



Feminism and Time in Recent Speculative Fiction

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“It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.”

—Donna Haraway

“We need writers who re[-]member freedom.”

—Ursula LeGuin

The aim of this paper is to explicate the usefulness of (a) feminist critique(s) of time, specifically those critiques posited by feminist ethicists Denise Ferreira da Silva and Karen Barad, in approaching an analysis of the political potential of science and speculative fiction (SF).¹ The paper is largely in response to popular media descriptions of the recent SF novel, *The Power*, as a feminist novel: a “feminist dystopia for the #metoo moment” (Fallon), and “...one of those essential, feminist works” (Charles). As a descriptor of *The Power*, the term “feminist” cannot mean something other than a mirror reversal of gendered power relations, putting women “on top,” playing into the antifeminist visions of right wing pundits and internet memes, and illuminating the confusion surrounding the goals of recent women’s marches worldwide.² The paper tries to reclaim the word “feminist” as having always at least the meaning of pursuit of equality and opposition to domination,³ and explores the possibilities for

¹In this paper, I will use the SF abbreviation to refer to both/either science and/or speculative fiction. Donna Haraway’s use of the acronym to refer to many forms of playful and questioning storytelling influences me (10), as does Walter Mosely’s description of speculative fiction as a genre that “...speaks most clearly to those who are dissatisfied with the way things are” (405). I am interested in speculative/science fictions that pursue the “what if” of scientific possibility, but also of ethico-political possibilities that differ from the modern paradigm.

²On the many aspects of the US women’s movement, see Amanda Hess.

³In an interview published last year, Judith Butler asserted that, “At a minimum, feminism opposes inequality, exploitation, and violence...” She goes on to say that a “...feminist ethics, and perhaps any ethic, should be committed to making life more

feminist ethico- politico social movement with Silva and Barad.⁴ It suggests that SF texts in which character and plot demonstrate relations of non-domination and mutual responsibility tend to challenge both linear and static conceptions of time and refers to Barad's use of the concept of "hauntology" to describe the other kind of time that emerges in these texts. If SF cannot meaningfully propose utopian visions of the future in our time, as Fredric Jameson famously suggested (288-289), but can maintain an anti-anti-utopian stance in the face of the limits of the present, it is "haunted" time in SF that presents the anti-anti-utopian at its most potent. Ultimately, the paper claims that the SF novel may be anti-anti-utopian and/or feminist specifically because it also haunts the reader bringing the reader into the experience of nonlinear time. Carmen Maria Machado's recent collection of stories, *Her Body and Other Parties*, serves as a compelling example of the feminist possibilities of haunted time in SF. The haunted SF feminist text provides anti-anti-utopian visions that support the pursuit of a world organized according to a different ethical program; because *The Power* maintains both relations of domination and teleological time, it cannot imagine the haunted feminism of *Her Body*.

To briefly address the need for the word "feminist" in the context of an ethico-political analysis of SF: to the extent that the anti-anti-utopian enables a belief in a differently ethical world, any such world necessarily includes more equal relations between people of all genders. "Feminism" is a marker for the pursuit of that particular equality. Silva adds the words "black" and "poetic" in her description of an ethics adequate to changing the world: "A Black, Feminist, Poethics," because the world as it is is predicated on the abuse and enslavement of black bodies, and because poetry is a form of resistance to a "reason" leveraged against nonwhite and non-male being (85-86). With Silva, the word "capitalist" is used to describe "a certain kind of world," (85-86) in which white male subjectivity becomes a determining force. The word "queer" is also added as necessary to ethical change in the world and it is proposed that any anti-anti-utopian SF must be read in relationship with all of these

livable for as many people as possible" (462). An acceptance of Butler's proposal of an assessment of minimum commitments for the designation of an ethical position as feminist might prove useful in a world saturated with media, literature, and ethical and political positions claiming or referred to as having a relationship to the term.

