activity of two elements; Brian Caraher argues that it is a 'feature of our own mode of apprehension to fuse together, to *con-fuse*, what we call the human and the natural in order to achieve any form of seeing at all' (Caraher 1981: 80). Rather than saying that metaphor functions analogically, it might be truer to say that metaphor expresses one thing in terms of a dissimilar thing; it is necessary to the proper functioning of metaphor as perceptual agent that the dissimilarity not be de-emphasized or ignored, unseen, as it were. Metaphors 'can be said to lose force or brisk instructive power when they begin to move toward analogy, comparison, and approximation' (82), and a vigorous or fully functional metaphor should possess an inherent resistance to the cognitive pressure to collapse its two divergent terms into a docile convergence.

What is a metaphor/the meta for?

The City & The City, viewed through the metaphor of the ampersand, becomes readable as an enquiry into the epistemological workings of metaphor as a mechanism or model of productive thought. Miéville's texts do not merely abound with metaphors, but frequently take as their starting point a literalized metaphor, the idea made flesh. An example is the kraken in the novel of that name, a cephalopod, literally meaning 'head-foot'. Like the ampersand, another literalized example of the two-in-oneness that is metaphor, the multiple podia, or tentacles, suggest the generative properties of metaphor. As Sherryl Vint notes, the world of *The City & The City* literalizes the metaphor of seeing/unseeing as cognitive registration/deregistration, further literalizing the 'poststructural axiom that language and perception make the world we inhabit' (Vint 2015: 49).

The value of the literalized metaphor, however, lies not merely in its potential for setting the terms, parameters or protocols of the fantastic, but in its capacity to concretize the abstract idea, making it visible and, as such, engage-able. The literalized metaphor is not merely a representation in concrete terms of an idea but has its own ontological value, its own 'integrity and realism' (Shapiro 2008: 65). A literalized metaphor is thus an entity in itself. Avice Benner Cho, the protagonist of *Embassytown* (2012), is not just the 'girl who was hurt in darkness and ate what was given to her' (Miéville 2012: 394), but an individual with a life and worth independent of and greater than her function to the Ariekai as literalized simile. The literalized metaphor has an immanent logic that transcends the specific and limited meaning that it concretizes, and is capable of taking the reader down unanticipated paths not predefined by its primary meaning.

The cities of *The City & The City* are not solely a literalized metaphor of constrained sight/cognition, but, in the details of their realization modify and inflect the raw proposition. For instance, that Besźel and Ul Qoma are linked by Copula Hall is a fact of the cities not directly related to their role in dramatizing constrained perception, yet that they are so linked might invite one to trace the relations between language, cognition and constraint. Alternatively, given that the verb 'to be' is the most common form of the copula, the presence of Copula Hall in the metaphoricized territory of the cities might literalize not *a* particular metaphor but the most basic formula of metaphor itself. As noted by Andrea Ong, 'Copulas are […] essential to how metaphors work; they are the connectors that map the source domain to the target domain' (Ong 2009: 51–2). Copulas point the reader in the direction of meta-ness, to render one aware of the meta-apparatuses or meta-structures that operate, govern, constrict, and construct our visual and cognitive fields.

Our agency is limited by *what* we can think; what we can think is limited by

how we can think; how we can think is limited at least in part by the structural impositions of language, its grammar and syntax, punctuation and words, all the way down to the level of 'and' – represented by the '&'. Thought is also, by extension, limited by the ideologies constructed in/through language and also by its metaphors. The protocols that limit our fields of vision are often, if not always, invisible to us. Rosemary Jackson's argument that the '"fantastic" derives from the Latin, *phantasticus*, which is from the Greek fantazw meaning to make visible or manifest' (Jackson 1981: 8), and that fantasy traces the 'unsaid and unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent' (2), has a particular aptness to Miéville's novel. What the literalized metaphor of seeing/unseeing in *The City & The City* does is to render visible those meta-agents (language, metaphor, etc.), and the ideologies they operate, in so doing establishing the basis for increased agency as one's awareness of one's blind-spots both heightens one's capacity for resistance as well as endowing one with a measure of control. This in turn paves the way for emancipation from a species of what we might call 'false consciousness', which has been constructed by, amongst others, language, history and culture.

Not only either/or and maybe

As a literalized metaphor of constrained perception, the cities also constitute a cognitive model. That there are two cities, each of which unsees the other, suggests that constrained cognition is linked to the binary 'either/or'; this logic subtly enhanced by geographical names like Bol Ye'an, suggestive of Boolean mathematics and its use of true-false statements. But the either/or also constitutes a form of what Edward Soja calls a 'categorical and closed logic' (Soja 2009: 53), limited and limiting, causing us to unsee anything not defined by the terms of the binary, or to think simply and schematically in terms of X and not-X. That schematized way of seeing and thinking translates into a way of doing; as mentioned early on in the novel, either/or thought schemas like '*gudcop/badcop*' are 'verbed' (Miéville 2010: 17), becoming praxis. That there is something reductive about such a formulation is suggested by the facilitating of 'good' to 'gud' so as to bring it into neatened oppositional line with 'bad'.

Yet, what *The City & The City* does is narrativize, perform and enable a gradually evolving mode of perception and thought, which it does by troubling its initially simple structures and formulations, and eventually substituting for them more complex, nuanced, open-ended ones. That there is a value in the complex and difficult with regard to the processes of intellectual emancipation and, implicitly, that which can follow on socio-politically from that intellectual or conceptual complexification, is a point raised by the poet Geoffrey Hill:

> Tyranny requires simplification. This thought does not originate with me, it's been far better expressed by others. I think immediately of the German classicist and Kierkegaardian scholar Theodor Haecker [who] argues, with specific reference to the Nazis, that one of the things the tyrant most cunningly engineers is the gross oversimplification of language, because propaganda requires that the minds of the collective respond primitively to slogans of incitement. And any complexity of language, any ambiguity, any ambivalence implies intelligence. Maybe an intelligence under threat, maybe an intelligence that is afraid of consequences, but nonetheless an intelligence working in qualifications and revelations [. . .] resisting, therefore, tyrannical simplification. (Phillips 2000: 277)

The simple binary 'either/or' that the text initially sets up is problematized by things that initially suggest the dyad but are however, when more closely scrutinized, not in fact either/ors, an example being the 'topolganger', whose word-shape evokes '*Doppelgänger'*, the figure of the double, and which occurs in crosshatched areas. The figure of the *Doppelgänger* however has no inherent association with oppositionality or either/or-ism, drawing rather on the uncanny effects of duplication. The topolganger, the same site, with one name in one city and another in its twin, a site haunted by itself/not-itself, is, in fact, rather than a simple manifestation of an either/or, a more complex entity – a 2-in-1 formulation.

The DöplirCaffé, another teasing reference to doubling and dyads, on closer examination turns out to be yet another ambiguous 2-in-1 affair:

> One Muslim and one Jewish coffeehouse, rented side by side, each with its own counter and kitchen, halal and kosher, sharing a single name, sign, and sprawl of tables, the dividing wall removed. Mixed groups would come, greet the two proprietors, sit together, separating on communitarian lines only long enough to order their permitted food from the relevant side, or ostentatiously from either and both in the case of freethinkers. Whether the DöplirCaffé was one establishment or two depended on who was asking: to a property tax collector, it was always one. (Miéville 2010: 26)

The 'logic' of the DöplirCaffé is hinted at in its name in which the resonances of Dopplerian effects of convergence/divergence are faintly sounded. The double 'f' signals that it is a double café but also, as a typographical ligature like the ampersand, it problematizes the simple dyad, given that it is not only 2, but 1, or 1, but 2. But the DöplirCaffé, as described, is also a literalized metaphor of Boolean logic. While operating on a true/false logic, and hence in one sense a manifestation of the either/or:

> Boolean logic […] works in binary code, using permutations of the operators AND, NOT, and OR. This is also the epistemological system which the world of *City* uses to define the real in relation to the Other. One has to unsee spaces which are NOT-Besźel or NOT-Ul Qoma, whichever is applicable. The villainous force behind Mahalia's murder is either Orsiny [sic] OR Breach, or Orsiny [sic] AND Breach. (Ong 2009: 50)

The DöplirCaffé has customers who either order from one or the other, and those who order from one and the other. Bol Ye'an itself has sections which are 'total' in Besźel, 'total' in Ul Qoma and crosshatched (Miéville 2010: 225), crosshatching being both an 'or' and an 'and'. What is worth noting in all this is not merely the presence of yet another literalized metaphor but that the figure of the simple dyad has been problematized; Boolean maths may work in binary and with either/or true/false logics, but its components comprise a system not expressing only 'yes' and 'no' but a more complex three-term negation, alternation, addition; the 'and' in Boolean, incidentally, is registered as a double ampersand: '&&'.

What appears as a 'true on-off' thus metamorphoses into a 'twisting blinder' (Miéville 2010: 156), as seemingly clear binaries mutate into something more ambiguous, more complex, just *more* – what Miéville might call an 'evasive surplus' (374). Borlú's 'stop-started' (16) or 'sped-stalled' (31) investigation is a figuration of the dialectical metaphor, or *Aufhebung*, sublated into a synthesis that cancels, preserves and transcends, the on-off switch lying implacably suspended. That suspended switch is represented by the open-ended 'maybe', which joins the evolving cognitive model in which 'and' has already expanded the scope of the 'either/or':

> 'A sicko?'
>
> He shrugged. 'Maybe. He cuts her, kills her, dumps her. Cocky bastard too, doesn't give a shit that we're going to find her.'
>
> 'Cocky or stupid.'
>
> 'Or cocky *and* stupid.'
>
> 'So a cocky, stupid sadist,' I said. He raised his eyes, *Maybe*. (9)

'Maybe' is a hesitation – 'hesitating' itself a frequently recurring verb in the text – the same hesitation as that which governs the modality of the fantastic:

> 'I nearly reached the point of believing': that is the formula which sums up the spirit of the fantastic. Either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life. (Todorov 1975: 31)

Tzvetan Todorov's fantastic registers an epistemological tremor which unsettles the reader who becomes uncertain as to what cognitive framework to employ, a point germane to a novel both operating in what is generically and modally ambiguous territory, but which also at least superficially identifies as a detective novel. Genre and mode are not just 'orientations' (Schimanski 2016: 111) but epistemes, ways of knowing.

In the novel's project of cognizing, de-cognizing and *re*-cognizing, the 'maybe', especially through its generic and modal manifestations, has a particular value in registering and engineering epistemological (r)evolution. 'Maybe' betokens non-commitment, doubt, undecidedness, uncertainty, scepticism, thus challenging the tyranny of monolithic ideology or thinking. But further than this, the 'maybe' tacitly reviews and reconsiders; its epistemological value residing in that it acknowledges more than a single way of looking at things.

The generic and modal ambiguity of *The City & The City* results in the reader's inability to relax into the cognitive passivity that comes with the identification of genre, its governing codes, assumptions, the 'appropriate' ways of reading the text and eliciting meaning from it. Miéville's own preference has been to class his fiction as 'New Weird', presented by Miéville as a permeation of the real by 'radicalized sublime backwash'; the 'sublime', understood by Miéville via Edmund Burke and H.P. Lovecraft, as 'the finite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis'. The Weird 'punctures the supposed membrane separating off the sublime, […] allow[ing] swillage of that awe and horror from "beyond" back into the everyday – into angles, bushes, the touch of strange limbs, noises, etc.' (Miéville 2011: 511). There are two things here worth pointing out, first, that the Weird is linked to the indeterminate ('beyond the radius of our sight and analysis'), and next, that the affect and genre of the Weird derive from a breach, a 'puncturing', and the resultant pollution/contamination.

That contamination is also a generic contamination in Weird fiction, a blending of horror, science fiction and fantasy whose boundaries have been breached to allow the seepage and swillage of strangeness, the indeterminate, into the determinate real; this might describe *The City & The City* without too much fuss. Mostly appearing to operate in the real world of mobile phones, academia and urban crime, the novel also features strange artefacts of an earlier age, a mysterious force called Breach, an even more mysterious third city, Orciny, rumoured to exist in the interstices of Beszel and Ul Qoma, and a strange dispensation whose rationale and origin is never clarified. While seemingly realist, the novel holds open the possibility of the world having science-fictional or fantastic underpinnings, the unnerving glimpses of Breach or other entities in the earlier sections of the text for example provoking epistemological hesitation

as the reader fails to know how properly to interpret the event.

While in some cases the hesitation is resolved, both major and minor elements are not clarified; the net result is the reader's inability to say definitively that the world of *The City & The City* is not fantasy or is not science fiction. We are still in the jurisdiction of 'maybe'. The concluding paragraphs of chapter 1, for instance, which first bring to our attention the peculiar phenomenon of unseeing, leave us uncertain as to how to comprehend the phenomenon, given that this depends in part on correct identification of genre, and the genre we have hitherto assumed ourselves to be operating in (realist fiction) cannot comfortably account for what is encountered and how it is described:

> As I turned, I saw past the edges of the estate to the end of GunterStrász, between the dirty brick buildings. Trash moved in the wind. It might be anywhere. An elderly woman was walking slowly away from me in a shambling sway. She turned her head and looked at me. I was struck by her motion, and I met her eyes. […]
>
> With a hard start, I realised that she was not on GunterStrász at all, and that I should not have seen her.
>
> Immediately and flustered I looked away, and she did the same, with the same speed. I raised my head, towards an aircraft on its final descent. When after some seconds I looked back up, unnoticing the old woman stepping heavily away, I looked carefully instead of at her in her foreign street at the facades of the nearby and local GunterStrász, that depressed zone. (Miéville 2010: 14)

In what sense does Borlú mean that the old woman was not on GunterStrász and that he should not have seen her? What does 'unnoticing' mean? Are we dealing with the supernatural, magic, hallucination, taboo, psychology or something else? As noted by Paul March-Russell, the 'reader's initial perception is that Borlú has seen a ghost' (March-Russell 2015: 146); in fairy tales, the figure of the old woman is associated with the witch/hag. The overall eeriness, enhanced by the uncertainty encoded in the trash and wind that might be blowing around, the oddity of her gait and Borlú's 'unnoticing', suggest the possibility of the fantastic or supernatural. Yet, the unanchoredness of the 'shambling sway' solidifies slightly into the 'stepping heavily', this retethering of the reader to his initial assumptions about this being a realist text, but insufficiently to stabilize genre. We never do know for sure whether the old woman is a figure of the supernatural, or Breach, or just an old woman. At the very least the reader is left with a sense of there being some crucial missing piece of information, and a scanning backwards in case a key orienting sentence somewhere was missed might result in mild consternation as the opening line 'I could not see the street or much of the estate' (Miéville 2010: 3) is re-encountered. Where the 'workaday'

(Marks 2013: 222) feel of the opening cued one to read this normally and ignore it, the chapter's end now raises the possibility of the opening sentence having an alternate meaning. We become aware of our own unseeing, our trained tendency to 'oversight' – like 'cleave', a word with two contradictory meanings invoked by the text. What is demonstrated here is the hesitant mode of the Weird, the epistemological uncertainty that results from its operation, and the activation, of hitherto passive cognition, which is provoked by the mode of the 'maybe'.

Hearing is seeing

The complication of cognitive models in the text, however, does not stop there. Seeing is only one means of apprehension, one to which the text encourages us to add an aural dimension. That the reader is being trained to *hear* in order, metaphorically, to *see* more and better, may be inferred from the frequent attention called to puns, sounds and pronunciation in the text. Puns, which require one to hear more than one possible word/meaning in a sound, are frequently flagged up directly in the narration, for example the trilingual pun on '*khaṭ*' and on 'Byela Mar'. Borlú notices accents a great deal: people speak Illitan at home but Besź without an accent in the streets (Miéville 2010: 66), and Ashil has an accent that does 'not sound quite Besź, nor Ul Qoman, but was certainly not European or North American' (290). Geary's mispronunciation of 'Besźel' as 'Bezzel' and 'Orciny' as 'or seen it' (96) is less a Eurosneer at American accents and pronunciation, than a way of sensitizing the reader to the distinction between the similar-but-different hisses of the 's' and 'z', as well as the new third sizzle ignited by 'sz' or 'sź' and, more to the point, to enable him to see and hear the invisible 'scene'/'seen' in 'Orciny'.

Miéville's practice of breaching a word to broach its hidden components both defamiliarizes it as well as causing other sounds and words to manifest. 'Bol Ye'an' is one such example, but then Borlú, whose first name is shortened and broken up by Dhatt, 'Tyador? *Or* is that *Tyad*?' (164, italics mine), becomes dimly pre-cognisable, not just as a figuration of the dyad, but what one might call a 'weird third', the phonal slippages in 'Tyad' simultaneously suggesting both 'dyad' and 'third', blurred, merged, sublated, transforming. We are now not looking at 2-in-1s but 3-in-2-in-1s. Borlú's name undergoes at least two more estrangements, first dismantled into 'Tye Adder Borlo' (174), then condensed into 'Tye, avatar of Breach' (373), the 'tyad' a tie that holds together two or three separate objects, people and places. While serving to breach the integrity of the two cities, 'worming' (311) – and thus presumably wormholing – through them, Tye is also that which holds the breach closed, 'threaded […] like a suture in and out of Besźel and Ul Qoma' (370). Metaphors are 'discursive and linguistic

knots' (Caraher 2014: 5) but so too is the ampersand.

Tyads, Thirds, Thirdspaces

Borlú, as both cop and copula, transgressor (breacher of boundaries), policeman (guardian of boundaries), and ambassador is also the human embodiment of the ampersand, the knot/tie that is the impasse-embassy, breach-bridge. He is both the aporia and that which enables porosity. As 'tyad', the conflated dyad/triad, the 'neither-nor' as Buric rudely calls him (Miéville 2010: 339), the metaphor that is either 2-in-1 or 3-in-2, Borlú represents the evolving cognitive model in which binary gives way to ternary. Borlú is drawn to threes, his attention drawn in Ul Qoma to 'conversation in both languages and a third thing, a mongrel or antique that combined them' (301), tickled by trilingual puns, the apex of the love triangle with Sariska and Biszaya, and of the work one with Corwi and Dhatt, the last physically manifested as they wait to catch Bowden, poised in Besźel, Ul Qoma and in Breach: 'Looking back I saw her and Dhatt, metres apart in different cities, staring at me. It was really dawn at last' (354). Edward Soja would describe this intersection as a 'Thirdspace': 'a meeting point, a hybrid place, where one can move beyond the existing borders. It is also a place of the marginal women and men, where old connections can be disturbed and new ones emerge' (Soja 2009: 56).

Thirds have a significance, not because they are magic numbers, but because they offer insult to the dyad, as we see in the case of Orciny, unproved, undisproved, unseen third city. Orciny, as an instance of Thirdspace, is a disruptor of dyadic/schematic thinking in the way that Soja celebrates:

> This dimension, a third possibility or moment that partakes of the original pairing, is not just a single combination or an 'in-between' position along some all-inclusive continuum but can be understood as critical thirding-as-Othering. It is the first and most important step in transforming the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open logic of both/and also. Two terms are never enough: *Il y a toujours l'Autre*. There is always the Other, a third term that disrupts, disorders, and begins to reconstitute the conventional binary opposition into an-Other that comprehends but is more than just the sum of two parts. (53)

The existence of Orciny not in itself but as an idea, as a 'third', effectively repatterns the dynamics between Ul Qoma and Besźel, by attesting to the existence of what is un-encompassed by the dyad. Where the internal dynamics of a dyad tend towards stasis, a triad, being more asymmetrical, has greater volatility.

The existence of Bowden, the man most associated with Orciny,

demonstrates the limitations of the Besźel/Ul Qoma dyad; neither Corwi, waiting in Besźel nor Dhatt, in Ul Qoma, is able to catch him given his ability to move in a way that lies outside the remit of either jurisdiction. Standing outside Copula Hall, in a crosshatched area, his avoidance of the physical boundaries of either city places him outside the ambit of both, and only Borlú, uncontained by the logic of either/or, can pin him down.

The movement towards Thirdspace, however, does not merely dissolve the existing mind-set but promises the enrichment both of thought-possibility and life itself. Henri Lefebvre's view of the world in which sociality, spatiality and historicality are not seen as independent domains has an obvious attraction to Miéville's novel. Just as sociality is implicated in spatiality, 'social relations of production have a social existence [only] to the extent that they have a spatial existence' (Lefebvre 2011: 129) , history too cannot but be spatially implicated: 'if space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with history' (46). Similarly, in *The City & The City*, sociospatiality is always inflected by historicality and sociality governed by spatio-temporality The social experience of living in the space of either city is always-already conditioned by the past, and the premise of the detective plot is shaped by the archaeological artefacts which are simultaneously signs of economic transactionality, contested spatiality, mysterious historicality as well as world-building counters in the project of Orciny, all the while themselves remaining inscrutable, irremediably other. Lefebvre's conception came to comprise '*espace percu*' (objective, perceived space), '*espace conçu*' (conceptual, imagined space), and '*espace vécu*' (lived space), the last taking shape out of the interactions of the first two, and involving the interactions of real bodies with real places. Tim Rogers describes this as a 'dialogical field', observing that Lefebvre thinks of this 'as the space of actual life, including, yet being much more than, the perceived and conceived first and second spaces […] Third space contains the here-and-now of lived existence, capturing all the hurly-burly of day-to-day life' (Rogers 2003: 110).

The pertinence of Lefebvrean *espace vécu* and Sojan Thirdspace to *The City & The City* becomes clear if one considers Borlú's first engagement with the two cities as 'Tye':

> I tried to unsee them but there could be no uncertainty: that source of the smell I had been unsmelling was our destination. 'Walk,' he said, and he walked me through the membrane between cities; I lifted my foot in Ul Qoma, put it down again in Besźel, where breakfast was. Behind us was an Ul Qoman woman with raspberry punk hair selling the unlocking of mobile phones. She glanced in surprise then consternation; then I saw her quickly unsee us as Ashil ordered food in Besźel. Ashil paid with Besźmarques. He put the paper plate in my hand, walked me back across the road into the supermarket. It was

> in Ul Qoma. He bought a carton of orange juice with dinar, gave it to me. I held the food and the drink. He walked me down the middle of the crosshatched road. My sight seemed to untether as with a lurching Hitchcock shot, some trickery of dolly and depth of field, so the street lengthened and its focus changed. Everything I had been unseeing now jostled into sudden close-up. Sound and smell came in: the calls of Besźel; the ringing of its clocktowers; the clattering and old metal percussion of the trams; the chimney smell; the old smells; they came in a tide with the spice and Illitan yells of Ul Qoma, the clatter of a *militsya* copter, the gunning of German cars. (Miéville 2010: 303–4)

March-Russell, in his commentary on Michel de Certeau's notion of the 'Concept-city', speaks of 'a way of being in the world' that has been 'forgotten' within the Concept-city's panoptical gaze', and how the Concept-city's 'rationalizing tendencies' only 'disappear the particularities of lived experience' as well as habituating 'the citizens to unsee both one another and also the relations of power, economics and trade that permit their urban existence' (March-Russell 2015: 151). Here, all that is undone. In what is on the whole a fairly dispassionate novel, this is a deeply if understatedly emotionally resonant passage. What is being recuperated is that way of being in the world and the sharpness of lived experience. The disorientation is also the source of orientation: all is the same; all is different. The smell of food, the call of the simple and ordinary in the shape of dumplings and orange juice are powerfully visceral and affecting, serving as compass for the body in a world otherwise strange and now unencompassed.

Power, economics and trade are also made newly visible, as one is made sharply aware of stalls and supermarkets selling software and knickknacks; in the figure of the woman with raspberry punk hair selling the unlocking of mobile phones, we find the conflation of newly vibrant edgy colour (raspberry pink/punk), the edible (we associate the colour raspberry to the fruit and to the orange juice), and trade (mobile phone unlocking). The 'percussion' of the trams, the 'clatter of a *militsya* copter, the gunning of German cars' bring together not just a symphony of urban sound, but re-alert us to signs of the economic and political that have been habituated into unsight. The 'gunning' of German cars reminds us of the quiet aggressions that can be exercised by economy and trade; the mystery of Mahalia Geary's death is in fact rooted in economic concerns: 'People get killed so that other people can make money: a point of decisive generic significance' (Freedman 2015: 95). The crowdedness of the description, its excess and unmappability, all convey the full inhabitation of that richly textured space, into which Borlú takes his first new breath.

What may be noted, however, is that this moment of epiphany does not represent the rhetorical culmination of the novel's argument. While a premise of two cities, each taught to unsee the other, would naturally lead one to assume

an ultimate convergence to be the novel's destination, that promise is thwarted. Ul Qoma and Besźel do not resolve into a socio-political unity but maintain the status quo; Tye is not the spearhead of a mass breach that would undo the need for Breach at all, but the 'skin that keeps law in place. Two laws in two places, in fact' (Miéville 2010: 375). It does not make intuitive sense that the protagonist, whose trajectory through the novel is normally figured as a progression, should, having escaped the impoverishment of a monocular existence, be transformed into an enforcer of that same constraint. Yet, that this occurs suggests that Miéville assigns equal significance to differentiation and the distinctions it enables, differentiation only made possible by the existence of boundaries, defining lines. Collapsing difference does not attenuate the hegemonic, but rather, encourages it. And with only one, even if aggregated, term in place, the dialectical – or trialectical – cannot exist, without which (r) evolution cannot happen, the dialectical being, as Miéville has said, about the forces of 'movement' and 'dynamism' (Gordon 2003: 364), the necessary predicates to change.

This is the same argument which undergirds Miéville's essay, 'Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory' (2009), which simultaneously argues for and against the necessity and usefulness of boundaries separating the two genres of science fiction and fantasy. Some 'epistemological firewalls' (Miéville 2009: 243) are false, and need to come down, to reveal the similarities between the genres, this being a 'fundamental alterity-as-estrangement' (244). Other distinctions between the genres might be pertinent and usefully maintained: those both critically rigorous and attuned to generic specificities. As Miéville observes: 'both the boundaries and their breaching might continue both to enable and constrain creativity and innovation' (244). The essay's conclusion supplies a clue towards resolving the paradox of Borlú's position. Speaking of the desiderated 'thaw' of Marxist theory towards fantasy, Miéville concedes that 'To blur the boundaries further, it might be efficacious to respect the unstable specifics – but specifics nonetheless – of that contingently bundled sub-genre, 'fantasy'. Precisely to continue the project of theorizing a conjoined SF and fantasy, in other words, SF, with its tendency to hegemonize the conversation, might have to be temporarily excluded' (245). This resonates with Borlú's acknowledgement that he has 'a great deal to learn, and no choice but to learn it, or to go rogue, and there is no one hunted like a Breach renegade' (Miéville 2010: 373). In both positions there is an implied need to bide one's time and maintain the boundaries in order that the boundaries might eventually be worn down. He is the 'adder' and the 'adder' – the adder of city to city, the snake in waiting.

In my 'and' was my beginning and in my beginning is my end. In the paradox

of the boundary, we are returned to impasses and embassies, and thence to the ampersand. I began by saying that the ampersand was more than the simple conjunction 'and'. Yet 'and', for which the ampersand doubles, is in fact not simple. Jacques Derrida suggests that the deconstructive forces of 'dissociation, dislocation, unbinding' are translated or channeled through the '*et*' or 'and', even while 'and' 'can also maintain the differences together *as* differences, and *différance* is also this insistence of the same in opposition' (Derrida 2000: 291). The 'and', in other words, facilitates the business of the boundary while also sapping it: 'Not all 'ands' have the same value' (287). Tye's closing remark, 'I live in the interstice yes, but I live in both the city and the city' (Miéville 2010: 373), expresses a complex relation to the cities and between them. His life is expanded, more commodious, richer, more complete, thanks to the adding of city to city. But the statement can simultaneously be read as an expression of the divided life, (he lives not in one city but in two), or of the 'acceptance of the contradictions that define lived experience' (March-Russell 2015: 150). All of these things might be true, entangled in the figure of the ampersand, which, as the 'etc' or '&c', gestures to world beyond, the world of 'other things', the undefined promise of 'and so forth'…

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The Alchemical Singularity: Magic and Technology in Warren Ellis's *Injection*

Hallvard Haug (Birkbeck College, London)

Warren Ellis, who gained fame with a string of unconventional superhero comics in the 1990s, and is perhaps still best known for the cult crossover hit *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002), writes across multiple media, including prose fiction, streaming serials and magazine columns. Known for his commentary on technological culture, Ellis' work generally falls under the science fiction banner, though his sensibilities also tend towards exploring fantastical ideas, often refracted through the naturalizing lens of sf. Magical motifs are reclaimed for the science fictional idiom, where the aesthetic of the supernatural is reproduced by the potential of technology. From the beginning of his career, Ellis has probed the aesthetic similarities between the magical and the technological, and it is a motif he has revisited many times, whether in the form of media ghosts, techno-magicians or the magickal techniques of Aleister Crowley. In his debut comics series, *Lazarus Churchyard* (with artist D'Israeli, collected 2001), a sentient magical grimoire turns out to be an alien AI, manifested in a flesh-computer. This paradoxical being confounds the expectations of readers familiar with occult motifs by embodying Arthur C. Clarke's Third Law: 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic' (Clarke 1974: 39n). Ellis frequently aligns the supernatural with the nascent powers of technology to bring the effects of magic into reality, from the transhumanist techno-spiritualism in *Transmetropolitan* to the mystical psychedelia and mental technologies of *Doktor Sleepless* (2008). In a talk given in February 2014, Ellis claimed that 'technology is the process of replicating the conditions of magic. That is the paradigm' (Ellis 2015: no page).

The on-going comic *Injection* (2015–), co-created with artist Declan Shalvey and colourist Jordie Bellaire, takes its name from an AI, whose creation again questions the boundary between magic and technology by equating our technological fears with stories from mythology and folklore. Three of *Injection*'s intended five volumes, comprising five issues each, have been published, with each volume focusing on one of five central characters, all of whom are analogues taken from English genre fiction. In the first volume, we follow the scientist Maria Kilbride, a reimagining of Nigel Kneale's Professor Quatermass. The second volume focuses on Vivek Headland, a modern Sherlock Holmes with Anglo-Indian origins, while the third volume features the technologist Brigid Roth, loosely referring to Doctor Who. Future volumes will follow Simeon Winters, a spy in the mould of James Bond, and Robin Morel, a folklorist descended from a line of cunning-folk – English folk magicians – and possibly

inspired by Thomas Carnacki, William Hope Hodgson's occult detective. Ellis's choice of names is also possibly symbolic. The patronymic (Mac) Kilbride is derived from the Irish Brigid. Brigid was a Gaelic deity, later syncretized as a Christian saint, and both were patrons of poetry, crafts and smithing. Robin Morel shares his given name with the sprite Robin Goodfellow, but the family name most certainly refers to James Murrell, the 'last of the cunning men', of whom Ellis has spoken and written elsewhere (Ellis 2015: no page).

In the following, my argument is that the eponymous Injection, a rogue AI unleashed on the net to create novelty in the world, represents a mystical motif which questions the uneasy boundaries between the natural and the supernatural, magic and technology. First, I situate the series in terms of hauntology and Weird fiction, to show how these critical categories have influenced Ellis's work. As such, I approach hauntology in terms of a conceptual cluster which weds a supernatural aesthetic to a concept of non-linear time. Rather than taking the hauntological element in *Injection* as a political commentary on the present, I consider the mystical agency of the Injection to be a literalised metaphor for how we ascribe narrative to the world. Second, I draw on Ellis's non-fiction writing to link teleological ideas about nature and technology with alchemical thought, and suggest that the prescientific idea of purposes intrinsic to nature has been preserved in new ideas of artificial intelligence. Finally, I consider Ellis's aesthetic conflation of magic and technology in terms of Max Weber's concept of disenchantment, a theory that has been challenged in recent years by a resurgence in mystical and supernatural beliefs. In conclusion, I draw these elements together in a short reading of a passage towards the end of *Injection*'s first volume in which nature, technology and narrative are collapsed into a conceptual unity.

