Spaces of Paradox: The Poetics of Disruption in Twenty-First Century Speculative Fiction



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Abstract

How do speculative novels post-2008 signal paradigm shifting ambiguities and uncertainties about literary genres in the first two decades of the twenty-first century? How might the poetics of disruption in contemporary speculative fiction signal a complex mediated interaction between formal literary devices and the transitional period from neo-liberalism into an unknown future global system defined by the uneven distribution of urban modernity? The six novels treated in this dissertation, published between 2009 and 2020, present a poetics of disruption that complicates distinctions between genres and modes, and demands a negotiation of ongoing paradigm shifts. Disruption of the status quo is a crucial tactic in social organising: just as speculation has literary and real-world referents, so too does disruption defy the borders of the text. I focus on three key spaces of paradox that are produced by the speculative mode in Anglophone literature in this century: urban interstices as depicted in China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) and Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City* (2010); hyperbole as a critical tool in Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017) and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017); and writing as a resistant act of reproduction in apocalyptic narratives that renegotiate the binaries of urban and wilderness as portrayed in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) and Lauren Beukes' *Afterland* (2020). Produced in the urgent socio-political contexts of the last two decades, these texts engage in discourse about the future, gesturing to an emerging paradigm in the literary market in which disruption is generative of literary activism through the imbrication of utopian ideals in the speculative mode. While presenting sometimes pessimistic outlooks, the speculative mode in this century interpolates a utopian impulse in its very form.

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Introduction

Cities also believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours.[1]

- Marco Polo to Kublai Khan in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*

In his influential essay "Walking in the City," social historian Michel de Certeau likened the urban space to a readable text, noting that it is viewed from above and outside, and is simultaneously experienced as fragmentary by the inhabitant.[2] The city-dweller is also the city-reader, and vice versa. He writes of an eagle-eye view of Manhattan: '*Le spectateur peut y lire un univers qui s'envole en l'air*.'[3] Steven F. Rendall's 1984 translation of 's'envole en l'air' translates this experience of reading the city as encountering a 'universe constantly exploding.' However, de Certeau's original '*s'envole en l'air*' can also be translated as 'to take off' or 'to fly away' into the air (my translation), with the pronoun emphasis '*s'envole*' implying self-propulsion. This line might also be: the spectator may read here a universe that takes to flight.

What does it mean if we consider that de Certeau might not be referring to perpetual catastrophe, but instead claiming that elusory meaning is inherent to the cityscape? The city takes to flight, it cannot be contained. I believe that de Certeau's description of the city as a universe that the reader witnesses '*s'envole en l'air*' evokes both explosion and elusory meaning. The city is both/and: it is a text to be read and in the process is co-created. It is thus rendered unknowable while being brought into (limited) comprehension.

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[1] Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities,* (London: Vintage, 1997), 44.
[2] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California, 1984).
[3] Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du Quotidien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 51.
The line quoted translates as: A spectator can read in it a universe that is constantly exploding, as Steven F. Rendall translated it, in de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 91.

The reader/viewer vantage point is evoked in the etymological origins of the words speculation and speculate: 'to speculate' derives from the Latin *specere* and *specula*, meaning 'to look' and 'watchtower' respectively. The Old French *speculacion* means close or rapt attention, and the Anglicised 'speculation' began to be used in English in the fourteenth century. Since the late nineteenth century, it has become more commonly used in reference to financial investments and credit. In the twenty-first century the term is widely used in reference to the 2008 financial crisis, following speculation in derivative securities. This constellation of meanings and present-day referents has led to a surge in scholarly interest in the term's uses for theory, as well as in fan communities and the literary market to signify particular literary aesthetics and to sell books.

I have chosen six novels written after the 2008 crash that use the speculative mode for purposes of literary activism. They do not refer to the crash itself; rather they are symbolic of the complex relationship between cultural products of and about the dying days of one political-economic system, neo-liberalism, and the transitional period into an uncertain unknown. While there are several branches or iterations of literary activism, I use the term in this instance to indicate a resistance in the literary text against prescriptions of form, as well as critiques of its contemporary moment, both literally and figuratively. In this sense literary activist texts engage in the particular discourses and concerns around the issues about which their novels speculate, in the case of the novels treated in this dissertation: issues such as economic segregation, climate crisis, and women's reproductive autonomy. There are many ways in which a writer might engage in literary activism, and for the purposes of this argument I necessarily limit the meaning to the critical work that these authors have undertaken through form, diction, style, language choices made in their speculative depictions of alternative, proximate worlds.[4] These

[4] Activism manifests in many ways, entailing both the philosophical work of ideation and consciousness raising and the physical activity of activism including demonstrations, or running for political office. Campaigning

novels use the speculative mode across genres in consciousness-raising efforts to address issues prevalent in socio-political and climate justice movements in the transition period between neo-liberalism and whatever forms of political economy that might follow. They also assert the literary merits of speculation as being more than an association with science fiction.[5] This dissertation asks: How do speculative novels post-2008 signal paradigm shifting ambiguities and uncertainties about literary genres in the first two decades of the twenty-first century? And, how do the poetics of disruption in contemporary speculative fiction interact with and inform this transitional period from neo-liberalism into an unknown future global system defined by urban modernity? If the neo-liberal period began with Augusto Pinochet's restructuring of Chile's economic system in the mid-1970s for the benefit of private and corporate enterprise, then the 2008 housing market crash in the United States was the beginning of the end, with pundits such as Cedric Durand suggesting that the COVID-19 pandemic has definitively rung the death knell.[6]

Texts written between the 2008 crash and the COVID-19 pandemic inhabit a paradoxical space of transition and stasis, as the world struggles with what it means to be at the beginning of the end of a decades-long economic system. At the same time, more than half of the global population inhabits urban spaces and more are anticipated to migrate to urban metropoles as the climate crisis escalates. These six novels in particular explore the utopian potential of pessimism, disrupt the presumption of neo-liberalism's ongoing grip on the globe,

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necessarily entails both, but what is particular to my conception of literary activism is the imbrication of activist intentions in the content and how the form reflects these intentions. It is both capital P Politics and lowercase p politics – public in so much as it is published for public consumption, and private in that it is work of the individual author. Literary activism has also been conceived of as a project that examines the structural underpinnings of all creative work, and as a protest movement against corporate publishers and their dissemination of right-wing media.

[5] Roger Luckhurst's Science Fiction (2005) makes the case for a cultural history of science fiction that refutes the low-brow association of speculation with pulp fiction. Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

[6] Cedric Durand, interview with Daniel Finn, "Neoliberalism Has Finally Reached the End of the Road," *Jacobin*, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2022/03/neoliberalism-state-economic-policy-monetary-pandemic-inflation, published on 21 March 2022, accessed on 6 May 2022.

and signal speculation's productive ambiguity as method and mode. The unique scholarly contributions that this thesis makes are as follows: it provides close contextual readings of speculative texts that are unusual in the authors' oeuvres and have received relatively little or no academic critical attention; it explores the utopianism of the speculative mode in the current century; and it argues for a paradigm shift that mirrors disruptive qualities of a mode that articulates the uncertainties of the transitional period out of neo-liberalism and into a political economy as yet undefined but certainly inflected by the uneven distribution of capitalist urban modernity.

The Warwick Research Collective (WReC) have argued that speculative fiction can, through critical irrealist aesthetics, 'register the impact of combined and uneven development in the colonial periphery', using Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* as a test case.[7] They raise the concern of whether at various periodically defined junctions we might register disturbances to the socio-political economic system through the 'spectrality and phantasmagoria' of speculative fiction to go beyond the violence of colonial expansionism to 'read the shock of transition,' and their example specifies the shock of transition from communism to neoliberal capitalism.[8] I would argue that speculative fiction's disruptive poetics, of which critical irrealism is a part, not only registers these earlier shocks, but in the contemporary period registers a still-evolving shock, a shock wave so to speak. This tsunamic wave involves the death throes of a political economic structure, in the tsunami analogy we might read this as the shifting of tectonic plates. The obliterating wave that follows such a shift has different consequences depending on the geopolitical conditions where it makes landfall, with the caveat that recognises the potentially regenerative consequences of such a seemingly apocalyptic socio-political upheaval. This mode in this period, due to its particular and specific

[7] The Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature,* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 97.
Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North,* (London: Heinemann, 1970).
[8] WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 97.

commitments to ambiguity and uncertainty, encodes a utopian impulse in texts that speculate about the aftermath of a system that dominates, in variously geopolitically determined ways, the way the world works (or doesn't work).

World-systems theory debates, and their literary counterparts in the world literature context, are invoked inevitably by any engagement with modernity as a ubiquitous concept. The early struggles to define 'world' have left the field (or fields) conflicted by differences on semantic intentionality.[9] What is interesting in the debates are the claims for particular capacities for resistance and activism in one or the other's conceptual framework.[10] Concentrating on what is being resisted might bring these terms closer together than their various champions would like, if colonial and imperialist violence at the local scale is understood as part of the slow march across the planet towards the ubiquitous present-day capitalist modernity. WReC argue that 'modernity is both what world-literature indexes or is "about" and what gives world-literature its distinguishing features.'[11] Speculation is itself inherently of and about the world but no less resistant for it, taking as its target a more insidious and wide-spread system, slipping the bonds of local, partial foci by asserting modernity as unbounded by Eurocentrism, by understanding modernity as a consequence of a distributed system, not a geographically-tethered culture. The speculative mode is no less resistant for being untethered by cultural specificity, and in fact, perhaps paradoxically, makes productive use of specificity, as I will describe, to register the shock of transition from one system to another, as yet undefined.

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[9] Postcolonialism and world-literature have been posited, with much concern for the former's status in the academy, as fields undertaking different types of work and entailing different areas of literature due to assumptions that 'world' is universalising. See Laura Gerday for a semantic perspective on the debate in "Rewording the World or Reworlding the Word? Some Postcolonial Perspectives on the 'World' of World Literature" in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol 24, no.6, 2022: 917–931.

[10] For example, eminent postcolonialist Robert Young's essay "World Literature and Postcolonialism" argues, amongst other things, that postcolonial literature is motivated by resistance.
Robert J.C. Young, "World Literature and Postcolonialism," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, eds. Theo d'Haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir, (London: Routledge, 2012): 213–222.

[11] WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 15.

It is my hope that through this dissertation, the word 'speculative' comes to refer not only to the content and poetics of the texts, but to the texts themselves – each of the novels examined here is employing a speculative mode, while also being an exercise in speculation about the form and future of fiction more broadly, particularly given the transitionary period in which the texts are produced and which they also mediate. The mixing of genres, styles, innovative narrative strategies, and political intentions in these texts suggests that speculation coalesces out of and speaks back to several literary genres, including literary fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and others. Crucially alongside these it is also invested ideologically in reshaping existing global power structures. In so doing these texts speculate about what else a novel might do and be, presenting the conundrum of whether we should understand these novels as being located within a genre, or whether they deploy a speculative mode.[12] Certainly, the content and style of these texts cannot be extricated from their status as products in a literary market, and must be considered as both products and producers of the particular ambiguity that besets their categorisation and critical reception. My analyses present new close readings of how these texts use the speculative mode to articulate their complex relationship with and critical response to the shock of the current transitional moment.

In this introductory section I explain that this political work is intrinsic to the texts' generic encoding of a Jamesonian utopian impulse. Thereafter I contextualise the taxonomic debate of speculative fiction versus science fiction. I draw the term out from under the umbrella of genre fiction and locate it more properly in the context of an evolving mode that engages utopian imagination, while remaining cognizant of the term's use as a genre category label in the distribution and reception of speculative fiction novels in the literary market. The texts

[12] Consider Kazuo Ishiguro's most recent novel *Klara and The Sun* (2021). This novel might be categorised as a bildungsroman in which Klara, at least mentally, comes of age while in employment as an Artificial Friend. The speculative conceit of this otherwise literary drama does not lessen the other genre conventions present in the text.
Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and The Sun* (London: Faber & Faber, 2021).

chosen for analysis in this thesis are in many cases unusually speculative in the context of the authors' oeuvres, a situation that brings these texts to the attention of a broader audience than the novels might otherwise have attracted. The analysis of the poetics of disruption sustains a recognition of speculative fiction's literary merit while acknowledging its political potentialities. Speculation is both a method and a mode. In the coming pages I will expand on the question of genre in relation to speculative fiction's relationship to, through a poetics of disruption, late-modernist responses to the liberal global metropolises of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, keeping in mind here 'the synchronic historical situation in which such novels can be read as symbolic acts.'[13]

These texts respond to the transitional situation of being of and dwelling in the period between neo-liberalism and whatever form of political economy that follows with ambiguity and experimentation in narrative temporality, the uncanny, and shifting perspectives. These are not wholly new strategies, to be sure, but the synchronic historical situation is such that these acts take on an urgency that is made paradoxical by the very nature of speculation: to look forward is not necessarily to move forward. In this way speculation is symbolic of the stasis of the temporal betweenness in which we find ourselves, struggling against the past into an ill-defined future. These texts are certainly products both of an appetite in the literary market for a melange of literariness, science, and fantasy, which is a consequence of both the recognition of literary fiction as a genre in its own right, and the promotion of science fiction and fantasy from low brow status through theoretical considerations in the last six decades.

When Ian Baucom describes Fredric Jameson's success with Ernst Bloch's ideas towards an historicist hermeneutic, he notes usefully that for novels, the 'historical situations (or ages or periods) are not *sui generis* but host to prior such moments, not autonomous but

[13] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious; Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, 1981, (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 65.

invested by a range of pasts which are not, in fact, past.'[14] For Baucom that means vesting the long twentieth century with the emerging ideologies of the eighteenth, latterly made dominant. In the case of the argument in *Spectres of the Atlantic* (2005) these are speculative finance and dehumanisation through slavery. Both of these transmute, as they must, into the twenty-first century, even as it has nonsynchronous continuity with the emergent ideologies of the nineteenth century. The privileging of urban modernity over other forms of social organisation and the concretising of the allegorical relationship between capital and commodities reflect this transmutation. The past lingers on, making time spatial in its enduring capacity to inhabit and be inhabited.

However, it appears that the twenty-first century does rather more than transmute the emerging ideologies of the nineteenth. It also exhibits mutations of many of those ideologies Baucom identifies as dominant in the eighteenth and twentieth, while sustaining continuity with those ideologies emerging in the nineteenth (in particular the prominence of the urban metropole). The centuries cycle through and around, oscillating and intensifying through the emergence and subsequent dominance of ideologies. Finance capital (what we might also call speculative financial discourse) is the dominant ideology of the long twentieth century as Baucom suggests, drawing on his own mapping of Giovanni Arrighi's argument of historical cyclicality and Walter Benjamin's perception of repetition of the seventeenth century in the nineteenth. The post-2008 period to the present, which is the period occupied with what Arrighi called a transition to 'an unknown destination,' is paradoxically both chronologically defined by these Arrighian historical cycles of accumulation, and also a nonsynchronous

[14] Baucom, Ian, *Spectres of the Atlantic: finance capital, slavery and the philosophy of history* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2005), 19.

contemporaneity defined by its mutated repetition of Benjamin's sense of the allegorical nature of the relationship between capital and commodities.[15]

The moment of transition from one period to the next is not so absolute as Arrighi's cycles indicate, though he is aware of the slippage between them: he presents the overlaps as significant as points of high financialisation.[16] The sub-prime crisis of the 2008 economic disaster and the consequent housing crisis fall out is an example of the high financialisation in a transitionary period that nevertheless has nonsynchronous continuity with the slave trade and the cyclical historical continuity into the long twentieth century of those 18th century crises of credit and inhumanity. Concluding his argument, Baucom writes that 'time does not pass… it accumulates.'[17] Under the conditions of urban modernity, compounded by 24-hour inter-continental travel, the internet, social media, and the 24-hour news cycle, I would suggest that in the twenty-first century time not only accumulates, but it also compresses and is compressed. In this way the ideologies of synchronous and nonsynchronous centuries emerge anew and intensified in our contemporary moment. As a result, ideas, politics, movements of all kinds, experience shorter life cycles, and the literary market mutates more quickly and reacts more immediately to global crises. Speculative fiction between 2008 and 2020 highlights the effects of this compression of time which influences its disruptive poetics. Given the transitory, in-between nature of the two decades in which the texts treated in this dissertation were published, we might consider how speculative fiction in the twenty-first century occupies a paradoxical space in which novels mutate and borrow forms and ideologies from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, making the ideologies of each both synchronously and non-synchronously contemporaneous with the present, while also pressing forward into new, unknown and

[15] Giovanni Arrighi and David Harvey, "The Winding Paths of Capital: Interview", *New Left Review* online, accessed 19 August 2022, https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii56/articles/giovanni-arrighi-the-winding-paths-of-capital

[16] Arrighi, Giovanni, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of our Times*, 1994 (London: Verso Books, 2009).

[17] Baucom, *Spectres of the Atlantic*, 34.

undefinable territory. This is what makes it possible for these texts to expand the semantic register of literature in general, and the speculative mode in particular. Mutation is fiction's survival response to neo-liberalism and the dying days thereof, speculation becoming a resistant mode even as it is circulated through the remains of the neo-liberal economy.

Speculative fiction is necessarily a 'mutation' as Richard Halpern might put it, of much that has come before, and has assumed its own generic label due to popular use and appropriation by the literary market.[18] This literary market is itself paradoxically imbricated in and extant outside of the market *tout court* because as Bourdieu argued, the literary market cannot exist outside of the social conditions that define it at any given time.[19] It is important that while we might consider speculation as a mode and a method, the practical use to which 'speculative fiction' is put in the communities of readers, writers, and publishers is as a commodifiable genre. This is another sense in which speculative fiction occupies a paradoxical space because while it functions as a mode across genres at an aesthetic level, it has quite another form at the commodity level.

Speculation is a mode in much the same way that utopian writing is a mode; loosely grouping types, and overlapping necessarily with science fiction and utopian fiction. Raymond Williams describes the common link between utopian and science fiction thus: 'it is true that the presentation of *otherness* appears to link them, as modes of desire or of warning in which a crucial emphasis is obtained by the element of discontinuity from ordinary "realism".'[20] Following this, we might perceive *otherness* as potentially uniting, but Williams asserts that it is not, precisely because discontinuity is not itself fixed. It is in this vein that I explore a poetics of disruption in the speculative mode, as I believe disruption accounts for the variability of the discontinuity, and foregrounds the crucially active element of speculation. Disruption is

[18] Richard Halpern, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 2.
[19] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and the Structure of the Literary Field*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).
[20] Raymond Williams, "Utopia and Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies*, vol 16, no 5, part 3, 1978: 205.

the play of speculation across genres, where it asserts a speculative element in a text that we might otherwise consider to be detective fiction, or climate fiction, or adventure. For Williams, what defines the bounds of a mode is 'the continuity, the implied connection, which the form is intended to embody.'[21]

However, from *Marxism and Literature* 'it is clear that the collective mode which can sustain and contain all individual projects is only one of a number of possible relationships.'[22] For Williams, ascribing mode is a collectivising effort and I concur: prescriptivism of genre or mode has extremely limited use in the study of literature precisely because any distinction by which we attempt to categorise them is not only variable, but also a product of social conditions. The term "speculative fiction" therefore gathers, loosely, texts that embody the intent of the word "speculation" and its relation to the period of transition that define its social situation, but it has the continuity, the implied connection of discontinuity that links it to utopia and science fiction. The mode distinguishes itself from these firstly by not relying exclusively on science for its discontinuity, and by presenting a different pessimism that is utopian in impulse though not in content. The success of a mode relies on continuation from previous iterations, but the stability or broad communicability of the mode depends on its social relations. This is I believe why speculative fiction struggles to find definitive description as a genre, mode, or type. Speculation as a mode has no *a priori* definition, only a loose intention, which is nevertheless understood as an organising principle, that being a utopian impulse toward socio-political amelioration communicated by narrative devices such as neologisms, resignification of words, hyperbole, and technologically-inspired formally distinct insertions in narrative prose.

[21] Williams, "Utopian and Science Fiction," 205.
[22] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 189.

We find these devices disruptive of the genre boundaries in detective fiction, climate fiction, adventure, and apocalypse fiction in the novels treated in this dissertation. For example, China Miéville's detective noir novel *The City & The City* pushes at the boundaries of detective fiction through the resignification of words related to sense perception. Seeing is crucial to detective fiction and yet the speculation in this novel is about how sight is actively curtailed by cultural and political convention, impeding on the detective work central to the novel's plot. Lauren Beukes' novel *Zoo City* similarly speculates about the role of sense perception in detective fiction, introducing a protagonist with additional sensory capabilities conveyed on her as a result of 'animaling' by criminal guilt. Hyperbole permits Kim Stanley Robinson to speculate about climate fiction at multiple scales, pursuing a deep-time view through narration from multiple narrators accessing both large scale perspectives and a local character-specific view. The black doors and extra-diegetic narration in *Exit West* suppose a fantasy in which the experience of refugee journeys is erased; this absence of borders and border crossings in the novel speculates about how the novel can be similarly border crossing and disinterested in geographic limits. Louise Erdrich's diary of a reproductive apocalypse in *Future Home of the Living God* examines how an apocalypse novel speculates about future readers, both real and implied. Beukes' *Afterland* reimagines the adventure novel, using speculation to reshape its gender politics. Both of these last two novels also imbricate social reproduction theory in their speculation about the creative act as a mode of resistance.

The upward trend in the popularity of speculative fiction and dystopia in myriad forms in the last two decades indicates a preoccupation with socio-political reform in the literary space. This is hardly surprising, given the social conditions out of which these texts are written and the antecedent pessimism about the state of the world in the twentieth century: Isaiah Berlin

asserted that the twentieth century was the worst in human history[23] while Walter Benjamin's angel looked back into the past while the future fell to ruin behind him.[24] At the end of the 1990s, China Miéville described modernity as a restless, anxious, shared temporal-spatial location in which we live and from which we are also alienated: 'We, the residents of modernity, live in an unquiet house.'[25] Presuming the alienation of humanity from 'architecture under capitalism,' Miéville constructs an uneasy solidarity, enveloping potential readers in the first-person plural experience of residing *in* modernity. Temporality, he implies, is also physically habitable. To live in time as we experience it in the twenty-first century is to live in modernity. This duality of alienation and habitation produces paradoxical temporal spaces in which the contradiction of simultaneous habitation and estrangement holds true. Speculation as method and mode is symbolic of this paradoxical situation.

Consider the paradoxical perspective of de Certeau's reminiscing *spectateur*: to spectate is not to inhabit, but rather to view or watch from a distance. In this context we might infer a somewhat dispassionate distance from the object in view. Height produces this distance: de Certeau views the city from atop one of its skyscrapers. In the urban landscape, de Certeau finds that he is both familiar with his location, and at a remove from it. The city is defamiliarised in the articulation of the urban space as a text to be read, just as it is explosive and flying away. The meaning of the urban space eludes de Certeau as geographer, as reader, as theorist. It is this elusory nature that compels him to read on.

The defamiliarised view of the city below poses the question: 'To what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong?'[26] Again, in 'cosmos' de Certeau

[23] Isaiah Berlin, *Affirming: Letters 1975-1997*, edited by Henry Hardy and Mark Pottle (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015).
[24] Walter Benjamin, "Theses of the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, edited with intro by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn, (London: Collins-Fontana Books, 1973).
[25] Miéville, China, "The Conspiracy of Architecture: Notes on a Modern Anxiety," *Historical Materialism*, July 1998, no. 2: 1.
[26] De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 91.

analogises the city as a universe. Elsewhere in the essay, de Certeau describes reading the city as 'totalising,' implying an expression of the desire to comprehend all, albeit from a distance.[27] Knowing or understanding an urban space engages the ecstasy of knowledge accumulation: reading is a satisfaction of the desire to know more and understand. De Certeau's erotics of knowledge centre on the acts of imagining and consumption of physical space: his contribution to the spatial turn is perhaps best evoked in his celebration of the city as 'the most immoderate of human texts,' and in his appeal to the role of the person on the street in its production and consumption.[28] Of course, not every person on the street reads the city in the same way or from the same vantage point, and the problem of unequal perspectives is itself part of how the city is (re)produced and perceived.

De Certeau's spectator desires the city as an object to be consumed, but the city is also simultaneously produced by this passionate viewer. Though they spectate, even that signifies active participation in urban co-creation, physically and/or psychologically, and is utopian in nature, being primarily a future-oriented act of making something anew in collaboration. Our view from atop de Certeau's skyscraper is doubled: it is the view of the city-planner but encompasses the experience of the person on the street. This is how the possessive pronoun 'mine' in the concept of 'my city' is identified, insofar as a city is shaped by an individual's experience of it. However, as readers and city-dwellers know, the text always also belongs to other readers. Each of us creates the text through our individual experiences of it, just as the city belongs to multiple other inhabitants who similarly constitute the space according to their own interactions with it and movement through it. Cities are spaces of paradox, being both possessed and possessing, inclusive and exclusive, safe and dangerous, familiar and uncanny.

[27] De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 91.
[28] De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 91.

In *The Image of the City* (1960) urbanist Kevin Lynch describes the legibility of the urban space, how one finds one's path through it, not just geographically but experientially as well. Similarly, in *Bardarac* (2006), French literary theorist Gérard Genette reflects on Paris and the Haussmanian arcades that so inspired Walter Benjamin.[29] Genette describes the city as a collection of texts, the buildings 'transformed little by little into shelves of books piled up and stretching to infinity, each floor becoming a shelf, each window the spine of a book. I search for an address and find only a call number.'[30] Expanding on Genette's personal reflection, architecture and urban studies theorist Anthony Vidler notes the tendency of writers over the last two centuries to make attempts to 'read' the city:

> From the city as an eighteenth-century version of the philosophical *Encyclopédie* through the city as mystery novel to the city of modernist collage and later to the city of cybernetic communication and finally to the city of virtual networks, the image has persisted, to the extent that city and library have been conflated in the imaginary of modern writers.[31]

At first, Vidler highlights the city as a metaphor for a compendium of information, *l'Encyclopédie*. However, he perceives that as time passed the city became a metaphorical referent for texts in popular genres such as mystery and collage. Finally in the contemporary period, despite their frequent intangibility, virtual networks establish the city once again as an information source, a library in the ether. Though Vidler's argument might have benefitted from analysis of Jorge Luis Borges' labyrinthine "The Library of Babel," (which he inexplicably leaves out), he correctly presents the persistent conflation of the part with the whole.[32] The part is a single text or building, the whole is the library which is representative of

[29] Gerard Genette, *Bardarac* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).
[30] Genette, *Bardarac*, 38 (translated from the French original and quoted in Anthony Vidler, "Reading the City: The Urban Book from Mercier to Mitterand", *PMLA* 122, No. 1, (January 2007): 235.
[31] Vidler, "Reading the City," 235.
[32] Borges' The Library of Babel is a paradox in itself as it is both infinite and finite, and each text a minor variation on all of the others, and the possibility of reading them in concert in infinite combinations.
Jorge Luis Borges, *Fictions*, edited and with an introduction by Anthony Kerrigan (London: Calder & Boyars, 1974).

the large tracts of knowledge with which the city is metaphorically endowed.[33] Unlike the contents of an encyclopaedia, the city is perpetually unknowable and changing even as it is perceived, just as the text, read for a second time, takes on different meanings for the readers who are themselves changed by the reading, and spectrally haunted by any previous readings.

To read the city is to imbue the design of urban space with the intended power of the political tract, one that is beset by the contradiction of being largely self-defeating. Having little aesthetic or ideological unity, cities cannot be representative of any cause or political position, though their expansion and centralisation of decision making speaks to the creep of capitalist urbanisation as Henri Lefebvre perceived it.[34] Cities are not cohesive wholes – they come into existence over centuries, inflected with the varied histories of conquest, depression, capital accumulation, segregation, cultural revolutions, and technological connectivity. The work of architects and urban planners acts in counterpoint to the presumption of urban cohesion because the envisioned city is never the city that is realised.

For David Harvey, the metaphor of the city for utopianism's demands holds an 'emotive power' which is produced by the interplay between the various utopian possibilities of the urban space.[35] This is captured in the future-oriented optimism of city planning, and the reality that the city space is occupied primarily by multiple others. Harvey writes that despite the association of city life with personal freedoms, 'the city is equally the site of anxiety and anomie,' locating the source of this anomie in the competing demands for recognition and rights by city dwellers both existing and arriving.[36] Turning his attention to utopian literature, Harvey notes that the 'evolution within the utopian genre of writing itself … into the full-blown drama of the (sometimes epic) novel signals an important transition in sentiments and

[33] I will not offend those doing anti-colonial work on knowledge production and pretend that any library could contain the sum of knowledge.
[34] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, 1974 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
[35] David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley, University of California, 2000), 157.
[36] Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 157.

technique.'[37] The poetics of disruption are an example of this transition: what Harvey calls the sentiments and techniques of the novel are transformative for the utopian genre into something more literary, more accessible, more readable, and perhaps as a result more actionable. What Harvey implicitly identifies here is that popular genres such as the novel enable the wider dissemination of utopian ideas. Perhaps the crises and failures of neoliberalism are more effectively communicated through fiction than they are through the political tract?

In their article "How do novels think about neoliberalism?" Nancy Armstrong and John Marx discuss the social and political structures that contemporary novels re-organise:

> If what we mean by *neoliberalism* is a culture marked by the collapse of the categories of liberalism (democracy/class hierarchy; democratic reading/literary genres; freedom/subjection), then does that collapse explain why post-WWII novels refuse to hold out "happy horizontality" as the resolution to the individual's struggle for self-recognition under dehumanising conditions?[38]

In an attempt to think beyond a binary of horizontality and vertical authority, Armstrong takes a well-worn path to non-binarism by signalling a desire for theory of contemporary novels to circumvent hierarchised organisational structures. Certainly, the cultural and political circumstances of the twenty-first century do indicate a collapse of liberalist binaries. However, Armstrong and Marx recognise in their discussion that authors cannot escape structures and hierarchies that determine the labelling, publication, and circulation of their texts.

The 'collapsed' distinction between democratic reading and literary genres is perhaps less a collapse than a slow fade to near-transparency, as genre bending, especially in novels from the last twenty years, paradoxically undermines generic distinctions while being intimately subject to hierarchies of genre. Two such arenas in this debate are the cult of literary prizes, and the tension between low and high culture. Speculative fiction cuts across generic tropes while also subverting these to produce political critiques, not only of the systems or

[37] Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 189.
[38] Nancy Armstrong and John Marx, "Introduction: How do novels think about neoliberalism?" in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 51, no.2, (2018): 159. Emphasis in original.

circumstances they depict, but also those hierarchies in genre itself that impose value judgements on particular literary aesthetics. If novels are indeed able to 'think' as Armstrong and Marx' essay title suggests, specifically about neoliberalism, they are certainly not thinking about conformity to type except, paradoxically, to subvert it.

Novels also think in conversation with the reader. They aid readers to negotiate circumstances we may encounter or might have encountered under slightly different circumstances, as in the case of existentially proximate speculative narratives. The 'garbage novel' description of the genre of contemporary novels that Armstrong and Marx critically examine is useful insofar as it subverts the linear teleology of literary history, indicating that the contemporary novel is born of misguided attempts to delineate periods and styles. What Armstrong and Marx posit instead is that contemporary novels 'offer the lure of a freedom that proves to be anything but.'[39] The contemporary novel is inevitably bound by the literary market, but for Marx these novels seem 'more like a diagnostic tool than a fount of actionable information or a repository of instructions for conduct.'[40] The novel therefore thinks but does not prescribe, and in diagnosis is inflected with a political imperative. I believe that the novel form can in some cases extend this diagnosis, but a sociological study of reading and empathy would be necessary to examine this concern further.[41]

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[39] Armstrong and Marx, "How Do Novels Think About Neoliberalism," 164.
[40] Armstrong and Marx, "How Do Novels Think About Neoliberalism," 164.
[41] Narrative empathy theorist Susanne Keen suggests that 'the very fictionality of novels predisposes readers to empathise with characters, since a fiction known to be "made up" does not activate suspicion and wariness as an apparently "real" appeal for assistance may do.' The paradox in Keen's theory is that the safe zone of the novel provides space for the reader to develop an emotional and perhaps moral response to the novel's contents. She does not however indicate why this is specific to the novel, and it seems that it may be the case for other media (except perhaps the news). Other fictions may however equally open a similar safe zone, as is indicated by the responses to David Kidd and Emmanuel Castano's 2013 presumption of a correlation between a single reading of a piece of literary fiction and the development of empathy. Dalya Samur et al suggest that 'it is possible that more enriched and prolonged exposures to literary fiction bring greater psychological benefits,' than single occurrences of exposure.
Susanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2001), 4; David Kidd and Emmanuel Castano, "Reading literary fiction improves theory of mind," *Science*, 342, no. 6156, (2013): 377–380; Dalya Samur, Mattie Tops & Sander L. Koole, "Does a single session of reading literary fiction prime enhanced mentalising performance? Four replication experiments of Kidd and Castano (2013)," *Cognition and Emotion*, 32, no. 1, (2018): 141.

The city as an urban environment inhabited at close quarters by multitudes is fraught with anxieties. These are made ever more pressing by the proximity of others, the othering of those with whom we share the streets, and the violence of urban development structured for the benefit of a privileged few. In *The Architectural Uncanny,* Anthony Vidler notes that 'the labyrinthine spaces of the modern city have been construed as a source of modern anxiety, from revolution and epidemic to phobia and alienation.'[42] Urban architecture evokes the Freudian *unheimlich*, Vidler argues, due to modern anxieties concerning what is and is not a home. These uncertainties result in contemporary architecture that visually and physically represents this psychological discomfort. The city-reader cannot but notice and be interpellated into this discomfort.

The uncanny was amplified in academic literary and philosophical thinking in the 1990s by more solid theoretical engagements with the concept. Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992) was quickly followed by Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* in 1994. Between 1990 and 1999, five hundred and twenty-eight items featuring 'uncanny' in the title were published, of which four hundred were book titles.[43] The term became particularly useful to theorists trying to describe the resurgence of the broadly defined gothic genre in the contemporary period, as well as to those working in postmodernism and postcolonialism. The 'uncanny nineties' as Martin Jay named that decade, led inevitably into the anxious early years of the twenty-first century, carrying as I have described the haunting dominant ideologies of both the nineteenth century and the defining characteristics of the twentieth.[44] These latter years have been preoccupied with what utopian scholar Caroline Edwards describes as a 'radical uncertainty,' particularly in literature.[45] This radical uncertainty is productive I believe, as it

[42] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), ix.
[43] WorldCat, 'Uncanny' search, June 2020.
[44] Martin Jay, "The Uncanny Nineties," *Salmagundi*, No. 108 (Fall 1995): 20–29.
[45] Caroline Edwards, *Utopia and the Contemporary British Novel,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 6.

creates space for speculation about 'what next' and 'what if.' As neo-liberalism lies dying, it is the radical uncertainty of where we are and where we are going that the speculative mode most embodies, while being in itself a mode in and of this in-betweenness.

Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) is perhaps one of the most important texts from the period for the relevance of the uncanny concept to postcolonial theory. Revised definitions of 'home,' 'belonging' and their referents permeate Bhabha's work, most obviously emphasised in the spatial interest signalled by the eponymous 'Location' of that formative text. Bhabha writes:

> Although the unhomely is a paradigmatic postcolonial experience, it has a resonance that can be heard, distinctly if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites.[46]

Bhabha frames the unhomely sensation of the uncanny as exemplary of the postcolonial experience expressed in literatures from around the world. 'Paradigmatic' implies that to feel out of place and uncanny is the very essence of the postcolonial experience, steering the reader towards Bhabha's further contributions to theories of hybridity and liminality. The paradigmatic quality of a sense of dislocation or alienation is precisely the work that speculative texts do, in challenging literary hierarchies as well as in the very disruptive qualities of the texts' contents and style. It is my contention that the rise of speculative fiction owes much to the work of postcolonialists and minority writers and thinkers whose work asserts the value of narratives that subvert what is considered real: speculative fiction is a mode that permits thought experiments outside of normative mimetic fiction. Non-mimetic narratives proliferate in postcolonial literature for example, creating a rhetorical need to distinguish new forms of narrative and previously un- and under-represented perspectives which contradict and challenge the dominance of colonialism and neo-liberalism. Speculation is a non-mimetic mode with a purpose; the thought experiment at both the content level, and the formal level,

[46] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 13.

where we examine innovation with narrative devices for their speculative challenge to the literary paradigm.

In the quote above, Bhabha extends the uncanny to the discomforting effect of making previously private concerns public, such as those entailed in the activist work of queer studies and feminisms. Fictions that negotiate powers of cultural difference are therefore, in Bhabha's terms, engaged in an excavation of the uncanny in what is hidden, and in what is known.[47] I use excavation explicitly here to signal the importance of doing the work to uncover the hidden and buried histories that Bhabha indicates resonate in fiction that focuses on the physical locations of unhomeliness. Anxieties that arose as a result of these unhomely revelations and sensations in both experience and theory in the 1990s are profoundly imbricated in the postmodernism of the late-twentieth century, and the styles that characterise much of the literature produced in the first two decades of the twenty-first.

My analysis of the six novels treated in this dissertation explores three facets of the paradox that inheres in urban space. Each of these facets is articulated and critiqued through the deployment of the speculative mode's disruptive poetics. The displacement of the detective protagonists in China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) and Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City* (2010) challenges the inclusion of city dwellers as equal inhabitants of this supposedly shared space, which I theorise as social disavowal in urban interstices.[48] In my reading of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017), hyperboles of

[47] This sense of an uncanny doubling is particularly evident in the role of uncovering hidden histories in the academy. The familiar faces and names of the canon have been defamiliarised by new activist work and scholarship that uncovers debts owed to collaborators and muses alike, often women excluded from literary histories of canonical male authors. The revelations of the publicised TS Eliot – Emily Hale letters at Princeton in January 2020 indicate the role of the 'muse' in Eliot's poetry and the debt owed to Hale as correspondent and reader.
Hannah Sullivan, "The Moment of Embalming," in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 31 January 2020, accessed on 28 April 2020 from: https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/the-moment-of-embalming/
[48] China Miéville, *The City & The City* (London: Macmillan, 2009); Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City* (London: Angry Robot, 2010).

excess and absence are evoked through extra-diegetic narration.[49] The novels' speculative planetary scope paradoxically implicates the metropoles of London and New York in global crises of climate disaster and forced migration, the scope of these novels emphasising the always-already nature of the metropoles' complicity in perpetuating these crises. Lastly, my readings of apocalypses of distributed modernity in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) and Lauren Beukes' *Afterland* (2020) examine how these texts explicate and critique the ubiquity of twenty-first century modernity through acts of resistance and reproduction.[50]

It is my contention in this dissertation that twenty-first century speculative fiction uses a poetics of disruption to highlight the paradoxes that inhere in modern urban life. Skewing the world as we know it only slightly off-centre, these novels achieve a kind of critical proximity made possible by the cognitive distance of speculative conceits and the nearness of real-world settings and contexts. These disruptive skewings through the speculative mode function as criticism of capitalist modernity, while also being products of that temporal space. The novels treated in this dissertation are as much spaces for speculation about the future of literary production as they are speculative criticisms of the conditions under which they have been produced. Reading and writing in this genre thus become a form of what David Harvey would term 'insurgent architecture' constructing a constellation of Jamesonian 'utopian impulses.'[51]

The Utopian Impulse

Fredric Jameson's seminal work *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005) offers some of the most comprehensive and influential Marxist

[49] Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2017); Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140*, (London: Orbit, 2017).
[50] Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God* (London: Corsair, 2017); Lauren Beukes, *Afterland* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2020).
[51] Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 244; Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Futures: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), 10.

interpretations of science fiction, providing the groundwork for his theory of cognitive mapping through a formalist approach to the genre.[52] Jameson begins *Archaeologies* with the forceful statement: 'Utopia has always been a political issue, an unusual destiny for a literary form: yet just as the literary value of the form is subject to permanent doubt, so also its political status is structurally ambiguous.'[53] He explicates a distinction, established and further expanded by utopian scholars of such eminence as Lyman Tower Sargent, Ruth Levitas, and Tom Moylan, between the form of literary utopias, political utopias, and the 'utopian wish' which he also describes as a Blochian 'utopian impulse.'[54] This is the eponymous desire of his 2005 text. In 2010 he revised that desire as both method and place – he clarifies the utopian impulse in what appears to be a tacit recognition of the political 'work' that novelist Kim Stanley Robinson identifies as utopian in intent, as I explain in the following pages.

For Jameson, most science fiction depicts how global conditions work to perpetuate a system based on capital. My contention is that the genre can only function in this way insofar as Jameson is referring to science fiction that is preoccupied with critiques of empire and othering, which we may hope is what the 'global' in his theory of cognitive mapping refers to. Understood not only as cultural texts achieving critical distance from the society, surely these novels-as-apparatuses are not merely representational, but far more securely imbricated in the social fabric? The distance between criticism and the critiqued is not as great as the critic makes it. This is one sense in which I understand spaces of paradox to be as theoretical as they are physical.

A paradox lies at the heart of utopian theory, from which utopian scholars perpetually struggle to rescue it. The limitations of the theoretical commitments of utopianism were a particular concern during the 2019 Utopian Studies Society conference in Prato, Tuscany. On

[52] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future,* 2005.
[53] Jameson, *Archaeologies*, xi.
[54] Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 1.

a roundtable on the domestication of utopia, Siân Adiseshiah rightly critiqued the gendered connotations in domestication, and the concomitant devaluation of the domestic as a site of women's labour.[55] On the same panel, Darren Webb argued that utopian imagining must be activist or it cannot be utopian, implicitly asking whether literary criticism can be activist. While the choice of 'domestication' for inclusion in the panel title leaves much in the way of gender equity to be desired, it does signal the importance of utopianism exceeding the bounds of either theory or fiction. In the same spirit of critique as that deployed by Adiseshiah, I contend that writing and reading are not 'domestic,' if by domestic we mean apolitical and hidden from the public milieu. When these constitute active engagements, they have as much potential to produce action as political discourse does. Distanced from the failures of Nazism and Stalinism, utopia has been re-upholstered within the discourse of egalitarian socio-political organisation, largely thanks to the work of utopian scholars of science fiction and dystopia.

Two such formidable figures in utopian studies, Greg Claeys and Tom Moylan, continue an ongoing debate about the state of utopianism in the twenty-first century. Prompted by Claeys' publication of *Dystopia: A Natural History* (2016), they bat back and forth the question of the value of dystopia as a constitutive part of utopian ideation.[56] Moylan's position is that the utopian impulse must not be subsumed by the insufficiently radical politics of dystopia which he identifies as a fault in Claeys' argument. Moylan reads Kim Stanley Robinson's influential *Commune* article, "Dystopias Now," as offering a useful position to take in opposition to what he sees as dystopia subsuming utopianism into the existing order and thus domesticating it. Robinson's stated position in "Dystopias Now" is akin to that presented in his

[55]Ian Farnell, "Things Are Heating Up: Reflections on Utopia, Dystopia and Climate Change, the 20th International Conference of the Utopian Studies Society, Europe," *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. 8, no. 2, (2021): 1–7.

[56] Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford: OUP, 2016). The debate between Moylan and Claeys can be found in the journal *Utopian Studies*, vol 31, no.1, 2020.
Tom Moylan, "The Necessity of Hope in Dystopian Times: A Critical Reflection," *Utopian Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, (2020): 164–193.
Greg Claeys, "Moylan and Dystopia," *Utopian Studies*, vol 31, no. 1, (2020): pp. 194–203.

novel *New York 2140*: action is necessary regardless of the hopelessness of one's circumstances. Moylan celebrates Robinson's refusal to accept dystopia as a purely pessimistic form. The novelist writes of dystopia: 'It's crucial to keep imagining that things could get better, and furthermore to imagine how they might get better.'[57] For Moylan and for Robinson, being anti-anti-utopian is to engage in utopian thinking. Writing and reading are a primary method by which both undertake this resistance to the pessimism of anti-utopianism.

The Jamesonian utopian impulse is of particular use here to frame both Moylan and Robinson's ideas of that political action that must abandon such notions as pure optimism and pure pessimism. A radical position should not be founded in an emotional response to circumstances, but rather in a practical response of necessity. Robinson articulates this position as an act of labour undertaken regardless of feeling: 'We have to do this work no matter how we feel about it. So, by force of will or the sheer default of emergency we make ourselves have utopian thoughts and ideas.'[58] He highlights the importance of action in the face of the paralysis that dystopian circumstances can result in by concession to political quietism, by which he refers to inaction in the face of injustice and in the case of dystopia or technocracy. Political quietism is akin to the failure that Moylan identifies in Claeys' account of dystopias. Claeys' interpretation of literary dystopias is however concentrated on the very aspect of negation that dystopia undertakes through satire, parody, and occasionally anti-utopian portrayals of ideal societies gone wrong. Moylan's critique of Claeys' theory of dystopia hinges on the presumption of inaction, while Claeys argues for the very imbrication of dystopia in the utopian project, which must start with recognising a corrupt society or diseased system when it appears. The politically productive negation in dystopia that Claeys identifies is akin to the inversion of negative phenomena with which Jameson revises his earlier conception of the utopian impulse.

[57] Kim Stanley Robinson, "Dystopias Now," in *Commune*, 11 February 2018, accessed on 8 September 2020, from https://communemag.com/dystopias-now/
[58] Robinson, 'Dystopias Now,' n.pg.

While Moylan pits Robinson's ideas of anti-anti-utopianism against Claeys' conception of dystopia, it seems that these theorists are, as is typical of debate in this field, arguing over a point of definition, instead of points of ideology and the generic political intent. Claeys' literary dystopia is no less politically engaged than Moylan's critical dystopia, though for Claeys different dystopias take different critical tacks due to their contexts: they 'grow out of existing trends towards dictatorship, economic monopoly, the degradation of the poor, or environmental collapse.'[59] Neither Moylan's nor Claeys' positions indicates that either theorist believes that dystopia does not undertake a political project of some kind, though the question for each is to what end and with what degree of radicalism. Anti-utopia, dystopia, and utopia each denote slightly different approaches to what I believe is surely a unifying intent: amelioration of the existing order of things.[60]

Jameson suggests that following the end of the Cold War, utopia 'seems to have recovered its vitality as a political slogan and a politically energising perspective.'[61] He follows Darko Suvin's assertion that utopia is a 'socio-economic sub-genre' of science fiction, which they both characterise as the broader generic form.[62] However, taken as a politically energising organising principle, utopia must certainly take precedence as a literary form in its own right, arising, as it does, in genres treated as distinct from science fiction, such as fantasy and adventure novels, since at least the sixteenth century.[63] Critics have struggled to define utopia, and Jameson himself vacillates on the subject. At times he understands it as a genre, at others a political movement, in still others, an impulse. Over time, he seems to have settled on the

[59] Claeys, *Dystopia*, 274–5.
[60] It is worth noting here that this amelioration is not always socialist in view, and that each utopian defines what a better world would look like for themselves.
[61] Jameson, *Archaeologies*, xii.
[62] Jameson, *Archaeologies*, xiv.
[63] Darko Suvin is famously derisive of fantasy fiction. His work has been field-defining and has played no small role in the separation of these genres, and the subsequent taxonomy problems to which speculative fiction has been subject. However, the utopian ideals in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) are presented in profoundly fantastical settings, while Thomas More's *Utopia* (1551) precedes this in both adventure novel and epistolary forms.

impulse as the most significant of utopia's manifestations. It is the impulse, the urge, that I find most useful when analysing speculative texts' poetics of disruption. An impulse is both unreflective in the sense of the sudden urge to act, but impulse can also refer to something that gives impetus.

This impulse is founded in what Jameson describes as a 'distinct process' and not as 'some unlocking of the political, returning to its rightful centrality as in the Greek city-states.'[64] What defines the utopian process, Jameson argues, is the intention to identify a problem and solve it, picking out the underlying fault in a social system and positing a resolution.[65] A secondary task is to locate this utopian intention materially, and it is here that I think Jameson does not account for the co-creation and ongoing reimagining of urban spaces both physically and in fiction. Both are driven by utopian ideals, as architecture must be, and by the free market, itself another iteration of a utopian commercial structure (utopias are not always imagined for everyone).

Jameson derides the 'unlocking of the political' for a return to classical antiquity's notion of the city-state. He posits that the real work resulting from the utopian impulse is identifying a problem to be solved, and how it might be tackled. The impulse is therefore solution-driven, and I infer an expectation of political action in Jameson's articulation, though through a process rather than through an awakening of some kind. Often ignored in utopian studies are Jameson's revisions of his ideas on the utopian impulse initially produced in *Archaeologies of the Future.* In his 2010 essay, "Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future,"

[64] Jameson, *Archaeologies,* 10.
[65] An example of this identification and amelioration is the fluidity of biological gender binaries in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969).
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 1969).

he writes: 'We ordinarily think of utopia as a place, or if you like a nonplace that looks like a place. How can a place be a method?'[66] How indeed?

Jameson's opening lines in the 2010 essay indicate the paradox that inheres in physical space. Though it is not Jameson's explicit intention, I find it useful to consider the relevance that his question has to urban studies and architecture. Buildings are intended as places that speak to a social method: ways of being, of interacting, of living, and of working. Reading the city, we might invert Jameson's question to ask: how can a method be a place? Perhaps in its capacity to determine or define a way of being in the world? The paradox in this is the very paradox that I believe sustains utopianism, and with which speculative fiction critically engages.

In addressing some of the criticisms of *Archaeologies*, mainly that it concentrates on the form of utopian literature, Jameson introduces 'cynical reason' – theorised beyond German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's initial conception of enlightened false consciousness.[67] For Jameson, reason, however cynical, must have consequence. This seems to me to share conceptual characteristics with Moylan's 'militant pessimism,' and China Miéville's optimistic or 'different pessimism, an unflinching look at how bad things are' because for Jameson, cynical reason is 'characterised by something like the inversion of political apathy.'[68] 'Something like' an inversion of political apathy leaves room for the ambiguity that a utopian

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[66] Fredric Jameson, "Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future," in *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, edited by Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 29.

[67] Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (London: Verso, 1987).
Slavoj Žižek also uses the term 'cynical reasoning' or 'ideological cynicism' to refer to a situation in which one knows that a situation is unjust but does not act upon that knowledge.
Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, Verso, 1989).

[68] Jameson, "Utopia as Method," 23.
Miéville describes good pessimism in his essay 'The Limits of Utopia' published by Salvage magazine.
China Miéville, "The Limits of Utopia," *Salvage*, published on 1 August 2015, accessed on 5 October 2020 from https://salvage.zone/in-print/the-limits-of-utopia/.
Moylan's conception of militant pessimism is grounded in his argument for the radical activism of dystopia, articulated in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000).
Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Cultural Studies Series, Boulder, Colo.; Oxford: Westview, 2000).

impulse entails; the inversion of apathy implies action that manifests in one form or another. For Jameson, as a literary theorist, one manifestation of action is literary form, though he does not discount the political forms represented by Soviet communism and various iterations of oppressive socialisms.

The 'representational utopia', for which he uses the example of the future pastoral communities imagined in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), is crucial to the larger utopian project, as these community-oriented utopias disrupt the cult of progress, the myth of teleology.[69] He returns then to an assertion that the utopian programme, which is bound by materialism, is specifically that: bounded, and physical. The material existence of a building or a garden is posited as the smallest unit of the utopian programme: in this way Jameson locates the method in and as the imagined place, made of ideas, wishes, and some elements of the real. The utopian impulse 'necessarily deals with fragments,'[70] the articulation of which chimes with his further insistence that it 'calls for a hermeneutic, for the detective work of a decipherment and a reading of utopian clues and traces in the landscape of the real.'[71] It is with this detective work in mind that the first chapter of this dissertation examines two detective novels, *The City & The City* (2009) by China Miéville and *Zoo City* (2010) by Lauren Beukes. The latter is set in real-world Johannesburg, the former in a fictional urban setting somewhere in Eastern Europe. Through the speculative mode that integrates with the form and style of the detective novel, *Zoo City* and *The City & The City* are littered with utopian clues that gesture to the impulse to challenge the ubiquity of homelessness and segregation of marginalised groups in urban centres.

Reading the landscape of the real, or perhaps we might say reading the city, demands this decipherment. Jameson thus not only connects method and place but seems also to

[69] Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (London: Del Rey, 2016).
[70] Jameson, "Utopia as Method," 25.
[71] Jameson, "Utopia as Method," 26.

highlight the importance of the defamiliarisation of the settings in texts that evince a utopian impulse. He goes on to a discussion of Italian philosopher Paolo Virno's retheorisation of cynical reasoning through the concept of the multitude, or the overpopulation of the planet.[72] Using both as illustrations of his method as utopia, or utopia as method, Jameson excuses himself from agreeing or disagreeing with Virno. This disingenuous strategy does not do his method service, given the political implications of both the terms used and content treated in his essay.

In his reading of Virno, Jameson articulates the philosopher's sense of the multitude as one of inevitable geographical movement of people and civil disobedience through self-organisation, such that 'the camps, the frontier' are the reality of Virno's multitudinous world.[73] Jameson's choice of terms in his reading of Virno is particularly disturbing as both 'camps' and 'frontier' carry weighty connotations regarding the distribution, possession, sale, and exploitation of geographical space and people in the last five centuries. In Virno's articulation the multitude are notionally homeless due to a breakdown between a Hobbesian inside and outside, such that no one can ever feel at home.[74] Jameson suggests Virno would have us embrace this displacement as the 'eternal return of the future and of utopian possibilities to be celebrated as though we had chosen them in the first place.'[75]

Here Jameson implies that Virno commends the multitude's subjugation to an inevitable future of a seemingly unachievable home, made so by the very system that has produced the multitude in the first place. In this instance, it is the moralising of overpopulation that Jameson interpolates in the concept of the multitude, and he fails to take this prime

[72] Paolo Virno articulates the multitude in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, challenging Hobbes' 'the people' as an insufficient a term to describe what Virno believes is a political bloc that engages in alternative forms of organising, such as nonrepresentative democracy through celebration of plurality rather than common identification.
Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For An Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004).
[73] Jameson, "Utopia as Method," 40.
[74] Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 2004.
[75] Jameson, "Utopia as Method," 41.

opportunity to critique the demonisation of overpopulation – a bogeyman for white supremacists who fear and resent increasing populations of people of colour. But Virno does not actually address rising population. Instead, he identifies the multitude as those in the West failed by ideological social revolutions that were never seriously explored in the 1960s and 70s. In Jameson's reading, the billions of people who occupy the 'camps' and face the 'frontiers' of the modern world, are living political statements, but by conflating them with the disenfranchised and dislocated poor, he appears to have misidentified Virno's multitude. This multitude might otherwise be found on the city streets, moving around and between one another, struggling to make sense of the world they have inherited and must now co-create with the unfamiliar others with whom they share it. They are neither ideologically homeless as Virno would have it, nor are they at a frontier as Jameson suggests, but they are not at home either. Speculative representations of this temporal dislocation suggest that they exist perpetually in the liminal space of modernity while paradoxically occupying physical space in the contemporary urban environment as well.

Speculative fiction specifically uses disruption to name social problems that require our collective attention, problems that arise from this temporal and spatial dislocation as a result of modernity. The black doors in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* are an example: they are an apparatus by which the author elides the traumatic process of becoming a refugee. The omission of the journey through a disruption of reality renders the novel's title sardonic: the eponymous exit is swift and relatively painless, but the West to which our protagonists escape poses yet more threats to their safety and wellbeing. As I explain in the second chapter, the effect of hyperbole in excess and absence, as in the case of the black doors, works to highlight the systemic injustice that yields little kindness for those who for reasons as varied as people are, find themselves compelled to exit west. Hamid's black doors are a utopian clue to how we might reorganise ourselves geographically and in relation to existing geographically-displaced others

if our system of international borders was disrupted. I detail how the extra-diegetic style Hamid uses in the sections of the novel concerned with the movement of unnamed characters through the doors normalises their transnational migration, achieving a critical proximity to the dislocation of refugees through speculation.

The speculative view of what cities could be, if people had animal familiars as in *Zoo City*, or if borders did not restrict international movement as in *Exit West*, or if humankind ceased to reproduce viable offspring as in *Future Home of the Living God*, is frequently engaged in the different pessimism that Miéville describes. Strategies for articulating potential disasters brought about by science or nature or magic in these speculative fiction novels promote exactly the kind of inversion of negative phenomena Jameson refers to when he describes utopian clues. Thus, writing and reading cities speculatively, through generic blending, innovative style and linguistic play, ensures that the activism of utopianism is not lost in the literary form. Instead, it is sustained through the co-creative act of readers and authors imagining how the fundamental material structure of social organisation in our century shapes our experience of the here and now.

Speculative Literary Criticism and Narrative Traction

'Science fiction has monsters and spaceships; speculative fiction could really happen,' Margaret Atwood insisted, defending her 2003 offering *Oryx and Crake* from the clutches of science fiction fans who saw that text as the author's concession to the genre.[76] Atwood outraged the science fiction and fantasy communities when she disputed the science fiction label assigned to some of her later work. Rejecting elements of Hard SF, she privileged the quality of speculation in her own future-oriented dystopian narratives set on a future-earth for their plausible probability, seemingly diluting science fiction. Her refusal to concede the

[76] Robert Potts, "Light in the Wilderness," in *The Guardian*, 26 April 2003, accessed on 14 October 2020 from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/apr/26/fiction.margaretatwood.

science fictional elements of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013), and most recently her speculative novels *The Heart Goes Last* (2016) and *The Testaments* (2019), reignited a debate that is ongoing in scholarly and fan communities.

The first use of the term speculative fiction is commonly attributed to influential American science fiction writer, Robert Anson Heinlein. Heinlein popularised the term in his 1951 essay 'On the Writing of Speculative Fiction,'[77] which develops his guest-of-honour address at the World Science Fiction Convention of the same year.[78] Speculative fiction has since been considered both an umbrella term for sci-fi and fantasy, and paradoxically as a sub-genre of these. However, I take Roger Luckhurst's lead when he suggests that science fiction should be understood through cultural and historical definitions, rather than exclusively through the formalist definitions offered by Darko Suvin and Carl Freedman, or the alternative conceptual definition that Samuel R. Delaney and Damien Broderick propose.[79]

Luckhurst argues that Suvin and Delaney's conflicting definitions have 'displaced genre history to a large extent because they were so concerned with formalist or narrowly conceptual definitions of SF.'[80] This ongoing taxonomic debate hounds the science fiction community and limits the integration of close reading analysis with thorough socio-literary critique, though it is important to recognise the contributions of both Suvin and Delaney to scholarship on the genre. Suvin brought science fiction into academic repute through his formalist approach, and Delaney diversified the genre through not only his own queer black science fiction, but also in his proposed conceptual definitions.

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[77] Robert A. Heinlein, "On the Writing of Speculative Fiction," in *Of Worlds Beyond: The Science of Science Fiction Writing*, edited by Robert A. Heinlein and Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, (London: D Dobson, 1965), 11–20. This is also an amusing and easy read by Heinlein on the craft of writing and the work to which narrative can be put, regardless of genre.

[78] Samuel R. Delaney, *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 16.

