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From Science Fiction to Science Fictioning (or, What is the Traction of Science Fiction on the Real?)

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Introduction

The following essay explores the different kinds of traction Science Fiction (SF) might have on the real, and, in particular, attempts to define a kind of art practice that is less 'about' the future than an instantiation – or performance – of it. I begin by setting up the general problematic through a commentary on Raymond Williams's writings on utopia and SF (alongside some brief remarks about Fredric Jameson's idea of SF as an 'archaeology of the future'). I then go on (in section 2) to look at Quentin Meillassoux's concept of a more radical 'extro-science fiction' – or fictions about worlds in which science is impossible – and, following this, an idea (missing in Meillassoux) that formal experimentation (and especially the break with typical syntax) might operate to present these other space-times. Section 3 of my essay looks to Afrofuturism (especially as outlined by Kodwo Eshun) – and in particular 'sonic fictions', but also the more general idea of alienation as somehow enabling – in order to extract further resources to build a concept of what I call 'science fictioning' (again, when this is understood as work that is not just about another world, but of it). In the fourth and final section of my essay I extend my concept of science fictioning to take into account a kind of performative writing – of derivatives and other 'financial instruments' – which involve a different, but in some ways very similar take on fiction's traction on the future (a recent essay by Suhail Malik is my guide here). My essay concludes with two case studies of science fictioning: the film *Centre Jenny* by the artist Ryan Trecartin (that pertains especially to section 4) and the experimental SF 'novel' *Cyberpositive* by the cyber-collective o[rphan] d[rift>] (that pertains more to section 2).

1. Science Fiction and Utopia

The Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams provides a compelling entry point for thinking the relations between fiction and the future. In his essay on 'Utopia and Science Fiction' he lays out a matrix of different narrative content for both the genres of his essay's title (including within the former dystopic literature): 1. The positing of a paradise and/or hell; 2. The externally altered world; 3. The willed transformation; and 4. Technological transformation (Williams 1978). For Williams, the first of these, typically found in 'fantasy' literature (and in which the place is more determinate than the means of getting there), is predominantly a form of magical or religious thinking.

In terms of Williams' other more well known matrix (of the temporal make-up of the present) this tends to utilise archaic forms that are, as it were, already incorporated within the dominant culture (although it is worth noting the very real possibility of residual culture – that might offer an alternative or even an opposition to the dominant – within this genre).¹ The second category is also of less interest to Williams amounting, as it does, to the positing of a transformation not caused by human actors (for example, by a natural catastrophe). Indeed, as a Marxist, it is especially the third category that Williams is interested in, but, in terms of cultural diagnosis, it is also the fine line between the third and the fourth that commands his attention.

The interest in willed transformation, which, for Williams, is a characteristic of properly utopian fictions, is then that it attends to human agency. In such fictions the future is not simply portrayed as the result of technological development, at least when this is thought of as somehow divorced from human sociality. Indeed, for Williams, humanity is the only real historical actor as it were (and, as such, also the real pro-genitor of technological development). For Williams the genre of Science Fiction (SF) crosses all the above four categories, but, it is especially the fourth that characterises it in its typical form.

Following this matrix (and interest in agency) Williams suggests that the different kinds of fiction laid out above are also expressions of different class positions (with their own particular ideas – or fictions – about their relation to the dominant mode of production). It is here that he makes some compelling remarks about the kinds of utopia attached to a rising class as oppose to those associated with a descending one. This question of 'social confidence' results either in a 'systematic' kind of utopia (an expression of confidence) or something more open and heuristic (which, for Williams, expresses a lack of confidence). We might extend this class analysis to race and note that some forms of non-Western SF, although of a particularly alienated consciousness, can express itself (confidently) in systematic and technological form. I will return to this below.

In fact, Williams goes further in his analysis and foregrounds a very particular kind of utopian fiction that attends to the *transition* to a new kind of world (and, with this, the development of 'new social relations and kinds of feeling' (Williams 1978: 209)). Such literature is not just the dreaming of another place but reports, as it were, on the struggle to bring this other world about. Williams' paradigmatic example here is William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (that itself looks back to Moore's *Utopia*) but he also names a more contemporary case of this category of fiction: Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*. For Williams, this particular SF novel, of 'voluntary

¹ Williams lays out this matrix (of dominant, residual and emergent culture) in his essay 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' (Williams 1980). In relation to fiction and residual culture see also my 'Myth-Science as Residual Cultures and Magical Thinking' (O'Sullivan 2017).

deprivation', is especially attuned to our present conditions, at least in what was once called the 'First World', and, even more particularly, with the dissatisfactions that comes with the consumer lifestyle of a capitalist hegemony. As Williams remarks:

[...] it is probably only to such a utopia that those who have known affluence and known with it social injustice and moral corruption can be summoned. It is not the last journey. In particular it is not the journey which all those still subject to direct exploitation, to avoidable poverty and disease, will imagine themselves making: a transformed this-world, of course with all the imagined and undertaken and fought-for modes of transformation. But it is where, within a capitalist dominance, and within the crisis of power and affluence which is also the crisis of war and waste, the utopian impulse now warily, self-questioningly, and setting its own limits, renews itself. (Williams 1978: 212)

In another short essay, this time just on 'Science Fiction', Williams offers up a reduced tripartite division: 1. 'Putropia': fiction of this type tends to portray a world in which the isolated individual, often the intellectual, is opposed or in confrontation with 'the masses'; 2. 'Doomsday': this involves the depiction of a world in which the human is faced with extinction; and 3. 'Space anthropology': a variation on 'travellers tales', a form of fiction in which 'new tribes' and 'new patterns of living' are articulated and explored (Williams 1988). For Williams it is, of course, the third category that interests him insofar as it offers up experimental models contra the dominant.

Indeed, as oppose to a writer like Fredric Jameson who's own writings on SF are often a form of ideology critique (or, at a pinch – and as he himself remarks – are 'anti-anti-Utopianism') (Jameson 2005: xvi), Williams is more attuned, it seems to me, to these more innovative and experimental aspects of the genre (although he is quite capable of executing his own critique, as in the sharp analysis of putropian fiction as bourgeois ideology). Indeed, we might say that SF is a site of emergent culture (to use another key term from Williams), and, as such, offers up the new 'structures of feeling' that he sees as a characteristic of the latter (these are also the 'new patterns of feeling' mentioned by Williams in the 'Science Fiction' essay) (Williams 1988: 359). SF can be a forward hurled affective probe in this sense. This might involve more technological predictions, themselves the result of a Promethean impulse (indeed, the science of SF announces this), but, for Williams, this kind of fiction is at its best when it explores what Gilbert Simondon once called other 'modes of existence'.² SF can indeed be an experimental social anthropology in this sense (albeit one that is also often untethered from the earth).

² See 'On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects' (Simondon 2011). In terms of a renewed rational Prometheanism and its connection to SF (and especially space travel) see Ben Singleton's essay 'Maximum Jailbreak' (Singleton 2014).

Jameson's own idea of the traction of these future orientated visions in the present is, we might say, more deconstructive. The issue, for Jameson, is not just that SF is written in the present – with the materials at hand – and therefore, necessarily, is of that present (its offering up of something different is limited in this sense), but that this is also a deeper ontological problem of how to combine 'the not-yet-being of the future' with the being of the present (Jameson 2005: xvi, note 12). For Jameson this is where the *Archaeology of the Future* – the title of his book on SF – comes in: just as there are traces of the past in the present (hence, archaeology), so SF might offer traces of the future in the present – although, clearly, the presence of the future in the present is less straightforward than the survival of the past.