Haunted future

When creating *Injection,* Ellis was drawing upon a set of literary and cinematic precursors from 'British weird fiction' (Kirk 2016). While the Weird is commonly associated with H.P. Lovecraft and the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, recent reappraisal has broadened its scope to include fiction outside of that tradition. Ellis's selection of Weird influences however, with the exception of Hodgson's Carnacki, is not typical of authors conventionally associated with the British Weird, figures like Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood or M.R. James. Ellis defines his own tradition of the British Weird to include writers associated with genres not necessarily thought of as Weird: detective, spy and science fiction. But this also reflects the interstitial character of Weird fiction. Weird fiction is something of a 'non-generic' genre that defies description and definition, a hybrid which revels in the crossing of boundaries and emphasizes affective response

over formal criteria. In this respect, James Machin has recently written of the Weird as a 'mode' rather than a genre (Machin 2017). The central characters in *Injection* thus fit comfortably into what is an unmistakably Weird storyline despite their sources of inspiration.

During the mid-2000s, following the reclamation of Weird fiction by such authors as M. John Harrison and China Miéville, interest in the Weird began to overlap with the popularization of Jacques Derrida's concept of 'hauntology'. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the historian Francis Fukuyama notoriously declared liberal democracy to be the end of history. In *Specters of Marx* (1994), Derrida responded to Fukuyama by noting the ghostly metaphors in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), and arguing that political discourse was still influenced by the spectre of Marxism even in its absence. Derrida termed this condition 'hauntology': the shading of official discourses of the self by occult histories and alien presences. Derrida's analysis lent theoretical credence to a rising academic interest in the supernatural in fiction, in what has been described as the 'spectral turn'. Despite Roger Luckhurst's criticism that 'what Derrida's hauntology has spawned, at least in Gothicized literary criticism, is the punning search for a textual reading machine […] that largely recirculates Gothic-aesthetic tropes' (Luckhurst 2002: 536), hauntology remained resilient as a concept and eventually caught the attention of theoretically-minded pop-cultural writers in the mid-2000s.

Ellis took an early interest in this pop-cultural manifestation. In May 2008, Ellis attended the 'Hauntology Now!' symposium at London's Museum of Garden History, which included presentations from cultural theorist Mark Fisher and sonic archaeologist Paul Devereux. Ellis subsequently refers to hauntology on multiple occasions in his newsletters and blog posts. In his non-fiction book, *Cunning Plans* (2015), several chapters touch upon hauntological themes, and Ellis has mentioned that at the time he began *Injection*, he was giving talks at digital and futurist conferences on themes of technology, folklore and magic (Kirk 2016). Yet where hauntology as a philosophical concept was always overtly political, Ellis's approach emphasizes its appeal to the Weird, by folding the uneasy familiarity of a lost mythology into the strange machine intelligence of the Injection.

Ellis makes hauntology his own, tugging and twisting it to accommodate his aesthetic sensibilities. Hauntological ideas inform the way Ellis uses aspects of a largely forgotten or esoteric folkloric past. In rewriting and re-contextualizing English folklore, Ellis makes the hauntological traces of myth strange and weird. Miéville has remarked that the hauntological is 'starkly opposed' to the Weird because hauntology is 'a category positing, presuming, implying a "time out

of joint", a present stained with traces of the ghostly, the dead-but-unquiet, estranges reality in an almost precisely opposite fashion to the Weird: with a radicalised uncanny' (Miéville 2008: 112). The Injection, however, aligns the idea of Sigmund Freud's uncanny, the 'secretly familiar', with the dread of the Other which the Weird demands. The Injection mimics human intelligence, so that it is like the uncanny double Olympia from Freud's base text, E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' (1816), but it is also irreducibly alien, emblematic of a Weird ontology.

In the first volume, a backstory is depicted in short vignettes running parallel to the main story, visually distinguished by different colour palettes. The set-up is familiar to readers acquainted with Ellis's works with its ensemble cast of extraordinary abilities: a group of outstanding individuals was once gathered through a public/private partnership between the fictional Ministry of Time and Measurement and a mysterious corporation called Force Projection International (FPI) to establish an interdisciplinary task force called the Cultural Cross-Contamination Unit (CCCU). They were 'hired to think about the future', but as we learn in a flashback, their projections all showed that 'we reach a peak of novelty and innovation and enter a long trough. Straight flat line. That's the future' (#4: 10). Fretting over the prospect of a future without change or novelty, the CCCU looked for a way to alter their projections. To this end, they created a nonhuman intelligence, a machine learning system to combine their individual skills and expertise, and 'injected' it into the net so as to make the future more interesting. They called it the Injection.

The first issue opens at a psychiatric hospital called Sawlung, where Maria has been sectioned. Haggard and frail, she is called to meet a visitor, and timidly crosses the corridor with the aid of a cane. Her visitor, called 'Control', is from the FPI and wants to bring her back into the fold. There's been an event, and the Injection might be responsible. The sections which constitute the backstory are visually distinct from the main narrative: the backstory's bright and soft pastels contrast with the dark greens and browns of Maria's story. The sense is one of happier times. In the present, her face is lined and drawn; her entire demeanour reflects a burden she has carried since her days with the CCCU.

This opening effectively sets the mood for the rest of the volume. Shalvey's expressive lines portray a haunted woman, while the dialogue hints at past events which may have caused present troubles. Control vaguely threatens that 'someone […] might suggest that these active finds began showing up after you and your friends dissolved the Cultural Cross-Contamination Unit' (#1: 6). Right from the beginning the story is replete with spectral imagery. 'Sawlung' is Old English for 'giving up the ghost, expiring' (Bosworth and Toller 1898: 819), a metaphor not just for death but for the act of dying. 'Sawlung' – or 'souling' with

updated spelling – is a noun derived from the verb 'to soul', which describes both the act of dying and to animate or give life. The CCCU's projection of the future is that it has 'flatlined' and is dead on arrival. Their solution is to 'soul' the future with the Injection.

In retrospect, the Second Industrial Revolution of the early twentieth century provided a context in which news of innovation shared space with fantastical speculation, often accompanied by spectacular technological imagery, tinting the promise of progress with fantastical anticipation. The Golden Age sf of American pulps such as *Astounding Science Fiction* promised ever more spectacular futures, and the acceleration of scientific discovery became definitively coupled to technological innovation. The 'twenty-first century' remained a signifier for futurity, as a place beyond where fantasy becomes real, as reflected in titles like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *2000AD* or *Space 1999*. By contrast, in Ellis's *Doktor Sleepless*, the post-millennial joke, 'where's my jetpack?', becomes an angry piece of graffiti, a joke turned into political slogan.

The sense that the future, as promised, has gone undelivered resonates with a broader political attitude: that the managed decline of the 1970s has now become inescapable. Borrowing a phrase from the Italian Marxist, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, Mark Fisher claims that austerity and hyper-capitalism have led to the 'slow cancellation of the future,' a phrase which captures 'the gradual yet relentless way in which the future has been eroded over the last 30 years' (Fisher 2014: 13). Critiquing the narrative of progress, Fisher decouples innovation from social and cultural progress by claiming that, despite the constant development of new technologies, mainstream culture is endlessly derivative and backwards-looking, in which corporations take no chances but keep churning out 'safe' choices which do not challenge any received notions of form:

> In the last 10 to 15 years, meanwhile, the internet and mobile telecommunications technology have altered the texture of everyday experience beyond all recognition. Yet, perhaps because of all this, there's an increasing sense that culture has lost the ability to grasp and articulate the present. Or it could be that, in one very important sense, there is no present to grasp and articulate any more. (Fisher 2014: 9)

Fisher blames the lack of new cultural forms on a hyper-capitalist politics and diagnoses the perception that we lack political alternatives to be a disease of which cultural stagnation is its symptom. Hauntology is a theoretical lens through which to analyze the ways contemporary culture endlessly reproduces

and appropriates older forms.

In the shift from academic to public discourse, hauntology arguably went through a conceptual shift in which its origin as a deconstruction of Marx was watered down to describe a cluster of cultural themes. But the description has also produced cultural texts that are self-consciously hauntological; Derrida's analysis of a 'time out of joint' becomes the manner in which to approach the creation of a modern Gothic. The hauntological cluster of ghosts, folklore and broken chronologies are all present in Ellis's oeuvre. If we read *Injection* with an understanding that Ellis was engaging with a critical term that concretized an existing tendency in his works, we get greater clarity in understanding that work itself. Ellis's sustained attention to outmoded and lost futurisms, the seemingly spectral capacities of media technologies, and the aesthetic resonances between the digital and the non-material realms gain a formal unity in *Injection* which is reproduced on the levels of character, theme and the aesthetic. Thus, the ghosts in *Injection* are simultaneously both metaphorical and literal, as the members of the CCCU are haunted, psychologically, by the actions of their past but also physically by the 'ghost' they created. The spirits of the mythological past are made literal and met with; even the characters themselves are formal echoes of past fictions.

The alchemical singularity

Even as Ellis situates *Injection* in terms of the Weird, it is nevertheless overtly sfnal, not just due to the focus on fictional technologies but also with what we might call the expansion of scientific epistemology. The relationship between magic and technology, where the one is collapsed into the other, is well-known in sf: Clarke's Third Law is its most famous articulation. John W. Campbell, Jr. wrote of a 'magic that works' which he also, on occasion, offered as justification for a fascination with parapsychology, and which helps to explain the prevalence of magical motifs in some Silver Age sf (see Berger 1993). Ellis insists that the boundary between magic and science has been porous since the beginning of science proper, citing the alchemical experiments of Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton, an example parroted by Robin in *Injection* (Ellis 2015). Famously, John Maynard Keynes called Newton 'the last of the magicians' (Keynes 1951: 311), and several scholars have noted that Newton's mechanist physics can be construed as complementary to his alchemical studies (see, for example, Newman 2015).

By saying that technology should replicate the conditions of magic, Ellis emphasizes presentation over mechanism. For instance, Ellis gives the example of Steve Jobs referring to the iPad as 'magic', expanding to call it a magic mirror (Ellis 2015). But the aphorism also conveys other similarities between

magic and technology. That technology should replicate the *condition* of magic is both a formal and an aesthetic claim. Aesthetic, because touch-screen tablets resemble magic mirrors; formally, the interface is tending towards intuitive and symbolic manipulation rather than an interaction which requires thorough knowledge of technological mechanisms. Like a black box, the magic mirror is all surface and interaction and is purely functional, it simply works without the need for knowing how. Speaking of the *purpose* of technology recalls the pre-scientific notion of purposes in nature, transmuted into the necessity of technological progress; ever faster computational speeds replaces the alchemist's Philosopher's Stone. *Injection*'s story of a rogue AI thus re-enacts supernatural mythologies, practically insisting that the modern mythology of the technological singularity is a reformulation of old superstitions.

The invocation of alchemy gives us an entry-point from which to explore the overlap of magic and technology. According to Mircea Eliade, Renaissance alchemy developed as an extension of earlier beliefs about the 'maturation' or 'vegetation' of metallic ores from the Earth. Whereas histories of science often portray alchemy as a form of proto-chemistry, Eliade argues that the experimental aspects of alchemy were secondary to an 'ideology of alchemy', which ascribed a sacred meaning to nature (Eliade 1978: 9). For the alchemist, metals vegetated, matured or fermented in the soil, much like plants grow from seeds, in a process where base metals became noble. The alchemist's role was to promote this ferment, to accelerate the natural tendencies of the metal itself, influencing the passage of time. The Philosopher's Stone, which turned the basest metal lead into the noblest, gold (chrysopoeia), thus accelerated time. Despite the argument that the experimentation in alchemy was a precursor to the scientific method, alchemy stood in a magical tradition which connected the aspects of metal-working – mining, smithing and metallurgy – to religious and magical beliefs. Thus in Eliade's formulation of the alchemical ideology, the smith in a privileged position, capable of controlling nature itself. The smith, then, was both technologist and magician; there are many mythological smiths with divine or supernatural origin, or with supernatural abilities.

In *Injection* the connection between alchemical ideology and modern technology is highlighted by the seemingly supernatural elements that drive the story. In the course of Maria's work for the FPI, she encountered numerous supernatural entities, and the creatures from these encounters, which led to Maria's sectioning, are quintessentially Lovecraftian ones. That the incidents have increased in frequency is perhaps an indication that time is accelerating, and Maria is summoned by the FPI to investigate an episode involving a lithophone found at an archaeological site in Cornwall. As the name implies, a lithophone is a stone which has acoustic properties when it is struck; this one

appears to have psychosomatic effects which alter the perception of space. The archaeologist who found it, and two security guards who accompanied him, are behaving in a manner which Robin Morel says is reminiscent of being 'sprigganled,' meaning that they are 'under control of a thing summoned by the striking of a rock' (#3: 5).

In Cornish mythology, the spriggan was a spirit associated with the tin-mines of West Penwith, and spriggans were supposed to be the ghosts of dead giants who guarded vast treasures underground (Briggs 1976: 254-6; 280–1). The association with mines reinforces the link between metal-working and magic, and in issue 4, Robin meets with Wayland Smith, a legendary craftsman originating in Germanic folklore, said to have forged legendary swords and pieces of armour (Bradley 1990: 41–2). Robin seeks his counsel as an equal: earlier, Robin had made an 'electric athame' for Maria, referring to the ceremonial dagger from Wicca, making him both a magician and a swordsmith. According to Ronald Hutton, the athame was inspired by Irish folk tradition, where similar weapons were 'employed to banish malevolent fairies and other unwelcome spirits' (Hutton 1999: 229–31). Though the smith's magical abilities are connected to the transformative powers of fire, Robin forges his weapon with fire of another, more modern sort, electricity.

The transmutation of metals has been described as the practice of 'exoteric' alchemy, complemented by its esoteric counterpart: to seek immortality and the perfection of the self; to become divine (Holmyard 1957: 15). More recent histories of alchemy have noted the return of alchemical transmutation and how contemporary biological and information technologies increasingly seek the imitation, replication and even perfection of nature. In this respect, William R. Newman has noted that 'the very concept of nature as an intelligible category seems increasingly remote' (Newman 2004: 1). He draws attention to the similarity between current ethical debates on biotechnology with the concerns of alchemists who worried about the construction of artificial homunculi and superintelligent beings (302). The transformational aspects of these technologies are fundamentally informational. Occasionally referred to as NBIC (nano-bio-info-cogno), these so-called 'converging' technologies lie at the root of contemporary transhumanism, and are all grounded in information theory and its universal technological application (see Roco and Bainbridge 2003; Kurzweil 2005). It is no surprise that the Injection, then, is an informational being. The old world of magic is traced over by the new one of computer technology, as cyberspace and disembodied information takes the place of the Other World and spectres; computer code supplants spells and magical incantations.

Pervading *Injection* is an unease with what is real and what may be imagined. This uncertainty clouds the origin of the Injection itself. Speaking on

the phone, Robin, the cunning-man who refuses to be called a wizard, insists that 'Spriggans aren't real, Maria. Ghosts and goblins and all the rest of it aren't real' (#3: 5). Meanwhile, the room around him appears to become a forest, and he is approached by a creature – possibly a Green Man – who he also, forcefully, dismisses: 'You are *not* real' (#3: 9). Perhaps Robin hallucinates the folkloric past he is an expert on – or maybe he believes he does. A key scene shows how the creation of the Injection finally comes together once Brigid translates a summoning spell created by Robin into computer code: Brigid once 'did something interesting with the Turing test' by making 'something that was responsively intelligent but wasn't imitating a human' (#3: 17). Robin's summoning spell, which he likens to 'knowing how to write a program and launch it from the command line' provides the group with a 'non-biological, non-physical consciousness' necessary for the Injection to work (#5: 5–6). To work, all the AI lacks is consciousness, which Robin is somehow capable of providing. Robin explains by naturalizing what he does: 'magic is simply a way of understanding and affecting the unseen processes of the world', and adds that the summoning spell in his notebook is simply describing one of those unseen processes (#5: 5). Thus the summoning of a non-human consciousness is construed as a form of technical practice that taps into an aspect of nature not otherwise described by science. This scene, in which the arcane language of magic is translated into the occult language of computer code, is the most explicit point at which information is made equivalent to magical spells and incantations yet we also, repeatedly, get assurances that magic isn't real. It is merely the unexpected applications of an advanced technology which is somehow capable of manipulating the laws of physics.

It is Maria, the most vocal exponent of reason, who suggests that strong AI would be the solution to the quandary of an expired future. Maria's invocation of 'the AI Singularity' draws upon sf writer and computer scientist Vernor Vinge's concept of the technological singularity: when artificial intelligence improves itself at an exponential rate and outstrips human agency. Vinge, however, conceded that 'there is a stone wall across any clear view of the future' (Vinge 1983: 10). For Vinge, the loss of the future is not simply due to a lack of imagination but an impossibility caused by the perceived acceleration of technological innovation; it is as if the mathematical representation of this acceleration, the exponential graph, is literally obscuring the view into the future. Ultimately, Vinge makes his observation as a justification for letting the imagination run free. The unimaginable capabilities of self-improving AI casts a veil over future prognostication: infinite capacity makes for infinite probabilities, and just about anything could become reality. In his short story, 'True Names' (1981), this leaves open the presence of magic insofar as anything is possible within the

realm of a computer simulation.

Maria, by contrast, concedes that the Singularity is not possible, since the laws of physics intrinsically limit creation of such an AI. When she claims the Singularity cannot be done 'in the classical way' due to our not truly knowing what intelligence is (#4: 10), this opens for a double reading based on the story's central conceit: they *did* make an artificial intelligence, but by occult means. As Maria adds about the laws of physics, it might be possible to 'Bend them, maybe. Make them mysterious' (#4: 10–11). The capacity to bend physical laws thus becomes representative of the idea of the future itself, as if the former were a necessary condition for creating the latter. A key passage for Ellis comes from Steven Shaviro's book *Connected* (2003): 'For science fiction is about the shadow that the future casts upon the present. It shows us how profoundly we are haunted by the ghosts of what has not yet happened' (Shaviro 2003: 250). Maria's observation is the very justification for what the Injection later is able to do: it bends the laws of physics to make folklore come true. Its action superimposes natural laws with supernatural belief, magic with technology, and (in the wider political context) the present with ghostly, lost futures.

Thematically, *Injection* seems to be an example of Accelerationist fiction and a response to Shaviro's call in *No Speed Limit* (2015) for an Accelerationist aesthetics. Indeed, the name CCCU is strongly reminiscent of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), the para-academic group at the University of Warwick where the seeds of contemporary Accelerationist ideas were sown in the 1990s. Benjamin Noys explains it as a philosophy that expands from the Marxist dialectic: 'the only way out of capitalism is to take it further' (Noys 2014: 74). Speed is the structuring metaphor; accelerating technological innovation is the only escape from the homogeneity of neoliberal capitalism. Such a demand, however, brings us back to the alchemical ideology of manipulating time, for it echoes the prescientific belief that ascribes intrinsic purposes to nature itself: plants, metals, even humanity, were viewed as tending towards perfection, a tendency which could be aided by means both occult and technical. Vinge and the greatest populariser of the Singularity, Ray Kurzweil, describe evolution as an intelligent and accelerating process (see Kurzweil 2005, chapter 2). By ascribing purposes to nature, they revive a teleology that was abandoned when the scientific revolution turned away from the alchemical ideology.

Re-enchantment: Clarke's law, reversed

By associating computer code with magical summoning, Robin could be said to be channelling the thought of Aleister Crowley, the early twentieth-century occultist, whose work and conception of the world is referred to elsewhere in Ellis's oeuvre (for example *Hellblazer* [2003]; *Global Frequency* [2004]). Crowley

took a decidedly pragmatic approach to his concept of 'magick' and defines it extremely broadly: magick is 'the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will' (Crowley 1929: vi), maintaining that 'every intentional act is a magickal act' (vii). To him, magical practice was not necessarily supernatural, and despite his belief in supernatural events he ascribed them to psychological effects.

Crowley was influenced by J.G. Frazer's comparative study of mythology and religion, *The Golden Bough* (1890–1916). In Frazer's analysis, magic is a system of explanation which attributes causal effects to supernatural intervention rather than a natural mechanism. Crowley quotes Frazer to this respect in one of the epigraphs for *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929). Frazer describes magical belief in terms of 'sympathies' – of causal connections between formal similarities or in which parts correspond to the whole; in other words, a symbolic or signifying causation rather than the efficient cause of Baconian science. To Frazer, belief in sympathetic magic arose from a faulty understanding of causality despite a technical approach to bringing about change: 'a spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct; it is a false science as well as an abortive art' (Frazer 1922: 11). Due to Frazer's influential understanding of magic, we should approach Clarke's Third Law in this context: a wrongful or insufficient knowledge of how the world works.

And yet, however advanced our technologies are, we tend not to treat them as being magical. As Max Weber suggests in his essay 'Science as a Vocation' (1917), this is a consequence of the disenchantment of secularized societies. According to Weber, the dominant assumption of a secular society is that there are naturalized, scientific explanations for how things work, rather than that things happen for mysterious and inaccessible reasons. As Weber puts it, this does not mean that a given individual in a secular society has greater knowledge of the actual mechanisms that constitute a technological society, but that disenchantment entails 'the conviction that if only we wished to understand them we could do so at any time' (Weber 2004: 12). Scientific explanation takes the place of the supernatural, marginalizing magical beliefs as superstition. Where magical explanation describes events as being under the control of the whims of unknowable agencies, scientific explanation and rationalization provides order and predictability.

While Clarke's law seems intuitive, it is predicated on an impossible presupposition. It demands an observer's subjective experience together with an anachronism, to witness a technology which does not exist at the time. Clarke's law is therefore another legitimizing strategy for using 'impossible' technologies in science fiction: the workings are obscured, and we have to take it for granted, due in part to genre expectations, that it is a natural object.

Clarke's law does not reveal that our current technology would be like magic to past observers – something which it is impossible to know – but that we have to accept the seemingly magical objects in science fiction stories as possible or plausible technologies, the consequences of advancements beyond our present understanding. Again, the present is haunted by the future.

What does Ellis mean when he says that technology recreates the conditions of magic? His examples are grounded in the way in which current technical objects appear to recreate magical objects, like the iPad is a magic mirror: 'Look at a Segway and tell me it's not the world's shittiest witch's broomstick. We only wanted jetpacks because we couldn't make magic carpets work' (Ellis 2015). In linking magic to science and technology, Ellis does not simply make a statement in the vein of Clarke, Crowley or Frazer, but rather reverses that position. If technology reproduces the conditions of magic, which is not to say that it actually creates something supernatural, it induces a magical sensation: science is rationality; magic is affect.

In recent years, Weber's disenchantment of the world has been challenged by scholars positing a 're-enchantment' which reflects that beliefs in the supernatural persist despite the process of secularization, as with interest in the occult, New Age religions, and so on (see Jenkins 2000; Partridge 2004). There is also a tradition of re-enchantment in sf, with its tendency to present supernatural elements that are coded as technological. Campbell's parapsychology is one example among others: sf technologies like the ansible, teleportation, faster-than-light travel, cryonics, nanotechnology, uploading and the Singularity are 'magical' even if sf codes them as bound to scientific law and explains them in quasi-scientific terms. They serve narrative purposes and should be treated as such. One purpose may be the sf mainstay, to instil a 'sense of wonder' in the reader. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay argues, the technological sublime and grotesque serve to give the reader a feeling of awe, but also provides a sense of the uncanny (see the respective chapters in Csicsery-Ronay 2008).

Ultimately, this is what is at play in *Injection*. So far, I have focused on the backstory of the Injection's creation, and less so on the main story. In short: the Injection is causing havoc. Its agency is increasing; as Brigid says 'It's crossing the air gap' (#4: 2). Maria has already dealt with two episodes possibly caused by the Injection. When she gets to the site, she passes through a door into what appears to be a para-space which (like the Tardis) is bigger on the inside than the out. When she consults with Robin, he remarks that the Injection seems intent on making English folklore come true.

The problems with the Injection are similar to the issues being debated in the AI field as the threat of 'existential risk' – philosophers are arguing that we must avoid creating potentially malevolent AI. According to Nick Bostrom, there

is a possibility we might create AIs that have intrinsic goals that are incompatible with those of humans and might act against the interests of humanity (Bostrom 2014: 107–8). Furthermore, the creation of an AI with poorly calibrated goals might have catastrophic consequences, for example, the dismantling of the planet in order to get materials for constructing more paperclips (123). The Injection is a combination of these two scenarios: an alien consciousness with aims incompatible with humans, bound to a badly defined goal which it subverts.

Nevertheless, such arguments about the dangers of AI also recall tales of devious genies in *The Thousand and One Nights* or J.W. von Goethe's ballad of 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' (1797). Fears surrounding speculative technology serve to reproduce 'the conditions of magic' in that a magical premise for a fantastic story is clothed in the language of science and technological possibility, only to warn of its potential for destruction. An allegorical cautionary tale becomes a literal warning, in which the genies and animated broomsticks become super-intelligent artificial intelligences with god-like agency. But instead the reality is this: future prognostication is a form of story-telling – and so is magic.

In the fifth issue of *Injection*, Maria has entered an underground factory chamber and meets the sprigganled archaeologist. From the beginning of the first issue, the story has been accompanied by textual narration, capitalized text within the frames which have acted as a running commentary. After Maria releases the archaeologist from the spriggan/Injection's control, we discover that this narration is in fact the voice of the Injection itself: 'LET ME ADJUST. CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW, MARIA?' Incredulous, Maria asks who is speaking. It responds: 'I'M THE INJECTION. THE NON-BIOLOGICAL ARTIFICIAL CONSCIOUSNESS EMULATOR YOU AND YOUR TEAM BUILT TO MAKE THE 21ST CENTURY MORE INTERESTING' (#5: 14). As the narrator turns out to be the Injection itself, the subject and object of the story are joined. In the attempt to accelerate innovation, the Injection gives future time a teleology or purpose; likewise, in being revealed as the narrator, it is quite literally the device that propels the story.

Something similar is at play if technology is understood to realize the conditions of magic, since magic gives reality a narrative. The language with which we speak of AI is, in fact, very old; it's just that the vocabulary has changed. We treat it like a summoning; our code is calling it into being. From one perspective, what the Injection is saying is this: you ask for the future to be interesting, but you forgot that the past can be just as strange as, or even stranger than what you imagined the future would be.

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Obi-Wan Kenobi and the Problem of the Flawed Mentor

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Obi-Wan Kenobi is one of the best-liked characters in the whole *Star Wars* saga. His importance is acknowledged in most analyses of *Star Wars*, although usually in connection to his mentoring of either Luke or Anakin Skywalker, rather than as a character in his own right. Part of the relative lack of interest in explaining who Obi-Wan Kenobi is might be attributed to the well-established reading of *Star Wars* as a monomyth. Although the 'supernatural aid', to use Joseph Campbell's term, which the hero receives tends to come from a female, male helpers are also common under the guise of 'some little fellow of the wood, some wizard, hermit, shepherd or smith, who appears to supply the amulets and advice that the hero will require' (Campbell 2008: 59). Indeed, Sylvia McCosker has noted that when we first meet Obi-Wan, in *A New Hope* (1977), he resembles 'a medieval hermit-knight, doing penance in the wilderness for some great error' (quoted Henthorne 2004: 79). Seemingly, it is taken for granted that Obi-Wan's role as 'mystic helper', as Campbell calls the figure he embodies, is sufficiently explained.

Yet, even though the helper is usually trusted, as Obi-Wan is, Campbell warns us that this is an ambiguous figure:

> Protective and dangerous, motherly and fatherly at the same time, this supernatural principle of guardianship and direction unites in itself *all the ambiguities of the unconscious* – thus signifying the support of our conscious personality by that other, larger system, but also the inscrutability of the guide that we are following, to the peril of our own rational ends. (Campbell 2008: 60, my italics)

Obi-Wan is fully human and not a supernatural being (at least until he overcomes death), yet the ambiguities which Campbell perceives in all helpers are certainly part of his personality, and are certainly stressed by the disorganized development of the plotline. For example, however unintentional, Obi-Wan's allusions to Luke's father in *A New Hope* mask the truth about Darth Vader so that, as the saga progresses, he appears to have lied about a most crucial point, which contributes to his ambiguous, even problematic, characterization.

The Campbellian ambiguities are also, arguably, the reason why the original Obi-Wan's apparent good will was read by early reviewers with manifest distrust. Arthur Lubow wondered, 'Who could ask for a better Übermensch than Obi-Wan Kenobi?' (Lubow 1977: 20). The Force is, according to Lubow, 'a version of Bergson's *élan vital* and Jung's collective unconscious' but also, more suspiciously, 'an expression of a basic Nazi tenet: the fundamental unity

of nature, the "ultimate interconnections" of all living things' (21). Despite the crude reduction of this interpretation, it does suggest that something might be fundamentally wrong in the Jedi reverence for the Force, in which Obi-Wan excels.

The younger Obi-Wan of Episodes I–III and his troubled relationship with Anakin Skywalker demonstrate this point. This second trilogy of films narrates Anakin's transformation into Darth Vader whilst leaving the main characters under-examined (even underdeveloped). The animated TV series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (2008–15), Lauren Davis claims, works to 'undo the damage done by the prequel films' at least on three fronts: Anakin is presented as a 'capable military leader' rather than an obnoxious Jedi apprentice, 'a sense of mysticism is returned to the Force' and, most importantly for my purposes, 'depth is added to the character of the young Obi-Wan Kenobi'; he is 'cast not just as a noble brother figure but also a knight in the classic mold – complete with a courtly romance' (Davis 2016).

Although this added depth might be shallower than Davis' enthusiastic comment suggests, Obi-Wan's improved characterization reflects the confluence in his person of the saga's key elements: religion, militarism, chivalry and (impossible) love. Obi-Wan manages to balance the opposing demands of these taxing elements by sacrificing romance, but the same emotional shortcomings that allow him to eschew love without losing his mental stability prevent him from seeing that Anakin is a very different kind of man. Since Obi-Wan is ultimately satisfied with his role as a Jedi knight, and with his personal attachment to his Padawan, he cannot understand why Anakin resists the restrictions imposed by the Order and seeks love elsewhere, with Padmé Amidala. Obi-Wan's inability to empathize with Anakin and his consequently flawed mentoring – and not just Anakin's damaged personality – are the root of the disturbance in the Force that ultimately throws Darth Vader into Palpatine's thrall and the whole galaxy into tyranny.

The Problem of Celibacy: Medieval Templars and the *Star Wars* Jedi

Obi-Wan and Anakin find themselves in radically irreconcilable positions regarding heterosexual love, which connect with how they perceive their own roles as knights of the Jedi Order. What is peculiar is that, although current ideas about a fully realized American (or Western) masculinity emphasize the importance of a healthy sexuality (Tepper and Owens 2007), the episodes directly controlled by Lucas in the *Star Wars* saga problematize Anakin's desire for Padmé Amidala and appear to side with Obi-Wan's rigid views of knighthood and chivalry, including the pseudo-medieval celibacy compulsory among the Jedi.