[79] For a succinct explanation of the taxonomy debate between the critical theorist camp championed by Darko Suvin and Carl Freedman, and the conceptual position taken by Samuel Delaney and Damien Broderick, see Roger Luckhurst's (albeit) Western-centric cultural historicist overview in *Science Fiction*, (London: Polity Press, 2005).

[80] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, 6.

Certain critics venture that by claiming the speculative label for her novels, Atwood aligned herself with the Mundane SF movement led by novelist Geoff Ryman.[81] Others, such as feminist science fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin, suggest that by drawing a distinction between the plausibility of speculative fiction and science fiction's 'squids in outer space', Atwood was attempting to distance herself from science fiction's legacy as a low culture or popular fiction genre.[82] Le Guin cuttingly synthesises her suspicions about Atwood's pandering to literary snobbery and the marketplace of literary prizes in her 2009 review of the second novel in Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, *The Year of The Flood* (2009). Describing Atwood's insistence on being a speculative, rather than science fiction author, Le Guin writes:

> This arbitrarily restrictive definition seems designed to protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hidebound readers, reviewers, and prize-awarders. She doesn't want the literary bigots to shove her into the literary ghetto.[83]

Surely Atwood is now a sufficiently eminent writer to have no fear of relegation from the literary marketplace. Following the resurgence in enthusiasm for *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and the concomitant success of the small-screen series adaptation by the same name, Atwood's shared Booker Prize win with Bernadine Evaristo is evidence of a shift in the concerns of the

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[81] Mundane SF rejects the interstellar travel, aliens, magic, and alternative universes of Hard SF, insisting instead that science fiction would do better to concentrate its focus on this planet and the known world. In Mark Bould, Adam Roberts, Andrew Milner and Sherryl Vint's edited collection *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, Paul Kincaid refers the reader to Geoff Ryman's mundane SF novel *Air* (2005), terming Atwood's resistance to the science fiction label as 'ill-judged'.
Paul Kincaid, "Fiction Since 1992," in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by. Mark Bould, Adam Roberts, Andrew Milner and Sherryl Vint, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009),181; Geoff Ryman et al, "The Mundane Manifesto," *SF Genics*, accessed from https://sfgenics.wordpress.com/2013/07/04/geoff-ryman-et-al-the-mundane-manifesto/ on 19 August 2019.
Science Fiction theorist David Ketterer describes Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* as containing mundane SF qualities, a novel in which 'reality and history are underwritten by fantasy and fable, by fiction and imagination.'
David Ketterer, "'Another Dimension of Space': Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy and Atwood's Blind Assassin," in *Worlds of Wonder: Readings in Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*, eds. Camille R. La Bossière, Jean-François Leroux (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), 21.
[82] This threat of literary ghettoisation has proven to be unfounded in the last decade as science fiction, or indeed speculative fiction texts, are being received both critically and commercially within the marketplace of both literary and popular fiction, consumer tastes neatly straddling the fictional divide. Indeed, Atwood won the 2019 Booker Prize (shared with Bernadine Evaristo) for the sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*: *The Testaments*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2019).
[83] Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood," in *The Guardian*, 29 August 2009, accessed from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/29/margaret-atwood-year-of-flood on 19 August 2019.

literary marketplace from those of generic value to identity politics and prestige. Prescriptivist taxonomies of, for example, the distinctions between science fiction and fantasy, were concretised (unfortunately) in academic theory by Darko Suvin in his seminal work *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (1979).[84] As a result, I infer a defensive quality in Le Guin and others' interpretation of Atwood's description of her work as speculative rather than science fictional.

Le Guin's own work is speculative and fantastic in the extreme, though she is lauded as one of the most important feminist science fiction (not fantasy) authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Her popularity in scholarly and science fiction circles owes much to the trend of critique in the last two decades towards eco-feminist frameworks. Le Guin has made no enemies with her insistence on the science fiction genre label and her intention to reclaim science fiction from the so-called literary ghetto.[85]

What speculative fiction constitutes then is contested, but the term is increasingly used as an umbrella amongst theorists of genre fiction to refer to those forms that include: science fiction, horror, gothic, fantasy, cyberpunk and silkpunk as well as the multitude of variations thereof. This common usage demonstrates an intuition by contemporary scholars working in these associated genres that the word speculation presents opportunities for more complex discursive contexts and theoretical strategies if we consider it more usefully as a mode. Another defining feature is that the world-building in speculative fiction does not deviate sufficiently from the reader's world to render it wholly alien or impossible, though the elements of fantasy,

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[84] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale, 1979).

[85] Le Guin has in the last two decades been the subject of increasing scholarly attention and following her death in 2018 there has been a resurgence in the popularity of her work amongst science fiction readers and scholars. Some notable examples of scholarly work on Le Guin include:
Warren Michelle, *Communities of the Heart: The Rhetoric of Myth and Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001);
Michael Cadden, *Ursula K. Le Guin Beyond Genre: Fiction for Children and Adults* (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Marleen S. Barr, "Ursula K. Le Guin: anthropologist of other worlds (obituary)," *Nature*, vol. 555, no. 7694, (1 March 2018), n.pg.

political intrigue, historical revision, or science fiction introduced into an otherwise recognisable world might contain an element of the contrived or the impossible.

I believe it is specifically this representational proximity to our experienced reality that lends speculative novels their political impetus, which it necessarily shares with science fiction and utopian fiction. However, speculative fiction does not stray so far into the future or so far beyond the world known to the reader that it is totally beyond the realm of possibility, nor does it remove the reader into fantasy world entirely divorced from the realities and contexts of our own. The speculative mode borrows much from science fiction, while in many ways leaving the world of the novel largely recognisable. While it is possible to imagine a spectrum on which we perceive speculative fiction at one end and science fiction at the other, this would not account for fantasy, nor would it account for the ways in which speculation cuts across other genres, altering our perceptions of these genres and where they fit on the literary register. We see the concept of representational proximity at work in the recent example of pigs genetically engineered to grow human organs, described in the 2019 article: "Genetically modified pigs as donors of cells, tissues, and organs for xenotransplantation."[86] This real-world example of bio-technological development recalls the near-human intelligence and organisation of the pigoons depicted in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy. The last novel in that trilogy was published only four years before xenotransplantation became a popular media topic.[87]

For some critics, speculative fiction encompasses both science fiction and fantasy.[88] Kim Wilkins suggests that speculative fiction as a genre is 'usually broken down into three distinct subgenres: fantasy fiction, science fiction and horror,' though she then crucially goes

[86] Eckhard Wolf, Elisabeth Kemter, Nikolai Klymiuk, and Bruno Reichart, "Genetically modified pigs as donors of cells, tissues, and organs for xenotransplantation, " in *Animal Frontiers*, vol. 9, issue 3, (July 2019), 13–20; Sarah Zhang, "Genetically Engineering Pigs to Grow Organs for People," *The Atlantic*, published 10 August 2017, accessed on 2 January 2019 from https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/08/pig-organs-for-humans/536307/.
[87] Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003); Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[88] Justin Landon and Jared Shurin, (eds) *Speculative Fiction 2012* (London: Jurassic London, 2013).

on to note: 'this breakdown is inadequate to anyone familiar with the genre.'[89] Authors frequently resist the designation of genres to their work: like Atwood, Kurt Vonnegut has expressed discomfort with the labelling of his work as science fiction.[90] P.L. Thomas argues that these genres should be understood as 'open questions' about the nature of the world, rather than prescriptions about the assigning of texts to certain generic groupings.[91] Such a generous invitation should be accepted, particularly in the case of speculation, which permits a series of open questions about the nature of the world through its capacity as a mode to cut across genres. Miéville uses speculation in his detective novel to pose alternative visions of criminality, national sovereignty, and segregation, while Erdrich deploys speculation to reconsider what is entailed in apocalypse and whether there is opportunity for renewal in disaster circumstances.

Reframing speculation as a series of open questions, or loose intentions as I suggested earlier, rather than as a prescribed genre category, allows us to explore new scholarly avenues in literary criticism. What is it to speculate? How else might we think about the future, and the past? What are the connotations of speculation's etymology and present-day use, and how do these complicate the utopianism of the mode? Would the playful portmanteau of 'speculafiction' connote a distinction between mode and genre categories? These questions are posed in the spirit of a hermeneutics of acceptance. Consider the growing field of speculative fiction studies in light of Rita Felski's recent theorisations of reading practices which, she argues, are informed by a hermeneutics of suspicion.

'Why', Felski asks, 'should anyone care about literature?'[92] Questions about the purpose of critical interpretations are implicit in the arguments made in *The Limits of Critique* (2015). Asking these questions is useful in and of itself: we must be able to ask to what end we

[89] Kim Wilkins, "Genre and Speculative Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing*, edited by David Morley and Philip Nielsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 38.
[90] P.L. Thomas, (ed), *Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012).
[91] P.L. Thomas, *Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction*, 4.
[92] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 14.

produce critical interpretations. Asking such questions need not necessarily entail what scholar Bruce Robbins fears, a depoliticising of the humanities.[93] Instead, scholars' self-reflexivity in this area can generate a renewed sense of ethical commitment. Considering the limitations of critique, we might ask: what does my engagement with this text make possible? Felski's contention is that the deployment of that broad category of 'Critical Theory' has been one of many kinds of interpretive practice and that working in other modes has productive analytic potential.[94] She argues in particular that a key feature of critique is 'the claim to be engaged in some kind of radical intellectual and/or political work, and the assumption that whatever is *not* critical must therefore be *un*critical.'[95] This should not however, mean that critical work should be done away with as Felski's critics suggest she demands, but rather that we might use criticism in tandem with other reading methods to locate literature more concretely in culture, and in response to political exigencies.

Turning to Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT), Felski asserts that the literary field must acknowledge its own complicity in the framing of critique and literature as mere reflectors of society, rather than as actors that are themselves also acted upon.[96] Conveniently, her instrumentalisation of Latour's ANT provides a framework for exactly the kind of work that she proposes are required of literary studies. I aim to produce literary analysis which is politically engaged beyond form and theory. In this I am aligned, to an extent, with Bruce Robbins when he critiques Felski's *Limits*. I agree with Robbins that it is not only the task of the literary theorist to critique, but also the task of the text for which 'critique is often unambiguously organic.'[97] Robbins seems here to presume all texts might offer critique, which

[93] Bruce Robbins, "Not So Well Attached," *PMLA* 132, no.1 (2017): 371–6.
[94] I use the term critical theory here to refer to the project of challenging social structures to reveal power structures. Elsewhere 'critical' refers to the act of criticism.
[95] Felski, *Limits*, 2. Italics in original.
[96] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter , 1991 (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 2005).
[97] Robbins, "Not So Well Attached," 371–6.

cannot of course be true – otherwise we might read critique into, for example, Jilly Cooper, whose books do not present serious critical perspectives (though a serious critical reading might be made of or through them). We must acknowledge, as Robbins does, the critical act; regardless of the hermeneutics with which the reader approaches their task. However, exclusively critical reading does not sufficiently address the problem, as Robbins' review of Felski's *Limits* implies. The interplay of scholarly interest and readerly enjoyment complicates the distance of culture and analysis that Robbins champions. Readerly pleasure mixed with critical attention is not unique to speculative fiction, though it offers many good examples of texts that create this experience.

If we accept speculative texts as artefacts of a culture, we cannot simultaneously ignore their co-creation as part of that culture. They do not engage in ideas with the same distance as Critical Theory but are engaged with socio-political concerns, represented through a poetics of disruption. It is impossible to deny that a text can make a distanced critique of the society in which it is implicated. Robbins notes that 'talking about literature entails an edginess or distancing ourselves from the values of the society around us.'[98] However, we must consider that critical distance is not the only quality of interpretations of cultural products. Perhaps we would do better as literary critics not to distance ourselves from the culture through critique, but to enter into it as active co-creators. This means in many cases that engagement cannot end at critique, though it certainly can, and often must, begin there. The utopian impulses identified in a text must have further consequences or they may fall prey to the limitations of critique that relegate the utopianism to theory rather than method or place. Through disruptive poetics, and generic ambiguity, speculative fiction is a cultural-critical mode which, paradoxically, succeeds in creating a critical distance without being divorced from its contexts. The reader is hereby forced to engage with both the aesthetic rhetoric and the ideological rhetoric of the text,

[98] Robbins, "Not So Well Attached," 372.

such that they must consider both the text's apparent intention and the world outside of the text, following Seymour Chatman.[99] By demanding so much of the reader, speculative fiction texts are necessarily 'open' in the sense that Umberto Eco imagines them: arranged with intention by the author but available to multiple interpretations and readings dependent on the reader themselves.[100] Speculative fiction sweeps through what Eco perceived as a closed text genre such as detective fiction, and opens it up, permitting a more multifarious reading which itself challenges the fixity of the genre. In the specific cases analysed in this dissertation, the poetics of disruption produce the paradoxical critical distance that is both near and far enough to make a critique of circumstances from which the mode has emerged while challenging genre demarcations and sustaining an openness to readerly interrogation of both the mode itself and the world/s about which it speculates.

Noting the increasing demands for urban studies to engage more radically and creatively with media like literature and film, and especially the speculative offerings in those genres, architect Amy Butt argues for the relevance of speculative fiction to the conceptual work of architects and urban planners.[101] Though she focuses primarily on hard-SF in her analysis, Butt's contention is that representations of the city in this genre 'are rarely neutral on the subject of the societies they contain and create,' going on to argue that the world-building in science fiction 'lends itself to the creation of visions of futures where morals are made material, and the urban and social are inexorably intertwined.'[102]

The implications of Butt's argument are that ideology is instantiated in architecture and infrastructure, an argument that we see materially reflected in the organisation and

[99] Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
[100] Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London: Hutchinson & co., 1979).
[101] Amy Butt, "City Limits: Boundary Conditions and the Building-Cities of Science Fiction," *Open Library of the Humanities,* 4, no.2, (2018): 4.
[102] Butt, "City Limits," 2.

development of cities in formerly colonised regions. Focussing on hard-SF about the metropolitan Global North, Butt describes an inevitable intersection of theory about the material world with future-oriented visions of ameliorated social structures. Her analysis signals the material relevance of speculative fiction to urban theory in which the built environment's reflection of constitutive ideologies becomes a pressing concern.

These visions of social reformation through fiction are overwhelmingly utopian for Butt, whose analysis of hard SF texts from the 1950s to the 1980s suggests that the cities featured in many twentieth century science fiction texts present visions of inclusive, racially (and species) diverse, and dweller-oriented urban architectures and planning. While my focus is rather more on the closer-to-home speculative qualities of the texts in question rather than the impossible futures of space exploration, Butt's work very audaciously and importantly advocates the utopianism of science fiction for architects and urban planners. The activist approach to social justice through one's research interests intersects with my own intention to suggest a moment of introspection for urban theorists, architects, urban planners, as well as authors of speculative texts.

What is it that one does when imagining a new urban space, be it fictional or soon-to-be-built? Who are the intended inhabitants or users of the infrastructure? In a period of greater awareness of myriad disabilities, as well as a growing housing crisis in urban centres the world over, the latter question should surely be at the forefront of ethical urban design, while the former remains rhetorical given the flows of power that render the distribution and use of space, built or natural, subject to neoliberal determinants. Speculative architectural theory and socially-inflected urban studies appear to have a common goal: deconstructing ideologies otherwise enveloped and normalised in urban development.

The problem faced is that much of this work is defined by the Global North-centricity of the field of urban sociology.[103] Fortunately, this North-South view has been usefully challenged by the renaissance in urban studies in the last decade which has reoriented to the Global South where the largest numbers of people migrate from rural settings to urban centres.[104] While sociology has long been integrated into the broadest definition of the field of urban studies, the focus has primarily been from the North, on the North. London and New York, as sites of global finance and metropoles of cultural and economic imperialism, provide useful loci for these thought experiments. Depicting these cities as sites of disaster, both *Exit West* and *New York 2140* paradoxically present the lived experiences of those whose stories might be recognisable to a reader, and those lives that are omitted from the record of history, people who are considered ungrievable in the Butlerian sense.[105] The speculative novel is therefore engaged in a provocation through the conveyance of, for example, disruption, apathy,

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[103] The very existence of a collection such as The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South, and its publication in 2014, implies a lack of recognition of the Global South in the field until very recently.

[104] See in particular the work of Ananya Roy on 'worlding the South', Garth Myers on Lefebvre's notion of planetary urbanisation in relation to Africa, Susan Parnell's work at the Africa Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, Binti Singh's work on the 'Southern turn' in urban studies particularly looking at local urban governance in India, and Sylvia Chant and Cathy McIlwaine's work on feminist urban futures.
Ananya Roy, "Worlding the South: Toward a Postcolonial Urban Theory," in *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*, edited by Sophie Oldfield and Susan Parnell (London: Routledge, 2014), 9–21.
Garth Myers, "The Africa Problem of Global Urban Theory: Re-conceptualising Planetary Urbanism," *International Development Policy*, vol 10, no. 4, (2018): 231–253.
Susan Parnell, "(Re)theorising Cities from the Global South: Looking Beyond Neoliberalism," *Urban Geography*, vol. 33, no.2, (2013): 1–25.
Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (eds.), *Worlding Cities: Asian experiments and the art of being global* (Chichester, West Sussex, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
Binti Singh, "New Frontiers of Urban Theory – A Global South Perspective," in *Oxford Urbanists*, 9 November 2019, accessed on 26 May 2020 from https://www.oxfordurbanists.com/magazine/2019/11/8/new-frontiers-of-urban-theory-a-global-south-perspective
Sylvia H. Chant and Cathy McIlwaine, *Cities, Slums and Gender in The Global South: Towards a Feminised Urban Future* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[105] In *Precarious Life: The Politics of Mourning and Violence* (2004) and *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009), Butler outlines the circumstances by which people become or are always-already ungrievable; by processes of racism, homophobia, the opioid crisis, the War on Terror, geography, and/or poverty. While the ungrievability in *Precarious Life* centres around the failure of American politicians to respond adequately to the Aids crisis resulting in the epidemic and mass deaths of queer and vulnerable people, Butler later developed the concept further in *Frames of War.* In the latter work Butler concentrated primarily on the production of ungrievability under the Bush administration: the processes by with a human being is made a non-person. She explicates that through dehumanisation the designation of people as being unworthy of the recognition of grief is an 'operation of power.'
Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Politics of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004); Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

inequality, and/or the uncanny. The function of speculative disruption is to signal socio-political imperatives in the text and generate narrative traction through readerly complicity in creating both the text and the city. The openness of the text asserts the reader's complicity because we have many avenues of interpretation available to us, within the confines of the scope of what we can imagine and comprehend.

I introduce the term 'narrative traction' in this sense to describe the way in which a text (or any other kind of narrative) can grip a reader. As any avid reader knows, it is a deep pleasure to be gripped by a novel, compelled to read on, and to seek out other similar work. Equally, if the world of the text makes this possible, a reader may also be compelled to seek out fan communities and to indulge in fan fiction and screen adaptations. What imbues the speculative mode, rooted in both pulp science fiction and the longer tradition of utopia, with narrative traction? And perhaps more importantly, what narrative traction can these texts have? We could begin with quantifiable metrics such as sales, referrals, adaptations, fan communities, clicks, hashtags or mentions, the success of book tours, film tie-ins, author speaker events and related activities, all of which are part of the economy of the literary market from which it cannot be divorced, and against which it perpetually resists.

These measurable consequences of traction are attractive precisely because they can be quantified, and therefore sold as data which might inform future production decisions by publishing houses, for instance. Consider then the traction of narrative unbounded by products, such as the narrative of the nation state, which both sustains and threatens regional group identities, and is used as a means of differentiation and as a justification for conflict. People are convinced to live and die for nationally inflicted ideologies, and to live by the dictates of governments, in part due to the success of the narratives that sustain regional geopolitics. Plato's concept of the city-state is a narrative with longstanding traction, and the representation

of the city in literature speaks to the endurance of that traction as well as to the ubiquity of city-dwelling in the twenty-first century.

The city works upon the writer as much as it does upon the reader who reads the urban setting both in the world and in a text. Writing about the value of science fiction to the scholarship in science and technology studies (STS), Sheila Jasanoff theorises the 'idiom of coproduction' as 'the proposition that the ways in which we know and represent the world (both nature and society) are inseparable from the ways in which we choose to live in it.'[106] Jasanoff refers here to the inextricability of our lives from science and technology, and I would extend this to include the ubiquity of urban habitation, made possible by the multiple connections described by Vidler: 'the city of cybernetic communication' and 'the city of virtual networks.'[107] She demands that we recognise these as actors in our political and social theorising. Like Felski, she tips her hat to Latour's Actor Network Theory. Jasanoff argues that technological objects are 'thoroughly enmeshed in society, as integral components of social order; one does not need fictive or futuristic stories to recognise this truth.'[108]

She argues for science fiction as the site at which sociotechnical imaginaries, those intersections where social imaginaries recognise and incorporate technological agents, are best articulated. Sociotechnical imaginaries are 'collectively held, institutionally stabilised, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology.'[109] Jasanoff suggests that these science fictions frequently offer intellectual thought experiments for working out the integration of science and technology into social imaginaries. Science fiction fills the academic gap where literature in STS fails because STS

[106] Sheila Jasanoff, *States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and Social Order* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2–3.
[107] Vidler, "Reading the City," 235.
[108] Sheila Jasanoff, *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*, edited by Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.
[109] Jasanoff, *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, 4.

lacks sufficient 'conceptual frameworks that situate technologies within the integrated material, moral and social landscapes that science fiction offers up in such abundance.'[110] As Jasanoff argues, it is this narrative integration that shapes how we understand the world we live in now.

Beginning with Hobbes and Boyle's Restoration-era debates about experimentation and the witnessing thereof, Jasanoff leads the reader into a discussion of performance and politics from Machiavelli to Yaron Ezrahi to Michel Foucault, noting that 'the viewer's capacity for observation is socially trained in ways that delimit what she can perceive.'[111] Perception then is considered a variable of power, a variable that determines what the viewer can consciously and, more crucially, unconsciously accept. Perception is crucial to consider when discussing readerly response because the open text invites a multitude of perceptions, while the implied reader in Iser's phenomenological theory must have sufficient knowledge to comprehend the text – two kinds of perception are at play, both are equally useful when considering how speculation works as a mode, at once requiring the reader to have the nous to identify the political intent and the capacity for multiple interpretations to perceive a variety of potential critical targets. Perception, or vision as Jasanoff goes on to call it, is thus subject to the vagaries of subjectivity. Jasanoff disputes the pre-eminence of optical perception as a mode for gathering empirical evidence:

> Yet, perversely, vision still remains the great naturaliser. What we "see" in familiar surroundings looks right, epistemically as well as normatively. So, the socially conditioned eye can take for granted that all-male orchestras or all-black passengers on the backseats of buses, or even scenes of filth and abject poverty simply represent the rightful order of things. And, as Foucault pre-eminently observed, when bodies are well-disciplined to live inside those orders, what looks natural from on high may not be so different from what looks natural from below. The same collective imaginary may condition and constrain the sense of justice that binds a community. Other ways of seeing and reasoning – ways that would make injustice palpable – may never give rise to organised criticism or opposition,

[110] Jasanoff, *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, 3.
[111] Jasanoff, *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, 13.

> let alone to revolutions that could hold power accountable, or at the extreme overthrow it.[112]

The socially-conditioned eye in Jasanoff's theorisation cannot help but see imperfectly, from a predetermined perspective that must account for inequality, privilege, and positionality. The implied reader of speculative fiction 'looks' with altered eyes, while the real reader hopes that their interpretation accords with the texts' ideological rhetoric. The world-building of speculative fiction demands that the reader suspends their own vision so as to decipher the utopian clues to which the skewed world alludes.

In order for the narrative to succeed, the reader must believe the world as it is presented, just as the viewer believes their own eyes. If their belief succeeds, a contradiction emerges in which an existentially proximate world is recognisable, while the reader's vision becomes uncertain. Destabilising the reader's vision of the skewed world thus serves the secondary purpose of presenting situations about which the reader may develop doubts. Situations such as homelessness become incomprehensible when subjected to the lens of 'other ways of seeing' emphasising the dysfunction of a society that produces such inhumane inequality.

Jasanoff's theorisation of the sociotechnical imaginary insists on the temporal displacement of technology as a precedent for cultural engagement, when in fact science and technology have in many cases followed the speculative imaginings of authors. 'Technological innovation often follows on the heels of science fiction, lagging authorial imagination by decades or longer,'[113] Jasanoff claims. She describes the technological innovations in fiction that preceded their real-world inventions, including cloning (Aldous Huxley), submarines (Jules Verne), credit cards (Edward Bellamy), space travel (H.G. Wells, Don Wilcox, and Fred Hoyle). Furthering this extrapolation of authorial imagination to the scientific invention that

[112] Jasanoff, *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, 14.
[113] Sheila Jasanoff, "Future Imperfect: Science Technology, and the Imaginations of Modernity," in *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*, edited by Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015,) 1.

followed, consider that in *The Time Machine*, published in 1895, Wells introduced time as the fourth dimension, over a decade before Hermann Minkowski developed his former student Albert Einstein's theory of relativity into a theory of time as the fourth dimension.[114]

In the late 1960s devices such as communicators and Portable Auxiliary Data Displays featured as futuristic technologies on the hit television series Star Trek. Today we know these as mobile phones and tablets. Xenotransplants were once the terrain of Margaret Atwood's eerie pigoons in her *MaddAddam* trilogy.[115] In everyday life, people ask their home bot assistants to put dog food on the shopping list and watch as Joaquin Phoenix falls in love with his AI voice assistant in the 2013 tech romance film, *Her*.[116] Since human beings began to self-conceptualise, our anxieties about the future, legacies, and death have been interwoven with narrative.

Jasanoff goes on to note that, 'Belying the label, "science fiction," however, works in this genre are also fabulations of social worlds, both utopic and dystopic.'[117] Here the STS theorist draws the reader's attention to the persistent political intentions of the genre's structures and form, and we should extend this to the eventual emergence of speculative fiction as a mode that owes much of its ideological rhetoric to science fiction, without relegating the tropes of that genre to low-culture. Roger Luckhurst argues that the 'historicity of that imposed value and shifting the premises of critical judgement' is necessary, particularly when framing genre fiction within broader contexts of interdisciplinary knowledges.[118] The very name of the science fiction genre 'necessitates an ambitious stretch of contextual material, ranging from

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[114] This is now known as Minkowski Space or Minkowski Spacetime.
Scott A. Walter, "Minkowski, mathematicians, and the mathematical theory of relativity," in *The Expanding Worlds of General Relativity*, edited by H. Goenner, J. Renn, J. Ritter, and T. Sauer, (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1999), 45–86.
[115] Sarah Zhang, "Genetically Engineering Pigs to Grow Organs for People," n.pg.
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003); Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[116] Spike Jonze, *Her*, Annapurna Productions, 2013.
[117] Jasanoff, *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, 1.
[118] Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 2.

the history of science and technology, via the softer social sciences, to the rarefied world of aesthetic and critical theory.'[119] According to Jameson it is precisely the 'pulp character' of science fiction that is 'indispensable to the thought experiment' that the genre undertakes, putting human or humanoid societies under the pressures of scientific extrapolation.[120] Speculative fiction engages pressure in a similar way, using narrative to put human societies under the pressures of extrapolation of different kinds, depending on the texts' utopian clues and disruptive world-building poetics. Following Luckhurst's example, I contend that the speculative fictions treated in this dissertation 'speak to the concerns of their specific moment in history' through representation of the experience of dislocation characteristic to dwelling in urban modernity and to the application of a mode to a swathe of genres, putting the boundaries of those genres under pressure.

Three recent academic works have explored speculative fiction's engagement with this specific moment in literary as well as economic history, integrating the financial context of this century into the literary moment. Aimee Bahng discusses the narrative power of speculation, as both a financial and a literary strategy in *Migrant Futures: Decolonising Speculation in Financial Times* (2018), [121] while Gayle Rogers' recent cultural and literary history, *Speculation: A Cultural History from Aristotle to AI*, examines who has the authority to determine and control what the future looks like.[122] Sherryl Vint's forthcoming *The Promissory Imagination: Speculative Futures and Biopolitics* will build on her own work in posthumanism and science fiction to explore the intersection between the economy and critical discourses of science fiction.[123]

[119] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, 2.
[120] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, 3.
[121] Aimee Bahng, *Migrant Futures: Decolonising Speculation in Financial Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
[122] Gayle Rogers, *Speculation: A Cultural History from Aristotle to AI* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2021).
[123] Sherryl Vint, *The Promissory Imagination: Speculative Futures and Biopolitics*, forthcoming.

Urban population is a defining feature of our specific moment, and it is therefore no wonder that the city permeates literature like never before. There has been a slew of survey texts on the city in literature in the 2010s legitimising the field of Literary Urban Studies (or Urban Literary Studies), with *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature* (2014) edited by Kevin McNamara a prime example.[124] The collection ranges across the subject of the earliest representations of cities in literature to postmodern descriptions of urban life. I believe that crucial to these legitimising efforts of such collections and anthologies on the topic of the city in literature is the question: what is the narrative traction of the city in literature? Form certainly has a role to play, as does the shift of more than half of the world's population from rural to urban habitation. The relevance of urban studies to the contemporary reader plays no small part in the traction of texts in the speculative fiction mode.

If we understand speculation's position in culture as an inheritor of both intellectual traditions and so-called low-brow culture, then critique in these texts is created precisely through the entanglement of the mode with the crises depicted or alluded to. I posit that critical engagement in relation to speculative disruption is the opposite of the critical detachment that Felski writes so searingly against in her controversial 2020 offering *Hooked: Art and Attachment*.[125] In it she incorrectly and patronisingly assumes the lay reader cannot participate in critical engagement. On the contrary, sustaining the value of critique outside of academic disciplines presents one way to attend to narrative traction as a literary concern that engages readerly attention ungoverned by scepticism, and which is indebted instead to engagement beyond disciplinary and institutional boundaries. Readers enjoy speculation, and that means something.

[124] Kevin McNamara, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2014).
[125] Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2020).

David Harvey, Mike Davis, and Sheila Jasanoff all refer their readers to the political power of literary texts for productive engagement with urban and technological developments, taking an urban literary studies approach. The broader field of urban literary studies engages the concerns of capitalist modernity in their literary analyses, a strategy deployed in my own work. Jens Martin Gurr's 2021 monograph, *Charting Literary Urban Studies: Texts as Models of and for the City*, addresses the role of literary studies for urban studies and the role of narrative in urban design. The latter was described in 2010 by Leonie Sandercock as the 'story turn in planning'.[126] For Gurr, it is the work of literary urban studies to be 'concerned with conceptualising the relation between the textual and material city'.[127] The analogy of the city as text or collection of texts is further complicated by the increasing role of certain cities as role-players in texts, particularly novels. From Minneapolis to Cape Town, Lahore to New York, London to Johannesburg, Besźel to Ul Qoma, fictional or real, imagined or destroyed, the urban spaces represented in the fiction analysed in this dissertation provide settings for politically generative conceptions of the relation between textual cities and the reality of inhabiting the urban space.

The edited collection *Writing the Modern City: Literature, Architecture and Modernity* (2012)[128] begins to build towards a recognition of the interrelation between modernity, the urban space, and literary urban studies. Palgrave MacMillan's *Literary Urban Studies* series indicates a growing market for theory at this intersection: where the material consequences of modernity manifesting as mass urban habitation meet social alienation depicted in fiction.[129]

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[126] Jens Martin Gurr, *Charting Literary Urban Studies: Text as Model of and for Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Leonie Sandercock, "From the Campfire to the Computer: An Epistemology of Multiplicity and the Story Turn in Planning," in *Multimedia Explorations in Urban Policy and Planning*, edited by Leonie Sandercock and Giovanni Attilli (New York: Springer, 2010), 17–37.
[127] Gurr, *Charting Literary Urban Studies*, 3.
[128] Sarah Edwards and Jonathan Charley, *Writing the Modern City: Literature, Architecture, Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 2012).
[129] This series includes the following two volumes:
Magali C. Michael, ed., *Twenty-First Century British Fiction and the City*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Maria Beville and Deidre Flynn, eds., *Irish Urban Fictions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

Extending his interest in Charles Dickens' Victorian London into the broader field of the city in literature and critical theory, Jeremy Tambling edits *The Palgrave Encyclopaedia of Urban Literary Studies* (2018-present), a live web document which provides not only an account of references and interpretations of the city in literature, but also a compendium of genres and texts that are proving fruitful for contributing authors.[130]

Paying critical attention to depictions of these near-future urban spaces in speculative fiction contributes to the field of literary urban studies and makes the case that fiction can produce useful and practical critiques about cities without an enforced theoretical distance. Speculative fiction functions as both a mode and also as a description of a plurality that is speculating about itself and the shape of literature to come. In this way it is both about alternatives and an alternative in its own right. The mode is engaged in a close critique of a culture and the accumulation of history and ideologies that produce it. For example, in 2008 unscrupulous financial speculation resulted in over a decade of economic hardship across the globe, felt most profoundly by the urban working and middle classes. In his theorisation of the 'Capitalocene' Jason Moore suggests that finance and capital are more and more to blame for looming environmental crises.[131] For Naomi Klein, disaster capitalism relies on and perpetuates crises long after the natural causes have dissipated.[132] The operations of capitalist modernity perpetuate crises produced by it, an ouroboros of accumulationist and expansionist ideologies about which the speculative mode asks: how does this end?

The implicit materiality of these speculative novels' settings entangles the reader in real-world crises through the critical proximity of skewed representations of estranged and

[130] Jeremy Tambling, *The Palgrave Encyclopaedia of Urban Literary Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Recent entries in the encyclopaedia include: Michael Hollington, "Melville, Bartleby, the Scrivener," published on 8 March 2019, and Tom Ue, "Gentrification, Mobility, and the Representation of Toronto in Margaret Atwood's The Testaments," published on 16 December 2019. Access at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62592-8.
[131] Jason W. Moore, (ed), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).
[132] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York : Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007).

estranging urban contexts. This reflects the experiences of those who live and move through the urban space that is at once their own and estranged from them by demands on their productivity; their wealth or lack thereof; political economic decisions made without public consultation; and urban planning for the few rather than the many. Through the creation of proximate settings and sympathetic protagonists, readerly identification with the estranging conditions of a speculative narrative can contribute to a text's traction. The poetics of disruption that engage this paradox of identification and estrangement are produced by exposition and innovation with formal conventions. Throughout my analysis of the texts treated in this dissertation I find that various narration strategies work in tandem with innovative expository language and style choices (word-play, double-meanings, diaries, blog posts, police records, extra-diegetic content) to draw the reader into the world of the novel, familiar but disrupted, identifiable but estranging. Many of these strategies normalise the speculative mode that disrupts the otherwise recognisable reality of the depicted world, creating a paradox of simultaneous identification and estrangement in the texts' world-building.

The following three chapters of literary analysis integrate theoretical concerns from social sciences, urban studies, and postcolonial studies to comprehensively examine the paradoxes of urban habitation represented in contemporary speculative literature. The utopian potential of cities invokes a tradition that goes as far back as Thomas More, and indeed beyond that to Plato's entanglement of the concept of the city with citizenship. Speculation imbues the novel with intent, which is not to suggest that other modes, genres, and novel forms do not communicate political concerns in their own right.[133] Rather, the speculative novel is perhaps

[133] Georg Lukács' *The Historical Novel* was the springboard for Marxist literary theories of political imperative in fiction. The historical novel offered an exploration of changing social and political structures as in Walter Scott's work, and of a romantic-nationalist present as in *War and Peace*.
Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, introduction by Fredric Jameson, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

a temporal counterpoint to the historical novel, providing a description of the future or an alternative present, no less politically inflected.

Novels like Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* exhibit many of the same narrative strategies as those which contribute to the historical novel's Marxist effect outlined by György Lukács, weaving real world events and characters into the stories of fictitious protagonists. Robinson's framing device implies that the future events in the novel's plot are in fact taking place at a distance from the present tense of the assumed reader, who we are given to believe exists several hundred years further in the future than the eponymous year 2140. The speculative mode is a product of the same industrial developments of capitalist modernity that have produced the conditions of mass urban habitation and market-driven production, estrangement of labour, and inadequate socio-political responses to humanitarian crises. It is therefore uniquely positioned to articulate and reflect the paradoxes of utopian impulses and dystopian energies in the unquiet house in which we are twenty-first century residents.

The first chapter, "Investigating Urban Interstices in *The City & The City* and *Zoo City*," examines two speculative detective novels, China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2010), and Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City* (2011) for utopian traces. I find that the poetics of disruption in these urban dystopias renders the cities uncanny to both the reader and fictional characters. These dystopian visions demand a politically rigorous response to contemporary problems of social exclusion, poverty, marginalisation, and neo-colonialism. The doubling of the city space works to highlight different levels of access to the shared space that people have based on the intersections of their privilege and abilities (or lack thereof). Processes of social disavowal undermine the ethical responsibility entailed in cosmopolitan commitments.

From interstices and marginal cities to centres of power, the second chapter "Excess and Absence as Critical Speculation in *New York 2140* and *Exit West*" analyses the effect of hyperbole in disrupted depictions of New York and London. These two metropoles of global

finance are the settings of Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017) and much of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) respectively. Building on the theorisation of narrative traction in the introduction, the second chapter also analyses how extra-diegetic narrative sections work to engage the reader in contemplation of the crises of climate chaos and refugeeism, using in particular hyperboles of excess and absence.

The final chapter, "(Re)productive Apocalypse in *Future Home of the Living God* and *Afterland*" critiques the failings of utopian ideation around rurality and wilderness, particularly regarding bodily autonomy and human rights. In this chapter I read Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) and Lauren Beukes' *Afterland* (2020) in the context of the discourse of reproductive rights as human rights, which are threatened in the protagonists' movements between urban and wilderness spaces. I examine how depictions of rurality or wilderness represent a ubiquitous urban modernity that rejects regional binarism between the urban and non-urban, and complicate what the apocalypse refers to, it being both destructive and potentially regenerative. Spaces of paradox abound in these two novels as characters seek safety but are consistently denied it, due to the omnipresence of connective infrastructures that define the shift from twentieth to twenty-first century capitalist modernity.

By weaving together traditionally disconnected theorists and fields I present a more holistic interrogation of the speculative novel as it challenges genre designations and opens up a new paradigm for literary production. My close readings of these texts in the dissertation's three chapters analyse depictions of the consequences of capitalist modernity as politically productive opportunities for utopian imagination. I began this dissertation by drawing on a social historian's view of the city as a readable text to signal my interdisciplinary intentions. The exploding universe, or indeed the city that takes to flight, must also be read for its speculative capacities. We read de Certeau not literally but figuratively – the reader knows that the city they look down upon is not actually a universe exploding or taking to flight. But, what

if it were? Suspending disbelief to permit a thought experiment to play out is inherently speculative, and I want here to draw the reader's attention to how de Certeau's perspective highlights the value of disruptive strategies which enable us to take a step back and ask: does it have to be this way? How can we make things different, better? These six novels are engaged in these questions, formally, contextually, and content-wise: spaces of paradox abound inside and outside of these texts as we, as readers and writers, struggle to comprehend the radical uncertainty of the beginning of the end.

Chapter 1

Investigating Urban Interstices in *The City & The City* and *Zoo City*

The literary terrain of speculative sleuthing is seeded with utopian clues and traces; both real and imagined. Following Fredric Jameson's injunction to undertake 'the detective work of a decipherment and a reading of utopian clues and traces in the landscape of the real,' I move now to a decipherment of the speculative mode in two pieces of detective fiction. Reading China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009), this chapter opens with an exploration of those processes of unseeing that permit social disavowal in the imagined cities of Besźel and Ul Qoma. Miéville's excavation of the interstitial spaces embedded in the architecture of international law offers ingress to my reading of the real-world utopian impulse that unseeing demands: we must recognise those people in our cities who suffer from being unseen. Thereafter I move to the real world of Johannesburg in Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City* (2010), reading this South African novel in concert with *The City & The City* to explore how detective fiction's critique of its social conditions, heightened by speculation, engages the utopian impulse through dystopian tropes, style, and innovative form. 'Critical irrealism,' theorised as non-mimetic narratives which pose social criticism, offers useful ingress to understanding how speculation disrupts the tropes of detective fiction while leaving much of the genre's critical power intact.[134] Vision, recognition, and representation are the key concerns in this chapter.

Urban interstices characterise the settings of both novels, the detective protagonists moving between spaces in which they are variously seen and unseen depending on the social conditions of their locations. Miéville and Beukes won the Arthur C. Clarke award in consecutive years, 2010 and 2011, for their respective novels, and the similarities between the

[134] Michael Löwy, "The Current of Critical Irrealism: "A Moonlit Enchanted Night," in *Adventures in Realism*, edited by Matthew Beaumont, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2007): 193–206.

novels, particularly in linguistic play through neologisms and resignification of words, highlights the appetite at the opening of the decade for texts that play intelligently with genre, semiotics, and social justice. Interstitiality defines both novels as the speculative mode heightens the genre fluidity in each, just as the protagonists' roles alter as the narratives develop.

The linguistic and genre games played in each novel engage a poetics that disrupts not only normative reality, but also what language can be and do in detective fiction. Mimesis is not strictly lacking in these texts, rather it is strategically elided, so that the reader must grapple with the issues that are specifically emphasised through strategic non-mimetic representation. In this sense, the speculative mode appears to be an iteration of the inherent contradiction of realism which requires resolution again and again as new iterations of realism are proposed. In *Adventures in Realism* (2007), Matthew Beaumont rescues realism from the traditional, and now old-fashioned, view in literary criticism that it is conservative and striving for real-world proximity of representation, that is pure mimesis.[135] Realism is more of a 'dynamic force field rather than some static phenomenon.'[136] For Beaumont and adherents to the ideas of a more dynamic realism, the distinctions between realism, modernism, and post-modernism are not so defined as has been supposed, citing the social critical intent of realist texts as the proper link between these. Taking this formulation of a sort of dynamic realism further, Michael Löwy proposes 'critical irrealism' as a term by which we might understand the critical work of non-mimetic texts, noting however that 'there is hardly an irrealist work that does not contain elements of realism, and vice versa.'[137]

It is here that the speculative mode gains traction, because the mode is invested in specific rather than general instances of non-mimesis. For Löwy, irrealism takes 'various

[135] Matthew Beaumont, "Introduction: Reclaiming Realism," in *Adventures in Realism*, edited by Matthew Beaumont, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2007): 1–12.
[136] Beaumont, "Introduction: Reclaiming Realism," 6.
[137] Löwy, "Critical Irrealism," 196.

forms: gothic novels, fairy tales, fantastic stories, oneiric narratives, utopian or dystopian novels, surrealist art, and many others.'[138] The speculative mode's intent is akin to critical irrealism's, where it is the absence of realism that defines irrealism rather than an opposition between the two. Rather than being entirely irrealist, however, speculation makes its criticism through specific and distinct instances of irrealism in texts that are otherwise fairly dynamically realist. Dynamic realism in this sense is realism freed from the conceptual inertia of a presumption of adherence to pure mimesis; it is a realism that evolves in response to changing perceptions of what reality is and how reality is conceived of. Given the shifting sands of our transitionary present and the legacy of the uncanny nineties and their demands on a recognition of alternative knowledge systems (magic as a science not fully understood, for example), speculative fiction is a response to the changing nature of reality as that reality is understood by the culture in which it is produced understands it, and speculation is of course also a contributor to that constantly evolving understanding. The speculative, non-mimetic instances in the two novels treated in this chapter are achieved through formal strategies that evince a social critique, where, as Löwy argues, '"critique" should in this context not be understood as relating to a rational argument, a systematic opposition, or an explicit discourse; more often, in irrealist art, it takes the form of protest, outrage, disgust, anxiety, or angst.'[139] The novels use neologisms and the resignification of words and terms that lead the reader to uncover the source and target of the texts' outrage through specific instances of non-mimetic representation. As we shall see, the disruptive poetics of the speculative mode litters detective fiction with utopian clues.

[138] Löwy, "Critical Irrealism," 194.
[139] Löwy, "Critical Irrealism," 197.

Miéville's Speculative Detective

The City & The City is Miéville's most accessible novel, written for his noir-loving mother Claudia Lightfoot at the end of her life. Our reluctant hero is Inspector Tyador Borlú, a detective in the fictional city of Besźel. He is tasked with solving a murder, a job complicated by the novel's speculative conceit: the cities are topolganger. This means that the setting comprises two simultaneous urban spaces which co-exist in the same geographical, physical location. Besźel exists with, in, and around Ul Qoma, and vice versa, the two cities sharing streets, canals, and often buildings. The murder victim is a PhD student from Prince of Wales University in Canada, Mahalia Geary, presumed at first to be a local sex worker before the police identify her.[140] As the novel progresses Borlú's real target is revealed: we discover that Geary was murdered to cover up a corporate plot to steal priceless historic artefacts.

In the novel, Miéville tries his hand at speculation, turning his attention away from the gun-slinging steampunk world of New Crobuzon which he had imagined for his anti-globalisation Bas-Lag series. Instead, he introduces a single speculative conceit to what we might otherwise recognise as our own world. Instead of a fantasy environment in which the participants are often only partially humanoid as in *Perdido Street Station* (2000), *The City & The City* is recognisably set on Earth in the late twentieth century and features chunky mobile phones and familiar car brands. Sustained by cultural norms and the dread of shadowy Breach enforcers, a legal urban segregation of two topographically simultaneous cities is the only speculative conceit in the text, producing the dystopian context of segregation shaped by the uneasy cohabitation of distinct nations in the same urban space.

[140] The trope of the murdered sex worker is common in the Victorian gothic tradition as well as in Film Noir. See both Elisabeth Bronfen's argument interweaving perfectible femininity and death in eighteenth century literature, as well as James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia* (1987), and the 2006 film by the same name. Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); James Ellroy, *The Black Dahlia* (New York: The Mysterious Press, 1987).

The use of neologisms (such as topolganger) in service of world-building is characteristic of Miéville's fiction. However, despite the New Weird label habitually appended to his work, Miéville is not tethered to a genre, but is instead engaged in furthering the critical and political work of his texts: imaginative world-building and genre experimentation. Weird fiction, pioneered by H.P. Lovecraft, is itself a genre of bleeding edges, described as an 'unsettling transnational hybrid of science fiction, horror, and fantasy.'[141]

Characteristic of many of the texts in the New Weird genre is a 'vertiginous sweep of genre-popping worlds that reconfigure our received understandings of literary boundaries', note utopian scholars Caroline Edwards and Tony Venezia.[142] Skirting the problem of a taxonomy of genre to which Miéville's works have been subject, Edwards and Venezia note that these boundaries are 'always-already problematic in terms of mapping critical frameworks onto texts that do not seek to fit within prescribed stylistic and aesthetic parameters.'[143]

What New Weird usually refers to then is generic hybridity within the genre fiction space, and for Miéville this has resulted in stylistically bountiful novels. This is evidenced by the breadth of labels that have been attached to them, ranging from biopunk to urban fantasy.[144] Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy note that 'central to attempts to define the weird as a genre has been its estrangement of our sense of reality.'[145] This is common to the taxonomic debates in genre fiction that concentrate on the issue of estrangement, thanks in part to Darko

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[141] Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy, "Introduction: Old and New Weird," in *Genre*, vol 49, no. 2, (July 2016): 117.
[142] Caroline Edwards and Tony Venezia, "Introduction," in *China Miéville: Critical Essays*, Eds. Caroline Edwards and Tony Venezia, (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015), 3.
[143] Edwards and Venezia, "Introduction," 3.
[144] Biopunk owes a debt to the fashion of steampunk in the 2000s, though entails refashioning of physical bodies, producing insectoid-humans in Miéville's work. Urban fantasy removes the fantasy genre from its traditionally medieval-esque settings and transplants it to contemporary urban settings. Lauren Beukes' early work also falls within the urban fantasy genre, deploying magical realism alongside fantasy in the urban setting of Johannesburg to produce an uncanny doubling of both genre and setting.
Weird fiction was born between the World Wars, with H.P. Lovecraft's stories setting reality off-kilter. Its defamiliarising appeal laid the foundation for authors such as Michel Houllebecq and Jeff VanderMeer in the 1980s. However, the genre designation was retrospectively applied to the work of these latter two authors, following the enthroning of Miéville in the 2000s as arguably the foremost practitioner of New Weird by fan communities.
[145] Noys and Murphy, "Introduction: Old and New Weird," 117.

Suvin's theorising of science fiction's cognitive estrangement effect in the late 1970s.[146] Theories of science fiction and fantasy have since improved upon Suvin's seminal work, but the scholarly attachment to estrangement as a metaphor persists in the field.

Estranging or not, what distinguishes New Weird is the shift from the imperial, white supremacist attitudes of HP Lovecraft to the more egalitarian, Marxist-inflected narratives in Miéville's work. Another point of distinction is Miéville's interest in language and linguistics.[147] As Mark Bould has usefully pointed out, linguistics is the science most commonly neglected by traditional science fiction authors, though the study of language in science fiction has received fairly comprehensive treatment.[148] If weird fiction is profoundly hybrid and transnational, New Weird reflects these characteristics in politically-inflected narrative that specifically engages language as a source of narrative complexity.

For Miéville, this has meant a literary career peppered with portmanteaus, neologisms, and unusually applied adjectives which appear in many of his novels.[149] While Lovecraft's work was pioneering in its simultaneous evocation of antiquity and the avant-garde, Miéville's work blends together genres and theory, as well as ideas more commonly found in narratology and semiotics, producing critical, rather than aspirational, tales.[150] This transition mirrors the shift from narratives of positive progress in the nineteenth century to the dystopian reflections common to speculative fiction in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These roving preoccupations also reflect the debt that contemporary speculative fiction owes to postmodernism, particularly deconstruction and relativism.

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[146] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale, 1979).
[147] Wes House, "We Can't Ignore HP Lovecraft's White Supremacy," *Lit Hub*, published 26 September 2017, accessed on 28 February 2019 from https://lithub.com/we-cant-ignore-h-p-lovecrafts-white-supremacy/.
[148] Mark Bould recounts a history of theory on the language used in science fiction in "Language and Linguistics," *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint (London: Routledge, 2009), 225–235.
[149] Sastrugi makes an appearance in almost every Miéville novel, usually to describe the surface of a humanoid characters' shell or skin.
[150] *Embassytown* engages explicitly with Derridean and Saussureian concerns of signification and deferral in language.

Importantly, New Weird is not to be conflated with speculative fiction, though of course they share irrealist inclinations.[151] Ann VanderMeer and Jeff VanderMeer argue that in its work to unsettle and disturb, the Weird 'acknowledges that our search for understanding about worlds beyond our own cannot always be found in science or religion and thus becomes an alternative path for exploration of the numinous,'[152] responding to an anxiety about the unknowability of both the present and the future. Miéville is perhaps the most representative New Weird author because he has 'managed to reinterpret, rewire, and overhaul the Weird in novel form, synthesising the tentacle horrors of Lovecraft with the intellectual rigour of New Wave.'[153] Intellectual rigour is certainly a hallmark of the author's fiction oeuvre, which ranges over ideas and philosophy more commonly found in Humanities syllabi than science fiction and fantasy novels.

Miéville's 1998 debut novel *King Rat* evinces the author's ongoing preoccupation with urban spaces and indistinct literary forms.[154] He grew up enjoying science fiction and horror, and in *King Rat* creates a mixed fantasy noir young adult novel, before moving on to his New Weird tour de force beginning in 2000 with *Perdido Street Station*, his largest and most populous novel to date. His Bas-Lag series, the most profoundly New Weird novels in his oeuvre, was followed by another young adult novel, *Un Lun Dun* (2007), set in another pair of dual-cities, London and UnLondon, between which the two twelve-year old female protagonists move. The prolific author thereafter published *The City & The City*, departing in 2009 from what many consider his signature New Weird or largely science fiction work in the Bas-Lag series to write this speculative detective fiction.[155] Following the publication and

[151] The doorstopper collection *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* edited by Ann VanderMeer and Jeff VanderMeer features stories from authors not typically associated with the genre, including Haruki Murakami, Joyce Carol Oates, Franz Kafka, and Karen Joy Fowler.
[152] Ann VanderMeer and Jeff VanderMeer, "Introduction," *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (London: Corvus, 2011), xvii.
[153] VanderMeer and VanderMeer, "Introduction," in *The Weird*, xx.
[154] China Miéville, *King Rat* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1998).
[155] Miéville wrote *The City & The City* as a gift to his mother who was terminally ill at the time. She had always been a fan of detective fiction and police procedural genres.

success of *The City & The City*, in the early 2010s Miéville went on a three-year run of stand-alone novels. *Kraken*, *Embassytown,* and *Railsea* variously deploy generic elements of steampunk, fantasy, mystery, and adventure.[156] He has since published several collections of short stories and in the last four years several non-fiction works on the history and consequences of Marxism in Europe.[157]

Within this oeuvre *The City & The City* stands out as the only novel whose setting and events might plausibly exist or occur, with a minor, conceivable deviation from reality in the disrupted spatial logic of the simultaneous cities Besźel and Ul Qoma. This in-between space that the novel inhabits and articulates is not unlike the in-between spaces in the novel's plot itself. It is set in a world that readers will recognise, subject to relatively few of the author's hallmark neologisms: 'crosshatching,' 'topolganger,' 'Breach' and 'unseeing' are some of the few linguistics revisions in an otherwise recognisable context. The 'un' prefix is attached to sensory verbs when characters in one city 'unsee' those in the other, buildings 'crosshatch,' and at times 'Breach' is invoked as a verb or noun, referring to the unlawful action, and the extra-judicial force which the action spookily manifests.

His turn to speculative fiction with *The City & The City* is therefore complicated by the history of his principal genre and the fluidity of the speculative mode, the latter made so in this instance by the author's characteristic linguistic play. 'Topolganger', which is produced by a merging of the words topography and doppelgänger, refers to a simultaneity and exact likeness of co-existing physical spaces. This topolganger quality of the cities Besźel and Ul Qoma disrupts notions of distinct, impermeable borders. Further, it ruptures constructions of the city as analogous to the nation, in the Platonic sense of the city as the self-contained, autonomous,

[156] China Miéville, *Kraken*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 2010); China Miéville, *Embassytown*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 2011); China Miéville, *Railsea*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 2012).
[157] Miéville's recent novellas include *This Census Taker* (2016) and *The Last Days of Paris* (2016). His non-fiction output in the last decade has been particularly impressive, with *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* co-written with Mark Bould published in 2009, *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution*, published in 2017, and *A Spectre Haunting Europe*, to be published in May 2022.

self-determining ideal political state. The text's elision of detail regarding the outskirts of Besźel and Ul Qoma, where the cities might diverge, sustains the disruptive speculative conceit of the cities as topolgangers. The distinctions between the two cities are known and comprehended only by their respective citizens; visitors and tourists undertake mandatory training to mimic the locals' habits of seeing/unseeing and patterns that dictate how they interact with their environment. These behaviours are partly what sustain the segregation between the two cities.

While the cities do not exist in the real-world, the text implies that they are in Eastern Europe, inland given the river that runs through the cities, linguistically akin to somewhere like Bosnia which presents the kind of crosshatching of Muslim/Catholic/Orthodox communities. The characterisation of the two cities invokes the particularities of the region's cultural cross-pollination. The text is imbued with geographical particularity through devices such as Borlú's regular reference to the hearty but bland Besźel food, hot Ul Qoman spices and sweets and the Germanic nature of the Besź language alongside the Arabic-inflected Illitan language of Ul Qoma. Borlú notes the latter has a written language akin to Cyrillic. An example of this crosshatching topolganger geography is that the same physical street has two names; in Besźel it is KarnStrász, in Ul Qoma, Ul Maidin Avenue.[158] A single river running through the cities is named both Shach-Ein and the River Colinin.[159] Miéville takes pains with Borlú's narration to make these distinctions clear, to emphasise the division and simultaneity of the cities with full and complex cultures and histories. Using these geographical referents and neologisms specific to the setting's topolganger quality, the reader is trained by the protagonist's first-person narration to comprehend the contradiction of the topolgangers' physical simultaneity and political disunity. In this way the text simultaneously implies allegorical reference to real-world

[158] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 159.
[159] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 172.

situations and avoids self-interpretation, the speculative mode conforming to a critical irrealism produced not through non-mimetic content, but through a specific skewing of otherwise recognisable cultural and geopolitical contexts that might believably exist in the world as we know it. The disruptive poetics signalled by neologisms and imaginary language characteristics as signifiers of geopolitical contexts are developed further in the distribution of contronyms and resignifications which further resist self-interpretation while sustaining the allegorical nature of the novel's semi-peripheral setting.

Contronyms such as 'oversight' and 'cleavage' complicate the linguistic terrain of the novel: each of these has a double and contradictory meaning which foreshadows certain plot events. The 'Oversight Committee' in the novel genuinely has oversight of the two cities, but due to bureaucracy and corruption manages to overlook an egregious miscarriage of justice occurring in both, which becomes the subject of Borlú's investigation.[160] Not coincidentally, their work takes places in 'Copula Hall:' a copula is a noun which refers to a connecting word in a sentence, usually the word 'be'.[161] No word is unnecessary or unintentional in Miéville's fiction, and naming the very seat of diplomacy between the divided cities 'copula' is a signature example of the poetics of disruption that write the speculative conceit into the very language of the novel. The historical separation event in the novel known as Cleavage is another contronym, connoting both separation and close attachment.[162] The infinitive 'to cleave' means both to sever and to stick together, and is equally applicable in the uncertain historical context of the cities' divided unity. These contronyms are an example of the disruptive poetics in *The City & The City* that engage paradox as a meaning making process and sustain the novel's speculation about how language can work to destabilise meaning while also refining it.

[160] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 133.
[161] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 133.
[162] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 51.

In his seminal text on the author's oeuvre *Art and Ideas in the Novels of China Miéville* (2015), Carl Freedman describes the 'weird' elements in Miéville's oeuvre as 'inflationary,' which requires the inclusion of a fantastic or scientific element.[163] Writing about *The City & The City*, Freedman contrasts the inflationary qualities of Miéville's habitual New Weird with the 'deflationary' style of the crime novel.[164] The blurring and satirising of both genres through stock characters and generic tropes allows Miéville to articulate the cynical view that, as Freedman describes it, 'nothing very much better – or very much worse – than the mundane world we see around us is ever likely to come to pass.'[165] The detective fiction genre, together with the inflationary tactic of topolganger cities, is paradoxical because together these render the novel both inflationary and deflationary. This paradox leads the reader towards a utopian clue in the very language of the novel: might we infer a desire to ameliorate extant segregation in the description and reference to the cities as topolganger? The inflationary and deflationary tactics also attest to the novel's genre-bending power, which along with the linguistic neologising and contronyms, surface the speculative mode in *The City & The City*.

The deflationary quality of *The City & The City* is transmitted primarily by its adherence to the detective noir plot style, in which the novel's resolution reveals the corporate villain's mundane motivations: accumulation and power. The stock-character villain in the novel is an allegory for a real-world villain, capitalist modernity, sustained by combined and uneven development and the attendant situations of 'underdevelopment, maldevelopment, and dependent development' outlined by the Warwick Research Collective (WReC).[166] Miéville would certainly be aware of the contemporary consequences and ongoing deployments of combined and uneven development, and we might perceive here how the condition of semi-

[163] Freedman, Carl, *Art and Ideas in the Novels of China Miéville* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015), 86.
[164] Freedman, *Art and Idea*, 86.
[165] Freedman, *Art and Idea*, 87.
[166] Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 13.

peripherality in the novel presents an impulse towards utopian amelioration through the interstitiality woven into the setting and very language of the novel.