Indeed, a key question remains as to the exact nature of this future trace. Or, more generally, how something might be in the world but not wholly of that world. For Jameson – and I think also Williams – this is the key problematic aspect, but also interest of SF (as itself a particular kind of utopian literature). It needs must figure whatever is to come in terms of the already here (or, at least, offer a view of a different kind of place in terms of this one).

2. Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction

The philosopher Quentin Meillassoux's offers a compelling inflection on this important problematic in his book *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction* (Meillassoux 2015). Therein he suggests that there might be a 'genre within a genre': whereas SF concerns itself with the relation of science to fiction, and, in particular, concerns the future form that this science might take (Meillassoux's definition of SF fits neatly into Williams' fourth category of 'technological determinism'), 'extro-Science Fiction' (Meillassoux abbreviates this to XSF) concerns itself with the possibility of worlds in which the very practice of science is impossible (and, as such, XSF may be said to broadly fit into William's third category of SF: 'space anthropology'). To a certain extent these XSF worlds are chaotic, precisely unpredictable, hence, crucially, the question of whether they are narratable and can be written as fictions at all (insofar as, narrative (Meillassoux also refers to 'plot' and 'storyline') requires certain laws that relate actions and consequences). In terms of Jameson's temporal (and ontological) paradox the issue becomes: is it possible to think – but also write – these XSF worlds from the perspective of our own world governed as it is by science (that is certain laws) and, indeed, inhabited, as it is, by human subjects that are constituted by these laws (not least in the production of consciousness).

In fact, we might say this is an isotope of a larger philosophical question for Meillassoux (and, indeed, within Western metaphysics more generally) about the possibility of thinking an 'Outside' to subjective experience (Meillassoux's argument is pitched against what he calls 'correlationism' – simply, that any access to what he also calls 'the great outdoors' is compromised by being correlated with a given human

subject). This Outside, it seems to me, is also the future, when this is understood as not simply involving the extension (and repetition) of already existing knowledges and logics (including science). In his key philosophical work *After Finitude* Meillassoux demonstrates this it is in fact possible to map out the conceptual coordinates of this Outside – that it is indeed thinkable – albeit it is not a place as such, but, rather, a radically contingent ‘hyper chaos’ (Meillassoux 2008).

We might note here that Jameson’s own ‘solution’ (to the ontological problem of the future) – the trace – is, in fact, not so different from Meillassoux’s description of the ‘archefossil’ as that which is within a world (or within the correlationist subjective circle) but points to something anterior to that world (and, as such, operates as a problem for any correlationist position that refuses to speculate on an Outside). However, Meillassoux’s analysis does not stop at what he calls this aporia, but proceeds from it. Access to ‘the great outdoors’ is not a question of traces or archefossils, but of demonstrating (in a series of philosophical manoeuvres) that the undecideability about the existence of a radical Outside to our own experientially closed circle is not a question of lack of knowledge, but more to do with the ‘nature’ of this outside – again, as pure contingency. It is here that we can return to and note the connections with Meillassoux’s XSF situation: the future is also pure contingency (or ‘hyper chaos’) in this sense.

In the XSF essay Meillassoux uses Hume’s example of the inherent unpredictability of the trajectory of a Billiard ball once hit by another ball (Hume is interested in questioning our common sense ideas of cause and effect and offers up a ‘thought experiment’ in which the ball moves in an unpredictable manner), and the responses to this ‘problem of causality’ offered by both Popper and Kant, in order to map out the various positions and possibilities of SF and XSF (in fact, he also uses the short SF story by Issac Asimov, ‘The Billiard Ball’, to further ‘flesh out’ his argument). In brief, for Meillassoux, Popper misunderstands Hume’s problem as being about the limits of any given scientific theory (or, simply, that if we had sufficient scientific knowledge we would be able to predict the movement of the apparently random movement of the ball), when really, for Meillassoux, it is about something larger – the very possibility of science in general. Kant, on the other hand, addresses Hume on his own grounds, but, for Meillassoux, lacks a certain ‘acute XSF imaginary’ insofar as he is unable to untether science from consciousness (the Kantian argument rests on the idea that a world without science would also be a world without consciousness, thus the very set up of Hume’s example (in which the ball moves in a wholly random manner after being hit) is, by definition, unknowable and unthinkable).

Meillassoux’s essay is then as much about philosophy as it is fiction, or, in Meillassoux’s terms, concerns itself with the possibilities of the ‘philosophical imagination’. In fact, in his own exercise of the latter he demonstrates that XSF worlds of a certain type are not just thinkable, but also narratable. At the one extreme – where no laws hold – there is just chaos and collapse. At the other there are worlds,

possibly much like our own, where although there is contingency there is also enough regularity to allow prediction, and, crucially, the repeatability of experiments that constitutes science. The middle point between these two, where some stability is maintained but there are significant uncertainties, is characteristic, for Meillassoux, of properly XSF worlds insofar as they are metaphysically valid and practically narratable but science per se is impossible (beyond what Meillassoux names a kind of ‘chronics’ that works through the positioning of relatively loose parameters for experimentation and prediction). In these ‘Type 2’ XSF worlds there is a stability of consciousness but not enough stability or regularity in the laws of nature to allow science as we know it to operate.

To back track slightly, for Meillassoux a key issue with XSF is that contingency rules and thus – in terms of writing fiction – there is the fundamental issue, or risk, of the ‘rupture’ of narrative. Meillassoux suggests various ‘solutions’ to this: that an XSF story might be about just one inexplicable rupture (and then narrate the consequences; one is reminded here of Williams’ SF category of the ‘externally altered world’); that the story might exhibit multiple ruptures and, thus, effectively operate on some level as nonsense (albeit, crucially, still held within a story); and thirdly, that the XSF story might exhibit a certain ‘dread uncertainty of an atmospheric novel’ (Meillassoux mentions Philip K. Dick as an example of the latter).

The striking thing, at least for this reader, is that these different XSF fictions are all understood at the level of content, or, to say the same differently, XSF is held within typical, or at least familiar, narrative form. In fact, it seems to me that it is really at this level of form – and especially in terms of style and syntax – that fiction might offer genuine XSF possibilities. Indeed, as Meillassoux quite rightly points out, narrative is the handmaiden of science (both necessarily proceed through cause and effect). It follows that XSF (at least in its acute form) will also need to break with narrative schema and, especially, the logical sequencing of sentences and so forth in order to properly ‘portray’ XSF worlds (but, in fact, would this still be a question of portrayal?). Here one thinks of William Burroughs’ cut-up SF novels rather than those by Douglas Adams which Meillassoux himself invokes as example of XSF ‘nonsense’.

This, it seems to me, is crucial. Certainly one can think through the possibility of an XSF imaginary in terms of narrative (and, one might say, those forms of thought – again, involving logical sequencing – that are narratable). These are fictions or stories *about* XSF worlds. But to really deploy this XSF imaginary, to make it real as it were, cannot but involve a rupturing of such narrative schema. Does this mean a haemorrhaging out of sense? Certainly, as this is typically understood insofar as good ‘sense’ is one of the crucial factors in maintaining the consistency of a centred and coherent self (fiction can and often does offer a reassuring mirror of and to a subjectivity already in place in this sense). That said in this other kind of more radical fiction a ‘minimum consistency’ is often still maintained – one thinks again of

Burroughs – through fragments of sense, laid alongside a non-sense that might nevertheless contain the germs of new kinds of sense. This consistency, a kind of ‘holding’ or patterning of non-sense, might, in fact, operate at the level of the ‘book’ or even an author’s name (to reference Foucault).