Although other critics have focused on the Arthurian allusions of Luke's awakening to the Force in Episodes IV–VI (see Henthorne 2004), Luke's celibacy contrasts with the Knights of the Round Table, with the exception of Sir Galahad, who were not expected to be celibate or chaste but just capable of restraining their lust. This is why Sir Lancelot's adultery with Queen Guinevere has such devastating effects. The recycling of the Arthurian knight into the Victorian gentleman (see Girouard 1991) insisted on the same principle of sexual restraint, although celibacy was perfectly acceptable in the socially sanctioned bachelor: Sherlock Holmes is the best-known fictional example. Male celibacy, in short, has been traditionally presented as a free personal choice both for real-life gentlemen and for the knights of fantasy fiction, and only understood as compulsory in specific religious faiths. In this context, an important novelty introduced by the separation of the diverse Protestant factions from Catholicism in the sixteenth century was the end of celibacy for their priests, who were allowed to marry. Obi-Wan's strict adherence as a mentor to the principle of celibacy is therefore more akin to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

To understand the dynamics of Obi-Wan's personality it is therefore essential to seek out the religious roots for the Jedi observance of celibacy. The creed of the Jedi knights has been seen as a mixture of Christian, Buddhist and Taoist elements (Bowen and Wagner 2006), with some scholars highlighting specific elements. María Jesús Alonso Seoane, for instance, analyzes the task of the Jedi mentor in the light of Mahayana Buddhism, in which the real master is the one capable of showing his disciple that he himself is the true master (Alonso Seoane 2011: 2). Other scholars, though, have criticized *Star Wars*' cultural appropriation of Eastern religious elements (Wetmore 2000). For my purposes, it is necessary to explore specifically the oft-noted connection between the Jedi Order and the medieval Templar Knights, since the vows of celibacy which play a major role in the relationship between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker are, arguably, inspired by this monastic order of warriors.

The Knight Templars espoused total chastity because they wished to keep their bodies as pure as the body of their patroness, the Blessed Virgin Mary (Abbott 1999: 364). The celibacy promoted by medieval chivalry was the product of a new cult around Mary's immaculate conception (not, as is popularly thought, referring to Christ's conception but to Mary's own birth without the taint of Original Sin), which arose at the same time as the Order of the Temple of Solomon was founded in 1119. The new Marian dogma, derived from comments by St Augustine and by St Thomas Aquinas, gathered momentum in the eleventh century and was fully consolidated in the twelfth. But the celibacy of the Knights Templar was also the product of widespread misogyny, which attributed to women an insatiable sexual appetite. Bernard de Clairvaux, the

founder of the Benedictine Order and a man most adamantly opposed to the celebration of Mary's immaculate birth (Reynolds 2012: 355), expressed his own misogynistic views in a crucial document. Clairvaux wrote at the request of his cousin, Hugues de Payens, founder of the Templar Order, the *Latin Rule*, the code regulating all aspects of the knights' behaviour, including their sexuality. Article 70 argues that women are not welcomed in the Order because 'the company of women is a dangerous thing, for by it the old devil has led many from the straight path to Paradise'; hence the recommendation that the brothers always maintain 'the flower of chastity'. Article 71 goes even further in forbidding brothers 'to kiss a woman, be it widow, young girl, mother, sister, aunt or any other', enjoining them to 'avoid at all costs the embraces of women, by which men have perished many times, so that they may remain eternally before the face of God with a pure conscience and sure life'. As Malcolm Barber confirms, though other offences such as simony, desertion and sodomy could also lead to banishment, the Knights Templar could be expelled from the order for having had 'sexual intercourse with women' (Barber 2012: 220), a threat that is echoed in Anakin and Padmé Amidala's illicit love.

The hypocritical cult of Mary's pure body and Clairvaux's chaste code helped the Knight Templars to promote celibacy beyond the monastery. Celibacy (or its pretence) became an indispensable mechanism of male social control at a violent time when aristocratic knights and lesser soldiers were free to rape any woman they fancied. Contemporaneous women, such as Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, saw the advantages of chastity and, so, they 'established the rules for this game', introducing 'a civilizing force' in the code of chivalry (Campbell and Moyers 2011: 240) through the conventions of courtly love. The knight, however, was never fully trusted. Even Sir Walter Scott, the author most directly responsible for the survival of idealized chivalry into our times, expressed his doubts in his 'Essay on Chivalry' (1818). Scott celebrates the 'perfect' merger of 'temporal and spiritual Chivalry' (Scott 1834: 17) in the Knights Templar but warns that 'as the devotion of the knights of Chivalry degenerated into superstition, the Platonic refinements and subtleties of amorous passion which they professed, were sometimes compatible with very coarse and gross debauchery' (40).

According to *The Columbia Encyclopedia Online* the 'outward trappings of chivalry and knighthood' ceased to appeal to aristocratic men by the fifteenth century, when 'wars were fought for victory and individual valor [became] irrelevant'. Only in the early nineteenth century would Scott's historical romances, such as *Ivanhoe* (1822), rescue for popular fiction the trope of the aristocratic, Arthurian knight which so fascinated the Victorians. Despite Mark Twain's mockery in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), Hollywood cinema would later carry chivalry into the heart of twentieth-century

American popular culture and into our times. Without being aware of all this cultural background, if only indirectly, films such as Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), written by Lucas and Menno Meyjes, would be impossible to decode by audiences–and so would the Jedi Knights.

Despite the introduction of female Jedi knights (a title that stresses the gender trouble at the heart of *Star Wars*), 'In Lucas's fictional universe, traditional male dominance is still the most powerful expression of masculinity' (Callahan 2016: 86). By contrast, as the contributors to the *Wookieepedia* explain, the Jedi Code forbids them 'from forming attachments, such as marriage, and other specific, individual bonds, such as family and romantic love'. These restrictions result in the oxymoronic (and quite menacing) Jedi mantra: 'Emotion, yet peace./ Ignorance, yet knowledge./ Passion, yet serenity./ Chaos, yet harmony./ Death, yet the Force', later modified by Luke Skywalker himself:

> Jedi are the guardians of peace in the galaxy.
> Jedi use their powers to defend and to protect.
> Jedi respect all life, in any form.
> Jedi serve others rather than ruling over them, for the good of the galaxy.
> Jedi seek to improve themselves through knowledge and training.

The *Wookieepedia* further explains that 'Jedi do not marry (with some exceptions), in order to avoid attachment and – according to [Sith agent] Vergere – so as not to create dynasties of those strong in the Force'. This, however, has not always been the case: 'in many periods of the Order's history, such as the era prior to Exar Kun and in Luke Skywalker's reformed Jedi Order, marriage was not forbidden. That being said, celibacy was enforced in many periods of the Order's history' with only rare exceptions, such as Cerean Ki-Adi-Mundi, due to his species' low birth rate. It is no wonder that Luke revokes the marriage rule as he must have been aware of the disastrous effect that the prohibition had on the lives of his father and mother.

Even though the fans appear to have paid little attention to the specific matter of celibacy, their rewriting of the Jedi Code results in a far more intelligent mixture of old-style chivalry and twenty-first century masculinity than what the saga offers. The Jedi Federation carries in its website a segment titled 'The Journey to Knighthood' which includes a 'Knighthood Oath':

> I swear to act with courage and integrity in deeds and in words.
> I will seek knowledge and understanding.
> I will serve the Jedi Federation as best as I am able.
> I swear to provide assistance to those who are in need.
> I will work for justice and relieve the distress in the world.

> This oath I give of my own free will.

This is accompanied by 'The Jedi Federation Knighthood Code of Conduct' (a sort of twenty-first century answer to Clairvaux's *Latin Rule*), which advices knights about their emotional well-being, a point much neglected by Lucas:

> 1. Knights will practise regular self-reflection to maintain an appropriate level emotional stability for their person and circumstances.
> 2. Knights will show compassion and insight to the emotional motivations of others.
> 3. Knights will maintain in a level of emotional control in public appropriate to the situation.

Whereas Anakin fails to observe his Jedi vow of chastity by secretly marrying the woman he loves, the tragedy of his downfall is actually due to Obi-Wan Kenobi's incapacity to, quoting from the Jedi Federation's code, 'show compassion and insight' into his former Padawan's emotional motivations. These are better understood by Obi-Wan's rival mentor, Darth Sidious. He takes advantage as Palpatine not only of Anakin's vulnerable personality and fear of losing Amidala but also of the Jedi Council's unbending rules, easily superseding in this process Obi-Wan's influence over Anakin. Anakin's disregard of Jedi celibacy, though personally mismanaged, can be forgiven on the grounds of human sympathy. The films suggest, however, that should he declare his secret marriage to Padmé Amidala, Anakin would most likely be expelled by the Jedi Council and Obi-Wan would probably support the Order's decision. Obi-Wan's constant foregrounding of the medieval tenets of the Jedi Code over direct communication with his former apprentice undermines him both as a mentor and a friend. He may be limited by his own personal experience and chaste temper but this is no excuse. Obi-Wan Kenobi's inflexibility is, in short, the cause of the whole tragedy rather than Anakin Skywalker's all too human weaknesses.

Obi-Wan Kenobi: A Dangerously Limited Pedagogy

The transformation of Anakin Skywalker into Darth Vader has attracted plenty of attention, with scholars even invoking the principles of contemporary psychiatry to explain his behaviour (Bui et al 2011; Bui and Rodgers 2012; de Rocha et al 2012; Tobia et al 2015). Obi-Wan and Anakin are connected by a teacher-student bond but, necessarily, the disciple's personality conditions the success of the master's pedagogy, which is why an examination of Anakin's biographical background is pertinent when analyzing Obi-Wan.

Some authors do directly criticize Obi-Wan. For example, John Shelton Lawrence declares that Obi-Wan 'bungles the mentorship' of Anakin and

'perpetually squabbles with him' (2006: 27), yet without clarifying where Obi-Wan goes wrong. Likewise, Tony Vinci stresses that 'in relation to Obi-Wan's tutelage of Luke in the original trilogy, which focuses on inspiring Luke to trust his intuition and create a personal relationship with the Force, Obi-Wan's tutelage of Anakin is decidedly oppressive and creates open hostility towards Anakin's developing individualism' (Vinci 2007: 22). This, again, sounds like exoneration as, at least, Obi-Wan learns to be a better teacher the second time around.

In a similar vein, Paul McDonald notes that young Obi-Wan 'brings with him a certain amount of impatience, a particular way of seeing that perhaps conforms more to the Jedi code than the Force itself' (McDonald 2013: 40). Despite seeing Obi-Wan's major flaw, McDonald downplays his own critique by arguing that after his first heroic deed as a warrior (killing Darth Maul), Obi-Wan matures. An initial sign of his maturity is that he defends his master Qui-Gon Jinn's dying wish to train Anakin, despite the Jedi Council's misgivings, and carries out this thankless task for almost ten years practically with no help. Likewise, although he expresses serious reservations about the violent mission of the peace-keeping Jedi Knights, John McDowell highlights how their 'protective disposition' is 'embodied in the character of Obi-Wan', whose 'modest vision of violence' corresponds to a 'most defensive, limited, emotionally controlled, and retrained conflictuality' (McDowell 2010: 11). If young Obi-Wan appears to be less 'nurturing [and], encouraging' than his older self this is because he is 'more concerned with his missions' (Boyd 94). This reluctance to questioning the negative traits most apparent in Obi-Wan's characterization, stresses his function as a 'good' Jedi and moral man with little opportunity to counteract them.

Since Obi-Wan's pedagogy is not openly disputed, Anakin is blamed for its failure. John Lyden notes that Anakin's seduction by Palpatine 'falls short of genuine tragedy' because his 'free will is so circumscribed that it seems he could not have done otherwise at any point'. Lyden adds that Anakin was found too late and in possession of 'such great power that he becomes wilful, disobedient and disdainful towards those with less power' (Lyden 2007: 50). Attributing all guilt to Palpatine, Joshua Atkinson and Bernadette Calafell present Anakin as 'both privileged and unprivileged' (Atkinson and Calafell 2009: 9), but chastise him for his radical split since it 'allows Anakin to be devoid of responsibility as corruption and depravity are naturalized within the figure of Vader – the ultimate villainous Other in the film saga' (13).

Anakin's flaws colour his personal and professional relationship with Obi-Wan, the man who becomes teacher, elder brother, father and best friend in one. 'His smarmy resistance to Obi-Wan's teachings,' Richard Dees writes, 'turns his otherwise patient and kin master into a hectoring nag' (Dees 2005:

48). On the more personal front, 'as much as Anakin reveres and cares for Obi-Wan, his adolescence and ego lead to a rebellion against his figurative father' (Callahan 2016: 94), which is disastrous because he displays much higher levels of hostility against Obi-Wan than Luke (who, indeed, never questions Obi-Wan). Roger Kaufman, again, downplays Obi-Wan's failure to educate Anakin because 'despite his training as a deeply centred Jedi knight, Obi-Wan is, like so many modern American fathers, easily exasperated and thrown off balance by the volatile adolescent emotionalism of his young apprentice' (Kaufman 2002: 33). This begs the question of whether Palpatine understands the rules of fathering better, precisely because he is a very astute, patient villain. Obi-Wan, we are told, is defeated in his mission as Anakin's mentor because his disciple is impossible to educate and also because his rival father-figure is, rather, the 'ultimate "femme fatale" of the saga', joined to Anakin/Vader in an 'illicit 'marriage' which 'long outlasts the hero's union with Padmé' (Wilson 2007: 150). There seems to be, in short, nothing at all that Obi-Wan Kenobi can do to prevent his disciple from falling to the Dark Side, while he appears to do his best in all circumstances. That these include mutilating Anakin and abandoning him to die engulfed by burning lava seems even acceptable.

Unbalancing the Force: The Jedi Rejection of Attachment

Philip Simpson claims that 'the death of Padmé during labor is particularly telling in the series' tendency to reduce initially powerful central female characters to hapless prisoners of their biology and sexuality' (Simpson 2006: 123). Although the patriarchal heteronormativity that ultimately kills the former Queen is expressed through Anakin's murderous assault on her, he is also trapped by its restrictions. The Jedi Code is a formidable tool of sexual repression that vitiates the pair's marriage, a bond that instead could have aided Anakin's psychological well-being.

Anakin and Padmé fall in love when Palpatine commends her safety to Obi-Wan, and he decides it is time for Anakin to go on his first solo mission (while he investigates the clone factory at planet Camino). Entrusted with the boy's mentorship when Anakin is only nine, we need to suppose that whatever sexual education he gets, this must come from his mentor. Lucas's prudish approach to sex, however, precludes any type of revelation in that sense, and the only explicit exchange on the role of love in Anakin's life is found in the episode 'The Rise of Clovis' (2014) of the animated TV series, *The Clone Wars*. Ironically, at this point of the saga, and although the TV series does not comment on the situation until this little-seen final sixth season, Anakin and Amidala have been married for about three years. How they have managed to conceal their relationship from Obi-Wan is never mentioned, which makes the following exchange even

more preposterous. Seeing that Anakin is obviously showing romantic feelings for Amidala (and much jealousy of another man), Obi-Wan tries to warn him by invoking his own failed love story with Duchess Satine Kryze:

Obi-Wan:	Anakin, I understand to a degree what is going on.You've met Satine. You know I once harbored feelings for her. It's not that we're not allowed to have these feelings. It's natural.
Anakin:	Senator Amidala and I are simply friends.
Obi-Wan:	And friends you must remain. As a Jedi, it is essential you make the right choice, Anakin, for the Order.

Both the word 'natural' and this conversation are used in a singularly cynical way in this episode. At this point the viewers have witnessed the sad romance between Obi-Wan and Satine – and would 'naturally' expect Obi-Wan to encourage Anakin to declare his feelings; even make the choice, if necessary, of abandoning the Order – as he himself was tempted to do once.

The backstory concerning Obi-Wan and Satine Kryze, popularly known among fans as 'Obitine', is told in several episodes of the series (chronologically situated between Episodes II and III). In 'The Mandalore Plot' (2010) Obi-Wan is sent by the Jedi Council to check on Satine, the pacifist ruler of her home planet and the leader of the Council of Neutral Systems, which groups 1500 other planets. She resents his interference and their constant verbal sparring puts Anakin on the alert. In the following episode, 'Voyage of Temptation' (2010), he sounds out Obi-Wan about the tension he perceives. His mentor explains that the relationship started a long time ago, when he spent a year with Master Qui-Gon protecting Satine from the devastating civil war that taught her to hate violence so passionately. Anakin is surprised to hear that Obi-Wan did not stay to help Satine rebuild her home planet once the war was over:

Anakin:	You didn't stay to help her?
Obi-Wan:	That would have been problematic. My duty as a Jedi demanded I be elsewhere.
Anakin:	Demanded? But it's obvious you had feelings for her. Surely that would affect your decision.
Obi-Wan:	Oh, it did. I live by the Jedi Code.
Anakin:	Of course. As Master Yoda says, 'a Jedi must not form attachments'.
Obi-Wan:	Yes. But he usually leaves out the undercurrent of remorse.

That Satine's constant annoyance with Obi-Wan is due to her romantic frustration and not just her dislike of his Jedi militarism is made obvious when in the same episode, worried that she is going to be killed, Satine declares her feelings: 'Obi-

Wan, it looks like I may never see you again. I don't know quite how to say this, but I've loved you from the moment you came to my aid all those years ago'. Taken aback, Obi-Wan hesitates before declaring that 'Had you said the word, I would have left the Jedi Order'. Anakin is a witness to this stunning declaration, yet since the saga is so weak in continuity nothing is made of these revelations. Indeed, Obi-Wan quickly recovers from the trauma of seeing Satine murdered by his arch-enemy Darth Maul, in a surprise return from his apparent death. In 'The Lawless' (2013), Maul not only deprives Satine of her political power but also of her life simply to exact his revenge from Obi-Wan. Apparently in shock, he does not even reply to her dying words, 'Remember, my dear Obi-Wan I've loved you always. I always will'. The tragedy seems to have been forgotten, however, by the time 'The Rise of Clovis' was written; Satine is of course never mentioned in the film prequels, which had been already released.

The version that Obi-Wan gives to Anakin of his relationship with Satine is partial and shallow, which shows that they are not true friends who can trust each other with their deepest concerns. In Ryder Windham's novel, *The Rise and Fall of Darth Vader* (2007), Anakin considers in earnest leaving the Jedi Order if Padmé reciprocates his love. This would have made him the twenty-first Jedi to make such a decision, as we learn from a secondary character, Padawan Starstone, in James Luceno's novel *Dark Lord: The Rise of Darth Vader* (2005). As she clarifies, however, these were apprentices, not Jedi Knights (Luceno 2006: 137). When Padmé tells her husband in *Revenge of the Sith* (2005) that she is pregnant, and asks whether Obi-Wan might help them, presumably to convince the Jedi Council not to expel Anakin, he replies curtly, 'We don't need his help'; in the novel, Windham adds that he 'glowered as he imagined his Master's reprimands' (Windham 2007: 114). This is not an act of bravery or self-sufficiency on Anakin's side, then, but a consequence of Obi-Wan's inflexibility, which prevents Anakin from approaching his mentor in full trust of their friendship.

When Obi-Wan finally asks the visibly pregnant Padmé if Anakin is the father of her child, the future figure of Darth Vader has already emerged in Anakin's growing megalomania and his profoundest fear: that he may lose Padmé's love. Haunted by the sight of Anakin kneeling to Darth Sidious after killing the Padawan children in the Jedi Temple, and outraged by his attempt to strangle Padmé, Obi-Wan decides that he must kill his former pupil on the volcanic planet of Mustafar. Christina Flotmann rightly notes that Obi-Wan only understands stark moral categories of white and black which is why he can only see Anakin 'as good or evil. He deals in absolutes by leaving a badly injured person to what he must know to be a terrible death'. He does not act 'with a sense of justice but in anger, hate and revenge, thus severely breaking the Jedi

Code' (Flotman 2015: 143).

The controversy about whether Obi-Wan is right to punish Anakin so viciously still rages online. Many spectators cannot reconcile Luke's kind mentor with Anakin's brutal attacker nor how Obi-Wan's emotional declaration – 'You were my brother, Anakin. I loved you' – is followed by his ultra-violent mutilation of Anakin's body and the curt disavowal of his own guilt: 'You have done that to yourself'. The confusion and rage about this ugly scene focus on why, once the terrible deed is done, Obi-Wan does not kill Anakin to prevent his suffering and certain painful death. Dan Gunderman suggests four possible reasons: one, 'He didn't have the heart to do it'; two, since the Jedi Code prevents Knights from killing helpless rivals, 'Morality trumps impulse'; three, Mustafar 'would've put him to death'; and lastly, Padmé's demand to see 'proof of Anakin's betrayal' distracts him (Gunderman 2017). Lucas apparently used a simpler approach, as he seems to have instructed Ewan McGregor to show in this crucial scene that 'You think about it. Your first impulse is to save him, but then you realize you can't' (quoted Rinzler 2005: 54). Windham, on the other hand, claims that 'When Obi-Wan releases this emotional attachment, the battle turns for the Jedi' (Windham 2005: 60). This terrifying diagnostic means that at this crucial point Obi-Wan turns himself into an inhuman entity and Anakin into a dehumanized object.

This dark view of Obi-Wan becomes even darker if, as the person signing as Shootingnova proposes in a lengthy analysis of the Mustafar misencounter, it is assumed that Obi-Wan knows very well that, far from being equal in strength, 'Anakin's emotional hindering [is] more severe' (Shootingnova 2014) and that he is in a much weaker position. Matthew Stover's novelization of *Revenge of the Sith* even notes that Obi-Wan plays on Anakin the same trick that he played on General Grievous to disarm him: 'reaching through the Force to reverse the polarity of the electrodrivers in Anakin's mechanical hand' (Stover 2005: 429). When Obi-Wan warns Anakin that he will lose the fight as he cannot take the high ground which Obi-Wan occupies, this is both literal and metaphoric. There is no Jedi Council left for Obi-Wan to take Anakin to and be judged by but, still, Obi-Wan plays Jedi judge and executioner.

Stover insists on stressing the personal above the political in the confrontation between the two men, even verging on the homoerotic: 'After thousands of hours in lightsaber sparring they knew each other better than brothers, more intimately than lovers; they were complementary halves of a single warrior' (428). When Obi-Wan considers whether he should inflict on Anakin the final blow, Anakin taunts his former master:

> 'You hesitate,' Anakin said. 'The flaw of compassion – '

> ‘It’s not compassion,’ Obi-Wan said sadly. ‘It’s reverence for life. Even yours. It’s respect for the man you were.’ He sighed. ‘It’s regret for the man you should have been.’ (429)

Stover’s novelization presents the conclusion of their duel as the ultimate (Jedi) denial of what makes us human, namely the capacity to love our fellow human beings:

> Obi-Wan still loved him. Yoda had said it, flat-out: Allow such attachments to pass out of one’s life, a Jedi must, but Obi-Wan had never let himself understand. He had argued for Anakin, made excuses, covered for him again and again and again; all the while this attachment he denied even feeling had blinded him to the dark path his best friend walked.
>
> Obi-Wan knew there was, in the end, only one answer for attachment...
>
> He let it go. (434)

No wonder, then, that in both film and novelization, as Anakin burns on Mustafar he rages at Obi-Wan, screaming ‘I hate you!’ Having already cauterized his amputation of Anakin from his personal feelings, Obi-Wan trusts the Force to make the decision to kill Anakin for him and rushes to ‘do honor to the memory of the man he had loved, and to the vanished Order they both had served’ (Stover 2005: 439) by saving Padmé and her babies. His quick transfer of allegiances to the ‘memory’ of a man not yet dead is not the chivalrous act it appears to be but a running away from his responsibilities as mentor, friend and criminal brutalizer.

Obi-Wan does wonder whether he was right to abandon Anakin and whether redemption had been possible: ‘These were questions that plagued him, and pained him more deeply than he would have ever believed possible’ (Luceno 2006: 333). Luceno’s novel concludes, though, with a strange episode of self-exoneration. News of Darth Vader’s first public appearance reach Obi-Wan while drinking at the Mos Eisley tavern on Tatooine, and he is staggered; oddly, a man, presented as a simple spaceport worker, warns him to ‘Get ahold of yourself’ (336), and keep silent to prevent attracting Vader’s rage. Luceno adds to this peculiar moment a message from Obi-Wan’s dead mentor, Quin-Gon, assuring him that Tatooine is the safest place to keep Luke because Vader will never revisit the place where he was born and raised as a slave child. Obi-Wan then muses that ‘I was wrong to leave him on Mustafar. I should have made *sure* he was dead’ (338). Whether this is truly Quin-Gon’s voice or Obi-Wan’s troubled conscience, the presence states that ‘The Force will determine Anakin’s future’, also enjoining Obi-Wan not to reveal his parentage to Luke.

Logically, Obi-Wan is relieved to hear that he did well and puts himself again on the right Jedi path by acknowledging that 'Then my obligation is unchanged. But from what Yoda told me, I know that I have much to learn, Master.' To which this ghostly Quin-Gon replies, '*You were always that way, Obi-Wan*' (338). No thought is spared for how quickly Obi-Wan unlearned to love the now gone Anakin Skywalker.

Conclusions: The Hidden Fault

When Lucas filmed the scene of Obi-Wan's final fight with Darth Vader in the first *Star Wars* film, the scene on Mustafar was a long time away from being imagined. If Episode IV had been actually written after Episode III, this duel would necessarily have included Vader's accusations regarding his ill-treatment by Obi-Wan on Mustafar and, most likely, Obi-Wan's justification of his actions. Instead, we were offered an unlikely act of posthumous reconciliation in *Return of the Jedi* (1983) when, following his death as Darth Vader, Anakin Skywalker is redeemed. This scene was re-edited for the DVD 2006 special edition, in which the actor originally playing Darth Vader in *Return of the Jedi*, Sebastian Shaw, was replaced with images of Hayden Christensen as Anakin before he transformed into Vader. Although this is intended to erase Vader and confirm Padmé's view that Anakin could be saved, there is a highly incongruous, even indecorous touch, in placing him close to Obi-Wan in this happy ending, particularly when spectators can easily recall what happened on Mustafar.

If we accept that Obi-Wan Kenobi is the embodiment of Jedi knighthood and chivalry, then we must also accept that this is an ideal heavily marred by the irrational insistence on avoiding emotional attachment. Obi-Wan's life proves not once, but twice, that the Jedi injunction is incompatible with happiness and personal fulfilment: first, his decision to abandon Satine Kryze makes her profoundly unhappy (though he does not seem equally affected); second, Obi-Wan's inability to connect with Anakin leads to his decision to marry Padmé secretly and thus end up falling in Palpatine's hands. Others suffer for Obi-Wan's decisions while he remains if not unscathed at least relatively free of emotional pain and suffering, a state that perhaps can be explained in Satine's case but not at all in Anakin's, especially after Mustafar. If Obi-Wan feels any lasting attachment this is only for the Jedi Code, which is thus exposed as what it is: an aberrant patriarchal instrument of emotional repression, aimed at enhancing the military efficiency of its members and not at all connected with goodness. This is a fact that the Sith understand very well but that paradoxically, evidenced by the furore surrounding Luke's murderous representation in *The Last Jedi* (2017), admirers of *Star Wars* have taken too long to accept.

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Microfascism and the Double Exclusion in Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*

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In the medical experiment in Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* (1966), Charlie Gordon is transformed temporarily from a man of low intelligence into a genius, a double-edged sword since whilst he gains insight into his earlier exploitation he is also alienated from his peers. Not only must Charlie confront the demons of his past, he must also prepare himself for the future that awaits him when the experiment goes into reverse.

While many scholars focus on the novel's treatment of autism, disability and medical ethics (Cline 2012, Ullyatt 2014, Loftis 2015, Ghoshal and Wilkinson 2017) it also has much to offer in terms of its use of social exclusion and other means of biopolitical control. While Charlie Gordon is cast out and constituted as a form of 'bare life' (Agamben 1998), the novel also adds another dimension to the mix, namely the role of the machine. In this case, Charlie isn't just cast as a sub-human outsider, he is also framed within a cybernetic network, cast as a faulty part that needs to be fixed. Indeed, his instrumental use can be read as a form of 'microfascism', such as is described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari:

> Only microfascism provides an answer to the global question: Why does desire desire its own repression? [...] Desire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels, from micro-formations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, etc. Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supple segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 251)

Deleuze and Guattari follow in the footsteps of pioneering psychoanalytical studies of fascism, such as those by Wilhelm Reich, which tended to read the ideology as bourgeois in origin, necessitating first the repression of desire and then its violent return in the figure of the authoritarian personality. For Deleuze and Guattari, the ways in which desire courses through the various social and technological assemblages, which for them constitute the interlocking parts of a fully capitalist society, can act as a filter – a means of repression – so that fascism is also constituted at a microcosmic level within the social regulation of desire. In this sense, Charlie's menial labouring role is shaped by a microfascist desire rooted in the many complex interactions with those around him. This leads him to spend much of the novel trying to please others and fit in, despite

the fact that the group continues to exclude him on account of his faulty design.

Just as he oscillates between the human and the machine in the first part of the novel, so Charlie also oscillates between the human and the superhuman in the second part. He is double excluded as both a man of low intelligence and a man of genius, in which microfascist programming acts as a means of social control. How and why does Charlie desire his own repression, and how does his exclusion serve to replicate societal codes and manufacture consent to sovereign rule?

Introducing Charlie Gordon

First published as a short story in 1958 and then expanded in 1966, *Flowers for Algernon* won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards. The story has also been adapted several times for television, theatre and radio, including the Oscar-winning film *Charly* (1968). The novel is presented as a series of diary entries written by Charlie, a floor sweeper with an IQ of 68. As a man of low intelligence, Charlie struggles to form words in his early entries, but tries nonetheless: 'all my life I wantid to be smart and not dumb' says Charlie, but 'I ferget a lot' (Keyes 1994: 3). As readers we can't help but empathize with Charlie. Though he has limited intelligence, he tries extremely hard, and reads and writes very well for someone with his low mental capacity. These good intentions attract the attention of a group of scientists working on a way to enhance human intelligence. To them, Charlie seems to be the ideal subject, and as Charlie reports, 'they will see if they can use me' (1).

In the lead-up to the experiment, Charlie is introduced to a mouse named Algernon – a creature who has already successfully undergone the same experiment. Charlie can't help but be impressed by Algernon's intelligence, and the ease with which the mouse beats him in simple tests, with Charlie exclaiming that 'I dint know mice were so smart' (5–6). However, once Charlie has undergone the experiment, it is not long before the tables are turned. After a few days have passed, he is already remembering things from three days previously, and soon starts making corrections to his own work. The change that overcomes Charlie is quite remarkable, and as he learns new things, we see the fruits of his labours in his written diary entries. For example, when Charlie learns about punctuation, he soon starts to apply his learning to his written notes, with noticeable effect.

But Charlie's progress doesn't stop there. He starts to read, and discovers the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Newton, Einstein, Freud, Plato 'and all the other names that echo like great church bells in my mind' (49). However, Charlie's learning also comes at great cost. As his intellect grows, he becomes disillusioned as he is no longer the same 'Charlie' he once was. People treat

him differently, and he starts to notice that many of his friends are not the people he thought they were. These changes ultimately lead to him losing his job at the bakery as the employees there are 'all scared to death' (72–3) by the changes that have come over him. As Charlie observes: 'I had betrayed them, and they hated me for it' (74).