Space is of tantamount importance to theories of combined and uneven development, even as we edge away from definitions that rely on the relationships between physical, bordered nation states and towards a world-systems theory by which we might comprehend the workings of capitalist modernity.[167] In the case of Miéville's novel, space, the setting, inflects the text with an awareness of the conditions of semi-peripherality. The narration is presented as though translated into English despite the fiction of the protagonist's Besz first language. The text also extracts identifiers of several cultures and deploys these for the purpose of creating the speculative simultaneity of the cities' topolganger quality. Roberto Schwarz's sense of the semi-periphery is that it mediates between the capital zones of accumulation and the raw materials of the periphery, occupying a space as neither one nor the other, but interlinked through the specific conditions which produce cultural products that disrupt texts' 'sacred aura' of pure identification with one culture or another of which Schwarz is so sceptical.[168]

The condition of semi-peripherality can help us to understand how texts circulate in and are produced out of capitalist modernity, as they borrow, imitate, and deploy the traditional forms of multiple cultures, both core and periphery, to create new cultural products that are no less valuable for their semi-peripherality. Schwarz writes: 'The inevitability of cultural imitation is bound up with a specific set of historical imperatives,' highlighting the consequences of colonial expansion on cultural products.[169] Semi-peripherality as Schwarz

[167] Broadly parsed, world-system theory understands labour exploitation as being inter-regional and transnational rather than specifically between core and periphery nations, and thus allows for a more representative understanding of semi-peripherality and the circulation of capital and cultural products. For more on world-system theory, though he resists the categorisation of 'theory', see Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System* four-volume series as well as the outputs of the *Journal of World-Systems Analysis*.
[168] Schwarz, Roberto, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, (London: Verso Books, 1992), 6.
[169] Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas*, 7.

understands it grounds the operations of combined and uneven development more historically because it recognises the effect of long-standing and existing social and class relations on the process of uneven development which is 'everywhere irreducibly specific.'[170] In the case of Miéville's *The City & The City*, the combined and uneven development of the topolganger cities plays into the deflationary elements of the novel, where the irreducibly specific situation of the historical context of co-habiting conflicting cultures determines the maldevelopment strategies of the vectors of capitalist modernity in the novel, the corporate enterprise extracting raw materials from the cities under the guise of national investment.

The inclusion of these motivations is an important constitutive element of this speculative fiction because the mundanity of evil correlates to a dynamic realism, while the specific irrealism of unseeing across topolganger borders emphasises the mode's utopian impulse. In order to negotiate the commonplace abutting the inflationary, the reader must locate themselves within the world of the novel. It is both recognisable and unfamiliar, characteristics of semi-peripherality, though due more to the speculative mode than to the distance of a reader's culture from the cultures invented in the novel. Through the simultaneity of the cities and the correlation of their cultural signifiers with real-world cultures and language systems, the reader is estranged, and the text becomes a space of paradox. The novel's 'deeply deflationary satire' doubles the novel's generic presentation, which in turn emphasises the novel's outrage about urban inequality and segregation within the larger narrative of the economic world-system.[171]

The epigraph of *The City & The City* bares the heart of the novel's intrigue. 'Deep inside the town there open up, so to speak, double streets, doppelgänger streets, mendacious and delusive streets,' writes Bruno Schulz, translated by John Curran Davis.[172] From Miéville's

[170] WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 12.
[171] Freedman, *Art and Idea*, 90.
[172] Miéville, China, epigraph, *The City & The City*, n.pg.

inclusion of this epigraph we infer that the novel's setting functions as the absent referent in the opening chapters. This gesture towards spatial irrealism is background for what the reader presumes is a murder mystery. Schulz' 'doppelgänger' streets are a clue to understanding the novel's linguistic play with topolganger, the very plot of the novel, as well as its utopian impulse toward recognition of the doubling in all urban spaces. All cities, we must concede, contain 'mendacious and delusive streets' and it is we who make them so. Miéville's interest in outsiders, edges, and peripheries is well documented in his interviews and public speeches, and the depictions of urban spaces and streets in Schulz' multiply influenced work gestures to Miéville's own interest in duality as it is experienced quite literally on the ground.[173]

The topolganger cities complicate the tropes of detective noir, and Miéville uses this generic ambiguity to simultaneously prompt and undermines the reader's expectations of the style and narrative arc within the main plot. The 'Phillip Marlowe-esque'[174] Detective Tyador Borlú is lured into a Matryoshka doll-style series of interlocking mysteries: at first he is investigating a murder, then a mysterious interstitial city Orciny, and, finally, corporate fraud and the theft of historical and cultural artefacts.[175] Borlú and the reader are confronted with endlessly propagating questions and are eventually denied the customary satisfaction associated with solving the case. Narrative resolution is perpetually deferred, just as the semantic play in the novel defers meaning through linguistic paradoxes.

The novel's opening sentence refers the reader to the speculative disruption that defines the mysteries of the novel's structure: where and when is it set? 'I could not see the street or much of the estate,' begins Inspector Tyador Borlú's first-person narration. On the surface, it

[173] Joan Gordon, "Revelling in Genre: An Interview with China Miéville," *Science Fiction Studies* vol 30, no.3 [91] (2003): 355–73; Kristen Tranter, "An Interview with China Miéville," *Contemporary Literature* vol 53, no.3 (2012): 417–36; China Miéville, "The Future of the Novel," in *The Guardian*, 21 August 2012, accessed from on 10 December 2018 from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/21/china-mieville-the-future-of-the-novel.

[174] Freedman, *Art and Idea*, 95.

[175] The BBC 2 adaptation of the film into a four-part series suggests that Borlú is also in search of his wife Katherine and portrays a far more sympathetic character on the screen. Katherine does not exist in the original text: Borlú has two age-appropriate lovers, though they cease to feature as the plot develops.

appears that Borlú is describing the crime scene as dark or difficult to see. This impression is dispelled over the course of the novel, as the reader discovers the verbs 'to see' and 'to unsee' imply political connotations of sedition and conformity, respectively. Vision and recognition invoke a broader narrative of inclusion and exclusion based on social norms entrenched as segregationist law in the novel.

The Politics of Seeing and Unseeing

Paul March-Russell argues that *The City & The City* is 'concerned with the exposure of power as an institutional force' and describes the concepts of split-cities and unseeing as Miéville's 'treatment of invisibility as an instrument of state power.'[176] March-Russell argues that the setting of the novel invites an incorrect reading, and that the author has intentionally drawn the reader's attention to the disruption of the novel's world: 'Miéville anticipates the reader's desire to read the text allegorically […] and instead encourages him/her to read the environment of *The City & The City* as a metonym: a compressed substitute for the reality beyond the text.'[177] I would argue that this reality does not refer to a real-world place or situation, but to contemporary urban interaction; in which the lived experience of two people in one city may diverge entirely, their paths determined by their socialisation into unseeing and their differing levels of privilege. For example, the persistent problem of people being forced to live on the streets is enabled by the tendency of the privileged to 'unsee' or ignore the homeless, just as litter and stray dogs remain largely neglected by most urban demographics.

Homelessness engages a fundamentally untenable logic that is sustained through collective, socially agreed, disregard. When the reader realises the mundane realities of crosshatching and unseeing 'the implications of it are worked out with a strict lucidity and

[176] Paul March-Russell, "Signatures of the Invisible: Reading Between The City & The City and Christopher Priest's The Glamour," in *China Miéville: Critical Essays* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015), 148.
[177] March-Russell, "Signatures of the Invisible," 152.

formally perfect logic – but a logic that is objectively insane in the way that only logic in the service of an inhuman extreme can be.'[178] With this analysis, Freedman emphasises the illogic of such a division of nation states, and by extension the illogic of nation states as organising principles in the real world. This organising principle is an illogic that operates at the sub-conscious rather than unconscious level. As a strategy of disavowal, it makes us all complicit in maintaining structures of power and dominance that disenfranchise marginalised groups.

The illogic of divided simultaneous states, fastidiously sustained by the citizens of Miéville's two co-existing settings, reflects our failure to recognise the simultaneity of our own experiences with those of others. Freedman's description of this objectively insane co-presence reflects the mass self-delusion that citizens employ as a social and political tactic to mentally defer the real-world consequences of inequality, thereby sustaining our own presumably comfortable and largely unchallenged existences. 'Unseeing' in Miéville's novel reflects our own logically untenable, but nevertheless perpetual, social and political practices of regularly 'unseeing' in the real world, which occurs whenever we skirt around a homeless person with whom we share the pavement. This is social disavowal, the process by which we are able to see and unsee the effects of poverty and environmental degradation.

Drawing on Peter Sloterdijk's conception of cynical reasoning and a formula posited by Slavoj Žižek – 'I know very well, but still…' – social disavowal works to permit the first person 'I,' who knows that their existence in some way impacts negatively on others, to continue without changing their behaviour or choices.[179] The contradiction that makes this state of continued existence possible is, I believe, a libidinal ignorance. Zahid Chaudhary's work on whistleblowing articulates the desire intrinsic to this ignorance when he argues that 'the place of knowledge in an atmosphere of fetishistic disavowal lends it a libidinal frisson.'[180] Within

[178] Freedman, *Art and Ideas*, 90.
[179]Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 18; Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (London: Verso, 1987).
[180] Zahid R. Chaudhary, "The Politics of Exposure: Truth After Post-Facts," *ELH* 87, no. 2 (2020): 309.

these terms, one might therefore choose to be publicly ignorant of those truths that inconvenience, or that might provoke the need to take self-sacrificing political action, while privately lamenting those same concerns.

Even though one might not publicly protest problems of corruption, ecological degradation, or poverty, we can take small steps in our private lives to resist or begin to correct those problems. We can give up animal products, reduce single-use plastics, or avoid unethically produced palm oil products. These are of course only minor steps towards a larger recognition of the role of governments and dirty industries whose environmental harms are significantly greater than the private individuals, even as we are compelled to feel guilt for our consumer habits. The privately known but publicly unacknowledged practice of disavowal is an example of the sustained contradictions in which many people privileged by class, wealth, location, race, and ability, live their lives. Although representative of "first-world" concerns, this disavowal by a privileged few has significant consequences for the rest of the world.

I argue that Miéville engages with this kind of disavowal in the concepts of seeing/unseeing and Breach. By exploring the implications of a procedural elision of the obviously present and physically manifest, Miéville demands that the reader consider these social norms and the violence they enable. In this granular representation, through one character's narration, the reader faces the absurdities of our real-world failure to see and acknowledge the depths of the crises our social and economic systems perpetuate. Within *The City & The City*, the prohibition against acknowledging the other city – seeing it and interacting with it – is the fundamental law that keeps the cities divided. The taboo also enables the cities' uneasy, yet functional, co-existence.

Without seeking an absolute real-world referent for the cities, I believe this division is allegorical of the distance between the middle-class urban dweller, and the homeless person around whom they may step as they make their way down any city's streets. To stop and help

every single person would entirely disrupt their life, which is where the libidinal frisson of disavowal is created – we protect our way of life by neglecting to help the homeless, for instance, and failing morally at the same time through our inaction. The space is shared, and yet we experience it entirely differently, raising questions about how Miéville intends his cities to be read: both the fictional, such as Beszél and Ul Qoma, and those that he negotiates in the real world, such as London.

Consider this instance in which Miéville explores the absurdity of these kinds of unconscious divisions: the break in Borlú's murder investigation is enabled by an illicit breach, a member of a group of unificationists tips the detective off. In the novel, unificationists are a radical political group that demand the unification of the two cities. The "unif", as members of this political movement are colloquially known, makes a call to Borlú from Ul Qoma. It is theoretically an international phone call, though physically he could have been mere streets away. On the phone with Borlú, he reveals his unificationist politics: 'I don't know where you stand on things like this but I think it is lunatic, an insult, that I am speaking to you from another country.'[181] Borlú's response is measured, and apolitical, though he is shocked by the man's actions: more conservative characters like Borlú himself and his professional partner Corwi view unifs as deranged radicals fighting for the impossible unity of the two cities. The comparison with politically conservative views on social justice warriors is there for the making.

Later when he and the unifs meet, Borlú demonstrates the paranoia that Breach evokes in the citizens of the two cities. The detective is shaken by the unif's casual disregard for the taboo of referring to the physical simultaneity and asks him: 'Don't you think we're watched

[181] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 43.

by powers?'[182] Regardless of Borlú's paranoia, however, it is the unif's transgressive politics that make him useful to the investigation. On the phone Borlú asks him:

> "How did you find out that she'd been killed?" I heard his hiss of breath.
>
> "Borlú, if you really mean that you're stupid and I'm wasting my time. I recognised her picture, Borlú. Do you think I'd be helping you if I didn't think I had to? If I didn't think this was important? How do you think I found out? *I saw your fucking poster*."[183]

Crucially, this extract contains Drodin's implicit confession to having Breached, even if only by looking across the invisible but impermeable border. The extract reveals several of the novel's formal qualities, which contribute to the speculative mode that imbues the novel with its particular political intentions.

The first is the unif's characterisation, which is typical of the shady, untrustworthy but personally-involved informer trope in detective fiction. His sentences are short and punchy, and he is resistant to Borlú's assumed authority gained from his jurisdiction as an enforcer of one of the cities' laws. Due to his politics Drodin is a fugitive, underground figure. For the reader, his views approach reason, but in the world of the divided cities his beliefs risk his being disappeared by Breach. Through his political commitment to unification, he is able to pierce the border between Besźel and Ul Qoma. This transgression enables him to see the otherwise mundane artefact of street posters, despite their being politically in another country. Choosing to look, to see, in this way, is to breach across the border of the two spaces.

By responding in Ul Qoma to the Besźel police's appeal for information, Drodin then makes Borlú complicit in his crime when he reveals the breach. Borlú registers this as an injury to his sense of self, and his narration characterises the experience as a kind of irreversible violence. Borlú feels as though he has been forced into a new state of being that he can never amend:

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[182] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 55.
[183] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 43. Italics in original.

> My informant should not have seen the posters. They were not in his country. He should never have told me. He made me accessory. The information was an allergen in Besźel – the mere fact of it in my head was a kind of trauma. I was complicit. It was done.[184]

The words 'allergen' and 'trauma' both suggest a visceral, embodied reaction to Drodin's implication of Borlú in a Breach-punishable activity. Despite this lament of his non-consensual complicity in Drodin's breach, Borlú goes on to describe his own collusion. The detective has a night-owl habit of looking out from his apartment window into the crosshatched space of the two cities and actively seeing the other city alongside his own. He admits: 'I always wanted to live where I could watch foreign trains.'[185] His admission of watching the trains in Ul Qoma as they passed his kitchen window in Besźel is a de facto acknowledgement of the cohesion of the cities and an accession to the political logic of Drodin's unificationist politics.

The fifth chapter offers the first description of the origin of the Besźel/Ul Qoma segregation. The narrative remarks that, some two thousand years before the present-day of the novel, the cities had been one, rent apart by an indeterminate event known as the Cleavage. The untranslatable name of the circumstance offers another insight into the deficiency of English to capture the essence of this historical event in the fictional cities; the word cleavage carrying altogether different connotations in English to those intended by the historical event's grave divisional referent and consequences. The untranslatability of the cleavage concept into English offers some ingress to the novel's treatment of combined and uneven development sustained through an historical reference in the novel, however fictional. This pre-existing historical situation of cleavage provides an opportunity to compare at extremely close quarters the ways in which uneven development is enacted against different cultures, and how the role of the first part of the formulation, 'combined,' contributes to the irreducible specificity of uneven development even as it is a global phenomenon. Through the speculative simultaneity

[184] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 45.
[185] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 49.

of the cities, the text describes how geographical proximity does not necessarily dictate how capitalist modernity works to under-develop regions.

Exploring humans' relation to space and the production of space under capitalism, Neil Smith builds on Henri Lefebvre's description of space as a social product when he, Smith, describes the amelioration of uneven development as a 'geographical project,' optimistically perceiving this amelioration as a global revolutionary undertaking by class actors.[186] Following Lefebvre's description of the triad dialectic of space as discursive, space as lived space, and the actual space as it exists, I think that Miéville's Ul Qoma and Besźel are as much discursive ideas as they are fictional settings. Smith describes uneven development as social inequality writ large onto a physical space and simultaneously the use of that unevenness for ends determined by social and class relations. Miéville reflects this as unequal investment in a single place, in which one group is privileged over another in a shared physical location. Building on the typical protagonist detective's trope character, Borlú's bitter first-person narration reflects the changing economic circumstances. His native Besźel is passed over by foreign investors for more lucrative Ul Qoman business development opportunities.

Following his lead to a unificationist base in Besźel, Borlú observes:

> As the river industry of Besźel had slowed, Ul Qoma's business picked up, and now there were more foreigners walking on the worn-down cross-hatched cobbles than Besź locals. The once-collapsing Ul Qoma rookeries, crenelated and lumpen-baroque (not that I saw them – I unsaw carefully, but they still registered a little, illicitly, and I remembered the styles from photographs), were renovated, the sites of galleries and .uq start-ups.[187]

The foreigners referred to in this extract are Ul Qoman people – not Americans, Canadians, or Europeans. Borlú has been carefully socialised to register anyone who is Besź like himself as a local, distinguishable from their foreign, spatial co-habitant Ul Qomans by their clothes, culture, and bearing. The Ul Qomans who have moved into the space are bringing investment,

[186] Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*, 3rd edition, (Athens: University of Georgia, 2008), 204.
[187] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 54.

supported by a lucrative trade-deal with Canada. Tacitly, because they have agreed by norm and law not to see one another, the Besź people in the area move away or limit their activity in response to this influx of economic power in the other simultaneous-but-foreign state. Here we see in fictitious action the seesaw of the production of space under capitalism, as development and underdevelopment operate in concert and in counterpoint to one another.

American public intellectual Mike Davis' work on urban disaster in Los Angeles describes and outlines the structural urban planning that leads to the eventual occurrence of natural and man-made disasters.[188] In *City of Quartz,* Davis examines how public urban planning, answerable to the financial machinations of real-estate developers, can push swathes of the already-marginalised population into increasingly precarious living situations, as in the case of the gentrification of abandoned malls.[189] This seesaw of development into underdevelopment and maldevelopment and eventual return to development (around and around) strips the veneer of progress to reveal how pre-existing conditions play into and exacerbate uneven development, precisely because, as Smith notes, 'the dynamism of geographical space is equally an expression of capitalism.'[190] The space changes by tacit and explicit agreement as capital circles back around, and this very close proximity of the regeneration of one space and the decline of another presents a stark example of how existing conditions intersect with uneven development to produce starkly different, though no less challenging, outcomes.

Unseeing is crucial to sustaining the novel's allegory of the co-existing cities which in turn permits the comparison of their mal- and dependent development that highlights the ubiquity of capitalism's unevenness even as conditions are specifically distinct. The first

[188] Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (London: Picador, 1999).
[189] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), 242.
[190] Smith, *Uneven Development*, 199.

instance of unseeing in the novel operates as a first look at the effect of the topolganger setting. Borlú narrates:

> 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 way. She turned her head and looked at me. I was struck by her motion, and I met her eyes. I wondered if she wanted to tell me something. In my glance I took in her clothes, her way of walking, of holding herself, and looking.
>
> With a hard start I realised that she was not on GunterStrász and that I should not have seen her.[191]

In this excerpt Borlú is looking for witnesses or informers at the crime scene and mistakes the woman in Ul Qoma for a potential witness: searching for those who might have seen the crime, he sees the unseeable, a crime in its own right. When he realises his mistake, he unsees her, lest he commit Breach.

The decision to see and unsee in the novel is always unconscious, but negotiated: citizens are trained socially to relegate one another to the periphery of their conscious minds. The negotiation with the unacknowledged other occurs both publicly in the act of unseeing, and privately in the act of registering the presence of a person that you should not acknowledge. Citizens of both places must necessarily be physically aware of one another for the simple reason that it would be criminal to accidentally bump into people in the other city, as contiguous as they are. Fortunately, the citizens of each city are safe from the threat of these accidents in their homes, which are 'total' even when the buildings they live in may be crosshatched, such that one's neighbours might occupy alter space, and effectively live in the other city and be unacknowledgeable.[192]

The trash that 'might have been anywhere' is symbolic of the ubiquity of rubbish that clogs the arteries of economically depressed areas all over the world. Here it re-emphasises the

[191] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 14.
[192] This recalls the divisions of East and West Germany that in some places bisected homes in Berlin until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

absence of physical borders between the cities. The cities are divided for reasons that are largely unexplained and relate to an ancient conflict in medieval history, known as the Cleavage. The circumstances are all but lost to historians, hence the fascination offered by the Ul Qoman archaeological dig on which the murder-victim Geary worked. The dig represents the cities' shared ancient past, while to Geary it tantalises with the possibility of a third, interstitial city which might explain the Cleavage that both divides and binds the cities.

As Borlú travels through Besźel he notes the growing trade in antiques, a trade that did 'as well as anything did in the city for some years, hand-downs polished and spruced as people emptied their apartments of heirlooms for a few Besźmarques.'[193] His observations reinforce the implications that Besźel is the less affluent of the two paradoxically indistinct places. In the second chapter of the novel, the cities' segregation is made more explicit through descriptions of location and setting: 'Most of those around us were in Besźel so we saw them. Poverty disfigures the already staid, drab cuts and colours that enduringly characterise Besź clothes – what has been called the city's fashionless fashion.'[194] Miéville takes pains to underscore inequality in the novel's descriptions of setting through Borlú's first-person narration. The detective protagonist is a narrative vehicle for the entanglements of seeing and inequality that plague the characters. These opening chapters are an opportunity for the reader to learn, through Borlú's expository narration, the rules of seeing and unseeing in the cities, rules that are tacitly mapped on to real-world strategies for navigating the urban space.

Using the sharp, specific sentences and world-weary protagonist of detective noir fiction, Miéville weaves the cities' defining topolganger characteristic with the narrator-detective's cynical, rough-edged, and world-weary tone. Borlú muses that if the foreigners on the train passing his home looked in through his windows (illegally) in the morning:

[193] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 16.
[194] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 21.

> They would have seen only a thin man in early middle age in a dressing gown at his morning yoghurt and coffee, shake-folding a copy of a paper – *Inkyistor* or *Iy Déurman* or a smudgy *Beszél Journal* to keep my English practiced. Usually alone – once in a while one or other of two women about his age might be there.[195]

Short sentences detail the character, his habits, and solitary lifestyle. He has two casual lovers but lives alone. The cynical, hard-boiled detective struggles over the course of the novel to discover the perpetrator of, and motive for, the murder of Mahalia Geary. Despite this familiar noir territory, the plot is disrupted by the estranging quality of the speculation that considers the existential consequences of urban duality and corporate greed.

In keeping with the detective noir genre, from the outset of the story there is something "not quite right" with the facts as they appear. This is an effect of the novel engaging metatextually with its genres. Initially the police label the murder victim Fulana Detail, a Besź equivalent of Jane Doe. With Corwi's insight about the victim's glossy hair and muted make-up tones, Borlú deduces that the victim is not a sex worker. This moment of misidentification has implications for the novel's broader metatextual concerns with appearance and seeing. The victim in the plot is presumed to be a sex worker because this is a noir trope – the social vulnerability of sex workers and the ubiquity of violence against women is such that the Jane Doe is almost written off. The investigation's false start opens avenues for Borlú's narration to consider sex work in the city, detailing the lifestyle and circumstances of those in Beszél who are less privileged: 'For many of the streetwalkers in Beszél, especially in areas like this, food and clothes for their kids came first; *feld* or crack for themselves; food for themselves, then sundries, in which list conditioner would come low.'[196]

As with the sex-worker trope, the journalist that annoys Borlú is doing what the reader expects: being a hack:

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[195] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 30.
[196] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 11. Italics in original.
Feld in the novel is a slang term for a narcotic drug that is ingested through chewing, and for which there is no real equivalent in English.

> Most of the press has always been polite, and amenable to my suggestions about what they withhold. In the last few years, new, more salacious and aggressive papers had started, inspired and in some cases controlled by British or North American owners. It had been inevitable, and in truth our established local outlets were staid to dull. What was troubling was less the trend to sensation, nor even the irritating behaviour of the new press's young writers, but more their tendency to dutifully follow a script written before they were born. Rackhaus, who wrote for a weekly called *Rejal!* for example. Surely when he bothered me for facts he knew I would not give him […] he did not have to say, as he tended to: "The public has a right to know!"[197]

Borlú's frustration with the role-playing hack journalist Rackhaus registers his long-suffering commitment to a career in law enforcement; his skill in his work; his resistance to external influence, particularly that of Britain and North America; and his scepticism of generic, stereotypical interactions. His characterisation is typical of the male protagonists in detective noir: he is bitter, tired, lonely, and cynical.

Borlú's forensic method of examining not only the case, but also those around him, and indeed his own language, betrays an authorial consciousness in which he knows himself to be bound by a narrative in which he must carry out certain duties to serve the plot. From his reflections on language and his interactions with his colleagues and the press I infer a self-satirising quality in the narration, as though Borlú cannot help but be a stock character. Miéville's simultaneous conformity with, and subversion of, the generic cynical detective trope undermines the reader's expectations of the detective novel. The genre conventions leave a false trail in the text, so that the reader is required to decipher the clues left by the disruptive poetics of wordplay to work out the novel's meta-mystery.

The extract above reveals not only the cynicism in Borlú's character, but also that, while the novel is written in English, Miéville has further implied the foreign location of the novel in the very language that the characters speak. Both languages referred to in the novel, Besź and Illitan, the fictional language of Ul Qoma, are invented by Miéville. The text of the novel is

[197] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 13.

peppered with just enough of each to imply a linguistic location or association without specifying a geographic one. Borlú only uses English strategically and often with other mother-tongue characters as we discover when American and Canadian characters enter the story in the course of the detective's investigations.

The intricate textual embellishments offered by examples of the novel's in-universe languages solidify the fictional but geographically bounded location, strengthening the text's gritty representation of the novel's reality. Upon closer inspection, language as a geographic marker is deployed in service of Miéville's larger project of misdirection through disruptive poetics. The novel is cleverly laden with linguistic contradictions and written as though translated from Borlú's native Besź into English. Uncertainty imbues every line of Borlú's narration when the reader realises that the narration is technically in another, fictional, language. Through Borlú the reader is taught a new language of division, one that makes the city navigable to its inhabitants. This language allows us to recognise the processes of acknowledgement and paradoxical immediate disavowal that maintain the uneasy peace.

Polysemy of Rights and Breaching the Law

Referring to the persistent and self-stereotyping journalist Rackhaus' claim that the public has the 'right to know', Borlú notes: 'I did not even understand him the first time he said it. In Besź the word 'right' is polysemic enough to evade the peremptory meaning he intended.'[198] Miéville reveals himself in the narrator's authorial consciousness here: the likelihood of the police detective Borlú being a comfortable user of the words 'polysemic' and 'peremptory' being low, though of course not impossible. Polysemy is crucial to the novel's interplay between real and fictional languages. The novel is obviously written in English, while the narration implies that it is in a fictional language: the multiple possible meanings of this echo

[198] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 13.

the multiple possible meanings of the word 'rights,' which is an ongoing intellectual preoccupation in Miéville's fiction and academic work.

This plurality of the meaning of 'rights' highlights the problematic gap between international law and human rights through which so many fall, and which Miéville portrays as fatal in the novel's plot. The novel's simulation of linguistic diversity enables Borlú to reflect, as Miéville might, on the concept of rights. The detective is sufficiently educated to translate English clichés into Besź, and so using the detective's ire against the hack journalist, Miéville destabilises the concept of the word 'rights' in Besź by revealing its multiple meanings. In this way he uses the translation of 'right to know' from a fictional language into English to make the concept of human rights in English intentionally uncertain by undermining the authority of the very language in which the novel is written.

This concern with the polysemy of rights is of equal importance in Miéville's non-fiction work on human rights and international law, outlined in his published doctoral work *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law* (2006).[199] For the title Miéville borrows Marx' maxim that 'between equal rights, force decides,' signalling his ongoing interest in marked absence:, force, and therefore power, is the absent referent in his title.[200] In this monograph Miéville notes that '[l]aw and violence are inextricably linked *as regulators of sovereign claims*' (italics in original) and outlines his perception of the relationship of domestic law with international law. Miéville claims that, together, they shore up the ability of nation states to participate in, and perpetuate systems of, capital accumulation and national border distinctions.[201] In *Between Equal Rights,* Miéville's concern is with the interstices between larger judicial institutions; usually those organisations and specifically nations, that embody and regulate power.

[199] China Miéville, *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law* (London: Pluto, 2006).
[200] Karl Marx qtd in Miéville, *Between Equal Rights*, 135.
[201] Miéville, *Between Equal Rights*, 2.

Arguing against the received notion that international law is a 'body of rules,'[202] Miéville poses the 'most recurring conundrum' of international law: 'what is the nature of a law that exists between bodies without a superordinate authority?'[203] It is important to recognise as well, the role of power dynamics in global fortunes and the imposition of inequality through combined and uneven development that international law, which lacks the cohesion offered by an enforcing structural organisation, imposes on less powerful states.

Within Miéville's conception, this gives some explanation for the failed decolonisation of many erstwhile colonies in the global south. He writes:

> The imperialism of international law means more than just the global spread of an international legal order with capitalism – it means that the power dynamics of political imperialism are embedded within the very juridical equality of sovereignty.[204]

For Miéville, sovereignty is the capacity and ability of a nation state to self-determine and self-govern. It is therefore always impossible to achieve true national autonomy due to political imperialism, which defines modes of self-governance: what legal, national self-determination might constitute; and how this is achieved. Political imperialism encompasses the imposition of modes of nation-formation and self-conceptualisation that inevitably determine a global hierarchy. Fundamental to his argument is Miéville's commitment to this dynamic Marxist critique of systems of marginalisation under late capitalist governance. This is a concern which lends itself more profoundly to the political imperative of *The City & The City* than to any of his other novels. There is rich material for the reader to identify the connections between Miéville's legal theory background, dynamic Marxism and the novel's depiction of the mundane evil in profit motive.

In the course of his investigations, Detective Borlú must cross from one city into the other and is drawn into this larger web of political and economic intrigue. He comes closer to

[202] Miéville, *Between Equal Rights*, 5.
[203] Miéville, *Between Equal Rights*, 2.
[204] Miéville, *Between Equal Rights*, 270.

understanding that Geary's death is the product of a conspiracy theory and corporate interest in the technological potential of the two cities' historical materials. Slow violence theorist Rob Nixon notes that the distinction of "foreign" as a conceptual place limits the responsibility of large corporations for their actions in other parts of the world: 'How foreign is the foreign? This question bears directly on the way complex corporate complicities are outsourced,' Nixon notes, referring to the transferral of culpability from the corporate organisation to the foreign state, often in developing countries.[205] Nixon's work in this regard refers generally to violence that is perpetrated against developing nations through uneven development and the displacement of ecological consequences of technological development. The theoretical framework naturally extrapolates slow violence to encompass the power of corporations in their dealings with vulnerable nation states, particularly regarding the exporting of tax residency to avoid a state's legal requirements regarding labour and the importing of raw materials.

Corporate greed supersedes national sovereignty, and in *The City & The City* even nationalists fall prey to the manipulations of multinational corporations. Borlú discovers too late that a nationalist group, the True Citizens, have been aiding the corrupt foreign investors CorIntech to conceal the falsity of the third city, Orciny, from Geary. By maintaining her belief in the third interstitial city, they ensure that she will continue to smuggle artefacts out of the Ul Qoman archaeological dig. As Borlú uncovers this conspiracy, the True Citizens engineer an accident between two buses carrying refugees from the coast inland. Martial Breach is invoked when the two buses breach from Besźel into Ul Qoma.

[205] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence: The Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 288.

Borlú recognises the disaster first as political, perceiving the crash as a crisis for the cities: the untrained and now injured refugees will fail to unsee and unsense. Borlú considers the effect of this on the local people in each city:

> I could imagine the panic of bystanders and passers-by, let alone those innocent motorists of Besźel and Ul Qoma, having swerved desperately out of the path of careening vehicles, of necessity in and out of the topolganger city, trying hard to regain control and pull their vehicles back to where they dwelt. Faced then with scores of afraid, injured intruders, without intent to transgress but without choice, without language to ask for help, stumbling out of the ruined buses, weeping children in their arms and bleeding across borders.[206]

Borlú's first concern is for maintaining the status quo. He worries primarily for the Besź and Ul Qoman people and their need to sustain the cities' segregation and spares a secondary concern for the refugees 'bleeding across borders' whom he terms 'intruders'. The citizens of the two cities, he fears, are panicked by the prospect of being subject to Breach should they help the injured refugees. In his narration, Borlú emphasises the use of refugees as leverage in a political action: 'Twice I saw them [Breach avatars] escorting terrified North African men and women from somewhere to somewhere, refugees made levers of this breakdown.'[207] Borlú's contact in Breach, Ashil, assumes at first that the bus accident is the work of the unificationist organisations. Ashil speculates that the accident is an attempt to merge the two cities by forcing people who do not know how to unsee into the streets, initiating a dual-nationwide Breach. Borlú, however, recognises that the crash is a decoy to keep Breach occupied so that the CEO of CorIntech can escape from the cities by helicopter and thus avoid prosecution for theft of national resources.

In this moment of critique, starkly illustrating the nationalist tactic of using refugees as political fodder, Miéville sustains the formal characteristics of the detective noir genre. A race against time ensues as Ashil speeds expertly through the streets, chasing the clock as a helicopter comes in to collect the corrupt CEO, Croft. During the final showdown on the roof

[206] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 328.
[207] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 334.

of the corporate's skyscraper, Borlú recognises a politician, Mikhel Buric. He is standing with the suits and the goons from the ultra-nationalist True Citizens. Buric is a nationalist mole in the centrist Social Democrat party, and this is how Borlú discovers that he has been liaising with Croft to sell off archaeological artefacts of scientific interest to maintain his ultra-nationalist Besź organisation. What ensues is a Hollywood blockbuster-worthy series of incidents: an action-packed car chase, a morally bankrupt politician profiting from his constituents, and a dramatic escape-by-helicopter for the villains.

When Borlú attempts to arrest Buric for conspiracy to murder, the politician raises a weapon but is shot by Ashil. Croft escapes with a snide put-down about the power and sovereignty of the two cities and expresses his disregard for the extra-judicial Breach:

> "I'm neither Besź nor Ul Qoman," Croft said. He spoke in English, though he clearly understood us. "I'm neither interested in nor scared of you. I'm leaving. 'Breach.'" He shook his head. "Freak show. You think anyone beyond these odd little cities cares about you. They may bankroll you and do what you say, ask no questions, they may need to be scared of you, but no one else does."[208]

The domestic and international laws that govern the two cities are of no consequence to the corporate man. For Borlú, Breach is all-powerful, and yet Croft dismisses it out of hand. He is a powerful foreigner who rejects the sovereignty of the small city states because he does not belong to them. The narrative utilises the deflationary aesthetic of noir, while the local characters present a healthy fear of the shadowy Breach, a legal manifestation of power made necessary by the novel's inflationary speculative conceit.

Earlier in the novel Borlú recalls witnessing a fatal traffic accident in his childhood which summoned Breach. In his memory a van crossed violently from Ul Qoma into Besźel on a crosshatched street:

> In seconds, the Breach came. Shapes, figures, some of whom must have been there but who nonetheless seemed to coalesce from spaces between smoke from the accident, moving too fast it seemed to be clearly seen, moving with authority and power so absolute that within seconds they had controlled, contained, the area of

[208] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 342–3.

> intrusion. The powers were almost impossible, seemed almost impossible, to make out.[209]

Borlú's recollection is that Breach emerges from the smoke. It is not made clear at that stage in the novel whether Breach is a mysterious, possibly magical, higher power, or the work of human operatives. As the plot develops, the mystery of Breach comes to overshadow the murder mystery. Far more of the novel is given over to descriptions of the way of life of the Besź and Ul Qoman citizens than to descriptions of the crime, once again undermining the formal tropes of the detective noir while using many of its strategies.

The noir form tends to focus on the actual crime, and the character who can solve it. In this instance, however, the setting takes precedence. Borlú describes at length how residents handle instances in which they cannot avoid objects in the other city. In the event that objects intrude from one city into the other, such as broken glass or a traffic accident, avoiding a potential breach requires careful navigation by the citizens of each place, the exception being for rubbish, which with time becomes universally owned:

> Touch if they must, though not is better. Such polite stoic unsensing is the form for dealing with protubs – that is the Besź for those protuberances from the other city. There is an Illitan term too, though I do not know it. (Only rubbish is an exception, when it is old enough. Lying across crosshatched pavement or gusted into an alter area from where it was dropped, it starts as protub, but after a long enough time for it to fade and the Illitan or Besź script to be obscured by filth and bleached by light, and when it coagulates with other rubbish, including rubbish from the other city, it's just rubbish, and it drifts across borders, like fog, rain, and smoke).[210]

The unseeing and unsensing that the citizens of the two cities perform is 'wholly psychological and learned,' Freedman notes.[211] It is entirely 'constructed in the minds of the Besź and Ul Qoman citizens' and is a gesture to Miéville's broader political imperative of critiquing irrational modes of state structure and law enforcement.[212]

[209] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 81.
[210] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 80.
[211] Freedman, *Art and Ideas*, 89.
[212] Freedman, *Art and Ideas*, 89.

Miéville theorists such as March-Russell and Edwards have presented contradicting positions on the signification of the concepts of Breach, cross-hatching, unseeing and unsensing in *The City & The City*. There remains a real-world consideration that has yet to be explored, however. Critics have failed to examine the realities of urban co-habitation across differently privileged groups as expressed in *The City & The City.* I think it necessary to examine references to the looming real-world spectres of increasing homelessness, poverty, and ecological disaster in Miéville's novel within the broader framework advanced in this dissertation. Namely, that of a speculative disruption which critiques conditions of neoliberal expansion, the apathy of late capitalism in urban spaces, and the disavowal of impending disaster that characterises our unquiet house of modernity.

Returning to the concept of Breach, the novel's depiction of supra-national power has precipitated some of the most insightful criticism into Miéville's work on international law and normative legality as described above.[213] Much like the international law of Breach that preserves the cities' divided and uneasy peace, the whispered-about and illicit third city of Orciny exists nowhere and everywhere. The citizens of the two cities, ostensibly living in two different countries, are bound by one overarching law of Breach, which occurs when a character rends asunder the painstakingly maintained social fabric through an illicit act of recognition. A breach occurs when a citizen acknowledges the bare fact of the people and buildings of the other city alongside which they live.

In addition to delimiting the cities' deepest, most dangerous taboo, the word Breach also refers to a mysterious supra-national enforcement collective which preserves the undergirding status quo. Breach as a verb invokes its noun referent in enforcement. *The City*

[213] Sherryl Vint, "Ab-Realism: Fractal Language and Social Change," in *China Miéville: Critical Essays*, Eds. Caroline Edwards and Tony Venezia (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015), 39–60; March-Russell, "Signatures of the Invisible," 139 –158; Mark P. Williams, "Abnatural Resources: Collective Experience, Community and Commonality from Embassytown to New Crobuzon" in *China Miéville: Critical Essays*, Eds. Caroline Edwards and Tony Venezia (Canterbury: Gylphi: 2015), 239–264.

& The City's conclusion confronts the reader with the narrator's struggle to interpolate the collapsing experience of dwelling on, and in, the interstitiality of urban space. The novel resists a formal resolution in favour of sustaining narrative, and existential, uncertainty. Miéville resists catharsis by requiring the reader to grapple with the philosophical conflicts of the combined and uneven development of the urban settings. By closing with the protagonist's decision to remain in the topolganger cities and become a part of their machinery of separation, the text illustrates this closed loop, creating enforcers out of past transgressors and collapsing possibilities for escape or revolution of the system. The resolution of the novel is futile, inconsequential, a characteristic of the detective genre, though Borlú's eventual capitulation to Breach is an example of how the speculative mode works to reshape genre expectations for critical effect.

Miéville's oeuvre has prompted critics such as Freedman, Edwards, and Vint to reflect that genre fiction can reveal important considerations regarding the contemporary political landscape. Within the scholarly criticism, however, remains the unexplored territory of the intersection between Miéville's representation of international law and the specifically urban space, particularly regarding contemporary global crises of migration. As I describe above, Miéville's doctoral work critiqued the inherent shortcomings of international law. The lack of international accord regarding legal norms applicable beyond the boundaries of nation states means that international law has little to no enforceable power. Freedman notes that within Miéville's conception: 'international law, though apparently marginal to legal studies generally, is actually crucial to conceptualising the nature of law itself.'[214] He argues that scholars of international law have:

> tended to understand international law as a set of ethically based rules of international relations that nation-states normally obey: or, at least, in a slightly

[214] Freedman, *Art and Ideas*, 155.

> different version of this approach, rules that nation-states ought to obey a good deal more consistently than they actually do.[215]

Freedman develops this argument into a reading of *The City & The City* as a fundamentally satirical novel, which critiques xenophobic nationalism. His reading is compelling: 'What *The City & The City* offers is a sense of how the absurdities of nationalistic hostility manifest themselves in the felt realities of everyday life.'[216] Here he concentrates on the nationalist ideologies underpinning the unseeing that citizens of the divided-but-simultaneous cities practice. While I agree with Freedman's description of Miéville's representation of the absurdities of nationalist hostility through unseeing, I believe there is a more local critique being levelled at the middle and upper-classes, evoked through the urban setting. The novel addresses inequality at both the macro scale of corporate power and the granular one of class divisions sown by combined and uneven development and the processes of unseeing that occur in the daily life of the fictional characters. This unseeing has a real-world parallel as well.

The segregated simultaneity of Besźel and Ul Qoma reflects the physical and experiential separation felt on the ground in real-world urban spaces. The professor character, David Bowden, attempts to leverage the segregation of the topolganger states to escape the law by appearing to be in both places through mannerism and clothing. His ambiguous presentation allows him to be unseen by the inhabitants of both cities, and to thereby achieve the effect of being in both places simultaneously while moving along crosshatched spaces. In the novel 'crosshatching' occurs where the two cities become distinct from one another at the physical level, through buildings for example, or along a road. A crosshatch signals the separation of one city from the other on either side of the point of contact. Breach would be invoked, for example, by ignoring the crosshatching and seeing "across" the invisible border, mere metres from where one stands.

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[215] Freedman, *Art and Ideas*, 156.
[216] Freedman, *Art and Ideas*, 141.

Crosshatched spaces are particularly difficult to negotiate and are prolific across the simultaneous cities, where almost all public space is mutually occupied. In contrast to crosshatched spaces, there are 'alter' spaces and 'total' spaces that belong in their entirety to one or other of the cities. Total spaces include, for example, private residences. Where these are distinct, the alter space is understood as a discrete space in the other city, into which citizens of each should neither physically trespass, nor even look. The law of Breach, as it is enforced in the novel, reflects our own contemporary social norms of class division. Breach illustrates the invisible policing of those socially contingent barriers inherent in the urban space, such as the fracturing of public space between road users and pedestrians, and those for whom the streets are a home of last resort.

In *The City & The City,* Freedman suggests that 'the chief socio-economic problem to be considered is uneven development.'[217] His idea here includes the full formulation of combined and uneven development, such that the uneven distribution of power, historically and in the present, is an equally pressing socio-economic problem in the novel where the cities' autonomy is undermined by the seesaw of capital and the predations of corporate greed upon cultural resources. This socio-economic problem lies at the heart of real-world urban conflict and distress, exacerbating and underpinning the growing wealth gap. Complying with generic tropes of detective noir, the system of late capitalist expansionism is revealed as the novel's real villain, capable of violence that operates at the cost of the sovereign integrity of smaller nation states. In a chapter on world literature and crime fiction in the nineteenth century, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee extends Johan Galtung's theorisation of structural violence to include 'the arc of capitalist modernity defined by a less visible but perhaps more endemic and

[217] Freedman, *Art and Ideas*, 86.

permanent kind of violence coded into the very urban spaces many of us inhabit.'[218] The uneven distribution of power, though less visible, is paradoxically coded into representations of the urban space, defined by capitalist modernity: it is unseen and yet a defining feature of urban spaces. Borlú's adversary is depersonalised, positioning the novel's antagonist as a system of combined and uneven power distribution rather than a person. The effect of this is to heighten the futility of the two conflicting nation states striving to be distinct from one another, as they are subject to the same corporate expansionism and capitalist modernity that undermines their statehood.

Drawing on the work of assassinated Marxist scholar and activist Walter Rodney and the long-standing formulation of combined and uneven development, Freedman notes that 'uneven development functions as a motor of capital accumulation, and thus that developmental unevenness is not necessarily a contingent by-product of the capitalist mode of production but can be structurally integral to the latter.'[219] Rodney analysed underdevelopment of former colonies by Europe during the period of colonisation, and contends that an economic violence has been perpetrated against the Global South, particularly Africa, in the limited development of particularly urban infrastructures for the minority colonisers, articulating what is sometimes known as dependency theory.[220] Where Rodney and world-systems analysts differ is on the geographic specificity of the uneven development, since for Rodney the relationship is geographically specific whereas in world-systems theory the unevenness stems from the relationship of capital and labour. However, Rodney (and following him Freedman) is right in so far as capital accumulation is driven by unevenness and that unevenness is an

[218] Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, "Detecting World Literature: (Sub)Urban Crimes in the Nineteenth Century," in *Planned Violence: Post/colonial urban infrastructure, literature and culture*, edited by Elleke Boehmer and Dominic Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 274.
Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 6. no.3, (1969): 167–191.
[219] Freedman, *Art and Ideas*, 99.
[220] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972).

integral part of the expansion of the capitalist system. A world order that encourages the conditions of its own expansion carries severe consequences for the social fabric of formerly colonised spaces; most notably the strengthening of capitalist systems since the 'colonial system permitted the rapid development of technology and skills within the metropolitan sectors of imperialism.'[221] In *The City & The City*, we see a contemporary neoliberal iteration of this combined and uneven development through the unlawful extraction of natural and cultural resources from the two cities, which Miéville uses as an opportunity to critique the uneven distribution of power that permits a corporate organisation to plunder the conflicted cities in different ways, though with similar accumulationist intent.

The purpose of the theft of the cities' artefacts is to explore their potential for technological development; the objects' rumoured paranormal qualities might have applications for weapons development. The murdered student Mahalia Geary is tricked into stealing these artefacts from the dig where she works in Ul Qoma, believing that she was liberating the stolen remnants of an ancient civilisation. Borlú realises the con:

> We had all heard rumours about Precursor artefacts. Their questionable physics. Their properties. They [Sear and Core] want to see what's true. They've got Mahalia to supply them. And to do it they've got her thinking she's in touch with Orciny. But she realised.[222]

Geary was convinced of the 'third city Orciny' conspiracy theory by Professor David Bowden, a disgraced academic whose mental health unravels as he attempts to prove his unsubstantiated theory that the third city exists. Bowden works in collaboration with a corrupt politician and CorIntech to fabricate the third city in a misguided attempt to vindicate his early work, a text titled *Between The City & The City*. The novel's embedded self-reflexivity contains prompts for the reader to locate this conspiracy metatextually. The title of Bowden's fictional academic work is an amalgamation of the title of Miéville's novel and his nonfiction treatise on

[221] Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 173.
[222] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 325.

international law, the name of which is itself a reference to Marx's writings. This metatextuality further illustrates the novel's stylistic imbrication of the political intent of the speculative mode with the authorial consciousness in Borlú's narration.

Ul Qoma and Besźel suffer what Nixon terms 'the legacy of a very modern external plunder by far-off forces.'[223] Nixon borrows Rodney's idea of the emptiness or insignificance of a region to explain the terra nullius ideology that justifies slow violence in developing nations. CorIntech CEO Croft is a representative of the logics of slow violence that are a product of capitalist modernity and an example of the operations of combined and uneven development. He takes the view that the cities are so insignificant that the cultural heritage and potential technological advantage of the Ul Qoman and Besź people can be extracted without consequences. When Breach-agent Ashil attempts to ground the fleeing helicopter, Croft describes the powerlessness of the two cities in the face of government-sanctioned corporate theft. He boasts:

> "Not that I think you could, but I strongly suggest you and your colleagues don't try to stop this vehicle. 'Grounded.' What do you think would happen if you provoked my government? It's funny enough the idea of either Besźel or Ul Qoma going to war against a real country. Let alone you, Breach."[224]

Croft implies that his country would protect the corporate interests he represents, despite their immorality. He goes so far as to belittle the sovereignty of the cities, suggesting that a country is only 'real' if it is an aggressor. Another deflationary shift takes place here when the ever-present, shadowy agency in the Besź and Ul Qoman imagination is punctured by the realities of corporate capitalist power. Breach emerges from the shadows only to be put down and humbled as a provincial administrative peculiarity.

By drawing attention to vast power differentials that exist between countries, and between countries and corporations, Croft destabilises the process of affirmative recognition.

[223] Nixon, *Slow Violence,* 165.
[224] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 343.

He emphasises Breach's inability to prosecute for the theft of the artefacts or for Geary's murder, even though she is a foreign national and a Canadian citizen herself. CorIntech extracts historically valuable artefacts which have the potential to be technologically valuable to the Besź and Ul Qoman people by means of duplicity and theft, and disregard local concerns, culture, and sovereignty in the process. The other more insidious implication of Croft's warning against provocation is that the death of an unimportant citizen of a powerful state is secondary to the corporate interests of that state.[225]

The question of what constitutes a real place also poses a metatextual question regarding the reality of the 'real' places in the novel, and how the topolganger cities undermine the narrative of unity upon which any kind of nation is contingent. The two cities are as unreal as the story is fictional, while the real places mentioned in it – Berlin, Istanbul, and Johannesburg – are made strange through their inclusion in a world where these two topolganger cities can exist. Miéville's experiment explores what happens when we change how an urban space is read, how it is interpreted, and what that means for our readings of the real, familiar cities in which we live. The dynamic realist style and tropes of this detective noir create a paradoxical, existentially proximate place, both physically and symbolically. The effect is to generate narrative traction by posing the question: what does it take for a place to be considered real, and to have worth?

This question implies the consequences of combined and uneven development and uneven distributions of power in its interrogation of what is materially relevant in international law, and how this may differ to what places an individual may recognise as being symbolically or materially real. In this instance, traction is produced through the reader's complicity in their identification with the rest of the world, a political order which sanctions segregation and

[225] Canada's policy regarding the Dakota pipeline and the arrests of Canadian First Nations protestors provides a real-world example of this disregard for citizens over economic interests.

ignores rights abuses in places that are not "real." The reader is both inside and outside of the novel's world. Through this instability, Miéville demands that the reader engage with the novel's metatextuality: in the act of reading, we must recognise and accept the self-reflexivity of the text's playfulness through the speculative mode, authorial consciousness, and the duality of the cities with their implied in-between space. In suspending our disbelief, the reader makes it possible for the topolganger cities to exist in our own world. Narrative traction is manifested in the metatextual demands made by the novel on the reader: to consider how the speculative mode gestures to a paradigm shift in literature; to acknowledge unseeing as a real-world manifestation of social disavowal; and to confront the uncanny urban space as exclusionary. Each of these demands is made innovatively through inflationary and deflationary narrative tactics that deploy style and linguistic play to generate critical effect. The reader is alienated from the narrative just as they are alienated in the city, and this sense of an uncanny dislocation is typical of detective fiction, made more powerful by the novel's speculative mode influencing and interacting with the genre.

Anthony Vidler observes that the uncanny is developed in horror and crime fiction, in which the alien presence that invades is both the other and the self. He extends his notion of the uncanny urban space by drawing on Walter Benjamin's idea that the uncanny 'was born out of the rise of the great cities.'[226] In this formulation, the individual – overwhelmed by their exposure to so many strangers, so many others, so much alienating space – attempts to 'preserve a sense of individual security that was only precariously sustained by the endless quest of the detective tracking his clues through the apparent chaos of modern urban life.'[227] In the novel's conclusion, Miéville replicates this quality of de-individualisation as a consequence of dwelling in the uncanny urban space. When Croft has escaped and the cities

[226] Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 4.
[227] Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 4.

have settled back into their separated peace, the first-person narration continues, though who is speaking is no longer clear. The identity and location of the detective become liminal:

> Inspector Tyador Borlú is gone. I sign off Tye, avatar of Breach, following my mentor on my probation out of Besźel and out of Ul Qoma. We are all philosophers here where I am, and we debate among many other things the question of where it is that we live. On that issue I am a liberal. I live in the interstices, yes, but I live in both the city and the city.[228]

To live in the interstices – the in-between and shadowy places – is to subsume oneself in the unhomely, to actively be both at home and alienated from it. In his role as detective Borlú's character was steadily maintained and generally presented in keeping with the noir detective trope. In the novel's conclusion Borlú's identity is called into question as he is subsumed into a physical liminality, signalled by his new, culturally neutral name, Tye, and his habitation in 'the city and the city.' Borlú's capitulation to the urban interstices emphasises the power of the city to overwhelm and subsume the individual: he becomes alienated from himself and his geography.

While Borlú has no choice but to disappear into the cities' interstices, Zinzi December, the detective protagonist of *Zoo City*, is compelled by socio-political circumstance to operate in the interstices due to sustained systems of inequality and prejudice in real-world Johannesburg. In Lauren Beukes' novel, the speculative mode defamiliarizes through linguistic resignification. This is achieved by normalising 'animaling,' 'Aposymbiosis,' and animal familiars in innovative expository sections that complement the narration. The latter is focussed on the protagonist detective's attempts to solve a missing person case and clear herself of drug debts. Beukes' novel supplements the deflationary tactics of detective fiction with speculative exposition in the form of police reports, interviews, journal articles, newspaper clippings, and entries from web-based film archives which sustain the linguistic resignification that drives the cognitive estrangement. In this instance it is animaling and concomitant acquisition of *shavi* or

[228] Miéville, *The City & The City*, 373.

magical powers that evoke the social critique through the absence of realism. This is made powerful through the specificity of the irrealism in the novel, and the otherwise adherence to a world recognisably the one in which we live.

In the world of *Zoo City*, a person's guilt or crimes manifest as an animal familiar, which in certain cases gives the possessor an ability such as being able to sense the location of lost items, or being able to manipulate others' moods. Aposymbiots – or 'zoos' – are immediately ostracised as criminals and are forced into the peripheries of society. Using a physical representation of a society in which prejudice against outsiders is maintained through moral equivalency, Beukes' novel deploys disruptive poetics to layer the speculative mode over the otherwise realist representation of present-day Johannesburg to critique those systems that discriminate based on appearance and status. Using her hometown as the setting, Beukes defamiliarises Johannesburg through the addition of animal familiars to the city's inhabitants and in blending genres and expository styles signals an alternative to fantasy through the paradigm shift that speculative fiction makes possible.

Muti Noir and a Defamiliarised Johannesburg

In his article "Magical Nightmare Jo'burg," Konstantin Sofianos reads *The City & The City* as analogous to Johannesburg, and *Zoo City* as an appropriate representation of the 'disjointed African metropolis' and 'wasting urban core' of that South African city.[229] Sofianos' response to Beukes' dystopian Johannesburg locates the city within the very culture that the novel ridicules, with its depictions of nightlife, opulence and post-transitional anxieties made strange by the speculative addition of animal familiars. Sofianos describes the novel as an 'audacious reimagining of the post-apartheid city,' arguing that the novel's most valuable feature is how it 'manifests a range of social desires and pathologies.'[230] This reimaginative value, I would

[229] Konstantin Sofianos, "Magical Nightmare Joburg," *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, vol 14, no. 1, (2013): 112.
[230] Sofianos, "Magical Nightmare Jo'burg," 120.

argue, stems expressly from the novel's generic ambiguity and experimentation with form and linguistic felicity. In this, linguistic play and expository media excerpts work to 'manifest' the city, which is not so much reimagined as exposed through the irrealist utopian clues. Beukes achieves a social critique by using dynamic realism to detail the skewing of the real-world city, through the speculative mode's insertion of animal manifestations of human guilt.

In *The City & The City* the effects of the speculative mode are detailed exclusively in the context of the specific fictional urban settings, whereas in Beukes' *Zoo City* the speculative conceit is a globally distributed phenomenon, examined through the focal location of real-world Johannesburg. Culturally, South Africa is a semi-peripheral region, and the effect of this on the text is specifically productive of its generic ambiguity, as Beukes layers geographically specific cultural mores alongside the tropes of detective fiction. *Zoo City*'s speculative animaling is used to interrogate existing segregations in South African society, which are made starker in the depicted contrasts between wealth and poverty that characterise South Africa's economic heartland. The consequences of the neoliberal economic policies so enthusiastically embraced by the apartheid governments of the 1970s and 1980s are prominently and unambiguously apparent in South Africa's urban hubs. The result of capital's seesaw in that period and the movement of capital in the three decades since apartheid's end highlights how investment in some areas and neglect in others produces maldevelopment, depicted by Beukes in the contrasts between the inner-city slums of the once-affluent Hillbrow and the comfort of the gated communities and restricted-access suburbs where once there was veld.

The protagonist, Zinzi December, moves between these worlds as a former inhabitant of the privileged world, and a current inhabitant of the less privileged and condemned Elysium Heights in Zoo City, a part of Johannesburg's notorious inner-city Hillbrow. She is an Aposymbiot with a sloth familiar that she cannot be separated from by more than a few metres without enduring extreme pain. Compelled by the magic of 'animaling' which requires

Aposymbiots to be physically close to their animals, Zinzi takes Sloth with her as she investigates the novel's central mystery. She is reluctantly commissioned to investigate the alleged kidnapping of Songweza 'Song' Radebe, one half of a rising star duo of teen pop twins, backed by Odysseus "Odi" Huron, a notorious music producer with a sinister secret.

As Zinzi traverses Johannesburg in search of the missing girl, Beukes uses the narration of the down-on-her-luck detective as a lens though which to showcase the inequalities and injustices that plague the city. Beukes' rendering of Johannesburg through the former-journalist protagonist's first-person perspective reveals a love-hate relationship with the city, captured in Zinzi's interactions with the physical city and its inhabitants. Johannesburg is an ideal setting through which to explore the consequences of a visible, physical manifestations of one's guilt. In a city geographically defined by the wealth gap, the Aposymbiots in the novel complicate the real-world optics of criminality. How do we identify threatening people and who, if anyone, is really innocent?

Zoo City presents the 'magical nightmare' of South Africa's sustained economic and social divisions, perpetuated by the violence of South Africa's history, even as it attempts to move into a future of post-apartheid integration. While Sofianos tells the reader that the Aposymbiots in the novel represent social desires, he doesn't expand on what these are. One might be the desire to be able to tell with certainty who is guilty and who is innocent, particularly in a post-apartheid society beset by anxieties around racialised criminality. Zinzi's side-line in 419 scams to repay her loan-shark, Vuyo, undermines this desire; Vuyo is criminal but not Aposymbiotic, raising questions about how the magical system that endows people with animals and magic *shavi* works. These questions go, perhaps productively, unanswered in the novel and so while this a minor point and likely goes unnoticed by most, the absence of an animal in Vuyo's life must register as an injunction to consider how morality, conceptions of criminality, guilt, and the notional justice system are at odds with one another.