Certainly this can bring about its own problems and paradoxes. Not least the question (gestured to above) about whether SF/XSF is simply the portrayal of another world or whether it can – in its very form – also summon it forth (to use Deleuzian terminology). Indeed, is this when SF leaves the realm of fiction per se to become something else? A ‘performance fiction’ perhaps?³ At any rate, one thing is clear: the XSF genre needs must engage with some formal experimentation least it become compromised by its very narrative (or, put differently: there is the risk that it offers up a world in which science is impossible, but portrays this in a type of writing that follows from science).⁴

This all has implications for Jameson’s future trace, or for those elements that are in our world but not exactly of our world. The problem is that SF – or XSF for that matter – must be written in the present, using the materials at hand (indeed, what else is there?). For Meillassoux, as I have suggested, it is then a question of developing a philosophical imaginary in order to think these worlds – from our own perspective as it were – that are nevertheless not like our world (or, in terms of Meillassoux’s *After Finitude* to begin the task of mapping out the coordinates of an ‘Outside’ to subjective experience). Strictly speaking Meillassoux does this philosophically – following Hume, and especially Kant (whereas, as I mentioned above, it seems to me a writer like Jameson remains at the level of diagnosis). And yet when it comes to the crucial question of narrative (as a determining factor of our world), typical (scientific) schema remains in place. Meillassoux’s XSF definition is indeed a genre within a genre insofar as its gesture to a beyond SF is nevertheless formulated within the very terms of SF.

We might say then that Meillassoux is guilty of a similar kind of mis-reading that he claims Popper gives of Hume’s paradox (or, more simply, he does not follow through the radicality of his own thesis). He positions the problem of XSF at the level of content (to say it once more, Meillassoux is interested in stories *about* XSF, which, as such, must be necessarily held within sense), when, really, it seems to me that XSF is

³ For more on performance fiction as a kind of genre in contemporary art see David Burrows’ ‘Performance Fictions’ (Burrows 2011).

⁴ In terms of the history of SF one might draw attention to the formal experiments of the ‘New Wave’ of the 1960s and 70s, not least of J. G. Ballard and Samuel R. Delany (and the way in which both of these looked to Burroughs) as opposed to the prior tradition of ‘Hard SF’ that focused on extrapolating science – and which is still present in the post New Wave movement of ‘Cyberpunk’ which also (generally speaking) holds its fictions with recognisable narrative form.

a question of form. A more acute XSF imaginary (to echo Meillassoux's critique of Kant) would push the XSF category further. In fact, I think this critique might also be applied to Meillassoux's larger project of thinking 'the great outdoors' – which is really the question of how reason and rational thought can think something that, on the face of it, is non reasonable and irrational. Meillassoux suggests that such an Outside (or, again, XSF worlds) can in fact be probed by reason (or, in terms of XSF, articulated in a narrative).⁵ But is reason really the best kind of probe for exploring this Outside? In fact, is it not also the case that the latter has already been probed by experimental forms of subjectivity (or, simply, bodies), just as XSF worlds have been produced from within this one, not through narrative, but through formal experimentation?⁶

In our own experimental take on Meillassoux's argument could we then add a further category to SF and XSF, that of or X(SF), which would name this more radical break with typical narrative (and, as such, science). We might, following Meillassoux's lead, even lay out our own matrix of X(SF) worlds, for example: Type 1 in which there is just occasional formal experimentation and breaks with sense; Type 3 when there is just non-sense, pure chaos; and Type 2 between these, properly X(SF) worlds in which there is a certain kind of consistency and coherence, but not as we typically understand it. Once again, Burroughs' cut-ups would be exemplary here – involved in randomness and chance (that is, contingency), but also a certain amount of deliberate editing and selection.

To recap my argument then: X(SF) fiction is not just about a non-scientific world, but, we might say, is an example of it (or attempts to instantiate – or embody – it in this world). X(SF), in this sense, is of the imaginary (afterall a fictional world is produced), but also of the real. Is this perhaps the difference between fiction and fictioning?⁷ Or the difference between a fiction that is simply in the world and one that *fiction*s another one?

It is worth noting that these brackets themselves suggest a further and continuing 'bracketing function': afterall, why not X(X(SF)) or X(X(X(SF)))? On the one hand each X simply announces a more radical Outside, but the brackets also point to a

⁵ Narrative might be thought of as itself a kind of Promethean probe in this sense. But, again, it seems to me that it will be more experimental types of narrative that are really able to probe contingency.

⁶ For a more sustained reading – and critique – of Meillassoux along these lines see the 'Conclusion: Composite Diagram and Relations of Adjacency' of my *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the finite-Infinite Relation* (O'Sullivan 2012: 203-22).

⁷ Meillassoux also uses the term fictioning in relation Kant's imaginary construction of 'a world in which science has become impossible' (Meillassoux 2014: 7).

‘nesting’ characteristic of the most interesting fictions.⁸ The positioning of fictions within fictions within fictions, that themselves point to the always contingent nature of any ‘reality’, that the latter is simply a fiction that might itself be bracketed in the positioning of a superior ‘reality’ (that is then itself simply another fiction for another reality and so on).

In a return to Williams we might suggest that these forms of X(SF), often found as much in art practice – again, ‘performance fictions’ – as in literature per se (and, especially, in certain kinds of ‘art writing’), are very particular examples of ‘space anthropology’ (albeit we are gesturing here to the limits of the human sciences, or, which amounts to the same thing, drawing a distinction between the latter and more creative research).⁹ But, in fact, we might also gesture to a larger category of fiction that also partakes of this strange posthuman and utopian ‘science’: the Modernist experimental novel. Indeed, in this will to break typical narrative and invent new forms – and with this to produce new worlds and modes of being adequate and appropriate to them – authors such as James Joyce and Gertrude Stein are as much SF writers as William Burroughs and J. G. Ballard.

3. Science Fiction and Afrofuturism

Another response to Williams’ four fold matrix of utopia and SF is to explore how the third category, ‘technological determinism’, might in fact also operate to provide specifically different counter-futures to those typically on offer (I gestured to this above in relation to what Williams calls utopias of the ‘systematic’ type). Here technology becomes the very means of producing something different to the predictions of more market-driven capitalist futurology. Kodwo Eshun writes well on this, from his pioneering work on and of Sonic Fiction *More Brilliant than the Sun* (a book that is itself experimental in its form, structure and syntax) to his ‘Further Considerations on Afrofuturism’ where he identifies Sun Ra (alongside George Clinton and Lee Scratch Perry) as key sonic exponent of this mobilisation of ‘future’ technology (alongside more imaginary presentations, such as space travel and the colonisation of other planets) against a present in which Black subjectivity has been emiserated.

⁸ Robin Mackay writes well on the idea of plots within plots (within plots), and, more philosophically speaking, the reciprocal relations and transits between local and global circuits and territories (see Mackay 2015).

⁹ I look at what might be called an example of ‘proto-art writing’ – that is also SF – in my Conclusion, but other more recent indicative examples of SF art writing are *Mo-Leeza Roberts* (Head Gallery 2016) and *Virus* (Stupart 2016). Art writing itself is a broader (and somewhat un-defined) ‘genre’, but, for indicative examples see the work of Maria Fusco, Katrina Palmer and, especially, Neil Chapman. There is also an increasing amount of SF ‘theory-fictions’ being written, the progenitor of many of these being Reza Negarestani’s magnificent *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (Negarestani 2008).