⁴That is, I seek an ethic that differs from the ethic of capitalist violence and look to theorists who have explicated feminist ethics as differing from violence. I follow Ferreira da Silva in suggesting that a possible nonviolent ethic would mean, "...the end of the world as we know it" ("On Difference" 2).

terms: feminist, black, anti-capitalist, and queer. The historic social movements that give meaning to these four words have also informed Silva and Barad's work in imagining other times.⁵

Struggles for social justice have a noted fraught relationship to the concept of a "future" time. In many analyses,⁶ the "future" is necessarily capitalist. It is only with the emergence of modernity that the concept of time as projecting and progressing line becomes an organizing factor in human life. This is the teleology of Hegelian and Marxist time, moving (straight) forwardly toward the undeniable time ahead. Before capitalist forms evinced a focus on growth, in Jameson's and others' analyses, people may have known time differently. Jameson describes this sense of time that emerges in capitalism as "...a different experience of temporality from that which was appropriate to a feudal or tribal system...", which demands "...a concrete vision of the past which we may expect to find completed by that far more abstract and empty conception...which we sometimes call 'progress'" (Jameson 284). Before modernity, Franco "Bifo" Berardi suggests a focus on linear time was contrary to a more Godly time: "Modernity started with the reversal of the theocratic vision of time as a Fall and a distancing from the City of God. Moderns are those who live time as the sphere of a progress toward perfection, or at least toward improvement, enrichment, and rightness" (Berardi 25). Though it is difficult to imagine any alternative conception of time now in late modernity, philosophers agree that capitalism introduces an emphasis on time as movement toward the future. Jameson additionally argues that the imaginary of a "better" future, like the description of utopia, has been a consistent project of bourgeois capitalism (Jameson 12). The vision of the future privileges bourgeois desire that is always predicated on the exploitation of the colonized world and the abuse of enslaved bodies. All characterizations of utopia are limited by the capitalist sense of time that informs the pursuit of utopia in the first place.

Utopian notions are further undermined by the history of pursuits of state utopia. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and Fukuyama's declaration of the end of history the capitalist future has changed again. There is a sense that the future has already arrived and

⁵Denise Ferreira da Silva is often referred to as a thinker within the black radical tradition. See, for example, John D. Márquez and Junaid Rana, "Black Radical Possibility and the Decolonial International." In addition, Barad writes in "Posthumanist Performativity" that her theoretical framework is indebted to Butler, Foucault, Donna Haraway, and others whose thoughts have grown out of queer social movement.

⁶See Jack Halberstam in addition to Silva, Muñoz, and Bifo Berardi.

is now closed. Capitalist progress is not reaching into a distant unknown, but maintains simultaneously a sense of time as linear progression and future as finally complete. Bifo writes that time now is “after the future,” a time in which future has become impossible, in the moment when “...the collective imagination becomes incapable of seeing alternatives to trends leading to devastation, increased poverty and violence” (Berardi 59). Political interventions that used to inspire feel hopelessly ineffective; the inevitable capitalist future becomes an interminable present. Just as the bourgeois capitalist at the height of modernity imagined the better future, neoliberal and late capitalist visions entail only a critique of the naiveté of any future-oriented socialist or communist utopian projects, already proven void.

Neither temporal framework (future-oriented or future-rejecting) offers a way out of capitalist exploitation, domination, and violence. Before the march toward future, we stew in permanent relationships of futureless abuse with no way backward or forward. There is no constant growth without coloniality and exploitation. There is no imaginable future remedy to the current reality of inequality without growth. The double bind prompts the global depression that Bifo analyzes (65).

Groups and individuals committed to the possibility of political change can be aware of the limitations of linear time and utopia and still struggle to avoid the organizing concept of a future. The static future of capitalism is, of course, an unsatisfying alternative as José Muñoz points out in *Cruising Utopia*. Social movements against the order of capital attempt to shift societal relations in the direction of equality and justice; the shift or movement entails a movement forward, toward a better time ahead (Muñoz 11). Even if people involved in movement accept the concept of “progress” as necessarily capitalist their work relies on a vision of future as improvement. For example, in Muñoz’s conception of a utopian queerness, queerness as an ethical or political stance must be situated in futurity. He refers to the 1971 manifesto of the radical group, Third World Gay Revolution, reading the “we” in their statement as “...a ‘we’ that is ‘not yet conscious,’ the future society that is being invoked and addressed at the same moment” (20). From within the capitalist present, it is difficult to imagine a social movement not organized around the pursuit of the better future.