Examples of the speculative poetics in the novel, 'animaling,' 'zoos,' and 'Aposymbiot' are used alongside academic and scientific prose style sections to explain the inter-species relationships while also signalling the colloquial and prejudicial terminologies that inevitably arise in social groups. In biology, Aposymbiosis occurs when ordinarily symbiotic organisms live separately, usually with negative consequences for both.[231] The term signals that the effect of 'animaling' is to separate two things ordinarily connected, and for that symbiotic relationship to emerge signalling the reliance of one on the other. Aposymbiosis is frequently considered existentially dangerous to both organisms. In the case of Aposymbiosis in the novel, it is left deliberately ambiguous what the two co-dependents actually are. Due to rumour, limited scientific study, and documentary film evidence referred to in the novel, the animal symbiont is generally imagined to be a physical representation or manifestation of a person's soul, transplanted out of the human body in the moment of guilt or immorality. When an Aposymbiot dies, the animal's body is left behind but the human is physically taken by 'the Undertow,' 'Hell's Undertow,' or 'The Black Judgement,' also described academically in a journal article in the novel as 'shadow-self absorption.'[232] The first three of these labels imply a descent into hell and the displacement of the self onto the symbiotic animal familiar, while the last suggests an academic definition which relies heavily on psychoanalytic theory to explain a phenomenon not wholly understood in the world of the text.

We might better understand Beukes' speculative project by asking what the consequences of having a physical manifestation of guilt that cannot be easily hidden would be for domestic abusers, rapists, people who engage in animal abuse, and the like. Sofianos contextualises social desires alongside criminal pathologies, but I would argue that the threat of having one's sins or morality made publicly evident would result in an economy of violence

[231] Aposymbiosis is most often seen in sea and ocean-based organisms, e.g., clownfish living outside of anemone, or certain kinds of coral that can live, though not thrive, without their symbiont algae.
[232] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 187.

whereby crimes might be further outsourced to an already criminalised demographic. This would, in turn, produce a system in which criminals are further pathologized, which would in turn exacerbate the torturous conditions of incarceration as a reactionary, rather than preventative, response to crime.

This novel offers an alternative vision of our world as one-amongst-many: the fantastical inclusion of animal familiars disrupts any visual association of appearance with morality. I draw the reader's attention here to the myriad ways that a novel can be speculative, in this case using 'animaling' as a moral register to speculate about alternative optics of criminality and the reality that many who are not criminalised are still guilty for actions against others, as the novel's plot reveals is the case with Odi Huron. The physical manifestation of guilt poses an interesting challenge to the traditional detective noir in which crimes are solved through research, clues, and the detective's gut instinct and skills, rather than by having our detective simply notice whether or not a suspect is an Aposymbiot and drawing the relevant conclusions. Beukes sustains the noir genre through Zinzi's missing person case while the introduction of 'muti' and Aposymbiosis raises questions about morality, criminality, and judgement based on appearance. In a country in which poverty often correlates with race, criminality is often ascribed along similar lines. Prejudicial and derogatory terms such as 'zoos' therefore fulfil a similar function in the novel to racial slurs in the real-world: the presence of the animal familiar permits a displacement of prejudice regarding perceived criminality from race to Aposymbiosis. Existing racial tensions are not however erased in the novel, and Beukes is very conscious of and attentive to racial discourse in South Africa. Zinzi's character in her Former Life is representative of a generation of affluent black professionals that has developed post-apartheid. However, her wealth privilege does not limit the prejudice she experiences once she acquires the sloth. Through the imagined 'zoos', Beukes achieves a specific instance of critical irrealism which targets systems of sustained racial discrimination that have devastating

economic and social consequences while also showing how these systems work within the context of the consequences of combined and uneven development for Johannesburg.

Beukes' success as an author has been helped in no small part by her outspoken positions on racial discrimination and gender-based violence in South Africa, which feature heavily in her novels. In an interview in June 2020, Beukes noted that she draws inspiration from the lives of people around her.[233] Her third and most successful novel, *The Shining Girls* (2013), was influenced heavily by the tragic rape and murder of a young family friend. In her re-writing of that horrific event, Beukes seeks to provide the victim and those left behind with a different outcome, agency, and revenge. Her earlier work similarly reimagines circumstances close to Beukes: in her debut *Moxyland* (2008), Cape Town is reinvented as a segregated, advertising-ridden space with the Rurals kept out of the city centre, while in *Zoo City* she challenges the optics of criminality in her hometown, Johannesburg.[234] In these two novels Beukes' characters live in the interstices, at the edges, and in the shadows of the economic violence that plagues South Africa's attempts to coalesce as a nation.

Her later novels *The Shining Girls*, *Broken Monsters* (2014) and *Afterland* (2020) are all set in America, indicating a shift in the author's focus to a global audience, and inspired by her travels to Detroit and Chicago in the late 2000s.[235] *The Shining Girls*, recently adapted to television and considered to be Beukes' most successful novel, is set partially in the late 1980s and Depression-era Chicago. The plot follows a serial killer who time travels, attracted by women who seem to glimmer with potential and whom he feels compelled to kill in order to restore balance to his twisted sense of the universe.[236] Also written in the detective noir style, *The Shining Girls* subverts the genius with which psychopathy is frequently associated. Beukes

[233] Chelsea Haith and Lauren Beukes, "Pandemic writing: How close is too close?" on *Narrative Futures* podcast, University of Oxford, published on 14 October 2020.
[234] Lauren Beukes, *Moxyland* (London: Angry Robot, 2008).
[235] Lauren Beukes, *The Shining Girls (*London: HarperCollins, 2013); Lauren Beukes, *Broken Monsters*, (London: HarperCollins, 2014); Lauren Beukes, *Afterland* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2020).
[236] Beukes, *The Shining Girls*, 2013.

does not glorify the intelligence of the serial killer, but rather presents his seedy psychopathy in counterpoint to the brilliant but traumatised protagonist Kirby Mazrachi, who survives her encounter with the killer and proceeds to stalk him across time to exact revenge.[237] Beukes' fourth novel, *Broken Monsters*, is set in the slums of Detroit. Another thriller, this novel sustains the author's preoccupation with urban poverty as a narrative backdrop for female detectives in intellectual combat with psychotic male killers.[238]

In 2015, Beukes began researching the man-killing virus that provides the speculative conceit for her fifth novel *Afterland* (2020). It was expected in early 2019 and was eventually published just as the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. That novel's speculation about the social consequences of a flu-like virus which mutates into fast-acting prostate cancer are morbidly coincidental. In the last chapter of this dissertation, I read *Afterland* alongside Louise Erdrich's apocalyptic *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), exploring these novels' rejection of the urban-wilderness binary through narratives of reproductive rights under apocalypse conditions.

The rest of this current chapter focuses on the political intent of the speculative mode in *Zoo City.* The strategies employed by Miéville and Beukes to explore questions of urban segregation and social disavowal are fertile for analysis. *The City & The City* uses language specific to sensory experiences of geography to critical irrealist effect, while in *Zoo City*, Johannesburg is both itself and doubled as another; its political geography reshaped by the advent of animal familiars and *shavi:* magic.

Readers of fantasy fiction will be familiar with the concept of animal companions who enable magic. Cats are the most usual familiar depicted in traditional fantasy, followed by toads and owls. Fantasy fans and YA readers may also be familiar with the daemons that accompany

[237] *The Shining Girls* was the subject of a fierce bidding war in 2011, and the film rights were subsequently bought by MRC and Leonardo di Caprio's production studio Appian Way. It is currently available to view on Apple TV with Elizabeth Moss as executive producer and lead actor.
[238] Beukes, *Broken Monsters*, 2014.

the human beings in the world of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series, daemons being the term for the animals which are acquired at birth and take multiple forms across childhood, settling on a single species when humans reach puberty.[239] The term 'familiar' does not appear in *Zoo City* in reference to the animals: I use it here to contextualise the possession of animals by Aposymbiot characters in the novel, and to capture the fantastic quality of magical powers that being 'animaled' brings Aposymbiots such as the protagonist. Through this speculative imagining of real-world manifestations of a person's guilt or shame, the novel engages a kind of magical realism that depicts traditional Southern African sangoma rituals, complicating several generic categories.

The presence of wild, often non-indigenous, animals in the urban space disrupts the distinction between the built environment and the natural one. Similarly, the very existence of animal familiars and the concomitant *shavi* powers their presence bestows undermines scientific and secular understanding. While the Aposymbiots appear to be like all other human beings, they are at risk of being taken by the Undertow, a mysterious force that claims them when or if their animal familiar dies. Late one night at home in Elysium Heights, Zinzi witnesses the shooting of a gang member's Bear. She describes the Undertow coming for the man, who runs 'like hell is at his heels.'[240] His panicked flight will be ineffectual:

> The air pressure dips, like before a storm. A keening sound wells up soft and low, as if it's always been there, just outside the range of human hearing. It swells to howling. And then the shadows start to drop from trees, like raindrops after a storm. The darkness pools and gathers and then seethes. The Japanese believe it's hungry ghosts. The Scientologists claim it's the physical manifestation of suppressive engrams. Some eyewitness reports describe teeth grinding and ripping in the shadows. Video recordings have shown only impenetrable darkness. I prefer to think of it as a black hole, cold and impersonal as space. Maybe we become stars on the other side.[241]

[239] Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials* trilogy (London: Penguin Random House, 1995-2000).
[240] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 244.
[241] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 245.

Zinzi cannot watch the entire scene and turns away 'as it rushes down the road in the direction of the running man […] The screaming only lasts a few awful seconds before it is abruptly cut off.'[242] The first 'it' refers to the shadowy substance of the Undertow, variously imagined and accounted for depending on religious views, an appetite for drama, and whether or not the fictional science is believed.

In the morning, only one corpse remains, that of the Bear, and a stain on the tarmac 'like a blast radius.'[243] The formal style of this description captures both Zinzi's naïvely wishful imaginings of the Undertow resulting in cosmic transformation, her realistic fear of it as an eventual death, and the existential change that Aposymbiots undergo. If no corpse but the animal's is left following the visitation of the Undertow, what then constitutes the person's physical self before death? In this way criminals and guilty people are figured as less than fully human, lacking in corporeality, producing the doubling quality of the uncanny in which they are both recognisable and the unknowable other.

During early promotional work for *Zoo City*, Beukes, only somewhat jokingly, proposed another potential genre label for her work. In an interview with Gwen Ansell, Beukes laments generic distinctions, saying that *Zoo City* 'turned out to be SF. Or speculative fiction. Or New Weird. Or urban fantasy. Or whatever the hell you want to call it. No-one's picking up on my muti noir tag, dammit!'[244] Muti is a very real part of the lives of many South Africans, the word translating as tree in isiZulu and most commonly referring to traditional medicine. It has varied uses and is viewed as both magic and medicine, depending on the practicing sangoma and their customer/patient.[245] Muti murders, which come to play a significant role in

[242] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 245.
[243] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 246.
[244] Gwen Ansell, "Behind the Monkey Business," *Mail & Guardian* online, 6 May 2011, accessed from https://mg.co.za/article/2011-05-06-behind-all-the-monkey-business on 11 March 2019.
[245] A sangoma is a person who feels a vocation for traditional healing practices and trains to be able to commune with the ancestors, as well as dispensing remedies for everything from erectile dysfunction and indigestion to broken hearts.

the novel's plot, are tragically not uncommon in South Africa. The body parts of certain demographics are considered more magically powerful than others, and in some cases the ingestion of these or the murder itself is believed to be capable of curing AIDS, inducing love, setting curses, or enlarging penises. For example, twins are thought to be powerful in muti medicine, as are virgins and albino people. Some muti is effective in that it uses the plant materials that are found in common medicines such as paracetamol. Other muti relies on superstition and can be highly dangerous to vulnerable groups, be they victims or clients. Beukes' description of the novel's genre as 'muti noir' suggests her awareness of the novel's magical realist characteristics, but she turns these on their head by localising noir, an otherwise globally generic term. She makes the noir genre specifically her own through the influences of Southern African traditional medicine rituals so that the speculative mode cuts across the novel's style and content.

The tropes of noir which rely on a stark, gritty representation of reality are complicated by Zinzi's dreams, which are rendered in italics at the end of each chapter, the speculative mode introducing specific elements of critical irrealism into the text to challenge the novel's felicity to perceived normative reality. As the novel progresses, we discover that the dreams signal Zinzi's intuition about the music producer's own Aposymbiosis, which he has sought to hide by living in seclusion in suburbia for over a decade. Intuition plays a crucial role in noir, permitting the detective to use their instincts to solve the mystery. In traditional noir, this does not detract from the realist style. However, in *Zoo City* Beukes asserts the magic behind intuition in Zinzi's dreams. In one dream, Zinzi is swimming lengths and making perfect tumble turns, which she is unable to do in reality. The ominous dream appears in italics at the end of the chapter, Zinzi's laps yielding to a threatening presence in the water: '*And far below me, so deep it's like this pool is suspended over a continental shelf, something is rising,*

swimming up towards me. Something with teeth.'[246] The double meaning in this dream sequence is evoked in the word 'rising.' Zinzi's subconscious is signalling that something is not right with her missing person case. The information rises up through her subconscious and foreshadows the moment when Huron's familiar, an enormous albino crocodile – we infer it is the 'something with teeth' – rises from the depths of the music producer's large swimming pool.

The aspects that we might call magical realism in the novel are most prominently evoked in Zinzi's dream sequences. These italicised and fevered dreams foreshadow plot events and complicate the genre trope of the noir detective's intuition as an element of the realist style. In *Zoo City*, the speculative conceit operates on a continuum, the animal familiars intensely speculative as fantastical additions to the otherwise noir style, while Zinzi's dreams and visions seem to be the product of a troubled and guilty subconscious. This is how Beukes normalises traditional medicine and magic in the detective fiction genre and uses linguistic resignification in the speculative mode to make the Aposymbiots appear an ordinary part of the novel's world, almost entirely akin to our own. The role of muti is only revealed in the second part of the novel, the first two instances occurring when Zinzi has visions after ingesting a potion. The third instance of muti magic takes place during the novel's showdown scene, when the music producer Odi Huron attempts to free himself of his animal familiar. He tries to disconnect his crocodile familiar from his spirit through a muti murder of the star twins he has been ostensibly producing. This is also a moment where the paranoia of white South African suburbia is set aside for beliefs in witchcraft and muti magic, highlighting a shifting socio-political landscape in post-apartheid South Africa. It is also an instance in which the novel engages with the conditions of semi-peripherality as the traditional medicine practice supersedes characters' cultural allegiance to Western medicine and institutionally accepted-

[246] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 240.

science, a consequence no doubt of the emergence of Aposymbiosis in the world of the novel. The interplay between dynamic realism and the speculative concept is mirrored by the interplay between perceived scientific 'reality' and the novel's assertion that the power of traditional medicine is very real.

The setting for the murder scene is the garden and pool area of Huron's suburban mansion. In the novel as in reality, unbound by any geographical constrictions, Johannesburg sprawls across the highveld like a fast-spreading, choking, weed. Just as unchecked invasive species unbalance an ecosystem, the suburbs of Johannesburg are a representation of the capitalist modernity that perpetuates the uneven and unhealthy stratification through the city, killing and feeding on the landscape in equal measure. Gated communities proliferate in Johannesburg as the wealth gap is exacerbated by present-day failures to redress historic inequalities. Setting the showdown scene in Huron's luxurious but heavily fortified home permits Beukes to highlight the invidious quality of South Africa's most populous city.

South African literary scholar Shane Graham contends that: 'Beukes' imagined Johannesburg is one in which spatial inequalities that seem chaotic, in fact structure the city and allow for social regimentation.'[247] Graham is correct in identifying spatial inequality as a structuring device that drives the plot, although the chaotic spatial inequalities he identifies are not unique to the imagined Johannesburg in the novel: they are faithful representations of how Johannesburg is ordered and operates – according to social regimentation. Zinzi's home in *Zoo City* contrasts with her formerly affluent lifestyle and the homes to which she travels in the course of her investigations. Each space she enters is uniquely inhospitable, each home concealing evidence. The choice of each setting is carefully specific: each location is chosen to present or symbolise the rot that undergirds the social regimentation of Johannesburg and

[247] Shane Graham, "The Entropy of Built Things: Postapartheid Anxiety and the Production of Space in Henrietta Rose-Innes' Nineveh and Lauren Beukes' Zoo City," *Safundi* vol 16, no.1 (2015): 67.

emphasise the effects of combined and uneven development in this semi-periphery, both culturally and geographically.

The novel opens with its setting: the Zoo City district is a place where people do not ask difficult questions. Although the suburb is fictional, it is positioned as part of the greater Johannesburg metropolis, located somewhere in the maze of neglected poverty that constitutes present-day Hillbrow. Hillbrow was a desirable and fashionable area in the 1970s and 1980s, but subject to the seesaw of capital fell into disrepair as capital moved to the suburbs, leaving the inner-city victim to underdevelopment. Through caustic first person narration, Zinzi's description of waking in Zoo City highlights both the source of the city's wealth and the effect of that wealth's uneven distribution on the landscape: 'Morning light the sulphur colour of the mine dumps seeps across Johannesburg's skyline and sears through my window.' Sulphur carries few positive connotations, and the mine dumps invoke Johannesburg's origin as a mining town, where black migrant miners worked for little and lived in deplorable hostels while the city boomed around them. Shane Graham reads Beukes' depiction of the now-empty mines and the large rats in Johannesburg's inner city as products of the same neglect, which I contend generates a concomitant anxiety about xenophobia and criminality in the city.[248]

Johannesburg was established during the Witwatersrand Gold Rush of 1886 and, as a result, is one of the only urban financial hubs in the world that is not located on, or near, a body of water. Positioned high on a geological plateau at an elevation of 1,753 meters, it has the space to expand across the flat Highveld, almost unhindered by physical or natural obstruction. Geopolitically, it is structured much like American cities, in which the wealthy retreat to the suburbs and the inner city is plagued by poverty and crime. Gated communities in the suburbs, 'fortified like privatised citadels', creep weed-like across all four compass points of the city. Even the poorest of the middle-class opt to gate and fence their communities, '[n]ot so much

[248] Graham, 'The Entropy of Built Things," 64–77.

keeping the world out as keeping the festering middle-class paranoia in,' as Zinzi quips.[249] The townships, areas of extreme poverty that were designated as living spaces for people of colour under apartheid, abut these more affluent communities. The inhabitants of the townships commute in and out of the wealthy suburbs each day to their jobs, many as service staff in the homes of the wealthier inhabitants. In the afternoons, although apartheid-era klaxons no longer sound, the staff of the middle and upper-middle class leave the suburbs and return to the townships or inner-city slums as they have done for generations. The end of apartheid has not led to any significant reformation of the domestic service industry. This industry continues to be troubled by persistent abuse, exploitation, and violence.

Inner-city Johannesburg presents another kind of poverty in a setting where interracial cohabitation had utopian potential in the transitional 1990s. Nowadays, the urban ghetto neglect puts the buildings in the inner city at risk of condemnation, and the inhabitants at risk of exploitation. Writing about urban ghettoes, Loïc Wacquant notes that: 'It is in these districts draped in a sulphurous aura, where social problems gather and fester, that the urban outcasts of the turn of the century reside.'[250] The inner city is itself a paradox, the outcasts residing at the urban centre, living amongst the ruinous effects of capital's seesaw away from the inner city, leaving the space and people languishing under capital neglect. Sulphur produces a vile smell of decay, not unlike rotting eggs, and Beukes' choice of sulphur to describe the city's early morning light evokes the decay of the urban ghetto as much as it does the yellow light corrupted by inner-city smog. Describing the urban ghetto as possessing a 'sulphurous aura,' Wacquant invites the reader to recognise the smells associated with poverty, usually attributable to a municipal or governmental disregard or abandonment. Beukes' description of the morning light as sulphur-coloured like Johannesburg's previously abandoned mine dumps

[249] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 100.
[250] Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Mass, 2008), 1.

foreshadows the revelation that Zinzi's situation is poverty-stricken and insecure, but that like the city, she too was once prosperous at great cost.[251]

Moments after she wakes, Zinzi slides her partner Benoît's familiar, a mongoose, off her laptop, commenting that the animal should know better than to rest on the warm machine because her work is 'not entirely legal.'[252] Later we learn that aside from using her skills for finding lost objects, Zinzi participates in an illegal 419 email scam, conning gullible people. She masquerades as various fictitious African princesses for the benefit of foolish, large-hearted Americans, pretending to be a victim seeking to recover her fortune. This work is for the benefit of her loan shark Vuyo, to whom she owes a drug-related debt. In the opening pages, Zinzi pads over 'rotten linoleum' to where she keeps her things, in a cupboard: 'Calling it a cupboard is a tad optimistic, like calling this dank room with its precariously canted floor and intermittent plumbing an apartment is optimistic.'[253]

Beukes engages the reader's sense of smell again here to enrich our understanding of the conditions in which the protagonist lives. Zinzi goes to find Sloth, whose 'mossy reek' is at least 'earthy and clean compared to the choke of stewing garbage and black mould floating up the stairwell.' She goes on to name her building, and the full extent of her circumstances, and the setting of the novel are made clear: 'Elysium Heights was condemned years ago.'[254] From the name of Zinzi's building the reader can infer the reference to Elysian Fields, the Greek afterlife accessible only to mortal relatives of the gods, the name of the building a nod to the afterlife that may or may not be Zinzi's fate.[255] This reference has a hint of irony given the protagonist's poverty-stricken situation while also gesturing to the dubious mortality of

[251] The mine dumps in Johannesburg were left untouched for several decades until in recent years it was discovered that with new technology gold could be extracted from the ground that was initially deemed waste. Excavations have been made into the mine dumps over the last decade to extract the leftover gold.
[252] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 3.
[253] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 4.
[254] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 4.
[255] *Elysium* is also the title of South African director Neill Blomkamp's 2013 dystopian film set on a ravaged Earth and in an artificial world just off-planet.
Neill Blomkamp, *Elysium* (TriStar Pictures, 2013).

Aposymbiots given no corpse is left behind when they pass away. The building and the character who tolerates it are condemned in one way or another.

Central Johannesburg is populated with buildings that have been condemned; in which the most desperate of the urban poor continue to live, often without the provision of services and at great risk of building collapse, fire, or Red Ants.[256] The first mention of magic in the novel is in reference to Zinzi's home security, a padlock on her door 'designed to keep out those with a *shavi* for slipping through locked doors.'[257] The second is in the description of a crime scene in her condemned building, where a 'zoo' has died following the death of their animal familiar. They are absorbed into the Undertow, leaving behind a smell 'like polyester burning in a microwave.'[258]

Zinzi notes that such a death is unlikely to warrant much attention from the law: 'The stairway is mummified in yellow police tape and a charm against evidence tampering, as if the cops are ever going to come back and investigate. A dead zoo in Zoo City is low priority even on a good day.'[259] Here Beukes' savvy protagonist describes the law's disregard for poor felons in this fictional, though representative, poverty-stricken area of Johannesburg. This state of affairs is commensurate with real-world apathy for the lives of people who are 'ungrievable' in the Butlerian sense. A 'dead zoo' is deemed unworthy of police investigation and is therefore neglected by the system in which only certain bodies are considered valuable in life, and in death.[260]

As Zinzi leaves to get on with her workday, she details the grit and grime of the condemned building and its inhabitants: a junkie 'passed out in the doorway, some dirty furry

[256] Red Ants are a South African private security firm that specialise in the removal of illegal structures, usually erected by the poor on land owned by private individuals. They self-describe as offering eviction and relocation services. They are frequently employed by municipal councils for the purpose of evicting illegal squatters from land or buildings, usually violently and with the destruction of personal property.
[257] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 5.
[258] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 7.
[259] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 7.
[260] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

thing nested against his chest.'[261] She identifies the man as a *tik* addict, noting the dark stairwell that she must descend several flights to where the lightbulbs are still in place. She wryly notes that it 'won't be long until they too find a new life as *tik* pipes, but isn't that the way of the slums? Even the stuff that's nailed down gets repurposed.'[262] She shares the space with people described as 'transgressions', such as a sex worker coming home, pulling her jacket closed over her naked breasts, her Robin symbiont hopping along the ground behind her.

Zinzi senses myriad lost things in the woman's wake and struggles to ignore the pull of these objects. She describes her magical ability ambiguously, and sarcastically:

> The problem with my particular gift, curse, call it what you like, is that everybody's lost *something*. Stepping out in public is like walking into a tangle of cat's cradles, like someone has dished out balls of string at the lunatic asylum and instructed the inmates to tie everything to everything else.[263]

Her sense for lost objects is a unidirectional psychic ability that allows her to sense loss in another person's psyche. This power allows her to identify and locate their lost objects. She advertises on community notice boards, her notices pasted 'up in Hillbrow among the wallpaper of flyers advertising miracle AIDS cures, cheap abortions, and prophets.'[264] These notice boards offer a glimpse into the concerns and needs of the people at whom they are targeted.

Far removed from the affluence of what she refers to as her Former Life, Zinzi scrapes a living finding people's missing things, writing scam emails, and hiding from her past. The novel is set at the juncture in the protagonist's life when she is spurred to life-changing action. As in *The City & The City*, Beukes' novel traces the dystopian landscape of a divided city before the revelation of a higher order injustice and murder, followed by the protagonist's escape from their urban confines. Slipping the bonds of the urban paradox, of belonging and

[261] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 7.
[262] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 8.
[263] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 9.
[264] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 10.

not belonging in the city space, the protagonists of both novels, having failed to resolve their cases, evoke the deflationary pessimism of detective noir.

The case that leads her to the main mystery of the novel, Mrs Luditsky's ring, is a MacGuffin, a common noir device that is necessary to the plot's context but is itself irrelevant. This case is an opportunity for the reader to learn about Zinzi's *shavi*. It also sets the scene for the first meeting between Zinzi and the suspicious duo Marabou and Maltese, who go on to frame her for Odi Huron's multiple homicide, implying she is responsible for the cash-grab muti murder.[265] When Zinzi and the older woman first meet, Mrs Luditsky describes losing her ring when removing her jewellery while hiding during a mall robbery, saying 'I know how *you people* are – criminals that is,' she adds hurriedly, 'No offence to the animaled.'[266] Here she makes a distinction between Aposymbiots and criminals. In her narration, Zinzi refutes this distinction with characteristic cynicism: 'The truth is we're all criminals. Murderers, rapists, junkies. Scum of the earth. In China they execute zoos on principle. Because nothing says guilty like a spirit critter at your side.'[267]

Zinzi is '*mashavi*', a person equipped with a magical ability, though she remarks that 'it's not so much a job as a vocation. You don't get to choose the ghosts that attach themselves to you. Or the things they bring with them.'[268] Characterising her ability as the attachment of a ghost foreshadows descriptions of the Undertow and Zinzi's drug-decimated past. Her sins come back to haunt her throughout the novel in the form of a duplicitous ex-lover and her loan shark Vuyo, for whom she is 'a master builder in the current affairs sympathy scam.'[269] It also

[265] The Marabou and Maltese pair indicate another Easter Egg for noir fans: Maltese is a nod to the famous 1941 noir film starring Humphrey Bogart, *The Maltese Falcon*, based on the novel of the same name by classic noir author Dashiell Hammett.
Samuel Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930).
John Huston, *The Maltese Falcon* (Warner Bros., 1941).
[266] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 12.
[267] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 12.
[268] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 14.
[269] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 35.

foreshadows the circumstances under which she accidentally gets her brother murdered in the novel's backstory, revealed progressively in italicised flashbacks and dream sequences.

In the present, Mrs Luditsky is murdered minutes before Zinzi can return the ring. As the old woman dies Zinzi feels the connection between the ring and its owner go slack. Coming upon the police-cordoned crime scene she meets two other Aposymbiots, a man with a Maltese poodle, and a woman with a Marabou Stork perched on her shoulders. They immediately spark suspicion, the Maltese man entirely lacking lost objects, the Marabou missing driving gloves, a book, and a gun. They offer her enough money to pay off her drug debts in exchange for finding a missing person, a job she would ordinarily categorically refuse. The job takes her into different parts of the city, which she is uniquely able to access as a well-educated, beautiful, young, black woman from an affluent background.[270] As is the case in much detective fiction, her personal circumstances and identity markers make her the only possible person who can believably solve the case, though she seems to stumble from crisis to crisis trying to make good on her past mistakes with only marginal success.

The novel concludes with the discovery that music producer Huron is attempting to use muti magic in the murder of the pop-sensation twins to free himself of his crocodile familiar, and to frame Zinzi for the various crimes involved. Marabou and Maltese are the fixers that frame Zinzi for the crime, but the plan goes wrong when Zinzi's romantic partner Benoît enters the scene and is injured by the crocodile. Following the transferral of the animal from Huron to one of the twins, S'bu, the crocodile kills Huron who has been mistreating the animal out of disgust and fear. Maltese and Marabou escape, as does Zinzi, who later flees South Africa for Rwanda, in search of her lover's wife and family, seemingly as an act of self-redemption. She hopes to apprise Benoît's family of his injuries and deliver their asylum application documents.

[270] Sofianos, "Magical Nightmare Joburg," 111–20.

'It's going to be awkward. It's going to be the best thing I've done with my miserable life.'[271] She sets out on this quest to Kigali out of a warped sense of guilt, possibly brought on by her possession of Sloth, whose presence encourages her to avoid bad habits and live more conscientiously. She is, however, also wanted under multiple warrants of arrest and must flee to avoid wrongful imprisonment. Zinzi's character is never totally altruistic, her cynical self-interest carrying across from her Former Life into her impoverished present, her selfish self-regard a trope personality trait for a detective protagonist.

While in *The City & The City* the protagonist gives up his detective life and disappears into the interstices of the city, *Zoo City*'s protagonist seeks redemption by escaping into the anonymity of the road north. Through their representation of the effects of uneven power distribution and consequent inequalities, these novels sustain the noir trope of justice remaining beyond reach of both victims and the flawed detectives working their cases. The critical proximity of the skewed worlds leaves utopian clues regarding injustice in both novels. Unhomeliness besets the urban settings of the novels as the protagonists struggle against their political geography to make sense of and right the wrongs plaguing their respective cities.

Innovative Exposition as Disruptive Poetics

Another example of the specificity of the speculative mode in *Zoo City* is Beukes' use of innovative alternative media for background exposition. These sections contextualise speculative conceit within the imagined world of the novel while sustaining the novel's the detective noir qualities through a dynamic realism. The novel offers a case study for the deflationary technique of noir, written in the gritty realist style of that genre. As in *The City & The City*, the introduction of the inflationary aesthetic, in this case an element of fantasy embodied by the animal familiars and associated *shavi*, works in tandem with the deflationary

[271] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 358.

techniques of the detective noir genre. Typical of detective noir, the detective, Zinzi, is given a case that only she can solve: she must find a missing person, using the threads of connection between lost items and their owners which only she can sense, as a result of her psychic *shavi*.

A former lifestyle journalist with a high-end cocaine addiction, Zinzi is 'animaled' following a set-up hijacking that goes wrong and results in the murder of her older brother, Thando. The novel opens with a single line: 'In Zoo City, it's impolite to ask.'[272] The scene that unfolds is an ordinary morning in Zinzi's 'new' life, with references made to what she terms her 'FL – Former Life' of chic clothes and upper-middle class wealth: 'I was always more of an outrageously expensive indie boutique kinda girl.'[273] Zinzi's former life is one of comfort and opulence, contrasted sharply with her new life in Hillbrow, where 'zoos' are forced to live by a housing market prejudiced against 'Aposymbiot individuals.'[274]

The novel presents a variety of terms to refer to those people who acquire animal familiars and a *shavi*.[275] The process through which a person is animaled is known as the 'Shift' and does not have an identifiable source.[276] This information is not imparted as part of the protagonist's first-person narration, but through short chapters or sections of chapters that appear as extra media: criminal records in chapter three; an Internet Movie Database (IMDB) entry in chapter eight; snippets from interviews with prison inmates across the globe in chapter ten; news reports in chapters four, fifteen, twenty-nine, thirty, and thirty-five; an entry in an online psychology journal in chapter seventeen; and a dictionary entry in chapter nineteen. Elsewhere in the novel the plot content is communicated through the text of Zinzi's scam emails; transcripts of a journalistic interview; communications with her loan shark via instant messenger; text messages between characters; and italicised memories or flashbacks. The novel

[272] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 3.
[273] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 4.
[274] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 187.
[275] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 5.
[276] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 75.

uses the media and messaging systems of the modern world to evoke a correlation with reality that the contents of those forms bely.

Beukes' experiments with form offer alternative narrative forms to those commonly found in detective noir, which usually concentrate on the detective's first-person narration. The effect of these extra media chapters and sections is to enliven the realist quality of the text, in a modern take on the verisimilitude created by Georgian- and Victorian-era epistolary and diary novels such as *The War of the Worlds* and *Robinson Crusoe*. The effect of the realistic media is to give credence to the fictional narrative, specifically because it appears to be separate from Zinzi's unreliable first-person narration. Even when the media pertains to her, its format and the presence of correlating information or interlocutors increases the verisimilitude of the existence of Aposymbiosis and *shavi*. These insertions of alternative kinds of prose also ground the novel in the recognisable world, in which media is consumed much as it is presented in the novel – in pieces, online, comprehended through context, enriched by format.

In the age of the internet, information is accessed across multiple platforms of interaction, some of which are multi-directional, such as social media, and others that are unidimensional, such as television broadcasts or news articles.[277] The shifts from Zinzi's caustic, no-nonsense, self-deprecating and unreliable first-person narration to these seemingly more trustworthy forms and back again is an acknowledgement of how technology shapes the world and how information is accessed and processed. These sections and chapters of unconventional text also function as clues for the reader as they attempt to understand the novel's mysteries, which operate at two levels: like in *The City & The City*, there are multiple layers that the detective (reader and protagonist) must work through to solve the mystery within the mystery.

[277] Even these can receive feedback through complaints to broadcasting commissions, comments directed though not always received through social media, and public sentiment expressed through letters.

The inflationary qualities of *Zoo City* operate in tandem with the deflationary aspects of detective noir and real-world representation to produce ambiguity at both stylistic and content levels. Chapter seventeen presents us with one of the novel's many experiments with style that capture an alternative rendering of an Aposymbiot's response to the threat of the Undertow not narrated by Zinzi. It opens with a bolded headline indicating a webpage that reads: '**Home>>SAPsychWeb>>Aposymbiot Counselling Resources>> Shadow-self Absorption**.'[278] The piece then begins in the style of an academic paper, with the title 'Masks of Existence: The Demystification of Shadow-self Absorption' followed by an abstract that opens: 'This paper presents the case for the demystification of counselling approaches for Aposymbiot individuals.'[279] In it, the anonymous author notes that: 'Current scientific thought tends toward an understanding of the "Undertow" as a quantum manifestation of non-existence, a psychic equivalent of dark matter that indeed serves as a counterpoint to, and bedrock for, the principle of existence.'[280] The abstract mentions cult mass killings of animal familiars to 'invoke the terror and rapture of shadow-self absorption' as well as the role that religion plays in the declining mental health of Aposymbiot individuals beset by religious as well as moral guilt.[281]

The abstract, which is all that the chapter consists of, is written in academic terms and style, drawing on real-world psychological terminology and phrasing including how to approach trauma counselling for Aposymbiots, and inventing an expert in the field. Dr Nareem Jazaar is the author of a fictional guide to the Undertow titled *Dark Matter, Black Judgement*, which is given a publication date in 2005. The abstract includes the following:

> Therapists who themselves, either tacitly or (in rare cases) overtly, subscribe to the idea of Aposymbiots as "animaled" or "zoos" and shadow-self absorption as "Hell's Undertow" or "The Black Judgment" perpetuate this stigmatisation and fail

[278] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 187.
[279] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 187.
[280] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 188.
[281] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 188–9.

> to see the very real trauma that Aposymbiots experience as a result of life-long anticipation of shadow-self absorption.[282]

This extract from the fictional journal article's abstract establishes a medical interest in the phenomenon that acknowledges and advocates for psychological treatment of Aposymbiot individuals' associated trauma. A chapter like this in the novel also does the work of exposition and world-building by explaining an aspect of the speculative phenomenon without resorting to a frame character. It also signals a body of research on Aposymbiots in the world of the novel that is akin to real-world academic fields which humanise inmates and other misrepresented demographics.

The article introduces speculative terms such as 'zoos' in context, both to establish them as derogatory terms, and to indicate that more politically correct terms are available. Typically of her character, Zinzi has reclaimed words such as 'zoo,' 'Undertow' and 'animaled,' which would otherwise be used against her prejudicially. While she doesn't use them as a source of strength, she resists the prejudicial power that they might otherwise have over her in a society that regards Aposymbiots as criminals. These sections of exposition are also useful to the reader precisely because they do not constitute traditional narration: the forms – journal article abstracts, police records, blogs, and interview transcriptions – are implicitly more reliable than the narrator, whom we are given to distrust from the outset. Zinzi's own criminality, her former drug habit, and sustained illegal email activity undermine her reliability as a narrator, as she is wont to gloss her own experiences and actions. For example, the reader discovers in flashbacks that Zinzi acquired Sloth outside Charlotte Maxeke hospital following her brother's death – but it isn't until much later in the novel that a further flashback reveals her partial responsibility for his death.[283] In the following chapter, Zinzi ingests a muti potion and has convulsions followed by dreams of her childhood interspersed with memories of the

[282] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 187–8.
[283] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 205-8.

incident that resulted in the accidental murder of her brother in a hijacking she had planned to pay off her debts. The section is written in italics and has the shaky uncertainty of a dream:

> *Pacing outside the ambulance entrance to Charlotte Maxeke's ER, smoking ferociously, practically chewing up the cigarettes. So absorbed in the loop of please-don't-be-dead-please-don't-be-dead and still high, I don't notice the shadows starting to drop from trees and axles and other dark places and coagulating.*[284]

Her muti dream fuses the acquisition of Sloth with the subconscious guilt that Zinzi lives with. The sentences lack subjects, indicating her psychological distance from the trauma, while the choice of 'coagulating' to refer to the shadows connotes the blood that she has inadvertently spilt. The shadows are like sticky, congealing blood, implying the inescapable way that they attach themselves to her and suggesting why the Undertow is described elsewhere in the text as shadow-self absorption. This moment only occurs just over halfway through the novel. As more of Zinzi's backstory is revealed, the reader discovers that Sloth acts as a reminder of her past sins, a sloth, rather than an albatross, around her neck.

These sections of the novel also offer global perspectives on the Aposymbiosis, setting the events in Johannesburg within the wider context of this globally occurring phenomenon. For instance, chapter ten comprises transcripts of interviews with three incarcerated Aposymbiot individuals from Australia, Pakistan, and America. Each depicts different experiences of becoming 'animaled' and the varied treatment of the animals by inmates and guards. The Australian inmate, Caleb Carter, acquires his Tapir while imprisoned after stabbing another inmate in the neck, implying that he did not have the animal when he was sentenced and signalling that criminality is not a sufficient condition for being animaled. Carter is allowed to keep his Tapir with him, walk her in the yard and 'look after her good.'[285] An inmate in Karachi Central Prison, Zia Khadim, only fourteen years old, has been kept separated from her Cobra since she was arrested at the age of nine. Sometimes animals are driven away from the

[284] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 206.
[285] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 97.

prison, which is described as a torture strategy: 'The pain is unbearable, you scream, you vomit, and you say anything.'[286] This indicates the necessary proximity of Aposymbiots to their animals, as well as different levels of compassion for incarcerated persons in different parts of the world. The American interview subject, Tyrone Jones, notes that the species of animal determines the prison pecking order. 'You can guess what it's like being in here with a Butterfly,' he laments, but goes on to describe his concomitant *shavi*: 'See when I go to sleep every night, I wake up as someone else. For the time I'm asleep, I live the day of someone else on the other side of the world […] I can't hate the Butterfly. Butterfly breaks me out of here every night.'[287] These excerpts of interview transcripts are followed by a bibliographic reference, authenticating their origins: 'Excerpt from *Caged: Animaled Behind Bars*. Photography and interviews by Steve Deacon. HarperCollins 2008.' The reference legitimises the interview extracts as part of a book of photojournalism.

The first known instance of animal familiars attaching themselves to people guilty of moral transgressions is outlined in chapter eight through an entry in an online film database akin to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb): '*Get Real: The Online Documentary Database*.'[288] Earlier in the novel Zinzi's narration foreshadows the disruption caused by the advent of animal familiars in a throwaway comment while being questioned in connection with Mrs Luditsky's murder. The police are sceptical of her innocence due to her Sloth and her criminal record. She says: 'It's a fragile state, the world as we know it. All it takes is one Afghan warlord to show up with a Penguin in a bulletproof vest, and everything science and religion *thought* they knew goes right out the window.'[289] The sarcasm of the statement obscures how bizarre and unlikely the advent of Aposymbiosis is, 'all it takes' being rather a

[286] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 98.
[287] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 99.
[288] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 72.
[289] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 27. Italics in original.

lot. The synopsis for the documentary, titled: 'The Warlord & The Penguin' reads as follows: 'Warlord. Icon. Patient Zero? The life and death of Dehqan Baiyat.'[290]

The pathologising of Aposymbiots through terminology such as 'Patient Zero' indicates the plurality of meanings that are ascribed to the condition. The film database entry gives the documentary's running time, filming location and awards, as well as a fuller summary of its contents including the fictional warlord Dehqan Baiyat's biography from his life as a film-student in America to becoming a warlord with the ability to 'torture a man without touching him.'[291] The documentary summary states that this ability 'was claimed to be black magic, genetic modification, Hollywood special effects.'[292] This description of the man's *shavi*, and the misconceptions about Aposymbiots, are compared to misconceptions about the spread of HIV. The fictional Dehqan Baiyat is likened to real-world Gaëtan Dugas, an AIDS victim who was alleged to be Patient Zero for HIV. The comparison highlights the stigma associated with animaled persons. The fictional Baiyat's death is captured in footage included in the documentary, described as follows:

> After the assassination of his penguin in a Taliban ambush, his very public death by the "black cloud" (or *Siah Chal* in Persian) was televised internationally. It was the first time the event had been captured on camera, and it caused widespread panic, leading to the establishment of quarantine camps in many countries and executions in others.[293]

This description of the Undertow claiming an Aposymbiot is presented in the style of a film synopsis, the phrasing 'first time the event had been captured on camera' intended as an attractive element of the documentary for people interested in witnessing the phenomenon on film. The 'widespread panic' which the filmic evidence of the Undertow resulted in has consequences for Aposymbiots all over the world. They are attacked and, in many cases, quarantined from the rest of the population due to religious assumptions about what shadow-

[290] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 73.
[291] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 74.
[292] Beukes, *Zoo City*, 74.
[293] Beukes, Zoo *City*, 74. '*Siah Chal'* translates roughly as dungeon or incarceration in Persian, referring to a real, historic dungeon located in the southeast of the Shah's palace in Tehran.

self absorption is. The process leaves only the animal's body behind, raising the question of what happens to the human being's physical form.

Though she is cynical and sarcastic, Zinzi's narration captures her fear of the Undertow and the suffering she endures living estranged from her Former Life in Johannesburg. In the first half of the novel her chequered past and acquisition of Sloth are as much part of the novel's mystery as the missing person case she is hired to solve. In the second half of the novel, Zinzi's history is overshadowed by the novel's focal mystery, the kidnapped Songezwa, half of the twin teen-bop sensation. Following Zinzi's attempts to locate and then protect the missing girl, the reader discovers that, as in *The City & The City*, the mystery of the novel is not the detective's mission, but instead a much larger corruption of justice motivated by greed.

The inflationary conceit of animal familiars in a deflationary detective novel set in a defamiliarised urban space has much the same critical intent as Miéville's topolganger cities. Othering occurs in both novels, though visibility is complexly and uniquely figured in each. As discussed earlier in this chapter, people in Miéville's speculative world are seen and unseen depending on whether they are determined to be in the same political location as the viewer, in one city or the other. In *Zoo City* people who have committed a moral transgression are 'animaled' as a visual and existential representation of their crime, or the guilt they feel for having committed it. They are hyper-visible as a result of their animal familiars, who must be kept near to them at all times out of physical necessity. Throughout, Johannesburg lingers in the novel's background, shaping the paradoxical simultaneity of light and dark, providing a physical stage upon which Zinzi wrestles with her guilt and conscience.

Writing about Beukes' engagement in South African socio-politics in her early work, Cheryl Stobie argues that the techniques of Beukes' novels 'enable the reader to view the texts

as central examples of critical dystopias.'[294] We may discern in her argument traces of Moylan's notion of the militant pessimism offered by dystopia, as Stobie seeks to fit *Zoo City* and *Moxyland* into the dystopian mould.[295] I would challenge Stobie's reading, because while *Moxyland* certainly is a dystopia, the setting of *Zoo City* is simply Johannesburg as it is – the seedy underbelly, the poverty and decay, the violence and segregation: all of these things exist and proliferate extant in the real city. It is the *in media res* quality of the writing style, that is typical of the dystopian fiction to which Stobie refers. Beukes does use dystopia's tropes to achieve critical irrealism through simultaneous real-world identification and estrangement. However, *Zoo City*'s setting is not the specific target of the novel's speculative mode, however dystopian real-world Johannesburg may be. What Stobie's argument signals is in fact that unacceptable but no less true reality: Johannesburg as it is is dystopian, made so by segregation, paranoia, surveillance, and private security. Stobie fails to recognise however that the expository sections in *Zoo City* are intended to highlight the fact of Johannesburg's unhomely and estranging nature, not to invent what has long been the setting's reality.

An aspect of the dystopian reality of Johannesburg is the outsourcing of personal security to private firms and the ongoing violence against black foreigners and immigrants. It's worth noting, as Graham does, that 'dread of invasion, contamination, infestation, and other encroachments of the new, alien, and other' are a type of 'post-millennial anxiety found in urban South Africa.'[296] For this reason, people fortify their homes and live with weapons and fear. This is true of both wealthy and working-class people, as anxieties about home invasions permeate the psyche of the upper classes while xenophobic violence periodically flares in the townships, exacerbated by any downward turn in the country's economy. Graham's choice of

[294] Cheryl Stobie, "Dystopian Dreams from South Africa: Lauren Beukes' Moxyland and Zoo City," *African Identities*, vol.10, no. 4, (2012): 370.
[295] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the untainted sky: science fiction, utopia, dystopia* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 157.
[296] Graham, "The Entropy of Built Things," 64.

'post-millennial' as a descriptor gestures to the increased crime rates in South Africa in the first decade of this century, as well as the sudden influx of African migrants into South Africa which had until 1994 been largely isolated from the rest of the continent. *Zoo City* is not the first in the speculative mode to discuss othering and division in South Africa's urban socio-political landscape. South African director Neil Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009) explores the structural and social processes by which outsiders are segregated, the alien 'prawns' of the film analogous to foreign nationals and illegal immigrants who travel across South Africa's borders in search of refuge.[297] In *Zoo City*, Aposymbiot individuals perform a similarly analogous role, presenting the post-apartheid so-called Rainbow Nation with another challenge that goes beyond the divisions wrought by historical racial segregation.

Private security abounds in Johannesburg and its suburbs, but for a price, which the inhabitants of the novel's Zoo City district are unable to afford. Graham notes that the 'neoliberal privatisation of law and order that has accompanied and shaped development in twenty-first-century Johannesburg, which the novel sometimes comments on explicitly, generates its own lacunae' citing the location of Zoo City in Hillbrow as one such seemingly vacant, though obviously occupied space.[298] The paradox of the inner city is that the buildings are both empty and full: although condemned to be destroyed, many buildings in Hillbrow are home to the inner city poor, drug-addicts and dealers, sex workers, and immigrants of various degrees of legality. Adding 'zoos' to the mix in the description of the novel's setting is no great stretch given the blind eye that authorities turn to these urban spaces. The empty space, unseen by the 'postmodern surveillance state' comes to house all of the imagined horror of the unknown precisely because it has been segregated. Its emptiness also renders its inhabitants illicit, impossible, invisible, or precarious within the bounds of the law.

[297] Neill Blomkamp, *District 9* (TriStar Pictures, 2009).
[298] Graham, "The Entropy of Built Things," 71.

This segregation by unseeing is produced by the fear of the unknown and social prejudice against potential ex-convicts and those perceived as morally transgressive. The segregated space of Zoo City within impoverished Hillbrow represents the urban uncanny, conceptually producing the unheimlich of a location haunted by the anxiety-inducing unknown: criminality and magic. The setting embodies Vidler's sense of the urban uncanny as 'a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity.'[299] The Zoo City district is both known and unknown, quantifiable as the location of criminals and poverty, but equally unknowable as a site where magic, muti, *shavi*, and animal familiars are commonplace, a physical representation of a fictional evocation of semi-peripherality. It therefore disrupts normative conceptions of setting for those who are familiar with Johannesburg, while also conforming to many of the expectations and perceptions that Johannesburg inspires. The empty space – paradoxically full of perceived horrors – is unheimlich, and produces a disturbing ambiguity.

The speculative conceit of Aposymbiosis and associated *shavi* powers shapes this novel's engagement with the question of social disavowal. The animals are hard to ignore – they cannot be neglected because they are both physically present and existentially attached to human beings. The optical logic in *Zoo City* segregates the undesirable other through discrimination, whereas in *The City & The City* citizens are socially conditioned to unsee one another for fear of bringing the uncertain might of a supra-legal agency upon themselves. Inclusion and exclusion are determined by sight, which shapes how characters are variously able to access and move through the urban spaces. In *Zoo City*, the presence of these animals as intrinsic to the criminal class of Johannesburg estranges the reader from the city, Aposymbiots defamiliarising the urban setting and disrupting the noir style of the novel. By

[299] Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 11.

contrast, the coexistence of unseen others operates as the disruption of normative reality in *The City & The City*, as the reader initially struggles to imagine unseeing those physically present until they begin to compare it to the treatment of the urban poor and homeless.

In both cases the reader is both interpreter and detective, seeking out the utopian traces, the clues to the novels' intentions, which Miéville and Beukes distribute respectively through the speculative mode, with wordplay, double meanings, hidden referents, unreliable narration, and innovative form. In Zinzi's narration the reader is compelled to consider how Johannesburg is socially regimented into segregating chaos and the ways in which the physically sprawling geography of that city works to sustain the anxieties and inequalities that plague it. The urban interstices of the novel are captured in the title, the othering of the Aposymbiots rendering Zoo City a space apart. The title also draws the reader's attention to the reality of Johannesburg itself, an urban site of perpetual chaos in which people are rendered less than human through the indignities of poverty. The absurdity of that city cannot be any less Beukes' target for criticism than the systems of inequality that generate social disavowal.

In this way *Zoo City* is symbolic of the shifting paradigms signalled by the speculative mode, as the novel's form and style play across genres and knowledge systems, both of which permit the insertion of specific instances of critical irrealism. The dream sequences and visions brought on by muti medicine which help our detective crack her case are akin to tropes in magical realism, but they are paired with the experimental media excerpts, texts, interviews, and emails, which in turn signify a correlation with reality in form while dealing with improbable, even fantastic, content. Beukes complicates genre boundaries through the speculative mode just as much as Miéville does, though in the former's case it seems to be less for style's sake and more for the purposes of the story, while Miéville's interest is in style and word play, perhaps more so than plot. Both authors disrupt traditional genre boundaries using the speculative mode and these texts in particular signal the urgent potential for a paradigm

shift in literature in this century which correlates to the contemporary transitionary period out of neoliberalism and into an as-yet undefined system of political economy. The productive potential of these texts is perhaps as much in their diagnosis as it is in their injunction to sit with and allow the uncertainty of the transitionary period to work on our collective and individual imaginations. Absent of conclusive resolutions, both of these novels emphasise the relativity of morality and justice, the respective detective protagonists losing against an always-already stacked deck.

Conforming to the deflationary tactics of detective noir, neither novel offers justice for the maligned, the murdered, or the bitter protagonists. Instead, the protagonists remove themselves from the initial settings of the novels, either physically as in *Zoo City*'s concluding image of Zinzi escaping from South Africa across the notoriously porous Beitbridge border into Zimbabwe and north, or through the disappearance into the in-between ontological nowhere land that Borlú chooses in *The City & The City*. The urban space becomes the site of the unheimlich for each of the protagonists, a situation which produces a double estrangement. This estrangement from the urban space previously understood as the home is doubly affected through the deflationary resolutions of the mysteries, and the inflationary poetics which skew the otherwise recognisable settings and highlight linguistic play as a key part of the speculative mode's critical effect.

Chapter 2

Excess and Absence as Critical Speculation in *New York 2140* and *Exit West*

In New York, people are 'mostly just ignoring each other, almost polite you might say, using the city-sharpened skill of looking past or through people, of not seeing the other, the crowds just background tapestries for you to play your life against,' comments 'a citizen' in Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*.[1] Living in cities sharpens one's ability to look past the other, but as this chapter will explore, the consequences of this unseeing are further reaching than merely making background tapestries of other people's lives. Echoing the urban alienation of unseeing and social disavowal discussed in the previous chapter, Robinson's omniscient citizen narrator develops a paradoxical proximity to the climate crisis by articulating a macro-scale perspective on an urban metropolis.

In contrast, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* considers the effect of absence as speculative hyperbole, exaggerating the effect of elision and engaging planetarity at the micro level.[2] The question of scale is crucial to readings of excess and absence as constitutive of these novels' respective iterations of the speculative mode. At the level of plot detail, the inclusivity of planetarity, which I explain in the first section of the chapter, succeeds where cosmopolitanism's attempts at utopianism flounder, while at the level of mode, the textual innovations with narrative extra-diegesis in each novel permit a paradigm shift in how literary speculation gains critical proximity and narrative traction.[3]

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[1] Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140*, (London: Orbit, 2017): 35.
[2] Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2017).
[3] I follow Michael Löwy's sense of the word critical not as being about argument, but as indicative of protest or outrage.
Michael Löwy, "The Current of Critical Irrealism: 'A Moonlit Enchanted Night,'" in *Adventures in Realism*, edited by Matthew Beaumont, (Malden, MA: Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2007): 193–206.

Critical proximity to these crises, gained paradoxically in the case of these two novels through narratorial distance, implies a utopian impulse in these texts which centre on ameliorating social structures and defying national boundaries. Utopianism demands a radical political revision, and the hyperbole of excess and absence in each of these novels reflects ameliorative desires for urgently necessary climate reform and provision for refugees from all forms of disaster, natural or man-made. In *Exit West*, the name of the city from which the main characters escape is elided, producing an absence made stark by the specificity of other locations in the novel. Hamid also supplements Nadia and Saeed's main plot with narrative extra-diegetic vignettes about transnational movement through the doors. These vignettes do not contribute to the protagonists' story but instead contextualise the transnational migrations made possible by the novel's speculative conceit: teleporting black doors. The effect of these doors is to challenge the very concept of refugeeism in a world disrupted by borderlessness, while the absence of a specific city of origin for the protagonist refugees Nadia and Saeed engages critical proximity through the absent referent. The omniscient narration of the facilitation of transnational movement beyond national borders for characters divorced from the main plot is similar to the role of Robinson's citizen narrator.

Robinson's citizen functions as speculative historian of sorts, recording and commenting on New York's evolution from the pre-Industrial period up into its 2140 water-logged iteration and beyond. Specifically because these narrators are not involved in the plots of the novels, they enable the excess and absence that define the novels' respective conceits. Taking climate change and mass refugeeism as political and historical horizons, each of the novels reshapes what it means to be a migrant, to be a refugee: definitions of statelessness become useless as the events in the novels reveal utopian possibilities for cooperative and collaborative living in their otherwise bleak settings. The exaggeration of dystopian circumstances in each novel signals the utopian impulse in these texts, heightened further by

the looming nature of the crises depicted. Exaggeration works as a style and figure of speech to emphasise the necessity of political action on these crises, hyperbole used as a strategy in the speculative mode to raise the stakes of the circumstances depicted on the micro and macro scales. Planetarity offers a paradoxical theoretical space in which ethical commitments to others can be preserved at the macro and micro levels, planetarity itself being a sort of hyperbolic cosmopolitanism. I proceed with a short theoretical explication of planetarity as a critique of scale before moving to examining the critical proximity of excess and absence in the narrative extra-diegesis and linguistic play in *NY2140* and *Exit West*.

Planetarity as a critique of scale

Returning to the speculative view of de Certeau's exploding urban universe discussed in the introduction, consider that hyperbole entails scale: it is a method of exaggeration that uses scale for emphasis. For de Certeau, hyperbole emphasises the sublime unknowability of the urban space. The explosion that de Certeau articulates evokes sublimity in the urban landscape, which then emphasises the unknowability of that space. This unknowability in turn draws the reader's attention to the overwhelming strangeness of the city from which the spectator is estranged even as we perceive and inhabit it. More recently, exaggeration through the word 'hyper' is key to comprehending scale in Timothy Morton's theorisation of the environment as a hyperobject, which he believes is subject to impending disaster. Morton theorises the hyperobject in terms of the sublime: it is almost beyond comprehension, 'massively distributed in time and space relative to humans.'[4] For Morton, the hyperobject entails just about anything that might bring about the end of the world, from Styrofoam cups to the millions of tonnes of carbon in the atmosphere. [5]

[4] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2013), 1.
[5] Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 2013.

However, this implied teleology neglects the physical reality of continued existence in and despite disaster conditions. Morton has since addressed this in his characterisation of COVID-19 as the ultimate hyperobject. 'It is literally inside us,' he told journalist Morgan Meis, speaking at the height of the pandemic in 2020.[6] The virus is as much a hyperobject as all of the harmful carbon in the atmosphere, because it is similarly distributed across time and space in relation to human beings. If we can categorise a virus as well as a non-metallic chemical element like carbon as hyperobjects, why not capitalist modernity too? It is globally distributed and context-dependent in its relation to and effect on the people who live in (and under) it. In this way, time might be reconceived as an inhabitable object rather than a linear passage. A paradox emerges from this line of argument because characterising time as an object implies that it occupies space. Of course, our human experience of space is generally comprehensible, but time operates at a much larger and unknowable scale than the human. Disrupting time's linearity is another way in which the interconnectivity between people and the spaces we inhabit makes scale a necessary analytic tool for urban literary studies. If we can consider ourselves as contiguous with those who came before and those who come after, how might that reshape our relationship with the planet and with one another? The consequences of this line of thought for climate action are close to hand.