For Eshun, Sun Ra's 'myth-science' involves both a reengineering of the past (away from that typically written in and by White history) and a projection forwards into an alternate future. In both the above texts, but especially the book, it is Black music – again, sonic fiction – that is crucial in constructing this view from elsewhere (although, as others have pointed out the visual imaginary is also crucial to the production of this alter-destiny: in relation to Sun Ra: the album covers, films (especially, *Space is the Place*) and such like – as well as the costumes and other visual aspects of the performances).

In contra-distinction to Williams there is no explicit struggle to bring about this utopia insofar as these future myths – at least on one level – are disconnected from any human agency (Sun Ra does not identify with the human at all). Indeed, it is this disconnection that constitutes their power (they refuse the logic of the existent and the 'way things are' (including typical history and future projections – as well as already-existing (oppressed) subject positions). Following my reading of Meillassoux we might say that there is a refusal to think the future in the terms provided by the present (subjection) and a concomitant turn to other myths of the future: precisely a turn to SF.

In fact, for Eshun the actual terrain of SF has recently changed with the emergence of futures markets, and, more generally, a situation in which 'power operates predictively' through the 'envisioning, management, and delivery of reliable futures' (Eshun 2003: 289). The future, we might say, is increasingly the new terrain of capitalist expansion (with these future visions then operating to call forth the very future they predict). Is this also something different to Williams' utopian impulse? Certainly, for Eshun it signals the end of the 'utopian project for imagining social realities'. Instead, SF becomes concerned 'with engineering feedback between its preferred future and its becoming present' (Eshun 2003: 290).

In Eshun's understanding the terrain of contestation for Black subjectivity is then no longer simply the past, with the project of a counter-memory that attempts to reclaim a history for those that have been written out of it, but also these other possible and specifically different futures that have a very real traction in the present. Hence the continuing importance of 'Afrofuturism' (Mark Dery is the first to coin this term in 1994) in order to combat the dystopian manner in which more dominant future narratives tend to cast the African continent (as the shadow – always on the brink of collapse – to a bright shiny (and Western) new future). Eshun suggests his own tripartite field of possible future interventions here: 1. Mathematical simulations: this is the future modelling performed by the markets; 2. Informal descriptions: as in SF and other less formal future predictions and projections; and 3. Black vernacular myths of the future.

The first of these, although clearly the terrain of neoliberalism, also bears some resemblances with recent calls by the Left to re-purpose existing technologies (what

has become known as ‘Left accelerationism’).¹⁰ The second is also as much the terrain of SF writing as it is expert futures consultancy (indeed, it is sometimes difficult to tell these two apart and Eshun himself remarks on the existence of formal-informal hybrids). The last involves a revisioning – or ‘reversioning’ – of previous future myths (or ‘vernacular futurologies’) and Eshun gives a role call of these which includes, of course, Sun Ra. There is often a further kind of hybridity – in this case temporal – in these last cases where a pre-historical (and non-scientific) past meets a post-historical (and supra-scientific) future. Ancient Egyptians travelling through space and time. Or, again, in Sun Ra’s term: myth-science.

It is also here that Eshun turns directly to art practice (broadly construed), and, in particular, to the sonic as an expression of these subjectivities-to-come. Again, it seems to me that with these practices we have not just the portrayal of other worlds (they are not simply utopian in this sense) but something else – more embodied perhaps? These ‘sonic fictions’ are not just about a different world, but, formally we might say, are of that world. Could we also call them X(SF) in this sense, when the X announces this performative aspect?

In the Black Audio Film Collective’s *The Last Angel of History* Eshun remarks that jungle, for example, as a particular studio produced music, does not have referents, as it were, on the street, but conjures up more imaginary spaces and places (it does not represent something or somewhere pre-existent). This abstract ‘portrayal’ is achieved by the new kinds of sound made available by new technologies (sampling, but also certain drum beats). Indeed, in another moment of *The Last Angel of History* Eshun remarks on the way in which Black musicians have always been involved in releasing the potential of technological instruments, in exploiting their capacities, often, precisely, in using them against their intended purpose (paradigmatically – in terms of the subject matter of the film – with turn tables and scratching).¹¹ One thinks again of Burroughs and the cut-up, but, more generally, the disruption of typical linear sequencing and causality – typical space-time – that involves a concomitant production of new blocks of different space-time.

It is also here that we return to the alienating effects of technological development insofar as many recent Afrofuturist ‘visions’ are enabled and, indeed, proceed from these effects (the ‘man-machine interface’). We might briefly return to Williams’ tripartite SF schema here and note that the first, ‘putopia’, can also be understood as

¹⁰ For more on Left accelerationism, especially in relation to fiction, affect and the Promethean impulse see my ‘Accelerationism, Prometheanism and Mythotechnesis’ (O’Sullivan 2014b).

¹¹ For a compelling account of how Sun Ra’s arkestra was involved in the building of new sonic worlds via the manipulation of ‘tone colours’ and the programing of ‘sensations without names’ see ‘Synthesizing the Omniverse’ in Eshun’s *More Brilliant than the Sun* (Eshun 1988: 154-63).

a fiction of alienation, but, in contradistinction to Williams' own take, here it is the very ground on which Afrofuturism develops its liberatory fictions. Eshun quotes Greg Tate from *The Last Angel of History*:

In 'The Last Angel of History', Tate argued that 'the form itself, the conventions of the narrative in terms of the way it deals with subjectivity focuses on someone who is at odds with the apparatus of power in society and whose profound experience is one of cultural dislocation, alienation and estrangement. Most science fiction tales dramatically deal with how the individual is going to contend with these alienating, dislocating societies and circumstances and that pretty much sums up the mass experiences of black people in the post slavery twentieth century. (Eshun (quoting Tate) 2003: 298)

As well as a documentary on Black music (from the Blues to Detroit techno) and its connections to Black SF writing (Greg Tate is interviewed, but also Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delaney), *The Last Angel of History* is also itself a work of SF: it involves a fictioning of the archive (of Black history) that involves its own loops backwards and forwards in time (the narrator of the film – or 'datathief' – is sent back from the future in order to research the 'mothership connection'). The film is also an example of the sampling and reversioning that it looks at. It is a sampling – or citational – work (reflecting the music it looks at, but also the intellectual horizon of its moment of production: Derrida and deconstruction). Fiction here becomes a method to re-work consensual reality and its attendant increasingly standardised subjectivities.¹²

Afrofuturism is then always already alienated, or, more specifically, it doubles the latter, offering up an alienation from alienation. We might think here again of the nesting function of X(SF), with the X announcing an alienation – or, more simply, an outside.¹³ In fact, as Tate suggests in the quote above (and Eshun makes explicit in his own reading of Paul Gilroy), African subjectivity has always already been SF (*The Black Atlantic* is a major work of SF). Slavery is positioned at the heart of modernity (its founding myth) with the 'middle passage' figured as the first alien abduction (hence the importance (in terms of Afrofuturism) for Eshun and others, of the techno producers *Drexciya* who mobilise the myth of an aquatic race born from the pregnant

¹² In relation to film as a kind of fictioning of the real – or 'docu-fiction' – see also Eshun's collaboration with Angelika Sagar, the 'Otolith Group', and, in relation to Afrofuturism, their film-essay *Hydra Decapita*.

¹³ In fact we might say, more accurately, that there are Afrofuturist SF novels that are about this alienation, i.e. XSF, but also novels that foreground this alienation in their very form. Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren* springs to mind as an example of this X(SF). See also my comments towards the end of the footnote below.

