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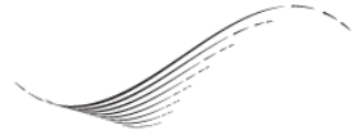
Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies

Unworld After-Picture
Virtual Cosmos
Urdu Cosmopolitanism
Print Culture
Plural Subjectivity
Reification
Para-Self
Aesthetics of Fragments
Ontological Plurality
Stargate SG-1
Reflexivity
Disability Studies
Colonial Modernity
South Asia
Phantomatic Ontology
Meta-Horror

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Even as we move into the second half of 2020, the crisis of COVID-19—though plateaued in some countries—is yet to decelerate in many parts of the world. Broken connections unify us in a humbling realization of the existential fragility of our human lives. Hope, however, continues to guide common people, rising beyond their differences and disabling circumstances, affirm Life by doing their bit and keep the world running. Our gratitude to these unknown men and women with big hearts who did what Governments couldn't.

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Contents

BOOK REVIEWS

EDITORIAL

Deeksha Suri and *Md. Faizan Moquim*

The onslaught of COVID-19 pandemic—affecting millions around the world directly as an infectious disease and indirectly by taking away their livelihood and/or displacing them in countries like India—has benumbingly flooded us with the deluge of news and data of ever-rising fatalities to the extent that our minds have begun to resist forming a credible vocabulary for conceptualizing and articulating the current crisis. The dogged uncertainty of future as the aftershock of this global health emergency will be looming over our social and economic systems for a considerable period of time to come. Parallel to this ongoing calamity, many cities in India are dealing with natural disasters such as cyclones, forest fires, floods, and recurrent earthquakes. This last Issue of Volume 3 of LLIDS is getting published, albeit behind the schedule, amidst this mayhem, and for this we appreciate the support that we have received from our colleagues and friends—some of whom were hampered by their circumstances but rose to the challenge to extend their helping hand. Even as the crisis keeps all the members, as well as the extended family of LLIDS, isolated in their respective homes, this Issue marks the completion of our three years of publication, and for that our heartfelt gratitude to all and everyone: editorial board members, authors, peer reviewers, interns as well as readers.

It may have come to the notice of our readers that Volume 3 (Fall 2019–Summer 2020) of LLIDS has attempted a dialogue on both the affirmations and expunctions of Cartesian rational subject within the history of modern Western thought—the ways in which human subject is constituted and deconstructed—with a special focus on contemporary debates of postmodern and posthumanist discourse. The previous three Issues, in this series, focused on interrogation and mapping of human subject's erasure within postmodernism, problematic of the duality of body-mind within posthuman thought, and the sense of ethical ground underlying posthuman praxis, respectively.

The rationale behind this attempt was to put to test one of the self-proclaimed goals of modern philosophy, of finding epistemic certainty in its dealings with the recalcitrant material reality of the world by investing hope in its understanding of 'being human.' Uncertainty, however, remains the only certainty against which rational subject designs his epistemologies, but finds it impossible to either remain in

control of the material world or to make sense of human existence within it. One scaffolding epistemology, bearing the illusions of certainty in rational subject's engagement with the material reality, forms itself as the anthropocentric metanarrative of humanism: a pivotal instance of establishing 'human' as a self-contained, self-knowing rational measure of specifically anthropocentric perception of reality. This all-encompassing metanarrative of anthropocentric humanism— since the establishment of Cartesian 'human' subject as the foundational principle within the Enlightenment discourse—though, largely finds itself out of favour within the postmodern thought that displays an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv). Postmodernity's incredulity towards the Enlightenment's metanarratives of humanism— the given cast to shape the material world—presents itself in twofold manner: while on one hand it begins to question a series of existing narratives, on the other hand however, this project of questioning the existing narratives, itself models another type of (meta)narrative that, somewhat paradoxically, reinforces similar set of values as the previous framework within the extant framework of postmodern thought.

The postmodern (meta)narrative of 'questioning,' within these given conditions, begins with a censure of modernist understanding of 'human'—"what makes us human?"—and brings liberal humanist tradition under intense pressure, eventually to the point of dissolution. As a corollary to this 'questioning' comes a sense of displacement, leading to the erasure, of the human subject as postmodern discursive practices opt for alternate definitions of being 'human.' These alternate approaches—consequent to the representation of the erased 'subject' as an inclusive, hybrid, variegated, and technologized category—are not only radically subversive to the prevailing modernist practices but also bring new modes of actualizing the subject as the 'posthuman' within the collective imaginiare. Within this imaginiare, even the reinterpreted history of social and natural sciences is "summed up as the elimination of the concept of the subject" (Touraine 1), where the problem of subjectivity looms over every attendant question on 'human posthumanism' in significant ways.

The philosophical and cultural shift from humanism to posthumanism, thus, includes within itself the disciplinary, socio-political, and ethical aspects attendant to this historical transition where, in its liberal scope, posthumanism prima-facie rejects the dominance of the Enlightenment humanism and substitutes it with hybridity, variation, and becoming. Collapse of the Enlightenment's humanist metanarrative—its worldview and especially final causality—allows

techno-science to configure a spectrum of undefined telos where radical uncertainty is at play. Within this uncertainty, concerns of body, memory, consciousness, and the metaphysics of birth and death branch out into the fantasies of disembodied, autonomous, and agentic entities leading to immanent and ongoing mutations in the representations of the posthuman. Despite the divergences between their perspectives though, the theoretical and practical struggles for posthumanist standpoint find themselves within latent humanist coordinates as their axes for reflection even as they toil to go beyond. Therefore, a dominant strain of representation in popular culture engages with the posthuman dramatization of the Enlightenment's dream of unlimited human perfectibility (Yaszek and Ellis) that, within the posthuman universe, is achieved as an engineered product—both fictional and real. Herein, genetic modifications, reproductive mechanisms, and virtual reality reveal biological and cultural anxieties, ruminations on the possibilities of existence, and spatial and temporal positioning of civilisation as a whole that remain curiously similar to the discursive deliberations that were part of the Enlightenment's framework of humanism.

Latency of humanist discourse can be witnessed, within the historical breadth of twentieth century that redefined the terrain of scholarly discussions, in the 'body-turn' that, paradoxically, became a pertinent part of posthumanist academic discourse. Couching its vocabulary within evolutionary continuum, the vector of posthumanist thought posits 'human body' as a corporeal limitation that must be overcome. Unlike the 'body-turn' in cultural studies or feminist studies that foregrounded the concept of body, posthumanism brings in fresh dialogue in terms of new ways of looking and engaging with the historically given understanding of 'human body.' Apart from representation of cyborg, android, Artificial Intelligence in fictive sphere, real-life 'cyborgs' (like Kevin Warwick, Neil Harbisson, Moon Ribas) too redefine the scope of body as a ground of identity in 21st century. It thus became symptomatic of posthumanism to declare the 'human' body as obsolete, requiring techno-enhancement for larger benefit, even as it concedes that all questions of subjectivity, affectivity, and mortality inextricably hinge upon the corporeal dimension of being 'human.'

The arc of the present Issue continues with chartering the anxieties and possibilities of posthuman subjectivities within popular culture's constructions of the posthuman—the universe of popular science fictions, films, television series, web series, and comic books—

largely through the modes of coupling humans to digital techno-science: cyborgs, Artificial Intelligence (AI), cybernetic enhancement, bio-technological innovations, and simulations. Taking a closer look at the second half of twentieth century, where the cultural representations take significant turn to subsume the trajectory of technological and scientific 'advances' within itself, it tries to study emerging areas within posthuman discourse that have sought to change the horizons of possibilities thereby attempting to rethink the future of the human world. Within these possibilities, human subject remains de-centred within the popular imagination, to be replaced by another species of posthumans who are sometimes presented as superior to human subject and sometimes as deviated aberrations to them.

This Issue brings together varied dialogues on the subject. Agnieszka Jeżyk brings out a subtle discussion of the representation of the human to animal and animal to human metamorphosis in Polish horror films. In her reading of Polish cinematography, aesthetics of horror genre is argued to be symptomatic of anxieties of past and present which underpin political, historical, and ideological questions in collective consciousness. Focusing on the trope of transformation, the essay engages in reflecting on the problematic of the boundary between human and non-human. K.M. Ferebee's essay presents a point of departure from the typical posthumanist framework in its critique of posthumanism on account of its inability to imagine plural subjectivity. The essay reads the character of Tok'ra as a plural being who challenges the naturalized, singular, human(ist) body and argues that the dominant representation of plural subjectivity has been in terms of loss (of subjectivity) and violation (of body). Ferebee's significant intervention lies in reorienting the optic with which plural ontology is perceived towards a way of thinking where it may be read in terms of assimilation and surplus of subjectivity. Last paper of this section by Marie Claire Brunelli discusses Heidegger's concept of "world picture" as the authentic connection between the self and the world, where subiectum is the basis of reference for everything. But, the continuous engagement with digital technology has shaped a para-self which, according to Brian Rotman, is splintered and plural. The relation formed by this virtual presence is understood as inauthentic in the face of the power of literature which is the authentic expression of the relational existence of man.

In the Special Submissions section, Yannis Kanarakis's reading of British aestheticism, market economy of the late nineteenth century

comes to be seen as a decisive factor in determining the aesthetic sensibility found in Walter Pater's criticism, Algernon Swinburne's poetry, and Oscar wilde's aphorisms and epigrams. By drawing upon the Marxist notion of reification, especially the one inflected by Jameson, the essay shows that capitalist logic of efficient production which gave rise to autonomous, fragmentary character of economy is very much the literary idiom as well as model of aesthetic production. In the next paper, Dominic Thompson undertakes a study of David Wong's *John Dies at the End* as a post-millennial horror fiction to analyse it in terms of metahorror genre. The essay contextualizes the self-reflexivity of metahorror vis-à-vis traditional tropes and stylistic of horror genre across literature, film, and video game. It maintains that self-awareness of a genre amounts to self-awareness of fiction in terms of its construction and enactment. In this regard, Thompson argues, Wong's novel is allowing a space for reimagining the schema of horror genre itself.

We hope to create a more engaging dialogue on this Issue through your questions and comments and, in these testing times, we extend strength and courage to all our readers and contributors.

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The Beast of History: Human to Animal and Animal to Human Transformations in Polish Horror Films

Agnieszka Jeżyk

Abstract

This essay presents a comparative analyses of four Polish horror films—two from the communist period: *Lokis: A Manuscript of Professor Wittembach* (1970) by Janusz Majewski, and Marek Piestrak's *The Return of the She-wolf* (1990), and two recent works: *The Lure* (2015) by Agnieszka Smoczyńska and *Werewolf* (2018) by Adrian Panek. In the context of the marginal popularity of the horror genre in Poland, the essay finds their focus on human to animal or animal to human metamorphosis intriguing, and studies it as a symptom of repressed national fears. It argues that what is subjugated in particular through this type of narratives is the anxiety of political, ideological, and social change. In this interpretation of the seemingly non-historical films, the essay will demonstrate that these surprisingly common depictions of transformations of subjectivity serve as vessels that expose the problematic approach of collective Polish consciousness to history. Some of the theoretical concepts used in the essay are Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of becoming as well as their demonic animal, Jacques Derrida's, Alexandre Kojève's, and Georgio Agamben's insights on human and non-human subjects and language, Freud's uncanny, and Žižek's interpretation of the Radical Evil in the context of Holocaust.

Keywords: Metamorphosis, Transgression, Subjectivity, Polish Horror Films, Cinema of Dread, Polish History, Animal Studies

> Do you desire a healthy man, do you want to have him disciplined, stable, and safe? Well then, wrap him in darkness, idleness, and heaviness. We have to become as stupid as the animals to become wise; blinded, to be guided.
>
> – Montaigne (qtd. in Birnbaum and Olsson 81)

"Chess Pieces on the Chessboard": Polish Cinema and the Impossible Horror

"In Anglosaxon culture, storytelling is a basis. It's about dragging the viewer into the game. We [Poles] don't have this skill," claims the director Jacek Koprowicz in the interview given to Paweł Jóźwiak-Rodan (Jóźwiak-Rodan). Later he speculates about possible reasons for this serious deficiency: "Maybe it is some genetic defect that we are

simply unable to tell stories. Maybe it is connected to the fact that historically we have always experienced failures, disintegration is inscribed in us, and we cannot construct anything." Similar is the view of Bolesław Michałek, who, in a 1967 article "We are Different, Weird"[1] points out the idiosyncratic position of the Polish cinematography so heavily reliant on the geographical location, the difficulty of the language, and historical circumstances: "Polish film is haunted by a ghost of historical fatalism. It has aesthetical consequences. For example, in Polish film protagonists as such don't exist [...] they are chess pieces on the chessboard" (Michałek 3–4).

Even if Koprowicz's diagnosis appears a little too far-fetched, Michałek's account proves symptomatic of Polish cinema. Polish cinematography, compared to American tradition, unquestionably lacks versatility in horror story-telling, and consequently such movies, which follow the specific objectives of the genre, inhabit a very thin margin of cultural production even today (Fiołek-Lubczyńska 2014). In Polish films, a vampire, a zombie, or a madman with a chainsaw has the face of a Nazi or Soviet occupier, the tales of metaphysics elevate the battle of good and evil to the realm of a writer's or artist's moral dilemmas, and the unknown is usually quite familiar embodied in historical or political forces destroying the nation. However, it can also be argued that it is actually in these Polish horror films only that the repressed collective fears, originating in the experienced complexity of history, become apparent. This essay argues from the position that what is subjugated in these movies is the anxiety of change which, taking into account the overwhelming time of the last two hundred years when Poland was not an independent state, may seem like a troubling paradox. This shared fear of change has been analyzed in this essay through the lens of four movies that discuss the transition of subjects from human to animal and vice versa. These depictions of metamorphosis of subjectivity is then perceived as vessels that expose the problematic approach of Polish collective consciousness to the idea of an abrupt change in history.

This essay also intends to show that Poland's past and present as well as the aesthetics of horror cinema are not mutually exclusive. In fact, most Polish "cinema of the dread," while depicting reality, is also heavily reliant on social and ideological changes resulting from the country's turbulent and often tragic history. The events of history—partitions of Poland between Russia, Prussia, and Austro-Hungarian Empire, failed uprisings, World War II, Stalinism, the deterioration and fall of communism—set the background, accelerate the plot, and/or even serve as *deus ex machina*, not only in the cinema of moral anxiety,

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[1]All Polish sources have been translated by the author.

or the critically acclaimed work of Andrzej Wajda, or Krzysztof Kieślowski, but they are also equally significant for Polish popular culture and genre cinema. Speculating on why the situation did not change after the fall of communism in 1989—which, at least initially, remarked Fukuyaman, was seen as, "the end of history"—Ewa Mizerska feels that, at that time, Poland also experienced the influx of American pop culture, which included not only blockbusters, such as *Ghost* or *Back to the Future*, but also classics of horror: *Silence of the Lambs*, *Scream* series, or *The Frighteners*. Rather than blaming the weak presence of Polish horror on the inability to tell stories, Mizerska points out more a practical justification: poor funding and insufficient technical skills.

> By and large, Polish filmmakers choose genres for which visual exuberance is not a necessary component of success. This situation, which is typical of all countries of the old Eastern Block, primarily reflects the fact that the Polish film industry is not ready to compete with Hollywood in the field of technical mastery that films belonging to these genres require. To an extent, the lack of horror or fantasy films and the prevalence of realistic genres suggests that, contrary to the widespread accusations of critics, Polish directors do not escape from what is widely regarded as their principal obligation, namely depicting the present. (Mizerska 16–17)

Cinema of Dread: Brief History of Polish Horror Movies

Instead of producing exemplary films within the horror genre, Polish cinematography has historically utilized its elements to create a domestic equivalent of horror: *kino grozy* (cinema of dread). Early examples of this phenomenon can be found from 1921 in *Pan Twardowski* by Wiktor Biegański, based on a famous legend of an alchemist who sold his soul to the devil to master magic arts. The year 1923 saw the first artistic success of a scary film: the expressionist *Son of Satan* by Bruno Bredschneider (Skaff 78), which used fashionable techniques of hypnosis as the main focus of the otherwise romantic plot and gained acclaim from critics and audiences. Similar themes were explored in *Atakualpa* (1924, dir. Henryk Bigoszt, Ignacy Miastecki), an "exotic contemporary love affair with elements of the occult," (FilmPolski.pl) which sadly did not survive the war. It shared the same fate as Leon Trystan's *Szamota's Lover* (1927) disliked by its own director but popular because of Igo Sym's—interwar period poster boy turned Nazi collaborator—appearance than for its aesthetic value (Hutnikiewicz). The film, based on a novella by Stefan Grabiński, ("Polish Edgar Allan Poe") follows the relationship of an editor and the beautiful ghost of Jadwiga Kalergis (Skaff 185). Lastly, Michał

Waszyński's Yiddish masterpiece *Dybbuk* (1937), despite being mostly a melodrama, included content not suitable for younger audiences: a pact with evil, demonic possession, and the inevitable death of the lovers (Gross 92–98).