At the same time that the novels treated in this dissertation began to be conceptualised and written, the ecological turn in literary scholarship was growing up out of its adolescence into a fully-fledged field of study.[7] The shifts in literary scholarship to accept genre fiction and the speculative mode as literary thanks to postcolonial and postmodernist scholars' efforts at restructuring hierarchies of value have also permitted the broader acceptance of climate fiction

[6] Morgan Meis, "Timothy Morton's Hyper-Pandemic," in *The New Yorker*, 8 June 2021, accessed on 4 October 2021 from https://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/timothy-mortons-hyper-pandemic

[7] For an overview of 'early ecocriticism' that predates the more contemporary ecocritical perspectives of the last three decades, see David Mazel's edited collection *A Century of Early Ecocriticism* which includes essays by DH Lawrence, Mary Wooley and John Burroughs.
David Mazel, editor, *A Century of Early Ecocriticism*, (Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

as an genre worthy of study in its own right. Another reason, climate fiction fans and scholars may hope, is the role of the novel in historicising and contextualising events. Amitav Ghosh suggests that future readers will certainly be looking to our cultural artefacts to understand our inaction in the face of climate disaster:

> In a substantially altered world, when sea-level rise has swallowed the Sundarbans and made cities like Kolkata, New York, and Bangkok uninhabitable, when readers and museum-goers turn to the art and literature of our time, will they not look, first and most urgently, for traces and portents of the altered world of their inheritance?[8]

Here Ghosh's concern is with leaving traces of our epoch behind in cultural memory, perhaps, though he does not say it, because the traces of our epoch are no longer erasable from geographical, planetary memory. The inclusion of portent is crucial to Ghosh's argument, because the effect of the Anthropocene is, for Ghosh, purely uncanny; following his argument we are haunted in the present by the spectre of future catastrophe while future generations will be haunted by our inaction in the face of overwhelming scientific and cultural evidence warning against our persistence with capitalist modernity. The relationship between human and nature has altered due to our gross negligence and concomitant disavowal because 'these exchanges are not merely strange in the sense of being unknown or alien; their uncanniness lies precisely in the fact that in these encounters we recognise something we had turned away from: that is to say, the presence and proximity of nonhuman interlocutors.'[9] This entails a revision of the stratifying narrative that distances human beings from the non-human (animals, insects, the planet itself) within a hierarchy that promotes human entitlement to the Earth's resources. Ghosh's argument identifies the particularly short-sighted quality of human selfishness that is occupied only with survival through power accumulation, without thought to the human or climate cost. This is compelling because it concentrates on the mistake we make in presuming ourselves exempt as a species from the consequences of our actions, which is not true, not even

[8] Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), 11.
[9] Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 30.

for those in the species who think wealth and geography provide a degree of security. Climate disaster might be unevenly distributed and manifesting in different kinds of extreme climate depending on geography and the uneven development that is social inequality writ on it, but nowhere are the effects of climate change non-existent.

Ghosh's articulation of the scale of human impact are akin in intent to Dipesh Chakrabarty's argument that humans are no longer 'just a biological agent': we wield a 'geological force' which threatens an extinction event and we do so because we fail to perceive ourselves as part of the planetary system.[10] Ian Baucom identifies this process as a kind of 'getting out of history' so as to 'supersede the critical and philosophical dominance of the historian's code as sole arbiter of the human condition.'[11] By way of a reading of the hierarchies of orders of time (weeks, years, millennia) described as the historian's code with Levi-Strauss's response to Sartre in "History and Dialectic," Baucom articulates the need for a theoretical method by which we might understand the relationship that humans have to variously distributed domains. The natural world is an example of one such. This method is needed Baucom suggests because there is a paradox enabled by the historian's code which 'finds the situation of the human both collapsing inward and exploding outward, veering simultaneously synaptic and planetary.'[12] We see this in people's experiences of climate catastrophes where the micro and macro scales become simultaneously urgent as individuals struggle in their specific contexts to survive the consequences of macro scale neglect. Baucom notes in Chakrabarty's recent scholarship the universalising effect of collapsing the distinctions between natural history and human history and the latter's demand that we shift our attention

[10] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2021), 7.
[11] Ian Baucom, *History 4 degrees Celsius: Search for a Method in the Age of the Anthropocene*, (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2020), 42.
[12] Baucom, *History 4 Degrees Celsius*, 43.

to the commonalities inherent in being one species, primarily the shared geographical space of the planet.

It would be an ungenerous reading if we presumed either Baucom or Chakrabarty has either universalist or assimilationist intent in these arguments even as they use the term 'universal', knowing that both theorists are committed to acknowledging in their scholarship the geographically-specific injuries produced by structures of power and capitalist modernity. What is intended is I believe a gesture to the planet-wide situation of climate crisis that, while manifesting as unevenly distributed climate disasters, is paradoxically inflected by relationships of peripherality and semi-peripherality. It is the scale of the planet that permits this paradox: the whole planet is under threat, but this threat manifests in different ways in different geographical regions due to the effects of combined and uneven development and operations of hierarchy between core, semi-periphery, and periphery areas. It appears that many of the theorists Baucom describes as supra-national and concerned with the biological, geographical, and cosmological (Jane Bennett and Donna Haraway are two) are articulating a deep-time view that decentres the human species from the position of overseer to co-inhabitant. From these broad strokes, it seems that through these macro scale perspectives the power relations of the colony can be reimagined as those of the co-operative. Given the capitalist modernity that has produced climate change, the human species needs to be conceptually demoted from accumulationist extractive employer to community-integrated unionised labourer in order to survive.

Parsing Baucom, a species-stratifying force produces 'differential exposure,' which entails the consequences of unevenly distributed climate disaster.[13] The planetary distribution of crises, the differential exposure of both humans and non-humans to existential threat, is instructive on the workings of capitalist modernity as a world-system. The geographical range

[13] Baucom, *History 4 Degrees Celsius*, 46.

of crises from fatal flooding in Pakistan to drought-induced famines in South Sudan and Yemen highlights how combined and uneven development produces combined and uneven climate disaster(s) while the latter is representative of and exacerbates the former in an ouroboros of accumulation.

Marxist or Marxist-inflected critical scholarship has taken the lead on shaping the discussion what the climate crisis is, historically. Author and SUV saboteur Andreas Malm describes the role of 'fossil capital' in the rise of neoliberalism while Jason W. Moore has detailed the terminological debate in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism* (2016).[14] Tongue not in cheek, Donna Haraway proposes a utopian species-symbiotic future of the 'Cthulucene,' positing with her interlocutors at an *Ethnos* conference in Aarhus in 2014 that the Anthropocene is a boundary event rather than an epoch.[15] As we cannot know the veracity of the latter statement without the benefit of time travel, we might park the Cthulucene for a moment (while acknowledging that in her choice of label Haraway implies that speculative imaginaries as crucial to human survival) and concentrate on the questions of scale which appear to occupy and indeed define the recent scholarship on climate change and literature.

Scale has been of particular interest to scholars working in the field of world literature, although I use the term tentatively given how scale affects the concept's reception and use in literary studies more broadly.[16] Taking to task the globalising effect of the proliferation of

[14] Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016).

[15] Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Cthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities*, 2015, vol 6, no. 1: 159–165.
Donna Haraway; Ishikawa, Noboru; Gilbert, Scott F.; Olwig, Kenneth; Tsing, Anna L.; Bubandt, Nils, "Anthropologists are Talking - About the Anthropocene," in *Ethnos*, Volume 81: Issue 3 (2016, July), 535–64.
A boundary event is a moment where a situation changes from one type to another, occurring as a kind of temporal demarcation between one time period and another. The Black Plague and the Holocaust were boundary events for instance.

[16] For Ben Etherington, world literature is itself an object existing at the maximal scale which requires an interrogation of its very existence as either an ideal category or an empirical truth. For more on this, see Ben Etherington, "Scales, Systems, and Meridians," in *The Cambridge Companion to World Literature*, edited by Ben Etherington and Jarad Zimbler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 52–68.

comparative literature as a discipline, Nirvana Tanoukhi suggests that 'the concept scale, properly theorised, would enable a more precise formulation of the role of literature, and literary analysis, in the history of the production of space.'[17] Tanoukhi draws on human geographer Neil Smith's descriptions of scale in the context of uneven development, endorsing what she reads as his invitation to 'enlarge our schoolish association of scale to maps.'[18] For Smith, scale is not fixed: distances change over time and are context dependent. Such a perspective that goes beyond traditional cartography yields a shifting human landscape that cannot quite be mapped.[19] Mapping and scale are useful concepts in world literature, given that maps offer a way of reading how places interconnect, and give a scaled view of these interconnections, even as they change and move with human geography and the passage of time.

The constraints on the potential of the discipline are made possible by an absence, Tanoukhi argues, of a 'literary critique of scale.' I attempt to address this absence by exploring planetarity as a way of thinking through the problem of how scale can both support and elide regional or local commitments. In the speculative texts in this chapter planetarity is evoked in the narrative extra-diegesis which is a large part of the speculative mode that each novel uses to critical effect. The hyperbolic disruptions of normative reality in each text work to highlight the urban contexts of the excesses of capital and the absences of the undocumented, the unmourned, and unacknowledged people and places that have been affected by the globally-relevant disasters upon which each of these novels speculate. [20] The cities in each are implicated

[17]Nirvana Tanoukhi, "The Scale of World Literature," in *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture*, edited by David Palermo, Bruce Robbins and Nirvana Tanoukhi, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 79
[18] Tanoukhi, "The Scale of World Literature," 83.
[19] Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, 1984, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).
[20] Hamid, *Exit West*, 2017.

in systems of inequality even as their utopian potential is asserted by the unidentifiable narrators.

Cities are expressions not only of the housing and shelter needs of people; they are also representative of the more complex aspects of what it is to be human, beyond our capacity to self-conceptualise in language. To live in community, to be defined by social relations, and most importantly, the capacity to express selfhood through lifestyle choices; all of these are constitutive of the assertion of humanness. If a city has character, then that character is mutually influenced by and has influence on all of those who inhabit it and pass through it. Jens Martin Gurr proposes a method of modelling to determine the relation between the text and the material city. The characteristics of such a model, Gurr suggests, is that it is 'representational', 'reductive,' and 'pragmatic.'[21] Gurr appears to believe that the city novel earns its status as a model of the city to which it corresponds: it must offer a representation of the urban space, a reductive view of its character and inhabitants, and be pragmatic in its integration of context and a modicum of reality. While useful, Gurr's modelling strategy is an attempt to justify the more abstract relations of fiction to urban spaces, to which urban sociologist Robert Park alluded over a century ago.[22] However, a chronotopographic description of New York like the one in Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *New York 2140* (2017) offers an example of how a literary text can successfully represent the interaction of a built environment with the social life of the inhabitants without conforming to the specificity of a modelling strategy.[23]

Chronotopography is a term typically used in mapping terrain alterations in geography, and in medicine to identify changes occurring in an epileptic's brain over time. In

[21] Jens Martin Gurr, *Charting Literary Urban Studies*, (New York: Routledge, 2021), 3.
[22] Robert E. Park, "The City: Suggestions For The Investigation Of Human Behaviour In The City Environment," *The American Journal of Sociology* vol.20, no. 5, (March 1915), n.pg.
[23] Chronotopographic refers to the changes to a physical landscape over time, and is particularly applicable to urban development, and in the case of the novels studied in this chapter, the changes to an urban landscape as a result of disruption, be it natural or man-made.
Robinson, *New York 2140*, 2017.

interdisciplinary literary studies chronotopography has been used by geographer Charles Travis to describe James Joyce's 'discursive mapping style' in *Ulysses*. Travis remarks that the modernist author 'engaged verbal and textual forms of *bricolage* to access the overlapping topologies of poetic time and place in classical and medieval literature.'[24] Travis' 'overlapping' might better be articulated as intersecting or co-existing because topology in this context is concerned with how Joyce wove classical and medieval imagery, symbolism, and context into *Ulysses* so as to achieve a melding of those literary periods with Bloom's experience of Dublin's physical topography.[25]

Joyce's famous stated intention to describe Dublin such that it might be recreated from his novel, or might we say mapped from it,[26] is further inflected by the palimpsestic effect of what Travis calls a 'kaleidoscope tapestry of language'.[27] The palimpsest is sustained by Joyce's infamously extensive references and his recourse to the 1904 *Dublin and Environs* map to plot the novel. Undertaking this textual mapping, Joyce would certainly have been 'aware of the particular discursive power of cartography within a larger economy of knowledge'.[28] This plotting and 'cross-pollinating of compass and pen' provide a schematic account of the novel, which incidentally assisted in the marketing of the novel in America.[29]

The intersection of a novel's poetics, influences, and cartographic reference points is productive of a chronotopographic reading when used to textually map its urban setting. My own interest in chronotopography is in its use as a method to explain how the interaction of

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[24] Charles Travis, "Joycean Chronotopography: Homer, Dante, Ulysses," in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, edited by Robert Tally (New York: Routledge, 2017), 324.
[25] Topology has only emerged as a field of study in pure mathematics in the last one hundred and twenty years. It is used primarily in physics in string theory for theorising the shape of time. In Human Geography it is used to map spatial connections across geographical space, e.g., maps of the London Underground.
Alisdair Rogers, Noel Castree and Rob Kitchin, "Topology," in the *Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography*, 2013, doi:10.1093/acref/9780199599868.001.0001
[26] Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses and Other Writings*. 1934. (Oxford: OUP, 1972).
[27] Travis, "Joycean Chronotopography," 325.
[28] Jon Hegglund, "Ulysses and the Rhetoric of Cartography," in *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 49, no. 2 (Summer, 2003): 164.
[29] Travis, "Joycean Chronotopography," 325.

time and space becomes distorted by a speculative conceit, such as the elision of the time required for a journey of migration as in *Exit West*, or the deep time approach of a multi-directional historical and future-oriented narrative view as in *NY2140*. Mapping and modelling have long been terms in use since the spatial turn in the Humanities, but the introduction of time's influence on topography, and the recognition of literary time (as in Travis' reading of poetic time in Ulysses) are crucial to the reading of twenty-first century texts since postmodernism and the supposed end of history (and how often it has ended!) have altered how space is described in the contemporary moment.

In each of these novels, metropoles of finance and power exist only in name alongside places that are erased by disaster. Robinson's unnamed citizen narrator describes the consequences of the climate chaos in the imagined twenty-second century:

> In the tropics a lot of construction had been dubious to begin with, and with the added storm intensities, and the ramshackle nature of the postpulse reconstruction, new weather events could simply smash coastal cities to smithereens. Confer Manila 2128, Jakarta 2134, Honolulu 2137. These were extremely sobering examples of the death and destruction now possible when an overwhelming storm hit an underwhelming infrastructure.[30]

'Postpulse' is just one of many neologisms Robinson devises. In this case it expresses a distinct before-and-after, the Pulse refering to a major sea-level rise event that occurs decades before the novel's present in 2140. Manila, Jakarta, and Honolulu are listed together with the years of their fictional future devastation by climate chaos. Robinson uses hyperbole here in the articulation of the 'overwhelming' disaster colliding with the 'underwhelming' infrastructures of locations between the tropics. Here the tropics signify a vast planet-wide swath of the developing world and evoke the macro scale while eliding the micro scale of the billions of lives smashed to 'smithereens.'[31]

[30] Robinson, *NY2140*, 440.
[31] Robinson, NY2140, 440.

The excesses of this speculative hyperbole evoke the grave disparities between the violence of the weather and humanity's woeful incapacity to brace against it and survive. These 'extremely sobering examples' are described no further, the citizen narrator citing places and dates of mass death and destruction as context for the novel's temporal setting, contrasting the effect of 'underwhelming' architecture made possible by uneven development with the violence of predicted future weather events exacerbated by capital and consumerism. The consequences of uneven development, the 'dubious' construction and 'ramshackle' rebuilding of cities in the tropics, are glossed over only as 'extremely sobering,' without a subject: who is sobered by these disasters? The death and destruction mentioned is described no further, the human toll is not mentioned. Only the name of the city and the year of its devastation stand as referents for the undoubtedly high death tolls and concomitant refugeeism that the speculative climate chaos creates.

Concentrating on specific global metropoles, in each of these novels New York and London are respectively made disturbing through this specific elision of the consequences of the crises, while cities in the Global South and less affluent regions are mere referents for disaster. By exaggerating crises through the absences and excesses in the narrative extra-diegesis in each novel, these authors erase and elide the human specificity of the crises depicted, challenging the cosmopolitanism that metropolitan centres might attempt to claim.

David Harvey asserts that '[s]ome form of geographical knowledge is presumed in every form of cosmopolitanism.'[32] He implies that cosmopolitanism risks exclusion without geographical specificity. It is important here to acknowledge the failures of language to adequately address the problems posed by the generalising of terms such as 'world' and 'global'. Cosmos is one such word, and it is necessary to examine whether the politics of

[32] David Harvey, "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils,' *Public Culture*, vol 12, no. 2, (1998): 557.

planetarity advocated by Tariq Jazeel in his essay 'Spatialising Difference Beyond Cosmopolitanism: Rethinking Planetary Futures' might better serve cosmopolitanism's intended connotations of interconnectivity, mutual reliance, acceptance, and global community.[33]

In his discussion of Martha Nussbaum's 1990s engagements with cosmopolitanism, stoicism, and Kant,[34] Harvey worries that: 'cosmopolitanism bereft of geographical specificity remains abstracted and alienated reason, liable, when it comes to earth, to produce all manner of unintended and sometimes explosively evil consequences.'[35] The anxiety for Harvey is the problem of inevitable exclusion or neglect of some people in the presumption of a universal subject who is committed to their fellow human at all times. Under the present conditions of radical inequality, both locally and globally, Harvey's concern that geographic specificity is elided from cosmopolitan constructions presents significant challenges to Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism, the tradition of which she labelled in that work's subtitle 'a noble but flawed ideal.'[36] Readers must, however, necessarily return to Harvey's geographical specificity, which chimes with Jazeel's advocacy that cosmopolitans must examine what the so-called "cosmos" includes and excludes. The idealism that Nussbaum signals in her subtitle is in the utopian tradition, as all cosmopolitanism is, if we accept Harvey's assertion that:

> A meaningful cosmopolitanism does not entail some passive contemplation of global citizenship […] It entails a political project that strives to transform living, being, and becoming in the world. This obviously requires a deep knowledge of what kind of geographical world we are intervening in and producing, for new geographies get constructed through political projects, and the production of space is as much a political and moral as a physical fact.[37]

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[33] Tariq Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference Beyond Cosmopolitanism: Rethinking Planetary Futures," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, vol 28, no 5 (2011): 75–97.
[34] Martha Nussbaum with respondents, *For love of country: Debating the limits of patriotism* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1996); Martha Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," *Boston Review*, 1 October 1994, accessed on 23 July 2020 from http://bostonreview.net/martha-nussbaum-patriotism-and-cosmopolitanism ; Martha Nussbaum, "Kant and stoic cosmopolitanism," Journal of Political Philosophy, vol 5, (1997): 1–25.
[35] Harvey, "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils," 557.
[36] Martha Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019).
[37] Harvey, "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils," 560.

The passivity Harvey identifies is the primary target in this critique. Global citizenship cannot and should not be assumed by anyone: any cosmopolitanism must entail action, not solely contemplation. The physical fact of the production of space – and here Lefebvre receives a timely nod– must play a more active role in the political project, which itself is an ongoing effort in idealism, guided by utopian impulses to ameliorate a given system or community. The universality of the "cosmos" is therefore impossible under the circumstances of cosmopolitanism's origins, as Jazeel describes.

He notes the failures of cosmopolitanism's pluralities or multiple iterations, as well as the concept's specifically Euro-centric origins in intellectual history: 'cosmopolitanism's pluralisation does little to open a Eurocentric critical imagination up to differences *not* proscribed by a centre that sets the parameters for difference.'[38] Here he seems inadvertently to veer into the concept of an ethical cosmopolitanism in the style of Kwame Anthony Appiah.[39] Jazeel's position is that the multiple definitions of cosmopolitanism – some of which I find genuinely useful for thinking through inclusion as in the case of Bruce Robbins' cosmopolitanism in deep time[40] – do not free it from its conceptual roots that determine which cultures accept the traces of which others, and consequently, which social groups, minority ethnicities, and 'others' are integrated into the hegemonic culture. Due to the ubiquity with which the term is used:

> it is difficult to have a debate about the challenges of living together beyond the local, with difference, in the face of alterity, without stepping out from the concept's long over-reaching shadows.[41]

We might find these 'long over-reaching shadows' in Nussbaum's 2019 survey of the tradition of cosmopolitanism, in which she departs from Kantian cosmopolitanism to arrive at liberal

[38] Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference," 76
[39] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: WW Norton, 2006).
[40]Bruce Robbins, "Prologmena to a Cosmopolitanism in Deep Time," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol 18, no. 2, (2016): 172–186.
[41] Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference," 76.

nationalism. These shadows linger in the criticism of Eurocentrism that cosmopolitanism has long faced. Nussbaum's influential 1994 *Boston Review* essay 'Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism' did much to revive academic and intellectual interest in cosmopolitanism, yielding a plurality of cosmopolitanisms over the last three decades. She argues for 'the very old ideal of the cosmopolitan, the person whose primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the entire world.'[42]

However, it is the presumption of personal allegiance to 'the entire world' that concerns Harvey, Appiah, and Jazeel. Harvey's geographical interest chimes with Jazeel's planetarity which echoes the ethical cosmopolitanism of Appiah. For Appiah, ethical cosmopolitanism includes sufficient conceptual scope for the inevitable partiality that must imbue our cosmopolitanism, or planetarity, with local allegiances. These allegiances must be of a sufficiently ethical standard that they do not ignore the individual's responsibility to a planet-wide humanity. Appiah sustains a commitment to cosmopolitanism that at times exceeds theory, as in his afterword of the collection *Cosmopolitanisms* (2017) in which claims to belonging supersede the politics of cosmopolitanism.[43] However, I find Jazeel's sustained scepticism about the 'cosmos' of cosmopolitanism compelling. Jazeel argues that Kant's conception of cosmopolitan law was dependent on deeply flawed and prejudiced ideologies of geography that cannot hold up under the scrutiny of contemporary moral and social justice movements for equality.

The centrality of a culture into which one might be expected to assimilate is the primary concern for Jazeel because 'the cosmos of cosmopolitanism is no geographically innocent signifier.'[44] Reading this problematic evocation of the so-called "global" in the notion of European conceptions of cosmopolitanism alongside Dipesh Chakraborty's criticism of

[42] Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Difference," 1994.
[43] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Afterword," in *Cosmopolitanisms*, edited by Kwame Anthony Appiah, Bruce Robbins, and Paulo Lemos Horta, (New York: NYU Press, 2017).
[44] Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference," 78.

European notions of modernity in *Provincializing Europe* (2000),[45] Jazeel notes that it is crucial to be cautious of 'the precise contours of planetary geographical imaginations implicit in any avowedly cosmopolitan claim,' for these are encumbered by the traces of thought characteristic of European intellectual history.[46] These encumbrances Jazeel suggests, 'will continue to measure, recognise and arbitrate on difference through the very categorisations it has conjured into existence.'[47] Such categories are the result of Enlightenment Europe's notions of rationality and the associated racialised and gendered hierarchies of intellect and the othering that the application of these so-called "intellectual" traditions produced when exported to the colonies. As a result, the 'cosmos' in cosmopolitanism is a misnomer, for what is encompassed by the term has an origin in a specific location, with a particular, and particularly violent, intellectual history and tradition.

Cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove outlines how the concept of a single global identity is perpetuated in Western media following the development of planetary visions through the Space Race of the Cold War.[48] The Apollonian view of the planet that Cosgrove critiques is consistent with the 'western cartographic and geographical imagination'[49] that for Jazeel, and similarly for Harvey, yields an ideologically-rooted origin in the politics of a metropolitan universality, which necessarily omits geographic specificity. Jazeel's articulation of these problems of presumed globality in cosmopolitanism works to importantly highlight the 'inherent connection between space and politics.'[50] Jazeel notes that the making of worlds, 'spatially, in thought or action offers considerable political potential in terms of the task of refashioning always more inclusive collectivities.'[51] I would add that art, as a constitutive part

[45] Dipesh Chakraborty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 2000, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
[46] Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference," 85.
[47] Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference," 85.
[48] Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
[49] Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference," 82.
[50] Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference," 86.
[51] Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference," 86.

of both thought and action, should be included in Jazeel's notion of the making of worlds, particularly given the political intent of the speculation mode which is made possible by the distribution of utopian impulses in poetics and content. World-making through art describes people operating at the local, micro scale for the benefit of others also on this level, bringing forth the partiality of Appiah's ethical cosmopolitanism in the local iteration of an individual's global responsibility.

An appeal to planetarity rather than cosmopolitanism requires that we rethink planetary futures by paying attention to sustained cultural differences, which are attended to in non-assimilationist theories of world literature such as those posed by the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) and world-systems analysts. WReC argues that the formulation of world literature 'pushes intrinsically in the directions of commerce and commonality, linkage and connection, articulation and integration, network and system,' pairings which seem to me to speak to the combined part of the combined and uneven development formulation, where existing social, class, and historical contexts play a role in uneven development.[52] Connection, commonality, articulation, and network all imply an attendance to the specificity of cultural difference without the loss of the utopian impulse towards planet-wide mobilisation.

Non-assimilationist theories of world literature attend to the cultural differences with which Spivak insists we must be concerned if we are to achieve planetary futures. Unlike the pluralities of cosmopolitanism which function more as prescriptions rather than descriptions, Jazeel appeals to Spivak's theorisation of planetarity which 'urges continual hard work to keep on decentring ourselves in the face of ungraspable otherness and other worldings.'[53] Jazeel's interpretation of otherness as ungraspable here refers to the work that must be done not to assimilate difference, but to accept it as it is, without seeking to make the other part of oneself.

[52] Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World Literature*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 6.
[53] Jazeel, "Spatialising Difference," 88.

Here we see the similarities between non-assimilationist theories of world literature and Spivak's planetarity, where the concept of the world or globe is thought through the same logics Spivak proposes, logics which sustain difference as constitutive of conceptual power. Where a difference may lie is in the acceptance of the ubiquity of capital, but a generous reading of planetarity would identify decentring with an acknowledgement of the combined elements of combined and uneven development, which attends to the importance of recognising the local and pre-existing conditions which contribute to the shape that various forms of uneven development take.

Through their respective speculations, *NY2140* and *Exit West* both present a commitment to planetarity in the absences and excesses that implicate metropoles in global crises, while the micro-level plot details sustain the local partiality that cannot be elided from an honest commitment to accepting ungraspable otherness. Through depictions of the universal though varied consequences of speculative events, these novels self-reflexively engage with and subvert narratives of nation, borders, and social inclusion and exclusion under conditions of capital possession. An adequate response to crisis is not maintaining the status quo but instead using the moment of disaster to inspire political amelioration and inclusive social restructuring. We see an example of this in the cooperative building housing schemes in *NY2140,* and the development of the London Halo housing projects to address mass migration in London in Exit West. The moment of disaster in Hamid's *Exit West* is local specific and also widely understood as more and more people accept migration as a survival strategy in the face of climate disaster and conflict. The crisis for Nadia and Saeed is a micro-level moment to reimagine macro-scale migration and refugeeism, as well as the tyranny of national borders which limit regional cooperation. The scope of each novel is planetary while concentrating on the minutiae of characters' lives as these are impacted by and equally impact upon crises that affect all who live on Earth.

In *Exit West* and *NY2140*, the planetary discourse inherent to global crisis is disrupted by the representation of the actions and experiences of individuals at the micro scale. In each text the urban space becomes the site at which the planetary crisis is experienced and in the narrative extra-diegetic sections these settings are complicated, historicised, and theorised. By narrative extra-diegesis I refer to the sections in these novels that do not develop the narrative at the level of plot but are specifically productive of the fictional-world of the novel, essentially representing the macro scale. These evoke an intersection of scales that engages a Spivakian 'planetarity' to which I have referred.[54]

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's call for a 'renovation' of comparative literature in the early 2000s led her to resist the marketisation of literatures in translation and world literatures.[55] In an attempt to 'overwrite the globe', Spivak proposed planetarity, noting that 'globalisation is the imposition of the same system everywhere.'[56] The globe represents systems of capital to Spivak, while she finds hope for the discipline in the terminology inherent in our location in space as being on planet Earth, a place that we do not own or control:

> The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system, and yet we inhabit it, on loan.[57]

Characterising the planet as a part of a different kind of system, Spivak's articulation here gestures towards the kind of thinking towards alterity that Ghosh proposes in *The Great Derangement* (2016), where speciesist distinctions generate hierarchies of dominance and oppression. The uninhabited 'computerised globe' to which Spivak refers is a further evocation of the interconnectivity of markets and communities of privilege that attempt unsuccessfully

[54] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 72.
[55] Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 1.
[56] Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 72.
[57] Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 72.

to assert planetary control through capital.[58] The image of the empty globe is also suggestive of narratives of terra nullius with which imperialist expansionism was justified.

Spivak cannot deny the existence and effects of global capital, and so proposes the frame of planetarity, which encompasses our struggle to live both on the planet and in the global system, which she proposes as alter and the planet 'on loan,' raising the question of ownership and who or what might be the lender of the space we occupy. This question highlights how even our language makes breaking out of systems predicated on possession and accumulation difficult to conceive of. Spivak takes what I consider a methodologically speculative turn in her argument, imagining firstly how the discipline of comparative literature might evolve through a tangential terminology of planetarity, and then in her description of planetarity as uncanny in the Freudian sense of being unheimlich. Spivak proposes the planetary view as uncanny in its resistance to a cartographical mania, a defamiliarisation which is echoed by those views of the planet from space in which the scale and galactic context of our 'home' render it unfamiliar.

In Spivak's articulation of planetarity I detect a demand that the micro scale be preserved and respected in the wider collectivity of a planetary perspective. This is I think the position of the amorphous 'figure' that Spivak herself struggles to identify in her planetary vision and whose anonymity she nevertheless wishes to preserve in the interests of allowing multiple signifiers to take up the mantle of imagining themselves 'as planetary, rather than continental, global or worldly.'[59] Spivak's demands with regards to comparative literature are to depoliticise where other non-assimilationist theories demand an active political awareness of comparative literature's projections, introducing a conceptual wedge. What is of import here is not the discipline of comparative literature, but instead the scalar view proposed. Through it

[58] Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 73.
[59] Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 72.

both the macro and micro scales might be attended to. Without eliding the seesaw of capital and its effects on the development of and existing relationships between core, semi-periphery and periphery regions and cultures, planetarity offers a scalar perspective that is crucially concerned with the interplay of the macro and micro levels.

As I read it, this presents a demand for an identification of alterity in the evocation of the macro planetary scale. *NY2140* and *Exit West* are examples of novels using the dynamic poetics of the speculative mode to do just this, and is in part why these novels are paired in this chapter. The narrative extra-diegesis in *Exit West* and *NY2140* works to highlight particular absences, which in turn contribute to the affective power of these texts, while engaging the reader in the macro level of each of the novels' chronotopographic concerns. In *NY2140* the citizen narrator operates at a critical distance which occasionally ironises the minutiae of individual lives in the face of climate crises and provides a chronotopographic view of New York. Layering the past and future of the city as contextual detail for the plot achieves a paradoxically critical proximity which in turn generates the novel's narrative traction. The extra-diegetic narration in *Exit West* makes migrancy a universal experience, erasing the trauma of flight and dislocation by way of teletransportation through the black doors. This textual representation of planetarity is achieved in particular in the anonymous vignettes that highlight different experiences of this intercontinental migration, the vignettes being unconnected to the main plot of Nadia and Saeed's migration from their unnamed city to Mykonos, London, San Francisco, and beyond. In each of these novels narrative traction is produced through the critical proximity generated at the intersection of the micro scale narratives with the macro scale global crises depicted.

Narrating the paradox of New York in *New York 2140*

Robinson's half-drowned New York is not the first instance of speculation about the effect of rising tides or the first novel in which New York is read as a backdrop for disaster. Following

early twentieth-century depictions of dystopian cities such as George Orwell's and Aldous Huxley's, another British author built a successful career as an author of speculative imaginaries focused on the urban space, inspired by the climate chaos he anticipated in the near future. JG Ballard debuted his career as a novelist with *The Drowned World* in 1962.[60] This novel speculates about the effects of rising sea levels more than half a century before melting ice-caps became news-worthy and political action manifested as climate crisis protests and equally vociferous climate change denialism. Set in London, Ballard's novel examines the effects of rising temperatures on the natural environment and the human psyche as a few lone characters struggle to survive and make sense of their circumstances in a tropical London submerged by fifty feet of water.

Retroactively, *The Drowned World* is classified as a work of climate fiction. Ballard's oeuvre is populated by speculative explorations of various apocalyptic outcomes of the policies of development that he critiqued in his fiction from the 1960s until the end of his life. Alongside *High Rise* (1975), *The Drowned World* is perhaps Ballard's most well-known novel, encountering a resurgence in popularity as we begin to realise the consequences of a warming planet. In his debut novel Ballard depicts London almost entirely covered by water, army corps ranging the swamps of the tropical heights of the English capital as many of the soldiers slowly succumb to the heat and an urge, seemingly a call of the wild, to migrate south to the tropics. Robinson comments that Ballard 'sees these giant catastrophes as a release from our current social set-up' and takes this approach further to consider how a new social set-up might work in the context of disaster.[61] While it replicates the flooded metropolis concept, *NY2140* is also a reluctant homage to the enduring persistence of the market capitalism that defines global finance and housing development, and to New York itself.

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[60] J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 1962, (London: Dent, 1983).
[61] Geoff Manaugh and Kim Stanley Robinson, "Comparative Planetology: An Interview with Kim Stanley Robinson," in *BLDGBLOG*, published 19 December 2007, accessed on 9 January 2022 from https://bldgblog.com/2007/12/comparative-planetology-an-interview-with-kim-stanley-robinson/

As a well-known global metropolis, New York is the backdrop of many speculative disaster novels. Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) preceded *NY2140* by four years, and is considered a Hurricane Sandy novel, the author reportedly revising the final manuscript just after that tragic climate event to reflect its effects on the city more accurately.[62] Alan Moore's 1986-87 graphic novel series *Watchmen* is set in a version of New York that is destroyed by a science fictional squid-like monster.[63] Two speculative novels published in the late 1980s and early 1990s indicate an anxiety about the excesses of violence that proliferated in the city at the end of the last century. Both are epistolary: The protagonist of Paul Auster's 1987 novel *In the Country of Last Things,* Anna, writes a letter which narrates the novel's plot, and Jack Womack's *Random Acts of Senseless Violence* (1993) is presented in diary form.[64] Anna's letter depicts a thinly veiled New York that has collapsed economically and socially, subject to mass homelessness and gangsterism. *Random Acts* similarly depicts Manhattan torn apart by riots and instability in twelve-year old Lola's diary of her progress through a privileged childhood into an adolescence of street-wise gangsterism.[65] More recent novels that use New York as a setting for speculative imaginaries about catastrophic circumstances include Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) and Ling Ma's *Severance* (2018).[66]

The New York setting of all of these novels as sites of disaster builds on New York as a setting recognisable to readers by virtue of its ubiquity in literature and film, and its status as an economic hub. What authors are perhaps particularly drawn to in choosing New York as a setting for disaster novels is the opportunity to explore what the consequences are at the centre of the impact zone, presenting one of the primary and representative sites of capitalist

[62] Nathaniel Rich, *Odds Against Tomorrow* (London: Picador, 2013); Teddy Wayne, "Grave New World," in *The New York Times*, published online on 11 April 2013, accessed on 4 October 2021 from https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/14/books/review/odds-against-tomorrow-by-nathaniel-rich.html
[63] Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons and John Higgins, *Watchmen*, 1986-7, (California: DC Comics, 2013).
[64] Paul Auster, *In The Country of Last Things* 9New York: Viking Press, 1987).
[65] Jack Womack, *Random Acts of Senseless Violence* (London: HarperCollins, 1993).
[66] Colson Whitehead, *Zone One* (London: Doubleday, 2011); Ling Ma, *Severance* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2018).

accumulation as it experiences the consequences of late-stage capitalist modernity. Alongside this geographical specificity, these texts permit insight into the experiences of seemingly innocent victims who are caught up in the consequences of their geographical location at a time of disaster. An homage to New York as much as a lament about the persistence of capital, *NY2140* presents a New York that is resilient even as it crumbles, contrasted with, for example, the abandoned New York of Ma's 2018 zombie novel. How Robinson's depiction differs is in his desire to highlight, through the hyperbole of excess in the speculative mode, capitalist modernity's ability to survive through mutation and evolutionary processes which preserve the unevenness of capital-labour relations.

The New York of *NY2140* is partially submerged by the rising oceans in the early twenty-second century. Despite its waterlogged foundations, the metropole continues to be operational as the site of global capital and futures trading. The message is clear: capitalism can defy the odds of climate crisis even as it exacerbates the disaster. While it is pessimistic about the end of capitalism, the novel's conclusion implies that politically active groups of socially conscious individuals have greater potential to disrupt the workings of late-stage capitalism than even large-scale loss and damage.[67] Both Ballard's and Robinson's novels depict a world whose cultural mores are unchanged despite the effects of radical climate catastrophe, both also neglecting in their narratives to account for the people displaced by the crisis in more than a cursory way. The characters that populate *NY2140* are survivors of oceanic encroachments, and the city survives despite the decampment of much of the world's wealth

[67] Loss and damage is the term used by climate action groups and adopted by the UN to refer to the consequences of climate change that are beyond what humans can reasonably adapt to.
Preety Bhandari, Nate Warzsawski, Deidre Cogan and Rhys Geroldt, "What is Loss and Damage from Climate Change: Six Key Questions Answered," on World Resources Institute blog, published on 6 April 2022, accessed on 10 May 2022 from https://www.wri.org/insights/loss-damage-climate-change

to Denver and other in-land urban locations. At the time of its publication, the novel was described by critics as unexpectedly utopian.[68]

There is a gesture to a utopian collectivity in the novel's hopeful vision of thousands of people sharing living space in the skyscrapers of Manhattan, forming cooperative ownership systems of the buildings whose functioning and governance is akin to the idealised Platonic city states. Some of this utopianism is bound up in the neologisms Robinson deploys to gesture to the attempts at using architecture to resolve the crises. 'Bjark's Wall' is an imagined barrier built to stop mid-town New York from flooding, but is destroyed in the Second Pulse.[69] The wall's name alludes to Robinson's admiration for Bjark Engels, the wunderkind Danish architect of speculative designs. The construction of superscrapers atop and alongside the existing skyscrapers in New York is another potential solution to the rising seas, the buildings described as looming uptown in all their 'gehryglory.'[70] Gehry is another architect admired by Robinson, known for his deconstructivist fragmentary style.

Each of these speculative architectural responses are however just that: merely responses. They do not solve the crisis, merely adapt to it, as New York does. However optimistic these speculative architectural marvels are, the absences in the novel, the undocumented climate refugees who petition the city for support and housing, the displaced, and the dwellers in water-logged squats betray the novel's dystopianism. So too does the capitalist economic structure that depends on wealth inequalities to sustain itself betray an obeisance to the whims of finance with little concern, even blatant disregard, for the lives on the wrong side of the waterline. The fictional mayor of New York is another dystopian trope

[68] Joshua Rothman, "Kim Stanley Robinson's Latest Novel Imagines Life in an Underwater New York", in *The New Yorker,* published on 27 April 2017, accessed on 6 January 2021 from: https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/kim-stanley-robinsons-latest-novel-imagines-life-in-an-underwater-new-york; Gerry Canavan, "Utopia in the Time of Trump," in *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, published on 11 March 2017, accessed on 6 January 2021 from https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/utopia-in-the-time-of-trump/ .
[69] Robinson, *NY2140*, 160.
[70] Robinson, *NY2140*, 17.

character, an unfeeling power-hungry bureaucrat concentrating on her personal ambitions at the expense ethical governance of the city.

The novel's plot builds towards two events: a megastorm that wrecks the city, and the political aftermath. The city authorities' failures to provide shelter to millions following the devastating Hurricane Fyodor while the homes of the absent super-rich in uptown Manhattan remain empty is emblematic not only of a dystopian social system but is also a direct reference to the real-world failures of governments to provide adequately for vulnerable citizens, both in and out of times of crisis. Descriptions of authority's failure or unwillingness to recognise the danger posed to vulnerable people by extreme weather and to make emergency plans in response are particularly critical, often produced in the chapters of third-person narration which follow the story-lines of the novel's civil servants: the middle-aged administration and housing co-op leader Charlotte, and the tough-cop Inspector Gen Octaviasdottir. These characters' reflections on the failures of governmental and mayoral leadership have real-world referents that the novel mirrors such that the flooded city conceit functions as a vehicle for advancing the political imperatives of the speculative mode through which it is portrayed.

The novel speculates about the world at another level, not through the inclusion of a fantastical element, but in the careful detailing of a likely consequence of global warming: the fifty-foot rise of sea levels the world over and the effective 'drowning' of all coastal cities and many of those along nearby rivers and estuaries. This is a departure for Robinson whose fiction more usually takes a hard-SF approach to the future of humanity, such as the terraforming of Mars in the *Mars Trilogy* (1992-1996), or the speculation about the various possible near-futures for Orange County in the *Three Californias* trilogy (1985-1990).[71] That said, his most recent novel, *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) uses a similar narrative structure to *NY2140*,

[71] Robinson, Kim Stanley. *The Wild Shore*. London: Futura, 1985; *The Gold Coast*. London: Futura, 1989; *Pacific Edge*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1990; *Red Mars*. London: HarperCollins, 1992; *Green Mars*. London: HarperCollins, 1993; *Blue Mars* London: HarperCollins, 1996.

following the lives of Zurich-based climate ministers, radicalised eco-terrorists, Indian government officials, and glaciologists working on how best to refreeze the Antarctic glaciers.[72] The sections of narration that follow named third-person characters are interspersed with polemic on the economics and science of rehabilitating the world's natural cooling systems. Robinson's narrative style has long included characters at the micro level in representations of planetary and extra-planetary events, implying an authorial interest in the effect of individual actions on the larger macro scale narrative.

Although some of his work has been described as frontier-fiction, particularly those novels that concentrate on terraforming, social action is at the heart of this author's work argues SF theorist and Robinson scholar Robert Markley.[73] The introductory essay to the 2012 special issue of *Configurations* dedicated to the work of Robinson notes that 'no other author epitomises the possibility of using SF to rethink science more consistently, dramatically, or entertainingly than Kim Stanley Robinson'.[74] Robinson's oeuvre consists, thus far, of twenty-one novels, and several dozen short stories and essays contributed to both fiction and non-fiction anthologies and collections focussed on science fiction and ecology. His reception in the American soft-left media has been positive, *The New Yorker* naming him 'one of the greatest living science fiction writers' in 2013, the article titled 'Our Greatest Political Novelist?'[75] That same year, in response to Robinson's Nebula win for *2312* (2012), *The Atlantic* similarly identified Robinson's science fiction as political, a view that is reflected in

[72] Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (London: Orbit, 2020).
It is worth noting that The Ministry for the Future is Robinson's most recent novel, but his most recent book length publication is *The High Sierra*, which details his passion for the Sierra Nevadas, which are themselves the inspiration for many of his Californian novels.
Kim Stanley Robinson, *The High Sierra*, (Boston, MA.: Little Brown, 2022).
[73] Robert Markley, *Kim Stanley Robinson,* (Champagne, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2019).
[74] Lisa Yaszek and Doug Davis, "Introduction," in *Configurations*, vol 20, no.1-2, (2012): 3.
[75] Tim Kreider, "Our Greatest Political Novelist?" in *The New Yorker*, published on 12 December 2013, accessed on 14 January from https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/our-greatest-political-novelist

the critical scholarly work on his fiction.[76] Robinson is extremely prolific as his output of twenty-one novels since 1984 attests, beginning with *Icehenge* and making his name at the end of the millennium with the Mars trilogy, winning a Nebula, Locus, Hugo and BSFA for the novels *Red Mars* (1992), *Green Mars* (1993), *Blue Mars* (1996).[77] While also set on Mars, Robinson's first novel *Icehenge* does not share the same universe as the Mars trilogy, and in the last two decades Robinson's attention has turned to crises on Earth. This commitment in his fiction to environmental socialism is not without the occasional forays back into outer space, as in his 2012 novel *2312* which has some similarities to the earlier *Mars* trilogy such as the colonisation of other terrestrial bodies and a far-future perspective.[78]

Robinson's early work is typical of the tradition of science fictional representations of space and future human habitation of Mars, with the attendant socio-political problems of colonisation and the elite's escape from a ruined earth. In the late 1980s he wrote The California trilogy, speculating about the future for his beloved Sierra Nevadas. In the 2000s he appears to revive this environmental concern, perhaps not coincidentally after Al Gore's controversial loss to George W Bush in 2000. In 2004 he published the Science in the Capital trilogy opening with *Forty Signs of Rain*, followed by *Fifty Degrees Below* (2005) and *Sixty Days and Counting* (2007).[79] These hard-SF novels concentrate on the effects of climate change in the twenty-first century. *NY2140* is a continuation of this environmental concern but suggests a departure in

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[76] Scott Beauchamp and Kim Stanley Robinson, "Our Greatest Political Novelist?" in *The Atlantic*, published on 1 April 2013, accessed on 14 January 2021 from https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/04/in-300-years-kim-stanley-robinsons-science-fiction-may-not-be-fiction/274392/
William J Burling edited a collection in 2009 titled *Kim Stanley Robinson Maps the Unimaginable: Critical Essays,* the science studies journal *Configurations* dedicated a special issue to the author in 2012, and in 2019 Robert Markley published his monograph titled simply *Kim Stanley Robinson* in the Modern Masters of Science Fiction series. This monograph was a finalist in the 2020 Locus Awards for non-fiction.

[77] Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars* (London: HarperCollins, 1992); Kim Stanley Robinson, *Green Mars*, (London: HarperCollins, 1993); Kim Stanley Robinson, *Blue Mars* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).
The reader might find it interesting to know that this trilogy also inspired the popular long-play board game Terraforming Mars, with most of the game play, events, and actions drawn from the contents of the trilogy.

[78] Kim Stanley Robinson, *2312* (London: Orbit, 2012).

[79] Kim Stanley Robinson, *Forty Signs of Rain* (London: HarperCollins, 2004); Kim Stanley Robinson, *Fifty Degrees Below* (London: HarperCollins, 2005); Kim Stanley Robinson, *Sixty Days and Counting* (London: HarperCollins, 2007).
In 2015 this trilogy was collected into the omnibus *Green Earth* (London: Harper Voyager, 2015).

the author's focus on the scientific specificities of the environmental crisis. This novel is more concentrated on depictions of individual characters' experiences of these crises and how their consequential collective action has an effect at the macro level. In *NY2140* the science of the fifty-foot rise of sea levels is entirely secondary to the effects of this rise and the human adaptation to it, both economically and materially. Thus, *NY2140* is unique in Robinson's oeuvre for its heightened concentration on description of the effects of macro scale disasters on the micro scale. The everyday characters in the novel are vehicles through which the speculative conceit is depicted and the loss and damage of sea level rise explored at the micro level, their stories occurring alongside the persistent global crisis. No other novel in this author's oeuvre is as concentrated on the consequences of the text's speculative conceit, and thus no other novel better presents Robinson's ethic of environmental socialism which has material consequences for the urban structure and reconstruction of New York in the novel.

The novel's chapters are focalised through the characters, each chapter titled with the name of the character to which the chapter pertains or which a character narrates. The six-hundred-and thirteen-page novel is divided into eight parts – though these do not correlate to the focal characters – and the narration is split between eight focalisers, mostly in the third-person. There are two exceptions, however, where Robinson opts for first-person narration: the chapters narrated by a young Wall Street speculator named Franklin;[80] and an expository voice named in the relevant chapter titles only as 'the citizen'[81] 'a citizen'[82] 'that citizen'[83] 'the citizen redux,'[84] 'the city smartass again'[85] and in one section simply 'the city.'[86]

[80] The term 'Franklin' historically referred to a class of British landowners between the 12th and 15th centuries who were not of noble birth but were free and wealthy men (not serfs). Franklin is also the surname of the American founding father Benjamin Franklin, whose images graces American one-hundred-dollar bills, colloquially known as 'Benjamins.'
[81] Robinson, *NY2140*, 139; 377; 601.
[82] Robinson, *NY2140*, 32; 262.
[83] Robinson, *NY2140*, 77; 205; 318.
[84] Robinson, *NY2140*, 439.
[85] Robinson, *NY2140*, 495.
[86] Robinson, *NY2140*, 531.

The unnamed citizen/urban historian's sections are extra-diegetic, presenting a history of the island Manhattan in relation to the predicted global climate crisis. In these sections the temporal setting of the novel, the years 2140 to 2143, has already occurred in the presumed past. As a result, the novel is inflected with the socio-political imperatives of a Lukácsian historical novel: the historical lens of the extra-diegetic sections places the plot events in the past of the assumed reader's temporal location which the reader is given to understand is some four hundred years in the future. The function becomes a retrospective view across time of the effect of unchecked capitalism at the intersection of planetary and individual scales.

The reader therefore encounters the plot at a remove of hundreds of years past, as well as set in the real-world future. There is the present time of the novel, 2140, the time of the reader, 2022, and the time of the assumed reader in approximately the twenty-fifth century. The real-world 2008 financial crash, for example, is historicised as a failed learning opportunity ahead of the fictionalised 2140 financial crash depicted in the novel. The temporal scales at which the novel operates are multiple and thus achieve a deep time maximalism while the plot follows the minutiae of the individual characters' lives, sustaining the relevance of plot events on the micro scale. These extra-diegetic sections are related only topographically to the novel's plot which centres on the Met Life building in Madison Square, New York, and the characters whose lives are intertwined with the physical city of New York in the year 2140.

In an authorial tone, 'the citizen' narrating these extradiegetic sections harks back to the period in which the novel is set, and addresses the reader directly, and often derisively: 'Sail ahead a page or two to resume voyeuring the sordidities of the puny primates crawling or paddling around this great bay. If you're okay with pondering the big picture, the ground truth, read on.'[87] The so-called 'big picture' or 'ground truth' represents the macro scale of the novel, the planetary changes that have raised sea-levels to the extent that New York is under fifty-feet

[87] Robinson, *NY2140*, 32.

of water. In a novel concerned with the relevance of rising ocean levels, a 'ground' truth implies a distrust of water, the ground offering a more stable foundation for a presumed 'truth'. We must also infer a reference to the phrase 'to be on solid ground' in which one is confident in one's subject matter, and a belief that the facts as they are presented are irrefutable. However, the novel's temporal structure, and indeed the crisis of violent weather around which the novel revolves, leaves the reader on extremely shaky ground, or at sea, if you will. When and where are we, other than in the amorphous and re-imagined New York? The physical location thus becomes the only mainstay for the novel, expressed both eponymously, in epigraphs preceding sections, and through the long contemplations by the citizen narrator of the history of Mannahatta and Hudson Bay from the pre-colonial period into the distant future.[88]

The 'great bay' is of more interest to the citizen narrator, whose deep time approach makes the efforts of the 'puny primates' seem futile, while the plot reveals the very necessary political action of cooperative organisation for affordable water-proof housing and strikes on rent, student loans, and mortgage repayments. Robinson goes so far as to have his characters nationalise America's banks following the devastating hurricane. The citizen narrator is suspicious of the reader's philosophical intentions, and implies that the stories of the individual characters, the 'puny primates', treated in the novel's plot are less important, less noble, than the historical and speculative exposition in these sections. The futility of the characters' operating at the micro level, which 'the city' narrator denigrates, is undermined however by the epilogues that precede every chapter and chronotopographically locate the chapters in the context of New York's artistic and literary history. Some of the epilogues are invented, fictitious, or fictionalised accounts of real-life interactions, as in the case of Mark Rothko and

[88] Mannahatta was the earlier name for the island now known as Manhattan, used by the first inhabitants. Robinson refers the reader through the orphan characters Stefan's and Roberto's fascination with maps to Eric Sanderson's Mannahatta Project, which maps the island as it would have been before Henry Hudson arrived in the bay.

Willem de Kooning meeting in Central Park in the early twentieth century.[89] Most are drawn from the literary, artistic, and philosophical history of New York, contributing to the novel's tertiary purpose as a love letter to the city's contribution to and influence upon art and culture. In this way, New York remains recognisable despite the radical changes wrought by climate disaster. Robinson sustains the estranging effect of speculation while evoking recognition and identification through the specificities of both the city's geography, and the cultural references peppering the narrative and the novel's structure.

The final section of the novel that is narrated by the citizen narrator is preceded by an extract from Walt Whitman's 'Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City', continuing a trend in the novel to precede chapters with Whitman's verse:

> Once I pass'd through a populous city imprinting my brain for
> future use with its shows, architecture, customs, traditions,
> Yet now of all that city I remember only a woman I casually met
> there who detain'd me for love of me.[90]

Critical interpretations of Whitman's poem suggest that this is a literary rather than biographical poem, though in the original *Leaves of Grass* manuscript 'man' appears in the place of 'woman' in this particular poem, suggesting that perhaps it was biographically inspired.[91] The location to which critics assume Whitman is referring in the poem is not in fact New York, but rather New Orleans where Whitman visited in February 1848. It is odd then that this epigraph be used in this context and suggests a purposeful indication of the erasure of the 'shows, architecture, customs, traditions' in the memory and the sole recollection and identification of a person with the idea of New York rather than the built environment itself.

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[89] Robinson, *NY2140*, 311.
[90] Walt Whitman, "Once I Passed Through a Populous City," from the 'Children of Adam' section of *Leaves of Grass*, (District of Columbia: Electrotyped by Smith & McDougal, 1872): 117, qtd in Robinson, *NY2140*, 566.
[91] James, D. Hart and Phillip W. Leininger, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, [1995], Oxford: Oxford University Press, 6th edition, accessed online 6 January 2021, doi: 10.1093/acref/9780195065480.001.0001

The insertion of this poem as the epigraph to this chapter in the novel narrated by the superintendent of the Met Life building, Vlade, alters both our reading of the love story between Vlade and his estranged wife Idelba, and of the description of the Met Life Tower itself. The allusion in this poem is to the enduring resonance of people rather than surroundings that are encountered in a city. The speaker in the poem wishes to recall the city from the 'imprinting' of the sites upon his mind and remembers only a lover. Similarly, Vlade's experience of New York is a palimpsest of painful and often repressed memories from his life with his wife in New York, the traumatic drowning of their son, and their eventual reconciliation towards the end of the novel.

Early on in the novel, another inhabitant of the Met Life, Detective Gen Octaviasdottir walks with the building's residents association chairwoman Charlotte Armstrong towards the building.[92] They enter at ground floor and Gen looks back at their surroundings:

> Seaweed stuck to the stone below the high tide line, mould and lichen above. Windows just above the water were barred with black grilles; higher they were unbarred, and many open to air. A balmy night in September, neither stifling nor steamy.[93]

Robinson uses the third-person narration of Gen's perception of the area called 'Super Venice' to highlight the smaller details of the flooded city, the necessity of barring windows near the water, for example.[94] New York's infamous dirt has become seaweed, mould, and lichen. Through the middle-aged detective the narration evokes a sense of *plus ça change*, indicating that despite the radical changes wrought by climate disaster, the city remains fundamentally itself. The 'balmy night' is an unusual detail to include, and Robinson seems to include it to register the departure from New York's ordinarily stifling conditions in the late summer

[92] The police inspector's name Octaviasdottir is a nod to the influence of the twentieth-century speculative author Octavia E. Butler, the detective's family name resembling 'Octavia's daughter' when read aloud.
[93] Robinson, *NY2140*, 12.
[94] Robinson, *NY2140*, 51.

months. So early in the novel, this reference to unusual weather foreshadows the destructive Hurricane Fyodor that makes landfall some four hundred pages later.

This is but one example of the micro scale superseding the macro in the novel as characters' experiences of the interaction between built environment and natural environment resonate with the reader. Whitman's poem as epigraph emphasises this quality of the city as a location for interpersonal connection and the recollection of past relationships. From this we might infer a self-awareness or ironic self-reflexivity on the part of the authorial citizen narrator who the reader must presume is aware of the machinations and intrigues of the 'puny primates' that they disparage as short-lived and ineffective. There is a paradoxical sense of futility and of hope evoked in Charlotte and Inspector Gen's characters, both women battling in their limited individual capacities against a seemingly endless tide of desperation and inadequate governmental response to the climate chaos around which the city improvises. The citizen narrator's deep time macro scale view makes these efforts seemingly meaningless, while also noting instances where action by individuals might have made a difference. This narratorial voice occupies a paradoxical space of being both defeatist and optimistic, while also narrating a physical location that is also paradoxically drowning and thriving.

The macro scale plot relayed in the extra-diegetic sections is both specifically relevant to the events of the plot as it provides context for the climate disaster circumstances of the novel, while also locating the reader at a temporal distance of centuries after the events in the narrative, presuming the assumed reader is encountering the 'story' in the future of the plot. The implied future-reader is presumed to be invested in the novel as a work of historical fiction, and so there is a pointed irony in the suggestion that the reader is a voyeur of the individual characters whose lives and experiences make up the specifically fictional plot of the text. This strategy of cheekily disparaging the reader and the characters demands that the reader conceive of a larger scale view, and acknowledge the futile, though necessary, actions of the individual

characters. Here the micro scale concretely affects the macro scale while also provoking the reader to recognise their complicity in the novel's events, from which I infer generative traction. However, this traction is only possible if scalar modelling works in the context of Spivak's planetarity so as to supersede demands for the utopia of ethical cosmopolitanism.

In his non-fiction writing, Robinson notes that dystopia operates as the not-concept of utopia, 'being the idea that the political order could get worse'[95] and cautions against the paralysis that mere acknowledgement of worsening circumstances results in, especially in the economically privileged. He notes in particular the utopianism of the political work and collaboration necessary to address the oncoming climate disaster, which he believes can be addressed, despite the evitable resistance to the necessary changes:

> Immediately many people will object that this is too hard, too implausible, contradictory to human nature, politically impossible, uneconomical, and so on. Yeah yeah. Here we see the shift from cruel optimism to stupid pessimism, or call it fashionable pessimism, or simply cynicism. It's very easy to object to the utopian turn by invoking some poorly-defined but seemingly omnipresent reality principle. Well-off people do this all the time.[96]

Robinson refuses to accept the excuses for inaction that proliferate in response to demands for an adequate response to climate disaster, shrugging these off blithely. The inaction that he critiques is akin to the urban social disavowal discussed in the first chapter and is bound in the selfish preservation of individual comfort at the expense of undertaking the seemingly 'too hard' or 'contradictory to human nature' efforts required to avert climate disaster.

Invoking optimism and pessimism as complementary, Robinson echoes China Miéville's 2015 comments about a different, perhaps optimistic, pessimism which the latter author theorises in his article "The Limits of Utopia" published in the leftist journal *Salvage.* Miéville posits a kind of optimistic 'different' pessimism as the only appropriate response, and the only response that will result in action. He writes:

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[95] Robinson, "Dystopias Now," n.pg.
[96] Robinson, "Dystopias Now," n.pg.