African slaves thrown overboard).¹⁴ Indeed, the issue of writing the future from the present – Jameson’s temporal paradox – is less relevant here in a situation in which SF is, as Tate remarks, the lived present for many. X(SF), in this sense, might be understood as a response to a SF situation: it offers a ‘way out’.

4. Financial Fictions as Future Instruments

In his short essay on ‘Hyperbolic Fictions: Speculative Finance and Speculative Fiction’ Steven Shaviro generally follows Fredric Jameson (who he quotes) in suggesting that SF offers a ‘psycho-social-technological cartography’ of the present via the setting up of a different perspective on it (Shaviro’s essay concerns two SF novels: *Market Forces* and *Moxyland*) (Shaviro 2011). Indeed, for Shaviro, this is SF’s *raison d’être*: it can offer a purchase on the various ‘hyper objects’ that increasingly determine our lives but that are too vast to ‘see’ (we might say that this is an isotope of a larger problem of how to represent the abstractions of capitalism).¹⁵ Through cognitive – and affective – mapping SF allows us to grasp the increasing complexity of our own time.

But Shaviro, like Eshun (and, indeed, Meillasoux) is also attuned to the more speculative function of SF and especially the way it might offer up an alternative account of the future to those increasingly being engineered by hedge-fund managers. Indeed, SF’s capacity to surprise – again, to offer a *different* future – is, for Shaviro crucial.¹⁶ That said the importance of these other futures is still understood in terms of the present insofar as their importance comes down to the way that they demonstrate – in their very portrayal of difference – that the present idea of the future has, precisely, been managed (SF show us the bars of our cage as Shaviro puts it).

¹⁴ See also Edouard Glissant, ‘The Open Boat’: ‘The first dark shadow was cast by being wrenched from their everyday, familiar land, away from protecting gods and tutelary community. But that is nothing yet’ (Glissant 2010: 5). For Glissant, despite the horror of the middle passage, poetry (and what Glissant calls ‘relation’) is also born in this forced exile (Glissant 2010: 5). Stefano Harney and Fred Moten also address the imaginary that is produced by the middle passage – and especially containment in the ship’s hold – in their book *The Undercommons*, and, not least, how this extreme alienation produces collectivity. In terms of Glissant *The Undercommons* also exhibits an opacity of sorts insofar as the style resists easy synopses or, indeed, straightforward comprehension. It does not give ground to its readers and, indeed, might be said to be an expression of the very undercommons it writes about.

¹⁵ See also Toscano and Krinkel 2015.

¹⁶ For further thoughts on this *different* future in relation to Deleuze’s philosophy of time (and as opposed to a future that is simply a representation of the same) see Chapter 4, ‘The Strange Temporality of the Subject: Life In-between the Infinite and the Finite (Deleuze contra Badiou)’, of my *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation* (O’Sullivan 2012: 125-68).

It does seem to me that this understanding of SF as an optic on the present has its limitations insofar as it restricts the genre and, again, formal experimentation becomes less foregrounded (insofar as it is the image or vision of the future that is crucial). I will return to this below. That said, and like Eshun, Shaviro does point to another compelling understanding of SF in terms of ‘financial fictions’ – or derivatives – and how these work to actually produce the reality they predict. Here fiction operates as a feedback loops and, as such, begins to have a very real traction on the future. Following Shaviro then we can certainly identify an increasing amount of SF narratives about these financial instruments (*Market Forces* for example), but what about the idea of SF as itself a form of derivative?

It is here that we might briefly turn to a more recent essay by Fredric Jameson, ‘The Aesthetics of Singularity’, that also concerns itself with the strange temporal logic of these futurological instruments and, indeed, gestures towards a similar logic that is evident in recent literature (Jameson 2015). For Jameson this new kind of fiction is one in which form has itself become content (Jameson mentions McCarthy’s *Remainder*). In relation to art practice per se, it is also one in which the singular event has superseded the object.

In his essay, and turning to financialisation more generally, Jameson follows Giovanni Arrighi’s periodization of Capital – identifying a third stage (our own) in which any new regions of expansion have been exhausted, resulting in a situation in which Capital must feed back on itself – double its existing territories – via speculation on futures. A derivative does just this, operating as a highly specific ‘locus of incommensurables’, a temporal mapping of various risks involved in various projected events and ventures (indeed, this is why there can be no generalised theory, as Jameson points out, each derivative being unique – hence the singularity of his essay’s title).

As Jameson also points out this interest in the future is not in itself new (there has long been a predictive, futures market), but what is new is both the way in which these futures feedback – or have a ‘reflexion’ – in and on the real (they are, to use another term, hyperstitional) and also that they are now incredibly complex (the various variables are only able to be calculated by computer) which means they are also already properly post human (Jameson follows Donna Haraway on this compelling insight).¹⁷

We can deepen this account of derivatives (especially in relation to what we might call their temporal structure and, in particular, their futurity) by looking to Suhail Malik’s recent essay ‘The Ontology of Finance’ (Malik 2014). Indeed, Malik offers a further – and radically different – inflection on Jameson’s temporal paradox of an ‘archaeology of the future’ (or how to predict the future when one is in the present)

¹⁷ See footnote 25 for a discussion of hyperstition.

insofar as time, following Malik's reading of Esposito, is figured in terms of systems theory, and, as such, is not to be understood as the backdrop to the operation of derivatives but, rather, as produced by them (time is system specific in this sense). The solution to the temporal paradox of SF is then that time is not separate from the fictions that are its circuits and loops. When laid out flat as it were – as cybernetic system – different pasts, presents and futures are all involved in different reflexive and recursive operations.

Malik's own thesis is developed on the basis of a key logic of derivatives (understood at their most simple as temporally based contracts (to sell or buy an asset) between two parties), that they tend to operate essentially divorced from any underlying asset (or, rather, via the deferral of the underlying; the contracts are rarely cashed in as it were), and, as such, their pricing is arrived at through a complex network of differential prices (that begins with the difference between price paid for the derivative and the predicted price of the asset at a future date). This is a network that spreads throughout space (and, as such, operates contra state boundaries), but also through time. Indeed, to all extents and purposes the 'terrain' of colonisation is infinite – not just because of the progression into an ever more distant future (involving ever further complex mathematics), but also, crucially, because these differential networks become nested as derivatives of derivative of derivatives are written.

Malik offers an impressive amount of detail on the various mechanisms and logics at play in these and other financial instruments, but ultimately, following Derrida, names this logic (of *differance*) the 'arkhderivative' – pointing out that the latter is not simply the logic of a certain kind of financial instrument (derivatives and the like) but also the very principle of financialisation and the new form of 'capital-power' attendant on this. The metaphysics of the market – which trades on the presence of an underlying asset – is always already in deconstruction in this sense.

Of particular interest for my purposes is the way in which financialisation operates a particular kind of time management, for example in the designing of predictive technologies. Malik discusses some of these – such as the 'Black-Scholes Model' – but also offers up a compelling counter argument such that the very unpredictability of the market – its volatility – is, in fact, constitutive to the successful working of derivatives that precisely need different horizons of possibility in order to multiply (the nesting function I mentioned earlier). We might note briefly here that this nesting of fictions – a kind of trading in representation without origin (or, at any rate, an abandonment of direct reference) – does not mean there is no traction on the real. Indeed the real (at least, the real in terms of the financial markets) is produced by these fictions.