Polish postwar cinematography experienced decreasing interest in "cinema of dread" for numerous reasons. The disastrous state of country's economy and infrastructure after the war, death, and emigration of many of the top actors, writers, and filmmakers, Stalinist enforcing of the socialist realist doctrine in art, and the emphasis on the war testimonies and experiences as a topic in moving pictures are but a few reasons (Janicki). Horror (and thriller) made its spectacular comeback with the series of five mid-length television pictures from 1967–1968 (*Checkmate*! by Andrzej Zakrzewski, *The Stub Track* and *Conflagration Site* by Ryszard Ber, *I am burning*! by Janusz Majewski, *Dance master* by Jerzy Gruza) entitled *Tales of the Extraordinary*, which gained high critical acclaim. Each of the films, based on a short story or a novella by Polish authors Henry Rzewuski, Józef Korzeniowski, Ludwik Niemojowski, and Stefan Grabiński is connected by the character of Kazimierz Rudzki, a literary figure, who is visited by a storytelling ghost (FilmPolski.pl).

The 1970s and 1980s mark the peak of interest in horror and, just like in the West, Poles had their share of artistically satisfying as well as much less successful scary movies. *Lokis* (1970) by Janusz Majewski belongs to the former group. The critics valued how the director provides a wholesome and nuanced film with a plot that expertly blurs the line between legends and reality, folk beliefs and science, manipulation and madness leaving audiences unsettled. A similar ambiance can be observed in *The Phantom* (1984) by Marek Nowicki. Another ambitious domestic horror with strong historical links is Jacek Koprowicz's *Medium* (1985) set in 1933 in the then German town of Soppot. It continues the interwar period fascination with the occult, esoteric salons, and hypnosis while also asking questions about the authenticity of being and free will against the backdrop of rising nazism. More mainstream horror films closely follow American B-movie patterns: the vampiric *I Like Bats* (1985) by Grzegorz Warchola gained popularity as a curious native example of the subgenre, and *She-wolf* (1983) and *The Return of the She-wolf* (1990) by Marek Piestrak are iconic examples of the 1980s camp aesthetics.[2] Andrzej Żuławski's

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[2]In her famous essay "Notes on 'Camp,'" Susan Sontag refers to camp as a certain type of aesthetics that is based on exaggeration, artifice, and the attempt to make something extraordinary. Some of the examples the author gives are Tiffany lamps, Swan Lake, the Cuban pop singer La Lupe, and the old Flash Gordon comics (Sontag 515–530).

films fall into a separate category. His gory *Devil* (1972) is an "[...] agonizing revision of patriotic phantasms referring to the topos of a madman patriot incarnated in vampiric Jakub obsessing over the idea of the fatherland" (Olszewska-Jończyk 180). Frenetic, sexually explicit, and, at times grotesque, the film was banned by communist censorship, which forced Żuławski to flee to France shortly afterwards. Some elements of horror can also be found in *Possession* from 1981 in "[...] shocking scenes of abjection and the horror provoked by a woman's relationship with a tentacled monster" (Goddard 248).

With films such as *The Legend* (2005) by Mariusz Pujszo, *Hyena* (2006) by Grzegorz Lewandowski, and *Time of Darkness* (2008) by Grzegorz Kuczeriszka post-communist cinematography in Poland unsuccessfully followed Western models and failed to bring idiosyncratic Eastern European twist to the genre (Dziduszko 25); for example, the socio-economical situation after the political transition of 1989 or local folk imaginary. The situation changes with the youngest generation of Polish filmmakers such as Marcin Wrona, Agnieszka Smoczyńska, Jagoda Szelc, Adrian Panek, and most recently Bartosz M. Kowalski who bring a breath of fresh air to the derivatitive and uninspiring "cinema of the dread."

Beastly Kinships: Humans, Animals, and Horror

In order to establish why this metamorphosis of the animate matter, more specifically, the transfiguration of a male or female into an animal subject, or vice-versa, has a powerful potential in horror films, the essay will make a basic distinction between a human and an animal. At first glance, the issue may seem trivial as it is ancient and fundamental to the development of Western civilization. Elizabeth Grosz emphasizes, in her book *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections of Politics and Art*, that since antiquity this relationship has been based on a radical rejection of the animalistic element within the human, and the establishing of a strict hierarchy in which the animal must be subservient to the human. Grosz claims that this structure functions according to the rule of the approval or denial of the access to power: "whether it is reason, language, thought, consciousness, or the ability to dress, to bury, to mourn, to invent, to control fire, or one of the many other qualities" (Grosz 12). In other words, by using technology as a means to tame and control nature, humans have legitimized their sense of superiority over whatever is not human. In "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," while discussing one of the crucial scenes from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* where Alice realizes that a cat doesn't purr for "yes" and meow for "no," Jacques Derrida points to a privileged human technology: language. The philosopher interprets it as a moment of realization that an animal's speech does not

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follow any distinguishable rules. It does not produce meanings that order reality and leaves us with no response. The inability to generate what humans recognize as language is the basis for the process of othering non-human subjects:

> Animal […] as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brother. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger or the elephant from the echidna. (Derrida 402; italics in original)

Derrida argues that the failure to recognize animals as our own kind permits humans to take advantage of non-human energy and life. This exploitation occurs on multiple levels. It might be motivated by religious practices, where the animals serve as a sacrifice to gods, it is also ingrained in the practices of human economy such as hunting, fishing, controlled breeding, testing on animals, products of animal origin, and the meat industry. Since the animal body is already dehumanized at its core, it can easily function as potential nutrition without producing a cognitive dissonance.

Understanding the dynamic and hierarchy between the human and non-human is crucial in the context of how fear is created and disseminated in animal-oriented horror films. Stacy Alaimo points out that one of the recurring motifs in the genre cinema is a local or global catastrophe that serves as nature's revenge for the perpetual and persistent exploitation of the environment by humans. This theme becomes especially significant today when we witness open discussions concerning climate change and human responsibility for the destruction of our natural surroundings. The same debate is also occurring in Poland and movies such as *Spoor* (2018) by Agnieszka Holland, based on Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, play a valuable part by problematizing animal rights and the part potentially played by non-human agency in the said destruction. Alaimo, however, emphasizes another significant aspect of this revenge scenario. In particular, she is interested in the situations where the boundary between what is human and non-human is put into question. Even though such plots may be incessantly attractive for the audience, they also introduce a serious theoretical problem:

> Monstrous natures pose challenges not only for environmental politics but also for ecocriticism and theory since the very thing

these creatures embody as horrific – the collapse of boundaries between humans and nature – is what many theorists, such as Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, and Donna Haraway, promote. How effective can stressing the continuities between humans and nature be when popular films represent this kinship as beastly? (Alaimo 280)

Alaimo makes it clear that regardless of the endless efforts of academicians and activists, who advocate for the shift in thinking about human/non-human relations, being exposed to images of a man turning into an animal remains one of the most terrifying cinematic experiences for a regular consumer of mainstream culture.

There are various possible explanations for this phenomenon. Certainly, the human to non-human transition produces the feeling of dread since it is a model example of the Freudian uncanny: something "secretly familiar [heimlich-heimisch], which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (Freud 243). In this type of man to animal transformation, the idea of facing the animalistic in a human becomes apparent. The subject is forced to step out of its privileged and set position into the realm of marginalized and unstable non-identity. And how does one talk about the ontological status of the *it* in the process of becoming? This is why it does not come as a surprise that Freud himself, in *Totem and Taboo* (1912), connects the term uncanny to "[...] residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression" (Freud 240). This process occurs not only in the individual but also on a social, economic, and philosophical scale. Hence, the kind of metamorphosis being discussed here functions as a scandal, which shakes the whole ontology.

The moment when the wild within resurfaces to disturb what has been constructed by culture is also a time of suspended progress. From this perspective, human to non-human transformations serve equally as a cause for anxiety about the end of civilization and the demise of humanity as such. Whatever form the subject will take next—animalistic, humanoid, robotic, or other—it will never be the same type of agency and intention which Western tradition ascribes to humans. In the book *The Open: Man and Animal*, Georgio Agamben further discusses this problem stating that humanity will vanish with the human language. What will be left? The speculations concerning what happens after the end of the civilization were already expressed by another philosopher, Alexandre Kojève, in 1968:

If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play also become purely "natural" again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their

edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play as young animals play, and would indulge in love like adult beasts. (159)

As Kojève claims, the end of language is neither equivalent to the collapse of culture nor does it stand for the end of the world. Indeed, there is a possibility that a post- or rather pre-civilization will emerge bearing some resemblance to human modes of existence and patterns of behavior. Its character will not be anthropocentric but Kojève's arguments seem optimistic: animate matter, including non-human subjectivity, will always find ways to express itself. However, for Poles, tormented by history, the images of man to animal transitions become a realm of ultimate dread since each metamorphosis foreshadows a deadly change. The images of metamorphosis are a way in which Polish cinema works through historical traumas generated by periods of political, ideological, and social transition.

Human and Non-Human Languages: Anthropomorphism and Zoomorphism in *Lokis*

Based on Prosper Mérimée's short story, Janusz Majewski's *Lokis* (1970) is set in nineteenth-century Lithuania. The film follows Wittembach, a German pastor and a professor of linguistics, who ends up at young Michał Szemiot's estate in search of an obscure catechism. Having accepted the sojourn, the scholar soon learns about the dark secret of his benefactor's mother who had lost her mind after a savage bear attack. Soon after, the woman had become pregnant with the little count but the identity of the baby's father was left to rumor and speculation. As the plot progresses, Wittembach's reason and logic, along with the viewer's, are regularly challenged by a sense of uncanny. Until the very end, it remains indecipherable whether one should trust in peasant sorcery and uncivilized stories or science and common sense.

The movie makes both subtle and overt attempts to disrupt the audience's fixed perception of human and non-human subjectivity. Beginning with the title, which means "bear" in Lithuanian (*lokys*) but has been meaningfully misspelled, the viewer is immediately alerted that language is one of the platforms where transgressions occur. It becomes a space that interestingly interrogates would claims about the inherently human nature of speech. In *Lokis*, language functions as the catalyst of the plot. The story originates from Wittembach's desire to retrieve the rare manuscript and to translate the Bible into Samogitian to evangelize the autochthons more effectively. From this perspective, the first conversation between the pastor and the count, which focuses on the questions of language, subjectivity, and agency, proves crucial.

While Wittembach argues that endangered species need to be preserved, Szemiot brings up Alexander Humboldt's anecdote concerning a parrot who was the last user of a forgotten language of a tribe long-exterminated by smallpox. The statement provokes no reaction other than a puzzled sigh. The pastor, who clearly believes in the flawlessness of the Agambenian (Agamben 33–37) anthropological machine,[3] refuses to deal with the messiness of the story. Do words recited by a bird actually exist, or was the language spoken by an animal already dead? Does speech produced without an intention, based purely on mimicking sounds, fail to be speech? Why is it a failure then, if it can be understood, classified, recreated, and reused? Who is the speaker, the subject: the parrot, or the person who taught her how to talk? Or, in other words, can a bird "purr" for yes, and "meow" for no? The film is successful at keeping the problem nuanced and ambiguous. One of the suggestions it provides is that the non-human subject needs a human translator to interpret the message in order to communicate at all. In the Western worldview, this obviously could only be a folk person, since they are closer to nature due to their uncultured position. A village witch, traditionally viewed as combining animality and femininity (Deleuze and Guattari 246–247),[4] functions as such a figure, and in one

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[3]In his book, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Georgio Agamben describes the concept of the anthropological machine which is a distinction between man and animals that works like a device for either humanizing the animal (ancient anthropological machine) or animalizing the human (modern anthropological machine). Agamben recalls late nineteenth century researchers (Haeckel, Steinthal) who were theorizing about "the missing link": a humanoid, or a man-ape that could undoubtedly prove the interconnection between animal and human world. One of the factors, which was supposed to determine this link was the emergence of language: "In identifying himself with language, the speaking man places his own muteness outside of himself, as already and not yet human" (Agamben 34–35). This view on the place of animal and human in the world establishes a strict hierarchy in which "the missing link" is just an intermediate stage on the ladder of evolution. Wittembach shares this frame of mind and applies it to thinking about human nationalities and races. His visible sense of superiority over East Europeans confirms this assumption.

[4]In the essay, "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible..." Deleuze and Guattari draw a close connection between the demonic animal and sorcerers/witches, which is sanctioned by a pact with the Devil or contagion ("alliance and contagion, pact and epidemic"). The authors quote anthropologist Edward Leach, who states: "Witch influence was thought to be transmitted in the food that the women prepared..." (247). By the same token, it is not a coincidence that Szemiot and Wittembach first meet the witch when she walks around the forest picking mushrooms. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari claim that becoming-woman is proceeded by an act of sorcery (248), and the sole status of "becoming" occurs to "minoritarian groups" (105), for example, from male to female. Curiously, the witch is played by Stanisław Milski, making it one of a very few cases in Polish cinematography when the male or female actor was cast to perform the opposite gender.

of the scenes she passes on unfavorable news, supposedly produced by a snake, concerning Szemiot's love life.

The above-mentioned questions that Wittembach would rather leave unanswered keep accumulating as the plot moves. Nevertheless, despite the attempts to deconstruct the rigid distinctions between human and non-human, Majewski does not break from the anthropocentric perspective. In *Lokis*, animals are the real heroes of the story, they chirp and howl in the background, they flit in the court (horses, dogs, rabbits), run through the forest (bison), and escape hunting (ferrets), but their status becomes elevated only to the extent that they are humanized by whoever is in control of language. By this token, they create structured societies (the witch's assumption about the elections of the animal king) or are able to recognize human intentions (Wittembach's diagnosis of their dislike for Szemiot). In the end, however, or so it seems, it is the human who draws an ironic distance between himself and animal life. The count's taxidermy collection or his capturing of the hawk are just two examples of how humans not only use non-human subjects for utilitarian reasons, but also purely for entertainment.

Moreover, there is an opposite operation occurring in *Lokis*. A person or a group viewed as lesser and other by the speaker is immediately zoomorphized. This status is ascribed to the witch, who is first aimed at by a rifle, and then locked up in a cage with the animals by the resentful count. Szemiot's mother is also degraded to a mere link between humans and non-humans and pushed to the margin. After the nervous breakdown caused by the notorious encounter with the bear, she behaves as if she has got "infected with animality." Trapped in the moment of trauma, her language deteriorates to moans, roars, and other inarticulate sounds. It is also significant that the only time she speaks up, the countess goes back to the accident. "Fast, kill the animal!" she screams just before her son's wedding, predicting the tragic fate of the couple. Through her insanity Szemiot's mother regresses to an animal state, unable to communicate or take care of herself. The paradox of her situation is that the category of madness does not hold in the animal kingdom because it is abstract and requires delineating normality. You can be either mad or an animal, but the way the countess is impossibly positioned in-between enhances her otherness. Due to her inability to produce language and her unpredictable behavior she is stigmatized as crazy and, at the same time, her inner animality resurfaces metonymically through her association with the bear.

Both of these mechanisms, anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, take place simultaneously in one of the opening scenes of the film when the pastor meets countess Pacowa, young Julia, and her governess on the train. At one point through the window, the

travelers notice a group of Romani with a domesticated bear dancing on the platform. Wittenberg jokingly inquires: "Is it a Prussian, Russian, Lithuanian, or Polish bear?" To which the matriarch responds: "I fear he is cosmopolitan like his owners, the gypsies." Seemingly lighthearted, the exchange exposes ideological hierarchy of power, and shows that the category of nationhood, which emerges during the time of Romanticism and Spring of Nations, plays a crucial role in creating potentially racist divisions. Elevated to the level of other performers, the animal suddenly gains human qualities, including nationality. However, this process is concurrent with the deprecation of the disorderly and uncontrollable Romani. The ordering structure manifests itself in Wittembach who relishes in stories of the cultured and the savage. In his worldview, barbarians, including the native dwellers of Samogitia, need to be dragged out of their natural animality through exposure to the written word of God. This again reinforces language, at least in the form of a text, as a civilizing tool, and positions it as a major distinction between human and non-human. As a German, he grants himself a privileged status of a westerner, which seems to establish him as a rational, scientific subject but, in fact, only legitimizes his ignorance. This situation is clearly visible when Julia tricks the pastor to believe that a ballad by Adam Mickiewicz, an iconic Polish-Lithuanian Romantic poet, is an authentic Samogitian folk text.

In *Lokis*, Eastern barbarism is epitomized in the supposedly refined count Michał Szemiot, and as his savagery is exposed throughout the film. It also becomes a manifestation of insecurities and inferiority complexes of 'the other' Europeans. Right from the start there are traces of evidence pointing towards his double, human and animal, identity. The bear performer at the station, anxiety that the count provokes in dogs, a bear figurine music box which Michał drops during the wedding dinner, and a dead bear near the train tracks towards the end of the movie are just a few examples of the allusions to his questionable origin. The witch, a suspicious subject herself, further confirms this impression. She addresses Michał while watching a group of European buffalos running through the forest: "You will be their king, you are big, strong, you have claws and teeth. You will be their commander." Casting these doubts will cost the old woman her freedom but Szemiot surprisingly incriminates himself confirming her implications. In the scene where Wittembach and the doctor find him in the ruins of a castle, Michał delivers a monologue about the duality of a human who desires to jump into an abyss but at the same time fears it. As a matter of fact, other information that he reveals about himself, such as his passion for taxidermy or an accidental attack on a friend, exposes Szemiot's nature as predatory. This diagnosis is confirmed in the climax when the young bride lies murdered as Michał vanishes on the wedding

night, although the viewer does not get a definitive answer as to whether the count transformed into a murderous beast or if a more ordinary human monster is responsible for the tragedy.