> Rather than touting togetherness, we fight best by embracing our not-togetherness. The fact that there are sides. Famously, we approach a tipping point. Rather than hoping for cohesion, our best hope lies in conflict. Our aim, an aspect of our utopianism, should be this strategy of tension.
>
> There is bad pessimism as well as bad optimism. Against the curmudgeonly surrender of, say, James Lovegrove, there are sound scientific reasons to suggest that we're not yet – quite – at some point of no return. We need to tilt at a different tipping point, into irrevocable social change, and that requires a different pessimism, an unflinching look at how bad things are.
>
> Pessimism has a bad rap among activists, terrified of surrender. But activism without the pessimism that rigor should provoke is just sentimentality.[97]

Miéville is suspicious of optimism that is blinkered to reality, and likewise is suspicious of pessimism that descends into paralysis. While he rails against the presumed 'we' implied by the globally-encompassing term Anthropocene, Miéville presents a unity that is defined by 'not-togetherness', which lacking in explanation, requires that we consider the various forms of action possible under such conditions of radical inequality. Rigorous interrogation of dystopian circumstances should, Miéville suggests, provoke pessimism with action necessarily following on its heels. This galvanising spirit can be found in the direct acknowledgement of just how bad things are alongside a 'strategy of tension'. Holding the pessimism that comes from an unblinkered view of circumstances alongside the optimism that must result from this recognition of dire straits is to enact the very tension Miéville proposes. As a strategy, this is intended to work at the political level to inspire action. At the conceptual level, the level at which the dystopian novel functions, the dire circumstances of the novel's world result in characters' action for amelioration. *NY2140* is a novel speculating about how systems can perpetuate under the direst conditions, and what kind of confluence of macro and micro factors would be necessary to ameliorate these systems.

[97] China Miéville, "The Limits of Utopia," *Salvage*, published on 1 August 2015, accessed on 5 October 2020 from https://salvage.zone/in-print/the-limits-of-utopia/, n.pg.

London and the urban absent presence in *Exit West*

Perhaps the most famous of dystopian, or anti-utopian, novels, George Orwell's *1984* (1949) is set in an imagined future London, the capital of one of three global powers, Oceania.[98] Presenting a starkly contrasted view to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) which preceded *1984* by almost two decades, Orwell's dystopian speculation is of a future of sensory and intellectual deprivation while Huxley's is of such excess that the life of the mind is deprived or neglected for the sake of pleasure and production. In a letter seemingly thanking his former pupil for a copy of *1984*, Huxley wrote to Orwell in 1949, dismissing the younger's man's vision of the future as lacking in the materialistic consumerism he himself had predicted.[99]

In his letter Huxley writes that Orwell's speculative future world of repression and oppression which defines even the urban materiality of the novel's London setting, Airstrip One would eventually 'modulate into the nightmare of a world having more resemblance to that which I [Huxley] imagined in *Brave New World*.'[100] The reason for this development of one kind of dystopia into another, Huxley briefly opines, is the state's desire to increase the efficiency of human labour. In the world of Huxley's novel, improved efficiency of human capital through both eugenics and conditioning would result in subduing the intellectual appetite of even those of the Alpha and Beta classes, bred to be the ruling elite.

Huxley's view was that the working classes would be deprived of intellect through genetic engineering so as to provide whole social classes with more efficient human labour, while the two elite classes would be socially conditioned to be so devoted to physical pleasure

[98] George Orwell, *1984*, 1949 (London: Penguin Essentials, 2008).
[99] Huxley taught French at Eton after he graduated from Balliol College, University of Oxford in 1916. Eric Arthur Blair, pen-name George Orwell, was a pupil of Huxley's during this period. Huxley's vision of a materialist, consumerist future was inflected by the culture of Los Angeles that he detested despite moving from England in 1937 and spending the remainder of his life in California.
[100] Aldous Huxley, "1984 vs Brave New World," published in: Shaun Usher, *More Letters of Note*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2017).

and amiability that they denounce intellectual stimuli in favour of fun.[101] Whether oppressive of freedoms, or oppressive of critical intellect, the city settings in these seminal dystopian fictions are effective as early depictions of anxieties about the future of urbanised societies, taking London as the seat of corruptive authoritarianism.

Brave New World preceded WWII, while *1984* appeared post-war during the decades commonly referred to as the Golden Age of Science Fiction, the 1940s and 1950s. Both were popular then despite the genre being dominated in that period by American science fictional magazines. In the 1960s the beginning of the New Wave in science fiction was heralded by the likes of Kurt Vonnegut and JG Ballard, and the absurd and obscure worlds they conjured would go on to open up the field to generic uncertainty, where it has since productively lingered. Tracing depictions of London from the high-tech, pleasurable world imagined by Huxley and the grey authoritarianism of Oceania to JG Ballard, there emerges a geographic specificity that denotes London as a sufficiently well-known signifier to function in these texts as a catch-all city-state.

London's popularity as a setting for urban dystopia in the twentieth century was sustained in the success of JG Ballard's cult novels *The Drowned World* (1962) and *High-Rise* (1975), adapted into a film of the same name by Ben Wheatley in 2015.[102] Written in response to the rapid urbanisation of London in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the eponymous building in *High-Rise* presents a metaphor for the intersections of capital and class in London, a subtle and carefully morally ambiguous take on the tower block building that characterised the 1960s and 1970s of Britain's post-war housing crises. In reality these utopian tower blocks utterly failed as social conditions deteriorated dramatically into the attendant gang violence and drug abuse of impoverished circumstances. In the 1980s, London continued to be a popular real-

[101] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World,* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932).
[102] For a clear and direct analysis of Ballard's oeuvre, see Roger Luckhurst, *The Angle Between Two Walls: The Fiction of JG Ballard* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).

world setting for novels speculating about alternative social organisation through the fantastic, magical realist and scientific. Instalments of Alan Moore's influential *V for Vendetta* graphic novel set in London were published between 1982 and 1989, Salman Rushdie's controversial *The Satanic Verses* and Michael Moorcock's *Mother London* were both published in 1988, and Martin Amis' *London Fields* speculated on the end of the millennium as early as 1989.

In the 1990s, PD James speculated on the end of humanity through the conceit of mass infertility and authoritarianism in *The Children of Men* (1992), set in Oxford and London in the year 2027.[103] In James' novel and the 2006 film adaptation by Alfonso Cuarón, London is figured as the seat of a dystopian authoritarian government, permitting mass-executions of the elderly, controlling reproductive rights, and caging human beings for genetic testing and elimination. London is variously figured as the site from which a broader dystopian narrative is extrapolated, but the depiction of the English capital in *Exit West* decentres the city, making it small in the macro scale of the refugee crisis. The depiction of London in the novel shares similarities with the narrative role of More's guide to the utopian island. The utopian narrative's hero traditionally travels to a new, perfected society and reports back on the stark differences in governance that render the other place aspirational. Nadia and Saeed travel to London, but their trip is not exploratory, nor do they find the society aspirational; on the contrary they decide that the life on offer in London is unappealing, and they move on, eventually arriving in Marin, near San Francisco, at which point they go their separate ways.

The absent presence of a specific location in which the first half of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2018) is set is crucial to the development of a political imperative in this speculative text. *Exit West* is Hamid's fourth novel and at the time of its publication was perhaps his most speculative, engaging an element of the fantastic in a novel that is as much about human relationships as it is about the refugee crisis of the early twenty-first century. Hamid's debut

[103] P.D. James, *The Children of Men* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992).

novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) attained favourable enough reviews but it was overshadowed by the rampant success of his second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), which was later adapted to film, starring Riz Ahmed as the protagonist Changez Khan.[104] Hamid's first two novels deal primarily with lives lived between cultures as his characters come to terms with the cultural disjunction between Pakistan and America. Hamid's own experiences suggest a source of inspiration for the intimate descriptions of characters' struggles to culturally assimilate and the trials of attempting to live between cultures. Hamid grew up in Lahore, Pakistan and attended Princeton and Harvard Law School before working in management consulting while writing his first novel. Neither of Hamid's first two novels are speculative, nor was his third, *How To Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013).[105] However, each employs innovative literary aesthetics and techniques.

Hamid's experimentation with form and most particularly with voice, contribute to the emotive impact of each novel. The frame narrative of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* situates two characters at a coffee bar in Lahore. Over the course of the novel the first-person narrator describes to the second-person 'you' the catalyst events and circumstances of his relocation to Lahore from New York following a failed relationship and the events of 9/11. The reader is given to understand that the 'you' addressed by Changez is the narrator's American interlocutor at the coffee bar. He is a stranger in peril from Changez who has been radicalised in the aftermath of 9/11. This novel has also been included in considerations of the contemporary historical novel which uses 9/11 as its historical referent to indicate how this event radically altered the twenty-first century.

How To Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia is also experimentally innovative, written in the second-person voice and addressed to the reader in the style of a self-help manual, though the

[104] Mohsin Hamid, *Moth Smoke*, (London: Granta, 2000); *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, (London: Penguin, 2008).
The Reluctant Fundamentalist, directed by Mira Nair (IFC Films, 2012).
[105] Mohsin Hamid, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013).

plot is well-developed and follows the rise and fall of 'your', the protagonist's, fortunes. Hamid's fourth novel continues some of the thematic interests from his earlier novels. The setting of *How To Get Filthy Rich* is an anonymous city on the Asian continent, thinly veiled as Lahore, just as in *Exit West* the first urban setting in the novel remains an anonymous location in a country on the verge of a civil war. The ambiguity of the location is intentional as this demands that the reader consider that it could happen 'here', the implied reader in this case being a person not situated in a city on the edge of the abyss of civil war. Another connection in Hamid's oeuvre is the black doors themselves, first mentioned in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a management consulting case study and adapted as the speculative conceit in *Exit West*. In Hamid's most recent novel, *The Last White Man* (2022), he once again plays with the elision of geographic specificity, the setting for this novel an unnamed American town.[106] In this novel the white protagonist Anders wakes one day, in the style of Gregor Samsa, to find that his skin has turned brown, and the novel follows the violence and confusion that occurs as gradually all white people become brown. Anders and his girlfriend Oona, who also turns brown, quarantine themselves away from the violence, an echo of the pandemic lockdowns, and the novel explores how power and privilege are affected by racial identification. By omitting a specific geographical setting Hamid targets a generalised middle-class America with the absurdity of race as a category with which so many decide their socio-political commitments. As with Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Anders, the protagonist of *The Last White Man*, is not innocently named. Hamid highlights his specific otherness in his name, even as the speculative conceit of the novel develops as a global phenomenon.

Hamid's interest in migration, globalisation, and the trials of assimilation are explored in each of his novels at the personal, individual level, concentrating on a few specific

[106] Mohsin Hamid, *The Last White Man*, (London: Penguin Random House, 2022)

characters' lives. In *Exit West* Hamid abandons his earlier experiments with narrative voice opting for an omniscient third-person narration which at times is concerned with the novel's protagonists and at times relates extra-diegetic vignettes about movement and people unrelated to the main plot. Using third-person narration, Hamid explores the interiorities of two characters, Nadia and Saeed, their responses to the war in their home country, and their flight across the world to London via Mykonos through the black doors. Nadia and Saeed's story is a microcosm in the larger scale of mass global migration enabled by the doors that we must infer from the vignettes. Through the short narrative extra-diegetic vignettes of migration that exist alongside the more intimate plot of Nadia and Saeed, Hamid attempts to normalise migration as something that if undertaken by people all over the world, as the black doors make possible, migration and perhaps the experience of people coming and going would lose connotations of violence, dislocation, and threat.

Exit West has been critically considered from the perspective of mobility studies, transnational literary studies, and postcolonial theory. In Claire Chambers' recent work *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels* (2019) she discusses the allusions to sensory experience in contemporary British Muslim fiction, concentrating a chapter on posthuman sensory enhancement through the use of digital technology in Hamid's *Exit West*.[107] Amanda Lagji explores the intersection of mobility studies and postcolonial theory in the novel while Liliana M. Naydan has delved into questions of digital connectivity and national boundaries.[108] However, insufficient attention has been paid to the anonymity of the primary setting of the novel and the other named settings of both the primary plot and the narrative extra-diegetic vignettes that support the novel's speculative world-building. Hamid elides entirely the

[107] Claire Chambers, "The Doors of Posthuman Sensory Perception in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West," in *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 213–52.
[108] Amanda Lagji, "Waiting in motion: mapping postcolonial fiction, new mobilities, and migration through Mohsin Hamid's Exit West," *Mobilities*, vol. 14, no. 2, (2019): 218–32;, Liliana M. Naydan, "Digital Screens and National Divides in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West," *Studies in the Novel*, vol 51, no. 3, (Fall 2019): 433–51.

experience of flight that refugees undergo in their escape from conflict and disaster, leaving a gaping presence, symbolised by the black doors, in the text, through which the human stories pass easily, as though the process of displacement were not as traumatising as leaving one's home behind.

The depictions of the privileged characters who use the doors to imagine new lives for themselves is particularly symbolic of the potential ubiquity of migration. Importantly, their experiences contrast with Nadia and Saeed's, producing an unevenness defined by race, class, gender, and geography. These factors render some people asylum-seekers, some migrants, some immigrants, some refugees, others ex-pats. In Nadia and Saeed's case in the house in central London, they are refugees, characterised as intruding outsiders, cut off from essential services and protested by British nationalists. In chronotopographic terms the scale of their distance from their original departure point is both planetary and minute – a series of doors is all that separate them from the violence and terror of their unnamed hometown. The doors make it possible for Lahore to neighbour Mykonos and Mykonos to neighbour London, constructing the world's geographic entanglements as uninterrupted by space and time. It is the work of moments to migrate through these doors, time becoming immaterial in the characters' passage across physical space. Using the speculative conceit of the teleportation through the black doors, Hamid suggests a radically different vision of what it is be a refugee and what might motivate dislocation from one's circumstances.

In an interview in 2017 Hamid explained the intentional ubiquity of the doors appearing in multiple locations across the globe: 'Imagine the worst happens if you're afraid of migration—both being forced from your home and having people come to your home. If everybody moves, even then maybe we can believe things will be ok.'[109] Secondary to the main

[109] Clare Chandler, "We Are All Refugees: A Conversation with Mohsin Hamid," in *The Nation*, 30 October 2017, accessed on 20 May 2020 from https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/we-are-all-refugees-a-conversation-with-mohsin-hamid/

plot which follows Saeed and Nadia's love affair and escape from their anonymous city are vignettes peppered through the novel that have no bearing on the plot but contextualise the migratory movement of people across the planet, some fleeing violence, others fleeing lives of unbearable boredom, desperation, or loneliness. The interchangeability of these trajectories of forced and voluntary migration offers a vision for genuine planetarity or ethical cosmopolitanism. At the micro scale the story follows a couple as they flee extremist violence. At the maximal scale the movement of people across vast geographical distances without concessions to borders and concepts of nations as boundary-enforcing entities centres the urban space as a site for radical social transformation and indeed social organisation.

The dystopian quality of the novel is the mistreatment of refugees, growing far-right extremism, and the persistence of segregated social structures that define Nadia and Saeed's time in London, before they move on through another door. London is eventually left behind, but the refugees' time in the city changes it, and changes the landscape around it. The larger narrative of borders and nations is rendered laughably futile by the novel's presentation of migrancy and movement not only as the recourse of refugees and asylum seekers, but of all people seeking something more. The maximal scale of possibility, of potential planetary futures, suggests that the novel's utopian impulse lies in the representation of restrictions on human movement and the presumption of nation states as enforcers of frequently arbitrary geographical boundaries.

Exit West is set during the present period of the refugee crisis, taking as the setting of the first half of the novel an unnamed city, widely considered to be representative of Lahore given various social and physical features and cultural mores, as well the author's own biographical relationship to Lahore.[110] The disruption of regional scale is expressed through

[110] In an interview I conducted with the Pakistani editor Mahvesh Murad, a friend of Hamid's, we discussed the evidence that the unnamed city is Lahore, which she found largely conclusive.

the black doors, which are first introduced through one of the short sections unrelated to the main plot. These short sections of narrative extra-diegetic exposition appear throughout the novel, presented in the third person, often leaving the characters in them unnamed. Only the urban spaces between which they move is made clear, in stark contrast to Nadia and Saeed's home city which remains unnamed throughout. The macro scale of the novel's fantastical speculative conceit of global travel by means of teleportation is contrasted with the local concerns of the main characters, and the unnamed characters in the vignettes. The effect here is a utopian impulse towards an integrated view of the planetary and the local. In this way two scales of connectivity converge in an individual character's social interpolation in both a global crisis and her regionally-specific community. The two main characters negotiate the balance of these scales individually: Nadia's digital freedoms in particular allow her a wider integration with migrants around the world, while Saeed's connections with local religious leaders indicate his experience of a more regionally and culturally specific responsibility. The doors therefore present new opportunities for people to negotiate their planetary commitments.

The elision of the experience of migration presents a hyperbole of absence. The experience that is absent from the narrative, the migrant's journey, is so traumatic and inescapably part of the crisis that to elide it is paradoxically to centre it in the novel. Through elision of refugees' journeys, the black doors emphasise the trauma of real-world refugeeism as the reader is forced to consider what is missing from these narratives of migration. The experience of dislocation, and the geographical uncertainty written into the first half of the novel are both absences in the text whose very existences imply the utopian impulse to ameliorate the traumatising conditions of transnational dislocation. The impulse is imbricated in the novel's speculative disruption of time and space, and the elision of geopolitical concerns. As a result, the reader's presumptions about the novel's settings are persistently and intentionally disturbed by the lack of identification.

Reading chronotopographically in this instance is to explore how the elision of a time-bound experience such as migration challenges the value of the arrival destination. The movement of people across the world through the black doors inevitably has consequences for alterations to the geopolitical and geographic landscape of the planet. Settlements appear where previously a landscape was empty of people, as in the development of housing for refugees in the 'London Halo' in what had previously been the green belt that surrounds England's capital, and in Marin, where a tented camp settlement develops near San Francisco.[111] Both of these are built by the transnational migrants who have arrived there and are populated entirely by them. It is a place of 'at least intermittent optimism' despite being 'overwhelmingly poor, all the more so in comparison to the sparkling affluence of San Francisco.'[112]

The narrator suggests that the optimism of the new city is the result of the altered circumstances of the inhabitants' personal safety, 'perhaps because Marin was less violent than most of the places its residents had fled,' or is the effect of its location: 'its position on the edge of a continent.'[113] Looking out across the Pacific Ocean, the new city, a poor but optimistic counterpoint to the 'sparkling affluence' of San Francisco, has altered both the lives of the people who shelter there, and the topography of California, doing so in an unusually short space of time. Migration and immigration ordinarily take time, transnational human movement slowed by bureaucracy, racism, anti-immigrant policy, border controls, customs, and most evidently physical distance. Erasing distance and the officialdom of borders and nations, the black doors radically alter the chronotopographic requirements of geopolitical movement.

Reflecting on migrancy and the geopolitical movement of people, the third-person narrator considers American nationalism in the context of the movement of the migrants in the novel to the new city outside of San Francisco. The narrator notes that the 'natives' of Marin

[111] Hamid, *Exit West*, 167.
[112] Hamid, *Exit West*, 193.
[113] Hamid, *Exit West*, 193.

are almost non-existent, because they are First Nations indigenous people who have 'died out or been exterminated long ago.'[114] Here Hamid draws the reader's attention to processes of nation building and white American nationalism which has in recent months proved to be so convincing for the American alt-right despite the very real cognitive failures by American white supremacists to acknowledge their own historic transnational origins in historic immigration:

> And yet it was not quite true to say there were almost no natives, nativeness being a relative matter, and many others considered themselves native to this country, by which they meant that they or their parents or their grandparents or the grandparents of their grandparents had been born on the strip of land that stretched from the mid-northern Pacific to the mid-northern Atlantic, that their existence here did not owe anything to a physical migration that had occurred in their lifetimes.[115]

The question of what it means to be 'native' to a place is subject to scrutiny here, determined by residents' ahistoricised claims to a place, ignoring their own ancestral migrancy. The term 'native' is rightly relativised in the extract, as it carries with it troubling connotations of racist use in derogatory reference to indigenous peoples of colour in various former colonies, including Central and Southern Africa, Latin America, and the Indian subcontinent. In the above extract, Hamid highlights the absurdity in the failure in contemporary American politics and national mythology to recognise the migration of millions of Europeans to North America and their presumptive possession of a terra nullius following the genocide of the indigenous peoples.

The presumption of possession of a physical place by dint of birth-right also harks back to pre-modern European systems of class and monarchic hierarchy, sustained in the contemporary period by the legacies of slavery, historic racism, and white supremacy in the Americas. That one's existence in a place might be 'owed' to circumstances also suggests a world-view that requires explanation for one's presence in a particular location. To 'owe' one's

[114] Hamid, *Exit West*, 196.
[115] Hamid, *Exit West*, 196.

existence in a place to someone or something implies that one is indebted to a progenitor for their migrancy. This is how the question, 'Where are you really from?' has arrived in the discourse of race in multi-cultural places. One's so-called "original" location might explain the reason for one's presence in a new place, in the way that civil war in Syria is a contributing factor to the refugee crisis in the early twentieth-century. But it is only a contributing factor to the migration of refugees, not the sole determinant, and thus in the logic of demanding 'Where are you really from?' location becomes causation. The debt that is owed for one's presence is a physical debt, determined ethnically and geopolitically, while the material and ideological circumstances of migration are far more complex, including lifestyle, ambition, education, amongst other determinants for migratory movement.

The first city described in the novel is 'swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war,' in the opening lines of the novel, anonymous and on the brink of war.[116] Hamid's intention is to highlight for the reader the normality of everyday life on the brink of civil war, and the notion that it can and might "happen here":[117]

> It might seem odd that in cities teetering at the edge of the abyss young people still go to class – in this case an evening class on corporate identity and product branding – but that is the way of things, with cities as with life, for one moment we are pottering about our errands as usual and the next we are dying, and our eternally impending ending does not put a stop to our transient beginnings and middles until the instant when it does.[118]

Hamid's description of everyday activities continuing in the face of disaster is reminiscent of Mike Davis' critiques of California in *Planet of Slums*, in which he perceives the possibility of violence as an ordinary status quo.[119] Normal life 'seeming odd' is expressly what Hamid is

[116] Hamid, *Exit West*, 1.
[117] I allude here to the resurgence of interest in Sinclair Lewis' 1935 dystopian novel *It Can't Happen Here* which charts the rise of a despotic American president whose popularity is produced by recourse to inflammatory rhetoric and divisive politics.
Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935).
[118] Hamid, *Exit West*, 1–2.
[119] Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).

writing against by depicting the trivial details of two young people's love affair in a city 'on the edge of the abyss,' a phrase subtly imbued with double meaning.

On the one hand it may refer to the impending civil war and the hellish circumstances of such a conflict. On the other, it is the conceit of the novel that every city in the world is on the edge of the abyss of the black doors which open up opportunities to escape the civil war, but also movement of people all over the world and the dissolution of firm national boundaries. Characterisations of conflict as a 'descent into the abyss' connotes the development of hell on earth in the place referred to only as 'their city' – the plural possessive pronoun denoting ownership that they cannot exercise in any way to protect the physical site, nor themselves. The city that they both live in is thus wrested away from them by the defamiliarisation of a war that destroys the known spaces and forces those who can flee as refugees from the unnamed urban site of destruction, 'abandoning the city to the predations of warriors on both sides who seemed content to flatten it in order to possess it.'[120]

The city here is an object that can be abandoned, flattened, or possessed, but it is also a location which had been a home, and from which the protagonists Nadia and Saeed mean to escape. It also harbours those who have arrived in the city from elsewhere, whether by foot or black door is uncertain, people made refugees in the city by the conflict 'in this death trap of a country.'[121] In this extract, the protagonists must skirt around the refugees who have flocked to the city and filled the streets ahead of the looming conflict. Hamid describes this influx in the context of the looming abyss of violence which the city inexorably leans. Noting the refugees attempts to 'recreate the rhythms of normal life,' the narration gestures to the bleak circumstances that have resulted in disavowal that makes it possible for people to be 'sleeping rough on pavements in the margins of the streets:' 'a family of four, under a sheet of plastic

[120] Hamid, *Exit West*, 66–7.
[121] Hamid, *Exit West*, 70.

propped up with branches and a few chipped bricks.'[122] Nadia and Saeed skirt around the limbs and shelters spreading across the urban landscape whenever they make a foray for food or gas.

The 'margins' of the streets filled with refugees fleeing ahead of the conflict that will engulf them recalls the idea of the unnamed city as a legible text, the margins of a page filled with marginalia. The people affected by the violence are described as notes in the margins of history, casualties in an unnamed city in an unnamed war. Under the conditions of the conflict the characters' experiences of their built environments alter with the threat of death: 'One's relationship to windows now changed in the city […] any spot indoors with a view of the outside was a spot potentially in the crossfire.' Then the doors began to appear:

> Rumours began to circulate of doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away, well removed from this death trap of a country. Some people claimed to know people who knew people who had been through such doors. A normal door, they said, could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all.[123]

The doors are introduced to Nadia and Saeed in this way, through a description of their relationship with their city, and with the entrances and exits through which people move from inside to outside. Each door in the apartment into which Saeed and his father invite Nadia remains normal with the power to 'mock the desires of those who desired to go far away, whispering silently from its door frame that such dreams were the dreams of fools.'[124] These dreams however turn out to be possible, when the pair pay a vast sum to escape from their city. Tumbling through a black door, they arrive in Mykonos where they stay in a camp for a time. Mykonos is not a location free from associations, being one of many islands to which refugees fleeing Northern Africa and the Syrian civil war have fled in the real-world. From the refugee camp on Mykonos, they pass through a door to London. The pair spend some time attempting to build a life for themselves on the island before Nadia's contact with a volunteer gives them

[122] Hamid, *Exit West*, 23.
[123] Hamid, *Exit West*, 69–70.
[124] Hamid, *Exit West*, 70.

a way out and they escape the island's increasingly volatile environment for London, the plot reaching a crisis point on the topics of assimilation and group identification.

The London of *Exit West* is seen not from within, but from without, by the refugees entering it through the black doors that open up in Chelsea and Kensington. The teleportation locations in these wealthy neighbourhoods ironically render the wealthiest parts of England's capital the 'dark London' for refugees. These parts of the city literally go dark when power and essential services are withdrawn by the areas' councils. The eventual resolution of the conflict between the inhabitants and the refugees in London suggests a correlation between the disruption of the tyranny of borders and a cosmopolitan worldview which allows people to become 'citizens of the world' in a more genuine sense by virtue of their ability to travel across the planet almost without restriction.

Vast numbers of people use the doors to get from place to place, often escaping untenable circumstances of violence, war, or poverty. The doors that open in London experience a high rate of traffic, unoccupied locations ideal for the migrants entering the city through the doors, impossible to contain:

> All over London houses and parks and disused lots were being peopled in this way, some said by a million migrants, some said by twice that. It seemed the more empty a space in the city the more it attracted squatters, with unoccupied mansions in Kensington and Chelsea particularly hard-hit, their absentee owners often discovering the bad news too late to intervene, and similarly the great expanses of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, filling up with tents and rough shelters, such that it was now said that between Westminster and Hammersmith legal residents were in a minority, and native-born ones vanishingly few, with local newspapers referring to the area as the worst black hole in the fabric of the nation.[125]

The racist classism of the British press is alluded to in this extract, describing 'the worst black hole in the fabric of the nation' appearing in the wealthiest areas of London, the 'black hole' implying a gravitational attraction to destruction. The absent owners of the Kensington and Chelsea mansions are contrasted with the absent wealthy in *NY2140* who refuse access to their

[125] Hamid, *Exit West*, 126.

buildings during the devastating hurricane in that novel. The speculative aesthetic of Hamid's novel allows free access and entrance to these buildings, such that it becomes 'too late' for the absent wealthy to dispute the squatters habitation of their property. The narrator acquires a somewhat ironic tone describing the wealthiest areas of London as 'hard-hit', this term often referring to the consequences of economic hardship or natural disaster for the underclasses. In this case an area that would under any other circumstances remain undisturbed by crisis has been infiltrated from within by the black doors that disrupt the norms of temporal-spatial movement and make it possible for migrants to squat in mansions. These areas become sacrifice zones for the rest of the city, an ironic nod to the real-world sacrifice zones around areas like Chelsea and Kensington, such as Grenfell.

Services are cut off to those areas of London populated by migrants, delimiting two Londons in Nadia's and Saeed's minds: dark and light.

> From dark London, Saeed and Nadia wondered what life must be like in light London, where they imagined people dined in elegant restaurants and rode in shiny black cabs, or at least went to work in offices and shops and were free to journey about as they pleased. In dark London, rubbish accrued, uncollected, and underground stations were sealed. The trains kept running, skipping stops near Saeed and Nadia, but felt as a rumble beneath their feet and heard at a low, powerful frequency, almost subsonic, like thunder or the detonation of a massive distant bomb.[126]

The underground heard and felt like a bomb detonating elsewhere signals their past traumas from the conflict in their home city, and the lack of welcome for the migrants arriving without the permission and outside of legal and social control measures. The accrual of uncollected rubbish and the cessation of transport services in dark London highlights the value of these services to the society depicted. The ubiquity of trash as a political point of contact between conflicting parties in this novel suggests an echo of the trash that drifts unhindered across the borders in Miéville's imagined cities described in the first chapter.

[126] Hamid, *Exit West*, 142.

London's tube system is a source of pride for the city, the skipping of certain stops in the novel emphasising the undesirability implied by this exclusion of transport services provision. The council refuse to assist the incoming refugees, who had not opted to arrive in Kensington prior to their departure, the destination of the doors being initially unknown. Due to bureaucratic inaction the cleanliness of the formerly affluent areas becomes a mere memory. The lack of transport provision confines the refugees to an area that could be contained and addressed. What form that address might take becomes a particular source of anxiety for the communities of refugees as the news media articulates the very real threat of nativist backlash.

The threat of white nationalism, echoing the anti-European rhetoric of the Brexit campaign in 2016, is heightened after initial riots protesting the migrants arriving in London. Once again, the complicity of Britain's media is made evident in their failure to curb hate speech and anti-migrant discourse, presenting inflammatory content such as the deployment of the army through a 'major operation, one city at a time', implying a militaristic and strategic purging. The intention is to 'reclaim Britain for Britain,' terms that are reminiscent of violence against South Asian migrants in the 1980s and 1990s. Saeed and Nadia hear about extremists organising squads 'with a wink and a nod from the authorities,' and Nadia's connections via social media indicate 'a coming night of shattered glass.'[127] The 'wink and a nod' by authorities suggest tacit permission to engage in active violence against the migrants, not unlike the criticism mounted in Riz Ahmed's *The Long Goodbye* music video in which white extremists attack British Muslim families with no consequences. Hamid and Ahmed use different media to make a similarly pointed critique of the turn to the white supremacy and conservative nationalism inherent in the Brexit campaign.[128] During all of this media chatter about military and paramilitary preparation to enact violence against the migrants, Nadia and Saeed must

[127] Hamid, *Exit West*, 132.
[128] Riz Ahmed, "The Breakup," track 1 on *The Long Goodbye* album (London: Mongrel Records, released 6 March 2020).

decide whether to stay or go. The intolerant response by the British to a global event in the novel, the emergence of black doors, is a barely veiled critique of the hostile policies with which the UK Home Office resists migration.

Though she is very much online, using social media to track migratory movement through the black doors, the drones and the military presence in the streets of London evoke for Nadia 'the kind of dread that a small mammal feels before a predator of an altogether different order, like a rodent before a snake.'[129] She feels surveilled to a degree that is life-threatening, the analogy of rodent and snake implying an expectation that she will at any moment be attacked by a force she cannot fully comprehend. Her visceral response to the ongoing instability entailed in her migrant/refugee status is common to many who experience dislocation in one place and disenfranchisement in another. She seems to feel subject to constant surveillance, and this anxiety is akin to her experiences in the city from which she and Saeed initially departed. Nadia feels entirely unable to comprehend the coming violence and the threat of xenophobic action. She considers whether migration has worked to free them, wondering 'whether the face and buildings had changed but the basic reality of their predicament had not.'[130] Here the threat of violence by an ideologically driven para-military nationalist force is compared to the threat of violence by the Islamic extremists from which the protagonists had escaped in the first half of the novel. In London they discover a similar threat against their freedom to self-determine, and though motivated by different ideologies this threat is similar in radical, evil intent: purification.

Eventually there is a détente between the state and the migrants, and Nadia and Saeed choose to stay for a time. Hamid seems naively optimistic about British society in this narrative denouement and the seeming acceptance of migrants in the depiction of this détente. The

[129] Hamid, *Exit West*, 151.
[130] Hamid, *Exit West*, 156.

migrants are given the option to move to the city's 'green belt' and accepting this they are set to building housing for themselves while living in former aircraft hangars and warehouses. [131] At this point in the narrative London becomes an example of how migrancy is negotiated in different parts of the world. The news that Nadia consumes is populated by war and conflict between nativists and migrants, and is 'full of fracturing too, of regions pulling away from nations, and cities pulling away from hinterlands.'[132] References to attempts to recreate the Platonic city state emerge, as urban spaces 'pull away' from national and regional structures.

Distinctions between urban and wilderness spaces are of particular interest in the following chapter as these complicate the binary similarly disrupted by the unquiet house of modernity. Restructuring regional and urban collectivities implies a renegotiation of space on a macro scale level in which individuals are required to assert their micro scale commitments, be these to group identity, nations, cultures, and the like:

> Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory, and people were questioning what role they had to play. Many were arguing that smaller units made more sense, but others argued that smaller units could not defend themselves.[133]

The fear articulated here is that fracturing nation states into smaller units leads inevitably to conflict over land and resources. The implication is that borders maintain the illusion of safety within a national structure that has claims to a geographically defined space. From a deep-time perspective, borders and nations are a relatively recent development in human socio-political history. The disruption of borders' capacity to limit and determine human movement highlights the illusory nature of the nation as an organising principle. This results in the personal reflection on the individual's responsibility and commitment to any system of organisation that has little relevance in a period of mass human migration, which itself is paradoxically the effect of randomly drawn borders and nations arbitrarily constructed for resource extraction in the last

[131] Hamid, *Exit West*, 135.
[132] Hamid, *Exit West*, 155.
[133] Hamid, *Exit West*, 155.

two hundred years. The organising principles by which the geopolitics of the contemporary period are structured are made absurd in their attempts to delimit defensible regions and social groups. The speculative disruption of the logic of borders and nations presents planetary movement as conducive to improved social relations:

> That summer it seemed to Saeed and Nadia that the whole planet was on the move, much of the global south headed to the global north, but also southerners moving to other southern places and northerners moving to other northern places. In the formerly protected green belt around London a ring of new cities was being built, cities that would be able to accommodate more people again than London itself. This development was called the London Halo, one of innumerable human halos and satellites and constellations springing up in the country and in the world.[134]

From the astronomic symbolism of halos, satellites, and constellations we must infer the macro scale of planetary reorganisation, as people move according to the operations of power that push and pull people around the globe. The movement from south to north, north to north, south to south, and in some cases north to south, is described in terms of celestial constructions. The connotation of this description alludes to the operations of power that exert gravity on people's lives, pushing and pulling us according to flows of capital and value. The changing topography of the city of London in the example of the destruction of the green belt to build the London Halo is accelerated beyond what might occur were such radical and instantaneous migration possible in our present bound by the laws of physics.

Beyond London and the micro scale of Nadia and Saeed's story is what we might understand as an intermediary scale at which the world-building and exposition of the novel's speculative mode operates. The vignettes in the novel are particularly important to explicate Hamid's simile 'with cities as with life'; the urban locations in each vignette are paired with a small personal narrative sketch of characters who are unrelated to the main plot of the novel.[135] The first of these is a moment when a man emerges through one of the black doors, the first instance in which the operation of the novel's speculative conceit is described. A man emerges

[134] Hamid, *Exit West*, 167.
[135] Hamid, *Exit West*, 1.

silently from a black door in a closet into a sleeping woman's bedroom in the gentrified area of Surry Hills in Sydney, Australia. The darkness of the doorway and the effort expended in the teleportation are the main features of the experience: 'He wriggled with great effort, his hands gripping either side of the doorway as though pulling himself up against gravity, or against the rush of a monstrous tide.'[136]

He is 'fighting mightily to come in' and it is unclear if this is to escape from whence he has come, or to keep quiet while entering the sleeping woman's bedroom.[137] It appears that he is trying to stay quiet so as not to wake the woman – she is not in danger from him, her closet is merely providing passage from somewhere else, the physics of her closet door altering to enable the teleportation. In the woman's room, 'the closet doorway was dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness – the heart of darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging.[138] The juxtaposition of the ordinary, if affluent, scene of the pale woman sleeping and the darkness of the closet as the black door appears is heightened by the intertextual reference, the implication that there might be a multidirectional movement of people, from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) to the affluent areas in cities around the world which are so far removed from the horror, the horrors of colonial violence.[139] The 'heart of darkness,' a description of the deep black, impenetrable absence of light in the doorway, appears here in this woman's comfortable bedroom, allowing the passage of a man 'who knew how little it took to make a man into meat,' the description implying his familiarity with violence.[140] Where he has come from is never stated, nor is his purpose.

The man with 'with dark skin and dark, woolly hair' emerges into the room 'in desperate silence, the silence of a man struggling in an alley, on the ground, late at night, to

[136] Hamid, *Exit West*, 6–7.
[137] Hamid, *Exit West*, 7.
[138] Hamid, *Exit West*, 7.
[139] Conrad, Joseph, *The Heart of Darkness*, 1899 (London: Penguin, 1999).
[140] Hamid, *Exit West*, 7.

free himself of hands clenched around his throat.'[141] The next sentence however reveals that he does not have hands around his throat, but that '[h]e wished only not to be heard,' comparing the experience of physical violence with the desire to move unimpeded. This momentary struggle is of course vastly different from the more common process of entry by refugees into Australia's notorious detention centres such as on Christmas Island. Eventually the man emerges fully into the woman's bedroom, rests for a moment and then slips out through the open window 'dropping silkily into the street below.'[142] The descriptions of these two unnamed, unknown characters crucially pass no judgements on either party and are almost clinical in their evocations of the vastly different worlds in which these two people exist, bringing them into the same space by the speculative mechanism of the black door. The characters thus function as contextually descriptive mechanisms in the text to indicate the vastly different worlds that these doors open up to one another, and as the other vignettes indicate, the varied directions and reasons for movement through them. This first description of the migration through the black doors calls back to both literary and historical circumstances of migration and human movement between their locations of origin and new places.

The 'rush of a monstrous tide' that the man had struggled silently against also implies a scalar imaginary as the man makes an effort to resist the normal laws of time and space. The monstrous tide is also suggestive of the tide of history, which in this vignette is subverted by the elimination of borders, and presents an individual's experience at the macro scale of transnational migration as he enters contrarily to both physics and geography into the woman's bedroom from elsewhere. This pair and this city are not revisited in the novel but Hamid's description of this intimate moment, the specificities of the man's awareness that he must be quiet, the sleeping woman's absent partner, evoke for the reader the sense of other stories that

[141] Hamid, *Exit West*, 7.
[142] Hamid, *Exit West*, 8.

might have been told about the movement through the black doors, thus universalising the desire to be elsewhere than where one is, for myriad reasons of security, ambition, wealth, or mental well-being. Migration, in all of its uneven forms inflected by the uniquely distributed privileges of the migrant, is one of the most specifically dynamic intersections of the individual and the global, as the personal story of migration becomes imbricated with a larger narrative of those who move, and at an even larger scale, the movement of human beings between and across regions in the last ten thousand years.

The second city named in the novel is Tokyo, the district of Shinjuku 'where midnight had already come and gone' and a young man is nursing an Irish single malt. He goes outside to smoke and behind him in a dark alley, two Filipina teenagers emerge from a door 'that was always kept locked, but was in this moment somehow open, a portal of complete blackness, as though no light were on inside, almost as though no light could penetrate inside.'[143] The description of the door as a portal in this instance conforms to generic science fiction tropes, but this description is not repeated elsewhere, and it is typical of the speculative mode over the last two decades that the mechanics of the black doors are not explained. They simply are. This particular door is a portal to the Philippines which the reader learns through the omniscient narrator's articulation of the interiority of the young Japanese man who sees the two girls emerge. We discover that he is violently racist as he considers the increase in Filipino people he has noticed in the area in recent weeks, presumably entering Shinjuku through the black door. The spectre of violence looms in the text as he decides to follow the teenage girls, his hand on a piece of metal in his pocket, whether it is a gun or a knife left ambiguously vague. This depiction indicates a moment in the narrative where the doors are not solely opportunities to escape but are also fraught with danger as travellers cannot know where the doors may lead.

[143] Hamid, *Exit West*, 27.

The third city mentioned by name is San Diego, California, where in the locality of La Jolla an elderly man finds himself helpless and superfluous while the American army patrol his area for 'Mexicans that had been coming through, or was it Muslims?'.[144] The process of 'coming through' is not described, but the reader infers that people are arriving in the area through the black doors, and the army have been enlisted to stop and detain these migrants, though their identities and origins are apparently uncertain and not communicated to the public. This vignette seems designed to articulate and thus critique a particular response to migration and to emphasise the differences in nations' responses to this migration which is by nature impossible to curb.

Within the context of the main plot, the vignettes are often described temporally simultaneously with Nadia and Saeed's story. This makes the specific experience of the couple smaller on the scale of mass migration, despite the narrative focus on them. The effect of the micro scale narrative is that through the traction of sympathetic characters we come to care about the macro scale context of mass migration and refugeeism. The speculative mode in this novel is evocative of both the macro and micro scales, the third person narration both omniscient and limited, explicating the experience of two complexly described protagonists while referring the reader to the depth of other lives that are changed by the migratory possibilities. While the couple are wondering if the agent they had paid to find them a door would return, the omniscient narrator tells us that 'elsewhere other families were on the move.'[145]

A family of four 'emerged from the complete blackness of an interior service door' which was 'deep inside a vast pedestal floor, below a cluster of blond-and-glass towers filled with luxury apartments and collectively named, by their developer, Jumeirah Beach

[144] Hamid, *Exit West*, 47.
[145] Hamid, *Exit West*, 86.

Residence.'[146] In this fourth vignette, the named city is Dubai, and the family's emergence is tracked by surveillance and security camera footage, the cameras of 'sufficient resolution that lip-reading software could identify their language as Tamil.'[147] The family are identified as being from the Indian sub-continent and tracked by surveillance hardware that has become ubiquitous in cities around the world. The family's uncertainty is related, with narratorial uncertainty, to their origin: 'Perhaps they were from a coastal village themselves, and not from a city, for they gravitated towards the sea and away from the buildings.' As they move away from their point of entry in the heart of Dubai's opulent development, 'they could be seen at multiple angles following a landscaped pathway through the sand,' and a 'small quadcopter drone was hovering fifty metres above them now, too quiet to be heard.'[148]

Their progress is monitored and eventually two uniformed men get out of a marked security vehicle, 'walking purposefully, but without undue or tourist-alarming haste,' and the family are intercepted and 'led away, apparently bewildered, or overawed, for they held hands and did not resist or scatter or run.'[149] The surveillance and private security in this fourth vignette section contrasts with the militarised response in the third vignette in which American troops are securing the area where people are coming through a black door. Again, no judgement is passed on the different systems of control, though the reader may make their own judgements of militarised responses to migration and refugee movement.

The directionality of the movement through the doors and the governmental and security services' responses to these instances of migration contain elements of the dystopic, as global organisations seek to use force to address the disproportion of people from conflict-torn and poverty-stricken places going through doors into wealthier cities in wealthier countries. Going through the door that opens up in 'their city' Nadia and Saeed 'learned that

[146] Hamid, *Exit West*, 86.
[147] Hamid, *Exit West*, 86.
[148] Hamid, *Exit West*, 88.
[149] Hamid, *Exit West*, 88.

they were on the Greek island of Mykonos, a great draw for tourists in the summer, and, it seemed, a great draw for migrants this winter,' referring the reader to the real-world circumstances of refugees seeking asylum on the Greek islands.[150] They learn also that:

> the doors out, which is to say the doors to richer destinations, were heavily guarded, but the doors in, the doors from poorer places, were mostly left unsecured, perhaps in the hope that people would go back to where they came from – although almost no one ever did – or perhaps because there were simply too many doors from too many poorer places to guard them all.[151]

To get 'out' in this vignette is to escape circumstances of poverty or violence, 'out' referring to anywhere wealthier than the migrants' present location. 'Out' is away from present circumstances, despite the lack of clarity about what might be found on the other side of the door. Wealth is associated in this way with greater personal safety, despite the relative impoverishment of refugees and asylum seekers in the countries to which they migrate. Guarding these doors, wealthier destinations hope to control the movement of people while migration to poorer places is more easily accessed. 'Out' in some cases becomes questionable, as refugees find themselves in camps on Mykonos, or beset by white nationalists in Vienna. In similar moments of threatened violence in London, Nadia wonders if their migration has changed their circumstances only geographically, while their personal security is still at risk. To get 'out' then is a significant risk, taken only under conditions of profound danger or threat to life.

The doors also operate as ways for people to change their lives. One of the vignettes presents the reader with a suicidal accountant in Kentish Town, London, who discovers a door in his bathroom. He finds that door 'reminded him of something, of a feeling, of a feeling he associated with children's books, with books he had read as a child, or books that had been read to him rather.'[152] Instead of killing himself he passes through the door and sends his

[150] Hamid, *Exit West*, 100.
[151] Hamid, *Exit West*, 101.
[152] Hamid, *Exit West*, 127.

daughter and best friend a photo of himself and an invitation to visit him in Namibia some months later, having escaped the misery of his London life for a different life in the Southern African desert country. The allure of the black doors in this instance is one of adventure and escape, the promise of which the man takes and which spares his life.

These vignettes also work to highlight the planetary impact of the black doors at the micro scale. 'For others too, the doors came as a release' the narrator notes, describing a Mexican migrant worker reunited with her daughter in Tijuana through a black door, and two elderly gay men who meet through a black door in Amsterdam and relocate to Rio.[153] In the final vignette in the novel we encounter an elderly woman in Palo Alto 'who had lived in the same house her entire life.'[154] She feels as though, although she has never moved away from the house, travelling but never relocating, 'the world had moved and she barely recognised the town that existed outside her property.'[155] As she ages she discovers that she recognises fewer and fewer of her neighbours and the local townspeople revolve, people who 'bought and sold houses the way they bought and sold stocks', people that she does not identify with due to their movement and material wealth.[156]

The black doors introduce a further influx of unknown people to the woman's previously small world. The changing demographics of the area and the freedom of movement initiated by the black doors alters the woman's experience of her location. The omniscient narration notes that 'we're all migrants through time,' evoking the chronotopographic in the narrator's philosophical musing.[157] The narration of the elderly woman's reflection on time's migratory effects emphasises the universalising effect of the migration through the black doors. The elimination of the temporal and governmental restrictions upon human movement is

[153] Hamid, *Exit West*, 157.
[154] Hamid, *Exit West*, 206.
[155] Hamid, *Exit West*, 207.
[156] Hamid, *Exit West*, 208–9.
[157] Hamid, *Exit West*, 209.

compared to the experience of being alive in a persistently changing world. Making migration universal would, the text implies, eliminate the trauma of the journey and introduce a more planetary solidarity.

The cities treated in this section are geographically diverse, dotted as they are around the planet. They are also presented in counter-point to the urban settings of the main plot in the novel: Nadia and Saeed's unnamed city and London. Presenting London as a counter-point to their home city, the 'out' to which refugees hope to get is made hostile. The threats to personal safety posed in the places of departure and arrival are no less threatening for being motivated by different ideologies, ordered by different authorities. While much of the novel centres on the immediate, present-day responses to the migration made possible by the black doors, the final three pages of the novel cast forward into the future. Nadia returns to her home city, meditating on the end to the conflict which initiated her migration. The narration reflects that the 'lives of cities' are 'far more persistent and more gently cyclical than those of people,'[158] evoking the macro scale of centuries in the context of an individual's short life span and their experience of a city's evolving life during their own.

The time scale evoked here is one that approaches the macro scale of deep time as the shortness of a human life pales in comparison to the time over which urban spaces develop, mature and perhaps eventually fade out. As an elderly woman Nadia finds that the city she returns to was 'not a heaven but it was not a hell.'[159] This reflection on the urban space as complexly developed and changed over time connects the character's micro scale experience with an intermediary scale acknowledgement of time's paradoxical capacity to be inhabited while also passing away. Nadia's return as an elderly woman is fraught with memory and

[158] Hamid, *Exit West*, 227.
[159] Hamid, *Exit West*, 227.

recollections of the violence that drove her to migrate through the black doors with Saeed, who she discovers lives there in the city they had escaped from in their youth.

The 'fires' she had witnessed are both metaphorical, the fire of ideological violence, as well as the very real fires that were set during the conflict that precipitated their escape. Nadia catches up with Saeed and they discuss visiting the Chilean desert, and Saeed offers 'if she had an evening free he would take her', as though travel to Chile from Pakistan were no great trial in these times, and indeed it is not. Universal freedom of movement presents a speculative disruption of planetary disconnect that allows not, the narrative implies, for world peace, but for the experience of the planet's beauty, a more probable and attainable cause.

The erasure of spatio-temporal constrictions on transnational human movement offers a unique depiction of migration that through a chronotopographical reading reveals the narrative's utopian impulse to change migration discourse for the sake of planetarity. The anonymity of the characters in the novel's vignettes and the unnamed city of Nadia and Saeed's births works to make the experiences of this maximal scale event communicable to anyone living in a conflict zone while maintaining the relevance of the subsidiary narratives of individuals' lives radically altered by mass planetary migration. The challenge to immoveable notions of borders and nations posed by the black doors is also representative of a Spivakian planetarity in Hamid's novel such that solidarity between those who come and those who go might be generated, if, as the elderly Palo Alto woman realises, we are all migrants through time. Chronotopographically speaking, we are all migrants through space as well, and if we reconsidered our obsession with possession and regional belonging then migration might assume a new guise. Perhaps something akin to a sustained and real-world planetary commitment, perhaps.

Speculating about global crises, each of these novels uses narratorial distance to critical effect, providing insight and perspective on the depicted crises without ascribing these views

to a particular character. In this way, the concerns of the novels intersect at both the macro and micro scales, producing narrative traction by implicating the reader in the macro scale events that affect the micro scale plot details. Excess and absence in the narrative extra-diegesis emphasise the political exigencies of the speculative mode in each of these novels by using exaggeration to emphasise the scale of the crises. Through the interplay of scales, these novels imbricate the micro human level into a planetary vision of disaster, emphasising through the speculative mode how climate disaster is a consequence of capitalist modernity.

Chapter 3
(Re)productive Apocalypse in *Future Home of the Living God* and *Afterland*

'This is how the world ends, everything crazy yet people doing normal things.'[1] Before the realities of the novel's speculative conceit begin to take full effect, the protagonist of Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) considers the boring normality of her apocalyptic circumstances. The corruption of the status quo is of equal concern in Lauren Beukes' 2020 novel *Afterland*, in which patriarchal systems persist even with the demise of over ninety-nine per cent of men.[2] As the apocalyptic circumstances in each novel begin to threaten characters' autonomy over their reproductive systems, they experience the consequences of distributed capitalist modernity and the concomitant combined and uneven development when the urban becomes paradoxically a site of danger from which they cannot escape even as they seek safety in rural and wilderness spaces. This is as a result of the entanglement of core regions with semi-periphery and periphery ones; each of these unevenly influencing the others in the seesaw of capital so that even wilderness spaces are not free of the estranging effects of exploitative capital-labour relations.

We presume in the concept of wilderness that it is utterly beyond the reach of capitalist modernity but due to a combination of cartography (never a neutral field) and climate-catastrophe-exacerbating development, we must understand wilderness in relation to the urban, rather than as divorced from it. Thanks to connective infrastructures, capitalist modernity establishes the urban space as the core on the more local regional scale, and due to technological developments in the last century the operations of urban modernity are now

[1] Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God,* (London: Corsair, 2017), 32.
[2] Lauren Beukes, *Afterland,* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2020).

ubiquitous; seemingly nowhere and no one is free from the effects of capital-labour relations. Beukes and Erdrich's respective novels enter the debate on how far this holds true by foregrounding reproduction as the conceptual site of apocalyptic crises. Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) offers ingress to this paradox of (re)productive apocalypse as it asks not only what kinds of labour relations are unacknowledged, but also who produces the labourers. I bracket the prefix '(re)' here and in the chapter's title to emphasise the multiple and interlinked significations of the terms reproduction and productive: the former foregrounds SRT and human reproduction in the term, the latter gestures to the conceptual productivity of apocalypse as a regenerative framework. There is value here in thinking the apocalypse beyond the merely existentially terminal by rescuing it from eschatology and engaging it in (re)productive work.[3] Each of these novels does so with varying degrees of optimism, most notably around the resistant potential of the creative act. Travelling between urban and contra-urban spaces while on the run, characters in both novels resort to creativity as a form of emancipatory resistance. These acts of creative production even as the apocalypse is upon them suggests a meta-narrative insistence on creative resistance amidst reproductive rights limitations. The characters, like the authors, assert themselves as individuals deserving of autonomy, gesturing to the regenerative potential of apocalypse.

In *Future Home*, the novel's apocalyptic scenario entails a teleological evolution: human reproduction begins to yield Pleistocene period Homo erectus. At the same time, other mammals' offspring revert to similarly ancient iterations of their species: domestic cats produce sabretooth tigers, chicken eggs hatch dinosaur-era lizards, lady bugs the size of dogs flit between the trees. Cedar, an adopted, indigenous American woman living in Minneapolis,

[3] Malcolm Bull's *Seeing Things Hidden* develops a theory of apocalypse based on its revelatory powers from his assertion that Hegel's thought was not eschatological. For Bull, the apocalyptic reveals what was hidden and he ties this idea into a theory of history concentrated on the interplay of seemingly competing identities under capitalist modernity.
Malcolm Bull, *Seeing Things Hidden*, (London: Verso, 1999).

is pregnant with what might be one of the last Homo sapiens foetuses. Her bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom are threatened by the American state's turn to Christian fundamentalism. Cedar attempts to reach safety outside of the city by escaping to her birth mother's reservation and beyond that to the Canadian wilderness, but the connective infrastructure of highways and technological innovations in the novel mean that even in the rural space she is under threat. The quotation that opens this chapter appears in Cedar's diary, in which she records the apocalyptic circumstances of her pregnancy, beginning with the time spent meeting her birth mother on the reservation in North Dakota at the novel's outset.

The novel is epistolary, the diary intended for Cedar's unborn, potentially human, child. It does not fully convince as a diary to the reader however, implying a self-reflexive disruption of the distinction between the implied and real reader which focuses the speculative mode's critical emphasis on creativity as a (re)productive resistance method. The plot events of *Future Home* occur over a six-month period during which the threat of human species extinction is met with religious fundamentalism, paramilitary control of transport and postal links, and the incarceration of fertile women in Womb Volunteer facilities. Despite their name, these are not voluntary institutions and function as terminal breeding facilities. Cedar has both white and indigenous American parentage, and we learn through her epistolary account that not only are women's bodies being co-opted in a futile attempt to preserve the species, but that the Church of the New Constitution hopes to breed exclusively white children.

The reproductive crisis in Beukes' pandemic novel *Afterland* is a flu-like virus that sweeps the world and leaves only approximately one per cent of men alive. The initial illness results in a highly metastatic prostate cancer, technically similar to HPV but affecting only those with the XY chromosome: it is called HCV, or Human Culgoa Virus. The protagonist Cole is a white South African woman, married to an African American scientist named Devon, and they have a son, Miles. The pandemic breaks out while the family are on a trip to Disney

Land, and they get stuck in America when the oncological consequences of the virus take hold: lockdowns, overwhelmed medical facilities, and shortages on painkillers despite the painful ravages of the cancer. Cole is forced to watch her husband die an agonising death while her pre-pubescent son, Miles, remains mysteriously unaffected. Following Devon's death, Cole determines that America is no longer a safe place to be and decides to try to get her mixed-race male child across America and onto a ship leaving for South Africa from Miami. The pair must evade capture by Cole's mercenary sister Billie who is in the employ of wealthy magnates, as well as the American military.

They are captured once and the novel opens at the moment when Cole and Miles go on the run from a military facility. Cole is unwilling to submit to the military's invasive research and exploitation of Miles' future reproductive capacities. Despite the novel's apocalyptic conditions, the world continues as normal with women stepping into the gaps left by the deceased men. The paradox of normality in such apocalyptic circumstances in *Afterland* is described in pithy media excerpts, email exchanges, and the prose narration of the three focalisers, Cole, Miles, and Billie. Cole becomes fixated on getting the pair out of America in order to give her son the opportunity to determine his own reproductive future, free from intervention. In both novels, characters seek safety in the semi-periphery contra-urban spaces, identifying the urban core with danger. However, their attempts at reaching sanctuary are thwarted by the ubiquity of urban modernity, which is made possible by the connective infrastructures of the twenty-first century which are themselves a product of maldevelopment.

This chapter continues with a brief contextual overview of Beukes and Erdrich's respective novels and oeuvres, followed by a discussion of the connective networks of capitalist modernity that threaten the bodily autonomy of characters in the novels. Thereafter I move to exploring the function of writing and reading as resistant acts and conclude with a discussion of reproductive rights as human rights.

Beukes and Erdrich in context

Both *Afterland* and *Future Home* were written in response to gender-based inequalities and debates surrounding reproduction and feminism in the last two decades. Beukes and Erdrich are both insider and outsider figures on the global literary stage, functioning as informants on ordinarily unrepresented communities while also occupying privileged positions as passing white women. Erdrich is part-Chippewa, based in Minneapolis with family living on the reservations, while Beukes is a white South African from Johannesburg who in December 2021 relocated from Cape Town to London. Both are successful professional authors writing from geographic and cultural semi-peripheries who have found validation in critical and academic institutions intrinsic to the conceptual core. Beukes has won the Arthur C Clarke Award along with several South African literary prizes, and her work has been adapted for television as discussed in the first chapter. Erdrich is taught widely on American literature courses in higher education and in 2021 she won the Pulitzer Prize for her 2020 novel *The Night Watchman*.[4] Using platforms sustained by literary success and recognition, both authors advocate for social justice causes such as equal rights for women and people of colour, and for the cause of reproductive rights as human rights.