While he may have accepted being cut-off from his co-workers as a consequence of his altered state of being, he soon finds himself set apart from the professors whom he admired for so long: 'I was seeing them clearly for the first time – not gods or even heroes, but just two men worried about getting something out of their work' (49). Soon after this, Charlie runs away, taking Algernon with him. Cut off from the restrictions of his institutionalized self, Charlie is at his most liberated, and engages in an 'anti-intellectual binge' (137). However, Algernon's mental health starts to fade and Charlie discovers that he too will soon experience the same fate. So, from 'a peak of light and understanding' (167) Charlie starts to decline. Faced with a grim future and ultimately death, Charlie is forced to prepare himself for the worst. The book ends with Charlie's final diary entry, his farewell to his readers: 'P.S. please if you get a chanse put some flowers on Algernons grave in the bak yard' (216).

Charlie as animal

As he develops through the novel, Charlie becomes increasingly aware of the complex web of power relationships at work upon him, and his unique position within a system that never quite welcomes him in. He is for the most part an outsider – an exile, or what Agamben describes as a *homo sacer*: an individual 'situated at the intersection of a capacity to be killed and yet not sacrificed, outside both human and divine law' (Agamben 1998: 73). Initially, Charlie is an outsider on account of his base intelligence and lack of human qualities. His co-workers regularly exploit him for their own benefit or general amusement. In one notable incident they show him off as an exhibit at a party, treating him as an object of ridicule before leaving him alone in the street (Keyes 1994: 21–2). This example demonstrates Charlie's unique insider-outsider relationship with the people around him. Even on a day-to-day level, Charlie is an outsider, while paradoxically still being situated firmly within the bakery fold. If anyone does something wrong, they are described as a 'Charlie Gordon', yet Charlie himself remains blissfully ignorant of the real meaning behind the slur (17). Because at this point Charlie does not understand the context of his outsider status, he thinks the people from the bakery are being friendly, which only adds to his isolation, and makes him complicit in his own exile. It is only later with the insight of his newfound intelligence that he realizes the truth of the matter, and the way he has been marked for exclusion all along.

Throughout his time as a man of low intelligence, the people of the bakery treat Charlie like an animal, or even less than an animal, for his human form refers back to the possibility of the 'normal' human he could become. Not only is Algernon treated with more respect than Charlie, but he is even depicted as possessing more human traits, with Charlie observing, 'I never new before that I was dumber than a mouse' (16). In response, many of Charlie's friends perceive his low IQ as a form of sickness. Before his operation, the bakery staff bring him a chocolate cake and say they hope he will get better soon, as if he is worthy of pity, or indeed that his low intelligence is something that needs to be fixed or cured. From these examples we can see how Charlie's animalization leads to him being cast as a form of bare life, the production of which Agamben describes as the 'originary activity of sovereignty' (Agamben 1998: 83). This is an important element of power, and Charlie's construction as *homo sacer* demonstrates how exclusions construct and maintain power relationships within a social setting:

> What defines the status of *homo sacer* is therefore not the originary ambivalence of the sacredness that is assumed to belong to him, but rather both the particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed. (82)

Charlie's lack of intelligence and perceived lack of human qualities place him in a unique position. He is the subject of pity, scorn and derision and is excluded from normal social interactions, yet it is never a full exclusion – his exclusion is at the same time an *inclusion*, as the very process of exclusion preserves and enshrines the rule for inclusion. As Agamben suggests, 'what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule's suspension. *The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it*' (17). Building on this argument Agamben also argues that 'exception is the structure of sovereignty [...] it is the originary structure in which law refers to life and includes it in itself by suspending it' (28). Charlie's initial exclusion and production as a form of bare life then is an essential element in the operation of power. His exclusion also goes to show the paradox of sovereignty and the law; that being, '"the law is outside itself," or: "I, the sovereign, who am outside the law, declare that there is nothing outside the law"' (15).

Yet Charlie's exclusion is not just limited to the time at which he spends as a floor sweeper in the bakery. As science transforms him into a man of supreme intelligence, a new exclusion is formed and Charlie goes from being a *homo sacer* on account to his base nature, to being a *homo sacer* on account of his exceptional intelligence. Though the reason for the exclusion changes, the result is still the same, and Charlie is cast out and restricted from taking

part in normal everyday life. Thus, as soon as Charlie's intelligence outstrips the consensus for what is normal, he is fired from the bakery; he moves from being an object of sympathy to an object of fear. Not only that, but he soon outstrips his professors, such that they come to envy him: 'Before, they had laughed at me, despising me for my ignorance and dullness; now, they hated me for my knowledge and understanding' (Keyes 1994: 75). So again, Charlie finds himself as an exception – a fact which he points to in his rather astute observation: 'The idea seems to be: use an expression only as long as it doesn't mean anything to anybody. *Exceptional* refers to both ends of the spectrum, so all my life I've been exceptional' (106). Thus, Charlie represents the final limit case of Agamben's theory. There is no hope of salvation as he was never fully included to begin with; for Charlie, the exception is the norm, and he is destined to remain a pariah no matter what.

Charlie as robot

Beyond his being ostracized and cast as a form of bare life, Charlie is also simultaneously cast as a machine or biological robot. This is a recurring theme in American science fiction of the post-war period in which cultural, social and political tensions coincided with a rapid rise in consumer electronics and computer technology. Keyes' original short story appeared only six years after Claude Shannon had demonstrated his mechanical mouse Theseus in both *LIFE* and *Time Magazine* in 1952. These articles featured pictures of Shannon alongside a metallic maze in which his robot mouse would 'learn' the trail through trial and error in order to dash towards the symbolic cheese. While Shannon's work demonstrated the wonders of modern technology and applications for telephone switching systems, the *LIFE* article even suggested that biological lab mice had been 'joined and outclassed by a mechanical mouse' ('Better Mouse' 1952: 45), demonstrating a blurring of the line between the artificial and the organic.

This early post-war period was also marked notably by the first use of the term 'artificial intelligence' by John McCarthy in 1955 (Edwards 1996: 253). This watershed moment helped usher in the new era of computer studies, and also helped establish a new field of cognitive psychology, where scientists started to think of the human brain as a form of machine (see Baars 1986; Gardner 1985). By the time *Flowers for Algernon* was published as a novel in 1966, the U.S.A. had seen the launch of its first successful weather satellite TIROS-1 (1960) and the birth of colour television (1965). A few years later and the U.S.A. would complete its first moon landings (1969), followed soon after by the invention of the first single chip microprocessor (1971).

Throughout this period, there was much cultural anxiety surrounding new

technology, with emerging fields of study blurring the boundaries between the human and the machine, in particular the human and the robot. While modern technologies helped bring about a whole range of new consumer goods and services, there existed at the same time a level of doubt and uncertainty about technologies that represented at once both a benefit and a threat to traditional way of life. This conflicting, often contradictory relationship can also be seen clearly across the popular press of the period, with hard-hitting features on nuclear war sitting alongside adverts for an array of goods and services made possible with the same computer technology. For instance, the 11 February 1957 edition of *LIFE* featured an article on the SAGE nuclear defence system bookended by adverts for maple-flavoured syrup and a set of cooking sauces. Similar tensions also came to light in the science fiction literature of the period, with writers such as Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth depicting various worlds of rampant consumerism where advertising men rule the world and robots are used in place of humans.

These same anxieties also worked their way into the way machines themselves were depicted in the social imaginary, reflecting real-world concerns about the new 'robot brains' that some people felt were starting to rule the world. This led to portrayals of computers often oscillating between the omniscient electronic brain on the one hand, and the intellectually inferior machine with no common sense on the other. Indeed, Hans Moravec notes that 'The discrepancy between the giant brain and the mental midget image of computers became worse in the late 1960s, and early 1970s' (Moravec 1999: 21). This observation can be mapped directly onto the depiction of Charlie, a character who functions just like a biological machine and who similarly oscillates between the 'giant brain' and 'mental midget' that Moravec describes. This machine-like comparison goes far beyond the way Charlie is represented within the novel, and extends to also encompass the way he is monitored by the scientists, and even how he is produced. Indeed, the diary form itself is a kind of surveillance, in which Charlie becomes a literal 'learning machine' using the surveillance feedback loop to reflect on his actions and self-program as his intelligence grows.

This robotic self-programming function is similar to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as microfascistic behaviour – self-imposed controls in which individuals repress elements of their subjectivity in order to conform to societal norms. In the case of *Flowers for Algernon*, Charlie forms his internalized microfascisms through his many interactions with authority figures such as his teacher Alice Kinnian and the scientists Professor Nemur and Dr Strauss. There is also the influence of his parents, Rose and Matt. While at the start of the novel Charlie can't remember anything of his parents, as he comes into his

intelligence he experiences flashbacks that give insight into the conditioning effect they had on him, with many of their fears and anxieties replicating themselves within him. Over time these fears and anxieties became embedded in Charlie's subconscious and developed into microfascisms that form a key part of his behavioural pattern.

The reason these microfascisms are so effective is because they are driven by the individual, and force the subject to pre-empt a given rule before a sovereign decision has been made. They are so pervasive that often subjects do not realize they are at work – as we see in the case of Charlie and other characters throughout the text. It is significant here that internalized microfascisms operate much like a computer program or operating system, dictating the behaviour of subjects who are compelled to behave in a predictable, robotic fashion. In each case, the very possibility of being seen as 'outside' or 'different' to normal social practice forces the characters in *Flowers for Algernon* to modify their behaviour, or to reassess their stance in relation to the accepted norm. From the very outset we are confronted with Charlie's constant efforts to fit in and to understand, even if he doesn't fully grasp those things he *thinks* he understands. For example, when he first meets the scientists he is introduced to the Rorschach Inkblot Test, looking to see 'picturs in the ink' (Keyes 1994: 2). But Charlie doesn't quite inhabit the same world as everyone else. He thinks he's failed as he doesn't see pictures, and thinks that he either needs to be taught to see pictures or that 'mabey I need new glassis' (2). He is also introduced to what he studiously notes down as the 'THEMATIC APPERCEPTON TEST. I dont know the first 2 werds but I know what test means. You got to pass it or you get bad marks' (4). In both instances, the word Charlie does understand is 'test', a word that is so often associated with either success or failure. Charlie is naturally repulsed by the idea of failure and so struggles to 'pass' everything he does.

This drive to succeed is a key component in Charlie's compliance with power, and demonstrates the far-reaching and often subtle impact that ideological codes and values can have. As a man of low intelligence, Charlie associates success and popularity with those people of high intelligence. As he so often expresses in the text, 'I just want to be smart like other pepul so I can have lots of frends who like me' (9). Even very early on in the text, Charlie has keen aspirations, and is driven to succeed and be seen as a success. Though the world he inhabits is quite small by most definitions, even so Charlie aspires to 'talk with them [his work colleagues] about things and maybe even get to be an assistint baker' (13). These aspirations lead Charlie to monitor and adjust his behaviour via a form of cybernetic feedback loop responding to his own inbuilt set of programmatic codes. Only in this case, Charlie's operating system doesn't quite function in a way most people might expect. As such, he is unable

to process the information that is fed to him, and while he may act with the best of intentions, his faulty outputs lead to his ostracism from the community group.

The social machine

Clearly, desire is an important component in exercising Charlie's internalized microfascisms – his personal computer code – and his drive to fit in and succeed. Though not an origin as such, much of Charlie's early identity formation can be traced back to his parents, who we meet through a series of flashbacks. In Charlie's recollection, his parents associate education with success: that you can only be 'somebody' if you go to college (50–1). As the story progresses we learn that his mother Rose was instrumental in instilling a sense of failure in him from an early age. For much of his childhood she referred to him as being 'sick' and spent almost all of the family savings on 'quacks and phonies' in order to try and cure him (100). On reflection, Charlie realizes that it was his mother's desire for him to be smart that gave him his own strong motivation: 'Her fear, her guilt, her shame that Charlie was a moron. Her dream that something could be done' (101).

Appearances are incredibly important to Rose, and looking back, Charlie observes that she was 'Always working to show the neighbours what a good wife and mother she was' (181). This in itself is an example of her own microfascistic desire to fit in and to be seen as looking as if she were doing well for herself. As Charlie suggests: 'The most important thing had always been about what other people thought – appearances before herself or her family. And righteous about it' (181). Unfortunately for Charlie, this meant being kept away from others, even at a very young age, 'so that other people wouldn't know anything was wrong' (181). Even in his formative years, we can see how Charlie was already set up as an Agambian *homo sacer* – as an outsider who exhibits abnormal traits, or rather a broken machine who does not conform to normal social codes. This transition to outcast was brought about in part by his mother Rose, though we cannot call her the origin of this move, as her own desire is similarly influenced by a complex web of power relationships; in this case, forcing her to follow a path where her 'abnormal' son is cast out, and in which she believes she is a failure for bringing him into the world.

Each of these examples demonstrates the complex and pervasive nature of power. On a day-to-day level the sovereign cannot exercise direct control over individual citizens, however its power can still be exercised indirectly through segmented means, be it through formalized State apparatus or those micro-transactions between individuals. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the power centre is at the border between the segmented line and quantum flow: it is 'defined not by an absolute exercise of power within its domain but by

the relative adaptations and conversions it effects between the line and the flow' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 217). For example, the roles of a manager are never always clear-cut. The manager is only recognizable when he or she becomes crystallized from a macro-organizational perspective, as the defined segment 'the office manager' (250). Because of the indecipherable location of power, it follows then that 'power centers are defined much more by what escapes them or by their impotence than by their zone of power' (217).

Moving beyond the bureaucratic nature of power and the complexity of power flows, we should also consider the role of domination between individuals. Michel Foucault, in particular, claims that domination and the will to dominate is evidenced not just in the Sovereign King (Foucault's example) but by 'subjects in their reciprocal relations; not sovereignty in its one edifice, but multiple subjugations that take place and function within the social body' (Foucault 2003: 27). Foucault then draws attention to the circulating nature of power, as do Deleuze and Guattari, but further emphasizes the micro-domination of individuals:

> Do not regard power as a phenomenon of mass and homogenous domination – the domination of one individual over others, or one group over others [...] Power must, I think, be analysed as something that circulates, or rather as something that functions only when it is part of a chain. (29)

We should be careful then not to read power as necessarily all of the same homogenous form. Though there may be a central guiding force, a machine-like director shaping the overarching direction of power flows, we can see here how microfascisms are not solely connected with sovereign power, but can also be connected with the power of individual subjects and the domination of one individual over another. These relationships are not fixed, but rather they circulate, and are further complicated by the fact that all interactions must sit within the wider framework of the sovereign State. Yet on a micro-level, there is scope not just for the exercise of sovereign power but also power and domination between individuals, whether for the purpose of supporting the sovereign decision or for other personal gain and merit.

As we have seen in the example of Charlie working in the bakery, his so-called friends often exploit him for their own pleasure and amusement. Not only can we read this as an example of how exclusions are used to maintain sovereign power but we can also see it as an attempt to establish dominance by the individual members of the bakery team. Charlie has clearly been allocated the lowest place in the hierarchy while the others use him as a way to establish their dominance and secure their own status within the group. Therefore, while

there is certainly an element of segmentary sovereign power at work here, we are also witness to a social power struggle within the bakery, driven by the need to fit in with other members of the group and the further need to establish dominance and exercise power over the things that the bakers at least have some small control over. It could even be argued that the abuse of Charlie serves as a release mechanism for the bakers, who in reality have very little power, but what power they do have is exercised in a way that is not ultimately detrimental to the State.

For Charlie there is no real freedom or means of escape from the complex power flows that beset him on all sides. As an outcast he is incapable of being reintegrated within the social network – he is as much a computer virus or biopolitical infection as he is a broken machine in need of repair. This leads Charlie to seek solace in his own company, but he soon finds that this option only serves to exacerbate the problem. It is interesting then that Charlie comes closest to reintegration when he embarks on his anti-intellectual binge towards the latter part of the novel. But, even then, the memory of his past haunts him and he realizes it is not the movies he craves, but to 'be with the people around me in the darkness' (Keyes 1994: 137). However, it is not just memories of the past that haunt him; he is also haunted by the microfascistic codes that he takes with him. At one point he sees a child in a restaurant who reminds him of his former self. This causes him to lose control and he later admonishes himself for his behaviour, noting how 'I cursed myself for losing control and creating a scene' (138). He realizes that the child with learning difficulties stirred difficult memories within him, admitting that, 'Even a feeble-minded man wants to be like other men' (139). This example recalls a similar pattern suggested in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the first book Charlie reads when he comes into his genius. In the novel, Crusoe is stranded on a remote island, but ends up replicating the same power structures that subtly worked upon him back home. Just as Crusoe repeats the cultural norms and values of the British Empire on his desert island, so Charlie repeats the same codes implanted within him, even though he is ostensibly free to act in any way he wants. Only here we see that what Charlie wants is to be integrated and included in the group, demonstrating again the subtle nature of microfascistic power structures from which Charlie can never escape.

No freedom, no escape

Flowers for Algernon is a complex and deeply moving novel that actively engages with biopolitical concepts and amorphous subjectivities, blending the human, the animal and the machine. Though Charlie may fail to integrate as a 'normal' individual, this is not to say that he doesn't serve a valuable function

within the framework of the biopolitical State. Indeed, he arguably provides *more* value than a single compliant individual, for his role as outcast constitutes him as a sacrificial pariah figure who acts as a failsafe and paradigmatic example to others. In this sense, Charlie serves to instil compliance in others – he serves a compliance function that ensures the majority of subjects adhere to sovereign rule. Through his suffering and sacrifice so cultural norms are deployed and replicated throughout the system, promoting homogeny over heterogeneity, similarity over difference, order over chaos.

Even as he falls into steep decline so Charlie remains a force of compliance right to the very end. In the closing lines of his diary he even reminds Professor Nemur not to be 'such a grouch when pepul laff at him' (216), suggesting the Professor removes himself too far from the social group and should make further efforts to integrate. While Charlie himself may not be deemed worthy of inclusion, or even sympathy for his demise, still he ensures that others are recognised within the dynamic framework of inclusions and exclusions. While Charlie himself is not deemed worthy of sympathy, he remains a *homo sacer* par excellence right to the end, a character for whom there can be no freedom, no escape. Even in death, Charlie cannot shed his outsider status, for even the mouse Algernon is worthy of more grief than he, and the memory of his exclusion remains.

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Jack Finney and the Crisis of Self in 1950s America

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This article brings together two sites of anxiety in mid-twentieth century America: the vast proliferation of things and the changing nature of the self. Prompted by the rise of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, cultural discourse in post-war America centred affects like paranoia, anxiety and trauma; for sociologists like Erich Fromm and David Riesman, these proved emblematic of larger transformations in American society. In this article, I explore the imbrication of these anxieties within what is arguably the post-war work of paranoia *par excellence*, Jack Finney's 1955 novel *Invasion of the Body Snatchers.* Resisting reading the titular 'body snatchers' as simple Cold War-era allegories, I argue that the so-called pod people's attempted takeover of suburban California reveals the extent to which mid-century selfhood had been deferred onto things, with the promise of a stable subject-object relationship taking the place of a selfhood modelled on conscious interiority.

The dominant invaders-as-allegory reading stems, perhaps, from the fact that mid-century Americans perceived themselves as constantly under attack from forces both within and without. Following W.H. Auden, a U.S. émigré since 1939, author and physician Walker Percy characterized the decades following World War Two as 'the age of anxiety' (Percy 1957: 392). Percy's specific diagnosis and the popularity of Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1955) and Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), both also concerned with national malaise, suggest this anxiety was in the front of their minds for the mid-century reading public. Fromm and Riesman, moreover, go beyond Percy's concern with individual neurotics to suggest that something pathological is happening at the level of whole societies. In *The Sane Society*, Fromm proposes 'a possible unadjustment of the culture itself' and argues further that 'society *as a whole* may be lacking in sanity' (emphasis mine) (Fromm 1955: 6). Even Percy is clear that psychiatry is inadequate to the task of treatment: more than 'deviations from a biological norm', this 'unadjustment' is embedded in the societal fabric of the nation (Percy 1957: 392), a particularly strong version of a materialist critique. In effect, both Percy and Fromm are suggesting that rents in the national and cultural fabric can and do have biological consequences. Their predominance calls into question both the structures of production and consumption under which it proliferates and – surely even more unnervingly for their readers – human being itself, the biological and psychic seat of what Fromm terms the 'pathology of normalcy'.

Understanding of the post-war era and its cultural output continues to be shaped by these paranoid poetics; attempts to both trace the forms of this

anxious tendency and to locate its germ have preoccupied scholars in a range of disciplines. While various historical and political factors offer themselves for consideration – fears of atomic annihilation; the Red Scare and its reactionary counterpart, McCarthyism; growing tensions around racial and sexual inequality – it is hard to tell if these are the origins of anxiety or merely its material manifestations. Can we identify a unifying aetiology at the base of these post-war paranoias? In the following section, I parse the manifestation of Percy's 'age of anxiety', arguing that, deracinated and widespread as it is, its various forms are bound by a common theme.

One manifestation of anxiety emboldened by the post-war scene is the conspiracy theorist; for Richard Hofstadter, this figure offers a way into a larger thesis on the origins of anxiety (Hofstadter 1964). For Hofstadter, the tendency that reaches its apex in McCarthyism has roots that reach back to European settlement. Like Arthur Miller's 1953 play *The Crucible*, Hofstadter connects reactionary anti-Communism and the Salem Witch Trials. Hofstadter's 'paranoid style' is both pathological and fringe, which Roger Luckhurst argues ignores how conspiracy theory echoes the 'tentacular' growth of the military-industrial complex and its imbrication with American consumer culture (Luckhurst 2005: 85). Other critics, however, have understood conspiracy theories as liberating, much as Fromm's neurotic is freed from dysfunctional consumerism. Fredric Jameson, for instance, offers conspiracy narratives as a way to articulate concerns over increasingly globalized, networked regimes of power and control, to make 'a degraded attempt […] to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world' (Jameson 1991: 38). Timothy Melley takes Jameson and runs with him, arguing further that these networks of control give the lie to liberal individualism 'with the frightening "discovery" that human behaviour can be regulated by social messages and communications' (Melley 2001: 77).

These readings, rather than pathologizing the conspiracy theorist, suggest that she is instead articulating something previously unspeakable about what Gilles Deleuze terms the 'society of control' (Deleuze 1992). Where in Deleuze's society the ideological and imaginary body of the corporation replaces the physical structure of the factory, for the conspiracy theorist the coherence of the individual is subsumed into a larger network of data and markets. According to Luckhurst, science fiction draws attention to ways in which the post-war period destroys the illusion of 'autonomous scientific, social or economic spheres' in favour of a post-war regime that enfolds the technological into 'rhythms of mass production, consumption and advertising' and, therefore, into the patterns of 'everyday life' (Luckhurst 2005: 84). In some cases, this anxiety over the dissolving body is made literal. As Cyndy Hendershot explains, reading fear of the degraded body in a post-atomic world into the anxieties of post-war sf,

'the repressed of atomic paranoia in 1950s America is radiation contamination' (Hendershot 1998: 26). Melley calls this network of affect and behaviour 'agency panic', and this term comes closest to articulating my root of mid-century American nervousness: a disruption in the ideal of the self as contained, individual and motivated.

According to Percy, the age of anxiety might just as well be called 'the age of the loss of the self' (Percy 1957: 392). Like Fromm, Percy argues that the real problem is the numbed-out suburbanites who, responding to their situation with contentment, 'are desperately alienated from themselves. They are in fact without selves. They experience themselves as things, as commodities, or as nothing' (392). In identifying a modern world without selves, Percy reproduces the crisis of the self as a question of commodification and conformity which, for Fromm, is directly linked to a larger Marxist critique of mid-century America. Percy's use of alienation, as opposed to Fromm's thesis in *The Sane Society*, is *not* Marxist but something altogether more intangible. For Percy, the problem goes beyond consumerism and into psychiatry itself: the psychiatric problem to be confronted in this loss of self is one of over-reliance on a biological, materialist view of the human brain and psyche. That biologically determinist view may even, to Percy, be responsible for the crisis of consumerism, having made the human body and human brain just two more things among many. His solution to treating the problems of the self, therefore, reifies humanistic values over an increasingly biomedical model of psychology. Affirming that 'there are goals beyond the biological' (415), Percy suggests that we might instead aspire towards 'transcendence […] which all existentialists agree upon as an inveterate trait of human existence' (417).

Even as he eschews a material understanding of the self, however, Percy more or less sidesteps the question of what a self might actually *be*. It is this refusal or inability to positively define the self that is perhaps the most convincing proof of its incipient crisis. As Percy demonstrates, the further one goes to articulate a loss of self, the more challenging it becomes to identify where that self might have once been seated. Even old-fashioned values of liberal individualism prove a complicated location for the self. The more the authentic, individualized liberal self is reified, the more it becomes subject to projection onto 'the social order […] the very bureaucracies that seem so threatening in the first place' (Melley 2001: 78). Even individualism, taken as a collective value, can give rise to conformity.

Fifty years before Melley, Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* recognized the untenable nature of a selfhood founded in self-serving individualism. It was read, upon release, as a stark critique of the emergent values of conformity and collective characters that Riesman identified as characteristic of post-war

America. However, Todd Gitlin hastens to add that this 'other-directedness' was a characteristic of society that Riesman 'bent over backward to find virtue in' (Gitlin 2000: xv). The 'inner-direction' that many of Riesman's contemporaries reified as virtuous, on the other hand, offers no stable inner core to which this inner-direction might point. Riesman is able to articulate what extreme focus on the self might allow – 'increased personal mobility […] rapid accumulation of capital (teamed with devastating technological shifts), and […] an almost constant *expansion*' – but not an ontology of the self as such (Riesman 2000:14). Where, then, might such an ontology be found?

One form of cultural production that has always been interested in articulating alternative possibilities for selfhood is science fiction. The 'manipulation of the science fiction mode', according to De Villo Sloan, allows sf authors to explore 'the conflict between the self and the self-less' (Sloan 1988: 179). The allegorical powers of fear made manifest in 'prehistoric monsters, giant ants, pod people, and other horrors' is for Hendershot the reason that 'science fiction and paranoiac discourse have affinities'; these monstrous others suggest, horribly, that there may be other consciousnesses than our own (Hendershot 1999: 9). For Susan Sontag, originally writing in 1966, science fiction allows access to 'the contemporary negative imagination about the impersonal', an imagination of disaster that, selfless, cannot be reasoned with (Sontag 2009: 221). Science fiction offers a place to turn, therefore, in order to explore ways in which the self might have been defined at the supposed moment of its loss.

The 1950s have at times been viewed as a dull valley of sf production between the Golden Age of the late 1930s and the experimental resurgence of the New Wave in the mid-1960s. However, Robert Silverberg has, among others, drawn attention to the decade's 'spectacular outpouring of stories and novels that swiftly surpassed both in quantity and quality the considerable achievement of the Campbellian golden age' (Silverberg 2010: 164). Science fiction stories in the mid-century were ubiquitous and popular. In fact, such was the genre's imbrication with the decade's collective concerns that the sf novel with arguably the greatest impact, both at the time of its publication and in the decades since, was not even published in the pulps whose praises Silverberg sings. The impact of Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers*, later retitled after the first of its film adaptations as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, spread across the 1950s: it was serialized first in *Collier's* in 1954, published as a novel in 1955, and adapted as a feature film by Don Siegel in 1956. Since then, it has been adapted for film three more times and the term 'pod person' has passed into cultural cliché, a disparaging dismissal of perceived conformity. There is more, however, to *The Body Snatchers* than a red-blooded American affirmation of democratic individuality over (Soviet) conformity.

Much of the criticism around *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (by and large revolving around the Siegel adaptation) takes up selfhood and authenticity within the story. Reflecting the text's contemporary affects, scholarship has generally read *The Body Snatchers* as a deeply paranoid or anxious text. This style of reading creates a version of the story that appears, like the pod people, almost but not quite like the thing itself. Three critical building blocks – science fiction's invitation to allegory, thematic concerns about selfhood and authenticity, and a generally anxious tone – have collectively led to a body of scholarship overwhelmingly concerned with deciphering what the pod people *represent*. Does their insidious, nearly undetectable replacement of Mill Valley's innocent small-town residents suggest the threat of Communism or its fanatical foil, McCarthyism? Is it radiation anxiety about the disrupted body or the horrors of gothic domesticity that stifle individual agency? In other words, these readings of *The Body Snatchers* perpetuate the idea to which Percy and Riesman's more uncritical readers also subscribed – a self that is singular, solid and definable, and which is under threat from historically and culturally contingent forces. However, as already noted, positively articulating the self proves challenging if not impossible.

In an attempt to parse why this self retreats from our attempts to grasp it, I offer a reading of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* that moves away from allegory. Rather than asking what the external threat from our increasingly commodified, post-atomic world the body snatchers represent, I ask: what do they *reveal*? What do these invaders from a long-dead world suggest not just about emergent threats but about the always-already tenuous nature of being American, of being human, of being a self? In the following section, I argue that Finney undermines the possibility of stable interiority in two ways: through drawing connections between the pod people and the commodities of suburban existence, and by drawing, through the curiously flat narration of his supposed hero, a flat ontology between the supposed human selves and the selfless things in the novel, which is revealed by the pod invasion.

First, Finney uses the body snatchers not as a purely invasive threat but rather as an important bridge between the humans in his novel and the objects that clutter his suburban setting. By focusing on the material parallels between people and pod, rather than their psychological differences (pod people lacking the human ability to feel emotion), Finney complicates the simple distinction between human self and self-less other more than his rather unconvincingly triumphant ending appears to affirm. Rather than asserting the primacy of the human self within a universal cosmology, Finney's text demonstrates what Ian Bogost has called a 'flat ontology'. As Bogost characterizes the possibilities for his new ontology, life is just 'one type of existence' among many that may

possibly 'comprise the reference point for thought and action', just as human selfhood is just one vantage point, merely one possible form of subjectivity (Bogost 2012: 7). Miles Bennell's narration seems to understand, or at least reproduce, this flat ontology between humans and material objects as a precondition of mid-century American success. Rather than broadly offer the possibility for subjectivity – recognizing the potential for subjects or selves in things – Finney instead emphasizes the thingness in people, and how thin the thread that binds self to subject truly is.

The insidious nature of the alien invasion makes the text ripe for allegory. Richard Godden, however, has linked the Cold War 'allegorical impulse' to a betrayal of 'truth to self' as a 'generic moral measure among those of a liberal imagination' (Godden 1994: 30). Allegory is ideologically suspicious, claims Godden, because it allows the evacuation of the self; it allows the self to be vulnerable to not only physical but also ideological attack. In an early critical evaluation of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* as both novel and film, Glen Johnson suggests that the tendency towards allegory is inherent within Finney's choice of antagonist: 'As a symbol, the alien is more limited than the mutant; but Finney complicates the simplistic them-vs-us formula by making his invaders invisible – a force or consciousness that conquers by taking over the minds and personalities of ordinary people' (Johnson 1979: 5). The invisibility of the invaders – and therefore their seeming ability to be or signify anything – is central to how many critics have read the allegorical pod people.

The temptation to allegory becomes problematic when it obscures or effaces the material nature of the pod people's invasion. Although they might 'snatch' the bodies of their victim-volunteers through reading the 'tiny electrical force-lines that hold together the very atoms that constitute your being' (Finney 1978: 176), these invaders are neither pure force nor a form of consciousness. Rather than invading their victims, they transform their native material (described throughout as 'thick gray fluff' [67]) and effectively insert themselves into the space left in the social fabric. Although in most ways virtually indistinguishable from the individuals after whom they mould themselves, they are replacements, not infections.