In fact, for Esposito, in Malik's reading, the time management (or 'time binding') of financialisation also has a very real traction on the reality insofar as it inevitably has

implications for social organization. As Malik remarks: ‘all forms of time binding have social costs, because they [...] also bind the opportunities and perspectives of all other operators’ (Malik 2014: 719). The financial markets, although divorced from the material world in one sense, nevertheless have a concrete impact on politics and the life of different societies and individuals more generally.

To return to Jameson’s paradox we might say that the logic of derivatives allows a wholly different take on the future (or, more precisely, on time itself). Like Meillassoux’s ‘great outdoors’ the future is not a place as such but a pure contingency. Just as Meillassoux demonstrates that one can begin to say certain things about this outside (it is thinkable) so with derivatives and other financial instruments one can begin working on a future that then becomes as predicted (as Malik suggests, following Esposito: ‘descriptions of the world change the world described’). As Malik also remarks, following Elie Ayache (a key pre-cursor to his own thesis), derivatives are then technologies of the future (or, precisely, a ‘medium of contingency’).¹⁸

Early on in his essay Malik remarks that what he offers up is a ‘general theory of price largely dedicated to the identification of capital-power’s complex constitution and organisation’, but also that this might be considered preliminary work, following Left accelerationism, for a ‘revectoring required to provide the requisite political tasks’ (Malik 2014: 639). One can speculate on what such a revectoring might involve – in particular an intervention of some kind perhaps in the already existing derivatives market? Sabotage *per se* is ruled out by definition insofar as such interruptions and ruptures are part of the very system – its volatility – or, to say the same differently, more typical strategies that might work in terms of sabotaging investment and so on, are rendered ineffectual in a derivatives market that can itself be premised on counter production (as Malik remarks: ‘Unlike in investment, in speculation gains can be made by decreasing profits, a market crash, or a food shortage, if that is what the contract stipulates and regardless of any other consequences (Malik 2014: 668)). Could then a form of acceleration of these logics effect a successful revectoring

¹⁸ Ayache’s *The Blank Swan* involves a critique of probability and possibility as the key factors in market ‘predictions’. Indeed, Ayache recasts the very idea of the market as itself a space yet-to-be-written (or, himself following Meillassoux, as a space of contingency) and thus not about prediction – or pre-vision – at all (and, as such, what he calls ‘contingent claims’ are prioritised over derivatives *per se*). Crucial here is the idea that the market operates outside chronological time (or as Ayache puts it in the penultimate paragraph of his book: ‘possibility and chronological time come after contingency and are only incidental to it’ (Ayache 2010: 448)) – and, equally, that the technology of speculation adequate and appropriate to the market is writing (or, as Ayache remarks at the very beginning of his book, this ‘medium of contingency’ ‘is also the ‘medium of the creation of literary work’ (Ayache 2010: xvi)).

perhaps?¹⁹ Indeed, what would it mean to accelerate the derivative? To nest its fictions beyond the reasonable (or the cash-in-able)?

Another kind of revectoring might be to think the logic of the derivative – how it folds time inside its own structure and, indeed, brings about a certain future – in relation to other non-financial practices. To return to the question I posited above, could certain forms of SF, for example, be thought as being similar in structure to derivatives? To a certain extent (and following Meillasoux) the need to be readable (as in SF literature) restricts the possibilities, but in art practice (broadly construed), this nesting function can be taken further. Derivatives of derivatives of derivatives can be pushed beyond the sensible and common-sensical. These ‘performance fictions’, derived, but ultimately disconnected from the world, are constituted by the nesting of fictions, the recycling and reusing of motifs and fragments of motifs, the construction of complex avatars from the what-is but layered so as to become unrecognisable (and, as such, they gesture towards a specifically different future).

Conclusion: Science Fictioning (or Case Studies of Practice)

The question of science fictioning (that leads on from my previous reflections on X(SF)) might then be stated thus: how to artistically manifest these different future fictions in the here and now, whilst also giving them a kind of traction on present reality (or even: how to present something in the world – and that has an effect on it – but that is not entirely of it)? Below, in conclusion to my essay, I present two possible ‘case studies’:

i Ryan Trecartin’s *Centre Jenny*

As I suggested above it seems to me that there might well be art practices that comment on, or intervene in, the new financial landscapes of prediction and contingency (or, indeed – as with Shaviro’s discussion of *Moxyland* – those that are ‘about’ these new territories) but, more interesting might be those in which a similar temporal structure (to the various instruments of the markets) is in play albeit instantiated in a different form.²⁰ An example of this kind of science fictioning – future fictions that are, as it were, materially incarnated, is the practice of Ryan Trecartin. Indeed, in a film like *Centre Jenny* the future has already arrived and is operative in the present as a kind of ‘future shock’.

¹⁹ See, for example the Robin Hood Cooperative at http://www.robinhoodcoop.org/DEMOCRATIZING_THE_POWER_OF_FINANCE (accessed 2 February 2016).

²⁰ An interesting case study of an art practice that is both about and an intervention of a kind (and that also utilizes some of the logics of financialisation) is the collaboration Goldin and Sennersby. See http://www.goldinsenneby.com/gs/?page_id=3 (accessed 2 February 2016) and especially, the novel *Headless* (K. D. 2014).

In fact, Trecartin's own description of what is in play in his films (in terms of their structure) could equally be a description of derivatives (especially as Jameson describes them in their singular yet also very complex character) as 'proposed realities that inhabit themselves via structural collaborations and then disperse when they're no longer needed by the entities involved' (Trecartin 2011: n.p.). For Trecartin this also means that the characters (or perhaps they should be called avatars) of his films operate in and as what he calls 'an affective possibility space' in which existence is simply the 'temporary state of maintaining a situation' (Trecartin 2011: n.p.). The avatars are events that gather various temporal circuits alongside certain affective vectors (or, in Deleuzian terms, becomings) giving them a minimal (and often precarious) consistency. To quote Trecartin:

The future and the past can be equally malleable; I don't think they go in opposite directions. Memory is more an act of memorisation than recalling: you're creating something that doesn't really exist behind you, it exists in the same place the future exists. In my videos the characters try to treat that idea as fact. (Trecartin 2011: n.p.)

As Trecartin's interlocutor (the novelist Hari Kunzu) suggests – in the interview from where the above quotes are taken – there is then an adjusting of the past from the future but also, of course, the continuing re-adjustment of a future from the present. Indeed, following Malik, to see time as system specific – again, as cybernetic – means any time can impact on any other time. In the patchwork temporality of Trecartin's films different loops and circuits connect and feedback on one another producing a temporally complex structure – at times bordering on an opacity – that, on the other hand, is also very immediate with a strong affective charge.