In the context of “no future,”⁷ or too much future, this paper discusses feminist ethicists Denise Ferreira da Silva’s and Karen Barad’s separate proposals of a need to rethink the choice between a linear temporality or a pragmatic or cynical presentism. Without reverting to a utopianism that reproduces the present, there are strains within these political feminisms that offer some possibility with respect to time. Both theorists take inspiration from quantum physics.⁸ They suggest, in different ways, that quantum studies of time reveal the fictiveness of all kinds of time, and the non-necessity specifically of capitalist time. Silva’s concept of the Plenum and Barad’s iteration of Derrida’s hauntology both posit temporalities beyond the *all*-future and *no*-future of capitalist modernity and postmodernity. This paper follows their work in proposing that these other temporalities might be necessary to the feminist ethical “minimum” of opposition to inequality, exploitation, and violence.

In “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics,” Silva describes the end of “a certain kind of world,” predicated on colonization and the abuse and exploitation of black and female bodies. Explaining the imposition of concepts of Time and the future on being, she states, “it is the notion of development that allows Herder and Hegel to transform the World into the Workshop of Time” (88). Development is, of course, colonial and capitalist development. For Silva, it is the “temporalizing of forms” that creates the racial dialectic: whiteness and blackness. Once there is an understanding of human history as progress toward, there is the privileged [white] Subject and the racial violence dependent on the Category of Blackness as “thing,” “arrested development.” There is always the threat to the Subject, however, that

⁷Muñoz’s text is partially a response to Lee Edelman’s *No Future* and what Muñoz refers to as “antirelational queer theory” (11).

⁸Physicist David J. Griffiths writes that quantum physics entails an “abrupt and revolutionary departure” from classical physics (viii). The essential problem that led to the development of quantum physics is the unpredictability of the position or state of a particle, just before measurement. Classical physics suggests that scientists should be able to determine the position/state of the particle; the actual unpredictability of the particle’s location/state required the development of theories that differ from classical physics, collectively called “quantum mechanics” or “quantum physics:” that either there are “hidden variables” that would help to predict the location of the particle, or the act of measurement itself might play a role in determining the location of the particle, or there might simply be no way to know. Either of the latter two approaches to the problem disturbs scientists’ understanding of the rigidity of the rules of classical physics (Griffiths 374-375). The quantum eraser experiment is particularly relevant to a discussion of how classical physics fails to explain the behavior of matter in time, the possible “real” influence of the present on the past, and time as nonlinear. That both Silva and Barad see the theories of quantum physics as potentially liberating from linear capitalist time motivates my investigation here.

Blackness will reveal the contingency of these temporalized categories. It is through the poetic/ethical release of "...the Subject into the World..." that Blackness/Black Feminism "...puts an end to the World of Time in which the racial dialectic makes sense" (90). Thus "Ending the grip of time restores the World anew" (90).

Silva further explains that her understanding of the necessary end of the world is inspired in her reading of twentieth century physicists. From quantum physics, Silva borrows the terms "non-locality," and "entanglement" (or "non-separability") to describe the characteristics of the world that might exist after the end of Time as an organizing force in the categorization of humans and things. In "On Differences Without Separability," Silva investigates the ethical implications of a quantum perspective on time and matter. (Because this paper is dependent on Silva and Barad's understandings of the physics involved, both of them are quoted at length.):

What if, instead of The Ordered World, we could image The World as a Plenum, an infinite composition in which each existant's singularity is contingent upon its becoming one possible expression of all other existants, with which it is entangled beyond space and time. For decades now, experiments in particle physics have astonished scientists and laypeople with findings that suggest that the fundamental components of everything, every thing, could be just such... What if, instead of the Ordered World, we imaged each existant (human and more-than-human) not as separate forms relating through the mediation of forces, but rather as singular expressions of each and every other existant as well as of the entangled whole in/as which they exist? (63).

In both works, Silva posits that the Plenum as an alternative to the "World," as a re-imagining of sociality based on the fictiveness of linear temporality and spatial separation, would be an "ethical opening." If everything in the universe is a constantly reshaping entanglement, there is no possibility of static differentiation between humans, and between humans and nonhumans. An ethics of non-locality and entanglement is the end of racial gendered violence.