The Howl of Lust: Human and Non-human Pleasures in *The Return of the She-wolf*

The link between rough sexuality and human to animal transitions is also the topic of Marek Piestrak's horror film, *The Return of the She-wolf* (1990).[5] Shot as a sequel to the more successful *She-wolf* (1983), the picture is set at the turn of the century Kraków, the capital city of the artistic milieu, and it follows a young poet, painter, and womanizer Kamil who is about to marry Krystyna. As the couple is leaving for their honeymoon in the estate that belongs to the groom's cousin Stefania, Kamil is cursed by his former lover. This scene prefigures future tragedies since the estate is haunted by a she-wolf, Julia, who tries to attack the bride during the wedding night. As a result of this incident, the young bride undergoes a nervous breakdown and is sheltered by the family until she later meets her death at the paws of the she-wolf.

As the maid Agata reveals to Kamil, Julia targeted the girl because she wanted to take the poet as her lover. Sex, as Agata claims, is what provides the countess with eternal youth. Interestingly, in this case, the beast does not seem to be primarily a slave to her passions but is rather overpowered by vanity. This essentially human trait marks Julia's lack of self-reflection upon her two-fold identity. Mistaken on who she really is, the she-wolf focuses her animal energy on the power she has over other characters due to her inhuman strength, and not on the uncontrolled desires of the flesh. The attempt to dominate on Julia's part could be read through Grosz's insights on animal/human hierarchy as an effort to win back her lost human status. In *Becoming Undone*, Grosz presents traditional modes of thinking about Darwin's theory of evolution and asks if we can "understand life as no longer bound by and defined through a hierarchy in which man is the pinnacle of the all living forms?" (Grosz 4). While the Australian philosopher tries to read Darwin's work in the spirit of diversity and equality, Piestrak's she-wolf legitimizes the well-established order that subjugates animals to humans. Torn between her animalistic and human nature, Julia strives to regain her higher status through conquering a human lover but, since she is lacking recognition of the duality of her liminal character, all her efforts are in vain.

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[5]Labeled by some as "the worst movie in Polish cinematography" (Filmweb).

Unable to function as a sexual subject herself, Julia serves as a catalyst sexualizing all her surroundings, especially Stefania and her daughters, Ania and Iza, who all fall under Kamil's spell. Unhappy in her marriage, Stefania tries to get back with her former lover, while the girls experience their first erotic fascination with the charming and flirty poet. Through female characters, *Return of the She-wolf* shows a significant change in behaviors, habits, and values of the turn of the century Polish aristocracy. Interestingly, the movie does not offer a moral lesson about the degeneracy of Poland's upper classes but depicts the shift in thinking and, especially with young girls' awaking femininity, the pursuit to break "the psychological and theological separation of women into two stock types in polar opposition: Mary/Eve, Snow-White/Rose-Red, Saint/Witch, nun/succubus; all these abound" (Allen 9). In this perspective, Julia's troubling presence in the estate precedes all types of societal processes—the rise of women's movements, urbanization, access to education, and active participation in politics—destabilizing patriarchal order. Ideally, these practices aim at:

> […] not only the production of alternatives to patriarchal (racist, colonialist, ethnocentric) knowledges but, more urgently and less recognized, a freedom to address concepts, to make concepts, to transform existing concepts by exploring their limits of toleration, so that we may invent new ways of addressing and opening up the real, new types of subjectivity, and new relations between subjects and objects. (Grosz 83)

Finally, interpreted through the feminist lens, Julia also embodies the anxiety of a vast part of conservative Polish society: unruly female sexuality which disrupts male power and limits patriarchal control over female bodies—a topic that is still sadly relevant in today's Poland.[6]

The focus on female sexuality is an intriguing element in *The Return of the She-wolf*. In one of the first scenes, the viewer is exposed to a very rare image in Polish cinematography: a woman masturbating. This display of passion takes place in a library, where one of the females is looking through a sketchbook containing suggestive graphics. The drawing, which makes her sexually aroused, depicts a woman pleasuring herself in front of a dog. Loaded with meanings, the picture juxtaposes the instinctive part of human nature connected to sexual impulses with the rational element represented by the setting and the presence of books. This act does not belong to this space, but its

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[6]Poland currently has the most severe anti-abortion laws in Europe. The attempt to further restrict it resulted in a series of protests mobilizing not only activists but also regular citizens (Król & Pustułka 366–384).

performance gives rise to another transgression. Here one system of signs, i.e. language, is substituted with another, i.e. images, simultaneously moving from the realm of what is exclusively human to a more inclusive, sensual territory. Secondly, the act itself escapes the power dynamic imposed by the patriarchal system inscribed in most erotic relationships. It is about pleasure and the body, not dominance or subjugation. Lastly, the presence of the dog poses additional questions. For Derrida, the gaze of an animal "[...] offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the unhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the border crossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself" (Derrida 381). The animal gaze may surely function as a tool of self-exploration, but in this case, the implications are sexual. The woman looking at the image filters the erotic situation not only through her own eyes but also through the presence of the dog. In this context the animal serves as a mirror for the female in the sketch; therefore, it becomes a narcissistic gesture while the pleasure remains voyeuristic for the real observer.

The image of the masturbating woman, one of the women who live on the estate but is never indentified, aptly represents the erotic atmosphere of the place. It also visibly contrasts with the virginal innocence radiating from the young bride, Krystyna. During the first night of the honeymoon, she rejects the rough advances of her husband claiming she doesn't want to do it "like that." Her dismissal is also a denial of animality within the human and of privileging sex over eroticism. Krystyna does not want to give herself away since it would seal her reliance on Kamil's desire. After the trauma of confronting the beast in her spouse, she falls sick. As one might expect, the court's medic, caricatural Freudist doctor Nussbaum, interprets her visceral disagreement to the violence of the intercourse as the fear of defloration: a normal condition among young women as he claims. He argues that the rejection comes from associating aggression with animality and, consequently, taking the husband for a dangerous predator. This instinctive reaction proves to be accurate. Krystyna does not have to take him for a beast for he is one. His attitude towards women in the film is, at its best, questionable. Kamil not only flirts and seduces but also breaks the rules of personal space and intimacy, writes suggestive erotic poetry, paints nudes without any realization of what damage they may cause, and later on even fails to mourn his dead wife. The other predator, Julia, keeps appearing in the estate reflecting Krystyna's inability to undergo a transition from a girl into a woman, from a maiden into a wife, from a virgin into a sexually experienced woman. The bride does not allow herself to explore her passionate side and embrace the non-human element of the self. In this way, her role is to balance Kamil's excessive and disordered sexuality. Interestingly, Krystyna dies

strangled in the bathtub, not ripped apart by Julia, making the murder more an act of a human, an almost intimate gesture, rather than the attack of a savage animal.

"We are not humans, we are on vacation": Hybrid Identities in *The Lure*

The connection between femininity and monstrosity, especially in the sexual context, is also a significant theme in *The Lure*, a 2015 film by Agnieszka Smoczyńska. Exceeding the genre of horror, this quirky "Polish musical about man-eating teenage mermaids" (Abrams) is focused on two sisters, Golden and Silver, who have been fished out of the waters in Poland's capital to become a sensational singing duo in the 1980s Varsovian nightclub. What might be striking for a viewer familiar with Polish cinema is not only the subversive potential and originality of this film but also how it depicts the last decade of communism in Poland. The reality created by Smoczyńska rejects politics both on the individual and global scale, and instead focuses purely on the entertaining aspects of the disco/punk era. At first glance, *The Lure* does not provide historical commentary on the changes occurring back then in Eastern and Central Europe. However, this avoidance to address the issue directly proves to be significant. Through the choice of the protagonists, Smoczyńska problematizes the theme of transition in a very unusual, thought-provoking way. The director discusses various layers of the sisters' unstable identities through which one can also observe the uncertainty of the glorious and dreadful 1980s.

The role of Golden and Silver in the story is shaped by collective memory and mythical tales. At the same time, however, as modern performers, they need to adjust to the rules of the industry. These two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. According to Greek mythology, sirens—beings with a female torso and initially bird then fishlike lower body—used to seduce sailors with their sublime voices to shipwreck on the nearest rocks (Phillpotts 34). Likewise in *The Lure*, the sisters sing their way out of the waters to the nightclub, where they demonstrate their skills in a variety of music genres. The price too, as in the myth, is death and destruction for everyone who hears the siren call: Mietek, the bass player, ends up with his throat ripped out, the marriage of the vocalist Krysia and the drummer falls apart. In a way, this hypnotizing and deadly aspect of singing links the mermaids not only with ancient but with Christian tradition as well, more specifically with Augustine's concept of "sinning by the ear" (Dolar 20). The fall is not only an individual fate but it's equally inscribed within the mythical structure. The seductive voices of Golden and Silver try to conceal the dark side of the music business which, despite the humor entailed in the story, is as monstrous as the incisors of the mermaids and, most of the

time, creates its victims out of young women. From this perspective, the scene where the girls wear playboy bunny ears and fishnets over their tails for a German photographer can be seen as a gloomy echo of the human trafficking occurring for decades on the Western border of Central Europe.

Another significant aspect of the sisters' status is that of hybrids: without water, they immediately change into ordinary young females but deprived of its access, they dry out and ultimately lose consciousness. To maintain their dual character, they need to constantly balance on the verge of being human and non-human, in the process of becoming women/monsters. This quality of mermaids is again right away capitalized upon by the club management. During one of the performances, Golden and Silver submerge in a see-through container set up in the middle of the stage and their legs change into fishtails. The popularity of the human/non-human duo reveals the night club as a space where transgressions are not only acceptable but are also welcome. However, their ancestor Triton, a leader of a punk rock band in communist Poland, warns that this liminal identity is impossible to sustain. "We are not humans, we are on vacation," he tells the girls. Gradually, the beastly nature of the sisters starts to come out. It is foreshadowed by Golden's moving solo performance with the refrain: "It has been a long time since I was so lonely, in the evenings I become more and more hungry." As the plot moves forward, the sisters attack random strangers and, in a meaningful gesture, devour their hearts. Simultaneously, the sisters are progressively transitioning from childhood into adulthood, experiencing all the symptoms of teenage angst: rebellion, mood swings, first love. Golden and Silver smoke for the first time, pick up guys in a bar, and the latter eventually starts an affair with the bass player, Mietek, whose fascination with her voice becomes a catalyst not only for her transition from a girl into a woman, but also starts an unexpected chain of events. At one point, Krysia, the lead singer of the band, has a dream in which she changes into a mermaid as well breast-feeding two siren girls. This vision signifies the vocalist embracing the role of a substitute mother, which means she loses some of her identity to her children and acquires some of their monstrosity. Her breasts, according to psychoanalytic tradition (Freud 43), are also an obvious sign of both nutrition and pleasure for which both girls are increasingly hungry. During a heated argument, Silver revolts against their make-shift family and asks why they are not getting paid for their work at the nightclub. Sensing their deadly potential, Krysia would rather view them as kids and disregards their concerns. However, as this order is not able to be maintained, the band members finally get rid of the mermaids as problematic, uncertain subjects and put them back in the river unconscious.

Everything changes upon their return and the sisters, lingering between myth and modernity, humanity and non-humanity, and childhood and adulthood, abandon the idea of sustaining the moment of metamorphosis to let it come to completion. As a result, Silver decides to undergo a surgery to permanently become a human woman while Golden embraces her identity as a mythical monster. However, Agnieszka Smoczyńska leaves a lot of room for ambiguity: in the end the rejection of monstrosity within leads to annihilation—Silver turns into seafoam fulfilling the prophecy—and, as it turns out, there is a lot of human love, loyalty, and sisterhood within the monster—drawn by these emotions, Golden symbolically takes revenge on the humankind for the death of her sister. With this gesture, the director blurs the rigid binary oppositions of what is human and what is non-human and, consequently, the hierarchies imposed by anthropocentric ways of thinking too gets dismantled. Moreover, in the context of Poland's political situation in the 1980s, what *The Lure* also seems to indirectly imply is that change, prolonged as it may be, eventually leads to a total reframing of reality. Mermaids and their uncertain ontological status reflect the turbulent time of the decay of communism: martial law (13 December 1981 between 22 July 1983), the rise of the Solidarity movement, on-going strikes, shortages of goods, mass political emigration, round table agreement between the government and the opposition (between 6 February and 5 April 1989), first semi-free elections, and mass inflation. Similarly, just like the clash of the human and non-human subjects in *The Lure* resulted in death (Silver), or rejection of the human world (Golden), the political shift had also negative impact on society.[7] In this way, the Polish collective anxieties of political transition are embodied in the liminal figure of a mermaid.

Snow White, Seven Dwarfs, and a *Werewolf*: Beyond Dehumanization

Another recent horror production from Poland set in transitional times is Adrian Panek's 2018 *Werewolf*. The story begins with the liberation of the Gross Rosen concentration camp in February 1945 with a group of kids who end up in an improvised orphanage located in a deserted German estate in the Table Mountains, Lower Silesia. Left with only two days of food supplies, supervised by one adult caregiver, surrounded by dispersed troops of the Werwolf unit, and uncertain of the Soviet soldiers' intentions, the children fight for survival against all

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[7]Some of the societal problems of new democracies were: growing unemployment, class inequality (Kelley and Zagorski 319–364), depression (Bobak, et al. 359–365), and the crisis of the elites. However, sociologist Piotr Sztompka claims that most of these problems originate in Polish societies' lack of trust in its authorities (Sztompka 37–62).

odds. Soon the orphanage is under siege from yet another enemy: a feral pack of abandoned German shepherds. Especially significant to the new Polish cinematography, due to the focus on a long-neglected moment in Polish history, *Werewolf* very successfully combines jump scares, gore, and psychological thriller with a combination of narrative we already saw in *The Lure*: myth, children's stories, and fairy tales. Similarily postmodern in ambiance, the film alludes to literary canon with *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, and the classics: *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White and Seven Dwarfs*, and *Little Red Riding Hood*.

Contrary to Brothers Grimm's story, there is no grandma (she must have died in Auschwitz) at the end of the space of adventure and transition (the forest), and the Big Bad Wolf morphs into a herd signifying the dispersion and multiplication of danger. The structure of the horde reminds of Deleuze's and Guattari's insights on the demonic animal: "a pack or affect of animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale..." (241). Deleuze and Guattari also emphasize that the key to understanding the concept is to grasp the ability of a demonic animal to transform. Why would it be the status of the supposedly domesticated German shepherds then? In the movie, their sudden appearance is foreshadowed by the Soviet soldier who sends the kids off on their journey but cautions them against a werewolf instead of the dogs. Even though he keeps the actual Nazi military forces in mind, the alert gives a clear message: children will be dealing with beings whose provenance is uncertain, since the werewolf is both a human and a non-human subject. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, the demonic animal's liminal, transgressive, and collective character is not all of its most crucial traits. Equally important is its connection to the forces of evil, which serve as a vessel linking the pack with a given community, or enabling human to animal transitions. Referring to the models established by the Inquisition, the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus* mention that the metamorphosis may occur via two different means: the imaginary vision and the spell. "In the first, the subject believes him- or herself to be transformed into an animal, pig, ox, or a wolf, and the observers believe it too; [...] In the second, the Devil "assumes" the real animal bodies, even transporting the accidents and affects befalling them to other bodies" (Deleuze and Guattari 252–253). This vision of the Devil that serves as a transporter of human emotions, values, and ideologies onto a non-human subject, would certainly work within the framework of Panek's *Werewolf*. In this case, the stray dogs function undoubtedly as the extension of the German perpetrators and as symbols of the systematized murderous machine that persists after the order have been annulled. Incarnated in the pack, the abstract system degenerates into the animalistic but keeps haunting the survivors sustaining the binary oppositions imposed by the Nazi ideology: the

division between the race of the masters and the race of the slaves, the civilized and the barbarians, those who are the epitome of humans and the dehumanized others, the hunters and their prey.

The idea of the devilish intervention into human matters, which enables the genocide to perpetuate, proves to be seriously problematic. Through the use of the magical transmitter, the question of blame becomes suspended and the division between victims and perpetrators more nuanced. Who is to be condemned for the atrocities of World War II, if the suffering inflicted is part of a divine plan (which also conveniently encompasses the Devil)? A similar concern, namely the danger of belittling concrete pain and making it abstract, could be raised in connection to the other intriguing link between the Devil and organized oppressive totalitarian system: Aleksander Wat's concept of the Devil in history. In an oral diary, *My Century* published in 1977, where Polish futurist poet and prose writer answers the questions of another literate, future Nobel Prize in Literature Czesław Miłosz, Wat confesses that for him experiencing history from the perspective of a Pole of Jewish descent is closely intertwined with a religious experience. The image of a laughing Devil came to Wat when he was a prisoner in one of the Soviet prisons during World War II (Wat 291), and the poet associates it with literal and metaphorical imprisonment a subject experiences in a totalitarian system (Venclova 270–272). Wat bitterly accuses the Western world of selling out Poland to the Soviets, finds communism as one of the manifestations of the Devil in history, and considers native writers who saw the allure of this system as committing "fundamental treason, not against Poland, but treason against some principle of good" (Wat 226). In *Werewolf*, the pack of feral dogs and their persistent presence even after the end of the war serves as a device enabling one totalitarian system to merge into another. From this perspective, stray German shepherds would embody a set of basic Polish collective anxieties: the fear of dependence, subjugation, and loss of identity.