Trecartin's films are digitally recorded and edited (ultimately they are 'written' as code), but, in terms of the material instantiation of fiction and, indeed, the nesting function I outlined above, they also involve 'real' actors (that are very much Trecartin's collaborators) in 'real' locations (they are not animations) – and, in fact, the films are also often installed in physical gallery spaces (alongside sets and other sculptural elements by Lizzie Fitch).²¹ Indeed, it seems to me that one of the key

²¹ See, for example, *Priority Infield* (and book/catalogue of same name) (Fitch and Trecartin 2015). The installation of the films as a series of different 'levels' harks back, it seems to me, to Matthew Barney's own Cremaster film series – indeed, in both, the fiction is created and sustained through a series of chapters (precisely, a sequencing). In the interview with Ossian Ward (in *Priority Infield*), Fitch remarks that the movie sets are always 360 degrees, but also that they are first computer modeled – bringing a further fictioning – or re-presentational – character to the exhibitions (Fitch 2015). Trecartin also remarks on the collaborative character of the work in which the performers (friends and other artists) contribute to the script. The collective character seems important in the production of a different world, and especially in terms of one that is not reducible to the expression of a single self-possessed artistic ego.

interests of Trecartin's work is this virtual-actual hybridity, a layering of different fictions (or different circuits of 'reality') that can extend to the gallery space itself as a certain kind of theatrical set-up in which to enter the fiction of the films (which, again, contain nested narratives or, as Patrick Langley remarks, 'screens within screens'). As another commentator, Christopher Glazek remarks, a film like *Centre Jenny* also blurs the lines between pre and post-production with the film itself depicting the production (behind the scenes as it were) of the fiction. Indeed, the variety of perspectives and different cameras used (especially the hand held) also adds to foreground the films status as constructed fiction. Glazek also makes one aware (in his essay 'The Past is Another Los Angeles') of the very particular context of the films: the 'make-believe' culture of that city which is itself a patchwork of different fictions and performances.

On the other hand however, the films are also digitally disseminated (Trecartin makes them freely available via YouTube and vimeo channels). The work over spills the typical boundaries of the spaces and places of art; indeed, they have as much in common with various popular and sub cultures as they do 'high' art (if this latter term has any real currency in today's post-post-modern world). There is then a kind of formal 'enclosedness' (or even sense of autonomy) of the films (they bring a whole world with them) and yet, also, this openness to a wider connectivity beyond the rarefied worlds of art.

In terms of the actual content of the films it is the layering of text and imagery that is also compelling (and that help produce the very particular affect of the film I alluded to earlier – a kind of amphetamine and hallucinogenic rush). The visual composition of the avatars, for example, arises from a linguistic or discursive complexity: 'logos, products, graphic design, interfaces' that produce a certain density in which an image – or name – contains condensed within it the parts from which it is made (a 'history' written on its surface as it were). Indeed, the different avatars might be thought of as compressed files, or blockchains in this sense.²² Or even as sigils.²³ A strange kind of fragmented digital subjectivity is at play here (characters tend to proliferate across different actors, just as individuals 'play' multiple parts), one with an agency, at least of a kind (the avatars, for example, reflect on their own 'history') albeit radically distributed (there are a multiplicity of 'Jenny's' in *Centre Jenny* for example). We might say, in this sense, that Trecartin's films 'reveal' the fiction of a fixed (and centred) self in our digitalised present.

²² As with derivatives, there might be art practices – broadly construed – that directly use the logic of the blockchain and especially the idea of a decentred network that can operate as a catalogue/record of transactions (as in bitcoin). See, for example, 'ethereum' that uses blockchain technology to allow for the drawing up of contracts, the recording of various transactions, and so on, but without a central hub.

²³ David Burrows has developed the idea of brands as sigils in a published talk on magick and art practice (Burrows and Sharp 2009).

Formally speaking, there are also the different speeds of a film like *Centre Jenny*. The quick cuts for example (as Trecartin remarks: ‘every year we acclimate to a faster pace’), and the acceleration (and manipulated character) of the dialogue (verging, at times, on a non-sense – again, one thinks of drugs) (Trecartin 2011: n.p.). Despite the real locations I mentioned above the films also exist in a strange non-time (and non-place) that is also an ever now (and every place) – not least insofar as the filming is itself ‘decentred’ with no overall perspective or even any fixed anchor points to orientate the viewer. As Trecartin remarks: ‘every individual moment becomes the work’s centre’ (Trecartin 2011: n.p.).

As Kenneth Goldsmith has suggested in his essay ‘Reading Ryan Trecartin’ the dialogue (as especially evidenced in the published scripts with their very particular syntax, punctuation and typography) also harks back to modernist experiments in materialising language, and especially to figures like Gertrude Stein and James Joyce. Goldsmith also mentions Burroughs and it seems clear that the cut-up is a key precursor to a film like *Centre Jenny*, with its breaking of linear causality and sense – albeit not completely (the film presents just enough cohesion and consistency and, as such, works to present a different block of space-time).

In fact, it seems to me that in Trecartin’s films – and *Centre Jenny* is entirely indicative – the form is content just as the content is form (in the same way in which Jameson describes the formal aspects of *Remainder* as its content). Or, as Trecartin puts it: ‘the way something is contained in a frame is just as valuable as the content inside’ (Trecartin 2011: n.p.). Indeed, it is not just the offering up of a future fiction (a utopia or dystopia – depending on your perspective) that makes the films so compelling and, indeed, affective, but the very way in which this is presented in a very particular mode of fictioning the real: Trecartin’s films are very much ‘of’ the future that they depict in this sense.

ii. o[rphan] d[rift>]’s *Cyberpositive*

Cyberpositive is a SF novel (at least, of a kind), with different characters and avatars located in different land and cityscapes, following different plots and narratives (often resembling game-space-scenarios). In terms of this content the ‘book-assemblage’ (as Suhail Malik calls it in his ‘Foreword’ to the recent 2012 re-issue) looks to other recent SF writing, for example by William Gibson, Greg Bear and Neal Stephenson (alongside Burroughs and Ballard), as well as films such as *Bladerunner* and *Predator*. It also turns to other writers and non-SF filmmakers – Thomas Pynchon and Maya Deren for example – where it finds the necessary resources to flesh out its particular view from elsewhere. The writing references all these – at times, interspersing quotes from these sources – to produce a dense inter-textuality bordering on an opacity. The book also looks to other non-Western cultures (it involves a spatial

as well as temporal syncretism), specifically voodoo (hence the Deren), with the loa-spirit world interacting with other virtual and more futuristic ‘shadow operators’.

But *Cyberpositive* is also composed of more philosophical references, sometimes explicit, at others more implicit: Georges Bataille, Jean-Francois-Lyotard, and, especially, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (to mention only the most obvious). It is also, itself, a book *of* philosophy when the later is understood as a form of future-orientated concept production. Indeed, following Deleuze and Guattari, we might understand this concept creation as itself a form of fictioning insofar as it involves a different thinking of the world ‘beyond’ typical subjects and objects (thinking is not, as it were, a line drawn between these two). Fictioning, then, names a different individuation in and of the world, but also other – stranger – causalities and transits (a ‘crossing the universe in an instant’) (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 201-2)).

Cyberpositive is also a difficult read, partly because of this content, but also because of the particular style in which it is ‘written’. Indeed, ‘pattern recognition’ rather than any kind of interpretation seems most appropriate when engaging with it. The reader is reminded (if this is not too ‘high culture’ a reference) of Jacques Lacan’s claim that his *Ecrits* was not a book to be read (for ‘meaning’). A less high culture reference would simply be the effect on the body of electronic music (or, more specifically, techno), a ‘genre’ that clearly had a determining effect itself on the book’s genesis. This difficulty is not least because the book is partly written in code, or, at any rate, in a non-typical syntax – a kind of stuttering and stammering of the key board (indeed, some pages are made up of just 0’s and 1’s). It reads as if written by the very machines and Artificial Intelligence systems it predicts (which, in some senses, following the philosopher Nick Land (one of the contributors to the book) and his idea of temporal feedback loops, it is).²⁴

Cyberpositive also contains words from other languages, actual and invented (it can read like Antonin Artaud’s peyote ‘poetry’ in this last sense), and, at times letters are voided – glitches occur – leaving words and sentences incomplete (again, as Malik remarks in his Foreword, it predicts texting, twitter, and so forth in this particular character). The book is not, however, non-sensical even though sense – straightforward meaning and narrative – can and does break down. The content is still held within a minimum consistency (and, of course, within the covers of a book).