In her own development of a feminist ethic, Karen Barad uses the same revelations of quantum physics to re-engage with the concept of "hauntology" as a disturbance of an ontology of distinct entities and

times. Derrida coined the now well-used⁹ term “hauntology” in *Spectres of Marx* (1993) to describe a theory of being, with reference to the many ghost metaphors in *Capital*, which recognizes that anything in existence balances between inaccessible past and unknown future (qtd. in Fisher 19). Unlike common-sense understandings of identity and existence, “Haunting can be seen as intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space. It happens when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time” (Fisher 19). The [non]existent spectre is not necessarily benign. Martin Hägglund explicates, being “...will always be threatened by what it cannot integrate in itself—haunted by the negated, the neglected, and the unforeseeable” (82). In his brief, “What is Hauntology?,” Fisher writes that Derrida uses the term explicitly to describe the “lost” futures, prolific in modernity, which are neither present nor absent in postmodernity (16). That is, in late capitalism, the lost futures of capitalism “haunt” us with utopian visions that it cannot integrate.

In her “playful” exploration of time from the perspective of quantum physics, Karen Barad proclaims, “...*empirical evidence for a hauntology!*” (Barad, “Quantum Entanglements” 260). Looking closely at the quantum eraser experiment, which has demonstrated that delayed observations of matter passing through slits can somehow change the past behavior of the matter, Barad explains the connection between the experiment and an understanding of time: present, future, and past, as unfixed/haunted:

What this experiment tells us is that whether or not an entity goes through the apparatus as a wave or a particle can be determined *after* it has already gone through the apparatus, that is, *after it has already gone through as either a wave (through both slits at once) or a particle (through one slit or the other)*! In other words, it is not merely that the past behavior of some given entity has been changed, as it were, but that the entities’ very identity has been changed. *Its past identity, its ontology, is never fixed, it is always open to future reworkings!* The physicists who proposed the quantum eraser experiment interpret these results as the possibility of ‘changing the past’ (260).

⁹Many in queer theory have taken up hauntology as a way to think queerness with respect to capitalist heteronormativity: as a scary ghost. José Muñoz has used the term to describe the need for a return to the utopian, or at least the anti-anti-utopian, in queer politics (28, 42).

Barad goes on to say, however, that the quantum eraser experiment does not entail the complete erasure of the first identity (before the change). This is a changing of the past that cannot completely undo past wrongs but a change that leaves another haunting past. Barad writes, "...it is not the case that the past (a past that is given) can be changed (contrary to what some physicists have said), or that the effects of past actions can be fully mended, but rather that the 'past' is always already open to change' (266).

The openness of the past to change implies for Barad an ethics of responsibility to the past, to the dead, and to the future, the unborn. "To address the past (and future), to speak with ghosts, is not to entertain or reconstruct some narrative of the way it was, but to respond, to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that 'we' *are*..." (264): not one, or self, but irreducible entanglements of others. For Barad, that is, the hauntological real is proof that "we" all owe each other, that we have a responsibility to the past and future of the world. The responsibility is unending. It cannot be resolved into a final utopia- the hauntological ethic is the rejection of any fixed identity.

Both Silva and Barad present convincing arguments as to why we should engage a theory of temporality that differs from either the modern or neoliberal. Both share the vision of an ethics of possibility to change the past and future of capitalist and colonial horror. Ultimately, this haunting ethic is not wholly contradictory to Muñoz's concept of a utopian queer hauntology, which, he says, emphasizes the future *in* the present (56). A hauntological futurity does not correspond to either bourgeois utopian time or neoliberal end of time. It haunts both with an ethic of not only possibility but necessity of change.

Why might we leverage these [Black] [queer] feminist [po]ethical concepts, the plenum and the hauntological, in a reading of the "feminist" in science fiction? Building on an analysis of futurist projects as always contained within the imaginary of capitalism, and the anti-utopian as an expression of the interminable capitalist, Jameson writes that science fiction does not have the potential to provide us with the vision of the ethical, but only to show us what we cannot imagine in speculations on utopias that necessarily fail, restricted as they are by the hegemonic global imaginary that limits political thought (284). From Jameson's perspective, the best utopian SF does not succeed politically or ethically in its recommendation of

any particular better world, but is meaningful in its refutation of capitalism's narrative of itself as the final and only possibility. Thus, Jameson states, "...the slogan of anti-anti-Utopianism might well offer the best working strategy" (284).