The devilish interference in human affairs, as convenient as it may seem, does not offer any long-term consolation, and will not aid in working through the shared trauma of war. A surprising lifeline and the way out of "elevation of the holocaust into an untouchable transcendent Evil" comes from a seemingly unexpected source (Žižek "Radical Evil"). Slavoj Žižek implies that atrocities inflicted by the Nazis on, among others, Jewish, Polish, Roma, and gay population of Europe do

not incarnate the Lacanian Radical Evil.[8] Instead, the Slovenian philosopher follows Hannah Arendt's notion of the banality of evil:[9]

> [...] the unbearable horror of Auschwitz resides in the fact that its perpetrators were NOT Byronesque figures who asserted, like Milton's Satan, "Let Evil be my Good!" - the true cause for alarm resides in the unbridgeable GAP between the horror of what went on and the "human, all too human" character of its perpetrators. (Žižek "Radical Evil")

In fact, the distinction between a man (or a child) and the animal in *Werewolf* is disrupted from the start. Initially, the kids also function as a herd marking the dehumanizing effect of the war machine. Due to the concentration camp numbers tattooed on their arms, the children are deprived of their individualities and can be viewed as a collective, nameless group. Later on, most of them are addressed through their most significant physical feature: Redhead, Black, Thin, Tiny, Big. The level of their zoomorphism is visible in the scene when the hungry kids devour the only available nutrition: canned dog food. To break this set of behaviors the caregiver, Jadwiga, and the oldest girl, Hanka, force the kids to use knives and forks when eating the leftover potatoes. Their attempts prove to be successful and, as the plot moves forward, the audience is able to distinguish the youngsters through their individual characteristics: a sense of humor, values, intelligence. What is also crucial is that eventually only kids and dogs survive, marking the beginning of a new chapter in Polish history.

One of the crucial factors that play a role in the process of socialization as well as in overcoming a supposedly hopeless situation is again language. The children use the German command "Nieder!" to try to tame the dogs, and build a bridge of communication between them and the dangerous beasts. This turns out to be effective when another system of signs—clothing—is implemented as a reference. German shepherds start obeying once the kids take off their prison uniforms. The

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[8]As Žižek mentions, the problem of Radical Evil was first brought up by Kant in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, and could be defined as an "a priori, not just an empirical, contingent propensity of human nature toward Evil" (Žižek 48). Žižek discusses against viewing Holocaust as a type of a Radical Evil—a notion which can be derived from Lacan's *Kant avec Sade*, where, as the Slovenian philosopher claims, the author equalizes indifference with finding pleasure in violence. He also argues that there is no connection between the death drive (the Freudian version of the Radical Evil), and the XXth century totalitarianisms (Žižek "Radical Evil").

[9]In her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt introduces a famous concept of the banality of evil. Instead of presenting the Nazi perpetrator as a villainous sociopath, the author emphasizes that his motivations were rather mundane: he wasn't driven by racist ideology, but by a desire to perform his job well (Arendt 1964).

most interesting example of how language functions in the film manifests itself in Mała, the youngest girl. The trauma of the concentration camp has left her mute, and her refusal to communicate positions her between a human and a non-human subject. This is also why she is the one able to cross over to the animal world. In a moving scene, where she speaks up for the first time she shows compassion to a dog stranded in one of the rooms of the orphanage. "There is no water," she says and passes a bowl filled after the rain to the animal. The gesture of reaching out and petting the dog ends the horror and becomes the ultimate transgression of the impassable human/non-human differences in the language of mercy and compassion. Everyone, human and animal, regardless of culturally imposed hierarchies that are changeable as the times that generated them, deserves water. From this point onward, the horrors of the war, and the echoes coming after, come to completion to make room for a fairytale ending, in which there are no perpetrators left, and both the kids and the dogs are survivors.

The Beast of History or a Journey Beyond Regression

In the essay, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," Friedrich Nietzsche paints a picture of humans whose identity is reliant on the past and constructed through history. Contrary to animals, the silent objects of our envy, who always exist in the moment, the mind of a man lingers on yesterday or reaches out to tomorrow: "The beast lives unhistorically," claims the philosopher, "for it "goes into" the present, like a number, without leaving any curious remainder" (Nietzsche 5). The aim of this essay was to reflect on rather the opposite: the situations in which non-human subjects prove to be of historical significance and relevance in the niche Polish cultural productions: horror movies. Each of the films focused on times of political, ideological, or social changes. *Lokis* centers around the shift in thinking which has its roots in the Romantic paradigm: the birth of nations and nationhood, the emergence of the West/East divisions, the discussion of the status of written and oral texts. *The Return of the She-wolf* shows the evolution of insights on female sexuality in light of the emergence of the suffragist movement and the growing role of women in the public sphere. The background of *Werewolf* is the chaos in the aftermath of World War II and the victory of the Soviets, while *The Lure* is set in the turbulent 1980s when the communist system was on the verge of collapse.

These liminal times produced ambiguous, complex subject-ivities, and their beasts also prove to be hybrid and uncertain. A count, who might also be a bear, an aristocrat who metamorphs into a she-wolf, mermaids who sing in a nightclub, and the ghosts of Nazi occupants embodied in the pack of dogs all represent collective fears of transition. The moments of political transformation or historical unrest are

reflected by the metamorphosis of each of the agents, usually from human to inhuman, exposing the problem at the heart of the matter: the anxiety of regression. To change into an animal is to become less than human, it's the rejection of culture in favor of nature and, in this linear view of history, it implies the impossibility of progress. According to this framework, human to animal transgressions signify embracing chaos and lack of structure typical of primeval cultures. Such fears are visibly present in Polish horror movies of the communist era, but they are not put into question or deconstructed. However, the recent productions, though centered around the same issue, do not view these metamorphoses as problematic. Their goal is to demonstrate that in the end the distinction between human and non-human, understood as the difference between good and evil or better and lesser, are just outdated binary oppositions. This is precisely why Silver from *The Lure* would rather change into the seafoam than kill the man she loves and, for that reason, Mała in *Werewolf* in a gesture of compassion waters the thirsty dog. New Polish cinema seems to understand that this is the only way to tame the beast of history.

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"Pain in Someone Else's Body": Plural Subjectivity in *Stargate SG-1*

K.M. Ferebee

Abstract

Lennard Davis, in his work on visualizing the disabled body, argues that at root the body is inherently and always already fragmented. The unified "whole body" is, therefore, hallucinatory in nature—an imaginary figure through which the body's multiplicity is repressed. There is much in this view that is consonant with posthumanism, which so often seeks to destabilize the "whole" and singular one in favor of the multiple, the fragmentary, and the hybrid. Yet despite these considerations of the body as fragmentary, little attention has been paid to the value of considering the body not only as fragmentary, but also as potential fragment. What might we learn by rejecting anthropocentric assumptions about the body-mind's inherent completeness, and exploring the radically plural ontologies offered by visions of shared, joint, or group body-minds? This paper turns to science fiction as a source of such visions, considering depictions of symbiotic and hive minds through the non-traditional models of ontology and agency. While science fiction has traditionally represented plural being as a troubling and fearful injury to wholeness, this paper aims to highlight the symbiotic Tok'ra[1] of television series Stargate SG-1 as a model of excess being that not only challenges the naturalization of the "complete" body, but also asks us to interrogate presumed boundaries between self and other.

Keywords: Plural Subjectivity, Phantomatic Ontology, Posthumanism, Science Fiction, Stargate SG-1, Disability Studies, Environmental Humanities

"Science fiction films," as Susan Sontag writes in her seminal 1965 essay "The Imagination of Disaster," "are not really about science." They are about a great many other things Sontag suggests that they "normalize what is psychologically unbearable," they represent the

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[1]The term symbiote (or *symbiont*) refers to a Goa'uld parasite living in a host animal such as a human or Unas. The Goa'uld are biotrophic which means they rely on their host to survive, as the long life and physical healing benefit is provided to the host for the sole purpose of serving the Goa'uld. The Tok'ra, on the other hand, live in a mutualistic symbiosis with their hosts, because both organisms benefit by sharing control of the body. Both are called endosymbionts, which means that they live inside their hosts.

extraordinary, they "reflect world-wide anxieties, and serve to allay them" (42–45). Perhaps most significantly, Sontag sees science fiction as offering a moral and moralizing simplification: one that both allows us to "look[] at freaks, at beings excluded from the category of the human," and provides us with a message "about the proper, or humane, uses of science." Though Sontag does not say so, this theory of science fiction transcends science fiction films and has its roots in what is broadly considered the foundational work of the science fiction genre, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It's in this novel that we see the trope of the "mad scientist" emerging—the man who puts science to an improper use and creates a monster; however, more importantly, we also see a nascent fixation on what is subtext in Sontag's description: science fiction tells us what is human and what is humane. *Frankenstein* is interested in what is *natural*—Frankenstein's "fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature" gives way to an awareness that in doing so he has trespassed and committed an unnatural act—but, as Cary Wolfe points out, "concepts of nature are always inseparable from those of *human nature*" (29), and, building on this, attempts to universalize and reify the natural are always simultaneously attempts to stabilize the human, a human whose nature has been called into doubt. However, written in 1965, Sontag's attempt to see science fiction as chiefly concerned with the problem of human/e behavior in an era anxious about the affordances of science: how we behave humanely when granted power that exceeds the scope of traditional ethics; where does the inviolable boundaries between nature and the human lie? The years since then, have seen the genre expand its scope to include the problem of human/e *being*: how to regulate what might be called "proper, or humane, ways of being" when alternative possibilities, in the form of 'trans-' or 'nonhuman' ontologies, are increasingly visible, as alien life forms or as the transhuman future in which "some altogether unrecognizable 'human nature' would take the place of this one" (174), as Fredric Jameson (2005) characterizes it? Sontag, writing in 1965, sees science fiction as chiefly concerned with the problem of human/e behavior in an era anxious about the affordances of science: how we behave humanely when granted power that exceeds the scope of traditional ethics; where does the inviolable boundaries between nature and the human lie. The years since, have seen the genre expand its scope to include the problem of human/e *being*: how to regulate what might be called "proper, or humane, ways of being" when alternative possibilities, in the form of 'trans-' or 'nonhuman' ontologies, are increasingly visible, as alien life forms or as the transhuman future in which "some altogether unrecognizable 'human nature' would take the place of this one" (174), as Fredric Jameson (2005) characterizes it. In this new era, a principal threat appears in the form of being-which-is-not-like-our-being, very often (indeed perhaps *most* often) in the form

of a collective consciousness (cyborg or alien), presented as an actively sinister and existentially horrifying Other against which the ideals of modern liberal humanism can be articulated and naturalized. Interestingly, in spite of science fiction's inherent potential to imaginatively engage with the Other, it is rare for depictions of collective, or what we might call more broadly "alternative" consciousness, to stray very far from this characterization. A posthumanist reading of the genre prompts us to ask why this is the case—why science fiction seems to resist nonhuman models of consciousness, and what we might gain from overcoming this resistance. This paper therefore looks closely at one of the rare examples of science fiction media that offers a more ambivalent vision of alternative consciousness: the 1997–2007 TV show *Stargate SG-1*.

Stargate SG-1 chronicles the adventures of a U.S. military team that travels through space with the aid of the titular ancient alien "Stargate." The show's signature alien villains—the pseudo-Ancient-Egyptian outer-space warlords against which the heroes of the show must eternally fight—are introduced in the first episode of the series (a spin-off from 1992's *Stargate* film). Called the Goa'uld, these snake-like aliens are creatures that possess the capability to attach themselves to the brainstems of humanoid "hosts," dominating the host's consciousness and body. Their depiction calls back to the uneasy psychosexual tropes of the body horror genre: incubated in the artificially incised and wound-like "wombs" of servants, they emerge as damp, undulating, and fleshy before penetrating their unwilling hosts through the mouth or neck. This physical penetration, so suggestive (in the tradition of Ridley Scott's *Alien*) of rape, makes the host's psychic invasion and subjugation visceral. This is not death—though it is suggested early on that "nothing of the host survives," we later learn that the host is conscious but inert throughout the process: capable of surfacing, and able to access its invader's memories, yet stripped of agency. In other words, somewhere between violation and death lies this state of enforced plural being—in which the oneness or wholeness of the subject does not survive, yet in which the subject is not extinguished—in which one is not oneself and yet not *other*, at least not completely.

If this suggests a "living death," it is in line with previous depictions of such a state. Enforced plurality through assimilation into a shared or "hive" mind is one of the principal threats presented by collective consciousness in science fiction. The Borg Collective of the Star Trek universe (who first appeared in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in 1989 before continuing on to feature in *Star Trek: Voyager* and the 1996 film *Star Trek: First Contact*) achieved

memorable villainy through their policy of "assimilating" those they encountered into a cybernetic whole, eliminating their singular consciousness while simultaneously marking their physical bodies with connective mechanical implants. The loss of "freedom of choice and the ability to act independently of the collective mind" is, Mia Consalvo observes, "allegedly worse than death for the individual involved" (193), and something that, Katrina Boyd notes, fixes the Borg as "entirely alien" (1996). *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s captain, Jean-Luc Picard, articulates this in his first encounter with the Borg: "My culture is based on freedom and self-determination," he declares. Yet what the Borg represent is not really a cultural difference, but something more fundamentally threatening. They appear, argues David Gunkel (2000), as unstable beings who are "relational subjects constructed and reconstructed based on the vicissitudes of the network," and are constantly reconfigured "in relation to the discursive arrangement of the occasion" (345). The Borg therefore "can appear as nothing less than monstrous, dangerous, and terrifying, for they interrupt and undermine the assumptions of individual subjectivity and agency" (345).

Two significant characters in the *Star Trek* universe, both "rescued" former Borg, serve to emphasize the Borg as "improper" way of being. The first, Hugh, appears in a 1992 episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* as a captured Borg drone who effortfully learns to be a subject, and then (twenty-eight years later) reappears in *Star Trek: Picard,* counseling other Borg through the de-assimilation process. Hugh's narrative is notable for the fact that his use of the first-person singular pronoun ("I," rather than "we") and, more generally, his demonstration of independent subjectivity result in his re-recognition as someone who possesses the right to life. Consequently, the Borg Collective as a being and the various fluctuating loci (as the name of the Picard-turned-Borg entity "Locutus" suggests) that emerge as beings-to-some-extent within it are not beings that have a right to life. This idea is further elaborated through the narrative of *Star Trek: Voyager* character Seven-of-Nine, which revolves around her journey from assimilated Borg "drone" who finds human community "small" and "insufficient" to full member of the "human collective" who embraces individuality (including, as Consalvo notes, the idea of gendered embodiment) and seeks to free other ex-Borg from collective existence even at the cost of their lives, stating that "survival [in and of itself] is insufficient" (*Star Trek: Voyager* 00:4:02; 00:6:02). Enlightenment here, as in the bildungsroman tradition, involves recognition of the proper way of being a person—specifically, here, the recognition of individual subjectivity is the only proper way of being, and that the hive mind is an abnormal and injurious fate.

Elsewhere in science fiction, plurality that doesn't threaten to assimilate is still figured as transgressive and horrifying, often in the form of an insectoid alien hive mind. Larissa Budde, writing about the Aliens of *Aliens* and the Wraith of *Stargate Atlantis*, argues that the insectoid quality of hive mind aliens "not only exemplifies and justifies their moral destitution and inhumanity; it also allows the equation of inhumanity and non-humanity" (126), as the unindividuated hive comes to signify the abjection of the human. Indeed, many examples of collective consciousness in science fiction take the form of insect-aliens: the extraterrestrial Chitauri invaders of 2012's *The Avengers,* the transdimensional kaiju of 2013's *Pacific Rim*, the many-limbed Mimics of 2014's *Edge of Tomorrow*. It is fair to ask, as James O'Sullivan does (writing about the Aliens of *Aliens*), whether these can truly be considered collective *intelligences*, as they are largely portrayed as "unintelligent, and rel[iant] on instinct for governance of their actions" (82); however, more than anything, this is emblematic of how alternative consciousness is equated with imperfect/insufficient consciousness—an issue that is perhaps made more complicated by the *Stargate SG-1/Stargate Atlantis* villain the Replicators, who appear as an insectoid mass of crawling robotic spiders, but coalesce in humanoid forms that speak intelligibly for the collective. It is not the animal unintelligence of the hive mind that is objectionable, but its lack of individuation, which becomes not only a marker of monstrousness, but also a diminishment of the act of killing: killing cannot be wholly or absolutely killing if the killed subject was only partially or imperfectly alive to begin with. In a similar vein, the death of a Goa'uld's human host in *Stargate SG-1* is often framed not as a death but as the death of an opportunity: the lost possibility of reinstituting the host to full life. The host is therefore mourned but not completely—the moment and agency of death are dislocated and diffused so that mourning begins to occur at the point of subjugation or, in other words, at the point of plurality.