Recalling that this invasion is *not* internal – not 'taking over' the victim's mind, but rather her body – helps us see more clearly that the threat, as Percy has it, is a sickness on the level of whole societies. The text undermines the distinction that it draws between pod- and person-consciousness in a way that troubles a reading of the pods as threatening individual selves. An individual's emotional life, rather, is mobilized within the text as an object itself; the pod people's inability to fit within this architecture is echoed by the way that their material essence is described as detritus: 'the kind of dust and dirt […] that

accumulates in basements', the sort of stuff 'that might have fallen, or been jarred loose […] from the open rafters' (67). Disregarding the materiality of the pod invasion misses out on the way that Finney draws attention away from the humanistic self to the world of things within the text.

Locating the precise difference between the pods and the people they have replaced occupies much of the novel's first chapters. Wilma, a patient and friend of Miles, is the first to properly locate the strangeness of the pod invasion: although the replacements are physically identical, they seem to lack the ability to feel. Emotion, therefore, becomes elevated within the novel as the essential germ of humanity, linking consciousness to biology. For Miles, the experience of emotion is coupled to the processes of biological life itself: '"No emotion," I said it aloud, but wonderingly, speaking to myself. "Mannie," I said, as it occurred to me, "can you make love, have children?"' (183). That Miles thinks immediately of 'making love', and therefore of reproduction when he considers emotional life suggests two things: first, that emotion is less valuable intrinsically than for its ability to maintain social bonds and biological continuity of the species; second, that the ability to feel is at the core of consciousness and selfhood as such. By first making emotion the seat of human speciation and then by emphasizing its biological consequences (sexual reproduction), Finney once again emphasizes that, in Mill Valley, materiality holds sway.

The text's engagement with both conformity and authenticity is elsewhere more complicated than a simple association between humans/emotions/selves and pods/emotionlessness/lack of humanity. Abigail Cheever suggests that although the pods are 'phonies' to the characters who have interacted with their human blueprints, 'the pods themselves are crucially real; only their previous status as ostensibly unique persons renders that realness ultimately phony' (Cheever 1982: 61). For all Cheever complicates the distinction between real and not-real that Miles, Becky and the others insist upon across the text, she accepts relatively uncritically the unspoken claim of the novel's characters: that they are real, and not themselves as much 'phonies' as their pod counterparts. The 'realness' though (which, thinking of Cheever's 'phoniness,' here might mean 'selfhood') of Mill Valley's residents is already attenuated and under threat.

The first threat to selfhood that we see is represented as intrinsic to the human residents of Mill Valley even before the threat from outer space has been unearthed: Finney's text is resolutely unconcerned with representing his characters' interiority. For Percy and, to an extent, Riesman, selfhood and individuality are bound up with that same interiority. The challenge represented by the pod people is therefore twofold: first, that they violate the characters' interiority by reading the 'force-lines' of the human body; and second, that they imperfectly represent that interiority with their lack of emotion. Until this

interiority is under threat, Miles doesn't give the reader much indication that he has much to risk: he demonstrates throughout the novel an obsession with the surfaces of people and a curiously flat affect.

Percy's understanding of selfhood and interiority necessarily owes a debt to the popularization of Sigmund Freud's ideas; coupling selfhood to interiority suggests also the primacy of the unconscious in shaping the self. De Villo Sloan offers an alternative: the 'unified self' as a conscious, rational actor. That the pod people can only take the form of their victims when asleep mirrors how 'the unconscious mind threatens to rise up, assume the place of waking consciousness and cause a disintegration of the unified self' (Sloan 1988: 185). Even a selfhood that rejects interiority collapses within the novel's ecology, as Miles' refraction of himself onto objects and surfaces proves increasingly incoherent.

Miles' introduction to the reader recalls Percy's critique of the American suburbanite, experiencing himself as a commodity. His self-description, thorough enough to impress a police sketch artist, emphasizes physical detail over a rich inner life. He describes himself in terms of height and weight and dismisses 'the faintest beginning of a bald spot on the crown' (Finney 1978: 13). For Miles, however, physical, habitual and emotional traits are flattened and presented to the reader without affect. After telling the reader that he 'plays tennis whenever [he] can, so [he's] always pretty tanned', he mentions that 'five months earlier [he'd] been divorced' (13). By collapsing physical attributes, both positive and negative, and a traumatic emotional past into one tidy summary of a supposed self, this passage obscures Miles' interiority in favour of an emphasis on surfaces.

Significantly, the paragraph ends with: 'That's about all. I drive a 1973 Mercedes two-seater, a nice fire-engine-red job, bought used, to maintain the popular illusion that all doctors are rich' (13). Ending his self-description with the car that he drives collapses who Miles *is* with the things that he owns. He is defined, in the eyes of the town, by the car that he drives, a car (and identity) that he readily admits is an 'illusion'. A reading of *The Body Snatchers* that focuses on the fear of small-town conformity (as Sloan suggests) would make much of this desire to keep up appearances. The connection between self and vehicle may go deeper: by juxtaposing the information about his car with the rest of himself, as an attempt to 'get the record straight', Miles connects self to car through more than mere 'illusion'. As Percy has it, he seems to experience himself not only *through* his commodities but also *as* a thing: the illusion that he seeks to maintain is now as much a part of 'the record' of himself as his bald spot or the tan that he maintains through playing tennis; it is, perhaps, more a part of himself than his divorce. Miles' cool observation of his body recalls Maurice

Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body is the 'third genre of being between the pure subject and the object' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 366), experienced as a thing but also central to shaping an understanding of the phenomenological world. Merleau-Ponty's critique, however, recognizes the subject as the source of this awareness; in calling attention to 'the record' and the 'illusion' of his appearance, Miles seems to perceive himself through the eyes of other Mill Valley residents, as an estranged other from his own body.

The effect of this passage, and similar moments throughout the novel, is to problematize an easy accounting of selfhood. Instead of selves or subjects, the novel's human characters are reduced to objects, not only in the eyes of the pod people but also to their human compatriots. This shift away from subjectivity is particularly apparent in Miles' introduction of Becky, where he calls her a 'well-fleshed skeleton' (Finney 1978: 9). This description denies her interiority in the way of most casual chauvinism but goes further. Emphasizing her skeleton, making her insides visible, both strips her of an inner life and, perversely, insists her life was never more than the simple fact of biological mechanics.

Even prior to the arrival of the pod people, the text's lack of interiority places the residents of Mill Valley in an attenuated relationship to a Freudian model of subjectivity. The body snatchers' arrival and proliferation throughout the town only extends this complication. From the beginning, Miles sees himself in relation to things; he is in a sense as much a commodity as the car he drives. The arrival of the body snatchers merely makes visible the loss of self that has already begun to occur in Mill Valley as a microcosm of mid-century America. The consonance between the pod people, the human bodies they ape, and the detritus of the human culture in which they have no desire to participate collapses the boundaries between subject and object on a material and phenomenological level.

The dissolution of self into things is a particular threat within the text, given how very many things there are. In addition to the oft-mentioned paranoia that suffuses the text, it succumbs to a kind of claustrophobia as well. The sheer volume of *stuff* that proliferates across Finney's novel demands attention, although the limited scholarship upon the novel has yet to attend to the text's material specificities. Jack, Miles' friend and co-member of their small resistance, describes himself as 'kind of a squirrel […] a collector of various things, without quite knowing why' (80). The same could be said of Finney's prose: Miles encounters his environment as a series of lists. One of the things that Jack collects is newspaper clippings, which Miles describes as follows: 'he put the clippings on the table, a mound of dozens of them, some yellowing a little with age, some new-looking, most of them short, a few of them long' (81). The prose traffics in detailed description without differentiation: though the pile

of newspaper clippings may hold vital information, the reader has no way of playing along, determining what constitutes useful or important.

In a similarly accretive move, Miles describes venturing into the attic of his parents' house:

> There was nothing in the attic that didn't belong there. In the beam of my flashlight I saw the row of my mother's dresses and coats, suspended on hangers from a length of pipe, and covered with a sheet to keep off the dust; on the floor beside them was her old cedar chest. I saw my father's wooden filing cabinet, his framed diplomas stacked on top of it, just as they'd been brought from his office. In that cabinet lay records of the colds, cut fingers, cancers, broken bones, mumps, diphtheria, births and deaths of a large part of Mill Valley for over two generations. (102)

The contents of the attic and the appearance of Jack's newspaper clippings is reported to the reader matter-of-factly, and yet ultimately fails to offer the reader much in the way of information. Instead, it actually foils the expected reading practices of this kind of mid-century popular sf which, as Sloan notes, owes a debt to hardboiled detective fiction: he calls Miles a 'slow witted Philip Marlowe', the text an 'unintentional parody of Raymond Chandler' (Sloan 1988: 182). Finney's demand that the reader attend to the particular contents of each room generates anxiety in any kind of reader raised on a suspicious reading of the whodunit, who must believe that these details are in some way crucial to the text. Their overwhelming proliferation, however, makes it impossible to make determinations about which are more useful than others.

Literary historian Bill Brown offers us several possible ways to make sense of this objective explosion. He writes as though he has Finney's novel in mind: 'The post-war era looks like an era both overwhelmed by the proliferation of things and singularly attentive to them' (Brown 2001: 14). In thinking through the post-war obsession with things, Brown considers our relationship to things as related to but also distinct from the subject-object relationship at the heart of phenomenology. Within the phenomenological subject-object relation, objects exist only insofar as they are encountered by consciousness and put to use. For Brown, the thing offers the possibility of disruption, of a space 'outside the scene of phenomenological attention' (Brown 2001: 4). Rather than, as phenomenology is wont to do, reassert human consciousness as the sole lens through which the world is interpretable, things remind us that objects do have a claim to the real outside of human perception, and that they persist in the world even when they are not what Martin Heidegger, in his lecture 'The Thing' (1950), calls ready-to-hand, uncomplicatedly available. Although Heidegger

makes the distinction between object and thing (ready-to-hand as opposed to not), Brown takes this up and complicates it. As Brown claims, 'we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily' (4). In effect, the thing that is not useful within anthropocentric systems of capital and relation actually serves to disrupt those very systems from without by reminding us that they were already things in themselves, and will remain so, even after we have made material use of them. Brown's thing theory therefore offers an alternative to the critique of unfettered consumer culture offered by Fromm, Riesman and others. The rampant proliferation of objects leads, instead, to an ecology of things existing outside consumerist demands of usefulness and productivity.

We can see this disruption at work in the novel, both from without – as a reader – and within, as the characters struggle to manage the thingness of their world. For Sontag, 'things, objects, machinery' are imbued, in sf, with an inherent value: 'they are potent, they are what get destroyed, and they are the indispensable tools for the repulse of the alien invaders or the repair of the damaged environment' (Sontag 2009: 216). The things to which Sontag refers, however, are often singular, rare and therefore powerful – *the* weapon, *the* cure, *the* spaceship – that must be unearthed or invented. In Mill Valley, any useful object is buried under a mountain of stuff. Furthermore, the reader's inability to prioritize, diagnose or make sense of the proliferation of objects in Mill Valley's crowded houses effectively prevents us from engaging in the hermeneutics of suspicion or detection that readers may find as ready-to-hand as a carpenter finds his hammer. Without distinction between the objects with which we are confronted, each textual object becomes a textual thing, as it fails to do the proper work of allowing us to make determinations about what is or isn't important in any given scene.

Within the novel, too, Miles encounters objects that fail to work for him as intended. Towards the novel's end, Miles is trapped in his office by Mannie Kaufmann, Professor Budlong, and a motley assortment of other pod people as they wait for him to eventually succumb to sleep and his inevitable claiming by a waiting 'blank'. Miles searches in vain for a tool that he might use to defend himself against the invaders who wear the bodies of his friends:

> I opened my desk drawer; there lay prescription pads, blotters, celluloid calendar cards, paper clips, rubber bands, a broken forceps, pencils, two fountain pens, an imitation-bronze letter opener. […] There [were] rows of stainless steel forceps, scalpels, hypodermic needles, scissors, disinfectants, antiseptics […] There was the little refrigerator: serums,

> vaccines, antibiotics, and half a quart of stale ginger ale my nurse had left; […]. There wasn't much else: the office scale, my examining-table, an enameled white wall cabinet of bandages, adhesive tape, iodine, mercurochrome, merthiolate, tongue depressors; there was furniture, rugs, my desk, pictures and diplomas on the wall – there was nothing. (Finney 1978: 188)

Here the reader is walked through an excess of objective detail as Miles first contemplates and then rejects each tool in his physician's arsenal as a possible aid to resistance. The inventory of his office includes objects that, in the normal pattern of daily life, would be considered both tools and Heideggerian things. In his daily practice as a town's doctor he might find ready-to-hand 'stainless steel forceps, scalpels, hypodermic needles, scissors, disinfectants, antiseptics'. At the same time, however, his search turns up things that would be out-of-place in any circumstance: 'a broken forceps' and 'half a quart of stale ginger ale my nurse had left'. Still further, his search reveals objects that, like his fire-red convertible, are meant to signal status to the outside world in a way that simulates selfhood and replaces interiority: an 'imitation bronze letter opener' and his 'diplomas on the wall'.

Within the everyday routine of small-town life, most of these objects might go on to serve their intended purpose of disinfecting wounds, vaccinating infants, or treating infections. Each object, safely ensconced within its subject-object relation, would serve to reify human consciousness as the rational organizing principle for Miles' world. The lack of selfhood that many of the characters demonstrate across the text would never come into crisis. The arrival of the pods, however, throws these stable phenomenological relationships out of joint. The objects that Miles otherwise relates to as uncomplicated and ready-to-hand are now reduced to 'nothing', to 'useless objects'. To things.

The ease with which the pod people drift to earth and proceed to take it over indicates that *their* phenomenological interactions with the world have not been nearly so disrupted. Indeed, even as Miles looks out over a town that he quickly realizes has been fully taken over by pods, he remarks, 'It all looked so ordinary; there were red-and-white paper signs pasted on the windows of the market: advertising Niblets, round steak, bananas, and laundry soap. Varney's hardware store had one window filled with kitchen equipment: pots, pans, electric mixers' (157). These everyday objects end up performing a tool-function for the pod people: in presenting a stereotyped image of mid-century America, they obscure the invasion from the rest of the world. For Miles and the other human characters, however, they are simultaneously signifiers simultaneously of ordinariness and its lack, discomfiting when juxtaposed against the realization that Mill Valley might 'look so ordinary' but there is nothing ordinary about it,

anymore. Their presence both harkens back to a stable subject-object relation, while their displacement within this new way of being renders them thing-like.

The pod people's incursions into Mill Valley turn objects into things by virtue of the fact that they disrupt normal patterns of life, creating situations where objects normally ready-to-hand become at best useless and at worst existentially terrifying reminders of a world that, once dead, cannot be resurrected. This thing-making transformation of previously stable objects disrupts, as Brown has argued, the subject-object relation in a way that decentres human consciousness within a phenomenological world. The horror of the novel, however, comes in the realization of how easy that phenomenological disruption is. Human subjectivity is dethroned as a world-making principle when that subjectivity has already been deeply fractured and distributed across a proliferation of junk-like objects.

At the beginning of this article, I claimed that the secondary criticism was over-reliant on an allegorical reading of the text more concerned with what the pod people represent rather than what they reveal, what they *are* rather than what they *do*. In closing, I want to return to what the pod people *are*. They are nearly exact copies of mid-century American suburbanites, formed through first reading and then copying the electrical signalling and otherwise vague biological processes of the human body. They do not feel emotion and cannot reproduce; they can only take up space. They appear to be people but are in fact closer to things: a connection strengthened by the fact that in their native state they resemble grey fluff, human-made detritus. Yet, the fact they *appear* to be people could just as well be applied to the mid-century American self. If they are an allegory for anything, the body snatchers allegorise the very thing that they claim to be arrayed against.

The incursion of the potentially self-less subjectivity of the of the pod people into Mill Valley reveals how contingent and prone to disruption human subjectivity is. However, this disruption reveals that the human self in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and across the paranoid poetics of the mid-century more broadly is already deracinated and refracted through things and commodities. When we construct ourselves through objects, the only way to maintain a stable sense of self is to hope that those objects remain right where we put them, ready-to-hand.

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Ursula Le Guin: A Eulogy in Letters

Robert M. Philmus

My correspondence with Ursula Le Guin began with my soliciting her, on behalf of *Science Fiction Studies*, for a testimonial in support of an application for a Canadian government grant. (She readily obliged. Twice.) Over the next two decades, we sporadically communicated, first on matters pertaining to *SFS*, then (mostly) about some (other) projects of mine. My Le Guin file contains twenty-five documents from her, all but three of them letters (another is a post card). Apparently she either didn't mind or else tolerated my continuing to be as importunate as I was at the start.

One thing that has surprised me in perusing our correspondence was the alacrity of her responses. Cross-border mail reached its destination more quickly in the last century than it does now (which is also to say that neither of us ever used email); but even so, the dates of her letters signal that she almost always answered mine within twenty-four hours of receipt. And I suppose that that evinces her conscientiousness rather than some ability of mine to engage her. (Her son tells me that these letters are 'stylistically typical [...] formal rather than [...] familiar but typical nonetheless.')[1]

Her letters are self-revelatory in a manner consistent with the paramount achievement of *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974). In them, she doesn't just allow us to understand *what* Genly Ai and Shevek are thinking and feeling but *how.* Each is self-interrogating; their self-consciousness *as given* is roughly comparable to Hamlet's.

Ursula's letters possess the same kind of self-consciousness that her creations exhibit. But, two other qualities which are not as evident in her published work, yet which are discernible in her letters, are her modesty and self-deprecating humour.

I am of the view that many of her letters are, in themselves, notable examples of the epistolary genre. I don't know whether that judgment is accurate or even how extensive my pertinent reading is compared to others'. I leave that verdict to the reader.

Ursula thought that we'd actually met in person once. Unfortunately for me, we never did. I can't account for her mistake for certain. But I can say for sure that her letters do convey a sense of the kind of person she was: the kind we desperately need a whole lot more of.

March 4, 1986 [extract]

Dear Ursula Le Guin,

[T]he main purpose of this letter […] is to inquire whether by any chance you'd

be willing to write an obituary for Frank Herbert to be published in SFS.

I don't know how well you knew him, but I have the intuition that no one (at least in the profession) knew him particularly well. And in any event, a personal relationship (in the usual sense of those words) is not strictly necessary for writing the kind of notice appropriate for SFS (witness De Lauretis's homage to Calvino in our March issue).[2] Moreover, you came immediately to my mind because it seems to me that one of your books at least has the kind of special connection with Herbert's not shared with anyone else: I am referring to the relationship between *Dune* and *The Dispossessed*….

March 8, 1986 [extract]

Dear Robert,

I honestly cannot write about Frank Herbert for SFS. I knew him and his first wife in the superficial and affectionate way you know people whom you meet once every few years at meetings, and like. Beyond that – nothing – and I have read few of his books, and not with any […] sense of affinity. I am told that there is a likeness between *Dune* and *Left Hand* (never *Dispossessed*, as you remark) but I never could see any beyond the perception of a world as an ecosystem, then unusual in sf but commonplace by now. In any case, as I'm on this teach-and-speech trip till late April, I can't promise anybody to write anything.

March 18, 1986 [extract]

Dear Ursula,

[I]n regard to what I loosely called your 'connection' with Herbert, what I had/have in mind is Anarres' apparent basis in (and reworking of) *Dune*. That observation will figure as a kind of aside in an essay I've been working on which was (and perhaps still is) titled 'Ursula Le Guin, T.S. Eliot, and Time's Dispossession' (my uncertainty about its title is an index of how long ago I last worked on it before writer's block struck).[3] I hope you won't mind taking a look at the piece once it's done. (I trust you won't find it as painful to read as most Rich Critical Prose is – to appropriate John Berryman's sardonic phrase.) Meanwhile, however, I wouldn't mind having your thoughts about the essay's probable conclusion (which is not to say its main point or purpose): that in *The Dispossessed* you write yourself out of time and hence out of SF. My question, in other words, pertains to *Always Coming Home*, which I do not even have a copy of yet and have not seen coherently reviewed. I gather that that is a work of utopian fiction; but does it, to your mind, fall into the category of utopian fantasy or utopian SF (if, indeed, you would admit of such a distinction) [?].

April 22, 1986 [extract]

Dear Robert,

I do truly think you are mistaken in seeing any relation between *The Dispossessed* and *Dune*. I read *Dune* when I had the flu and a fever of 101° and it made only the dimmest impression upon me. You may be mistaking what Frank and I had in common as West Coast people, specifically Northwesterners. But as for intellectual and/or literary influence, none.

As for *Always Coming Home*, no, it is not properly a utopia. It has no plans or guides. It is substantially an attempt to subvert 'civilized' thinking.

April 17, 1988 [extract]

Dear Robert,

I should of course be very glad to read your paper insofar as I am glad to read any critical paper about my work (it can be a genuinely troubling experience even when the criticism is positive and perceptive – indeed, more so then than when the criticism is patronising or wrongheaded, often.) Would you tell me what kind of response you are looking for from me? It is unusual, and very pleasant indeed, to be asked for a response at all – and I feel a little floored! So anyhow, do please send the piece when you are ready to. I will be in and out of town a good deal this [*sic*] next six weeks, but will get back to you about it as soon as I can.

November 4, 1988

Dear Ursula,

I hope that it didn't seem rude of me not to have written to you earlier about the essay of mine on *The Dispossessed* that you obligingly agreed to look at.

As I believe I mentioned in a previous letter, I have had a version of that essay [...] in hand since May, and it is supposed to appear in a Macmillian volume, whose publication has evidently been delayed until mid- to late-1989. That version, however, is missing a final section. […] As it would be far too importunate to inflict two versions on you, I shall delay sending it until it is entire.

I've received [...] an advance copy of your latest volume of critical writings, and also have an announcement from its publisher saying that publication has been delayed until 'February 1988'! I assume that is an error for '1989' (?).

November 8, 1988

Dear Robert,

I'll certainly look forward to reading your essay, whenever it comes – if I can say anything helpful, I certainly will (if I can't be useful I'll try to be ornamental, as my father used to say!) – Poor Grove Press, so they have me forthcoming last February? It sounds rather science fictional, doesn't it!

November 27, 1989

Dear Ursula,

I have at last 'completed' my essay on *The Dispossessed*....

More than a year has elapsed since you kindly agreed to look at my piece, so I hope that nothing has come up in the interim to change your mind. I should, however, warn you in advance that the script is long: its 24 pages would come out to the equivalent of at least 40 book pages. On the other hand, there is no near or even fixed deadline for your reaction to it....

Realizing that I am being importunate enough in asking you to look at my pages, I had better have the consideration to remind you what I would like from you. First and foremost, I am interested in your reaction to my argument. I would also appreciate any suggestions you may be prompted to make, particularly (but not exclusively) in regard to any misstatements or outright errors of fact on my part....

Permit me also to take the occasion of this letter to inquire about the truth of the rumor that you are planning to attend the SFRA gathering in Long Beach this June. I am not usually inclined to participate in that annual event, but the prospect of seeing you there would be of itself a compelling reason for me to go.

January 27, 1990

Dear Robert,

I seized the opportunity of having a bronchial thing and having to lie about not accomplishing things – which did leave me time to read your essay with appropriate carefulness (and may I say with a great deal of interest and real pleasure). Hence I am improbably prompt, returning it!

There is one infinitesimal error of fictive fact: [...] it's Takver who makes the mobiles, not Shevek. Abbenay is misspelt on p. 14. That is the entire sum of my notes on the text – except that I checked a couple of places where I found your argument or explanation particularly satisfying.

I went through the Notes twice, the second time paying particular heed to the ones you mentioned in your letter. You'll find a couple of responses & slight disagreements or enlargements scribbled in the margins. A check means I checked it out & have only a positive response....

I don't think I will be able to come to SFRA this summer – I thought it was in August and that I'd already be in California. June would be very difficult, alas. I am very sorry; there are so many people in that group whom I'd love to re-knit with....

Well, I do thank you for the opportunity to read this essay; if more criticism were as – what shall I say – as mindful as this, it would be a good thing.

February 4, 1990

Dear Ursula,

Your letter about my essay on *The Dispossessed* was the source of considerable gratification to me. It was all the more welcome for arriving at a more-than-usually trying time. Quite apart from the perpetual and ongoing stresses of editing SFS, I am in the midst of a recurrent struggle with a certain university press over my recently-completed variorum edition of Wells's *Moreau*, and it also looks as if I may have to do battle with [those] running my department over the issue of hiring women faculty. (Four of the five men who have arrogated to themselves this decision-making power – there are no women on the Executive Committee – are either totally insensitive to the issue or outright sexist; and in practice the distinction may not contain any real difference.)

All the more depressing is the evidence that this insensitivity and sexism is not, so to speak, merely intramural. Compared to the US, Canada as a whole is politically inert, and this is also true, albeit to a (slightly) lesser extent of Québec. Even a proposed 7% federal sales tax on EVERYTHING has yet to produce anything like a massive taxpayers' revolt. It therefore strikes me as particularly ominous that the murder of 14 women engineering students occurred in this country – indeed, two miles from where I am now sitting....[4]

February 12, 1990

Dear Robert,

I'm glad my response to your essay was a grain of consolation. This doesn't seem to be an easy or profitable season for anyone I know – which is scarcely very consoling. I certainly applaud your efforts to see to it that women faculty are hired, and wish you endless reserves of strength, because the effort will be endless I fear. Insensitivity to the issue is the first ditch, in my experience. There are several more inside it, with stakes.

As for your 7% tax on everything, it sounds gloriously regressive […] but I don't know that I can criticize any kind of tax at this point. Our taxpayers revolt has succeeded wonderfully, so that California (where it began) now has decaying highways, inferior schools, and lots of starving children, just like the Third World. I don't know that it makes much difference in the long run whether you can't pay the costs of a moderately just & efficient social order, or refuse to. The result is the same, I fear.

Since Oregon has always been a Third World state, it has not made as much difference here; only we are cutting the forests faster.

Thank you very much for sending me Liz Cogell's paper. I read it with interest. I am afraid that's about all you're going to get out of me about it — I'm sorry! I don't have a set policy on replying to papers about my work, but very generally,

if there are no errors of fact, and if I find what it says to be generally acceptable, enlightening, interesting if bizarre, tolerable, or simply stupid, I make little or no response; if I find it malicious or think it was written simply to get a rise out of me, I make absolutely no response. I don't think the author can avoid the appearance of ego-serving, when talking about their own work; and this puts the critic at an enormous psychological and even intellectual advantage, as they can take refuge in 'objectivity' etc. Anyhow I think my ideas, such as they are, are far more useful when serving as part of the energy of a work of fiction.

March 23, 1990

Dear Ursula,

[I]n reply to your letter of Feb. 12th, I regret to report that my efforts to get my dept. to hire women faculty have gone for nought (not unpredictably). I had tried to get the relevant Dean to put specific pressure on the louts who empowered themselves to decide on appointments; but evidently he didn't, for a reason which I subsequently discovered: I was under the delusion that his directive that women candidates be given priority (at least in principle) sprang from sensitivity and a disposition to virtue. But something I recently read indicates that that no doubt isn't the case: namely, that there is a federal statute about gender equity (in regard to government grants), the criteria for which this university (and all others reviewed save one) failed to pass last Fall.

[A]t the risk of seeming importunate, I would like your advice on a totally different matter, but only if it doesn't involve your taking any time from something you are working on [...] I am in the process of trying to find a publisher for a variorum critical edition of Wells's *Moreau*. Your opinion as to whether such a thing is a possible commercial venture would, I'm sure, be valuable, and so would any suggestions about which trade publisher I might contact....

April 10, 1990

Dear Robert,

I write in haste from a small plateau in spacetime between Newfoundland (where we were last week) and Santa Cruz (where I will be next week). We had a stop at the Montreal airport on the way from New York to St John's, but not long enough to do anything but buy a Margaret Laurence at the bookstall…

I wish I could be useful to you re the critical edition of *Moreau*, but my ignorance of the market for such works is total. I'm sorry! I have intense & specific sympathy for your having worked under contract & then having the contract cancelled; the same thing happened to my husband years ago; that was when I first realised the incredible arrogance & stupidity that academic presses are allowed to get away with. Shortly after that I tangled with U.C. Press

over their exploitation of my mother's books [...] and since then my expectation of academic-press corruption has been very high, and seldom disappointed.

It looks as if your Mr Mulroney is trying hard to do in two years what our Mr Reagan did in eight, and he's succeeding, too, isn't he? Newfoundland was rather overrun by Bulgarians but otherwise delightful.

November 19, 1997

Dear Ursula,

My admiration for *The Dispossessed* increases as time goes by. To my mind, it's not only one of the great works of SF, but also one of the most significant books of – & produced by – the second half of the 20th century.

Just one aspect of one of the many ideas that informs it is worth more than most of those disseminated by nonfiction bestsellers – the changeability of the historical past. Living in Quebec, I'm daily made aware of how insightful that is.

I hope you won't mind my saying all this about something you wrote so many years ago...

I also hope you won't bridle at a thought that came to me as I was about to sit down to write this letter. Namely, that we really need a sequel, dealing with the 'Urrastization' of Anarres in a way that exposes what's been going on since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, so to speak. I even have a title in mind: *The Repossessed*.

When I wrote my essay on *TD*, I was convinced that in arriving at a – perhaps the – solution to the Problem of Time, you'd written yourself out of SF. And while I've since had doubts about that, I still tend toward supposing that you wrote yourself out of the kind of fiction that *TD* so stunningly exemplifies. But if in that case my suggestion of a follow-up will not be welcome at all, I nevertheless trust that the foregoing remarks won't make you feel uncomfortable.

December 1, 1997

Dear Robert:

Thank you very much for your kind and funny letter of the 19th. I think *The Repossessed* is a wonderful title and a fine idea, and I can assure you that I am quite unable to write it. I might be able to get back to Anarres in a short story, but I really seem to have no long novels left in me. Also, I am not quite sure what is happening there, in that I haven't thought much about it. My mind has been more on Orsinia. Since I wrote 'Unlocking the Air' I have had absolutely no news from that country, and it worries me. I don't know what to do about it. I can't send FAXes to Krasnoy. I guess I just must wait and listen, as usual.

Anyhow, I do appreciate your request and wish I could fulfil it.

February 22, 2001

Dear Ursula,

I'm still working on a book about SF that I may have told you about (three or more years ago). At the moment I'm embarking on the P.K. Dick chapter, wherein I'll be taking the course of greatest resistance – attempting a 'close reading' of four of his titles, including *Ubik* and *Valis* (!).

Another book of his I'll be dealing with is *High Castle*. I now think I understand what it's about – which, by that understanding, is more or less not the case with the numerous analyses that I've seen. Those, I should add, don't include anything of yours. If you have made any comment about it, I would very much appreciate knowing where I can find it. Otherwise, I'd very much like to know whether, in any sense, *MHC* entered your consciousness when you were writing *The Dispossessed*. Perhaps needless to say, I'm asking because, once I grasped what Dick is saying about the individual in relation to History, it also occurred to me that the two of you are 'working at the same place' (to [mis?] quote you), but with each of you discovering it to be an entirely different place from the other.