Reading with Jameson and other SF writers and scholars, I propose that the concept of the hauntological might be an effective tool in the analysis of SF as ethically different from capitalism. It is the coexistence of multiple haunted times that allow narratives to defy the limits of capitalist utopian and anti-utopian futures imagining other ways into and out of time. These are concepts that affirm that capitalist time has no claim on forever, the future, or even right now. What exists is already haunted by an entanglement of time and matter in which there is no [straight]forward separation between human/thing, mind/body, and self/other. Further, anti-anti-utopian SF successfully haunts the time of reading, bringing the reader along in defying the limit of now and future. The novel "...becomes the site for an encounter with broken time" (Fisher 19).

SF has the potential to engage these hauntings, to illuminate entangled ghosts, or to maintain the fiction of a fixed ontology which prolongs the racial and patriarchal violence of capitalism. It often unfortunately does the latter. Scholars within critical race studies and gender studies have long decried the strong legacy within SF of racist, misogynist, and heteronormative characters and narratives. Still, some of those who are most aware of the problems of the genre are also the most vocal regarding the possibility of SF to exceed itself. Nalo Hopkinson's introduction to the collection of decolonial SF fiction that she edited, *So Long Been Dreaming*, expresses the tension that she feels as a racially aware person who loves science fiction:

...one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives... for many of us, that's not a thrilling adventure story; it's non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appear out of nowhere...(8).

She goes on to say that her edited anthology is comprised of:

...stories that take the meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humour, and also, with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things(9).

Like Jameson, Hopkinson is also thinking here about the radical potential of the narrative itself, before the act of reading, to express or hold the possibility of difference from capitalist hegemony. She does not necessarily contradict Jameson in her suggestion that the narratives make it possible to *think* about new ways.

In her proposal that we *read* SF queerly (23), Veronica Hollinger also investigates queerness as a concept that, in its attention to the fictiveness of gender and sexuality, turns the “real” into “fiction” in a way that asserts the influence of fiction on “real” social relations. For Hollinger, building on Butler and Haraway, queerness “...marks a utopian space... inhabited by subjects in process who are not bound by reifying definitions and expectations, and in which bodies, desires and sex/gender behaviors are free floating, and in constant play” (33). Hollinger’s use of “utopian” to describe the defiance of definition in “floating” and “play” resonates more with the rejection of capitalist limits than a bourgeois utopianism. In her expression of the effect of fiction on the “real,” the concept of a haunting of the reader and the reading time can be found.

Of these reflections on SF, only Hollinger’s explicitly refers to feminism, but all of them have a relationship to feminism, of collaboration as well as disruption and dissonance. They “interrupt [feminism] productively,” in the words of Donna Haraway (Schneider 149), to make sure that feminist interrogations of SF texts (like feminist interrogations of ethics) do not reproduce more of the same. But these are also approaches to SF that search deliberately for the haunting or the glimpse of the Plenum in the world. The “new way” of doing things, “browner,”¹⁰ less normal, and “queer,” “thrives” in a Plenum or a Hauntology, and not in an orderly, linear Time. Finally, it is interesting to see whether or not SF can entangle us, as readers, in the haunted time, thereby helping us to think beyond the anti-anti-utopian, toward the creation of a more ethical world.

What is to be understood, then, by the description of *The Power* as a “feminist” text? Is the text haunted by lost utopian futures? There are occasional moments in the book in which characters express an entanglement that does not settle well with the driving plot. This section of the paper, however, argues that these barely perceptible moments are stifled in a way that is reminiscent of capitalism stifling

¹⁰Also see N. K. Jemisin’s blog on how a new SF after the #racefail conversations of 2009 might be more subversive of the normal.

its spectres; the anti-utopian is much stronger than the anti-anti-utopian hauntings. The remainder of this essay visits both *The Power* and *Her Body* in order to search for “ghosts,” i.e. the missing futures and pasts of capitalist time, and to suggest that an ethically feminist text would do the same: not to kill the ghost, but insist on its presence/absence as beyond the suffocating capacity of capitalism.

The Power is a novel of several protagonists; however, much of the narrative centers around the figure of Allie, alias Mother Eve, a black, sixteen-year-old former foster child who has experienced physical and sexual abuse at the hands of multiple sets of foster parents. Allie acquires the power early on in the novel and has a particularly pronounced ability with it, in addition to a lifelong relationship with a disembodied voice, never fully explained (possibly, but probably not, the voice of Allie’s mother, possibly Allie’s own thoughts, and maybe the voice of God; the voice is more pronounced when she hasn’t eaten). Allie has always heard the voice, since before the awakening of her power in the “Time of the Girls,” and it has consistently helped to protect her from abusive adults, advising her in strategic maneuvers. The voice confirms that she should use her new-found power to kill her rapist foster father. After she does so, Allie sets out in search of her destiny, following without any doubt the instructions of the voice.