Beukes's work has long been influenced by questions of bodily autonomy, beginning with her 2008 debut *Moxyland*.[5] In that novel, characters sell advertising space on their skin in a dystopian Cape Town city bowl that keeps the Rurals out and the moneyed few in. In *Zoo City* (2010), discussed in the first chapter, Beukes explored what it would mean to have one's sins manifest as an animal that endows magical powers on the guilty.[6] The novel that brought Beukes international fame was her third, *The Shining Girls* (2013). It deals with one woman's

[4] Louise Erdrich, *The Night Watchman,* (London: HarperCollins, 2020).
[5] Lauren Beukes, *Moxyland,* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2008).
[6] Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City,* (London: Angry Robot, 2010).

journey to get revenge on a time-travelling serial killer who attacks and leaves her for dead.[7] *The Shining Girls* was the first of Beukes's American novels, followed by *Broken Monsters* (2014), set in Detroit, which depicts another story of serial murder and a policewoman's attempts to solve crimes that entail the gross rearrangement of women's bodies after death.[8] Themes of gender-based violence and reclamations of bodily autonomy are central to Beukes' work, and *Afterland* is no exception. The racial context of *Afterland* also draws the reader's attention to a tendency in Beukes' latter three novels to displace South African social crises onto the USA, perhaps to appeal to an American market while sustaining a south-to-north cultural critique. The novel was five years in the making despite its relevance to the COVID-19 pandemic and addresses gender equality from the perspective of a trans-inclusive radical feminist position. This fifth novel by Beukes examines the structures of power in which we are all 'literally invested,' drawing connections between the socio-economic systems of capitalist modernity and women's complicity in those systems.[9]

The premise of *Afterland* asks: what if there were no men? Beukes makes the case that women can be just as violent and manipulative as patriarchal systems render some men. On their journey the pre-pubescent Miles is forced by circumstance to present as a girl named Mila so as not to attract attention. Through Cole's and Miles's focalisations, the novel reveals that women immediately occupy the roles left vacant by the man-killing virus. Not unlike in *Zoo City*, much of the world-building in the novel is outsourced from traditional prose to fictional media excerpts. The Interlude at the centre of the novel contains these experimental excerpts, including a blog by a 'Dr Fuzz Wolf,' an imagined blogger who describes the early days of the fictional pandemic. Using tactics similar to those exhibited in *Zoo City*, Beukes complicates

[7] Lauren Beukes, *The Shining Girls,* (London: HarperCollins, 2013).
[8] Lauren Beukes, *Broken Monsters,* (London: HarperCollins, 2014).
[9] Lauren Beukes and Chelsea Haith, "Pandemic Writing: How Close is Too Close?" Interview by Chelsea Haith, on *Narrative Futures* podcast, published 14 October 2020, audio, 23:22: http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/episode-1-pandemic-writing-how-close-too-close.

the novel's formal conventions by providing dynamic realist material which refers to the imagined apocalypse of the novel in media similar to those in the real-world. The inclusion of media excerpts is also evocative of the experience of a viral disaster in the twenty-first century, in which our lives are so often mediated through various online platforms. Mediation through technology is one of the means by which the contra-urban is sustained as culture and capital circulate between core and periphery regions at ever increasing speeds thanks to connective infrastructures. During Devon's illness, Cole consumes the news of the pandemic 'with a junkie's fervour,' her morbid obsession akin to the online discourse around case numbers in the early days of COVID-19.[10] Through her mobile, Cole follows death tolls around the world, noting that geographical privilege only goes so far to limit the suffering, men all over the world suffering the excruciating cancer to equally final ends. While Beukes could not have predicted the real-world COVID-19 pandemic, her exposition in the Interlude section of the novel is uncannily prescient about how the internet would contribute to the discourse around an imagined pandemic and the uneven distribution of solutions and care around the world.

Similarly experimenting with form and style to thematic and literary effect, Erdrich is one of America's most important authors due to her technically innovative narrative style, world-building, and compassionate representation of indigenous peoples. Erdrich's oeuvre spans from her critically acclaimed debut *Love Medicine* in 1984 to *The Sentence*, published in November 2021.[11] Her 1988 novel *Tracks* is widely taught as part of the twentieth-century US literary canon due to her visionary writing style and topical subject matter.[12]

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[10] Beukes, *Afterland*, 31.
[11] Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, 1984 (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Louise Erdrich, *The Sentence,* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021).
[12] Louise Erdrich, *Tracks,* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988).
Tracks is preceded by *The Beet Queen* and succeeded by *The Bingo Palace* in what is known as the Love Medicine series, Erdrich's collection of novels set in North Dakota, moving between a town named Argus and the reservations further north, concentrating on the lives and histories of five families across two centuries.

Despite some of their similarities, such as insider-outsider positionality, these authors engage the novel form in critiques of capitalist modernity and urban habitation that are unique to each writer and to their contexts. The different narrative strategies in these novels engage with and complicate the traits of apocalypse narratives and the animated field of reproductive rights as human rights. Reproduction is a paradoxical concept in apocalypse narratives, precisely because it gestures towards the continuation of the species. Thus, apocalyptic circumstances disrupt the sense of progress that is intrinsic to notions of reproduction, and reproduction disrupts the presumption of finality in notions of apocalyptic time. Malcolm Bull's sense of apocalypse's regenerative potential is instructive here to think beyond an 'end times' teleology and to imagine, in the utopian tradition, what might be possible, and what a particular form of apocalypse conceals, and what it reveals.[13] For Beukes one answer is patently that patriarchal structures persist beyond gendered binaries, while for Erdrich it may be a little more complex.

Cedar's diary and her qualified joy around her pregnancy, fraught as it is with religious guilt and apocalyptic dread, carries a utopian impulse that reads the planet devoid of humans as-we-are as a positive outcome, permitting climate and natural regeneration at a cost of art and culture. Erdrich posits the creative act as an existential necessity and an act of resistance to not only oppression but also to extinction. Leaving a cultural legacy for a species-unknown and likely illiterate future human-like child is both futile and hopeful. That the novel does not convince as a diary layers this paradox as the interplay between the implied reader and the real reader raises questions for the latter around the purpose of creative acts that no one perceives. Of course, we read the novel in the real world, but the descriptions of evolutionary chaos imply that Cedar's diary will never be read, and indeed the novel takes to flights of fancy, imagining

[13] Malcolm Bull, *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision, and Totality,* (London: Verso, 1999).

that Cedar is able to retain the diary it even as she undergoes the tortures of the Womb Volunteer Facility. Erdrich is surely asserting the value of art for art sake, or art for the artist's sake, in the meta-narrative of Cedar's impossible diary. Writing the apocalypse, Cedar, and Erdrich, are able to sustain a semblance of control by ordering a narrative and imposing logic on events that by definition defy comprehension. Erdrich's apocalypse of evolutionary chaos is revelatory of a world-view that perceives capitalist modernity as terminal, and it is regenerative in that the damage it imagines promotes new possibilities, new hope, for the planet and whatever iteration of Homo sapiens survives the fall out.

Drawing on the notion of an 'end times' in contemporary Anglophone literature, Diletta de Cristofaro usefully theorises apocalypse literature as that which draws on a teleological narrative of linear time. Her position is that the temporal realities of the imagined apocalypse are complicated by expectations of apocalypse situations in twenty-first century Western fiction and media.[14] However, it is important to recognise that for many the apocalypse has already come and is in fact ongoing: the so-called 'end times' are the real-world present just as it is, and that these apocalypses are no less violent for being revelatory of the operations of capitalist modernity. The history of colonial expansion that was apocalyptic for those indigenous communities who were wiped out by disease and genocide; the First Nations and indigenous peoples in North America, Australia, and South Africa are the most well-known examples of these circumstances and programmes of brutal purging as smallpox and maldevelopment were distributed around the globe, creating cores and peripheries through the capital-labour relationship. The reader might infer the centring of outsider figures in both novels treated in this chapter as a corrective gesture for these past apocalypses, in which the world, as it had been known, was eradicated.

[14] Diletta de Cristofaro, *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel: Critical Temporalities and the End Times*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

The apocalypse for First Nations indigenous people in North Dakota looms large in Erdrich's oeuvre covering centuries of exploitation, disease, poverty, and mass death at the hands of small-pox, tuberculosis, and genocide. The apocalypse in indigenous communities should be understood as ongoing and disproportionately affecting raced bodies. From this perspective the supposed 'end' of the world is already upon us, though not in ways imagined in popular culture or religious representations of linear time with an apocalypse occurring at a notional 'end.' Erdrich engages with this notional end as an ongoing event in her Love Medicine series, and while *Future Home* is not set in that particular story world, the apocalypse setting is more blatant, and thus draws the reader's attention to the conditions that give rise to the reproductive dystopia of her imagined twenty-first century America.

Future Home represents a departure from Erdrich's usual wheelhouse of family sagas in the Love Medicine series and the style of spiritual realism of those novels. She is a trailblazer in making indigenous literature popular and acceptable to the publishing establishment, and the speculative mode sets this novel apart. Erdrich's work often explores individuals' negotiations of identity; socially isolated characters; and homecomings through unusual narrative strategies. She is a registered member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, a recognised subsidiary of the Anishinaabe tribe, and her work engages with the complex hybrid identities entailed therein. While Erdrich's literary career has always been politically-invested, *Future Home* represents a departure from her usual style, engaging as she does in a more globally-relevant catastrophe and its real-world inspiration: threats to reproductive autonomy. Government threats to reproductive rights were the primary inspiration for *Future Home of the Living God*, which Erdrich began writing in 2000 following her dismay at the election of George W. Bush. The political contexts from which these two authors draw in these novels register a critique of capitalist modernity that is sustained by the specific instances of critical irrealism in the speculative mode.

In the following sections I examine the effect of apocalypse time on capitalist modernity through a discussion of how these texts complicate and contribute to a more inclusive discussion of the paradox of progress and decline that inheres in capitalist modernity, most particularly in the comparison of rurality and urbanity. As with intentional reading, writing of this kind is a method of resistance, responding to the limitations on women's bodily autonomy prevalent in our world today. There is an intersection between the fight for reproductive rights as human rights and the paradoxes that inhere in modernity's physical manifestations, which the speculative mode enables by forcing the reader to suspend disbelief and follow the protagonists on their journeys. The contra-urban or not-urban is anything that is not the city, defined in relation to the city. This definitional relationship highlights how spaces like suburbia, rural areas, and wilderness are all encompassed in a singular concept by their opposition to the urban space. I draw together theories of reproductive rights and Social Reproduction Theory, the interplay of capitalist modernity with apocalyptic time, and identify a utopian impulse in seemingly futile creative work to provide a unique comparative frame for identifying the critical intent of the speculative mode in these texts.

Capitalist Modernity and Apocalyptic Time

Taking a view from below of a waning Global North superpower presents an opportunity to analyse through literary representation the rotting foundations of 'apocalyptic America.'[15] A view from below is not one determined by a vertical hierarchy but is instead inspired by the Tower of Babel analogy, the base being the strongest section and offering support to the rest. Feminist authors' depictions of biological catastrophe and the consequences for women in America provide one level of that base. To view an 'apocalyptic America' from below then, requires us to consider perspectives on a system from those who have not participated in its definition and whose depictions of apocalypse in that space complicate the teleology of

[15] De Cristofaro, *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel*, 57.

progress as a constitutive aspect of American political and economic systems. America is also a core region, but it is made up internally of multiple smaller core and periphery exchanges determined by the seesaw of capital which renders certain spaces underdeveloped, maldeveloped or dependently developed, depending on their existing social and class conditions.

The novels' settings emphasise the other traditional formal elements of the generic classification of apocalypse novels: isolated communities living away from urban sites; certain demographics of the population being targeted or scapegoated; characters developing survival skills; and descriptions of the altered landscape or terrain, such as the empty highways I discuss in the next section. The apocalyptic visions in these two novels present the current moment of the twenty-first century as fragile. The rights won for bodily autonomy and reproductive rights in America in the last century have become vulnerable to dissolution in crises. These rights are no longer inalienable, and imply the dehumanisation of demographics whose bodies are co-opted for political agendas and nationalistic programmes. Afraid for her son's life, Cole critiques America's immigration policies as she fatalistically contemplates their recapture by the military: 'It feels inevitable that they'll be found and dragged back. She'll be arrested. Miles will be taken away. In America, they steal kids from their parents. This was true even before all *this*.'[16] The sections focalised through Cole highlight a mistrust of American social policy in the character which fuels her desire to escape to South Africa.

She feels trapped in the country of her husband's birth, imagining, without an explanation or sound reasoning, that South Africa will be safer for both herself and her son. She has the recent history of the pair's detention in the military testing facility as motivation for the dangers posed by remaining in America, but recognises the non-rational in her desire to

[16] Beukes, *Afterland*, 7. Italics in original

return to Johannesburg. Following their escape from the luxury military compound near Seattle, Cole and Miles drive into the desert. Miles questions her:

> "But where are we going, Mom?"
> "Home." The idea is ridiculous. Thousands of miles, whole oceans and now multiple felonies between them and ever seeing Johannesburg again.[17]

Cole has committed a series of crimes to keep her son safe, including hitting her conniving sister over the head with a tyre iron, and hoarding painkillers in case Miles succumbed to the cancer. Cole's loyalty to the utopian ideal of Johannesburg surfaces earlier in the novel when the family take their fateful trip to Disneyland and highlights a value judgement that the character makes, preferring the semi-periphery conditions of South Africa to the situation in the core of America. At the airport on their way into Disneyland pre-pandemic, Cole's response to the immigration officer's inquiry about their return to South Africa is unequivocal:

> "Yes, that's where we live," proud of the hard fact of it. Away from everyday Nazis and school shootings so regular they were practically part of the academic calendar along with prom and football season, away from the slow gutting of democracy, trigger-happy cops and the terror of raising a black son in America. But how can you live there, people would ask her (and Devon, her American husband especially), meaning Johannesburg. Isn't it dangerous? And she wanted to reply, how can you live *here*? [18]

Cole's response makes it clear that she cannot imagine the 'terror' of raising a black child in the United States and is proud of her family's choice to make their home in Johannesburg, choosing a place for its familiarity and for the relative safety of racial majority for her mixed-race child. Beukes highlights the problems of America's social divisions which have become more widely known thanks to movements such as the Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality in the last five years. Cole's narration expresses all of those things that symbolise America for her: 'everyday Nazis,' 'school shootings, and 'the slow gutting of Democracy' all refer to police and gun violence, as well as the rise of white supremacy and the failures of the electoral college. This remembered moment in the novel's temporal past

[17] Beukes, *Afterland*, 11.
[18] Beukes, *Afterland*, 30. Italics in original.

establishes the impetus for the mother-son road trip across rural America as they hope to flee the States for South Africa, where Cole presumes they will be safer, with no reason to suppose so other than the sense that she knows and understands 'home.'

Much of Cole's narration is focussed on her maternal role and the decisions she makes for herself and in order to preserve Miles's future sexual and reproductive agency. By contrast, Miles's narration is an exploration of burgeoning adolescence, artistic development, and the gullibility of youth. His first chapter opens with a recollection of the second facility, Ataraxia, framed by the landscape through which the mother and son move as they escape. He presents an awareness of the conveniences that capitalist modernity promises while he wonders about the violence of their escape and the supposed safety of the research institute they had been imprisoned in:

> A city skyline is visible through a haze of heat in the distance like a mirage in the desert, promising junk food, a bed, maybe even TV – if all that still exists, Miles thinks. The roads are coated with bright yellow sand and scored with at least one set of tyre tracks, so someone must have been through here before them, and they're not the Last People Left on Earth, and they didn't make The Worst Terrible Mistake leaving the safety of Ataraxia, even if it was like being in the fanciest prison in the world. #bunkerlife. It was definitely better than the army base though.[19]

His longing for comforts is evoked in the choice of 'mirage' to describe the distant city, implying that it may be wishful thinking. Their time in the facility was lengthy enough that he wonders if there are other people left alive, and so is reassured by the tyre marks in the dust on the road, even as this indicates the massive population decline. Miles's musing indicates that he is looking for signs that he and Cole have made the right choice: he tries to identify safety in the existence of signs of life as he knew it pre-pandemic.

The first descriptions of Miles present a young boy hoping for the luxuries he associates with urban living: junk food and television. His longing for a bed reminds the reader of their escapee status and the associated hardships. The capitalisation of phrases indicates a childish

[19] Beukes, *Afterland*, 13.

tendency to categorise circumstances – he clings to evidence that he and Cole are not the 'Last People Left on Earth' and that their escape from Ataraxia was not 'The Worst Terrible Mistake.' Focalised through him, the pair's approach to the city indicates that he identifies the comforts of urban life with safety, while Cole's more mature reasoning imagines the wilderness as a place into which they might safely escape. Sections focalised through Miles differ stylistically to those dedicated to his mother Cole and aunt Billie. Capitalisation and clumsy phrasing such as 'worst terrible' draw the reader's attention to his youth, emphasising the strain that the novel's events have on his pre-pubescent character. Miles' immaturity contextualises his development into full-blown puberty during the events of the novel's present (it is set in 2023) and registers the ordinary desires of a young boy that persist despite catastrophic circumstances. Miles' association of these luxuries with the urban space are an early intimation of the threatening attraction of capitalist modernity's ubiquity and homogeneity and the disruption to it posed by apocalypse's devastating and regenerative potentials.

Both *Afterland* and *Future Home* concentrate the reader's attention on the everyday, or commonplace experience of apocalyptic circumstances through the narrators' ordinary longings. These longings are evoked in passages such as Miles' hankering for junk food or Cedar's overwhelming desire 'to be outside and freely walking' though she must remain hidden indoors to conceal her pregnancy.[20] The novel form offers a unique opportunity to explore a seemingly universal event through a specific set of characters' focalisations. How 'the American project' influences each of the characters, and to what degree they buy into it, determines how they perceive the apocalypse conditions in each novel. For example, Cedar perceives evolutionary disruption not as an end, but as the beginning of something new, experiencing a 'sense of time folding in on itself' as she realises 'I am not at the end of things,

[20] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 119.

but at the beginning.'[21] This chimes with Bull's articulation of apocalypse as regenerative, the old, damaged elements sloughed off to make way for new life. Cedar rejects America's teleological project, her epistolary musings a disruptive poetic in the speculative mode as the interplay of meta-narrative and 'real' diary entries emphasise the utopian impulse in the text. The end of the American project fills Cedar with a 'tranced awareness,' her pregnancy operating as a paradoxical counter to the devastation of the end of the world.

Reproductive rights under capitalist conditions represent the fundamental paradox at the heart of the 'American project' which is underpinned by 'apocalyptic foundations of nationalist and imperialistic ideologies that construct America as the culmination of history.'[22] De Cristofaro's contribution to criticism of contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction concentrates on works produced by authors not typically given to writing in the speculative mode. In her monograph she introduces 'critical temporalities' as a model for what she deems contemporary literature's 'obsession with the end.'[23] She reads the texts treated in her monograph as critiques of traditional apocalyptic imaginaries, imagining 'apocalyptic time' as a defining feature of the American project. Her monograph chapter 'Apocalypse America' surveys critiques in fiction of American narratives that depict an apocalyptic culmination of history in that nation's justifications of violent neo-imperialistic projects.

De Cristofaro's argument against an American utopian telos is supported by her readings of several novels, including Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011), Omar El Akkad's *American War* (2017), and Erdrich's *Future Home*. While her monograph is wide ranging in textual case studies, what it offers in breadth it suffers for in depth of analysis. *Future Home* would benefit from an interrogation of more than the Christian fundamentalism that pervades the novel. A paradox is sustained in Cedar's negotiation of this fundamentalism with her own

[21] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 116.
[22] De Cristofaro, *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel*, 58.
[23] De Cristofaro, *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel*, 1.

Catholicism, her adherence to the doctrines of her faith complicated by her unplanned pregnancy.

Speaking to her birth mother, nicknamed Sweetie, Cedar finds that they share their Catholic faith. Erdrich is ordinarily sceptical of Catholicism in her novels, noting the hypocrisy, the sexual repression and violence, and the corruption of Catholic institutions on North American reservations. In this instance, Catholicism brings characters closer together, though later in the novel pilgrims to the reservation's saint betray Cedar to the fundamentalist government. Sweetie tells Cedar about a 'wayside shrine' that reservation parishioners have erected near the casino where apparitions of the saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Lily of the Mohawks have been reported.

Cedar later finds solace in the statue of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. The 'wayside' where the saint has been rumoured to appear at is by the side of the highway which leads into the casino on the North Dakota reservation, indicating the rurality of the area to which Cedar has escaped. It is implied that the sightings are the effects of alcohol and guilt on local gamblers leaving the casino. Nevertheless, the statue of the saint gains popularity, particularly as the evolutionary chaos begins to take effect and pilgrims come from Minneapolis to pray and seek solace. Cedar goes home to her indigenous family twice, once at the outset of the novel when she has just learnt she is pregnant and wants to find out about any hereditary health concerns, and later when she escapes her first Womb Volunteer facility in Minneapolis. Her native family shelter her on the reservation when, aided by her adoptive mother Sera, she and another inmate escape the facility using lengths of rope they've made from unpicking the woven hospital blankets. On Thanksgiving they prepare a meal, during which Cedar's teenage half-sister Little Mary comments on the pilgrims that have come to the reservation to pray to Lily of the Mohawks: 'Transcendence seekers have been passing through the reservation in tattered campers bearing Tibetan prayer flags. They are often looking for protection, or fleeing, and

have put a burden on the militia.'[24] Eddy, Cedar's step-father and Sweetie's depressive husband, insists that they won't feed the newcomers: '"We'll feed our elders, our children, and our warriors. Maybe not strictly traditional, but hey, learn from experience. First Thanksgiving, we ended up with our heads on pikes."'[25] Despite Eddy's cynicism the family do offer food to the pilgrims, and as Eddy predicted they are betrayed despite their goodwill when Cedar is kidnapped, validating Eddy's fear and mistrust of the invading outsiders. The scenario refers back to the original circumstances of the indigenous people's experience of the earlier apocalyptic event of European settlers' arrival.

The family had planned to send Cedar north into Canada, but she is by that point heavily pregnant and feels safer with her indigenous family in the contra-urban space of the reservation. Though she shares a room with her slovenly half-sister Little Mary, Cedar thinks: 'At the moment there is no place I would rather be. Though I am supposed to be moving somewhere else, probably farther north and safer.'[26] She resists going north because she feels at home on the rural reservation. 'North' and 'safety' are interlinked because Canada is presented as a sanctuary due to the vast wilderness of that country. Eddy tells Cedar: 'Canada still functions as an escape hatch in the roof of this country, though the fence is well guarded and people are constantly hunted down and returned.'[27] The latter part of this quote is reminiscent of slaves escaping the Antebellum South and being hunted in the American Free States and returned to enslavement. The wilderness offers escape, but not perhaps the level of imagined safety, as Eddy describes, linking the slave trade to the pursuit and oppressive control of women's bodies in the world of the novel. Canada's role as an escape hatch out of America is also reminiscent

[24] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 312.
[25] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 313.
[26] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 272.
[27] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 141.

of Atwood's depictions of Canada's wilderness as a site of safety for those fleeing Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*.[28]

Cedar's adoptive parents and Eddy intend to get Cedar away from cities, further away from the reservation where she is still in danger of discovery, and into a place where she will be isolated by wilderness and distance. Thinking about trying to stay, Cedar says to her birth mother Sweetie:

> I'm so big there's nowhere to really hide me. But are they looking? Does the tribal militia protect pregnant women? I want to stay right here. I don't want to go farther north. Right here is where I want to have my baby.[29]

Cedar's sense of how much she is in danger is stunted by her relief at escaping from a Womb Volunteer facility once, and her biological family's care for her. She feels secure on the reservation, ignoring the threat from new technologies that can turn on devices and video functions to record without the users' consent.

She wants to give birth on the reservation, envisioning a cyclical return to her indigenous family under the protection of the tribal militia which she believes, naively, can resist the heavily militarised, fundamentalist state. The colloquialism of her diary offers some productive ambiguity as 'have my baby' might imply the more common interpretation of giving birth, but also suggests Cedar's desire to continue to stay on the reservation, to keep 'having' her child on the reservation. 'Right here' also suggests not only that she wants to stay in the rural setting of the reservation, but that the location is 'right' and feels ideal to her: she is where she feels she ought to be. Cedar is not a particularly savvy protagonist, and the effect of the epistolary style is that the reader encounters Cedar's innermost conflicts and struggles about her child, her ancestry, and her sense of belonging to a place, which she begins to regain in her interactions with her birth family. She is pregnant with what might be one of the last

[28] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 1986 (London: Vintage, 2016); Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments*, (London: Vintage, 2020).
[29] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 4–5.

viable human children, and her diary expresses her sense of rebirth as she acquires another set of parents while she prepares to become one herself in a world where the continued existence of the human race as Homo sapiens is uncertain.

The rural space is no haven for Cedar to disappear into though, as we discover when she is kidnapped and returned to Minneapolis. Instead, the modernity perpetuated by cities and their associated connective infrastructures of highways and telecommunications networks pose a danger to the protagonists of both novels precisely because global capitalism has centred on urban development. Despite developments in connective infrastructures, which in the nineteenth century brought people into productive, engaged contact with their environments, twentieth and twenty-first century capitalist modernity is defined by an urbanism in which human rights are preserved in neither the urban nor the contra-urban domain due to the simultaneously connecting and isolating capacities of these symbolic and material infrastructures.

The production of the uncanny urban space has not yielded a deepening familiarity and identification with the rural, but rather a contra-urbanity, such that the wilderness becomes the not- urban, rather than its opposite. The pockets of human dwellings that form the rural such as the reservation in *Future Home*, or the one-horse towns Cole and Miles pass through in *Afterland*, are threatening in their relation to both the wilderness and the urban. Reproduction in the wilderness is a matter of survival, whereas in the rural space it is often fraught with the regressive politics of religion and patriarchal values, subject to the desperation of poverty, and governed by authorities that overwhelm the gestating person.

Given the premise of *Afterland,* Miles is an extremely valuable person, primarily for his sperm, which makes him vulnerable to exploitation. Cole tries to conceal his gender as they travel, hoping that his age will be sufficient to mask his gender and sex. On the road post-escape, although Miles can see Salt Lake City in the distance, Cole chooses to explore a gated

community for its possible advantages. They enter the gated community, and Miles is not pleased, drawn as previously noted to the promise of luxuries in the city. The gated community troubles Miles, the empty townhouses threatening in their unknowability. This is also the first time we learn that Miles needs to practice concealing his gender and sex:

> "But the city's right there!" he protests.
>
> "We're not ready for civilisation yet. We don't know what's out there. It could have been annexed by a colony of cannibal bikers who want to turn us into tasty, tasty human bacon."
>
> "Mom, shut up."
>
> "Okay, sorry. There are no cannibal bikers. I promise. I need to rest for a bit. And I want you to have time to practice being a girl."[30]

Miles' protestations emphasise his youth, while Cole's attempt at lightness suggests her sense of humour as well as her awareness of their shared tension. She tries to break the tension with the joke, to which Miles does not respond well. This interaction is the first of many in which Cole begins to learn to negotiate her quickly maturing son's emotional state even while trying to retain her parental authority and semblance of control over their situation. Miles is unwilling to stop in abandoned suburbia but understands the necessity of the break for his mother. Cole's reference to cannibal bikers betrays a dark humour, a trait common to all of Beukes' female protagonists. The reference alludes to traditional apocalyptic narratives of violent roving bands capturing people to consume them, as in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* or the *Mad Max* franchise.[31]

The third person narration in the chapters focalised through Miles expresses both the burgeoning maturity forced by circumstance and his oncoming puberty, as well as some inevitable childishness, particularly in imaginative play:

> Maybe one day people will come tour the ruin of this golf-estate town-house. And here, the guide will say, is the very house where the notorious outlaw Miles Carmichael-Brady, one of the last boys on earth, took shelter with his mom that

[30] Beukes, *Afterland*, 14.
[31] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006). *Mad Max* franchise, directed by George Miller, (Roadshow Entertainment and Warner Bros, 1979-2015).

> fateful day after busting out of a luxury bunker facility for men. The tourists will take their own happy snaps, and maybe there will be a commemorative plaque.'[32]

Miles's speculation about his historical relevance through playful self-mythologising as a 'notorious outlaw' is both a defence against the realities of his situation and a processing method. This narrated internal monologue is part of the novel's speculative mode because it is a world-building strategy, reinforcing that though luxurious, the Ataraxia bunker was a form of imprisonment from which they had to 'bust out'. The contra-urbanity of the gated community at which they arrive, formerly the terrain of the upper middle-class, is now uncanny – it has been abandoned by women who previously occupied it with partners and children.

The threats to bodily autonomy and reproductive rights that the speculative mode in *Future Home* and *Afterland* emphasises are the most urgent similarity, as the dystopias that emerge from these apocalyptic narratives are defined by the failures of social progress. This is despite the progress of modernity that rendered urban dwelling the preferred habitation mode for humanity. At issue here is the right to bodily autonomy for which the protagonists must go on the run, escaping the urban spaces in which they are in most danger, but finding themselves equally though differently exposed in the rural and wilderness locations they had hoped to disappear into. Longing for home in an apocalyptic world is doomed, and yet it is also the primary motivation for the protagonists' movement towards and through the natural world. These novels are located primarily in American suburbs, connecting interstates, and rural backwaters. Each focuses the reader's attention on biological disasters that emphasise how reproductive rights in twenty-first century America are representative of conditions of inequality sustained primarily by capitalism. These texts present not only the post-apocalyptic, but the present-apocalyptic conditions of a catastrophe as it happens.

Driving home from the reservation, Cedar arrives back in Minneapolis, the empty city uncanny and troubling. The neighbourhood, and likely the whole city, is without power and

[32] Beukes, *Afterland*, 21.

Cedar feels disquiet on the roads as she drives in 'the stillness of an ancient dream, the muted perfection of a "before" disaster photograph.' [33] She perceives the time of her pregnancy as the calm before a kind of storm brought about by evolution's disruption. Poised on the edge of the abyss of human civilisation, Cedar imagines the evolutionary reversal as the 'future that haunts us now.'[34] To be haunted by the future is to imagine spectral future possibilities in the present; in this case Cedar feels that the city is haunted by the forthcoming return of pre-historic humanoid and other species.

The imagined future of pre-historic humans roaming our urban sites looms spectrally over the events of the novel's present, and the seeming solidity of the present dissolves under the pressure of the palimpsestic quality of time in the novel. Cedar experiences the absence of people, the overlay of the catastrophe on what are otherwise ordinary circumstances, as uncanny. She mediates the disaster through imagined photography, conjuring before and after images of the oncoming catastrophe. Through her diary and imagining photographic representations of the coming end of Homo sapiens' dominance of the planet, she records the months before the consequences of the biological disaster truly take effect. Her diary is as much a record of the apocalypse and her pregnancy as it is a critique of the value given to particular kinds of human knowledge over others.

Creating a sense that geography is a constitutive part of time, these novels disrupt the notion that time is linear, rejecting the telos implied by de Cristofaro in her articulation of Apocalypse America. The future primitive species anticipated in Cedar's diary and her hopeful expectations for this new beginning disrupt the teleology of progress and perfectibility in colonial and expansionist discourses. Cedar finds a kind of pessimistic hope in imagining different ways that humanoid species might occupy the planet:

[33] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 79.
[34] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 79.

> If it is true that every particle that I can see and not see, and all that is living and perhaps unliving too, is trimming its sails and coming about and heading back to port, what does that mean? Where are we bound? Is it any different, in fact, from where we were going in the first place?[35]

Imagining evolution as a boat turning around similarly evokes the earliest iterations of colonial exploration by sea, interpolating that process with the incorrect presumption that evolution functions in a linear manner.[36] The idea that we are 'bound' or 'going' in any particular direction implies Cedar's sense of linearity in evolution, and the revolution in that thinking made possible by the meta-narrative poetics of the novel's speculative mode.[37] Conflating the imagined destination of linear evolution with the consequences of the end of the human species, Cedar projects the chaos of the present into the imagined future, implying that disaster was inevitable one way or another. Through Cedar's reflections on folding time and evolution's disruption, the novel implies paradoxically that evolutionary progress and evolutionary chaos will have the same outcome.

Connective infrastructures and the contra-urban

The threat of the urban space in contemporary apocalypse fictions drives characters into rural spaces, as they seek safety in the presumed lack of threatening others. This is apparent in the attempts made to escape or avoid cities in other recent apocalypse novels such as Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), Edan Lepucki's *California* (2014), Ling Ma's *Severance* (2018), and perhaps the most famous of contemporary apocalypse novels, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006).[38] Inevitably the protagonists of these novels encounter unknown and

[35] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 16.
[36] Consider that while evolution is considered a progressive adaptation of organisms, that adaptation isn't linear: we might imagine evolution not as progressively improving, but as progressively experimenting. This idea is popularised by evolutionary biologist Stephen J. Gould, who compares evolution to a bush rather than a tree. Stephen J. Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (London: Belknap, 2002).
[37] It's worth noting that 'bound' is also a contronym, meaning both 'to go somewhere' and 'to be tied down'.
[38] Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven* (London: Picador, 2014); Edan Lepucki, *California* (London: Abacus, 2014); Ma, *Severance* (Melbourne Text Publishing Company, 2018); McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

unsuspected dangers posed to them by fellow humans, who have developed cult-like organisations in the wilderness. The connective infrastructures of highways and technologies sustain the dangers to autonomy posed by modernity's symbolic entities.

Driving across America following their escape from a military bunker near Seattle, Cole looks out at the landscape, longing for 'home':

> In the early morning light, the highway is a grey canyon swipe through the salt flats crossing into Utah, craggy mountains reflected in the water, eerily similar to the Karoo, that long arid stretch on the drive from Johannesburg to Cape Town. Wild wests and savage lands, hostile alien territory where anything might happen. Landscape you can project yourself into, or disappear in, Cole thinks.[39]

Cole's reflection in this excerpt on the similarities of the American desert plain and South Africa's semi-desert Karoo are inflected by an expansionism prevalent in colonialist discourse. The wilderness is a 'wild west' and a 'savage land,' cut through by the highway, a promise of urban so-called civilisation. 'Wild' and 'savage' connote the untamed wilderness, the existence of a landscape not yet subject to human intervention described as 'alien territory.' The production of the unknowable other in the landscape, the land and territory being the domain of the alien or savage, implies possession of the land, whereas indigenous views entail a more complex expression of land relationships that do not imply exploitation or legal ownership.

The highway that cuts through it all reminds the reader, and Cole herself, that the landscape has been tampered with: this symbol of urbanism in the wilderness produces a contra-urbanity in the landscape. The highway represents connection and distance, between physical places and also between people and the spaces they inhabit. The novels highlight the uncanny, paradoxical duality of contra-urban spaces, focussing in particular on the potential threat to reproductive freedoms. They use symbols of techno-social progress to highlight the fragility of bodily autonomy under apocalyptic conditions. For Cole and Miles, the highway offers escape and self-determination, but it also connects sites of danger, and poses danger

[39] Beukes, *Afterland*, 98.

itself, implied in Cole's reflection on the 'alien' territory of the desert made knowable only by the connecting infrastructure of the highway.[40]

In his influential exploration of the effect of changing urban infrastructure on the emergence of modernity in the last two centuries, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), Marshall Berman describes connective infrastructure as symbolic of a period's urbanism:

> The distinctive sign of nineteenth century urbanism was the boulevard, a medium for bringing explosive material and human forces together; the hallmark of twentieth century urbanism has been the highway, a means for putting them asunder.[41]

The highway for Berman is a twentieth century symbol of expanding urbanism that yields a separation between forces that might have been social catalysts. On the one hand, the boulevard forces interaction between people and their lived environment, and Berman gives the example of Baudelaire's modernism represented in the figure of the flâneur who ambles through the city, observing all. Boulevards, specifically those in Paris, made this ambulatory perception possible. On the other hand, the highway 'puts asunder' the forces that brought people and circumstances together, and in this Berman uses the American example of the highway. Its prevalence is due in part to the inexorable march of capitalist urban development, under which the car became the primary mode of transport in the twentieth century and determined the construction of highways across America. In a car, one interacts neither with one's fellow citizens, nor with the built environment and infrastructure. Driving from Johannesburg to Cape Town, to which Beukes' character Cole likens the experience of traversing America, was made possible in the last century by the advent of highways, these vast countries being otherwise desperately difficult to negotiate and navigate geographically.

[40] I take Marshall Berman's sense of connective infrastructure and expand it to include the connective networks of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that characterise urban modernity. These refer to those technological developments which determine how a society is physically connected, e.g., highways and telecommunications.
[41] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 1982 (London: Verso, 2010), 165.

Highways are often subject to the metaphor of arteries: they are connected to the heart (of the city) but are not strictly part of the heart itself. If the highway is an artery and cities are metaphorised as hearts, we might imagine a given geographical region as the rest of the body. The relationship established between the city and the country, or the city and its broader geographical region, is complicated by this anatomical comparison. Reproduction, for instance, looms symbolically in the image of the highway, the arteries which convey blood both around the body and to the foetus. The highway/artery comparison implies the export of modernity through connective infrastructures. As Berman convincingly argues, drawing on the separation of people by vehicular transport, the highways are both connective infrastructure and reproductive of modernity, while being simultaneously isolating.

The promenading promised by the boulevards of the nineteenth century made interaction on the street inevitable, and explosive, Berman suggests. His analogy of this interaction as explosive casts light on his perception of urban catalysts, encounters with ungraspable others with whom one must consistently negotiate interactions and spaces. As a result of this catalyst quality, the person on the street is compelled to consider themselves always amongst a crowd, rather than isolated from unknown others. These catalysts of material and human forces were constrained in the twentieth century by class delineation through motor vehicle ownership, as well as the proliferation of lone travellers on the highway, cut off from interaction with their immediate neighbours.[42] Bringing Berman's argument into conversation with Anthony Vidler's sense of the urban as a series of bibliographic networked connections described in the introduction, we find that connecting infrastructures in the twenty-first century step off the city street and into the hands and homes of citizens, as telecommunications networks make connections between people possible while interaction with both built and

[42] The first interstate infrastructure built in America was the Arroyo Secco Freeway connecting Pasadena with downtown Los Angeles in 1940. In 1956 Dwight D. Eisenhower signed in the Federal-Aid Highway Act, making interstate highways commonplace across the USA.

natural environments is sidelined. Material catalysts have much less of a role to play in social relations while technology and connective infrastructures between urban centres paradoxically separate and connect individuals across time and space.

The highway in *Afterland* engages a paradox of distance and connection, as the focalisation through Cole permits a comparison of how different settler communities distribute connective infrastructures to manage and often restrain a region's wilderness. Casting both forward and backward in *Afterland,* the landscape that the highway traverses is described in terms that recall both European expansion in North America and the concomitant perception of indigenous peoples as 'savage.' This conception is similarly represented in discourses that supported colonial expansionism in Southern Africa where indigenous peoples were dehumanised and, in some cases, almost completely wiped out.[43] In colonialists' dehumanising discourse, indigenous people were identified with the landscape, a process which the invading colonisers used to justify projecting of themselves onto and into the landscape as frontiers men in a terra nullius.

In Beukes' novel the highway across America's Great Salt Lake Desert makes it possible for Cole and Miles to traverse the vast expanse on their way to safety. The highway does not however allow them to access the wilderness on either side of it; rather, it impedes their access to the wilderness that might have provided genuine sanctuary, quite literally off the beaten track. Cole imagines that she and her son could disappear into such a landscape and thus find refuge and safety in it. However, they cannot disappear into it as they are bound to keep to the infrastructure that defines how they traverse the continent. These transport choices made for them by twentieth-century infrastructural planning both give them a route for escape

[43] The so-called 'forgotten genocide' against the Herero and Namaqua people by German colonial forces in 1904-07 almost completely annihilated the tribes that inhabited German Southwest Africa, present-day Namibia. Further south the Khoi-San people were treated inhumanely and enslaved by colonial settlers, and have since been amalgamated into the broader racial category of Coloured people, who trace their racial heritage from Afrikaner invaders, Malaysian slaves, Khoi-San slaves, and the isiXhosa people.

and constrict how they can imagine their escape from and in America. As a 'swipe' through the landscape, the highways are symbolic of the modernity that connects urban spaces, functioning as arteries that control movement through the wilderness, and which produce rurality in the interstices between cities and that 'alien territory' of the desert. It is in these descriptions of the contra-urban spaces that Beukes is at her most literary, her descriptions of landscapes evoking the isolation and fear that infuse the novel with its productive tensions.

The geographical wildernesses in *Afterland* are spaces onto which people have projected themselves since the advent of colonialism. Colonial invaders treat the Utah salt desert as terra nullius, and, likewise, the Karoo. Both were originally inhabited by indigenous peoples. The name for that semi-desert area in South Africa is taken from the Khoi-San /Xam word meaning 'Land of Thirst,' in reference to the area's lengthy droughts. The San people spoke various dialects of the indigenous /Xam language in this area of Southern Africa before they fatally encountered the Cape Dutch settlers in the seventeenth century. Similarly, the Great Salt Lake Desert of Utah was previously occupied by Ute tribes, the descendants of whom are now largely confined to the Uintah and Ouray Reservation south-east of Salt Lake City. It is this latter desert space upon which Cole looks in *Afterland*, imagining it as a space into which one might disappear as a possible way to protect her son's reproductive rights. The novel's plot keeps the pair moving across the landscape, through Salt Lake City and on to other rural American spaces on their way to the coast.

At its heart *Afterland* is an adventure thriller, including the stock character of a drug magnate, traditional horror-style gore in the form of Billie's weeping head wound, and the race against time to evade capture and escape both a place and a social system. The cross-continental chase that forms the novel's plot could be written for any characters in any number of contexts without the inclusion of the novel's speculative conceit. However, what drives the action of the novel is Miles' reproductive autonomy, which is threatened by the military-establishment's

desire to possess him as a resource and test-subject. This fuels Cole's certainty that her son will not be able to determine his own reproductive future if they remain in America. Why she thinks this will be different in South Africa is not explained.

Reproductive autonomy drives the action of Erdrich's novel, which also uses the intermingling of the everyday and the speculative to yield an aesthetic of disruption, achieved in *Future Home* through the epistolary form. Under the apocalypse conditions of these two novels, characters experience threats to their bodily autonomy in cities and attempt to escape to contra-urban locations supposing these will be safer. Instead, they find that they are pursued to and in these sites of presumed safety, their flight made possible and then impossible by the infrastructure of highways and telecommunications technologies which lead their pursuers to them. The mechanisms that halt their flight are often side-effects of a tenuous modernity in which 'to be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction.'[44] The paradox of modernity in both novels is that written and technological communications connect them while also threatening their autonomy, just as the highways provide a means of escape that is consistently denied by the very modernity of the contra-urban space.

In *Afterland* Miles shares images on social media app Snapchat that lead his bounty-hunting aunt Billie to him and his mother. Using a borrowed mobile phone, he films the Garden of Gilgal, a sculpture park in Salt Lake City, 'hiding behind the camera.'[45] The reader must infer the irony of this as Miles then uploads his images to Snapchat, hoping that his friend back at the military facility will see them, though he knows 'she'll almost certainly never see them, because she doesn't have internet and his account is set to private, but it makes him feel better knowing that she might.'[46] He is 'hiding' in plain sight, inadvertently putting himself and his mother in danger through this act of self-expression. Miles wants to feel comforted by

[44] Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 13.
[45] Beukes, *Afterland*, 108.
[46] Beukes, *Afterland*, 109.

connecting with his friend, but when sharing the images, he forgets that his aunt Billie follows his account. She does see the footage and uses the images to trace the mother and son's route. Miles' self-expression using connective technologies increases the threat to his autonomy, though the creative act provides some small comfort.

In *Future Home*, telecommunications technology seemingly takes on a life of its own when Cedar's television and computer spontaneously turn on to reveal a propaganda figurehead called Mother, who encourages Cedar to turn herself in at a Womb Volunteer facility. While working on her laptop one day Cedar's screen is filled involuntarily with the spectre of the Mother, who shares this ominous message:

> "I wonder if you have the courage to save the country we love. We need you to be a Patriot. We need you to volunteer. If you are a woman, if you are pregnant, go to any of our Future Home Reception Centres. WV. Our chefs are waiting for you!"[47]

While the conclusion of this message suggests that the women will be well fed, the ominous tone suggests a more sinister, cannibalistic intention. This message from Mother invites women to submit their bodies to medical reproductive intervention for the good of the nation. 'Mother' invokes an American nationalist rhetoric in the appeal to women's 'courage' to 'save the country we love.' The individual 'you' must self-sacrifice as a Womb Volunteer for the benefit of the greater, national 'we.' The volunteering aspect is actively ambiguous: as the plot develops we discover that the facilities are hastily repurposed prisons, the so-called 'volunteer' work often fatal as the birthing of evolutionary throwbacks proves extremely dangerous to the human mother.

The Mother is a propaganda figure for the recently established Church of the New Constitution, which Cedar discovers is 'calling in drone strikes on the basis of voice and facial recognition, so people are holed up anywhere there is a tunnel system,' from a conversation with her adoptive mother Sera later in the novel.[48] Cedar's pursuers use technology to stake

[47] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 113.
[48] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 280.

her out and thus intrude on her privacy while she waits out her pregnancy. Through a truly twenty-first century intersection of connective infrastructures that typify urban life moving from the twentieth century into the twenty-first, the highway that leads to the reservation and the ubiquity of mobile technologies, Cedar is eventually recaptured and imprisoned in the facility where she gives birth and will likely be interred until death.

Paradox and contradiction define the relationship between the urban and the contra-urban, as well as the interstitial semi-urban spaces around them: slums, suburbs, and the highways that lead towards the surrounding wilderness. These spaces of paradox inflect the speculative mode of these two novels as the physical landscapes in turn shape the experiences of the protagonists as they struggle to survive apocalyptic circumstances. Berman views the highway as symbolic of twentieth century urbanism because in his view it acts as a connector that wrenches asunder catalysts that might otherwise interact productively. The highway's seemingly contradictory situation, as a connector of urban spaces as well as a representative of the contra-urban, is symbolic of the paradox of modernity with which these novels engage. Contra-urbanity sustains the urban in its very name, while indicating an alternative in its prefix.

Writing these contra-urban spaces as sites connected to and inseparable from threatening urban modernity, Erdrich and Beukes both resist an urban/wilderness binary. In the speculative mode, these texts depict reproductive interventionist strategies by the state as dystopian in apocalyptic circumstances. Similarly, through writing, photography, and art, the protagonists in both novels resist threats to their autonomy by asserting their personhood through creative acts. These novels crystalise speculation as a viable paradigm for literary resistance by re-imagining real-world problems of violent reproductive intervention through the formal disruption of speculative imaginaries.

The crises that give rise to the reproductive catastrophes in these novels imply a dystopic present: the novels begin *in media res*; characters find themselves struggling to resist

authoritarian constraints and threats; and governmental controls subvert human rights, in particular reproductive rights. Placing the sanctity of bodily autonomy, one of the most contentious issues in contemporary American public discourse, at the heart of these narratives draws a necessary critical attention to reproductive rights, an attention which engages with and challenges conceptions of modernity and the myth of progress in the context of individual freedoms. Characters' quests for self-determination and autonomy in the face of urban threat and rural chaos highlight the discourses of reproductive rights in America in the twenty-first century, and speak to these novels antecedents as well.

The influence of utopian and dystopian fiction from the 1970s and 1980s on these two novels is unmistakable, many of the tropes being derived or adapted from the works of Marge Piercy, Octavia E. Butler, Joanna Russ, and Margaret Atwood. Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) for example is a cornerstone of the 1970s utopian feminist fiction movement.[49] Russ' novel depicts four women encountering one another across time and space as they learn about different approaches to gender and challenge one another's assumptions about gender roles and traditions. Butler's novels are equally significant, particularly the *Xenogenesis/Lillith's Brood* trilogy, which explores the consequences of combining human and alien genetics, asking readers at what point a human stops being a human and becomes something else.[50] Piercy's depictions of mental health asylums and the forced testing conducted on women of colour in the 1970s in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976)[51] seem a direct inspiration for Erdrich's imagined Womb Volunteer facilities where Cedar is eventually imprisoned and forced into a 'breeder' role under the Christian authoritarian government.

[49] For more on the Feminist utopian fiction from the 1970s, Angelika Bammer's *Partial Visions* is the primary text for analysis of the texts and clear discussion of the context of the period that gave rise to novels such as *The Female Man* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*. It was republished in 2015.
Bammer, Angelika, *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s*, 1991 (Peter Lang: Bern, 2015).
[50] Octavia E. Butler, *Lillith's Brood*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000).
[51] Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, 1976 (London: Del Rey, 2016).

Erdrich's and Beukes' explorations of power through dystopian fictions centre on the protagonists' escapes from the urban space as expressions of desire for survival, and the ubiquity of capital and corruption that limits protagonists' chances at self-determination. In this way Beukes and Erdrich present creativity, particularly writing and reading, as redemptive methods by which we might resist dystopian despair. The act of creativity in these novels is the utopian impulse in practice, just as these novels are themselves representative of the novelists' own utopian dreams.

Resistance in Writing and Reading

Opening *Weak Planet* (2020), a diverse foray into the capacities for resilience and vulnerability exposited by literary texts, Wai Chee Dimock argues that 'ecological disruptions have been part of human life for centuries,' referring the reader to 'casualties from European colonialism' which in particular had a significant death toll across the two American continents.[52] These, Dimock argues 'changed the earth's climate, making adaptation and experimentation key to indigenous survival.'[53] Erdrich's oeuvre is an example of a literary representation of these kinds of survival strategies, both in the content of her novels, and in their very existence as texts that demand an acknowledgement of indigenous peoples' contributions to art and culture.

Dimock writes that literature has much to offer in the way of explicating and representing indigenous peoples' and endangered populations' efforts 'to avoid paralysis, to stay in the fray against all odds.'[54] Paralysis in this instance speaks quite specifically to cultural stasis engineered by oppression, while Dimock's phrasing gestures to the sometimes quite literal fights that indigenous peoples must enter to retain ownership of their cultural heritage

[52] Wai Chee Dimock, *Weak Planet*: *Literature and Assisted Survival* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 10.
[53] Dimock, *Weak Planet*, 10.
[54] Dimock, *Weak Planet*, 10.

and to protect land of which they have historically been custodians.[55] Literary texts as art forms are both politically invested in this resistance, while simultaneously being cultural artefacts. Erdrich engages this idea of the written word as a form of resistance in *Future Home* through the epistolary form and in the novel's very existence.

Cedar's reflection that the world ends with 'everything crazy yet people doing normal things' evokes Dimock's expression of the apocalyptic conditions that have been the consequence of colonialism, and the circumstances of post-colonialism since the advent of expansionism for capital gain. Ecological disruption is as much a question of human population as it is of the climate crisis on the natural environment.[56] Adaptation and experimentation for indigenous survival as advocated for by Dimock can also function as resistance through a critique of a modernity bound up in the theft and inequitable distribution of physical space as in the case of the parcelling out of indigenous land in North America.

Through the specific instances of critical irrealism in the speculative mode focusing on apocalyptic imaginaries, these novels present the co-creative act of writing and reading the contra-urban space as a mode of resistance which particularly emphasises the threat to bodily autonomy of a parasitical capitalist modernity. These texts draw out the similarities between the act of writing and physical reproduction. The creative act brings a new world view into being, just as the reproductive act brings a new human being, with their unique perspective, into the world. Reproductive dystopias have traditionally engaged with the power of writing for self-assertion and eventual radical resistance, perhaps most famously in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).[57] Offred discovers a previous tenant's injunction 'Nolite te bastardes carborundorum' scratched into the base of a cupboard, despite Gilead's attempts to keep the

[55] The resistance against the Dakota Pipeline project is an example of one such fight.
[56] Amitav Ghosh argues in *The Great Derangement* that we can no longer presume a separate distinction of human beings from non-human animals in our reflection on the effect of our species on the planet.
Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
[57] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985 (London: Vintage, 2016)

handmaids illiterate.[58] The will to represent oneself through words and the desire to assert one's physical agency are imbricated with one another as creative acts that co-construct the world anew.

The safety of characters in both novels depends on their being free from the impositions of others' wills, their bodily autonomy being presumed more likely to be unimpeached if they are at home. For Cedar, Sweetie's reservation becomes the contra-urban home to which she tries to escape, and beyond that the further promise of the Canadian wilderness. Beukes' protagonist Cole longs for the freedom she imagines possible in South Africa if they can escape the American authorities and her bounty-hunting sister, Billie. The promise of a safe, imagined 'home' and the concomitant opportunity to determine one's bodily autonomy are conceptually challenged and eventually denied by the networks of modernity, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Future Home is the only novel in Erdrich's oeuvre that is dystopian, inspired by the threats she perceived to women's rights in the outcomes of the 2000 and 2016 American elections. Devolution is dystopian in this novel, as Erdrich makes the reversal of human evolution as much political and social as it is biological. Novelist and critic Anita Felicelli notes in her review in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* that this is one of Erdrich's most accessible novels, narrated as it is in Cedar's colloquial diary.[59] The optimism and caustic humour in Cedar's diary entries written to her unborn child imbue the novel with a hope that becomes increasingly utopian in its impossibility.

Catherine Rainwater notes of Erdrich's early work that the author's interest in marginalised or outsider characters is founded in the opportunity to explore how 'marginal status is simultaneously an advantage and a disadvantage, a source of both power and

[58] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 62.
[59] Anita Felicelli, "Louise Erdrich's Dystopian Dreams in *Future Home of the Living God*," in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, published online on 12 December 2017, accessed on 20 January 2021 from https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/louise-erdrichs-dystopian-dreams-in-future-home-of-the-living-god/

powerlessness.'[60] This holds true of Erdrich's enduring thematic concerns thirty years after Rainwater first wrote about the author's interest in indigenous identity and hybridity. In *Future Home*, Cedar struggles with her identity as an adoptee, being a half-indigenous woman, and her late conversion to Catholicism. Each of these identity markers influence her response to her pregnancy and the measures she takes to protect herself and her child. Cedar's experiences of being adopted by white liberals, finding her birth family at age twenty-six, having recently conceived, and witnessing the devolution of nature over a period of six months, are narrated through her diary.

The pregnancy is itself apocalyptic, as it will change Cedar's life forever, entirely altering her and her interaction with the world. The socio-political regression in human rights, tolerance, inclusivity, and religious freedoms depicted in the novel is prompted by the biological devolution, thus contrasting Cedar's pregnancy, identity, and liberal way of life with the authoritarian control of reproduction instigated by the Church of the New Constitution and symbolised by the ominous authoritarian Mother in the novel. The unbidden appearance of the Mother on Cedar's electronic devices occurs during a forced isolation in her home to hide her pregnancy and thus, ironically, to retain her freedom of movement. The casting of the maternal figure as both resistance fighter (in the character of Cedar) and as a propaganda agent for a theocratic Christian fundamentalist government (the Mother figure) must shape the reader's perception of reproduction and the way it relates to nation-building, regionalism, and human progress.

Reproduction becomes not only the act of incubating and birthing offspring, but also the act of incubating and birthing ideas. Creative work is another kind of social reproduction which makes it possible for us to continue on despite the myriad trials of living in capitalist

[60] Catherine Rainwater, "Reading Between Worlds: Narrativity in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich," *American Literature*, vol. 62, no. 3 (Sep., 1990): 405.

modernity. These texts perform a meta-narrative double function as objects that creatively offer reproductive recovery through readerly engagement with critical dissent against capitalism's ubiquity, and as novels that represent this social reproduction in in-text creative acts. I understand these acts as social reproduction following theorist of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) Tithi Bhattacharya's urging to consider not only who does unpaid care labour (following socialist feminist discourses proposed by the likes of Lisa Vogel), but also what conditions are necessary to enable the worker to work, including in this the social care of public health provision, public transport, parks and personal relationships.[61] Approaching the same topic from the angle of neoliberal capitalist operations in conversation with Sarah Leonard, Nancy Fraser articulates her crisis of care thesis that the financialisation of neoliberal capitalism means that workers are too exhausted to care for one another. This, Fraser suggests leads to increasingly estranged societies under which care is withheld and the system puts itself at risk of collapse by limiting the care capacities of individual workers.[62] In the last five years SRT has gained traction as theorists articulate the paradox of relations between social labour and capitalism. Susan Ferguson notes that Social Reproduction Feminism is a loosely defined school of feminism that 'identified and developed the political insight that the social labours involved in producing this and the next generation of workers sit in *a necessary but contradictory relation* to the capitalist drive to produce and accumulate surplus value.'[63] This contradictory relation emerges out of the position of reproductive labour as a vanguard against capitalism and as a site of resistant protest. The creative act detailed in the novels as modes of

[61] Tithi Bhattacharya, "Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, edited by Tithi Bhattacharya, (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 1–20.
[62] Nancy Fraser and Sarah Leonard, "Capitalism's Crisis of Care," in *Dissent Magazine*, published in 2016, accessed on 29 September 2022 from https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/nancy-fraser-interview-capitalism-crisis-of-care
[63] Susan Ferguson, "Social Reproduction: What's the Big Idea?" on the *Pluto Press Blog*, published in 2017 and accessed on 29 September 2022 from https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/social-reproduction-theory-ferguson/#_ednref1, n.pg.

resistance represent exactly this kind of contradictory position, resisting capitalism even as the novels themselves are commodities mediated in the market.

In an interview conducted by Margaret Atwood, Erdrich explains to Atwood that she 'wrote obsessively in Cedar's voice', responding with despair to the election of George W. Bush in 2000 and her perception of the devolution of women's reproductive rights.[64] She set the novel down for sixteen years, writing, amongst others, her Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Plague of Doves* in the interim. After the 2016 American election, she returned to *Future Home of the Living God*, telling Atwood that the loss of the elegance and thoughtfulness of the Obamas in the White House made her 'need' the story of Cedar again:

> I like remembering when our leaders made us look good. But we have a tendency to regress after we move forward. I picked up *Future Home of the Living God* again, after the 2016 election, because I needed Cedar. Maybe I'm writing the biological equivalent of our present political mess.[65]

This interest in political regression is replicated in the evolutionary regression in the novel. Erdrich extrapolates this in her depiction of the rise of a Christian fundamentalist government in America, which coincides with the enslavement of fertile or pregnant women as breeders.[66] Paradoxically, while Erdrich grieves the real-world political and social regression in the United States, her protagonist Cedar finds the evolutionary regression natural and perhaps inevitable. She tries to speak to her adoptive parents about her deep-time perspective and her hope for her child, writing: 'they aren't going to understand on a visceral level, the way timeless time got to me when I looked at you on an ultrasound screen. They aren't going to see you into that measureless dimension.'[67] Here she conceives of another life form 'seeing into' time, as though to acknowledge another fully, we must locate them not only in space, but also time. The

[64] Margaret Atwood and Louise Erdrich, "Inside the Dystopian Visions of Atwood and Erdrich," in *ELLE magazine*, published on 14 November 2017, accessed on 19 October 2020 from: https://www.elle.com/culture/books/a13530871/future-home-of-the-living-god-louise-erdrich-interview/
[65] Atwood and Erdrich, "Inside the Dystopian Visions," n.pg.
[66] Donald Trump's defunding of Planned Parenthood is a real-world example of Erdrich's fictional speculation about the effects of a nationalist American government.
[67] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 77.

measureless dimension of time offers hope to Cedar while her adoptive family despairs at the impending losses of art and the 'end of science.'[68] For Cedar these are not achievements that justify the persistence of the species, and in this perspective, she portrays a deep cynicism about the value of modernity and human civilisation as we know it.