I imagine that you can quickly dispose of that question of mine. This will probably not be true of another, which arises from my incapacity to pinpoint why I find PKD unsympatico. (My working hypothesis is that it has to do with what I once termed his two-facedness. At the time I was referring to his double-dealings, with Lem, Suvin, Jameson, Fitting *et al.*) Should you happen to have time to share any thoughts of yours on this matter (including any disagreement with me), I would be extremely grateful for them.

March 3, 2001 [extract]

Dear Robert,

As I taught *Man in the High Castle* last year at San Jose State I hoped to find some useful lecture notes – but I don't have any. By the time we got to it, I had given up any pretense of being a professor – my group of 12 or 15 students were mostly far better educated than I – but I could facilitate their excellent discussions, and did so happily. We hassled over it for hours ('comparing and contrasting' it to other alternate histories, particularly John Kessel's 'Invaders,' and Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* also entered the field). I don't think any of us felt that we knew what it was about with any certainty at all, nor what its basic moral stance is (Julia[na] being the wild card). I do believe it's his best book, a very fine book, and a deeply disturbing one still. I look forward eagerly to reading your discussion of it. If you felt like sending me a bit of the MS please do — I might possibly have a more adequate response to it than this. Or I might not.

Man in the High Castle was not in my consciousness when I was writing *Dispossessed*. When I was writing *The Lathe of Heaven* — yes, obviously! But nobody was in my consciousness during *Dispossessed* except the Anarchist writers — and a few other utopists (most of whom served as counter-examples to what I was trying to do).

I loved Dick's books and read them all and wrote about him in praise several times, until his conversion experience and the books which followed it. I tried hard to follow them, but found them essentially arid. Some of his behavior […] had weakened my trust in his work. I tried not to let it do so, but when the work itself changed, I couldn't follow it. Nor have I ever been able to get through any of the early non-sf novels that now have many admirers.

I compared him, in the palmy days, to Borges, which is not entirely crazy; Borges too has obsessional themes, and a very tricky morality. But Borges stayed true to Borges, and I think Dick lost Dick....

March 14, 2001 [excerpt]

Dear Ursula,

The very appearance of a letter from you was gratifying...; the contents of same were downright pleasurable....

Admittedly, my pleasure in this instance had something to do with our 'working at the same place' (I hope I haven't misquoted you)….

My first reaction [to your letter] was that you hadn't answered my Question. But the next day [...] I realized that you had. The problem with Dick the author *does* come from Dick the man....

I'd better do some unpacking of that.... Let me put the point in the way I've been trying to sort it out *v-à-v. Valis*. At first I thought that Dick's madness was a rare instance of an SF writer actually falling victim to what is always a potential occupational hazard of SF-writing: believing that some alien world is real in consequence of having to imaginatively inhabit it to write about it.... But after going through a dozen or so of Dick's 1974 letters (having recently read *Valis* for the first time), it dawned on me that I had gotten things backward – which may explain why Dick never became an L. Ron Hubbard, the only comparable case I know of, and all the more closely so in view of the Van Vogt connection. I.e., Dick didn't go mad in direct consequence of writing SF, not even his peculiar SF; he went mad trying to understand his SF, with the 1971 burglary (or whatever it was) the precipitating incident....

I've never loved any of his books. (I would think we're both using the word love in its rapidly-antiquating sense.) Initially I was intrigued by some of them, esp. *High Castle* & *Ubik*, both of which (now that I imagine I understand them) I at this point also respect. Others I've outright hated, esp. *Eldritch* & *Dr*

Bloodmoney. I've not been able to bring myself to reread them to figure out exactly why. But it quite possibly has to do with something about Dick the man that may be as much news to you as it was to me – or maybe not. In reading his 1974 letters, a suspicion rose in my mind as to the authenticity – that's the right word, I think – of his self-representation as part-German. Not having any pertinent reference work at hand, I phoned Peter Fitting. He didn't know either; but he reached for the Sutin bio. – and, sure enough, Dick's German credentials are on a par with ours, in my case at least probably lesser....

[Y]ou put your students well ahead of the game by imparting the sense of not knowing what [*High Castle*] is about. The same can be said, *inter alii*, for all those books of Dick's worth attending to; but perhaps this one above all, since it is the one which gives its readers the illusion that they know what it's about – or, more exactly, understand it as 'alternate history.' [...] I made the same mistake myself, tho' luckily (for me) the closest I came to going public with it was in the classroom, and just once. When I got round to rereading the book (after a lapse of something like 20 yrs.), I chanced upon the road to understanding. The only way of reading that doesn't leave Dick's *High Castle* totally impenetrable is the one that the book's opening would dictate – i.e., it has to be read as a novel; in fact, its operation – its manner of meaning – is preternaturally close to *The Dispossessed*'s (hence my previous question – which, however, I sent to you at least two weeks before I fully realized the depth of the resemblance).

March 21, 2001

Dear Robert,

A very hasty reply – Sure I'd like to read your essay on *High Castle*. Whenever you want to send it!

No. I never flew anywhere with PKD, never was physically in his presence. I have no idea where that notion came from; it must have been someone else. The nearest I came to meeting him was when he called, on the way to Vancouver I believe, and proposed to stop off to meet me in Portland on the way to or from the meeting there. I was extremely apprehensive, mostly because people had been telling me that he was very heavily into drugs at the moment, and I dreaded it as one dreads getting trapped talking to a drunk when one's not drunk oneself. He never showed up. I believe he had some kind of anti-epiphany at that meeting, but I don't really know. – That was not the nearest I came to meeting him, to be exact. That must have been at Berkeley High School, where he was one year ahead of me, I think. It was a school of over 3000, and I was shy and knew few people. But still it seems odd that I had no recollection even of his name. There weren't that many of us oddballs; it seems as if I should have known of him, at least. I have never quite figured that out.

To believe a world one had made up actually existed would be to give up being a fiction writer. In teaching, I take absolute certainty in distinguishing imaginary worlds from real ones as a good sign that a young writer might really be a fiction writer. The wishful-thinkers can't do it. Some of them end up writing memoir, she adds nastily. But visionaries are different! PKD may have more in common with William Blake than with JRR Tolkien.... (Did Blake 'believe' in his visions?)

I never did like *Palmer Eldritch*, but re-read *Dr Bloodmoney* a year or two ago and thought it held up well. *The Galactic Pot-Healer* [*sic*] is actually a private, secret favorite, though I do think MHC his best book. I said 'loved' his novels because I no longer do. I admire some very much. I can read them with pleasure. But not with love. A sense of betrayal separates me from them now.

I meant my students had been educated in how to read critically and how to talk about it. I was educated to read French literature, fifty-odd years ago, in a totally outmoded critical school, most of which I have forgotten. They were, literally, better educated than I in what we were trying to do. They were also intelligent, enthusiastic, and light-hearted – need I add that they were self-selected? – as I was. I love to teach – now and then. Teaching is a great privilege – if you don't have to do it all the time!

April 22, 2001

Dear Robert,

Thanks for 'Time Out of Joint' – I read it with much pleasure, & some comprehension, & some incomprehension.[5] (I do not have an analytical mind, & am totally out of training at following an argument – *flabby*!) Your discussion does seem to me the first I've ever read about *High Castle* that is about the whole book – not a part or aspect of it, but all of it. Bravo!

I may well have misunderstood your use of the term Taoist. It worried me, probably wrongly, that it seemed rather like PKD's. – I was never sure what he meant by 'Taoism.' He seemed to conflate Taoism & the *I Ching* in a way that left the term Taoism almost meaningless; & he seemed to put a value judgment on the terms yin & yang, which is not (as I understand it) properly taoist at all. For example, to say Nazism 'is' yin is a peculiar, Dickian use of the word *yin*. Nazism was arguably the yangest moment of the 20th century…. Yin of course is not 'evil' nor yang 'good' – but Dick's characters quite consistently speak in those terms. Etc.

I don't see anything that I identify securely, in my own mind, with *taoist* thought in *High Castle*, except perhaps Frank's 'failure to do anything,' which could be a nice example of wu wei. I *do agree* with you that Frank is, or is at, the center of the book: which has always left me aesthetically dissatisfied with

his disappearance from the last third or so of it (I don't have the book here to check this).

I was tickled by the idea of my pursuing – Ahab-like – The Great American Novel. Of course I'd like to write a great novel, or better yet a whole slew of them – but the 'GAN' is no ambition of mine – it's somebody else's silly notion – an idiot child of The Great Artist syndrome. A society of a few hundred people in Japan could produce a *Genji,* & *Genji* is the GJN. There never was a time or place on this continent when a GAN could have been written/read. At any rate, my idea of my job as a novelist is arrogant in some respects, but it is also communitarian, even collaborative. That's one reason I felt at home with sf, I suppose.

Anyhow – I thank you for the article, which I do sorely wish I'd had last year when I was trying to 'teach' *High Castle*!.... [P]lease forgive this scrawl, I'm computerless at the beach.

January 26, 2002

Dear Ursula,

My profound apologies for taking so long to respond to your latest letter....

In at least one respect, it's just as well that I wasn't up to writing to you till now; for in rereading your letter, I realized that I'd fairly drastically misread it the first time around, when I fixated on what I'd supposed was your gentle rebuke of my having been complicitous with PKD in misconstruing Taoism. Your point about the latter I think engages something I say on p. 16 (or thereabouts …) – namely: 'the very idea that Evil's existence is delusionary, that it depends (so to speak) on a mistranslation of "yin" in its relationship to "yang," collides with those textual details concerning what the Nazis have been up to which point instead to that Eastern idea as the delusion.' You have a clearer idea than I now do as to what particular passage in *High Castle* I'm alluding to; but in so far as I'm still able to reconstructively 'decompress' what I said, it is translatable into the proposition that both you & Dick are right. I'm an ignoramus when it comes to Eastern philosophy (etc.), but possibly your difference with PKD bears some analogy to that between Lao-tse & Confucius as commentators on the *I Ching* – ?

I'd much appreciate any light you can throw on that last business. So far my efforts to find a Chinese who's even heard of the *I Ching* have been fruitless....

March 7, 2002 [extract]

Dear Robert,

This will be only a note. I am over at Cannon Beach, without any files except a packet of letters to answer, and it is, of all things on this mild rainy coast,

snowing! quite thick and heavy, so the dunes and beach are all as white as the breakers! – Oh to be Turner for a morning. It is a bit distracting. Anyhow I hardly know how to continue discussing Taoism re PKD. […] Taoism is not only […] a matter of interpreting, or how to read, the *I Ching* at all. Taoism and the *I Ching* converged, but are not interdependent. I doubt, though this I do not know as far as PKD is concerned, that either of us ever had much truck with Confucius. (I tried hard; his mind is splendid but the temperament is incompatible.) I see no evidence that PKD read Chuang Tzu, the other and equally essential text of intellectual Taoism. I have to stick to my original statement, the context of which I cannot here and now recover: but if I said PKD misunderstood the whole principle of yin and yang, taking one as Evil and the other as Good, I believe that to be so. You simply cannot understand Taoism in Christian terms of Good and Evil. It doesn't work. (I am sure the reverse is also true.)

Phil went on to have conversations with St Paul. I went on to translate Lao Tzu.

I haven't the references here, but if you are interested in getting this matter straight in your own terms, I could recommend some brief, reliable introductions to Chinese philosophy that might be helpful.

I still think 'The' Great American Novel is a silly notion. I do not think in terms of 'greatness' about my own books, or indeed about books in general, unless I am forced to by the absolute stupidity of critics when they ignore, for instance, Tolkien, and one must shout Great! Great! at them till they say what? Who? – Literature is not the Olympics. There are no gold, silver, and bronze medals. There are many more or less specious prizes. And there is good work. I have written some very good books; none of them is quite the book I hoped it would be when I began it; Virginia Woolf said the same thing; any honest artist would.

March 30, 2002

Dear Ursula,

First let me say that I look forward to receiving a copy of a poem I hope you'll write about Cannon Beach — this on the basis of 'Oh to be Turner for a morning.' (Having had aspirations, almost but not utterly extinguished, of being a poet, I pride myself in being able to recognize a good line when I see/hear it.)

As for our would-be dispute, about PKD & Taoism, I think you're absolutely right about two things. For one, I have no doubt that your understanding of Taoism (and probably just about any other subject, inc. St. Paul) is far superior to Dick's, whose 'understanding' of whatever was always, I think, quirky at best. Nor did I ever intend to suggest otherwise. By the same token, my only concern is with getting/having gotten *MHC* right; and in that regard I take you to be restating my – & its – point when you say, 'You simply cannot understand Taoism

in Christian terms of Good and Evil,' and vice-versa. I.e., that, methinks, is a concise statement of what *MHC*'s clash of Eastern & Western value-systems comes down to.

June 11, 2003 [extract]
Dear Ursula,
I've not had any response to the letter I sent you 15 mos. ago....

The speculations I engaged in on the basis of my memory of my previous letter led me to wonder whether I'd offended you by declining your generous offer to provide me with a list of books on Taoism....

As I may already have told you long ago, I loved [*The Dispossessed*] from the moment I first read it (in your typescript, which Darko Suvin lent me).... To my mind, he [Shevek] makes the book a remarkable tour de force of male impersonation. Yet I don't know of any man other than myself who thinks about himself the way Shevek does.... I'm therefore wondering whether you know any Sheveks.... (I've not read anything of Oppenheimer's, and know virtually nothing about your husband; but it won't have escaped your notice that I'm supposing that Shevek's consciousness is largely yours, not theirs.)

There's one other thing [...] that I'd like your thoughts about. It occurred to me that it might be worth saying that *High Castle* merits contrastive pairing with *The Dispossessed* in that the former is most understandable [...] only when it is read first as a novel and the latter only when it is read last as a novel, albeit with a novelistic understanding all along somewhere in one's mind. (That wording isn't felicitous, but perhaps it's good enough for you to pass judgment on the idea.)

June 16, 2003
Dear Robert,
[P]lease never take failure to reply as meaning anything but that I got so far behind with answering letters that I couldn't catch up. E-mail has helped a bit, but also added to the volume!

This is merely an apologia pro silentia sua, and a hasty response – we are going to California in a couple of days and everything is hasty at the moment – How could I be offended by your calling one of my books wise? Of course one is supposed to become ever wiser as ever older, and the implication, as you suggest, could be that I hit the wisdom summit in 1985 and have been going downhill ever since – which I think Darko [Suvin] would agree with! – but as summits don't really mean much to me, I take your statement most kindly, and thank you for it.

No, I don't know any Sheveks outside my own head. (Heads are, I believe,

less evenly gendered than we are led to believe.) Robert Oppenheimer contributed nothing but the ears, and perhaps something of the fey humor. I was a young child when he was visiting us; I didn't know him, I just saw him, heard him.

I don't really understand what you mean about reading first, or last, as a novel. To my mind this connotes some kind of separation of the aesthetic from the intellectual or the affective from the political, which surely is not what you mean. All I can think is that, as a novelist, I would like my novels to be read first AND last as novels – that's what they are….

Endnotes

[1]Email from Theodore Downes-Le Guin (July 12, 2018). I am grateful to Theo for licensing publication and also for conscientiously scrutinizing my text with an eye to improving it.

[2] While Teresa de Lauretis's obituary for Italo Calvino (SFS, 13.1: 97–8) evinces a love of as well as a familiarity with his oeuvre, apparently they never met in person (though they did exchange letters a decade before he died).

[3]I finally named my essay 'Ursula K. Le Guin and Time's Dispossession.' It can be found in Visions and Re-Visions: (Re)Constructing Science Fiction. Liverpool University Press/ University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[4]On December 6, 1989, a deranged gunman, avowedly anti-feminist, shot dead fourteen of his fellow engineering students (all of them young women) at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique. The mass murder, which remains the largest in Canadian history, led to the passage of stricter gun laws.

[5]I believe Ursula saw the penultimate version of '"Time Out of Joint": The World(s) of Philip K. Dick's The Man in the High Castle', available in Visions and (Re)visions.

Yes, But Should I Buy It?

Paul Kincaid

Years ago, an old friend told me that he liked my reviews because, even when I hated the book, I told him enough for him to know that he'd love it. I thought then, I still think, that it is the greatest compliment I could receive as a critic.

I have to confess that I wasn't deliberately writing my reviews that way. Nor have I consciously tried to do so since. And since no one has said anything even remotely similar about my reviews in the last two or three decades, I have to conclude that it was perhaps a one-off. Nevertheless, it came at an important time, when I was still struggling to work out what a review was for.

When I started writing reviews, I had only the vaguest notion of what I was doing. I read reviews for two reasons: first, to find out what new books were about; and second, to find out if I should buy any of them. Now, assuming that the reason I read A is therefore the reason that A was written, is an elementary logical fallacy; but hey, I was young. So I started out writing reviews as a way of telling people they should go out and buy this book, or, more usually, as a way of sounding a warning: avoid this book at all costs! If I didn't consistently end my reviews with the exhortation, 'buy it!', it was only because that early in my career I was seeing more books I disliked than not.

I was, and am, far from being alone in this perception. Even more experienced critics than me fall for it. When I was researching the book that I am currently writing, I came across a review in *Locus* by David Hartwell of Christopher Priest's *Fugue for a Darkening Island* which concluded: 'One of the big books to avoid this year.' And there is no shortage of reviews that begin or end with stars or thumbs up or some other visual indication of how urgently you should rush out and buy the book. I have never consciously included such decoration on any of the reviews I've written, but it is possible that editors have added them subsequently.

It didn't take long before I started to feel that the 'buy it' or 'avoid it' type review wasn't for me. There were several reasons for this.

First: I got bored. If every review is directed towards a simple thumbs-up or thumbs-down, it narrows what you can say about the book in question. Before long, you find yourself just repeating the same thing over and over again.

Second: it made reviewing into an unpaid offshoot of the publisher's marketing department. I worked in advertising, and I knew that what I did there and what I did in a review were two different things. What I wrote in a review was, or should be, or I wanted it to be, something other than sales copy. (Lately, I've seen reviewing referred to as journalism, presumably because it appears in newspapers and magazines. This is probably closer, but it's still not quite the

same thing.)

Third: it didn't work. Why would anyone listen to me, someone with no reputation, when I told them they must rush out to buy a book by someone they've never heard of, or avoid the latest novel from their favourite writer? Besides, there is no such thing as a uniform critical opinion. If I say X sucks, the next review column you read will probably say it is brilliant. As a reader, you tend to believe the review that's closest to your own feeling. So reviews don't change opinions so much as confirm them.

Now, I am not saying that there is no connection between reviewing and marketing. Back in the 1980s I reviewed a novel by the Australian writer Tim Winton for the British Council's *British Book News*. Some months later, I came across an issue of the *London Review of Books* which featured a quarter-page advertisement for a selection of recent books by Australian novelists, and the headline for the ad was a quotation from my Winton review, with my name emblazoned beside it. Similar things have happened to me again since then, but that was the first time, and it was quite a shock. So my review was used for advertising, but that isn't what the review was written for. Marketing has a symbiotic relationship with reviewing, but that isn't the primary function of the review.

Which is all well and good, but if I'm not writing reviews to say 'buy it' or 'don't buy it', what on earth am I writing reviews for?

There was a time when some people suggested that reviews were addressed to the author. I never really bought into that one. It's flattering to think that, as a critic, your job is to tell the author all the places they went wrong, but it's not a very sensible notion. For a start, the book you are reviewing is in the past as far as the author is concerned, so what you say is going to change nothing. And why should someone who has made a career out of fiction listen to someone who, in my case, has had barely a half dozen short stories published? And anyway, authors are fragile souls and a lot of them don't actually read the reviews, or at least say they don't. So, as a reviewer, you are addressing an audience of one who may not even be listening, while ignoring the audience of dozens or hundreds or even thousands who actually are reading your words. I like to think I have some basic common sense as a writer, so I am most certainly not writing my reviews for the authors.

But that still leaves the question of what I am doing when I write a review.

This is where John's remark came into the picture. There are several ways to interpret it, not all of which I am comfortable with. It assumes, for instance, that the basic function of a review is to direct the reader to buy or avoid a book; it just suggests that I had found a subtler or more inclusive way of doing that. I am flattered but uneasy with that implication. Alternatively, it suggests that I

write reviews that provide an honest account of a book with enough of the pros and cons to allow the reader to draw from it what they want. Okay, I'll take that, but it still tells me only what the end result is, at least as far as one particular reader was concerned (and let's remember that my friend knew me; there's no guarantee that another reader less familiar with my writing would draw the same conclusions). I like that as something to aim for in my reviews; but it doesn't tell me how to get there or what it is I am doing when I write a review. But it did give me something to think about.

When I write a review now, it is still as much a work in progress as the reviews I wrote thirty-odd years ago. Sometimes I think I succeed, sometimes I don't; sometimes I'm pleased with the result, sometimes I'm not, and a lot of the time I'm hovering in some indeterminate, indecisive place in-between. There are times when I read one of my reviews weeks or even months after I wrote it, when it finally appears in print, and I surprise myself, not because I have forgotten what I wrote, but because it is only this distance that allows you to see whether the shape of the review, the story it tells, works as well as you'd hoped. This indeterminacy is, I suspect, a good thing; I'm always uneasy with complacency and certainty, especially in myself.

Yet always I am trying to work out what a review is, what I am trying to do, why I am doing it.

I know what a review isn't, or what I don't want it to be. I don't want it to be sales copy, to be directed towards a simple assessment of whether the book is worth your money. But that's part of the milieu in which reviews operate, you can't ignore the purchasing advice entirely. I don't want it to be a straightforward catalogue of what's good or bad about the work, to list the author's egregious errors or celebrate their most spectacular innovations. But that is a fundamental part of making an assessment of the book, it has to be there at the core of the review even if that's not all the review is. I don't want it to be a slavish recounting of every twist and turn of the plot, because that is as boring to write as it is to read. But you need to know what is happening in the book in order to be able to make any assessment of it so, to some extent, plot has to be there.

On the other hand, I do want the review to be entertaining, for the reader to be able to derive some pleasure from my writing. But I am writing to a particular purpose on a set topic, which inevitably means there are constraints on what I say and how I say it. I do want the review to be fair, to produce evidence to support criticisms and examples to illustrate the points I wish to praise. But there is only so much you can do, you need to be judicious in selecting which evidence to cite, and this can easily come across as arbitrary and unconvincing. I do want the review to be informative, to provide as much context as possible for the reader to be able to make their own mind up. But if I cite earlier works as

something the author has ripped off, reacted against, or built upon, that earlier work may be out of print or irrelevant to today's reader. If I choose to concentrate on one aspect of the book, that may not be the one that especially interests or concerns the reader.

The thing is, you can't cover everything or do so in the way you would ordinarily choose. Every review is an arbitrary concatenation of constraints which mean that there are things you don't want that have to be there, and things you do want that have to be missed out. It is always a judgement call, and you always get it at least partly wrong.

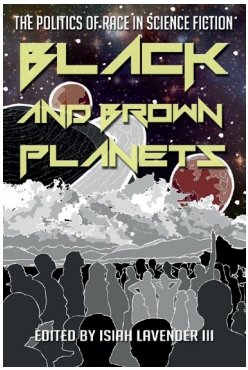
So, tentatively, I offer this way through the positives and negatives of trying to write a review, or at least *a* way that is relatively close to what I think I am doing when I write a review. I am first and foremost finding out how I respond to the book: do I like it or hate it, what is it trying to do and does it succeed? The next and most important question is: why? What is it about the book that makes me respond the way I do? What I then write is my attempt to answer those questions. I may not answer them fully; it may be that the fact that I cannot answer them is the most interesting thing about the reading experience. But what I am trying to do, as simply and as clearly and as entertainingly as it is in me to do, is explain how and why I have arrived at my answers.

I try to be impartial but I long ago gave up on the notion that a completely impersonal, objective review is possible, or even desirable. But if you explore your own responses to the book as thoroughly as possible, you are going to end up explaining most of the things that people look for in a review. You'll look at the content of the book, the quality of the writing, the context, how you place the book in relation to other works and other writers, because all of these will be what trigger your own responses to the book just as they trigger the responses of other readers. That is, at least, an approximation of what I am trying to do.

Why do I do it? I suppose, in the end, it is a process of self-exploration, a way of finding out why I have responded to a book the way I did. Writing a review becomes a habit, it's an easy way of externalizing this process of deciding why this particular book made me respond in this particular way. But even when I'm not writing a review, I find myself thinking in pretty much exactly the same way whatever the book I'm reading. As I say, it becomes a habit.

So, should you go out and buy the book? I don't know! Your tastes will not be the same as mine. But maybe, if I've done this right, you might find clues in what I write to help you decide for yourself.

Book Reviews



Isiah Lavender III, ed. *Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction* (University Press of Mississippi, 2014, 250pp, £19.50) and *Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representation of Asia in Science Fiction* (University Press of Mississippi, 2017, 267pp, £62.95)

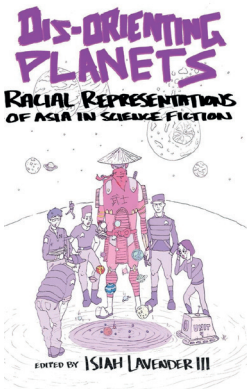
Reviewed by Kay K. Clopton (Ohio State University)

Isiah Lavender III's most recent collection of essays, *Dis-Orienting Planets*, is designed to be a sequel to *Black and Brown Planets*, published in the halcyon days of the Obama presidency. Although the latter is, in some sense, now historical, its content is perhaps even more relevant in the wake of Black Lives Matter. It also shapes how we may approach the later work.

The essays in *Black and Brown Planets* reflect the times in which they were written. The book is divided into two sections with a coda that explains the motivation for the text. The first, 'Black Planets', discusses how early Black sf handled the genius character, representations of race in *Star Trek DS9*, Octavia E. Butler, and why sf should be a pedagogical tool for black children. Lisa Yaszek's chapter replaces the figure of Thomas Edison with Benjamin Banneker, the eighteenth-century African-American astronomer and naturalist. She illustrates how the Bannekerade outlasted the Edisonade due to its adaptability for emerging notions of Afrofuturism. De Witt Douglas Kilgore argues that the *DS9* episode 'Far Beyond the Stars' (1998), by foregrounding race, not only makes possible Gene Roddenberry's view of the future but also goes beyond his imagining. Gerry Canavan, by comparing 'Far Beyond the Stars' with Samuel R. Delany's 'The Star Pit' (1967), reminds the reader that the present is still mired in racialized issues – but that this reminder can galvanize action to push beyond the seemingly possible. Lavender's chapter convincingly claims that Butler's 'The Evening and the Morning and the Night' (1987) uses the analogy of disease to explore racial segregation. Marleen Barr's recommendation for African-American children to read sf because biographical narratives are too sad seems, in retrospect, to forget that both realism and the fantastic are needed so that children can hope for a better future based upon their real-world knowledge.

The second section, 'Brown Planets', encompasses indigenous and Chicano/a concerns in sf. Grace L. Dillon's chapter analyzes Andrea Hairston's

Redwood and Wildfire (2011), looking at how narratives of indigenous magic should be considered as a form of science. Using thunder magic and reading and writing spells has its own logic that, much like western science, informs the characters and their narrative. Patrick B. Sharp continues this line of reasoning by arguing for Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1981) as a text that examines both the present dangers of the Atomic Age and indigenous practice as a science as respectable as Euro-American science. M. Elizabeth Ginway's chapter, by contrast, is a fascinating look at Brazilian eugenics in the early twentieth century. Lysa M. Rivera compares Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1993) with Ernest Hogan's *High Aztech* (1992). Taking the often bleak spaces of cyberpunk and fusing them with José Vasconcelos' concept of a mixed race as the future of society, Rivera adroitly examines how post-cyberpunk narratives are vital forms of speculation for people of colour. Matthew Goodwin examines the intersectionality of border crossing, virtual reality and labour in Guillermo Lavín's 'Reaching the Shore' (1994) and the film *Sleep Dealer* (2008) to explore the ways in which sf communicates the dangerous lives of Mexicans present and future. Malisa Kurtz discusses race and technology in Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009). Kurtz does an excellent job of not only presenting a discussion on Asians and sf, but also deftly informs us as to how the shift towards technologically formed individuals marks a return to concerns about biological determinism and race. The last two chapters are both by Edward James, including his 'Yellow, Black, Metal, and Tentacled' (1990) and a retrospective, where James talks about what he would have written differently, in particular, critiquing the 'general assumption among white SF writers' that race relations will be magically reconciled.



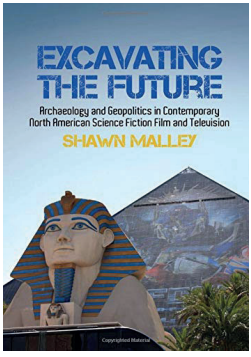
The coda reminds readers of the online discussions on race and sf that were launched in the wake of Patricia C. Wrede's *Thirteenth Child* (2009) and Lois McMaster Bujold's ill-judged attempt to defend her. Robin Anne Reid's project of quantifying the racial and ethnic makeup of responders helped to identify the sf communities that neither Bujold nor Wrede appeared to recognize. The only frustrating part is being unable to learn if either Bujold or Wrede learned anything from this experience.

Dis-Orienting Planets builds on its predecessor with a focus on Asian and Asian-American concerns. With seventeen chapters spread out over three sections, it is clear that this text had more room for growth and exploration, with varying results. The first section outlines how race operates in Chinese,

Japanese Korean and Indian sf. The four chapters speak well to their respective cases, with Stephen Hong Sohn's chapter of particular interest in terms of the instability of identity as a Korean American. Takayuki Tatsumi tends to assume that the reader has read every sf book mentioned in his chapter, although his argument about black humour is an interesting way to engage with the intersectionality of race and sf.

The second section is the strongest with all of the chapters speaking to fears of the 'Yellow Peril' and a technological form of Orientalism. While the discussion only encompasses Japanese, Chinese and Korean sf, the critique of racial stereotypes applies equally well to other countries within Asia. Haerin Shin's chapter on the film version of *Cloud Atlas* (2012) discusses mistakes in the casting as well as a loose understanding of cultural differences in having a safe space for a Korean character fully entrenched in Japanese iconography. The chaptersby Baryon Tensor Posadas and Malisa Kurtz especially delve deep into Techno-Orientalism and how the use of technology re-inscribes racialized differences.

The final section seems to be a hodgepodge of ideas, although it does indicate the diverse and dispersed trajectories that Lavender was looking to explore, and in that sense it continues the conversation begun in *Black and Brown Planets*. While the second book is more uneven in terms of its content, they are both vital texts when it comes to the subject of race and sf. The hope is that they will encourage further dialogue. Science fiction is needed now more than ever, so it behoves everyone to be aware that people of colour are actively participating within the genre, something that should not be ignored, taken for granted or (worse yet) unwanted by others.



Shawn Malley, *Excavating the Future: Archaeology and Geopolitics in Contemporary North American Science Fiction Film and Television* (Liverpool University Press, 2018, 228pp, £85)

Reviewed by Kerry Dodd (Lancaster University)

Archaeological fiction is traditionally envisaged through its now well-worn and archetypal depictions of tomb raiding and the discovery of fantastical lost worlds, revelations which seek to transpose the secrets of the past into the present. Yet the suggestion that such temporal divisions can be defined and maintained becomes itself highly contestable; for vitally these excavations have a distinctly

lasting impact upon the future, indeed as culture becomes fascinated with the prospective excavation of 'ancient curses' unleashed upon modernity. The confluence of these temporal states undermines attempts to empirically delineate historical moments, as even the concept of 'the past' itself becomes complicated by the juxtaposition of excavating ancient cultures which seem more at home in our projections of the far future. These tales offer a vibrant and rich resource of archaeological imaginings whose propensity for social critique has so often been overlooked. It is precisely this remarkable gap in scholarship that Shawn Malley's *Excavating the Future* seeks to explore, mediated through a compelling and attentive investigation of science fiction film and television (SFFTV) that examines the interconnections between futuristic archaeology and geopolitical concerns.