She ends up at a convent; the nuns welcome her, and Allie feels at home with them. A possibility opens early in the narrative then for a life of female community: “[T]he company of women is pleasing to Allie... The girls have chores to complete, but when they’re done there’s the ocean for swimming and the beach for walking, there are swings out back and the singing in chapel is peaceful and quiets all the voices in Allie’s head. She finds herself thinking in those quiet times: Maybe I could stay here forever... “ (Alderman 45-46). That haunting utopian possibility is almost immediately foreclosed by the instructive supernatural voice, however, which tells Allie, “If you want to stay, you’ll have to make this place your own.” (46). From early on in Allie’s story, her own desire to be a member of community is usurped by the voice in her head telling her that she cannot have community, she must have ownership, in order to have stability. “Remember, sweetheart, the only way you’re safe is if you own the place. Allie says: Can I own the whole world? The voice says, very quietly, just as it used to speak many years ago: Oh, honey. Oh, baby girl...” (133).

Allie willingly follows the voice's suggestion in establishing herself as the leader of other girls arriving at the convent, in expelling the nuns from their home, and in faking miracles in order to start a new global religion that recognizes her own voice as the voice of the one true God (who has decided to adjust gender relations on Earth).

Meanwhile, women revolt in all parts of the world, overthrowing male oppressors. The wife of the dictator of Moldova, Tatiana Moskalev, kills her husband and establishes a new country, Bessapara, inhabited primarily by women who have been abused as sexual slaves and now find themselves capable of securing freedom. Though initially Moskalev and Bessapara are inspirational symbols of new possibilities for the world, Moskalev quickly devolves into mental instability, Bessaparans torture male servants, and independent men are forced into refugee camps and then slaughtered.

Possibly, one could argue that characters within the text resist the trend of normative females occupying positions of dominating power. Allie's friend and only rival in power, Roxy, doubts Allie's blanket rejection of possibilities for collaboration with men. Allie tells Roxy, "You can't trust, them, though." Roxy laughs. "What, men? All men? Can't trust any of them?" Allie says, "Be careful. Find women you trust to work with you." Roxy says, "Yea, we've talked about this, babe." "You have to take it all," says Allie" (132). This moment could be read as one in which Roxy asserts that Allie's model of domination, of assertion as self over and against others, is not the only possible one, but she ends their conversation by telling Allie, "You know, I think you're right" (132). Later, Roxy's brother steals her "skein," the source of her power, for his own use. Roxy must go on living without it, and without the power to dominate that she describes at moments as "the only thing worth having" (52). There is a sad hopeful possibility in Roxy's humiliation, that her skepticism might lead her to become the force for egalitarianism. But at last we see Roxy at the end of the story, sitting with her father after the death or incapacitation of all of her brothers. Her last words with a smile are, "Bet if I had a daughter she'd be strong as fuck" (372). There is another foreclosure here.

There is another storyline in the novel that raises the question of gender queerness, and again opens the possibility for an exploration of difference from domination. Jocelyn is the daughter of a powerful woman, Margot, who becomes Governor of New York. Though she is one of the first characters in the book to develop the power and she is the one who awakens the power in her mother, we learn early on that

there is something wrong with Jocelyn's ability to utilize her skein. At times her power is too strong to contain, at other times it is completely absent. Then, the narrative tells us that Jocelyn is gay, possibly bisexual, or possibly queer: "Jos quite likes girls. She quite likes boys who are a bit like girls" (171). Jos searches online for others like her, and meets and dates Ryan, a boy who has a skein, though it is a small one. Like Roxy, Jocelyn reads as a character who could introduce the possibility of nonconformity with abuse. Her character is downtrodden in a way that hurts her redemptive potential: bullied by her peers explicitly for her gender queerness, susceptible to her mother's and to Allie's manipulation, both of whom use her to secure their own power.

A beautiful moment is when Jos thinks of a plan to free herself from her mother's control, through blackmail, in order to be with Ryan and fully accept herself as queer. Then she is attacked by Roxy's brother, who has the stolen skein, her power fails and Jocelyn is injured beyond repair. In the last section of the narrative, she is not a conscious character, "...it becomes clear that she will never fully heal" (368). Margot has the last word: converting the threat to Jocelyn into evidence of the need for ever more power: "The most important thing is that our enemies, both global and domestic, must know that we are strong and that we will retaliate... Believe me, at a moment like this, you need to appear stronger than ever" (368).