Time as a non-linear dimension becomes crucial to our reading of Cedar's diary, as she contemplates the devolutionary processes taking place in the biological world. She considers whether the development of human levels of intelligence could be a 'maladaptation, a wrong turn, an aberration,' imagining that a different apex species might better deserve this planet.[69] While she is aware that the idea of human intelligence as an aberration should cause her some distress, her pregnancy gives her hope: 'perhaps because I am carrying you, little baby, I can't seem to feel the level of consternation that this news causes everyone else.'[70] Cedar has hope for the future of the planet, whatever its apex species. Her pregnancy makes her consider whether human beings are in fact the best custodians of the planet. Custodianship in this instance recalls the Judeo-Christian God gifting the world into Adam and Eve's care, following their acquisition of human consciousness and self-awareness. Cedar's religious musings permeate the novel as she struggles through different ideas about what might be taking place:

> Perhaps the spark of divinity, which we experience as consciousness, is being reabsorbed into the boundless creativity of seething opportunistic life. A great wish courses through me. I am curious with desire. I want to see past my lifetime, past yours, into exactly what the palaeontologists says will not exist: the narrative. I want to see the story. More than anything, I am frustrated by the fact that I'll never know how things turn out.[71]

Here Cedar's diary betrays an authorial consciousness as she longs to know what any reader longs to know: what happens next? Paradoxically she imagines a conclusion to this chaos, articulating this wish as a desire for 'the narrative.' She resists the scientists' view that

[68] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 78.
[69] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 72
[70] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 73.
[71] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 84–5.

evolutionary chaos will mean the end of consciousness and persists in a belief that there is an explanation, a narrative, that will illuminate the chaos, and that there will be a human mind capable of perceiving this narrative in the distant future. She articulates the evolutionary chaos of the novel's speculative conceit as a kind of divine punishment, implying that human beings are not worthy of consciousness. Being pregnant, Cedar is optimistic about the future of the earth despite the chaos of a world thrown into an uncertain evolutionary trajectory. She considers that the progress which human beings have made might be an evolutionary mistake, corrected by a reabsorption in the 'boundless creativity of seething opportunistic life.' Cedar's reflection is presented in contradiction to the fears that she encounters from her adoptive mother Sera as well as the news media about the great works of art and literature that will be lost as a consequence of the devolution of the species.

The television station that Cedar's family watches shows graphics about the evolutionary chaos, which include: 'humanoid figures growing hunched as they walked into the mists of time, while in the background Beethoven's Fifth Symphony dissolves into a haunting series of hoots and squawks.'[72] The devolution of music into hoots and squawks represents the fear of the loss of the power of artistic creation, while the upright human figure loses its posture as the 'mists of time' encroach upon it, a visual reversal of the Evolution of Man image. The fear of losing evolutionary, cultural, and technological progress is represented by the corrosive 'mist' that the past, seemingly revisited upon the future, holds in store. These fears reveal the growing power of the racist fundamentalist government as the news reports about the crisis coincide with the gradual disappearance of people of colour from the television and media that Cedar encounters. Racial hegemony is important to the new Christian fundamentalist government that takes over the fictionalised America, indicating the initial regression of social inclusivity at the outset of the biological disaster.

[72] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 66.

Prior to this we learn about Cedar's childhood and her privileged upbringing, which are complicated by her father's infidelities and her adoptive mother's love. This is what motivates Sera to break Cedar out of the first of the WV facilities and assist her to escape north to the reservation, with the intention of disappearing into the Canadian wilderness. The role of the mother in this case becomes ambiguous as Sera is Cedar's 'mom' while Sweetie is one of her biological parents. Cedar's struggle to come to terms with these two identities plagues her at the outset but as she struggles against the state's attempts to curtail her bodily freedoms, she finds herself better able to accept the multiplicities of her identity, focussing her attention on protecting her own unborn, mixed-race child.

Cedar's adoption by white Minneapolis liberals, whose surname Songmaker is of British origin, is ambiguously legal, and it is later revealed that she is in fact her adoptive father's biological daughter by her indigenous mother, Mary Potts, nicknamed Sweetie. Cedar points out the irony of her naming at the outset of the novel. Her white liberal parents gave her names taken from nature: Cedar Hawk, while all of the women in her indigenous genetic line are given the plain and nature-uninspired name of Mary Potts. Cedar is disappointed to learn that she is not special, having previously been exoticised by both her parents and her peers, amongst whom she is revered: 'Native girl! Indian princess!' She records how she was supposed by peers and family to have 'a hotline to nature' and that '[m]y observations on birds, bugs, worms, clouds, cats and dogs, were quoted.'[73]

Contradictory to her expectations and to her self- and familial-mythologisation, when she is contacted by her biological mother, she discovers:

> I was even more ordinary than I'd felt myself to be in college. My family had no special powers or connections with healing spirits or sacred animals. We weren't even poor. We were bourgeois. We owned a Superpumper. I was Mary Potts, daughter and granddaughter of Mary Potts, big sister to another Mary Potts, in short, just another of many Mary Potts reaching back to the colonisation of this

[73] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 5.

> region, many of whom now worked at the Superpumper franchise first stop before the casino.[74]

Cedar's experience in college is typical of mixed-culture people, caught as she is between worlds, unable to identify linguistically with the other indigenous students, and profoundly upper-middle class as a result of her upbringing, awed into inconsequence by her indigenous peers' tales of addictions and suicides. She is no longer considered a princess with a connection to nature, and this disconnection is sustained when, at the age of twenty-six, she makes contact with her birth mother and is disappointed by her commonplace heritage in the long line of women named Mary Potts. She mourns the lack of powers or connection to nature that are part of the exoticised view of indigenous peoples, despite the fact that these stereotypes are imbricated with the history of America's colonisation.

The Superpumper from which her indigenous family derive a living is a petrol and convenience store stop, usually stocked by Shell gasoline in the United States. It plays a crucial role in the latter part of the novel when Cedar is evading capture by state authorities who wish to study her pregnancy and enslave her as a breeder. The Superpumper is symbolic of America's dependence on oil and makes her family complicit in this dependence. Cedar's idea of her indigenous parents is shattered by the revelation of their bourgeois lifestyle and their main occupation, the Superpumper, a polar opposite to the 'in touch with nature' stereotype that she had associated with indigenous people.

Erdrich's de-exoticising of indigenous life has long been a hallmark of her work. She draws out the realities of life on the reservations: the poverty, the lack of education, and the social disregard that indigenous communities experience at the hands of nearby white communities. In this way she raises the profile of America's colonisation and the ongoing effects thereof, heightening awareness of America's history as a settler state.

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[74] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 6.

Under the conditions of an apocalyptic revision of time, *Future Home* speculates about the possibilities of revising imperial time not as far back as the pre-colonial period, but further, pre-historic animals returning and common animals dying out while human beings' own newly-born offspring present pre-human traits. This revision of time in the present day of the novel rejects the myth of progress and notions of teleological time. Cedar's narration through the diary form attempts to force linearity onto circumstances that defy temporal constraints. The reversal of evolution in the novel revises the stranglehold that America's colonial operations of power has sustained through the imposition of imperial time over indigenous people and the natural world. De Cristofaro notes that *Future Home* 'frustrates this desire for an apocalyptic sense of an ending.'[75] Even as Cedar longs to know 'how things turn out,' the speculative conceit of the novel intrinsically denies the possibility of any conclusive narrative. While de Cristofaro's scholarly interest is in the deconstructive capacities of the novel's critical temporalities, my own concern is with how these temporal revisions, these deconstructions, implicate modernity and thus critique the ubiquity of the urban settings from which the protagonist is persistently trying to recede or escape.

During her time on the reservation, Cedar meets her maternal grandmother for the first time, and is compelled to reflect on the elderly woman's experience of time. Writing about her newfound grandmother she writes: 'It is odd to look at her and think perhaps she has lived through the final efflorescence of human culture and thought.'[76] Cedar has only just found this part of her family and feels on the brink of losing them, the world changing drastically under martial law and womb volunteering. Cedar tells her grandmother about her pregnancy, which unlocks a well of narrative and storytelling in the elderly woman. Grandma Potts shares her stories with her granddaughter, though Cedar remains uncertain whether the woman recognises

[75] De Cristofaro, *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel*, 66.
[76] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 43.

her. It is Cedar's pregnant state that triggers the elderly woman's compulsion to tell stories and which engages her memory:

> Probably my identity, our place in time, the muddy river of reality, all of this is bundled in shadow. Yet the word "pregnant" may have registered, because that word triggers a story, and then another story, many of them. Listening, I realise that her tales are so practiced that Grandma Virginia probably tells and retells them all the time. And here I am now, new audience! It doesn't matter who I am. Her memory shifts. The narrative is all that matters. She seems to have lived out many versions of her own history.[77]

Now more than ever before, reality is a 'muddy river,' both for Cedar and her grandmother, but this does not stop the flow of narrative, even as the 'many versions of her own history' complicate what is and is not real. Cedar's own epistolary attempts to capture what the time during her pregnancy is like in the minutiae of her days contrasts with her grandmother's willingness to give herself up to multiple possible histories, all of which are her own, changing with each retelling but no less real for that. 'The narrative is all that matters,' signals the novel's subversion of time and truth, the act of storytelling being a primary mode of resistance and self-assertion, for both Grandma Mary Virginia, for Cedar, and for Erdrich herself.

In the spirit of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Erdrich uses Cedar to explore contemporary anxieties about the oppression of women's right to reproductive autonomy. Fearing for herself and for her future child, Cedar explains her diary-keeping to her unborn baby:

> Historic times! There have always been letters and diaries written in times of tumult and discovered later, and my thought is that I could be writing one of those. And even though I realise that all lexical knowledge may be useless, you'll have this record.[78]

Writing and in many cases recording events mentally to be related to 'you', the second person addressee of the novel's diary form, Cedar is nevertheless aware of the possibility that her child, and all other future human children, may not have the capacity to learn to read.

[77] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 43.
[78] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 3.

Regardless of this probability, her diary is also a love letter to her unborn child in the event that they are separated.

Noting the chaos and uncertainty about the origin, purpose, and eventual outcome of the global medical emergency, which we can recognise more easily today in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the protagonist writes melodramatically: 'Historic times!' This is also ironic given that history will soon be of no use to anyone in the novel. She follows this up with sobering lines about wanting to leave a record behind, despite the futility of this desire. The diary is therefore a paradoxical project, intended for a foetus which may never be able to read, and which may never know its mother, while also being an assertion of Cedar's maternal love, and her enthusiasm for narrative and life.

Despite being epistolary, the second-person narration style implies a reader that the narrator actively involves in the story. Erdrich uses this style often in the portrayal of one of her most famous characters, the mischievous Nanapush, who features in the Love Medicine series, and particularly prominently in *Tracks* (1988) and *The Last Report on the Miracle at Little No Horse* (2001).[79] The effect of speaking or writing to an imagined reader entangles both the imagined reader and the real reader in the narrative, making them complicit as Nanapush does, or using the second-person 'you' for critical proximity, as Cedar does. Her diary brings the reader into the crisis of the novel in such a way that we are actively involved through identification with the paradoxically specific and non-specific 'you.' Erdrich makes Cedar's record keeping speculative, asserting the power of narrative in the paradoxical logic that defines the novel's form and content: in the future in the novel, no one will be able to read Cedar's diary, but in the real-world present, the reader as the non-specific 'you' actually reads the diary, thus validating Cedar's record-keeping. We are brought close to the speculative

[79] Erdrich, *Tracks*, 1988; Louise Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, London: Flamingo, 2002.

disaster through the form, the diary generating critical proximity by interpellating the reader in the narrative. Both Cedar and Erdrich use form to resist the invalidating circumstances they perceive in their worlds, the journal as much a record as an assertion of self which through readerly identification creates narrative traction.

Another instance in which a character uses record keeping to assert a sense of self in a world gone mad is Cedar's stepfather Eddy and his magnum opus of reasons not to die. Each day he records a moment that convinced him to keep living, despite his struggles with debilitating mental illness and his despair about the land dispossession suffered by indigenous people. Evolution's reversal paradoxically gives Eddy new hope as he finds concrete ways to reclaim land and organise against the fundamentalist government. Eddy and Cedar begin to exchange letters, and when she is incarcerated these become the means for communicating encoded plans for her escape from the first Womb Volunteering facility. In this way writing within the world of the novel becomes a method by which characters assert an autonomy of mind, even as their bodies are constrained. The letters and parts of Eddy's journal are recorded by Cedar in her diary, which layers the creative resistance in the very form of the novel. These acts of literary resistance in the face of dystopian authoritarian control and the end of human consciousness are further imbricated in a meta-textual layer of the novel itself being a form of resistance by Erdrich. In the face of despair, Erdrich's characters choose the same course as the author: they write. Hope is implicit in these acts of literature, the utopian clues operating in each layer of creative resistance that relies on a belief in the power of the written word.

The epistolary nature of Cedar's diary in *Future Home* recalls an antecedent in this genre, Octavia E. Butler's *Earthseed* duology (1993 and 1998).[80] In these two earlier novels Butler's protagonist Lauren Oya Olamina keeps a journal that comes to form the foundation of the new religion that she founds, Earthseed. The young woman instigates this new faith with

[80] Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, 1993 (London: Headline, 2019).

the belief that 'God is Change' during her flight with other refugees from violence and wildfires, precipitated by climate disaster in California. Olamina is more interested in building a spiritual community than being a mother. However, she falls pregnant and her cult-like community of believers is further developed in concert with her pregnancy and motherhood in the second novel in the duology, *Parable of the Talents* (1998), which is narrated in part by her sceptical daughter, and through diary excerpts written by Lauren and her close family.[81] The conceit of an unknown or unborn reader to whom these epistolary accounts are addressed in Butler's unfinished series is replicated by Erdrich in *Future Home*. The unidirectionality of much of Cedar's writing, intended only for eyes and a mind not yet formed, thus functions as a method of reproducing a world view, and in many cases a world that is unlikely to be recognisable to a future generation. Following Butler, Erdrich's choice of form engages with the presumption of hope in reproduction, reproduction here referring to both the reproduction of the self in ideas, and physical human reproduction. Writing as a form of reproduction, and reproduction as utopian world-building, reimagines the apocalypse in Erdrich's novel, just as Butler's novels use form to reimagine the apocalypse with utopian intent. Record keeping for future generations makes hope implicit in reproduction, and the literary form of this record keeping implies the utopian impulse in these texts. Engaging literature in the discourse of reproductive rights as human rights reveals the utopianism in writing that might otherwise seem dystopian in content. In intent, it is the opposite.

While the epistolary form of *Future Home* demands recognition of the reproductive person as human, innovations with exposition in *Afterland* highlight the mediated subjectivity of that novel's reproductive crisis. The effect is to enable exposition which permits a variety

[81] Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Talents*, 1998 (London: Headline, 2019).
Butler had intended Earthseed to exist as a trilogy but she developed writer's block and died before she was able to complete it. While the first two novels are very much Earth-bound, the intention of the protagonist Lauren Oya Olamina is that human beings should take to the stars, or more precisely, eventually live off-planet. This dream begins to be realised with the first people leaving earth at the end of *Parable of the Talents*.

of perspectives on the apocalyptic crisis. The prose of the novel is interjected with news articles, texts, emails, transcriptions of radio broadcasts, and Reddit forums. When Cole manages to make contact with her best friend back home in South Africa via email, Keletso replies: 'Not everywhere is worse off now that the men have mostly gone. Some countries are thriving now that there are no all-male terrorist groups or militias roaming around, and also there's some seriously fascinating stuff about alternative economies emerging. I'll keep researching.'[82] Keletso's emails provide a real and emotional lifeline for Cole who arranges with her friend to board a boat in Miami heading down the west coast of Africa. She writes:

> just focus on getting the hell out of the US […] We'll take care of what happens on their other side later. Most African countries welcome immigrants now that most of the sick people are actually dead. Matriarchal cultures seem to be less uptight in general. Mostly. ;)[83]

Keletso is irreverent and joking, but also extremely serious. The content of the email evinces her problem-solving abilities while the tone implies the friends' close relationship. The wink emoji is also typical of Beukes' characters, who use irreverence and sarcasm to communicate larger feelings such as political views or deeply felt emotion. The friends' email chain provides an opportunity for exposition about the world beyond the United States. Keletso's presence allows for a wider view of the effects of near-total male annihilation, and different cultures' responses to it. Her virtual presence enriches Cole's capacity resilience who, having received Keletso's email, rests for a moment, 'holding it, the plan, the knowledge that someone else is out there, on her side.'[84] In this instance writing is a method by which human ties are sustained and characters are able to assert agency by sharing information and making plans.

Midway through the novel there's an 'Interlude' section featuring media sources, beginning with a blog titled DirtyHarry.tv dating back in the novel's time to 30 April 2021:

> Unlike your racist Fox-News-lovin' grandparents, you'll be pleased to know that CV does not discriminate on race, class, religion, or sexuality. You just need to

[82] Beukes, *Afterland*, 119.
[83] Beukes, *Afterland*, 119.
[84] Beukes, *Afterland*, 119.

> have that Y chromosome. Sorry trans sisters, peace out :(It's the equal-opportunity fuck-you we've been promised since the dawn of the first mitochondrial collision.[85]

Once again, an emoji signals a humorous tone while communicating deathly serious information: the sustained threat of the virus to anyone with a prostate. Through the morbid jocularity of the blog, we learn that HCV stands for Human Culgoa Virus, and that it causes prostate cancer which metastasises quickly and results in an agonising death. One respondent writes into the blog: 'I don't understand. How does a virus turn into a cancer?'[86] The structure of the Ask Dr Fuzz Wolf segment presents an explanation of the HCV so that a lay-person might understand it: 'Viruses are sneaky little fuckers is how, and oncoviruses in particular – those are the ones that can cause cancers.'[87] The blogger goes on to give an explanation of how viruses work and a list of cancer-causing viruses. This stylistic choice allows Beukes to explain the circumstances of the apocalyptic events while taking ideological pot-shots at right-wing American politics and media outlets along the way. Another respondent to the blog introduces gender politics, ostensibly on the gay blogger's account. The respondent asks: 'So what happens now?' and Dr Fuzz Wolf responds with devastating humour and honesty, noting that most industry is 'traditionally penis-centric' in terms of labour, and that this has knock-on effects for the economy: 'Guess the feminists were right on this one. Patriarchy is bad for everybody after all!'[88]

The blog post is later contextualised by a female editor who notes that the piece is retained on the site for the use of 'future (female?) internet historians,' in the event that any such historians may exist, to 'see how terribly naïve and hopeful we were about the death toll.'[89] The date given for this updated context is 18 January 2023, and registers the deaths of approximately '3.2 billion men, boys and people-with-prostates' which includes the original

[85] Beukes, *Afterland*, 193.
[86] Beukes, *Afterland*, 194.
[87] Beukes, *Afterland*, 194.
[88] Beukes, *Afterland*, 197.
[89] Beukes, *Afterland*, 197.

author of the blog post.[90] The editor concludes by imploring readers to respect the ban on reproduction: 'please, please, stick to the 2021 Buenos Aires Accord: obey the reprohibition, beware of black-market semen, and don't go trying for babies until we know it's safe out there!'[91] Using this editorial context on a blog post, Beukes is able to explain the circumstances of the prohibition on reproduction, 'reprohibition,' through a fictional meeting and treaty titled and dated like an international agreement. Human reproduction is banned because the threat of the virus to any children with prostates is too great, which in turn makes viable sperm an extremely valuable commodity on the black market. This is what makes Miles an attractive asset.

The blog style is irreverent and jaunty while dealing with the very critically serious effects of HCV. Dr Fuzz Wolf articulates these beyond a sky-rocketing death count, including in his list: 'political fallout, the financial markets crashing harder than a skydiver without a parachute;' 'hospitals are going to be overwhelmed;' and 'we're going to run out of chemo drugs and then painkillers and then illegal opiates.'[92] This list provides some insight into the years between the first infections in 2021, and the present-time of the novel in 2023. The novel runs the risk of a plot hole regarding trans women, but these blog posts sustain Beukes' trans-inclusive politics by noting the chromosomal focus of the HCV and including trans women in the description of 'people-with-prostates' subject to the morbid 'equal-opportunity fuck-you'.[93] The blog also registers authorial resistance against fake news and conspiracy theory, providing exposition as well as exhibiting how writing might be a mode of resistance and self-assertion, however faint, in apocalyptic circumstances.

The second piece of media in the Interlude is a *Vice* article titled 'Last of the Lost Boys,' dated 2 December 2021. The piece is written in the style of a long-form investigation by a

[90] Beukes, *Afterland*, 198.
[91] Beukes, *Afterland*, 198.
[92] Beukes, *Afterland*, 197.
[93] Beukes, *Afterland*, 193.

female journalist who explores the sub-cultures of a few surviving men: two gay Ugandan men dressing as women to pass unscathed; a male trucker who lives on the road driving between Mumbai and Delhi and has refused the Bangalore luxury government facility; and a paramilitary 'manclave' in the Ukraine called XY City. She writes of the two Ugandan men on the run: 'I try to tell him about the amnesty. There are only two million men left in sub-Saharan Africa. The government will bend a lot of rules to keep them safe, forgive a lot of sins. No country is enforcing anti-homosexuality laws anymore, for example.'[94] This excerpt indicates the possibilities for revisions of gender-based violence and homophobic laws across the world under the radical circumstances.

Another of the ways in which Beukes builds the world in *Afterland* is through depictions of television news, focalised through Billie. Trying to repair her head wound, Billie finds herself in a motel room with the television on. The world described in the reports is much as we know it, though men are replaced by women in the reports on elections, celebrity weddings, and morbid tourism. Billie watches one report on 'deadmen tourism' which follows groups of women who pilgrimage to sites where men attempted to escape the virus, such as Pionen, 'a Cold War bunker turned data centre under Stockholm where 600 rich techbros, CEOs, government officials and military high-ups barricaded themselves away from the virus. And died anyway.'[95] This narration focalised through Billie's character presents not only her personality and worldviews (inflected with irreverence and scepticism about Silicon valley in the labelling of technology moguls as 'techbros') but also the sense that despite global tragedy the world carries on: celebrities get ostentatiously married, scientists discuss solutions, droughts still occur. Beukes uses these reports to emphasise and critique the persistence of established social structures even in the face of apocalyptic disaster.

[94] Beukes, *Afterland*, 200.
[95] Beukes, *Afterland*, 122.

As world-building strategies, the media excerpts in *Afterland* and Cedar's diary in *Future Home* are specific instances of critical irrealism in the speculative mode which function as architecture for the novels and the worlds depicted in them, while also operating as modes of resistance to the political ideologies they critique. Using non-traditional prose forms to explain the dystopian elements of governmental interference with reproductive rights, these novels challenge notions of modernity as progressive. Threats to bodily autonomy are articulated as a consequence of a dispersed modernity that is perpetually present, even in the contra-urban locations to which the novels' protagonists attempt to escape. These apocalyptic novels innovate with form and the narrative strategies of the speculative mode to skew their worlds, the reproductive dystopias revealing the paradoxes inherent to capitalist urban modernity in which the myth of progress obscures the realities of sustained oppressions.

Reproductive dystopia

Feminist studies and activist work have made major contributions to the field of reproductive rights as human rights. The literature produced by activist-scholars highlights the necessary intersections of theory and activism in a field that must consider the grassroots and on-the-ground experiences of women and people with wombs in their struggles against reproductive oppression. The intersection of reproductive rights with human rights discourse came to the fore following the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, which adopted a Programme of Action, also known as the Cairo paper.[96] This document focuses on heterosexual women's rights to family planning technologies and the impact of contraception provision and education on improving impoverished women's circumstances in both developed and developing nations. Women's rights thus became imbricated in development discourse. While a landmark event in the fight for recognition of reproductive rights as human

[96] Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "From Population Control to Reproductive Rights: Feminist Fault Lines," *Reproductive Health Matters*, vol. 3, no. 6, Women's Health Policies: Organising for Change (Nov., 1995): 152–61.

rights, the resultant Cairo paper produced what critic Rosalind Petchesky terms 'feminist fault lines.'[97]

These fault lines persist between those committed to development goals, and those committed to the liberation of women's bodies and sexualities. The primary problem with the Cairo paper, viewed from a distance of twenty-eight years, is that reproductive rights are figured primarily within the sphere of contraception provision and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies. The Cairo paper has defined how reproductive rights were understood for almost two decades, and women's access to family planning technologies and suitable reproductive health care still informs much of the discourse around development and aid in developing countries. However, the discourse around reproductive rights has shifted in recent years to consider reproduction as labour in a material, economic sense, and to recognise the activists who have campaigned for reproductive justice as worker's rights. One recent intervention, published in September 2020, is Zakiya Luna's *Reproductive Rights as Human Rights: Women of Colour and the Fight for Reproductive Justice*. This monograph discusses the role of women-of-colour in reproductive rights activism, focussed through a sociological study of the activist group SisterSong.[98] Luna's work stands on the shoulders of activist authors such as Betsy Hartmann, Jael Silliman, and Jeanne Flavin, who have identified reproductive rights as imbricated in oppressive policies for control over the populations of black and brown communities, particularly in the United States.[99]

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[97] Petchesky, "Feminist Fault Lines," 153.
[98] Zakiya Luna, *Reproductive Rights as Human Rights: Women of Colour and the Fight for Reproductive Justice* (New York: NYU Press, 2020).
[99] One of the earliest texts on reproductive rights and human rights, Betsy Hartmann's classic *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control*, originally published in 1987, was re-released with a new foreword by the author in 2016. Indian-Jewish author Jael Silliman published *Undivided Rights* in 2004, discussing the activist history of women of colour in reproductive rights activism. Jeanne Flavin's *Our Bodies, Our Crimes* (2008) details how the policing of women's reproductive rights in the United States has resulted in mass sterilisation and infringements on human rights, especially of the underprivileged.
Feminist activist and public intellectual Dorothy E. Roberts' seminal text *Killing the Black Body* (1997) outlines the problems limiting African American women's access to reproductive justice in the United States and was also recently re-released in a twentieth anniversary edition.

Sophie Lewis' ground-breaking work *Full Surrogacy Now* (2019) also engages in the surrogacy debate about wombs-for-hire and gestation as labour.[100] She accounts for the development of surrogacy into a billion-dollar industry in developing countries such as India and Kenya. Considering reproduction as productive labour, Lewis argues for gestational communes so that better rights might be accorded to surrogate mothers and the labour of childcare shared equitably in communities, rather than in unequal, nuclear family structures. This is itself utopian ideation, particularly in its rejection of the notion that children might be owned or possessed by others. Lewis' key target is the structure of the nuclear family, or private family, which she states is the 'headquarters' of 'discomfort, coercion, molestation, abuse, humiliation, depression, battery, murder, mutilation, loneliness, blackmail, exhaustion, psychosis, gender-straitjacketing, racial programming and embourgeoisement.'[101] These are the circumstances and consequences of the private, nuclear family, against which Lewis writes so vehemently. She advocates for dismantling the nuclear family to allow for greater equality in the distribution of child-raising labour, such that communities of mutual aid and social support might be formed. Drawing on these debates in this section, I will explore how these two novels engage with and complicate reproductive rights discourse in the context of urban modernity.

In her interviews, Beukes has stated the influence of Margaret Atwood's fiction on her work, particularly the effect of motherhood on a woman's drive to protect a child, and the

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Betsy Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights as Human Rights: Women of Colour and the Fight for Reproductive Justice*, 1987 (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).
Jael Silliman, *Undivided Rights: Women of Colour Organise for Reproductive Justice* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2004).
Jeanne Flavin, *Our Bodies, Our Crimes: The Policing of Women's Reproduction in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2008).
Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 1997 (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017).
[100] Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against the Family* (London: Verso, 2019).
[101] Lewis, *FSN*, 82.

narrative effect of limiting reproductive rights.[102] *The Handmaid's Tale* is a forerunner in reproductive rights fiction, or what Lewis calls 'pregnancy dystopia.'[103] I contend that the term fails to account for all kinds of reproduction, given that pregnancy is the domain exclusively of those who possess a womb, while reproductive dystopia encompasses the labour entailed in production and in the casting of reproductive bodies as resources rather than human beings. Reproductive dystopia taps into the violence of gestation by emphasising the ways in which this labour is unpaid and distanced from the labourer.

Lewis notes that 'biophysically speaking, gestating is an unconscionably destructive business.'[104] The violence of pregnancy and birth are apocalyptic as they transform the world entirely for the gestating person and the child, usually through violent expulsion or extraction.[105] I read Lewis' point that 'it seems impossible that a society would let such grisly things happen on a regular basis to entities endowed with legal standing,'[106] as an indication of her position that permissible violence, such as childbirth, is representative of rights limitations. She implies that people with bodies capable of gestation are confined by nuclear family heterosexuality into a reproductive system unless they have the courage to eschew cultural mores, as in the case of queer chosen families, for instance. In this she somewhat elides the agency of the gestating person who may choose to reproduce, even with the full knowledge of what lies ahead. She cites coercion as an explanation for the sustained violence of reproduction and all of the labour that it entails, using this as an entry-point to a discussion of the similarities

[102] I conducted interviews with Lauren Beukes in June 2020, which were published as a podcast episode in Narrative Futures: *Episode 1: Pandemic Writing: How Close is Too Close*, accessed on 23 November 2020 from http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/episode-1-pandemic-writing-how-close-too-close.
Jennifer Malec and *Cloud Atlas* author David Mitchell spoke to Beukes in the Open Book Festival podcast episode Writing Adventures, accessed on 23 November 2020 from https://openbookfestival.co.za/podcast/writing-adventures/
[103] Lewis, *FSN*, 16.
[104] Lewis, *FSN*, 2.
[105] I use 'gestating person' here to include surrogates who are not ordinarily referred to as mothers but who must obviously suffer the violence of giving birth.
[106] Lewis, *FSN*, 3.

between Margaret Atwood's Gilead and the situation in contemporary societies that permits the exploitation of gestating person's bodies.

Lewis describes Atwood's Gilead as a pregnancy dystopia, using the following details as evidence: 'Armed policing of productive wombs; inseminations carried out through state-sanctioned ritual rape; new-borns systematically expropriated by the gentry.'[107] Her view is that the conditions of forced surrogacy are what determines the dystopian quality of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Forced surrogacy is what awaits Cedar as a Womb Volunteer in *Future Home*, where the inmates are required to watch videos of Mother, who tells them that through pregnancy have an opportunity to have their sins redeemed. '"You can be absolved of anything you did, you can completely win back God's love, by contributing to the future of humanity. Your happy sentence is only nine months,"' the Mother figure tells them.[108] Cedar knows that this is neither happy nor true. The survival rate of mothers and children is between fifteen and twenty per cent: 'Nobody gets out of here in nine months. I'm positive. Nobody gets out of here at all.'[109] The reality becomes desperately clear once Cedar has given birth and the child has been taken from her. She knows that she will soon be inseminated and forced to undergo another pregnancy once she has recovered from the delivery of her son. These circumstances are akin to those in Atwood's Gilead where fertile women's bodies are subjugated to state-programmed reproduction.

Although she is a woman of colour, her ability to reproduce potentially viable human children keeps her alive, as the Church of the New Constitution becomes violently racist. Cedar notices this social regression as she watches the news, noting that people of colour disappear from the films and news casts. There is a second moment in which the racial motivation of the

[107] Lewis, *FSN*, 15.
[108] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 321.
[109] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 322.

Christian fundamentalists becomes clear. Listening to the radio, Cedar discovers that the embryos of non-white people are being disposed of in the subtext of a broadcast:

> On the radio someone describes a raid on an in-vitro clinic by members of some militant organisation we've never heard of. They plan to use one thousand Womb Volunteers to gestate the embryos they've liberated from that clinic's deep freeze. There is crackling. A sudden interruption and a young woman's voice.
>
> "We took the leftovers. The embryos not labelled Caucasian. We're going to have them all and we're going to keep them all. We're not killing any."[110]

This interjection on the radio programming suggests there is a resistance group fighting back against the white supremacist fundamentalist government's programme to reproduce exclusively white human beings. The reader infers the forced surrogacy implied in the articulation of the 'plan to use one thousand Womb Volunteers to gestate the embryos.' The gestating subjects, so-called volunteers, are erased entirely. The interjection by the young militant in the broadcast highlights the government's valorisation of exclusively white genes, and the decision by militants to gestate non-white embryos to emphasise and promote the value of Black lives.

The fundamentalist government's (likely futile) decision to try to reproduce only white children in the face of apocalyptic evolutionary chaos is a fictional depiction of Lewis' description of real-world 'competitive latter-day-imperial worries about being overtaken, overrun.'[111] She highlights the racism inherent in criticisms of accelerating birth rates in countries populated by majority brown and black people. The subtext in these calls for population control is of course an uneasiness felt at the addition of people of colour to the global population and the perceived threat to the so-called 'morality' of wealthy developed nations. For Lewis, Atwood's novel and series fail in their erasure of people of colour. The novel fails in its the 'purging of the tacitly African "Children of Ham,"' while the Hulu show's so-called post-racism and diversity fails to account for these white supremacist desires for

[110] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 114.
[111] Lewis, *FSN*, 16.

racial purity.[112] Perhaps unsurprisingly given the author's identity and politics, Erdrich's representation of Christian fundamentalist governments' control over human reproduction is less colour-blind than Atwood's.

Future Home presents the elision of people of colour from the future-imagined America as the white supremacist ideal. In one instance of this being enforced, Cedar witnesses the violent arrest of a heavily pregnant black woman, her white husband and their mixed-race daughter being manhandled by the police. The crowd stand by inactive, seemingly cowed by the explanation of the arrest as 'female gravid detention.'[113] Later in the first Womb Volunteer facility a white woman laments the murder of her boyfriend by the undercover agent Bernice, who also detains Cedar. The white woman, Agnes, rages against the racial injustice: 'She murdered my beautiful black boyfriend. So, I know they won't fucking let me keep my baby.'[114] *Future Home* highlights the same inequalities in reproductive rights that Dorothy Roberts explored in the context of real-world American reproductive policy in *Killing the Black Body* (1997).[115] Speculating about a future in which the human race is unlikely to continue, Erdrich presents white supremacist policies as dystopian, giving as evidence the intention of the Church of the New Constitution to breed exclusively Caucasian children. The reader must surely recognise in this depiction of white supremacist eugenics a critical response to discourses of overpopulation which centre around demonising the reproduction of brown bodies.

Lewis argues that in pregnancy dystopias, 'the conflation of real-world gestation work with forced and coerced impregnations in fiction comes from an unreflexive horror at the idea of gestational surrogacy.'[116] I would argue that there is more going on here than an unreflexive

[112] Lewis, *FSN*, 16.
[113] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 93.
[114] Erdrich, *Future Home*, 156.
[115] Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).
[116] Lewis, *FSN*, 18.

horror that infants might be ritually appropriated by the state, however. Another horror that attends this conflation is the fear of being forced to undertake gestational labour without agency. Lewis argues that *The Handmaid's Tale* galvanises a white neo-liberal feminism against post-reproductive estrangement, the dystopia of the novel producing 'a kind of utopia: a vision of the vast majority of women *finally* seeing the light and counting themselves as feminists because society has started systematically treating them all – not just black women – as chattel.'[117] The feminists who take up *The Handmaid's Tale* as a representational prediction, Lewis argues, fail to recognise already existing and normalised forced gestation, with its historical antecedents in slavery and anti-abortion theocratic policy.

The reproductive dystopia of *Future Home* raises some challenges for Lewis' argument while presenting an alternative narrative of gestation without reproductive gain: what happens when the work is without profit? Profit in this case is the issue of a healthy human child, able later in its life to contribute to the labour force, and possibly to reproduce itself. The system of capital that demands that human reproduction produce labourers is violently ableist and presumes that reproduction has value only if it results in profit. The continuation of the human species then becomes co-opted by the system of capital that seeks to perpetuate itself and to progress through reproductive optimisation. This last desire is evident in real-world increased capacities to screen foetuses for defects, as well as policies that encourage abortion if the result of the gestation will be more of a drain than a gain for the economy.[118]

What Erdrich's novel implies is that under conditions which pose an existential risk to the human species, the subjugation of the surrogate womb to the labour demands of capital becomes horribly permissible. This is another instance of the contradictory relation of social labour to capital as the reproductive bodies in Erdrich's novel incubate potential workers while

[117] Lewis, *FSN*, 17.
[118] Sarah Zhang, "The Last Children of Down Syndrome," in *The Atlantic* online on 18 November 2020, accessed on 18 January 2021 from https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/12/the-last-children-of-down-syndrome/616928/

their likely unviability renders this reproduction resistant as its products cannot be pressed into service of the system. In *Future Home*, the products – babies – become the property of the capitalist state rather than of the gestating subject. This presents an ideological paradox, where political structures limit gestational women's freedoms while co-opting reproduction as a tool for nation building and capitalist accumulation. While Erdrich imagines a reproductive dystopia of devolution and religious fundamentalism, Beukes considers the social effect on conceptions of gender in a reproductive dystopia centred around viral prostate cancer. *Afterland* shifts the reader's attention from controls over the female reproductive body to the male.

The shift of reproductive rights discourse from women to men in this context is intentional and in keeping with Beukes' radically progressive gender politics. Social reproduction is typically feminised work and women are interpellated in reproductive work due to the possession of a womb – by drafting Miles's body into the reproductive matrix, Beukes rightly recentres oppression as the intended function of reproductive and social labour. She subverts the concerns of a traditional pregnancy dystopia in which women's bodies are policed to emphasise the logics of inequality in reproductive rights as human rights discourse: if reproduction were the sole mandate of men, would it be taken as a given that reproductive rights are human rights? Miles's human rights are at risk in the dystopian apocalyptic world of Beukes' imagined 2023 America, precisely because his reproductive capacities are his most valuable asset. Forcing him to pass as a girl effects an ironic protest: only women are safe in the world of the novel and so Miles must pretend to be one, highlighting the logics of gendered oppression that sustains gendered social and reproductive labour systems.

The more institutional, authoritarian, and violent the attempts to curtail characters' reproductive freedoms are in these texts, the more important these rights become. These encroachments on personal space and physical agency force the protagonists of both novels to

escape from urban centres with the intention of finding safety in the obscurity of contra-urban spaces. *Future Home* engages in the discourse of reproductive rights at the point of authoritarian demographic controls sustained through urban connective infrastructures, while in *Afterland* the limitations on men's reproductive rights recast second-wave discourses. Beukes undermines the utopian urge implicit in the question 'what if there were no men' by showing patriarchal structures that persist even after men are removed. Dismantling the master's house takes time and radical imagination, Beukes' novel implies.

The threat to Miles' reproductive rights is posed from two sources: the Department of Men supported by the American military, and Cole's low-grade mercenary sister Billie.[119] Billie tries to kidnap Miles and sell him to her drug-magnate employer Mrs Amato, with the intention of harvesting his colloquially described 'boy juice.'[120] Billie's narration provides good context both for a skewed view of reproductive rights, as well as a consideration of a patriarchal society made up almost exclusively of women:

> She [Billie] has to *fix* this. What if Mrs Amato decides to wash her hands of the entire affair. Like Lady Macbeth. Out damn spot. Semen instead of blood. Billie's golden chance. For all of them. You have to grab opportunity by the balls. Sometimes even literally. That was the beauty of it, right? Not asking Miles to do something he wasn't naturally doing anyway.'[121]

Billie justifies her intention to kidnap her nephew to sell his sperm by assuming he is masturbating, likening collecting his semen to 'sinking a tap into a maple tree.'[122] The simile here further supports the perception of Miles' sperm as a natural resource to be exploited, as the maple trees might arguably be exploited for their sap. The elision of a discussion of the

[119] The invention of the Department of Men in the novel is a subtle tongue-in-cheek rebuke of South Africa's Department of Women, the title of which attracted criticism upon its formation for its breadth of remit given that over fifty per cent of the population is female. The Department later changed its title to include 'Youth and Persons with Disabilities', attracting further criticism for the insinuation that women are not agentic and fully capacitated as legal, adult rights-bearers.
[120] Beukes, *Afterland*, 45.
[121] Beukes, *Afterland*, 45.
[122] Beukes, *Afterland*, 45.

'tap', the means by which Miles' semen might be harvested, is particularly sinister evidence of intended sexual violence.

In her internal monologue, Billie insists that she would never lay a hand on the boy, but that she could encourage him to do it himself, her greed blurring her sense of what does and does not constitute coercion. She goes on to justify her intended violence through the rhetoric of women's bodily autonomy and right to determine their bodies' futures:

> She thought Cole was all *for* women's right to control their own bodies. Doesn't that include the chance to get pregnant? Okay for some, those who still have living kids, but not everyone is as lucky as her sister. Selfish. Selfish goddamn cunt.[123]

Billie's sense of Cole's supposed selfishness stems from being thwarted in her attempt to kidnap Miles and deliver him to Mrs Amato. The violence of her language and the use of the word 'cunt' reveals the psychological disconnect between her projected desire to 'help' Miles and her greed for the millions that his sperm would generate. She post-rationalises her violence and criminal intentions, providing insight into the mind of a woman mad with pain and frustration. Her pain is the result of a head wound inflected by the ordinarily passive Cole, who stops Billie's attempted kidnapping in its tracks by hitting her with a tyre iron in the Ataraxia bunker's garage. Cole then escapes without her injured sister, presuming her dead, and driving away from their planned rendezvous on the California coast into the North American hinterland. Billie feels that the problem of her sister and nephew's escape from her and the bunker is something to 'fix,' driven by her greed and fear of her employer.

Mrs Amato is likened to Lady Macbeth, whom Billie fears will wash her hands of the kidnapping plot: 'Out damn spot. Semen instead of blood.' Billie conflates Lady Macbeth's famous hand-washing with Pontius Pilate washing his hands of guilt in the trial of Jesus of Nazareth. The mixing of these references evokes both a sense of Billie's psychological confusion, and also her intuition that the drug magnate is both guilty and a sexual predator to

[123] Beukes, *Afterland*, 45.

whom she is willingly considering delivering her nephew. The allusion to perpetual, maddening guilt in Lady Macbeth's manic handwashing suggests Billie's awareness of the fundamental wrong in trying to harvest her nephew's sperm. She rationalises that because the boy is approaching puberty and will soon begin to masturbate, he will voluntarily produce the 'natural resource' of sperm organically and without intervention. Her inability to accept responsibility for the failed kidnapping alerts the reader to her psychological damage, as she shifts the blame to Cole, who she considers a 'selfish goddamn cunt.' The use of this anatomically female swearword is compelling in this instance, as 'cunt' is culturally considered among the most offensive of profanities while the tension of the novel hangs on reproductive capacities denied to people with biological vaginas.

Cole is merely defying Billie's desire to accumulate wealth through the sexual exploitation of Miles, and Billie's response signals both her emerging psychosis as well as the sustained cultural mores of ascribing offensive profanity to female anatomy. This signals Billie's other function in the narrative, which is to highlight how pervasive patriarchal structures are. Through the sustained power structures represented in Billie's criminal world, the novel implies that the eradication of men would not immediately produce a kinder, softer, more emotionally-sensitive world. The novel flips the narrative that women are inherently a gentler sex, presenting the somewhat obvious but culturally neglected argument that women are people too, and are as capable of violence as people of other genders.

Billie rationalises Cole's efforts to protect her son from sexual violence and interference as an anti-feminist desire to limit women's access to reproductive technologies, despite the global reprohibition accord against pregnancy. Billie tries to convince Miles that the freedom to reproduce is a fundamental right, describing the Reprohibition as authoritarian:

> "Listen to me. It's about the freedom of choice. It's about the right to life. It's the most basic and most fundamental human right, to have children, and these people,

> these governments of ours are trying to control it, they're trying to control us. Does that sound fair to you? Does that sound right?"[124]

The question of whether Reprohibition is 'right' and 'fair' in Billie's explanation draws on infertility discourse that demands that women be permitted and in some cases supported to bear children. The Reprohibition in the novel is scientifically grounded: Beukes interviewed public health expert Lydia Nicholas and CDC contractor Jessica Riggs to determine the probable global governmental response to a pandemic of this nature, which would be to ban reproduction outright.

Due to the international accord, 'throwing the sperm banks and embryo-storage units open' will make Miles less valuable as access to reproductive technologies will be reintroduced. Despite asserting that she wouldn't touch the boy, Billie's conversation with Miles leads her to ask: 'Are you jerking off yet?'[125] The short sentences and blunt language of Billie's narration contribute to her characterisation as a villain, contributing to the adventure thriller aesthetic complicated by the apocalypse conceit. Miles tells his mother about this conversation despite his uncertainty as school 'didn't exactly cover the correct etiquette of what to do when your aunt asks about jerking off because it's the only way to get out of here.'[126] Miles is conflicted because he understands that they might escape if he consents, but he is a minor and legally not able to make this decision for himself. Cole is horrified that her sister is intruding on the boy's privacy and potentially traumatising him during his already incredibly difficult adolescence. Billie's viewpoint is not unique however, as Cole discovers when she learns that her son is referred to as a 'national resource for "future security"' by the American military.[127] The treatment of men as a resource for future security revises and highlights the absurdity of people as a resource, for reproductive or other kinds of labour.

[124] Beukes, *Afterland*, 168.
[125] Beukes, *Afterland*, 168.
[126] Beukes, *Afterland*, 169.
[127] Beukes, *Afterland*, 112.

Imaginaries that posit human beings as sources of reproductive labour have a long history in citizenship discourse and scholarship. In *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (1997), social policy theorist Ruth Lister notes that: 'The ostensible gender-neutrality of the term 'citizenship' disguises the gender divisions constructed in its name, both historically and today.'[128] The framing of reproductive persons in *Future Home* and *Afterland* as resources for national security undertakes a similar de-gendering of the role of those reproductive resources whose rights are infringed upon to preserve the nation. Lister argues that women have consistently been excluded from public life due to their reproductive capacities: '[t]he history of women's exclusion from citizenship in Western societies is thus intimately linked with their relegation to the private side of the public-private dichotomy.'[129] Beukes engages with this citizenship discourse by reversing the rhetoric that excludes women from the public, placing the burden of reproduction on men and imagining public spheres populated entirely by women. Beukes casts her vulnerable male character in a role typically ascribed to people with wombs to highlight the inequalities of the reverse, which is the world as we currently experience it. The apocalyptic situation of the novel thus generates a critical opportunity in which Beukes explores the absurdities of contemporary gender politics that elide women's agency by relegating them to the role of reproductive labour resources. Lister argues that 'citizenship as an expression of agency contributes to the recasting of women as actors on the political stage,'[130] and Beukes' novel performs this action by eradicating the usual possessors of full citizenship – men – thus forcing women into the public sphere.

This chapter has examined how these novels depict the contra-urban space as a site for speculative exploration of reproductive rights as human rights by positing the city as a site from which reproductive bodies must escape to preserve their autonomy. In these fictional

[128] Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1997), 66.
[129] Lister, *Citizenship*, 71.
[130] Lister, *Citizenship*, 199.

contexts reproductive rights are also complicated by the epistemological uncertainty of the interstitiality between the urban space and the wilderness, represented by the highways that carry the protagonists both towards and away from danger, and which are symbolic of twentieth century isolating infrastructures which impact upon contemporary modernity. Fundamentally, the possession of bodily autonomy is threatened, undermining characters' assumptions that they can find personal safety by escaping from urban centres. Performing creative acts, the characters and the authors of these novels write against oppressive circumstances which seek to limit their freedoms as reproductive agents and marginalised women. Designing alternatives through critical narrative forms, the texts' inherent utopianism imbues these speculative reproductive dystopias with hope for alternative social structures inspired by the worlds these dystopias threaten. These novels represent a shifting paradigm in speculative fiction which acknowledges the apocalypse not as total annihilation but as the persistent oppression and eradication of marginalised peoples and their stories, and as possessing a regenerative potential in its revelations of the operations of capitalist modernity.

Conclusion

Spaces of Paradox: The Poetics of Disruption in Twenty-First Century Speculative Fiction presents an account of the paradigmatic shifts occurring in genre fiction as a result of speculation's development as both method and mode in the first two decades of this century. This shift is inter-related to the current temporal shift into a transitionary period from neoliberalism's stranglehold into whatever form of political economy comes next. This dissertation establishes speculative fiction as a mode that sits across genres such as science fiction, detective fiction, and apocalypse fiction and asserts the literary merit of speculative texts which deploy a utopian impulse through critical proximity to real-world socio-political concerns. Using the figurative concept of paradox, the dissertation emphasises the necessity of sitting with the contradiction and ambiguity that speculation generates as both mode and method.

This dissertation has posed the questions: how do speculative novels post-2008 signal paradigm shifting ambiguities and uncertainties about literary genres in the first two decades of the twenty-first century? And how do the poetics of disruption in contemporary speculative fiction interact with and inform this transitional period from neo-liberalism into an unknown future global system defined by urban modernity? Moving from detective fiction to climate and refugee crises to apocalypse novels, the three chapters explored the poetics of disruption that sustain specific instances of critical irrealism in the speculative mode as it uses linguistic play, resignification, neologisms, meta-narrative, and other formal strategies to critical effect.

My discussions of the speculative mode are concerned with the ways in which poetics and form are used to disrupt normative reality as we perceive it and how speculation thus also becomes a method by which a critical intention can be raised in a text. Speculation is therefore productively ambiguous, and this ambiguity is a part of the complex relationship that contemporary iterations of the mode have with this period of uncertain transition between

systems of political economy. This generative perspective through ambiguous meaning is akin to the effect of the multiple views evoked in de Certeau's exploding universe described at the dissertation's outset. The city viewed from the dual perspectives of both the spectator above and the person on the street is elusive in meaning precisely because, as with literary criticism, we cannot know all that the city-as-text contains. We can know only what we can see, and that imperfectly. This goes some way to excuse the limitations of this dissertation, which concentrates on six novels when of course the myriad texts emerging in this mode might have been equally ripe fruit for examination. Exploring different iterations of alienation and dislocation in speculative fiction set in and around cities, I concentrated on these six novels by five authors, using a comparative frame in each of the three chapters. This comparative frame permitted me to explore different iterations of similar or contrasting disruptive strategies in each chapter. I examined how the speculative mode recognises and is also a product of the transitionary period in which we find ourselves debating the epochal nature of the end of neoliberalism, and/or the Anthropocene (or Capitalocene, or Cthulucene), through engagement with three real-world problems: homelessness and urban segregation; refugeeism due to climate and migrant crises; and threats to reproductive rights and bodily autonomy.

These three concerns provide a mid-level organising structure while at the granular level each chapter compares the sometimes starkly different approaches to the topic through exploration of the novels' different deployments of disruptive poetics. Drawing as it does on multiple literary and genre-fiction traditions, the speculative mode can disrupt the otherwise familiar world in myriad ways. An author might achieve critical proximity to a socio-political concern through the elision of refugee dislocation, such as Hamid's black doors, or they might introduce a man-killing virus to explore how patriarchy sustains itself even in the absence of men, as in Beukes' *Afterland*. Disruption in each of these instances engages in a form of literary activism through the critical proximity that is made possible when we consider the critical work

that the formal elements of the text can perform. The efficacy of this kind of literary activism is untested, and the narrative traction that a text might gain through readerly complicity and real-world social justice concerns is limited by the distribution of these texts. The position of these texts as outliers in the oeuvres of the authors raises the likelihood of these reaching audiences who might not otherwise encounter the ideas they engage with. However, if we measure activism's efficacy by real-world results, these texts work to shift the paradigm of a small corner of literary scholarship and their impact beyond it is negligible at best. In this way their existence betrays the presence of the same utopian impulse that imbues their speculative mode with political intent, which is how speculation can operate as both method and mode.

This is not, however, how the authors see it. The germ of this dissertation was sown in 2017 when I attended the Open Book Festival in Cape Town and heard writers on a speculative fiction panel, Lauren Beukes and Ken Liu, resist speculative fiction as a category. They claimed not to be conforming to any particular genre or mode, stating that they merely write, untethered by formal conventions. That resistance to labelling, which echoes Atwood's resistance to her own work being described as science fiction, signalled to me a writerly intention to engage with the world at a literary level that does not consider genre or mode the most pressing concerns, but instead concentrates on the story, characters, language etc. The authors' position implied they were more interested in the craft, but in their work, speculation arises persistently as a useful mode through which we might theorise and understand the activist intentions in their narratives. While they therefore might not thank me for doubling down on a study of the poetics of disruption in a mode that is so ambiguously loose and generally still ill-defined, I assert that speculation is a mode that represents something of its temporal present: paradox, confusion, contradiction, elusory meaning, ambiguity, and uncertainty.

These are the qualities of the last two decades that have shaped Anglophone speculative fiction which deals primarily with those social justice concerns dear to the left,

broadly conceived.[1] The utopian impulse in these texts emerges from the inversion of negative phenomena as positive instances generative of a pessimistic optimism. Social critique through the speculative mode demands the kind of reading that urges the reader to engage with the text's critical project. Literary activism is therefore the domain not only of the literary critic but, in this instance, of the speculative author as well.

Half-way through the writing of this dissertation the COVID-19 pandemic began and required that I make changes to the original project proposal. The advent of the UK lockdown, being unable to return to South Africa to see family and my perceptions of heightened social paranoia in the UK shaped this project in ways I can only begin to understand. The interaction between the inside and outside spaces in cities has changed drastically for everyone: the city is more uncanny than ever, particularly now as we negotiate how and when we re-enter it, and under what conditions and social contracts. In April 2020 I began volunteering as a prescription runner, getting medication to the shielding vulnerable and elderly around Oxford. Cycling around a seemingly abandoned city for several hours a day contrasted starkly with the remaining hours of work indoors during which I was writing and thinking about how people move through and access urban spaces. The irony of my position was not lost on me. I began to think more and more about how the empty streets did not mean that the city was empty, but rather that the buildings were full.

The first chapter of the thesis concentrated on the processes of unseeing and disavowal in China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) and Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* (2010). In revising the chapter, I was struck in particular by the visual absence of unhoused people from

[1] There may be scope for a conservative/right-wing reading of speculative texts like those produced by the proponents of the Sick Puppies movement (also known as Sad Puppies) in the RaceFail debate, but these are widely panned by the speculative, science fiction, and fantasy communities alike and deserve little critical attention here.
For more about the Sick Puppies and RaceFail: https://lithub.com/how-a-self-published-writer-of-gay-erotica-beat-sci-fis-sad-puppiesat-their-own-game/
Sophia M. Newman, "How a Self-Published Writer of Gay Erotica Beat Sci Fi's Sad Puppies at Their Own Game," on *LitHub*, published on 26 August 2016, accessed on 4 January 2021 from https://lithub.com/how-a-self-published-writer-of-gay-erotica-beat-sci-fis-sad-puppiesat-their-own-game/

Oxford's streets in mid-2020. Vision and perception became paramount to the chapter as the tasks of the detectives in the two novels came to entail uncovering larger, more insidious, injustices than the initial mysteries proposed. I perceived that also as my task in excavating how these novels use the speculative mode to raise and centre oppression and elision through linguistic allusions to the optics of belonging, criminality, and grievability. Instances of critical irrealism through unseeing and animaling in the respective speculative conceits of these novels offered ingress to each text's critical operations. Linguistic play, neologising, and resignification function as methods by which the speculative mode complicates genre in the novels and emphasise the ambiguity that shapes the mode temporally and stylistically.

Moving from this to crises of climate and migrancy, I explored the question of scale in hyperbolic narrative strategies as a manifestation of the speculative mode in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017). I draw the ideas of core and periphery through here from earlier interrogations of the consequences of combined and uneven development to non-assimilationist theories of planetarity. Through interactions between core and periphery regions and related cultural products, focussing on the global metropoles of New York and London, these texts examine how capitalist modernity produces climate disaster and mass migration as a consequence of modernity's operations of power.

The variability of experiences of crisis shaped by access, privilege, accidents of birth and operations of capital meant that experiences of lockdown were starkly contrasted through mediated channels as connective infrastructures became increasingly important to sustain connection between friends, family, and colleagues. Outside of the home, who accessed the city, how they accessed it, and under what conditions became the subject of intense governmental guidance and social scrutiny. Backlashes against mandates characterised the lockdowns as dystopian and authoritarian, while also raising the profile of self-surveillance as a method of social control. This shaped how I thought and wrote about the dystopian

circumstances in the novels I analyse - and helped me to think through the political potential and failings of utopian ideation. The pandemic has meant that many industries are able to rethink their operations, promoting hybrid work models for those in the knowledge and professional sectors, such as academics and white-collar workers. This does not however reflect the experiences of a vast majority of frontline workers who were and are still required to be physically present at work and who experience greater degrees of risk while operations of capitalist modernity continue to extract labour from the most vulnerable at a time when social care is most necessary.

Thinking about the redistribution and changing conditions for labour during the pandemic shaped the final chapter on reproductive dystopia profoundly, particularly since I was living at the time in a building full of young families with infants and pre-school age children. The final chapter draws on concepts of connective infrastructures and social reproductive theory to explore the regenerative possibilities of creative resistance in the apocalyptic circumstances in Lauren Beukes's *Afterland* (2020) and Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017). The chapter explores the threat that urban modernity poses to bodily autonomy given the connective infrastructures that connect and entangle us, concentrating on these tensions between the presumption of safety and the reality of danger as consequences of capitalist modernity. The speculative conceit of an apocalypse raises the stakes of reproductive activities, and the contexts of the apocalypse scenarios provided a unique opportunity to explore the (re)productive work of creativity and the regenerative potential of the concept of apocalypse as it reveals the hidden operations of power in the status quo.

Utopian thinking is inherently blue-sky, but it also engages the different, perhaps optimistic, pessimism that China Miéville contends is the only ethical response to crises of all kinds. The spaces to which the title of this dissertation refers are the physical spaces of the cities in the novels treated, as well as the conceptual spaces that speculative texts open up, and

the real-world narratives of crises of homelessness, climate and migrant refugeeism, and reproductive rights limitations. In the real world, inequalities made wider by neoliberalism have been further stretched over the last three years as wealth accumulation by the richest escalated exponentially. The wheels of disaster capitalism turned, and though the pandemic has raised awareness of the effects of global consumption, how long before we return to unsustainable habits, if we haven't already? The novels analysed in this dissertation use the speculative mode to reshape pessimism by imbuing it with a utopian impulse. As Robinson suggested in his essay "Dystopia Now," we must do the work, regardless of how we feel about it. Writing and reading the city sustains a politics of resistance, one that refuses capitulation or stasis – it is the act of production, of creation, that shapes and reshapes the narratives that define our lives and in which we struggle to imagine better structures even as we inhabit the alienating architecture of cities that were not imagined for any sense of a collective, equitable, planetary 'us.'

While this work has been focused on the three key concerns of interstitiality, hyperbole, and reproduction in novels that complicate what 'urban' refers to, other potential topics that might equally be analysed in the context of speculative disruption include nation building, race as a social construct, and design as social control. For reasons of scope, I limited myself to six novels and three core thematic and stylistic concerns, but future iterations of this work would certainly benefit from an expanded collection of primary sources, and a broader temporal remit to encompass texts set in the 1990s to account for the genre's uncanny antecedents.

Contextualising the speculative mode in relation to different types of genre fiction and analysing its potential for and generation of narrative traction gestures to potential for sociological exploration as well, which might be served by a large-scale qualitative study of the effect of speculation on political action arising from reading experiences. There is still a lack of sufficiently thorough studies into the effect of reading speculation on the political

imagination of activists, though this may be a problem of scale: such an undertaking would likely be the work of years and require funding on a scale ordinarily reserved for the sciences.

Working with these texts, speculation as a mode has concretised for me around the sense that paradox cannot and indeed must not be escaped – if we believe in a duty of care to our fellow human beings, we must live in and with the contradictions of late-stage capitalism that mean that one person's lifestyle of bourgeois comfort has negative consequences for others, socially and economically, given the unsustainability of such a lifestyle and the vice of capitalism that constrains our resistance to its ubiquity. Speculating about how else we might socially, economically, and politically organise through the representation of negative phenomena, the speculative mode in these contemporary post-2008 texts to assert the paradoxical utopianism of pessimistic optimism in a period of transition and radical uncertainty. Although it may seem that nothing we do matters, we must do it anyway.

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