This presentation of plural subjectivity as deficiency is consistent with an ideological framework that, for Mergrit Shildrick, regulates the subject as a "sovereign mind" in an "appropriate body," an "inviolable self/body that is secure, distinct, closed, and autonomous." Those who are "inappropriate/d others" (who violate the norm of "one body/one mind"), Shildrick argues, "cannot occupy unproblematically the subject position" (51). Never can plurality, in this context, figure as surplus or repletion; instead, to have too many minds or too many bodies is the same as having too few. The blurring of boundary between self and other disqualifies the 'bodyminds' involved in plurality from the category of subject, instead positioning them as "monsters" who both

threaten the stability of subjectivity and serve to re-constitute it through their vigorous and continual othering.

Such a view of subjectivity is unsurprising within a mainstream popular consciousness that draws its models from broadly humanist ideas about what the proper subject is. However, what is surprising is the extent to which posthumanism[2]—a field or genre that prides itself on its openness to non-human forms of being, that vocally prizes multiplicity, and positions itself as rejecting the individual, the object, the atom, the fixed and unitary act, as well as the dualisms implied by these divisions—has allowed this view to go so little criticized or addressed. Indeed, posthumanism seems to evince a general uneasiness with too-radical explorations of subjectivity, instead hewing very close to traditional humanist notions of how we constitute a subject. The multiplicity of posthumanist scholars is often related in some sense to Deleuzian multiplicity; this multiplicity, Deleuze writes, "must not designate a combination of the many and the one, but rather an organization belonging to the many as such." In other words: "everything is multiplicity, even the one, even the many" (182); there is nothing that is outside multiplicities. A multiplicity "has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature" (8). The posthumanist subject, under this influence, often figures as a multiplicity coalescing out of multiplicities, a vital process, material and nomadic, "[…] actualized by the relational vitality and elemental complexity that mark posthuman thought itself" (Braidotti 189). Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "becoming-other/imperceptible" presents itself as an approach that "decisively breaks with the notion of an atomistic and corporeal subject," marking the "I" as a "contingent project" that is "[…] one part of the cycle of becoming that extends beyond the human and the singular body to figure a non-temporal and unstructured coalescence of creative forces" (Shildrick 175). Ontological emphasis is thus placed on touch, interaction, and connection between desires and flows rather than on the provision of the body or identity—what Shildrick terms "a stable centre, a reference point for agentic actions" (175). For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is synonymous with multiplicity insofar as a multiplicity "is defined not by its elements, nor by a center of unification or comprehension" but by "the number of dimensions it has," and therefore "cannot lose or gain a dimension *without changing its nature*" (251–3).

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[2]The term "posthumanism" is used here in a sense that encompasses what others have called the "nonhuman turn," in other words, the turn away from humanism and the centering of the "human" and towards an approach that challenges both the category of the human and its privileging over the nonhuman. (See Grusin)

Yet this deterritorialization of the self, while productive in its critique of the stable subject, has proven a remarkably unfertile ground for theorists seeking to reconceive problems of subjectivity. Braidotti maintains that the posthuman subject as *the* singular, stable subject "needs at least *some* subject position" (*The Posthuman* 102). In her articulations of subjectivity, she further argues that the nomadic subject is "a spatio-temporal compound which frames the boundaries of processes of becoming" (3). It is a "sustainable self" that "inhabits a time that is the active tense of continuous 'becoming'" (3) and takes for granted a fundamentally human vision of the subject even as she makes it plain that this is the opposite of her goal of arguing that her "non-unitary" (multiplicitous/becoming-based) vision of the subject allows for the recognition that "the life in me is not only, not even human" (6).

Braidotti is not alone in seeming to embrace the breakdown of the unitary subject at all levels except that which is most pertinent in this writing, which is to say the level at which the boundary between self and other collapses in a more than philosophical sense. One might say that the default position of posthumanist theory is that there can be an *I* or there can be an illusory, infinitely multiplicitous and shifting "*I*," but there can never be a *we*. N. Katherine Hayles writes of the "'we' of autonomous agents operating together to make a self" as a plural that is "meant ironically," in other words it is too absurd an idea to be taken seriously. Annemarie Mol, in her influential study of ontology in medical practice, emphasizes that "the body multiple," the multiplicity of bodies that are produced through sociomaterial practices, "[…] does not fit into a Euclidean space" (119) and cannot be reduced to a single "whole" body, yet also explicitly rules out this model as pertaining to "[…] two different persons or one person divided into two" (82). The cyborg body that is equally at the root of many anti-anthropocentric approaches, and that is iconic for its capacity to transgress boundaries, remains—even if one accepts its power to destabilize relations between wholes and parts, between the "natural" and the "unnatural"—the body of some*one*. *Mixotricha paradoxa,* the "mixed-up" microbe that raises, for Donna Haraway, all kinds of questions—"What constitutes *M. paradoxa?* Where does the protist stop and somebody else start in [the] wood-eating insect's teeming hindgut?" (xvii)—can teach us about origins through its "paradoxical individuality," but its form of life, which "[…] makes a mockery of the notion of the bounded, defended, singular self," does not ever quite challenge us to rethink our assumptions about the nature of the subject. The perverse and fabricated "cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras" that, according to Haraway, we find ourselves to be are always singular creatures, albeit fluid, composite, and unstable in nature. Pramod Nayar, in his description of the human as "congeries," perhaps comes closest to articulating the idea

of "a subject that is essentially intersubjective and intercorporeal [...] the human [as] a node, one that is dependent upon several other forms of life, flows of genetic and other information, for its existence and evolution" (76), yet his survey of critical posthumanism is primarily interested in the human's biological and environmental intercomposition rather than the potential of this intercomposition in terms of subjectivity and agency.

The takeaway from posthumanism's view of the subject is that we are multiplicities, and we participate in other multiplicities, but at the same time *we are*, and we are not other people, however materially (through the interchange of molecules) or figuratively (through shared vulnerability or situation within larger social and ecological bodies) entangled we may be. The understanding of the self as multiple and fluid does not do away with the nonsensicality of the statement Wittgenstein offers in *The Blue and Brown Books* when considering the grammar of the subject in pain: "To ask 'are you sure that it's *you* who have pains?' would be nonsensical" (67). Within anti-anthropocentric frameworks, this grammar persists. However chimeric or mosaical the subject may be, one person cannot have another person's toothache, or be confused as to whose toothache they are feeling. In some sense there is a limit here that organizes our grammar of the subject, and it is a limit on ontological plurality. Some aspect of my body can pain me, and forces outside of my body can cause me to have pain—in other words, forces outside of my body can be involved in the phenomenon of my pain—but fundamental to the definition of how personhood works is the notion that I can't have pain in another person's body, and another person's body can't have pain in me.

The way this definition operates regarding the self and the other is fundamentally related to a similar delineation in terms of the physical constitution of the body, one that has been productively explored, in disability studies. Writing about the amputated bodies of Classical nudes, Lennard Davis suggests "the disabled Venus serves as an unwanted reminder that the 'real' body, the 'normal' body, the observer's body, is in fact always already a fragmented body" (140); in other words, to see the statue as a damaged version of some "pristine origin of wholeness" is to engage in a "[...] repression of the fragmentary nature of the body" (135; 138), a willful hallucination that represses the fragmentary or multiple reality of the body (which constantly threatens to reappear). The disabled body, by drawing attention to the fact that the body is always already multiple and composite, evokes cognitive dissonance (139). This is similar to and consistent with readings of the cyborg body that perceive it as troubling or threatening because its equation of biological and mechanical parts

(the interchangeability of these parts) suggests the fundamentally illusory status of an integrated human whole. Machines, being "merely" made up of parts, will, when made part of a human body, "[…] always seem to mark a process of disintegration," as R. Rawdon Wilson writes (147), echoing what the film theorist Giuliana Bruno (characterizing the aesthetic of *Blade Runner*) calls the "dark side of human technology, the process of disintegration" (63), and what Fred Botting characterizes as essential to the science fiction genre: "[…] horrible visions of psychological and corporeal disintegration in which known boundaries collapse and bodies are transformed" (38–9).

Yet, to acknowledge the hallucinatory quality of wholeness, and the disintegrated manifold body, does not address the obverse of the situation that Davis describes: what does it mean to look at a body not only as a fragmentary body—that is, not only as a multiplicitous assemblage, capable of disintegrating into parts—but as a potential fragment *of a body*? If disintegration, as a process, is marked by drawing attention to the fragmentary body, then what is the process that draws attention to the body as itself a potential part of a larger whole? What we might call the annexation that involves, for instance, feeling "pain in someone else's body" struggling to identify whose pain a particular pain is? (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 222). This paper suggests that the failure to imagine such a process of superintegration instead of disintegration—a failure to imagine plurality, a many-being—has been responsible for this process's representation in terms of loss, penetrability, and violation rather than in terms of surplus, plurality, and fruitfulness. Science fiction's representation of plural consciousness as living death or diminished being relies upon and reinscribes normative visions of a subject that must abstain from plural subjectivities in order to be understood as complete or "whole." Embedded within these visions of the subject is an implication that to be other than the discrete ordained whole is to be *part* of someone or something else, and therefore less-than-whole, subject-*ed* rather than subject. A surplus of subjectivity is therefore always the same as a deficit.

As previously described, the *Stargate* universe's treatment of shared consciousness begins in a manner consistent with humanist models of enforced subjectivity. The rhetoric of possession and rape that is used to depict the Goa'uld as a species operates on the assumption that the experience of multiple consciousness *must* naturally be experienced as a diminishment. In the series' second season, however, *Stargate SG-1* begins to offer a second and markedly different interpretation of this experience. Episode 2.02, "In the Line of Duty," introduces a benevolent faction of alien symbiotes who wage war

against the Goa'uld despite sharing the same genetic roots. One of these Tok'ra (as the show refers to them), fleeing an assassin, enters and assumes control of the body of lead character Samantha Carter, a co-embodiment that Carter at first rejects and resists, but eventually mourns the loss of when the symbiote dies to save her.

The Tok'ra, as viewers learn, are biologically identical to Goa'uld, but behaviorally distinct in the way they choose to join only with willing human hosts. "Blending" with a human host is a delicate and serious process that requires careful matching, and that affects both human and symbiote identity. Symbiotes, for example, have no gender as such, but may develop a lasting preference for a certain gender of host; when a symbiote blends with a new host, the blended person who was the lover of the symbiote's previous blending may continue to love—or fall in love with—the symbiote-in-new-host. Carter, having been briefly joined with the symbiote Jolinar, later meets and experiences romantic feelings for Martouf-Lantash, the blended Tok'ra who was the lover of Jolinar-in-its-previous-host.

The blending of Tok'ra symbiote and host does not create a third, separate, *discrete* subject—or not one that is in any sense stable. Both symbiote and host retain a distinct sense of self and can distinguish (though sometimes with considerable trouble) between their memories. Symbiote and host are also capable of speaking in individual voices, which *SG-1* demarcates by using a deep sound filter on the "symbiote" voice, though more frequently the "human" voice speaks for both the human individually and for symbiote involved. Internal communication of some form takes place between the joined symbiote and host, with hosts occasionally making reference to the symbiote "saying" or "thinking" something. Yet the blending does not wholly respect previously established boundaries of self, insofar as it draws together and influences the identities of both symbiote and host, causing personalities and self-perceptions to shift. When lead character Jack O'Neill is temporarily joined with the symbiote Kanan to save his life, the blending of O'Neill and Kanan results in a form of existential crisis that causes O'Neill-Kanan to storm a dangerous fortress, seeking to rescue an enslaved woman who had loved and been abandoned by Kanan-in-its-former-host, and whom the newly blended O'Neill-Kanan finds it morally unacceptable to leave behind.

The blended Tok'ra person is thus neither two minds in one body nor two bodies with one mind—the more common figurations that violate the norm Shildrick has elucidated of "one mind/one body"—but rather two overlapping body-minds that resist conventional demarcation. The discrete physical bodies of symbiote and host persist and can survive separation (albeit with difficulty), yet together form a

symbiotic system that is stronger, healthier, and more sustaining than the life that either may enjoy alone. The discrete psychic (conscious, discursive) bodies of symbiote and host also persist, yet these bodies are supremely "leaky" and continually intermingle with one another, resulting in what one might refer to as a superposition,[3] a state in which shared identities are simultaneously self and other until an attempt is made to distinguish them. For all the emphasis that *SG-1* places on markedly different voices as a means of signaling the communicating personae of symbiote and host, the show depicts frequent uncertainty regarding who exactly is speaking when a Tok'ra speaks. "Is that Jacob speaking? Or is that Selmak?" O'Neill asks of the Tok'ra character Jacob-Selmak ("Reckoning"), while a Tok'ra leader questions another's judgment by observing that "[i]t seems I am talking to a human host" ("Death Knell"). Such questioning suggests that, in the absence of explicit distinction, the Tok'ra should be understood as speaking from this superposition of identity; it is a marked distinction from the representation of symbiotic existence offered by *Star Trek* in its "Trill" characters—joined Trill, who are the product of unions between a humanoid alien race and slug-like symbiotes who are surgically placed in their hosts' bodies, are singular identities comprising the blended personalities and memories of host and symbiote. The Trill symbiote does not retain a distinct subjectivity within the joining—while Trill character Jadzia Dax, as Kathy Ferguson has explored, refers to past joinings as both self and other with the mixture of third and first-person pronouns (187–192), she does so from the standpoint of Jadzia (the host)-who-has-become-Jadzia-Dax (the host-symbiote joining). Dax, the symbiote, never emerges as a subject with a voice. Moreover, Trill strictly regulate identity by enforcing a taboo surrounding contact between joined Trill and anyone who enjoyed a close relationship with previous joinings of the symbiote. As this paper will relate, the fluctuating uncertainty of the Tok'ra superposition produces a very different experience of intimacy.

This superposition in which the Tok'ra body exists bears many resemblances to the "prosthetic body" that is excessive rather than merely restorative. The prosthesis may be regarded, Elizabeth Grosz writes, "[…] as an opening up of actions that may not have been possible before, the creation of new bodily behaviors, qualities, or abilities" (147). Prostheses "[…] may actualize virtualities [...] inducing a mutual metamorphosis, transforming both the body supplemented and the object that supplements it" (148). The prosthetic part draws attention to the body's diverse capacity, to its excess potential, that is, not *potential for excess*, in the sense of the "whole" human body *plus*, but *excess*

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[3]Apologies to quantum physics, whose terms are so often abused by theorists.

potential, in the sense of potential for bodies in excess of the "whole" body. The choice to forgo a prosthetic part thus also highlights this potential "to accept a body with parts that are missing is to reorientate our relation to our bodies" as Sara Ahmed writes (184). The refusal to use a prosthetic part is to embrace bodily difference—"a refusal [...] to aspire for the right things in the right way" (184). Ahmed categorizes this kind of choice as willfulness, an excess again, here of will, in line with Grosz's prosthetic vision. Just as Grosz, expanding on Henri Bergson, describes the prosthetic part as "'feel[ing]' different from the organic limb" (151), so too the absence Ahmed discusses *feels* different, causes the body to feel different, generates a different body that one feels and a different body with which to feel.

Grosz in her exploration so far raises the question of whether other living beings can be construed as prosthetic, but her examples (a virus and its host, slave ants and ant masters) betray a preconception of the prosthetic as unconscious or lacking what we understand as subjectivity (153). The default human assumption is that ants and viruses do not have selves. The vision that Grosz presents is thus one of a subject that "makes use" of an object: a body that makes use of a part. The prosthetic is annexed by the subject body, made part of that body. The use of the prosthetic becomes an act of domination: to establish or maintain the wholeness of the body requires that the whole subject dominate the object-part. It is difficult, in this framework, to conceptualize a symbiotic dynamic wherein each of two bodies mutually makes use of the other as prosthetic.

It is particularly interesting to examine the Tok'ra character Jacob-Selmak in this regard. The human host, Jacob Carter, is initially introduced on *Stargate SG-1* as lead character Sam Carter's father: a retired Air Force Major General who is dying of cancer. The previous host of the Tok'ra symbiote Selmak is also dying, and the symbiote cannot live without a new host ("The Tok'ra (Part Two)"). Blending is thus a life-saving option for both Jacob and Selmak—a dynamic that is revisited in later episodes when the dying symbiote Lantash blends with a wounded airman to save both their lives ("Last Stand"), and when the symbiote Kanan, whose host has died, blends with O'Neill to heal him from a fatal virus ("Frozen"). In each case, host and symbiote function as life-sustaining extension of one another's bodies. Yet in the case of Jacob-Selmak, host and symbiote also make possible new forms of life for one another. When Jacob was ill and retired from military service, Jacob-Selmak becomes a vital force in the interstellar Tok'ra resistance, opting to leave Earth behind and travel across the galaxy. When Selmak was (in its former host, Saroosh) previously a female councilor of the Tok'ra, Jacob-Selmak becomes a distinctly male hard-bitten soldier.

Both (symbiote and host) enjoy a renewed and close relationship with Sam Carter, whom Jacob had previously been distant from. "In a way, Selmak gave me the father I never thought I'd know," Sam says, commenting that she and her father "[…] have been closer than we ever were in my whole life" ("Threads"). Blending not only causes Jacob and Selmak to "feel [their bodies] different[ly]" and to physically feel through the means of a different (joined) body, but also generates new possibilities of affective feeling: new closeness, new commitment, and new loyalty.