Most terribly, the chapters in *The Power* are divided into sections that maintain a book-long countdown: "Nine years to go," "Eight years to go," "Six years to go," "Five years to go," "Can't be more than seven months left," and "Here it comes." This is the future in its most invasive form, already telling us what the present must (and cannot) become. What is the book counting down to reach? From the manner in which the various threads of the story conclude—with Jos all but dead, Roxy imagining her daughter's rise to power, Margot drawing strength from her queer daughter to become the preeminent dominant person in the US, and Allie in charge of Bessapara—the book expresses both the dominance of linear time and the inevitability of the final establishment of heteronormative female dominating power, a replica of the existing patriarchal order.

This is not the anti-anti-utopian imaginary of a difference from global capitalism. The conclusion of *The Power* is straightforward anti-utopia. Even in the moments in which the possibility of difference emerges, the countdown predetermines their failure to subvert the inevitable. From its Biblical epigraph, *The Power* tells us that dominating power hurts the potential of humanity and humans will

never do anything else. But this is the myth of capitalism as expressed by Jameson: that there is no alternative to capitalism; the alternative will turn out to be the same. The promise of the future is the retrospective avowal of the existing structure as the only possible one. By the end of the book, the ghosts are all dead.

The epigraph to this piece reads Ursula Le Guin's expression of a prescient ethical need (for "...writers who remember freedom") via Barad's call for an ethical re-mem-bering of past and time. Re-mem-bering in this context entails Barad's taking of responsibility "...for that which we inherit (from the past and future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that 'we' *are*..." (264). It is the same thing to say that re-mem-bering, of course, involves interaction with and responsibility for ghosts.

Both ghosts of anticapitalist possibility and more literal ghosts abound from the first page of Carmen Machado's collection of stories, *Her Body and Other Parties*. Machado cites poet activist Jacqui Germain: "My body is a haunted/house that I am lost in" (2). Reading this line after Barad, the haunting takes on a new meaning. The body as "haunted" is a not-necessarily scary place; the loss of self is not necessarily a horror. The lines propose a hauntological reading of the stories that follow, toward the imagining of responsibility instead of (merely) fear. Next, Machado takes example of Elisabeth Hewer: "...god should have made girls lethal/when he made monsters of men" (2). In this second epigraph, Machado references the same dynamic that overwhelms *The Power*: the sense that a liberation from abuse and murder entails (merely) a reversal of order. Interestingly and importantly, the wife does not kill the husband in the first story nor does she imagine killing him. Though the text immediately introduces the imaginary it also immediately erases it, pushing readings that question the meaning of "lethal" and lethal to what or whom?

The narrator of the first story, "The Husband Stitch," gives an account of her life and marriage that is "haunted" by other women's stories, particularly fables that have been recounted by many and which have many different endings. These stories appear suddenly in the middle of her own personal one and the narrator explains, "When you think about it, stories have this way of running together like raindrops in a pond. Each is borne from the clouds separate, but once they have come together, there is no way to tell them apart" (16). She instructs her reader in how to read the text out loud, implying that she understands the connection of the reader's own story to hers, as well.

Throughout her tale, the narrator also makes jarring and wandering references to time: “over and over,” “one afternoon,” “again sometime,” “one night” (22-23). Like all of the stories in the collection, “The Husband Stitch” is haunted by the spectre of love between women and one woman in particular who appears at a class with the narrator, and a coffee date, and then vanishes. The narrator explains, “I am captivated by her, there is no other way to put it. There is something easy about her, but not easy the way I was—the way I am. She’s like dough, how the give of it beneath kneading hands disguises its sturdiness, its potential. When I look away from her and then look back, she seems twice as large as before” (23). Finally, there is no “end” to the story. The narrator apologizes (from beyond the grave?), “For these questions, and others, and their lack of resolution, I am sorry” (31).