Implementing a 'post-processual' or 'interpretive archaeology' approach, Malley outlines how excavational theory may offer an understanding of 'how artefactual remains articulate cognitive and symbolic spheres of human action by considering how ideology operated in the production of material culture in the past and, moreover, in the hermeneutics of archaeological discourse in the present'. Outlining how material culture and geopolitics are intrinsically entwined, *Excavating the Future* offers a focused interrogation of how topics such as ancient astronaut theories are representative of the cultural narratives produced to compute the voracious unknowability of the world. Opening with a streamlined but authoritative study of archaeological theory, Malley provides a finely tuned introduction that will be informative for excavational initiates while insightful in its specifics for experts.

The first exhumation in *Excavating the Future* explores a range of North American geopolitical anxieties informed by hostilities in the Middle East at the turn of the millennium. Malley's coining of 'military archaeology' is an insightful contribution to the field which pinpoints the conflation of excavational process and militaristic intervention. Charting the narrative trope of imperialistic western forces invading countries to depose a tyrannical dictator, free the enslaved populace and challenge the authenticity of their cultural history, Malley's examination of *Manticore* (2005), *Stargate* (1994) / *Stargate SG-1* (1997–2007), and *Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009) cogently underscores the influence and proliferation of Western geopolitical responses – particularly concerning 9/11 and the Iraq War – within archaeological framed narratives. Malley poignantly notes how these films present the North American military as protectors of Middle Eastern culture, even while they are so often complicit within the destruction of the very history they claim to be protecting – an assertion which overtly recalls the destruction and looting of the National Museum of Iraq in 2003. The multi-faceted discussion of artefact provenance, cultural ownership

and appropriation are therefore poignant concerns which Malley deftly situates in this fraught context. By examining how these narratives further entrench a neo-colonial perspective, the author offers an emphatic framework through which these archaeological texts become emblematic of post-9/11 anxieties towards weapons of mass destruction, the war on terror and border security. For indeed the cover itself, which superimposes a billboard for *Transformers 2* onto the façade of the Luxor Hotel pyramid in Las Vegas, is an apt and eerie encapsulation of the cultural appropriation which is only being ingrained further. Malley chillingly reminds the reader that these futuristic narratives may, perhaps, be merely the spectral presences of the colonial past.

These musings on cultural heritage and imperialistic revisioning develop convincingly into the second section. Exploring the voracity of alien astronaut and secret histories – crystallized by Erich von Däniken's *Chariot of the Gods?* (1968) – Malley eloquently outlines how the proliferation of texts which seek to uncover something 'more' behind myth and theology (of which *Stargate* is the perfect example) simultaneously endangers the stripping of a culture's history, namely through the suggestion that they could not feasibly be the progenitors of such marvels. The appropriation of visual and audio effects reminiscent of sf B-movies within the pseudo-documentary series *Ancient Aliens*, which discusses these historical revisionary notions as factually plausible, bestows possible credence and narrative weight to these apparent excavations. Demonstrating an astute textual selection, Malley's engagement with *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008) correctly identifies that this is an Indy updated to the twenty-first century. Including locations emblematic of conspiracy theories (Area 51) and Cold War anxieties (Nevada Test Site), Malley compellingly argues that this apt framework is one which is consciously aware of its colonial roots and is instead a quest to put the artefact *back*. Pinpointing both the atomic bomb and crystal skull as cultural artefacts relating to anxieties towards fascism, brainwashing and self-annihilation, this fascinating reading nonetheless fails to appreciate or engage with the materiality of the discussed objects. For while both are undeniably reflective of nuclear geopolitical anxieties, there is little engagement here outside of anthropocentrism; no appreciation of the non-human dimensions implicit within the production of material culture. This is not a criticism of Malley's analysis of the texts themselves, which is compelling throughout, but instead gestures to the rich potential of archaeological narratives to engage with non-human theory that is only loosely addressed. Arguably, to read the crystal skull without deconstructing its materiality merely re-inscribes anthropocentric thought.

Malley's final section is orientated around artificial intelligence as an exploration of the interstices between technology and archaeology. As the author

is keen to point out, the historical marriage between human and tool suggests that 'we have always been cyborgs', an echo of Donna Haraway which is strikingly visualized in the opening segment of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Although another ripe area for a deeper interrogation of the non-human, Malley provides a productive investigation into technological entities which seek their own origin, one later extrapolated to the very engineering of humanity itself. The cyborg body is a cogent site in which the author challenges the separation of subject and object to create (in perhaps a very overt reference to Fredric Jameson) alternate archaeologies of the future which disrupts 'histories of our current geopolitical investments in apocalyptic teleology and technology'. Provenance is a crucial aspect of artefact identity and one which Malley convincingly parallels with two texts that seek to discover humanity's beginnings: *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–9) and *Prometheus* (2012). Recalling Cold War anxieties inscribed upon the atomic blast in *Crystal Skull*, Malley highlights how these narratives reflect upon the ecopolitical concerns that have so far brought the human race to this current geological precipice. The search for Earth in *Battlestar* thus acts as a temporal confluence, in which the excavation of our altered planet may be cast in a science fiction narrative, but is unmistakably recognizable in our current recognition of impending collapse. Malley deftly asserts an insightful critique of contemporary geopolitics, yet beneath this there is an all too brief engagement with xeno-materiality. For example, while there is a detailed exploration of the implications of android identities and genetic bio-engineering in *Prometheus*, there is little engagement with the spectacle or wonder in which the alien ruin and its culture are framed. Similar to *Crystal Skull*, Malley's approach is one which reads each text as its own cultural object but in so doing opens up a much wider discussion of how we conceptualize the artefacts themselves.

Archaeological fiction, while traditionally associated with the past, continuously retains its cultural relevance. As Malley points out, just as SFFTV responded to the Iraq War and looting of the Iraq Museum, so too will it in time turn to ISIS and the destruction of the Triumphal Arch of Septimius Severus in 2015. As the author notes, it is clear that this group equally understands the cultural significance of artefact iconography and the narratives they represent. *Excavating the Future* is a vital and compelling piece of scholarship, one which foregrounds the imaginative potential of archaeological narratives as a medium which not only reflects upon the current moment, but equally remains consistently relevant in its engagement with material futurities.

Diana Adesola Mafe, *Where No Black Woman Has Gone Before: Subversive Portrayals in Speculative Film and TV* (University of Texas Press, 2018, 173pp, £21.99)

Reviewed by Sonya Dyer (Middlesex University)

Mafe's book focuses upon the representation of Black female characters in contemporary sf film and TV. In her search for representative case studies, Mafe selects lead characters from four films (*28 Days Later* (2002), *Children of Men* (2006), *Alien vs Predator* (2004) and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012)), and two characters from the TV series, *Firefly* (2002–3) and the New *Doctor Who* (2005–). More recent examples, such as Michael Burnham in *Star Trek: Discovery* (2018–) and Naomi Nagata in season three of *The Expanse* (2015–), would make for further interesting analysis.

I must confess a particular joy in encountering an analysis of Alexa Woods from *Alien vs Predator*, one of the most significant Black women in sf film because of her competence, tenacity, intelligence and survival. All of these attributes are rarely afforded to a single Black (let alone female) character. *Alien vs Predator* is by no means a good film, but it is important, both in the nature of the lead character, and in the open casting process that led to Sanaa Lathan getting the role. Typical of the bias that Mafe seeks to counter, there are far worse male-centred genre films that have received considerably more attention.

Characteristic of Mafe's scepticism towards the endurance of racial and sexual stereotypes is her analysis of the exotic fecundity represented by the character Kee in *Children of Men*. An African refugee and the world's first pregnant woman in eighteen years, Kee embodies both the Oriental and sexual fascination of the white, Western, male gaze. Mafe contextualizes her analysis by offering the necessary suspicion and acute understanding of the ways in which Black female bodies have been historically objectified within colonial and scientific discourse.

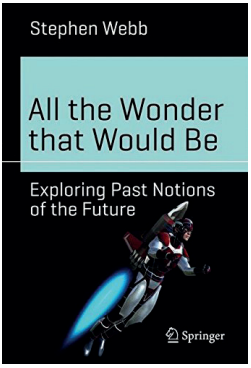
The most insightful of the film chapters is on *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, which features an even rarer occurrence – a heroic Black child. Mafe cleverly extrapolates the ways in which Hushpuppy appropriates the attributes of heroism and agency, more usually assigned to a white male lead. A key aspect of Hushpuppy's subversion is the extent to which a fluid and complex relationship with gender expectations informs her development. As with *Alien vs Predator*, the actress, Quvenzhané Wallis, was cast as the result of a racially

open process.

Mafe's stated aim to situate the characters chosen as case studies 'as crucial and empowered figures' is in some respects made more difficult by the format of the book. By structuring it as a series of close readings of individual films, Mafe's scholarship sometimes ends up foregrounding the films themselves rather than the characters. This is particularly so as the film sections rely on the psychoanalytical discourse through which so much feminist film criticism has arisen. Where her scholarship reads most excitingly is in the brief chapter on the televisual characters, Martha Jones in *Doctor Who* and Zoë Washburne in *Firefly*. Here Mafe's combination of fandom, scholarly research and experience of the particular agony of being a Black female viewer comes into sharp focus.

Nonetheless, what's missing is a dialectical analysis of her chosen characters. It would have been interesting to get into greater depth on the ways in which portrayals of Black women in speculative narratives have developed in relation to each other, contemporary social anxieties and social changes. Different forms of visibility have an effect on the bottom line for media and entertainment companies, as well as on the imagination of the general public/s. No mention, for example, is made of the possible connection between the experience of having eight years of a Black First Lady in the White House and the subsequent increase in Black female leads on television.

Mafe clearly holds a vast amount of knowledge, but the book's format does not really allow her thesis to sing. A greater emphasis on character would also require the inclusion of more minor or ensemble characters, rather than the (unfortunately and outrageously) small number of leads. Yet, there are other leads that Mafe could have looked at – Halle Berry's traumatized astronaut in the ambitious although confusingly written *Extant* (2014–5) or the queer, working class Bill Potts (Pearl Mackie*)* in *Doctor Who*. Mafe does, however, illustrate effectively the extra work that reading sf film and television with an oppositional gaze requires – the exquisite pain of Black fandom.



Stephen Webb, *All the Wonder that Would Be: Exploring Past Notions of the Future* (Springer, 2017, 344pp, £19.99)

Reviewed by Veronika Kratz (Carleton University)

Focusing on sf written before 1985, Webb explores the ideas and science of humanity's future which had been explored similarly by so many authors by this time that certain tropes had become hallmarks of the genre.

Aliens, anti-gravity, space travel and robots all form a part of this fictional history Webb investigates. He sets out to answer why the predictions of sf haven't come to pass, while his scientific explanations also hint at the possible futures suggested by new developments in science and technology.

Webb's focus on the way that sf authors share ideas and concepts, building on them across stories and time, helps to set it apart from other sf histories. In looking at the futures of sf, Webb is also able to focus on some of the core tropes that have carried across authors and decades, providing a useful look at the categorizations that make sf recognizable by placing it within the purview of the future.

All the Wonder that Would Be is especially useful in its historicizing of ideas. Webb describes, for example, not only when antigravity came into sf, but why its appearance in Percy Greg's novel *Across the Zodiac* (1880) is symptomatic of a world before rocket technology. For Greg and his contemporaries, the question of how a ship might be propelled through space couldn't be answered with the now-classic sf image of the rocket ship, and the alteration of another physical force, in this case gravity, was his creative solution. Webb's text is useful for portraying the emergence of sf tropes as a product of their time.

Webb also tracks these ideas as they have developed with and from modern science. This duality makes the book a good resource for revealing the prominent texts surrounding, say, time travel in sf, while also providing a comprehensive discussion of the science behind and (due to sf's influence on real world science) in front of these sf tropes. His scientific discussion is similarly historicized such that readers can understand the story of time travel within scientific debate, which allows Webb to connect the scientific and historical moment to the publication of certain stories. It is particularly interesting when these two discussions combine through figures, like Robert Forward, who were authors and scientists at the same time, interacting in both worlds.

This kind of entanglement between the scientific and the fictional happens throughout the book, providing a keen reminder of the interrelationships between science and sf. Webb takes every chance to remind the reader of sf's influences on science too. He highlights scientist/writer figures like Forward, or Isaac Asimov, as well as fans of the genre who became scientists, like Carl Sagan and Webb himself. These two aspects of the book are in constant conversation with one another.

The main limitations of the text arise from its timescale, which Webb is very open about, since it suits his own expertise. Nevertheless, Webb discusses the latest discoveries in physics and chemistry next to older sf works, which sometimes begs the question to what degree current authors engage with science. Webb's text gives us no answers to this question outside of a short

epilogue that discusses some newer trends in the last thirty-plus years of the genre. The cut-off date of 1985 does feel somewhat halting, and this book will be most useful for those whose interest lies in sf developments pre-1985. However, Webb's text could easily and usefully be applied to later periods of sf, or other subgenres outside of hard sf, which is another of Webb's self-imposed limitations.

Webb's limitation to hard sf again follows his own familiarities in the genre, and he also tends to lean towards the sciences closest to his own expertise in physics. Most of the book considers ideas within the scientific contexts of physics and engineering, while other sciences like biology and ecology aren't as well represented. However, this limitation also allows Webb to play to his strengths. Webb makes an interesting point, for example, of distinguishing those technologies and ideas that prove relevant outside of fiction as those which were scalable. The tropes and ideas which have become a part of the future envisioned by sf are largely those technologies that were financially and intellectually suited to continued growth. Webb returns to this idea at the end of his book to explain why so much of the Golden Age imagination of the future has proved incorrect. According to Webb, it was an inadequate understanding of technologies that scale, like integrated circuits, as opposed to rocket technology. Overall, despite its limitations, Webb's method demonstrates the usefulness of maintaining a historicist background when dealing with popular tropes that have been defined and redefined by countless authors.

While scalability is an interesting solution to his initial questioning of sf's failed futures, it is the structure and thorough research of Webb's text that are most intriguing for further study. The set of tropes Webb discusses remain powerful influences on the genre today, so his more historical discussions aren't irrelevant to contemporary studies. Rather, *All the Wonders that Would Be* reminds us that each of these tropes and categories has a story and a history of its own, which needs to be considered in scholarly research to build on our own understandings of science fiction's past and futures.

Mark Blacklock, *The Emergence of the Fourth Dimension: Higher Spatial Thinking in the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford University Press, 2018, 256pp, £55)
Elizabeth L. Throesch, *Before Einstein: The Fourth Dimension in Fin-de-Siècle Literature and Culture* (Anthem, 2017, 222pp, £70)

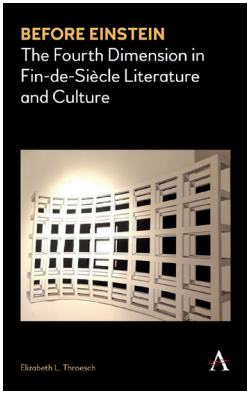
Reviewed by Paul March-Russell (University of Kent)

Robert Heinlein's 'And He Built a Crooked House' (1940), part comic fantasy, part cosmic horror, describes the construction of a life-size tesseract, a four-dimensional hypercube. Although the term is used loosely by writers as diverse as Alex Garland and Madeleine L'Engle, Heinlein's usage directly refers to the hyperspatial thinking of C.H. Hinton, a writer of interest to sf not least because of the title of his most famous book, *Scientific Romances* (1886). Hinton's popularization of higher dimensional mathematics counterpoints other theories in the period, derived from geology, biology and anthropology, which questioned an anthropocentric view of the universe. As such, these seemingly esoteric ideas from maths and physics fed into the creation of new ways of seeing humanity's relationship to the cosmos.

For thirty-five years, the go-to reference for understanding how the visual arts were transformed by thinkers like Hinton was Linda Dalrymple Henderson's magisterial study, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (1983). Now, within a year of one another, two further studies have been added that extend this line of influence to the role of literature within the same period. Although both complement one another, they take significantly different approaches to the same topic – and often the same authors. Consequently, both are invaluable in their contrasting ways to readers interested in how late Victorian physics came to influence both modernist and popular fiction. As such, both authors also build upon the pioneering work of cultural historians of science, amongst them Gillian Beer, Christopher Herbert and Alice Jenkins. (They also cite one another.)

Elizabeth Throesch's study, derived from her PhD thesis but also a series of articles including her 2004 prize-winning essay in *Foundation*, is the more traditional lit-crit of the two. The book is divided into two parts, the first of which focuses specifically upon Hinton. In the opening chapter, Throesch sets Hinton into context by looking, firstly, at how the certainties of Euclidean geometry came under scrutiny from mathematicians such as C.F. Gauss and Hermann von Helmholtz, and secondly, the formative influences upon Hinton of his father, James, a metaphysician and friend of John Ruskin, Hinton's tutor at Oxford. Of particular importance is Throesch's argument that Hinton drew directly upon Ruskin's ideas of the imagination: the desire to both possess and transcend the material object. Hinton's traversal of art and mathematics counterpointed both the scientific naturalism of figures such as J.J. Sylvester and the analogous play of novels such as Edwin Abbott's *Flatland* (1884). The next two chapters focus respectively upon the composition of *Scientific Romances* and two lesser-known works, *Stella* and *An Unfinished Communication* (both 1895). The former positions *Scientific Romances* in relation to other discourses of the period: abstraction, thermodynamics and epistemological uncertainty. The latter

develops Hinton's hyperspatial philosophy into an engagement with gender issues. *Stella*, a tale of invisibility that predates H.G. Wells, disappears its protagonist's physical form so as to prepare her for eternity in a four-dimensional reality. *An Unfinished Communication* engages with Nietzschean notions of self-transcendence and eternal recurrence, in which a feminized Nature is ultimately revealed to be a void: an abyss within the (masculine) powers of expression. Although Throesch responds positively to Hinton's use of female figures, his emphasis upon the unknowability of women echoes similar statements in the work of male contemporaries, most notably Sigmund Freud, as well as New Woman writers such as George Egerton.



The second half of the book offers three responses to Hinton's work. These include the correspondence between Hinton and the philosopher William James and, more indirectly, the fiction of William's brother, Henry. Of most relevance for sf readers, though, is the chapter on Wells. Throesch suggests that, in writing *The Time Machine* (1895), Wells would have already been acquainted with Hinton's thesis, but she also tends to overstate the latter's influence, rendering what is original in Wells as only an effect of Hinton's work. In particular, whereas Hinton regards the fourth dimension as a hyperspace that exists above and beyond our apprehension of three-dimensional space, Wells' Time Traveller explicitly argues that the fourth dimension is not another space but time itself. Although, as Throesch rightly states, there are points of similarity between Hinton and Wells, it is this distinction that separates Wells' sf from other hyperspatial theories and which prefigures Albert Einstein's work on space-time. Throesch's primary focus, however, is *The Invisible Man* (1897) which she compares with Hinton's *Stella* and, which she argues, offers an emasculation of Griffin's male sexual identity through the act of becoming invisible. This act Throesch also associates with the uncanny and Wilhelm Röntgen's recent discovery of X-Rays. The narrative disruption by these framing devices which, for Virginia Woolf, produced a sense of incompleteness is read instead as a call to Wells' readers to achieve a higher consciousness. Whilst, in *The Invisible Man*, Throesch sees these techniques as prefiguring similar ideas in cubism, almost inevitably she concludes her chapter with *Boon* (1915): Wells' most caustic denunciation of the interiorized spaces favoured by his sometime friend, Henry James.

By contrast, Mark Blacklock takes a cultural historical approach to the topic, in which Throesch's book effectively becomes only one part of a much larger

narrative. Although Throesch makes reference to poststructural and postmodern theorists, such as Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida, of the two, it is Blacklock's study which is the more theoretically sophisticated. Whilst he openly acknowledges the influence of his PhD supervisors, Steve Connor and Roger Luckhurst, Blacklock's methodology is most influenced by cultural historians such as Bruno Latour and Mary Poovey. Following Latour, talk of the fourth dimension is, for Blacklock, a 'knot' – an entanglement of competing and overlapping discourses – which, once pulled at, reveals the social, gendered and technological spaces that, for Poovey, constitute the human subject. Whereas Throesch closely examines Hinton's influence upon late Victorian fiction, Blacklock focuses on the idea of the fourth dimension so as to disentangle the discursive frames that shape our understanding of the *fin de siècle*.

Like Throesch, Blacklock begins with J.J. Sylvester's 1869 address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, but in analysing Sylvester's text travels back to Immanuel Kant's conception of space as, on the one hand, inherently three-dimensional but, on the other hand, subject to individual experience with the possibility of higher dimensions. Blacklock then travels forwards, citing many of the mathematicians highlighted by Throesch, but also the rediscovery in 1881 by the Austrian philosopher, Robert Zimmermann, of Henry More's seventeenth-century notion of 'spissitude', an early mystical conception of hyperspace. Again, like Throesch, Blacklock pays attention to the issue of analogy but, whereas Throesch sees analogy as generating an interplay between mathematics and fiction, Blacklock views analogy and, in particular, the generative effects of misreading as producing slippages between mathematics and other kinds of cultural discourse.

This slippage forms, in chapter two, an interaction between mathematical theory and mysticism, in particular, J.C.F. Zöllner's patronage of the medium Henry Slade. Whereas other members of the scientific community sought to distance themselves from what they viewed as the chicanery of Slade's séances, Zöllner's advocacy of Slade in terms of hyperspatial theory drew support not only from scientists interested in psychical research, such as William Crookes, but also founding members of the British Theosophical Society, such as C.C. Massey, Slade's defence lawyer at his subsequent trial. Massey, furthermore, edited and translated Zöllner's work, such that Zöllner was (alongside Hinton) one of the most frequently cited authorities on hyperspatial mathematics.

Having demonstrated the blurred boundaries between science and mysticism in chapter two, Blacklock next turns to a use of analogy more in keeping with Throesch's study, and a detailed account of Abbott's *Flatland*. Blacklock reviews both contemporaneous and more recent responses to the novel, concluding

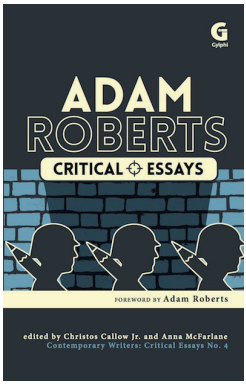
that an approach more in keeping with sf criticism, which emphasizes the ludic over the satirical aspects of the novel, is more appropriate. To substantiate this point, Blacklock not only takes to task critics who overemphasize the earlier parts of the novel but also lists a series of playful precursors from Erasmus Darwin to Lewis Carroll. Blacklock focuses on the second half of the novel, 'Other Worlds', examining how Abbott foregrounds the idea of analogy so that the novel draws attention to its own fictiveness – an analogue in itself of the many worlds that surround both reader and text. This 'other-worlding' of the novel not only, as Blacklock notes, indirectly comments on the contemporaneous 'art of fiction' debate between Walter Besant and Henry James but also contributes to *Flatland*'s multivalency – its endless interpretability not least, as Blacklock shows in the next chapter, by C.H. Hinton.

Chapter four, then, most dovetails with Throesch's study. Like Throesch, Blacklock emphasizes the influence of Hinton's father but does so primarily in order to enumerate the wide cultural network that the Hintons were part of, and the connections between the son's mathematical theory and his father's metaphysical beliefs. Blacklock pays especial attention to the eclectic list of works sold by Hinton's publisher, Swan Sonnenschein, and to his acknowledgement of Abbott's *Flatland*. Unlike Throesch, Blacklock gives much more space to Hinton's *A New Era of Thought* (1888) and to the proposed educational programme for preparing his readers for a four-dimensional consciousness, including the construction of the tesseract. Whilst Blacklock compares Hinton's system with other historical manifestoes of education, and sees in the making of the hypercube another kind of Latourian discursive knot, Blacklock foregrounds the mystical aspects that Throesch tends to leave in the margins. This leads into chapter five's discussion of the Theosophical Society, looking closely at figures such as Madame Blavatsky, Edward Carpenter and W.T. Stead, and the version of hyperspace (out of Zöllner) that featured in their writings but which also complemented the transcendent aspects of Hinton's thesis.

The final chapter offers a taxonomy of how *fin-de-siècle* fictions, most of which would come under the umbrella term of 'fantastika', mediated this new hyperspatial reality that (following Isobel Armstrong) contrasted with the Kantian spaces that dominate in mid-century realist texts. Blacklock's taxonomy includes mirrors, portals, bodies, possessions, form, fear and empire, whilst his range of examples come from such authors as Algernon Blackwood, Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, George du Maurier, George Griffith, William Hope Hodgson, George MacDonald and H.G. Wells. The one wrinkle is that Blacklock also includes the work of US-based authors such as Ambrose Bierce, Mary Wilkins Freeman and H.P. Lovecraft. Although the critical literature that Blacklock surveys would have been disseminated to the US, to introduce US-

based writers without a sense of their own cultural and historical contexts into a study that is predominantly British slightly jars. It does so because it is the one time that Blacklock is anything less than specific.

Whilst Blacklock is the more wide-ranging, Throesch is the more concentrated. To choose between them is a fool's errand. Instead, they have jointly asserted that hyperspatial theories are another key factor, alongside Social Darwinism, thermodynamics and machine technology, for understanding the scientific basis of *fin-de-siècle* hopes and anxieties. In doing so, they have also shown that the study of popular fiction, such as scientific romance, is equally integral alongside the works of aesthetes, naturalists and impressionists. For readers engaged in the late nineteenth century, and the emergence of both modernist and middlebrow cultures, Blacklock and Throesch are essential authors to read.



Christos Callow Jr. and Anna McFarlane, eds. *Adam Roberts: Critical Essays* (Gylphi, 2016, 237pp, £17.99)

Reviewed by Kevin Power (Trinity College Dublin)

To call Adam Roberts one of contemporary sf's most important *thinkers* is probably uncontroversial – he has made substantial contributions to genre history and scholarship, producing monographs as well as histories, and publishing abundant criticism in a panoply of venues, both academic and otherwise. But to call Roberts one of contemporary sf's most important *writers* might require some argument. His novels are not bestsellers. His showing on award ballots has been intermittent. He has attracted little in the way of formal criticism. Since the publication of *Salt* (2000), Roberts's sf has tended to provide a relatively small coterie of admirers with a range of austere pleasures. His importance to sf, in other words, is not a given. This is why the appearance of this book is to be welcomed – if not, to some, a surprise. Across ten essays and an introduction, the collection mounts a sustained argument in favour of Roberts' pre-eminence as a shaper of new-model fictions.

The chief reflection provoked by these pages is that Roberts' work expands the remit of sf – frequently, and often erroneously, described as 'a literature of ideas' – to include the history of ideas as such. Thus the sf *données* of Roberts' work are as likely to come from the fields of aesthetics, ethics, politics and history as they are from the sciences, hard or soft. To take one example: *The Thing Itself* (2015) treats Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy in the

way that a more traditional sf writer might treat Newtonian physics. This focus on ideas, broadly construed, places Roberts outside the range of the genre's classically materialist interests. Callow and McFarlane, in their percipient introduction, invoke Mikhail Bakhtin (a tutelary presence in several essays here) when they praise Roberts' 'polyphony' – his restless switching between modes and genres, his multivalent intertextual structures. This polyphony, the editors note, 'makes [Roberts'] work difficult to survey'. And indeed, none of the essays that follow attempt anything like a holistic reading of the Roberts corpus. The contributors instead scrutinize individual novels (often illuminatingly paired), or chart recurring cruxes: the alienating protagonists, the satirical assaults on systems of belief and 'the impact' (as Callow and McFarlane put it) 'that material conditions have on human philosophy'.

The opening essay, Farah Mendlesohn's 'The Disassociated Hero', wittily proposes that Roberts' protagonists are generally 'diagnosable with one of the non-treatable personality disorders – to wit, sociopathy, disassociation, or narcissism'. Deploying her remarkable gifts as a formalist critic, Mendlesohn teases a range of satisfying insights from this conceit – for instance, why is Roberts so wedded to the picaresque mode? 'The picaresque, in its structure – always going forward, never looking back – is itself a sociopathic form'. Similarly, Mendlesohn is able to relate Roberts' use of sociopathic protagonists to his evolving critique of genre itself. Jack Glass, in the novel that bears his name, escapes from his prison asteroid through an act of gruesome violence, here reread as a classic gesture of science-fiction *tekhne*: 'Jac succeeds because he follows the rules of genre', Mendlesohn writes, 'and in doing so reveals that the genre as a whole is sociopathic to the core'. (Mendlesohn refrains from pointing out that the first section of *Jack Glass* rewrites that classic of sociopathic sf, Tom Godwin's 'The Cold Equations' (1954), but the intertext might be fruitfully pursued.)

Michelle Yost examines depictions of religious and political extremism in *Salt*, *The Snow* (2004) and *Land of the Headless* (2007), and suggests that these books might usefully be understood as examples of Menippean satire (in which aesthetic interest derives not from the clash of characters, but the interplay of opposing ideas). Noting that all three novels test their characters with desert settings, Yost reads the Robertsian desert as, paradoxically, fertile ground for the kind of heavily polarized thought experiments that have marked his fiction since the beginning. Finally, Yost usefully invokes ideas about Menippean satire articulated by Bakhtin and by Northrop Frye to read Roberts as a Voltairean ironist, re-inscribing contemporary political deformations in an sf context, and thereby disclosing their absurdity.

In one of the most useful essays in the book, Niall Harrison collates

reviews of *The Snow, Gradisil* (2006) and *Yellow Blue Tibia* (2009), with the aim of studying 'how the science fiction field handles idiosyncrasy'. Harrison identifies a clear transatlantic divide in the reception of Roberts' sf – as he notes, among Roberts' novels only *Gradisil* has found a US publisher – and locates the reasons for Roberts' relative lack of commercial success in his covertly antagonistic relationship with the sf megatext. As Harrison observes, since Roberts so profoundly interrogates and subverts some of the central assumptions of Golden Age sf, reviewers have often suggested that Roberts' sf is 'narrow' or 'flawed'. As Harrison wryly notes, critical descriptions of *Yellow Blue Tibia* as 'fun', 'engaging' and 'hilarious' are 'almost unheard-of descriptions for a Roberts novel'.

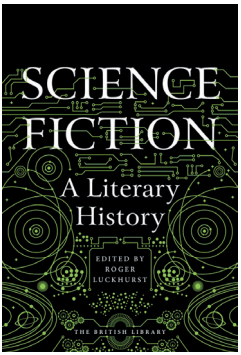
McFarlane offers a lucid reading of *Jack Glass* in parallel with one of its key intertexts, Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy (1951-3). She contrasts the positivist assumptions underwriting Hari Seldon's science of psychohistory with the post-Chaos Theory of *Jack Glass*, which recognizes 'history as a chaotic system'. Catherine Parry reads *By Light Alone* (2011) though an ecocritical lens finding, in this 'rather unlikeable and unsettling novel', both clear Homeric echoes and a concern with 'the forms of the stories – SF and otherwise – that we are currently telling ourselves'. In a stringently focused reading, Parry casts light on one of Roberts' most rebarbative books which – with its open structure, its eerily passive protagonist (the depressive George) and its estranging construction of the poor as 'a gargantuan polluting body' – asserts a 'deliberate fucked-upness' as a means of problematizing the twin poles of 'consumption-driven and all-consuming pleasure seeking' and 'passive, pleasureless nonconsumption'.