These new possibilities of feeling do not arise solely in or from the time and space of the joined body. The intermingling of symbiote and host consciousness means that a symbiote may retain the memories and feelings of a previous joined body or human host, while a human host who has been separated from a symbiote may retain the memories and feelings of the symbiote or the symbiote's previous blended bodies or hosts. As mentioned, Sam Carter develops romantic feelings for Martouf-Lantash following her brief blending with Jolinar, whose previous joined body was the lover of Martouf-Lantash. She continues to carry many of Jolinar's memories, particularly those associated with strong emotions, and at times becomes confused as to whether these are Jolinar's memories (which is to say Jolinar's memories of being in a different host) or her own. Blending therefore cannot be easily delineated as an event, nor even "ended" by separating the joined bodies. This indeterminacy is consistent with the flux of identity suggested by the ability of symbiote, host, and host-symbiote to emerge as distinct subjects within the blending. The Tok'ra thus disrupt expectations both of stable, linear, and constant body-mind alignment and of stable, linear, and constant subjectivity.

The philosopher of science Astrid Schrader has offered one possible approach to this form of disruption, which she terms "phantomatic ontology" and specifically positions as an alternative way of understanding what otherwise might be deemed multiple or uncertain ontologies. The phantom (the subject of phantomatic ontology), she writes:

> […] is importantly distinct from all those kinds of objects that suggest a specific topology as either fixed, such as the atemporal Euclidean volume, or variable *in* time, such as 'fluid objects' that may reshape their configurations in different contexts. Phantoms rather challenge our conception of time as homogenous flow of self-identical moments, in which a cause by definition precedes its effect... Phantoms are 'agentially real'; they contribute to their own materialization and make demands on us to be accounted for. (278–9)

Schrader's phantom is conceived of as scientific object, designed to account for and grapple with problems of ethics and responsibility in scientific practice. The particular "phantom" to which Schrader addresses herself is a microorganism: the dinoflagellate *Pfiesteria piscicida,* which cannot determinately be ruled as the "fish killer" responsible for mass mid-Atlantic fish deaths in which it is implicated. *Pfiesteria* can potentially undergo a large variety of transformations, some of which may be "naturally" occurring parts of its life cycle, and some of which are environmentally induced "morphs"; it is difficult to untangle one from the other, the "real" *Pfiesteria* from the effects of environment. It is also not possible, Schrader argues, to "capture" *Pfiesteria* in its entirety at a single moment in time—what Schrader breaks down into *Pfiesteria piscicida* and *toxic Pfiesteria* (responsible for killing fish) are in some sense related organisms, but attempts to detect or measure this are limited to recording either an organism that *is,* but does not *do* (*Pfiesteria piscicida,* which does not kill fish) or an organism that *does,* but seems not to *be* in the sense of pre- and post-existing its doings. Thus not only does the "[…] distinction between internal or innate characteristics and externally or environmentally induced behaviors implode[] in *Pfiesteria*'s life-histories" (283), but so too does, more generally, any attempt to construct a linear, continuous, and unitary being that is, will be, and has been the subject of all of the actions associated with *Pfiesteria*. The many morphs that take part in *Pfiesteria*'s complex life cycle (which is not truly, as Schrader points out, a cycle) are not "parts" of a larger "whole" being, and neither are they stages of transformation through which a sustained single being passes. Schrader describes them, in fact, as coming together in "[…] a superposition of various, partially overlapping temporal and spatial scales that cannot be easily disentangled" (281). This difficult ontological map is strikingly similar to those required for the types of subjects the paper has discussed, and Schrader's singling-out of agency and responsibility as areas that must be re-addressed in the light of such an existence identifies them as relevant, too, to the paper's concerns.

In the case of the Tok'ra, *Stargate SG-1* itself offers a tentative awareness that agency has been thrown into question, acknowledging the difficulties inherent in abiding by a traditional understanding of the agent when actions may emerge from a complex network of bodily associations over time. Is it "really" Sam Carter who is attracted to Martouf-Lantash in the aftermath of her blending with Jolinar? Who is responsible for O'Neill-Kanan's actions during their blending? To what extent can Jacob-Selmak be relied upon by the U.S. Air Force? The same elusiveness that Schrader notes when arguing that the *Pfiesteria* dinoflagellate cannot be captured in their entirety at any one moment in time is characteristic of and visible in the Tok'ra. A Tok'ra symbiote is

born separate and will progress through many different blendings over the course of its life, undergoing and actioning many transformations as it intermingles identities and memories with a series of human hosts, each of whom has a preceding separate life that they bring to the blended identity, and any one of whom might diverge from the blending, carrying away a post-blended identity and memory. Aspects of the Tok'ra self are constituted not simply by the two overlapping body-minds of a single blending, but also by the range of intersubjectivities between symbiote and host. It is therefore not always simple to parse the agency underlying the actions. And, in fact, being and doing here are entangled: subjects become differentiated chiefly through specific acts, as we see in the case of speaking, which "collapses" the subjective superposition. Yet in contrast to the ways in which this kind of entanglement is often read by posthumanist scholars as necessitating the all-or-nothing acknowledgement-or-abolition of the subject, subject-ivities continue to cohere in such an existence.

This, the current paper argues, is what renders the Tok'ra form of life especially alien. It's a form of life that is even, when juxtaposed with Wittgenstein's observations, grammatically nonsensical: not only does the blended body mingle and intercross the pains of subjects, but the symbiote may remember pain in the host's body, the blended body may remember the first-person experience of pain in other blended bodies, and a separated host may remember pain in previous host or blended bodies. To talk about the grammar (as Wittgenstein would put it) of pain experience is to reveal that all of these bodies are at once each other's body—that a phantomatic unified/ing Tok'ra subject emerges under certain conditions, at certain points, and certain times, and that this might then be put forward as an intermittently, if fluidly constituted, singular subject—at the same time as they are someone else's body/ies to each other. The subject(s) thus comprised is/are paradoxical, and cannot easily be fitted into even a posthumanist understanding of what a subject is and means.

Perhaps this is why an element of uneasiness surrounds the Tok'ra in the world of *SG-1*. Despite Tok'ra culture's strong taboo against or even horror at the idea of symbiotes "taking" unwilling human hosts, and despite the show's depiction of the group as often-heroic human allies, human characters frequently express discomfort with the notion of the symbiote-host blending. Early in the Tok'ra-human alliance, one of the Tok'ra observes to a human, "The very thought [of becoming a host] sickens you," and identifies a human "[…] distaste for our very being," asking, "If you're so disgusted with the very thought of blending, how can we be associated with one another?" ("The Tok'ra (Part Two)"). O'Neill in particular is dubious that any human

would freely volunteer to host a symbiote, referring to the symbiotes as "snakes" and continually attempting to differentiate the human host's opinions from those of the (presumably less trustworthy) symbiote ("Crossroads"). Some element of O'Neill's, and indeed the general, unease is almost certainly tied to the symbiotes' physical form: a writhing, damp, spiny, insectoid creature whose penetration of the human body strongly evokes the same rhetoric of violation that is so integral to the depiction of the Goa'uld. Yet it's difficult not to wonder if the form of life associated with blending is simply perceived as violation regardless of the consent of those involved, their contentment, or the potential benefits. This default assumption that plurality is either penetration or deficiency is particularly provocative to consider, given the ways in which Tok'ra blending is, in at least one episode, suggestive of a very different kind of bodily joining: pregnancy.

When Sam-Jolinar is attacked and badly injured in the episode "In the Line of Duty," the symbiote Jolinar heals Sam at the cost of its own life. Their still-blended body is rushed into a medical bay, where doctors monitor the two brain waves and "energy levels" in a manner similar to that in which a medical show might depict the monitoring of maternal and fetal heartbeats. After Jolinar's death, Sam remains in the medical bay, where the child of another character comes to visit her. It's explained to the child that Sam's body is "absorbing" the remains of the symbiote, and that Sam is "just a little sad right now," but that a visit from the child will cheer her up ("In the Line of Duty"). When we see Sam, she is exhausted and wet-eyed in a hospital bed, and responds with visible emotion to the presence of the child. The framing of the scene can easily be read as that of a miscarriage, which in some ways seems apropos: Sam is mourning her return to life as a separate body, mourning a life she only briefly knew through the blending, and mourning the life she might have had with Jolinar had she remained blended. Jolinar and Sam, of course, shared more than bodies, and Jolinar was an adult symbiote with a complexly constituted identity. Yet the suggestion that losing a symbiote or host is akin to the loss of a pregnancy codes blending as a feminine way of being. In-universe discomfort with the Tok'ra thus takes on a gendered and perhaps transphobic element: fear of pregnant bodies and bodies that can become pregnant; anxiety surrounding the "wrong" bodies possibly becoming pregnant. These fears are unsubtly present in depictions of the Goa'uld, particularly when warrior-caste "Jaffa" soldiers—sometimes women, but more often hyper-masculine men—are shown to incubate larval Goa'uld in womb-like pouches as part of their degradation and enslavement. This discomfort seems inextricably linked to uneasiness surrounding the instability of the subject: the pregnant body threatens insofar as it points out the unfixed nature of bodily boundaries. Like the disabled body, as

considered by Lennard Davis, it draws attention to the illusive and hallucinatory quality of wholeness—in this case, however, not by reflecting the reality of the fragmentary body, but by reflecting the potential of the body to be part of another body; a potential that has, of course, also been universally actualized through gestation.

Iris Marion Young has argued that the pregnant body is a body that challenges insistence on a unified subject as precondition for experience. Young suggests that the pregnant woman experiences her body as "[…] de-centered, split, or doubled [...] herself and not herself. Its inner movements beyond to another being, yet they are not other" (45–62). In other words, pregnancy "[…] blurs the individuated/ unindividuated distinction," as Pramod Nayar puts it, writing of what he terms the "parturition Gothic" (117). Margrit Shildrick notes that pregnancy is one of two cases (the other being organ transplants) in which distinctions are drawn between self and non-self material within the body—distinctions that fluctuate as the fetus undergoes a splitting that transitions it from part of the mother's body to a whole "other" body (18). This uneasy ontological condition of self-and-otherness is governed by strict normative expectations: the mother must experience a complete ontological "cut" at the point of birth, just as a transplant recipient must "[…] incorporate the alien material into her own embodied experience, no longer as foreign, but as an integrated element of her own identity" (18), regulating the unity and inviolability of the subject in this zone of ambiguousness and instability. Yet this normative regulation is not enough in an era of new reproductive technologies of visualization. Susan Squier in her essay, "Fetal Subjects and Maternal Objects: Reproductive Technology and the New Fetal/Maternal Relation" observes that recent years have seen the increasing subjectification of the fetus, which she attributes to technologies that, as they render the fetus a self, transform the mother into "[...] something less than a self [...] an antagonist, an obstacle to fetal health, an object" (516). "The maternal, or more precisely the potentially maternal, body," Squier writes, "is no longer conceived of as a discrete entity under the control of the mother. [...] Rather, it is seen as a being that colonizes another marginal and oppressed being, the fetus" ("Fetal Voices: Speaking for the Margins Within" 17). The language of colonization and antagonism here is consonant with the rhetoric of science-fiction collectivity; as in fictional depictions of hive minds, the collective body of the pregnant person is figured as a battleground where subjectification of one must objectify the other—where one self, in order to be whole, must render the other a part in order to survive. The impermissibility of acknowledging a more expansive plurality that the pregnant person may feel herself to be part of, means that the identity or subjectivity of the pregnant woman becomes wholly displaced by that

of the fetus; for her to assert her subjectivity injures the fetus insofar as the nature of the whole subject means that her subjectivity must come at the cost of its own. Even without the element of plural subjectivity that science fiction adds, the boundaries of subjectivity—like the boundaries of the body—must be rigorously policed.

The fear and anxiety that attach themselves to the pregnant body are thus linked to uneasiness surrounding the instability of the subject: the fear and anxiety provoked by the idea of losing the wholeness of one's subjectivity, or of having it forcibly taken away—the child as parasite, the pregnant body as Borg Collective. Figured alternatively, it is the mother who becomes parasitic—Squier describes the ways in which representations of the fetus as "impossible" and "ventriloquizable" subject, work to render the pregnant person as antagonist ("Fetal Subjects and Maternal Objects: Reproductive Technology and the New Fetal/Maternal Relation" 532). The perception of subjectivity as a zero-sum game[4] tends to result in the inability to think a state of pregnancy that is not a kind of "living death," resulting in the figuration of mother as "vessel" or "host" (here, again, a machinic part)—and a tendency to perceive certain kinds of (chiefly female) bodies as inherently impregnable and haunted by violation.

The Tok'ra, by figuring plural subjectivity as a way of being that all bodies have the potential to participate in and by explicitly associating blending with a range of gender expressions, offer a way of degendering the experience of plurality. However, they insist on demilitarizing the relationship between "competing" subjects, and disavowing the idea that such a linear and delineated model of the plural subject could ever make sense. Their depiction affirms the intermingling and simultaneous excessiveness of many that are always *more than*, not *reducible* to a unitary whole. In order to account for this mode of life, we must reach beyond models of parts and wholeness and grapple with a grammar and vocabulary that encompass new understandings of subjectivity. As Schrader writes in the different context of environmental science, responsibility in the realm of such subjects "entails not responding to a particular other, who may not exist as such, but the *enabling of responsiveness* within particular relatings" (297)—a complete reenvisioning of, perhaps, relationship.

The bioethicist Carl Elliott writes that "[p]art of what we mean by the word 'person' entails a certain moral attitude" (160). Perhaps this is one reason why explicitly-other ontologies are so often depicted as damaging and sinister onscreen. To acknowledge a subject that does not

[4]In a zero-sum game, the player's gain is exactly balanced by their opponent's loss, and vice versa.

remain single or linear, or that may or may not consistently exist, is to extend personhood in a way that not only challenges the naturalization of the humanist model, but that also potentially commits us to recognizing the moral agency of nonhuman life in ways that we currently resist. As Pramod Nayar details, not only is it the human who has "[…] determined which qualities *count as human*" (88), and "the human cognition of what the animal (or human) *is* that determines who 'possesses' or 'deserves' rights," but that arguments in favor of extending personhood to animals center around the idea that "because animals demonstrate subject-like traits, they should be given the same moral consideration as humans" (92). However, "[p]roceeding along this line of thought," he observes, "it would then follow that the very concept of subjectivity and the subject implies *human* subjectivity and the *human* subject" (92). By depicting other forms of being as undeserving of the moral attitude extended to persons, we implicitly reaffirm our right to withhold the language of personhood—and thus preserve the illusion of the stable, whole subject as universal being. Hence, the reluctance of posthumanism to properly engage with the question of truly nonhuman subjectivity, as previously detailed, is problematic: it is a failure to grapple with the full set of demands that the central aims of posthumanism make upon us to rethink our assumptions about the different ways of being [a person]. The example of the Tok'ra is therefore useful insofar as it explores the affordances that might result from expanding our understanding of the shape and temporality of personhood. We are asked to consider not only the potential for new feeling that might thus be produced, but also the potential for new feeling-with that emerges from nonlinear, discontinuous forms of embodiment. How does one regard the *other*, whom one has been; the other beloved of the *other*, whom one has been; the other, who will become the other, whom one has been? When it is conceivable to experience pain in someone else's body, and thus face the paradoxical incorporation of someone else's body into/with oneself, what is the moral attitude demanded by inter- and intra-action? These questions invite us to envision a world in which excessive life is not excessive, but merely expansion: in which an abundance of feeling is not a diminishment of self, but rather a natural part of a wider universe.

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Unworlded After-Picture: The New State of Being in the Virtual Cosmos

Mary Claire Brunelli

Abstract

In 1938, Heidegger christened his era "the age of the world picture," evoking the human capacity to represent a meaningful existence through authentic social engagement and care for shared surroundings. There have been various "world pictures" throughout history, each a response to popular media produced by the latest technology. From papyrus to print, alphabetic writing has long supported literature as the dominant medium. Now, the development of digital, virtual, and network technology is dethroning this tradition and reshaping the world picture established through text. Brian Rotman notes that habituation to new technologies is restructuring the brain's cognitive architecture, resulting in unpredicted consequences on thought, activity, and selfhood. The private, self-contained, alphabetic "I" is splintering into the porous, pluralistic, public agent that Rotman calls *para-self*. Accessible and available at all times, adept at navigating the invisible pathways of global cyberspace, simultaneously "present" at numerous "sites," crisscrossed by networks of other selves and simulacra of itself through an ongoing stream of spontaneous information, this *para-self* does indeed present a picture of the world that corresponds to the technology used to build it, digitization. The question is, to what extent can this digital imaginary sustain the "world picture" heralded by Heidegger as a participatory and conscientious unity of Being-in-the-world?