The story communicates a sense of time that is eminently hauntological. Though the ghost of the murdered wife does not come back (in this version of the story) to kill the monster husband, the possibilities of multiple endings (and beginnings and middles) suggests ghosts/spectres of feminist ethics that exceed the imaginary of revenge. Maybe the wife ran away with the woman who was like dough. Maybe her husband did not teach her son to want to possess her. The stories are entangled and the versions of female characters, narrator, and reader, are responsible for each other.

In another haunted story, a queer woman contemplates her relationship with her partner named Bad. “Mothers” is a story so haunted by its possible outcomes that its difficult to untangle “what happened.” Did two women actually have a baby? Did the narrator escape into her fantasy life? Did Bad and the narrator kidnap two children? The timelines in this story make the relationship between the ghostly “fantasy” and the “real” entirely unclear. Bad and the narrator meet at a wedding in which people are dressed up in “...hats and veils... connecting them to millennia” (47). The two women become entangled and their times and places blend together: “We were somewhere in Little Russia, and then a drug store, and then a beach...” (49). The narrator states, “I felt like she was seared into my time line, unchangeable as Pompeii” (50).

The narrator says, “We were in love and I dreamt of our future.” The home in Indiana that she imagines is exquisitely vivid, down to the detail of food rotting in the fridge and which is fresh, with an altar to all of the feminist saints of all times. The description of the place and the women’s relationship in it extends for five pages, during

which it no longer reads as a fantasy. The daughter, Mara, is real. This is after they have had the baby, the baby has grown up, and Bad has not left the narrator after abusing her.

Of course, the time and situation does change. A teacher (Whose? Was the baby real? But Bad left before the baby was school-age?) overhears Bad verbally abusing the narrator on the phone and tells her, "I'm just saying that if it always sounds like that, then even if you think something is there, nothing is there" (58). In the slippage of time, the love in the story becomes more real than the abuse, without erasing or hiding the abuse or the "Badness" of the part that is not "real." The narrator constantly refers to the work of memory and exhorts other characters (imaginary ones?) to "remember." "I realize—I remember—that it is spring" (59). "Then the not-memory washed away like a wet painting in a storm and I was in the shower, shaking, and she was outside, losing me, and there was no way for me to tell her not to" (61). "Mara, remember? Your own babies?... How you still love your little brother the ferocity of a star; an all-consuming love that will only end when one of you collapses?... Your lives sated and solid, strange but safe? Do you remember?" (62-63). These memories or not-memories are so entangled and inseparable that the narrator lives in all of them. The story ends with a decision still to be made (Mara's) or a responsibility to be upheld (to be "good" mothers).

It is not necessary to explicate all of the stories in order to demonstrate the haunted time of the collection and its consequential vision of a more ethical world than the world of *The Power*. The narrator in "Mothers" expresses her belief in "...a world where impossible things happen. Where love can outstrip brutality, can neutralize it, as though it never was, or transform it into something new and more beautiful" (56). In Machado's stories, the constant haunting of time creates characters who try to reshape both past and present in an ethical way, not an escapist one. The reader becomes tangled in the characters' tellings too and is responsible for the effect of interpretation on the characters' world. Both narrators and readers haunt the impossible or predetermined future with other more ethical realities.

Because *The Power* presents time as both linear and static (predetermined), it affirms capitalism's narrative of its own inevitability, and of the inevitability of relations of domination. The countdown to the end in which women complete the project of gender reversal in domination also traps the reader in both frameworks of

capitalist time: teleological and finished. On the other hand, Carmen Maria Machado's *Her Body and Other Parties* haunts the time of reading with queer feminist nonlinear time. In stories like "Mothers," detailed descriptions of contradictory futures entangle both the characters and readers in a possibility of multiple "real" times. Plots and characters engage in simultaneous and convergent, but different moments, of reality and fiction "running together like raindrops." It cannot be mere coincidence that every story also includes queer relationality among women with a consistent emphasis on mutual dignity and critique of domination. The anti-anti-utopian queer relationships come across as catalysts for the possibility of experiencing multiple times or vice versa. These stories and moments provide characters and readers with the "encounter with broken time" that hints at existence as hauntology.

If one of these texts can be meaningfully described as "feminist," it is the one that both provides the encounter with haunting moments of equality in entanglement and non-separability. In attempting to read SF for ethical and political anti-anti-utopian possibilities, it may be useful to search for the hauntological. If both the future and the time after the future are capitalist (including strands of patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, abuse), the ethical feminist text might be one that successfully (for a moment, repeatedly, always) breaks time.



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