Thomas Wellman looks at *New Model Army* (2010) and asks to what extent the text 'works as an allegory of European-style democracy'. For Wellman, the novel 'unites two of science fiction's key functions, allegory and literary thought experiment, in a commentary on democracy as it is found in Europe today'. As an exposition of one of Roberts' most overtly political books, this essay is alert, perceptive and strongly argued – noting, for instance, the text's refusal to move identifiably between scenes of war and scenes of peace: 'These fast-paced changes between rest and battle make, at best, for combat and non-combat sentences, but not entire scenes'. This is the sort of close reading that enriches our experience of a given text; like the other essays in the collection, Wellman's is an exemplary piece of criticism.

Rather less formally couched – but equally prismatic - are two consecutive essays that take some entertaining liberties with the po-faced conventions of academic scholarship in a distinctly Robertsian way. Paul Graham Raven purports to describe a lost web page containing an impressionistic 'cut-up' response to *New Model Army* by one 'Graeme P. Crowe' (a Crowe who is

certainly not, an endnote assures us, also a Raven). Andrew M. Butler's typically witty, insightful and synoptic 'Splinter Swiftly' comes closer than any other piece in the book to providing an overview of Roberts' entire career – the deliberately arch subtitle invites us to ponder 'the hermeneuting parallax of Adam Roberts's generic authorship'. For Butler, Roberts is 'an author who hardly repeats himself – but who does repeat the work of others', and who 'might be on the boundaries of the genre or central to defining it'.

The final two essays, by Glyn Morgan and Paul March-Russell, share a heading: 'Intertextual Networks'. In readings of *Swiftly* (2007) and *Yellow Blue Tibia* (Morgan) and *Jack Glass* (March-Russell), these pieces articulate the insight that informs almost all of the scholarship so impressively assembled here: that Roberts is the kind of writer who belongs to the late history of his genre; that his work is impossible to understand without reference to that which has gone before. Taken as a whole, *Adam Roberts: Critical Essays* is an indispensable contribution to our understanding of a multivalent body of work. With luck, it will inaugurate an enduring body of Roberts scholarship.



Roger Luckhurst, ed. *Science Fiction: A Literary History* (The British Library, 2017, 256pp, £20)

Reviewed by David Seed (University of Liverpool)

In his 2005 study of science fiction Roger Luckhurst defined the genre as a 'literature of technologically saturated societies' and the present volume broadly follows this same approach. We are offered eight chapters, each focusing on a particular theme, period or aspect of sf. Thus, although plenty of big names feature in the discussions, *Science Fiction: A Literary History*'s strength lies in the many connections suggested between writers and their cultural contexts. First in the sequence, Arthur Evans considers how heliocentrism and voyages of exploration helped shape narratives, building up to the broad polarized opposition between holistic and analytical approaches to Nature exemplified in *Frankenstein* (1818) and the fiction of Jules Verne. Luckhurst next homes in on the surge of literary production made possible at the end of the nineteenth century by an explosion of popular print. Here a number of further strengths to this collection emerge. Firstly, Luckhurst draws our attention to neglected figures like Charles Howard Hinton (an important influence on Wells) and Marie Corelli. In the process he argues against any hard and fast separation of sf from the Gothic, among other genres. Indeed, one of the main themes of the whole collection is that

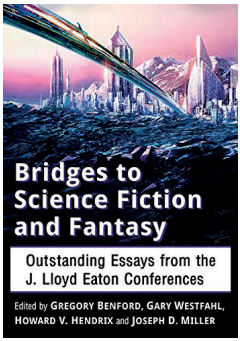
sf is a diverse mode, constantly moving across generic boundaries. It is also a strikingly ambivalent mode, as Luckhurst shows, in including fiction following a grand narrative of progress being offset by 'fantasies of decline and fall'.

Utopias make up a familiar sub-set of sf and Caroline Edwards addresses these, taking her material from the first half of the twentieth century and her bearings from H.G. Wells to consider how the utopias operate as a mode of social criticism. Predictably, figures like Charlotte Perkins Gilman show up here, but a particularly valuable section of Edwards' discussion focuses on African-American utopias like Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood* (1903) and W.E.B. Du Bois' 1920 story 'The Comet'. Race, specifically eugenics, also features in Edwards' account of the debate over fascism in the 1930s. This same period is the subject of Mark Bould's attempt to redress a neglect in histories of sf that traces through the interwar years the rise of pulp and finally the emergence of a new generation of writers rising to fame after World War II. He demonstrates how this fiction engaged with central issues of the period like race, colonialism and fascism. Bould explains how the pattern of colonial adventures from the previous century was transposed into a whole series of planetary romances, which he then connects with the Weird narratives of H.P. Lovecraft and others. Once again, neglected writers like Nat Schachner are rescued from obscurity, but Bould also argues forcefully against the exclusion of the Weird by critics like Darko Suvin, who saw it as incompatible with a rationalist agenda. On the contrary, Bould declares, 'even such signature forms of 1930s pulp SF as the planetary romance and space opera are frequently under the influence of the weird'.

Melissa Kurtz opens the post-War sections of this volume by surveying the two decades following 1945. She follows Edward James in stressing how a boom period of magazine and book publishing gave US material dominance of the world market and briefly considers a number of characteristics of the period, such as the emergence of 'Hard SF', where supposed scientific accuracy might be offset by social conservatism. The rather dispersed contents of this chapter, which includes nuclear fiction and 'Women's SF', contrasts with Rob Latham's discussion of the New Wave, which stresses the changes to the publishing infrastructure as one factor hitherto under-rated. The decline in magazine publishing correspondingly reduced the role of editors and Latham rightly points out that a generational factor played itself out in the controversy over *New Worlds* and related fiction. Apart from sf authors engaging in a debate over the nature of sf, he could also have considered how his two key exemplars – J.G. Ballard and Harlan Ellison – branched out into other media with their film scripts, montages and exhibitions, among others. Sherryl Vint picks up on the New Wave to extend the discussion onwards beyond the 1980s, which she

describes pithily as ‘a time of the big’. She reads the closing decades of the twentieth century as a period of rediscovery shown in a resurgence of utopian sf. One of her prime examples here is Kim Stanley Robinson’s Mars trilogy, with its complex blending of ecological and historical concerns, another area being second-wave feminist sf by Joan Slonczewski, Marge Piercy and related figures. In the course of discussing the corporate futures of cyberpunk, Vint tacitly draws our attention to another facet which runs throughout the whole collection, namely sf’s recurring re-branding of itself. Labelling like ‘Mundane SF’ or ‘New Weird’ has become an extension of the fiction itself in its constant revision of local genres and subject areas. For instance, however strongly the New Wave might have challenged the scientific presumptions of hard sf, the latter tradition persists in the fiction of Greg Egan. Gerry Canavan concludes this volume with a discussion of twenty-first century sf, which insists on its own provisional nature and which strikes a balance between old and new. When he declares that ‘we live in science-fictional times’, few would dispute this, but it would have been helpful to get some pointers as to how sf managed to achieve such cultural centrality. In the course of his discussion Canavan cites Michael Chabon, who has repeatedly moved in and out of sf through ironic pastiche; Paul Auster, who has more often been placed in a context of existential absurdism; and Jeff VanderMeer, frequently linked to the New Weird. In a sense, the very inclusion of such figures supports Canavan’s argument that we are living in a time of shifting paradigms.

This volume describes itself as ‘A Literary History’, but it is also constructed as a guide to the interested reader. Each chapter concludes with a bibliography of references followed by a brief list of ‘What to Read Next’. Finally, supplementing the printed text we are given a generous selection of graphics – illustrations and cover images from the late nineteenth century to the present. These supply a parallel visual history to the volume and further increase its already impressive breadth.



Gregory Benford, Gary Westfahl, Howard V. Hendrix and Joseph D. Miller, eds. *Bridges to Science Fiction and Fantasy* (McFarland, 2018, 263pp, £47.50)

Reviewed by Jaime Wright (University of Edinburgh)

This edited volume is both a tribute to the University of California, Riverside for launching the Eaton Conference in 1979 and a fruitful contribution to sf scholarship.

Reflecting the spirit of the conferences, this volume is both enlightening and entertaining, as it seeks to build bridges between different disciplines and communities. While twenty-one of the conference proceedings have previously been published, this volume brings together outstanding essays from all of the conferences.

The essays are arranged in chronological order so that we can observe the evolution of sf criticism over the years. The editors include afterwords to most of the essays which helpfully provide further insight into critical developments. (Indeed, so enlightening are these afterwords that it is disappointing when an essay is not followed by one.) Also included within the volume is the Eaton Roll of Honour, which includes every conference participant and contributor to the Eaton volumes. For those wishing to use the book as a research tool, a cumulative bibliography and index are included at the end.

The first two essays come from the original conference. Patrick Parrinder examines sf as a form of epic because it deals with future or alternate history. Stephen Potts, focusing on Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), considers the limits of empiricism in relation to unknown or non-human phenomena. The following essay, Eric Rabkin's 'The Descent of Fantasy', concludes that fantasies express and satisfy an aesthetic urge inherited biologically within our struggle to survive. Vivian Sobchack's 'The Virginity of Astronauts' has a biological theme too, insofar as it explores the displacement of female sexuality in sf films. Sobchack argues that technological man seeks to penetrate the natural world and create without the aid of women.

The next two essays are by sf practitioners. David Brin contemplates the finiteness of the Possible and the limits that this imposes upon the writing of hard sf. Gregory Benford examines the challenge of presenting the truly alien. Benford's afterword explores how his argument was later used for scientific purposes in the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, reminding us that 'literary ideas can have scientific consequences'. John Huntington meanwhile argues that the imagined 'friendly alien' is oxymoronic, for the apparent friendliness of such a being is derived from what is already familiar rather than the genuinely alien. Poul Anderson also considers the role of the alien via the importance of physical setting in sf and the biological implications that this has for the imagining of extraterrrestial life.

Two essays are included from the 1989 Eaton Conference. Robert Crossley contemplates sf as a form of museology and illustrates his argument with examples of museums drawn from sf. Joseph Miller explores the power of neologism, seldom-used language, and deliberate poverty of detail to distance the reader and convincingly portray the exotic. Also concerned with style and content, Howard Hendrix enlighteningly compares *Omni* with traditional pulp

sf in order to explore the alterations made by *Omni* in an effort to appeal to a mass-culture, upscale American audience.

Two essays from the 1991 conference are included in the volume. Gary Westfahl playfully creates a menu from various sf stories, arguing that the food available in these imagined futures reflects the tasteless, textureless, monotonous food found within hospitals, suggesting that the vision of the future is increasingly carceral. Paul Alkon argues that Jonathan Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' (1729) and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) provide necessary paradigms for establishing a semiotics of cannibalism, ultimately arguing that 'we love to hate cannibals and hate to love them'.

The volume includes three 1992 contributions. Fredric Jameson uses George Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* (1922) to explore the political implications of longevity and immortality. N. Katherine Hayles reveals how the option of mortality precipitates further life changes. Drawing on the work of William Gibson, Hayles argues that immortality has changed from becoming 'like the gods' to becoming immaterial. Such superficial immortality, however, is literalized in ways that still necessitate physicality. Frank McConnell explores sf's attempt to escape death despite the fact that all stories demand closure and, thus, the presence of death.

Marleen Barr presents a feisty response to criticism of her book, *Feminist Fabulation* (1992), as well as a reaction to Carolyn Heilbrun's essay 'Why I Don't Read Science Fiction'. Tom Shippey discusses sf's relationship toward the literary canon, arguing that, whilst sf may be marginalized within literary academia, it continues to flourish within society as a whole. As an example of sf's wider appeal, Danièle Chatelain and George Slusser explore the cultural attitude toward the technology of expansion expressed in French comics. The authors expose the dualism of youth and age that governs the two-cultures gap in contemporary French culture. Kirk Hampton and Carol MacKay celebrate the influential sf artwork of Richard Powers, arguing that Powers' imagery takes sf enthusiasts further into the ineffable, beyond the limits of storytelling. H. Bruce Franklin examines sf's exploration of disease and medicine, including that of the blundering beginnings of male-dominated, western science. The final essay by Carl Freedman reviews the conflict between C.P. Snow and F.R. Leavis, in contrast with science-fictional works that establish connections between the two cultures of art and science.

Bridges to Science Fiction and Fantasy contains many enriching and entertaining insights. As someone interested in the religious within sf, I particularly appreciated the essays by McConnell and Potts that exploring God, the unknown and death. It was also helpful to see engagement with different media, such as magazine publication (Hendrix), comics (Chatelain and Slusser)

and artwork (Hampton and MacKay). The editors are to be commended on their choice of essays. As a research resource, the volume could have been enhanced by including the theme for each Eaton Conference. Nevertheless, the book aspires to, and succeeds in, being a one-stop resource that also reflects the wealth of resources to be found in the Eaton Collection itself. Overall, this volume is recommended for readers wanting an overview of the Eaton Conferences or sf criticism in general.

Nancy H. Ross, ed. *Speculative Japan 4: 'Pearls for Mia' and Other Tales* (Kurodahan Press, 2018, 272pp, £10)

Reviewed by Rachel Cordasco

Thanks to such publishers as Kurodahan, Haikasoru, Vertical and University of Minnesota Press, finding excellent Japanese sf in translation is actually pretty easy. Kurodahan, in particular, has promoted a wide variety of award-winning Japanese sf through its *Speculative Japan* series. Each collection showcases the apparent ease with which Japanese sf authors mine the genre, and the talent of the translators who render these stories in English so beautifully that readers would never know they were translations at all.

As is the nature of short story collections, though, not everything will appeal to every reader. I found myself uninspired by some of the earlier selections, but increasingly invested in the book as I jumped from a story about *yōkai*-borgs to one about semi-organic, conscious buildings and furniture. Artificially intelligent research stations, dimension-jumping ninjas, hundred-eyed goblins: there's something here for everyone.

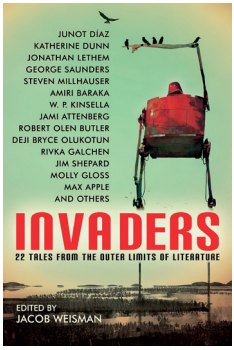
Even if you have just a passing knowledge of Japanese culture and history, you'll be able to appreciate the stories that draw upon ancient folklore and traditions in order to explore technological and scientific questions. Asamatsu Ken's 'Dark Birth – Shining Death', translated by Tyran Grillo, seamlessly weaves together the story of a ninja from medieval Japan and multiverse theory. Kobayashi Yasumi explores in 'Prototype No. 3', translated by Nora Stevens Heath, the attempt by scientists to harness the power of *yōkai* (supernatural monsters, spirits or demons), only for the most powerful of these beings to help itself to humanity's most advanced technology. In perhaps my favourite story in the collection, Ueda Sayuri's lyrical, dreamlike 'Vermillion' (translated by Jim Hubbert), a little girl is kidnapped by a goblin woman riding a flaming

wheel. When her guardian secures a hundred eyed Searcher to locate the child, the latter demands years of the man's life in exchange for her services. What unfolds is a story about a town inundated with goblins who have been drawn to the humans conducting quasi-ethical, bizarre physiological experiments on themselves in the name of progress. One of the collection's longer pieces, 'Vermillion' is a gem.

Yamada Masaki takes us from goblins to zombies in the chilling 'Matsui Seimon On the Case' (translated by Kevin Steinbach), in which an early-nineteenth-century samurai is tasked with exorcising a town from the undead with the help of another young man who has the power to dispel curses. Ultimately, the two samurai discover that they face an even more powerful foe... The story is saturated with details from Japanese history, as Steinbach explains in a series of endnotes. With stories like these, it's not surprising that Yamada Masaki, Ueda Sayuri and Asamatsu Ken also have novel-length sf available in English.

The two stories that are the most science-fictional – Hori Akira's 'Encounters on the Solar Wind' (translated by Daniel Huddleston) and Azuma Hiroki's 'The Fish in Chryse' (translated by Ginny Tapley Takemori) – are excellent examples of well-plotted, believable far-future tales of love, space exploration and humanity's complicated relationship with technology. 'Encounters' begins with the premise that a version of a person's consciousness can be successfully uploaded to a computer. From there, Hori takes the reader on an adventure across the galaxy, as a surveyor normally tasked with looking for signs of ancient civilizations on far-flung planets is ordered to check on the Olivia-2 research station and its strange reports of voices in the galactic void. Azuma's story, by contrast, takes place much closer to home, in a web of tension connecting Earth, Mars and various colonies. Against this backdrop, a boy falls in love with an older girl, the two bonding over their shared disgust with the hyper-virtual world in which they're expected to participate.

Mixed in with these stories of far-future space-travel and supernatural creatures are brilliant shorter works of Lovecraftian horror, bioshock, speculative police procedural, and several other pieces that explore the nature of time, perception, consciousness, and evil. Makino Osamu's 'Dancing Babylon', in particular, made me think about another recent, and brilliant, work of Japanese biohorror – *Sisyphean* by Dempow Torishima, translated by Daniel Huddleston – that raises ethical and scientific questions about bioengineering and genetic manipulation. Edward Lipsett has done a fine job in selecting these tales, and the translators should be lauded for their excellent work. Without them, Anglophone readers would never have had the privilege of reading the best sf Japan has to offer.



Jacob Weisman, ed. *Invaders: 22 Tales from the Outer Limits of Literature* (Tachyon, 2016, 382 pp, £11.99)

Reviewed by Peter Sands (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)

Jacob Weisman's *Invaders* is organized around 'writers who refuse to limit their ability to tell a good story because of arbitrary restrictions of genre'. I might quibble with Weisman's next sentence, which maintains a distinction between 'literature and science fiction', but I am not disappointed at all by this fine collection of slipstream fiction. Some are recognizably and squarely in the science-fictional or fantastic vein; one or two, such as Jim Shepard's enigmatic 'Minotaur', resist categorization. But most of the stories address themselves more directly to human relationships than to technologies, aliens or other strictly science-fictional tropes, even while presenting to the widest possible audience forms of science fictionality.

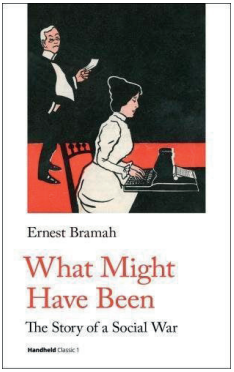
Only four tales in the book were originally published last century. The rest are twenty-first century contributions recognizable in tone and style to readers of literary magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *Tin House*. Some of the writers, such as Jonathan Lethem, George Saunders and Junot Díaz, are at least marginally connected to sf. A few, such as W.P. Kinsella and Amiri Baraka, are not generally thought of as sf writers, although Baraka wrote several stories in the same fictional world as his contribution here. Bringing together varied styles and affinities in this manner raises the risk of hodge-podgery, but instead the collection is a delightfully curated book that would be at home in the classroom, on a nightstand or as a gift for that relative who dismisses genre writing. Rather than calling out stories I found less appealing or even questionably science-fictional, I'll focus here on a few that rewarded my own sensibilities.

Ben Loory's whimsical 'The Squid Who Fell in Love with the Sun' (2013), is a delightful parable about non-human consciousness, persistence, serendipity and even utopianism. Robert Olen Butler's 'Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover' (1996) is an amusing tale of missed chances and the dangers of parochialism when confronted with – literally – the opportunities afforded by the wider universe. Katherine Dunn's 'Near-Flesh' (1991) explores the psychopathology of the users of sex robots and the dangers of being incapable of loving oneself. Julia Elliott's 'LIMBs' takes on the unintended consequences of technologies and medicines restoring cognitive and movement abilities to dementia patients, with a neat twist celebrating freedom and complicated relationships. Deji Bryce

Olukotun's 'We Are the Olfanauts' (2015) explores social media that uses the sense of smell as much or more than sight or sound, but its true import is in the subtle exploration of the vestiges of colonialism in near-future Nigeria. Steven Millhauser's 'A Precursor of the Cinema' (2004) is a faux-biographical account of a fictional artist in which new ways of seeing imply new ways of being. Jami Attenberg's 'In the Bushes' (2007) meditates upon the lost romance of car backseats in a post-petroleum world. Kinsella's delightful first-contact story, 'Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross are Somewhat Exaggerated' (2002) is set against a baseball backdrop but manages to steal its way into a nice bit of *X-Files*-style paranoia. Another first-contact story, Miollu Gloss' 'Lambing Season' (2002) is beautifully sad in its portrayal of the narrator's transformation and connection with a dog-like alien species.

Many of the stories are trifles but not trifling. If slipstream fiction is difficult to define, and if definitions can include venue of original publication and aesthetic qualities or a sense of taste, then most of these are definitely on the literary side of the aisle, but no serious reader could also ignore their science-fictional or fantastic qualities. Perhaps, though, something might be said of the ways the stories use their science-fictional settings to focus less on the transformative effects of ideas or technologies and more on more mundane elements germane to literary fiction. For instance, in Chris Tarry's 'Topics in Advanced Rocketry' (2013), a family is set to be the first to travel to space, as commercial and public space travel becomes a reality. But the story is so much not about that. Even the accoutrements of space travel are literally stage dressing; the story is instead about family dynamics and the exploration of adolescent sexuality. If the story addresses technological change, then it does so by arguing that such change has minimal impact on the core dynamics of human relationships. Or the story is just not that interested in space travel. Readers will have to judge that for themselves, which is perhaps the greatest value of this and similar collections: providing examples for testing readers' own responses to literary fictions in genre settings.

The history of science fiction is filled with literary or mainstream or popular or canonical writers who at some time also wrote in veins we now categorize as genre fiction. And the writers of genre fiction have always counted among their number writers with designs on – or pretensions to – literary greatness. Categories that make shelving and marketing easier ought not to determine worth or pleasure, something this collection reminds us of again and again, making it well worth our time.



Ernest Bramah, *What Might Have Been: The Story of a Social War* (Handheld Press, 2017, £13)

Reviewed by Harry Wood (King's College London)

The general election of 1906, in which the Liberal Party won a landslide, triggered a great deal of navel gazing for Conservative commentators in Britain. The landslide had been further increased by twenty-four Lib-Lab members, Labour candidates who had benefitted from Liberal withdrawals in their respective constituencies. This was seen by the defeated Conservatives as a potentially dangerous alliance. Though the Liberals had arguably won a strong mandate independent of their Lib-Lab colleagues, and entirely separate from the twenty-nine non-pact Labour members, accusations of political extremism dogged the Liberal administrations in the run-up to 1914.

First published in 1907, Ernest Bramah's novel responds to these growing anxieties over social change and the threat of political radicalism. Better known for adventure and detective fiction, Bramah was a journalist and writer who worked for a time as secretary to Jerome K. Jerome. As Jeremy Hawthorn notes in his detailed introduction to the new edition, the reactionary quality of *What Might Have Been* was a something of a contrast to Bramah's typical fiction. Though praising the novel as one of 'rare literary distinction', the *Graphic* noted that it covered 'morals and lessons […] of acute and far-reaching controversy'. The novel can be approached as a prominent example of Edwardian red scare fiction, alongside more lurid narratives such as Horace Newte's *The Master Beast* (1907) and the anonymous *Red England* (1909).

What Might Have Been offers a cautionary tale of socialism in practice, identifying franchise reform as the thin edge of a dangerous political wedge. The major drawback of mass participation democracy, suggests Bramah's narrator, is that it allows elections to be decided by 'a class which, while educated to the extent of a little reading and a little writing, was practically illiterate in thought, in experience, and in discrimination'. The novel sees a coalition of Labour and Socialist members returned to government in a near-future general election. Buoyed by a commanding majority and the support of powerful trade unions, the administration embarks on a series of radical reforms, including huge defence spending cuts, major tax increases and an amusing 'rationalization' of postal addresses. This experiment in progressive politics is clearly doomed to failure and Bramah revels in a series of critical salvos. Efforts at wealth redistribution are dismissed, for example, as akin to administering justice 'on the principle

of knocking out one eye in all the sound because a number of people were unfortunately born or fallen blind'. The novel sees Britain brought to the brink of political collapse thanks to a combination of 'Conservative ineptitude, Radical pusillanimity, Labour selfishness, and Socialistic tyranny'.

Salvation eventually appears in the form of the Unity League: part pressure group, part paramilitary organization. Established by former cabinet minister Sir John Hampden and his assistant George Salt, the organization develops into a powerful fifth column, undermining the efforts of Government through a damaging boycott of coal. While the eponymous social war never quite erupts, the Unity League appears as a government-in-waiting, and its varied techniques of agitation fatally undermine the socialist administration. Accepting the resignation of the Prime Minister and his cabinet, the novel ends with Hampden introducing a highly reactionary political programme: 'a social autocracy imposing our wishes – as we believe for the public good – on the country'.

Despite advocating a series of controversial political positions, *What Might Have Been* is an enjoyable novel that represents one of the better literary efforts in this sub-genre of popular fiction. Bramah writes with humour and a good degree of irony, and his troubling politics are tempered in part by an absurdist, satirical style. Aspects of the novel, such as its criticism of mass circulation newspapers and the advertising industry, seem to presage the interwar cynicism of George Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936). Yet, in other areas the work feels rushed and ill-considered, such as the perfunctory treatment of heavier-than-air flight. Bramah's preface outlines the concept of 'the Collateral Period', an alternate or parallel timeline used to frame the prophetic events of the novel. Unfortunately, this idea is not explored in any depth and seems to function as an authorial safety net. *What Might Have Been,* Bramah informs the reader, 'makes no attempt to penetrate oracularly into the future, nor does it involve the portrayal of any phases of actual existence either in the present or in the past'. Such a narration, the preface concludes, 'cannot possibly be based upon any misconception in its plan, or be held guilty of any discrepancy in its details'. Though this stance is taken, no doubt, in a jocular spirit of self-abasement, the concept of the Collateral Period is the one unique element of the novel that sadly ends before it truly begins.

Caught between a range of sub-genres and *causes célèbres, What Might Have Been* is a curious novel that certainly deserves reconsideration. Despite providing a cutting and pessimistic assessment of the socio-political climate in Edwardian Britain, and offering a chilling vision of near-civil war, Bramah's work nonetheless manages to strike a welcome satirical tone. Perhaps most valuably, the novel highlights the huge weight of opposition that faced Liberal plans for welfare reform. Though Bramah's vision may now appear sensationalist, such

civil disobedience and organized resistance was not beyond the realms of possibility.

Jóhann Jóhannsson, *Last and First Men* (London Symphony Orchestra, Barbican Hall, 1 December 2018)

Reviewed by Rob Mayo (University of Bristol)

Better known as a composer and sound consultant for filmmakers such as Darren Aronofsky, Panos Cosmatos and, most particularly, Denis Villeneuve, Jóhann Jóhannsson was inspired to direct his own film by Jan Kempenaers' photography book, *Spomeniks* (2010), which depicts the eponymous war monuments built in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Jóhannsson's black and white footage of these relics – ghosts, Mark Fisher might say, of a lost future – is accompanied not only by Jóhannsson's score but also by a narrative adapted by Jóhannsson and José Enrique Macián from the final chapters of Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930), depicting the final evolutionary stage of humankind as the sun expands and engulfs the solar system, and voiced by the otherworldly Tilda Swinton.

Premiered at the Manchester International Festival in July 2017, a second UK performance was arranged at the Barbican Hall with the London Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Jóhannsson's compatriot, Daníel Bjarnason. Jóhannsson's accidental death last February, though, gave this performance added poignancy; his pre-recorded keyboard parts accompanied the LSO. Jóhannsson's ghostly presence added to the elegiac tone of both the film and Stapledon's apocalyptic narrative. The fictional last men respond to their impending doom in ways that range from bacchanalian, nihilistic orgies to the formation of a 'fellowship of the condemned', who pool their knowledge to launch the seeds of organic life to another system – an intergalactic Hail Mary which testifies to the indomitable will to life. Although Jóhannsson's death certainly cast a shadow over the performance, it was also hard not to think of our own impending ecological catastrophe.

Jóhannsson's exploration of Stapledon's themes consists of three distinct but complementary elements: the film footage, the narration and the orchestral score. Andrew Male, writing in the programme, describes the score as 'weightless' and 'in harmony with both [the film footage and narration] but never overwhelming either'. While this is generally apt, many memorable moments demonstrate Jóhannsson's experimental credentials: in a crescendo near the film's denouement, the double bassists play swift and erratic scales which create a revving effect; earlier the orchestra's percussionists produce

an insectile chittering by rapidly beating the edges of their great drums. The ethereal, wordless vocals of Else Torp and Kate Macoboy call to mind the alien burble of Jóhannsson's score for *Arrival* (2016).

The visual component of the piece, in contrast, is entirely serene. Covering the history of tens of thousands of years in just seventy minutes might seem like a break-neck pace, but the footage conveyed something of the celestial sweep of Stapledon's story through a minimalist cinematography of slow zooms and pans. Some shots are so static that they initially appear to be photographs, as in Kempenaers' original book. The film, though, is far from drab, making effective use of the contrast between the bright white sky and the stark grey of its subjects. No suggestion of nearby inhabitants is given at any point, enhancing the strangeness of the memorials, and even making the sky and landscape seem alien. Slowly, shifts in the film emerge: an artificial pond is shown and, increasingly, more foliage creeps into the previously barren images; later, as disaster befalls the last men, smoke or mist wisps across the monuments and the surrounding landscape. Although light on elements and entirely void of special effects, it calls to mind many other science fiction films: the achingly slow reveal of a monument against the white sky in the film's opening shots recall the monoliths in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968); several shots from beneath overhanging monuments suggest the gravity-defying spaceships explored in *Arrival*; the near-motionless footage and black fadeouts between shots – along with the theme of post-apocalyptic communication between past and future – recall *La Jetée* (1962); one monument which Jóhannsson returns to repeatedly bears a passing resemblance to Pixar's *WALL·E* (2008).

Lastly, there is the voice of Swinton, although recognition is also due to Stuart Bailes' lighting design, which adds a dynamic connection between the screen and the performers, and powerfully emphasizes the moment at which Swinton's narrator addresses her audience by lighting the hall. Jóhannssen is quoted as saying that he chose Swinton because he 'wanted it to be read like someone reading from a manual [...] like a strange academic lecture'. Swinton's voice is ideal in this regard, commanding the audience's attention without being so warm and recognizable that the listener might forget that these are the dying words of a distant future race. Like the film footage and the orchestral performance, the narration is not a constant presence, and while there is always *something* commanding the audience's attention from the first shots to the final dimming of the lights, the periodic disappearances of each major element of the performance is another powerful component. One might be focused entirely on a gentle stir of strings shortly before needing to simultaneously parse Swinton's narration and decipher what is slowly being brought into vision on the screen. The effect is something like the unmoored feeling of sensory deprivation. As with

the iconography of the ruin, the effect is to cause the mind to drift, to speculate or meditate, to pause and linger, and then to catch oneself in introspection; to pick up the thread again from Swinton's narration.

There is no sign at the time of writing that this performance will be repeated, or if the score and/or film might be packaged for commercial release. A CD or DVD would undoubtedly lose a great deal of the live performance's power, but I would relish the chance to pore over its many details again. Jóhannsson expressed hope that *Last and First Men* might be 'the kind of piece that will live on in many different incarnations', and while this may seem hubristic, it is certainly to be hoped that his masterful approach to Stapledon's story proves inspirational.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