In his 1938 essay, Martin Heidegger christens modernity as "the Age of the World Picture"[1] to account for the historical circumstances that enable mankind's experience of its socio-cultural environment as a singular, cohesive, meaningful construction. He goes on to explain that the term "world picture" signifies the understanding of the relationships that scaffold one's own being in the world. Throughout history there have been many "world pictures" that have confronted and configured

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[1] This paper refers to the first half of the twentieth century as "modernity" or the "modern age" as per Heidegger's determination. All subsequent uses of "modern" will refer to this time period.

human culture. The world picture is a product of the media of its time, and therefore depends on contemporary technology. For millennia, literature, determined by the technology of writing (from papyrus scrolls to electronic print), has been the dominant media of representation. (Other arts, such as painting, sculpture, and music, also enable a world picture, but, being nonverbal, have been less readily accessible and explicitly comprehensible to most people.) In the twenty-first century, however, innovative technologies and their resulting media are dethroning the literary tradition, as well as the arts in general. The transition to digital and network media is changing the world picture we have come to know through our historical experience of a text. Not only does habitual use of these new technologies restructure the neurological architecture of the human brain, it also transforms the essence of human subjectivity by troubling the boundary between self and other. This paper engages with the Heideggerian notion of the modern "world picture" as a platform for discussing the consequences of current information technology as it leads us into the age of post-literacy and after-imaging. It posits that such a future will undermine our ability to exist in conscientious unity with other human beings as part of a sensible, meaningful world.

Key to Heidegger's analysis of the world picture are his reflections on man's ability to make sense of being in a world among other things, which he elaborates in his work *Being and Time*.[2] Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* (literally translated as 'Being-there') to express our original existential state of Being-in-the-world. Dasein is a mode of being that is aware of itself and of others present alongside itself as a "*unitary* phenomenon" (78; italics in original). Described as an "entity which in each case I myself am" on the condition of [my] ability to "'dwell alongside' the world, as that which is familiar to me" (78, 80), Dasein entails a sense of belonging that presupposes an ontological relationship to the world in terms of time and space. In thus recognizing that relationality substantiates its very being, existent Dasein knows to prioritize the world over itself. Heidegger explains that "Being-in-the-world, as concern, is *fascinated* by the world with which it is concerned" (88) in such a way that does not consider its usefulness, or how it can be manipulated to achieve one's own selfish needs. The concern expressed by Being-in-the-world is articulated in Dasein as the activity of care (*Sorge*).

Heidegger's discussion of Being-in-the-world as the "basic state" of Dasein (90) provokes his investigation of the ontology and phenomenology of the world. Since Being-in-the-world presumes the structure of a pre-existing, surrounding world (*Umwelt*), "world" can be

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[2]First published as *Sein und Zeit* in 1927.

considered a "characteristic" of Dasein. Heidegger's first assessment of the word "world" emphasizes its facticity: "'World' is used as an ontical concept, and signifies the totality of those entities which can be present-at-hand within the world" (93). In relation to the ontological concept of Dasein, "world" is the theoretical dwelling[3] which comprises those that are *not*-Dasein as well as Dasein itself. It may designate the "'public' we-world, or one's 'own' closest […] environment" (93). Our ability to represent and apprehend the phenomenon of the world is a property of Dasein. Thus Being-in-the-world incorporates both common and subjective conceptions within the ontological structure of the world; it is a gesture of taking-care (*Besorgen*). Heidegger concludes that the world is held together by temporality; that the world containing all beings is prior to their interactions—that is, prior to all subject and object relations—and also makes them possible which implies that time is the *a priori* condition of care, and therefore of Dasein itself. Dasein's openness to time enables it to understand the past in the present and thereby project itself into the future in such a way that is authentic and true.

Heidegger draws from this analysis of Being and world in "The Age of the World Picture."[4] He begins by clarifying the meaning of "world picture." In this case, his definition of "world" is rather straightforward: "the world itself, the world as such, what is, in its entirety" (*Age* 129). To the word "picture" he devotes a more complex explanation:

> "Picture" here does not mean some imitation, but rather what sounds forth in the colloquial expression, "We get the picture" [literally, we are in the picture] concerning something. This means the matter stands before us exactly as it stands with it for us. "To get the picture" [literally, to put oneself into the picture] with respect to something means to set whatever is, itself, in place before oneself just in the way that it stands with it, and to have it fixedly before oneself as set up in this way.[…] Hence world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture. (129)

The world picture is not an absolute value but a subjective interpretation of an objective reality determined by that particular "entity" considered as a world. Heidegger concludes that this representation of the world

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[3]Heidegger uses the concept of *dwelling* to explain how Dasein occupies the world: not simply by inhabiting its space, but also by being familiar and earnestly involved with it.

[4]Hereafter, "The Age of the World Picture" will be referred to as *Age*.

conveys the "Being of whatever is" (130), an assessment that recalls his earlier claims regarding the essence of Being-there, or Dasein.

Heidegger asserts that the modern age (*der* Neuzeit) is unique in its ability to set forth the world as a picture because its existential conditions enable man to rise to the position of subject. In the history of Western civilization, guided by Greek philosophy and Christian theology, true subjectivism has been previously denied to mankind. According to Greek sophism, this is because of the fundamental tension underlying its understanding of Being as presencing (*hypokeisthai*) and truth as unconcealment (*aletheia*).[5] Similarly, medieval Christendom[6] precludes further investigation into the nature of the world and Being as anything more than objects of God's Creation. Of his own era, Heidegger staunchly declares: "But it remains certain that no age before this one has produced a comparable objectivism and that in no age before this has the non-individual, in the form of the collective, come to acceptance as having worth" (128).

Heidegger then identifies several modern metaphysical phenomena that allow for the "liberation of man" (128) through the emphasis on individualism and subjectivism. Of these, he declares science to be the most important and machine technology to be its greatest contribution: "Machine technology remains up to now the most visible outgrowth of the essence of modern technology, which is identical with the essence of modern metaphysics" (116). Specifically, scientific activity toward the development of machine technology is what allows man to assume subjectivity through the effort to "get the picture" as well as to participate in that picture. Furthermore, science that respectfully explores or directly benefits the world around us can be considered an act of concern or of care, respectively. Under these

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[5]Heidegger ascertains that "Greek man *is* the one who apprehends (*der* Vernehmer) that which is, and this is why in the age of the Greeks the world cannot become a picture" (*Age* 131). He elaborates this metaphysical position in Appendix 8 to this essay: "Through man's being limited to that which, at any particular time, is unconcealed, there is given to him the measure that always confines a self to this or that. Man does not, from out of some detached I-ness, set for the measure to which everything that is, in its Being, must accommodate itself. Man who possesses the Greeks' fundamental relationship to that which is and to its unconcealment is *metron* (measure [*Mass*]) in that he accepts restriction (*Mässigung*) to the horizon of unconcealment that is limited after the manner of the I; and consequently acknowledges the concealedness of what is and the insusceptibility of the latter's presencing or absenting to any decision, and to a like degree acknowledges the insusceptibility to decision of the visible aspect of that which endures as presence" (145–146). This tension between the man that presences (*metron*) and the unconcealedness of that horizon from which the man presences ascertains that man can never be *subiectum.* In a later argument, this paper reiterates Heidegger's distinction between apprehension (Greek) and representation (modern).
[6]Christendom imposes a world view based on Christian doctrine (*Age* 117).

circumstances, science may impress a world picture constellated as a meaningful arrangement about one's own resolute being.

However, Heidegger reveals his own concerns about the possibility—or rather, probability—that modern science will destabilize the world in its entirety. He begins by contending that "science" is quite different from the medieval terms *doctrina* and *scientia* and from the Greek *episteme.* While earlier notions of science imply exact knowledge of the natural world, modern science concerns "research," which requires a procedure and experiment to procure results that do not convey absolute Truth. Heidegger describes research as an "ongoing activity" (124) that continually reimagines its environment: "Research must represent [*vorstellen*] the changeable to the changing" (120). The results of any research are not fixed but may be considered the premise for more research, perhaps a new experiment that will draw different conclusions. In sum, research amounts to provisional truths that can assist our understanding of a world that we can never know absolutely.

Heidegger believes that science as research not only enforces individualism but also reconfigures human subjectivity through the "necessary interplay" and "reciprocal conditioning" of subject and object within a system (128). He explains that to know something through research is to be able to represent it so that it may be pondered, calculated, measured, and even manipulated. By objectifying the subject of research, the researcher him/herself becomes the subject. Since the researcher is anterior to the present activity and scope of the research, he/she becomes not just the subject but *subiectum*,[7] a translation of the Greek *hypokeimenon,* meaning "that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself" (128). Heidegger specifies that *subiectum* is not the same thing as "man" or "I"/*ego.* Rather, *subiectum* indicates that man becomes the relational center of all things he perceives. The sum of the meaningful connections in which we exist with others is how we understand "world."

Subiectum is capable of representing the world as a picture through the following temporal process. The world is a system existing before the self and the things within it; it subsequently belongs and testifies to their existence. In contradistinction to the act of apprehension,[8] representation of the world (by modern metaphysics)

[7]Since Heidegger maintains the italicization of *subiectum* and returns to normal font for Dasein*,* the same has been followed here.

[8]Despite his appropriation of the Greek term, Heidegger clarifies that in Greek sophism man can never be *subiectum* because the action of man as subject is apprehension: he himself presences toward what appears. Therefore, to consider Greek man as a representing subject actually moves into the realm of the *imagination* as he "fantasizes," or brings forth an objective image of whatever is into the world as picture (paraphrased, 147).

means that the subject brings before itself what is already present, and subsequently considers in alternative ways: first as "something standing over against," then as something relating to itself, and finally as inexorably drawn into itself in circumscribing a "normative realm" or world (131). This process of "getting the picture" enables the representing subject to realize its difference and relation to the things that constitute the world and thereby re-enter the world in which the world and itself are now represented: "Man becomes the representative [*der Repräsentant*] of that which is, in the sense of that which has the character of object" (132). When the representing subject becomes the representative of the object, it "gain[s] mastery over that which is as a whole" (132) and thereby transcends both subject and object to the state of *subiectum*. Therefore, the representation of the world as a picture aligns with the transformation of man into *subiectum*.

Heidegger seems to contradict himself when he implies the historicity of this process, and subsequently asserts that only the modern age allows for the world to become a picture: "The fact that whatever is comes into being in and through representedness transforms the age in which this occurs into a new age in contrast with the preceding one" (130); then "[t]he world picture does not change from an earlier medieval one into a modern one, but rather the fact that the world becomes a picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age" (130). These statements can be interpreted to mean that humans have always developed technology and experienced media that allow for the incarnation of *subiectum*. Heidegger suggests that these events comprise the influence of humanism, that is, the evolution of Greek thought through Plato and Aristotle, who defied sophism (143). Earlier in his essay, Heidegger proposes modern art as another vehicle for this process, being that it occupies the aesthetic realm as an "object of mere subjective experience," and as such becomes "an expression of human life" (116). What is notable about the modern age is that representedness becomes the essence of so many aspects of civilization that the average human necessarily assumes the phenomenon of a world picture.

With regards to science as research, the connection between *subiectum* and Heidegger's earlier discussion of Being-in-the-world is implicit. The fascination and concern that Being-in-the-world exhibits toward its surroundings is comparable to the curiosity and purposefulness often motivating research. Undeniably, research-science has bettered our world in many ways by finding solutions to problems and innovating improvements to our way of living in the world. In these circumstances, research-science is operating as care, and thus can be considered a projection of Dasein. Heidegger notes that this requires of the scientist a selfless attitude and motives, and of scientific institutions a willingness to establish an "internal unity with other like activities that

is commensurate with themselves" (126). In sum, science must guard a certain self-awareness and earnest cooperation with the world in which it participates: "But the more unconditionally science and the man of research take seriously the modern form of their essence, the more unequivocally and the more immediately will they be able to offer themselves for the common good, and the more unreservedly too will they have to return to the public anonymity of all work useful to society" (126). The scientist who works to bring forth a world of togetherness (that is, to change the world into a better environment for all entities within it) inhabits the position of *subiectum,* which is none other than the mediation of Dasein. Their work—a world picture—is therefore a meaningful expression of care.

However, Heidegger also notes that the expansive tendency of science and the calculative character of research threaten the integrity of the world picture as such. He remarks that the essential nature of *subiectum* is to reject the individualism that informs its subjective existence while embracing the communalism that certifies its objectiveness within the world it creates. He warns against the tyranny that may develop through the event of *subiectum* in the sciences and elsewhere:

> Namely, the more extensively and the more effectually the world stands at man's disposal as conquered, and the more objectively the object appears, all the more subjectively, i.e., the more importunately, does the *subiectum* rise up, and all the more impetuously, too, do observation and teaching about the world change into a doctrine of man, into anthropology. (133)

Such is the narrative of unworlding (*Entweltlichung*): the world overcomes that Being who first presented it, who no longer feels co-belonging to the world, but that the world belongs to It as no more than an objective presence. When science approaches nature with the purpose of consuming, manipulating, and even destroying, human beings experience the surrounding world as useful and are thus characterized as *worldly.* In such circumstances, the symbiosis of subjectivism and objectivism has been shattered, as the activity of the representing *subiectum* morphoses from care to insouciant self-interest.

In his 2016 essay "What is a World?" Pheng Cheah situates Heidegger's account of the world alongside the deconstructionist and phenomenological interpretations of Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida. In revisiting these earlier theorists, Cheah concludes that the world is constituted by inter-subjective relationships and assesses the ethicopolitical consequences of 'loss' of world. He also reiterates their shared concern about the world-destructive power of globalization, as a capitalist venture motivated by the "instrumental and calculative

reduction of existence," as well as their faith in the world-forming power of literature:

> Because the unification of the world as a meaningful whole is associated with practices of collective existence, a principle of real hope persists and is structurally inscribed in the very processes of global modernity that repeatedly threaten the world with annihilation. 'Literature' discloses and enacts this unerasable promise of the opening of other worlds. (Cheah 97)

Unlike global capitalism, literature[9] is capable of creating the cosmopolitan and spiritual unity of the world. In reading literature not only do we imagine a world (aesthetically figured) but we also feel a sense of belonging to a community. Cheah bestows upon literature the same beneficial qualities that Heidegger praises in poetry.[10] In earlier writings, Heidegger argues that poetry is the best antidote to unworlding because it induces "nonthematic discourse,"[11] which brings human beings together: "Poetry [*Dichtung*], is nothing but the elementary coming into words, the becoming-uncovered, of existence as being-in-the-world. For the others who before it were blind, the world first becomes visible by what is thus spoken" (qtd. in Cheah 126).[12] As a combination of the spiritual subjective and the material objective—though neither exclusively—poetry is ontologically compatible with the notion of world.[13] In reading poetry, we uncover possibilities of meaning that challenge our understanding, that is, we empower worlds to become visible.

Importantly, Cheah draws from Heidegger's analysis of world as a "'force' of opening or entry" grounded in temporality, which upholds our existence as Dasein, in order to show that literature, and poetry in particular, is likewise capable of setting "resolute authentic action in relations with others that can help us overcome the

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[9]Cheah values the world-forming potential of all literature but specifies that the category of world literature may be the most effective. In fact, the term "world literature" often refers to the totality of national literatures. To avoid a discussion on the exact definition of "world literature," this paper addresses "literature" in general.

[10]Cheah notes that Heidegger's emphasis on poetry occurs in earlier writings. Heidegger later broadens his perspective to include the arts in general.

[11]Heidegger's emphasis on discourse as the defining characteristic of humanity derives from his interpretation of Aristotle's description of man as *zoon logon echon.* Accordingly, Heidegger understands *logos* as the ability to talk discursively (Cheah 127).

[12]This excerpt is from Heidegger's commentary on Rilke's *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge,* located in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology,* trans. Albert Hofstadter, rev. ed., Indiana University Press, 1988, pp.171–72; 244, (translation modified).

[13]Kant elaborates on the same idea in his assertion that a sensibility of aesthetic pleasure develops "the universal feeling of participation" (qtd. in Cheah 44).

worldlessness of modernity" (96). This is due to the recursive nature of language itself.[14] Language is a symbolic system in which meanings are assigned to sounds (spoken)/symbols (written) and then sounds spoken or words written are associated with meanings by the addressee. The foundation of language is discourse, making it a temporal medium that enjoins a "circle of understandability as parts of a whole that necessarily belong to each other" (127). It follows that the symbolic structure of language is in fact a world itself, one that, through discourse, weaves together meanings and the human life that understands these meanings. Participating in language and discourse is effectively Being-in-the-world. The quality of this existence is elevated by encountering a work of art. Cheah summarizes Heidegger's ideas about poetry and art and extends them to literature in general: "By virtue of its being a process of coming-into-being, the work of art is ontologically the same as the process of worlding. It is worlding to a second degree. It exemplifies worlding by making worlding its structure […] it brings the earth into the opening that is world and maintains this opening" (129). In terms of his own concern about global capitalism, Cheah sees world literature as an essential force of worldliness that empowers possibilities for the future to counteract the demolition of possibilities encountered at every present moment in history. He concludes that world literature is a process of transcendence and restraint which, though unable to "cause or make anything," nonetheless "uncovers the world and opens up other worlds, thereby giving us resolve to respond to modernity's worldlessness and to remake the world according to newly disclosed possibilities" (129).[15]

Cheah's encomium to literature, based on the theories of his deconstructionist forebearers, resonates with Heidegger's explicit critique of modern technology as well as with the contemporary ideas of Brian Rotman. As a mathematician and cultural theorist, Rotman explores the semiotic systems that have perpetually redefined human history and reinscribed cultural consciousness through innovative technologies. In *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero,* he describes how the introduction of the concept of zero during the Renaissance period inexorably altered the Western comprehension of subjectivity. Rotman relates three important changes that occurred in the coded systems of arithmetic, economic exchange, and perspective art that signify the creation of a zero-value meta-sign, "a sign-about-signs outside it […] whose meaning arises outside these signs in a relation of

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[14]Cheah here refers to *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, a lecture course that Heidegger delivered at the University of Freiburg in the winter semester of 1929–1930.
[15]"Disclosure" or "unconcealedness" is central to the idea of truth (*aletheia*) in Ancient Greek philosophy. Heidegger returns to this notion regarding the opening up of presence (or of a world) which suggests a truthful reality.

origination to them" (13, 26). He notes the parallel function of the number zero, imaginary money, and the vanishing point in facilitating a system of infinitely many signs (numerals, pictures, transactions) in which it is conspicuously absent. These signs within the system are representations of an anterior reality for the active human subject-who-represents (by counting numbers, dealing with money, or viewing a picture). Therefore, the activity of representing is essentially a thought-experiment enabled by the agency of the meta-sign that also incarnates the virtual presence of a (human) meta-subject within the represented system.