The science fictioning then operates on two levels: of content (the narrative and philosophy) but also form. Indeed, *Cyberpositive* is both *about* and *of* the future it

²⁴ In fact, Land has experimented with this kind of writing elsewhere; see for example his essay on the Chapman Brother’s art ‘A ZiiGothic X-Coda (Cooking Lobsters with Jake and Dinos)’ (Land 2011). In terms of the latter, Jake Chapman’s *Meat Physics* (Chapman 2003) also performs its content in a very particular use of syntax that is reminiscent of Land’s writing (and indeed *Cyberpositive*) (albeit the narrative content is more horror than SF).

predicts (its is written in 1996 but from 2012). It arrives from a different – machine – consciousness, but it is not simply a story about the latter, a representation (in our familiar language) of this other thing. Indeed, again, it seems to me that the book is written ‘by’ the very machines it writes about (and, in this sense, it resonates with that other experimental SF-theory of the 1990s: Manuel DeLanda’s *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*). *Cyberpositive* is a future shock in this sense, a fragment of something-yet-to-come smuggled back into our own time in order to engineer its own genesis. The book is about a schizoid out of place and out of time, but is also out of place and out of time itself.

This is also evidenced in the ‘look’ of the book: the font and typesetting, the cover – as well as its size (over 400 pages), shape (narrower than a typical novel) and, indeed, whole ‘object’ feel.²⁵ There is something about this material thing, a throwback to a previous technology that indicates a future one, something about code being written on paper (the book as proto-digital codex). It is also a collaboratively produced text insofar as there are, alongside the writers mentioned above, a whole set of contributors who were part of a particular ‘scene’ that *Cyberpositive* emerged from, but also helped cohere. It is, to use a term associated with its authors, a *swarm* written novel. Again, Malik draws attention to the way in which this sampling of different voices, very much a ‘cut and paste’ construction, produces a very particular kind of text, and one that is itself incredibly prescient in terms of the writing practices of today premised as these are on the edit functions of word processors. But this collaboration – or hive-mind – also suggests a stranger, more alien, collectivity from which the book emerges.

²⁵ In this respect it is also interesting to note the original context and point of production of the book. As Maggie Roberts (of o[rphan] d[rift>]) and Delphi Carstens remark at the beginning of their own reflection: ‘*Cyberpositive* beings as a text collage to an installation’ (Carstens and Roberts 2012)). Their essay attends to the collaboratively produced nature of the writing, but also its character as feedback loop. It also lists some of the key influences, pro-genitors and fellow travellers that it samples, describing the book – convincingly – as a ‘psychogeographical drift through the SF imaginary’ (Carstens and Roberts 2012). For a text on *Cyberpositive* that resonates more with the fiction-status of the book (and, again, its character as predictive and prophetic) see Nick Land’s ‘Cyberpositive’ (from where the aphorism that begins my essay is taken). After *Cyberpositive* (the show and the book) o[rphan] d[rift>] embarked on a series of performances and audio-visual presentations, often with accompanying texts, culminating in the complex ‘Syzygy’ collaboration with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccru) (see footnote immediately below). Although not within the scope of this particular essay a ‘reading’ of that event – conducted over 5 weekends at Beaconsfield art gallery in London and involving the ‘manifestation’ of demons/avatars themselves premised on Ccru’s particular ‘calendric system’ – might also be understood as a form of science fictioning.

Does this perhaps tie into a certain mythos of o[rphan] d[rift>] and there sometime collaborators the ‘Cybernetic Culture Research Unit’ (Ccru)?²⁶ I have written about the latter – and the ‘hyperstition’ mythos – at more length elsewhere.²⁷ Suffice to say here that a myth-system needs a collectivity (even if this just the collectivity of one). It needs to come from some other place/time (even if it necessarily emerges from a scene that is located in a particular space-time). And it needs objects and images as well as words to cohere and successfully maintain its consistency – and give it traction in the real (there is good reason, it seems to me, that *Cyberpositive* is actual as well as virtual, concrete as well as abstract).

‘Liquid Lattice’, a more recent piece of writing and collaboration between o[rphan] d[rift>] and Ccru also has this fictioning quality (Ccru/o[rphan] d[rift>] 2014). On the one hand it is, again, SF – in this case moving from an account of Madame Centauri, her tarot pack and a Black Atlantean magic tradition (with segues of the Cthulu mythos) to more recognisably SF landscapes, cityscapes and seascapes, themselves populated by alien and aquatic hominids. It also has the character of a sampled text, written in different styles (and with different forms of inscriptions, from type to hand written), but also including drawings. Once again ‘older’ analogue technologies are brought into conjunction with newer digital ones.

And yet, on the other hand (as with *Cyberpositive*) it is not exactly a narrative and, certainly is not always an easy read. Different words (from other languages and myth-systems) are included and there is also mirrored writing this is all but indecipherable. There are also repetitions, the running through of different permutations of the same elements (reminiscent of the I-Ching) that stymies straightforward linear comprehension. The cut-up character of the text both prevents meaning, but also suggests new meanings, producing snap shot visions and images of another place and

²⁶ The Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccru) was a kind of para-academic research laboratory set up by the cultural theorist Sadie Plant, and then ‘led’ by philosopher Nick Land after her departure from academia (both Plant and Land contributed to *Cyberpositive*). A key concept for the Ccru was ‘hyperstition’ defined as both ‘element of effective culture that makes itself real’ and ‘fictional quantity functional as a time-traveling device’ (Ccru a). In relation to the nesting of these fictions see the Ccru text ‘Lemurian Time War’ that identifies Burroughs as a key exponent of what it calls ‘hyperstitional practice’:

Diagrams, maps, sets of abstract relations, tactical gambits, are as real in a fiction about a fiction about a fiction as they are encountered raw, but subjecting such semiotic contraband to multiple embeddings allows a traffic in materials for decoding dominant reality that would otherwise be proscribed. Rather than acting as transcendental screens, blocking out contact between itself and the world, the fiction acts as a Chinese box – a container for sorcerous interventions in the world. The frame is both used (for concealment) and broken (the fictions potentiate changes in reality). (Ccru b)

²⁷ See my ‘Accelerationism, Hyperstition, Myth-Science’ (O’Sullivan 2014c).

another time. Indeed, is this not the goal of all art? To produce something that is both of you and not of you at the same time? Something that ‘speaks back’ to you from an elsewhere?

If *Cyberpositive* has a certain urgency, a certain *rush*, then ‘Liquid Lattice’ is more hallucinatory. The drug references are inescapable: both read, to use Sadie Plant’s phrase, as ‘writing on drugs’ (see Plant 1999). Again, they are both about and from a different space-time. But in their very existence as objects, in their textual density as print, they are also firmly rooted in the present. This is the temporal paradox my own essay has been concerned with (how to be in the world but not wholly of that world). It is the move from SF to science fictioning, where ‘to fiction’ is not simply to tell a story about the future (or offer up a representation of it) but, to call it forth. Indeed, there is no longer an attempt to solve the temporal paradox of SF theoretically; instead, it is made manifest – presented as fact – in the here and now.²⁸

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²⁸ ‘Liquid Lattice’ was published in the third volume of John Russell’s *Frozen Tears* project – itself an example of fictioning, or a book of different texts and fictions but also an object that worked as a kind of performance (not least in its particular length (the size of large ‘door-stop’ air-port novel) and the variety but also density of its contents) (Russell 2005).

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