Rotman's analysis corroborates Heidegger's explanation of the process of creating a world picture. The transformation from viewing subject to meta-subject recalls the subject becoming *subiectum* as the relational focus of the world picture it represents. Heidegger's world picture, like Rotman's mathematical, economic, and perspective systems can be deconstructed in the same manner: "What lies at its centre, explicit in the talk of 'prior' reality, is some supposed movement into signification, some shift from object to sign, from presentation to representation, from a primary given existence to a secondary manufactured description" (27). The picture of the system (world, money, math, or visual scene) is a "perfectly plausible original fiction" (27), an illusion that allows for the representation not only of supposed reality but also of any imaginable relationship among the things it contains. This picture is existent possibility, a description of reality as if it were external and anterior to itself, one that discloses a certain "world" for the subject that comes to life as the significant meta-subject within it. As Heidegger said of the *subiectum* incarnate: "This means: whatever is, is considered to be in being only to the degree and to the extent that it is taken into and referred back to this life, i.e., is lived out, and becomes life-experience" (*Age* 134). Similarly, Rotman explains that finance based on imaginary money, math based on numeral zero, and perspective drawing based on a vanishing point offer a virtual reality so compelling that Western cultures have conformed themselves to the signage of these systems, which affect not only communities but also individual lives.

Rotman pursues his analysis of technological media and human subjectivity from the realm of numbers and images and into that of letters and words. In a later book, entitled *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being,*[16] he deconstructs alphabetic writing, the use of symbols to represent spoken language, which has been the West's primary cognitive technology for millenia.

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[16]Hereafter, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being* will be referred to as *Becoming*.

Like the codes of arithmetic, money, and painting, the alphabet is a semiotic system that has become embedded in the neural structure of the human brain. In the transition from gesture to speech to writing, the human body gradually dissolves from communication, which changes the way that humans-who-write conceive of themselves and their surroundings.

In the absenting of the body of the one-who-writes a virtual world unfolds. In this realm, texts are entities that exist without spatial, temporal, or cultural context; they can be reproduced anywhere and anyhow. Rotman claims that to engage with these texts posits a

> […] virtual user, an abstract reading/writing agency who or which is as distinct from any particular, embodied, and situated user as an algebraic variable is from the individual numbers substitutable for it, an agency who/which accommodates all possible readers and writers of texts regardless of how and when in space and time they have or might have appeared. This floating entity makes ideas of disembodied agency, action at a distance, and thought transference plausible. (*Becoming* 6–7)

This analysis compares to Heidegger's belief in poetry's ability to assemble a virtual human collective as a world picture. Through contact with the disembodied entities inherent to a text, any reader can channel their essential Dasein. As Cheah points out, there is a connection between the act of reading and care for the world. The activation of Dasein through fascination and concern with the virtual world contingent to a text elevates self-consciousness and consideration of the real world. We can learn to recognize and respect the integrity of others through our psychic participation in the text-mediated world picture.

The analyses of Rotman and Heidegger can be superimposed in demonstrating how literature reconfigures human subjectivity. Since reading and writing encourage entry into a world picture through empathetic engagement, it follows that the meta-subject of this literary sign system, made explicit in the graphic word "I," can be considered a direct address to the essential state of Being-in-the-world as Dasein. It follows that "I" entails the hypostatization of Dasein as *subiectum,* presiding over and participating in a system to give it meaning. However, unlike the spoken "I" with its intrinsic association to the human body, the written "I" is an invisible, indeterminate agent with infinite potential and enjoys absolute *author*ity over the text. As the entification of the alphabet's virtual user, it could exist at any time or place—it could be you or I or any one of us.

Rotman avers that habituation to the written "I" primes our acceptance of such abstract, disembodied agents as Mind, Psyche, God,

Spirit, and Infinity which have governed Western metaphysical thought for millennia. Religions capitalize on this alphabetic function to instill beliefs in "I am that am" (Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible), the Greek *psyche* dwelling without body within the body, or Aristotle's *nous* as the disembodied organ of reason.[17] Just as Heidegger intimated the constant reinvention of the world picture throughout history, Rotman asserts that communicational media continually transform their environments and reinscribe human subjectivity within them. In the same way that the spoken language engenders a spoken "spirit" separate from the gesturing "I" of the body, written language confirms the hypostatization of that spirit as a transcendental agency. The question now is how do new information and communications technology affect the subjectivity of "I" and thus the relationship of the individual self to the world?

Rotman begins to confront this problem by examining the ways that current digital, virtual, and network technologies[18] exact different cognitive activity from their users than does alphabetic writing. Drawing from scientific research, he cites several neurological alterations that reshape our cerebral pathways and psychic minds in accordance with new media. In particular, he emphasizes the shift from serial to parallel computation as the preferred strategy of approach to digital and network technologies. Serial and parallel are two opposing and interdependent modes that create and organize various cultural practices to give them meaning, significance, scope, and aesthetic value. The serial expresses sequence, temporality, linearity, and singularity. The parallel expresses co-presence, simultaneity, spatiality, and multiplicity. Examples of this duopoly occur in music (melody/harmony), symbols (text/image), language (syllable/phoneme), arithmetic (ordinal/cardinal numbers), and electrical circuits (serial/

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[17]Note that Rotman's assessment of Western religions does not include Christianity proper, and thus may accommodate Heidegger's critique of medieval Christendom as oppressive to human individualism and subjectivity. Based on Rotman's description of the virtual, disembodied subject, it can be argued that the Christian belief in the physical person of Jesus as one and the same as God and Holy Spirit removes the ambiguity of the inherited notion of Yahweh-I which allows for the projection of a meta-subject within lived Creation. Rather, Christianity (Catholicism in particular) emphasizes the Body of Jesus (as Christ) as proof of his humanity and (subject) agency. In the New Testament stories, Jesus is a subject with whom we as human readers are not meant to fully identify—that would be not only presumptive but also counter-intuitive to the project of Christian faith as salvation.

[18]The differences among these three is as follows: Digital media is the premise and interface of virtual and network technology. Network technology enables the transmission of digital information. Virtual technology immerses its user in the digital world, often using network resources. Earlier the paper argued that various forms of art are fundamentally virtual media. The difference between their virtual reality and that of the current age should soon become clear. Henceforth, the paper will refer to "virtual technology" as that which relies on digital and network media.

parallel). In any of these symbiotic systems, a change in one mode will affect the other to the same degree.

Rotman notes that new technologies, in the interest of saving time and expanding domain, increasingly privilege parallel processing to one-move-at-a-time calculation. This way they can divide and disperse data, memory, tasks, etc., among discrete, interconnected elements acting simultaneously (such as autonomous computers wired to the Internet, robotic mechanisms, cell phones, social media, and central processers). Many believe that the shift toward parallel computing is natural considering the globalized world in which we now live. Rotman concedes the possible benefits of this transition which "[…] amounts to the belated recognition of the presence of collectivities at sites long, deeply, and mistakenly held to be the province of individual, serially thinking subjects" (*Becoming* 90). In that case, if the age of slow-mo, serially-scripted, alphabetic "technology" produced a single-minded monadic Being, then the current age of high-speed, far-reaching, ever-present digital, network, and virtual technologies will produce a distributed, interconnected, plural-minded Being-in-the-world. According to Rotman's argument, the frequent use of digital media and virtual technology should be capable of transforming the human brain to make it more compatible to the conditions of multiculturalism, democracy, and equality.

Instead, the transition to parallel computation at the expense of the serial has a drastic effect on human thought, activity, and notions of selfhood. Rotman describes it as follows:

> Whether through cell phones interchanging private and public spaces, through the plurally fractured linearity of so-called multi-tasking; through the manipulation of external avatars of the self in communally played computer games; through engaging in the multifarious distributions of agency, intelligence, and presence that immersion in networked circuits put into play; or through the still unfolding capacity to be in virtual contact anywhere, at any time, with unknown human or machinic forms of agency – these computational affordances make the who, the what, and the how of the parallelist self radically different from its alphabetic predecessor. (*Becoming* 92)

The "lettered self" of alphabetic writing has been invaded, fractured, de-privatized, and dissolved by the apparatuses of parallelism, and with it dies the potential meta-subject. There is no longer a psychic foundation for the "I" who writes, speaks, and acts in the world. Rather, that "I" leaks out into the collective that permeates its borders. The individual soul, once private and contained, disperses into the public realm,

becoming social, or one can say, global. Rotman refers to this ontological phenomenon as the *para-self,* "a parallelist extension of the 'I' of alphabetic literacy that is crystallizing around us" (133). Within this exogeneous entity, the internal and the external fold into each other, becoming a field crisscrossed by networks of other selves and simulacra of itself through an ongoing stream of spontaneous information. The single-bodied subject and the world around it are not only one but many, changing the way we consider others and ourselves: "By distributing an individual linear consciousness, a monadic thinking self, over a collectivity, its action both pluralizes the alphabetic 'I' behind this consciousness and correspondingly reconfigures the social multiplicity, the 'they/we' against which it is defined" (134).

Furthermore, the dissolution of the lettered psyche predicates the decline of faith in the old monadic ideas that have dominated Western culture: the Jewish 'I' (God, Yahweh, "I am that am"), the Greek "I" (Psyche), and even the Infinite Mathematical Agent. Rotman contends that any religion or principle that authorizes itself by means of an alphabetic text is threatened by the incarnation of this most recent ubiquitous agency. The downfall of these fundamental principles recalls Heidegger's analysis of modern metaphysics, where the "loss of the gods" entails not only the dismantling of the Christian world view but also the state of uncertainty about any god(s) or higher being. As humans abandon religion, they turn to history and psychology to explain the persistent mysteries of the world. Rotman observes the current resurgence of religious fundamentalism, such as "Bible-obsessed evangelism" and "Jewish and Koreanic literalism," which he interprets as an intuitive defense of a writing-based God and the Creation engendered and enclosed by holy books. Though such groups may not consciously associate the increase in societal secularism and individual heathenism with the rise in digital, virtual, and network technologies, it is probable that the general skepticism and even indifference toward sacred texts has spurred such a fierce response.

While Rotman passes no judgment on the state of a society of *para-humans* who have replaced organized religion and even personal spirituality with psychic porosity, he is concerned about the extent to which we are in control of our own metamorphosis. It seems that we are becoming *para* not by conscious choice but by adaptive convenience. Is the network and virtual media of the digital age doggedly pressuring us into situations of distributed co-presence that will produce unknowable consequences within the sacred space of cognition? Moreover, do we want to change who we are, or were, or thought we should be in the age of the alphabet, the holy books it created, and the God it engendered? He concludes:

> A technologically mediated transformation of the 'human' – global, all encompassing, and seemingly inescapable – is being made by us to happen […] We are living through tumultuous, dizzying times on the cusp of a new era; times spanning a seismic jump in the matrix of human culture, which looks to be as momentous, epoch-making, and far reaching in its consequences as the invention of alphabetic writing. (*Becoming* 105)

Our subjectivity is critically at risk, not only in the proliferation of the para-self but also in the disempowering of the para-human.

It is not only religious texts and practices that may be jeopardized by the contemporary technocracy, but books as academic resources as well. Comparative Literature scholar Haun Saussy is skeptical about the current "age of information" (that is, the early 2000s) and believes that it threatens the state of literary scholarship, particularly in his own discipline. In our high-speed, inter-connected society, the abundance of information tends toward meaninglessness. While any query is searchable in cyberspace, the quality of these "results" is questionable, mostly because of the character of the "research" used to procure them. First, one can never be sure of the truth of anything read online. Second, the ease and efficiency of the process leaves little space for intellectual and emotional reflection. Third, it takes connectivity for granted. Rather than forging thoughtful connections based on carefully collected data, the modern Internet scholar is likely to fall under the tyranny of the omnipotent search engine that flattens the world to ultimate abjection: all objects available, comparable, useful: "The idea that a wider context will take care of hermeneutic problems, which is the assumption at the base of Google-mancy, takes for granted that text and context are co-present, 'really,' in some precritical fashion, a move that allows for a positivistic style of reading" (Saussy 33). Literary criticism, and Comparative Literature in particular, depend on an openness to interdisciplinary discourse and methods, as well as an accurate understanding of the interpretive pathways that bring them to light and a continual awareness of the real, global conditions that make them relevant. The overly-simplified world of computer research, offering a given range of algorithmically-certified "results," presents alternative conditions to understanding real-world issues, and thus cannot be expected to present the most thorough investigation thereof. Certainly, scholars may avail themselves to use the Internet as a tool, but should not expect its calibrated information to count for Truth, nor for this new form of research-science to optimize our ability to know the world around us.

It is tempting to equate the splintered subjectivity of the para-self to an existence of Being-in-the-world, but connecting through digital, network media is not the same as Dasein's activity. While this may hold in some circumstances, it is not necessarily true for several reasons. The first is an echo of Rotman's concern about the intentionality of our *para* transformation. In *Being and Time,*[19] Heidegger stipulates that Being-in-the-world is not guaranteed by co-habitation or spatial proximity to others: "This state of Being [Dasein] does not arise just because some other entity is present-at-hand outside of Dasein and meets up with it. Such an entity can 'meet up with' Dasein only in so far as it can, of its own accord, show itself within a *world*" (84; italics in original). Network media assumes that all entities are consistently "present-at-hand" and can be "met-up-with" at any time, not necessarily "of [their] own accord." For this same reason, being "present" within network media cannot sustain the creation of a world picture: "Wherever we have a world picture, an essential decision is made regarding what is, in its entirety. The Being of whatever is, is sought and found in the representedness of the latter" (*Age* 130). Although the para-self that is "found" through the multi-tendrilled, protean realm of cyberspace seems to reflect this quality of "representedness," the activity lacks the deliberation required for making a world picture. To create and then put oneself in a picture of the world is not only a conscious decision, but also one that requires courage and continual maintenance for the survival of Being.

Furthermore, the essential nature of the para-self—multiple, uncontained, undefined—is incompatible with world-forming because it cannot attain the condition of *subiectum.* It is true that *subiectum* subsumes both subject and object(s), but crucial to this state of transcendence is awareness of the relationships that define its being. Heidegger clarifies that for man to reach *subiectum* is a matter of active reflection about his own Being and the world around him: "This is possible only when the comprehension of what is as a whole changes" (*Age* 128). On the other hand, the para-self is unable to differentiate between itself and others and therefore cannot accurately describe their relationship. It cannot propose a picture, or form a world, of the virtual landscape. Even if it could, the elements of the picture—other para-selves and para-things—would be so completely collective and not-themselves they could not provide any ontological understanding.

Rather, the para-self collectivity associated with the "world" of network media seems to exemplify Heidegger's description of Being-with-one-another:

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[19]Hereafter, *Being and Time* will be referred to as *Being*.

> And it is precisely these […] deficient and Indifferent modes that characterize everyday, average Being-with-one-another. These modes of Being show again the characteristics of inconspicuousness and obviousness which belong just as much to the everyday Dasein-with of Others within-the-world as to the readiness-to-hand of the equipment with which one is daily concerned. (*Being* 158)

With e-mail, text message, phone calling, and even video chat, communicating with others is so easy and efficient that it risks becoming careless. New modes of "discourse" are being invented regularly, which suggests at least some level of awareness of its lack (or lack of meaning) in contemporary society. Moreover, each one of us is enveloped in a plethora of accounts—for socializing, banking, dating, gaming, exercising, etc.—that typically include profiles, inboxes, "histories," and, with algorithmic assistance, our tendencies concerning at least one aspect of our personhood. Without having to devote conscious participation to the micro-community associated with each given account, we are continuously "active" therein—"present" for anyone who wants to view, message, or "like" that sliver of who we are. This situation is made all the more possible by the fact that we live in increasingly close proximity to the technological devices that make this Being-with-one-another possible; wireless earbuds, fitbits, and iphones nestled in a breast pocket are but a few examples of this endosymbiotic process converging our bodies with foreign matter.

The third reason relates to the reason we set up virtual accounts and purchase expensive technological equipment in the first place: it is useful. Modern technology and media encourage us to see things as handy, practical, and even profitable. Whether we are wielding a hand-held or scavenging the virtual entities of cyber world, our purpose is to acquire and possess. Heidegger specifies that Dasein is a "mode of dwelling autonomously alongside entities within-the-world" on the condition of "holding-oneself-back from any manipulation or utilization" (89). Any notion of care for the world, which is the activity of Dasein, can only be genuine if it entails a willful refusal of objectifying other people and things for personal "use" (unworlding). *Using* technology obviates the necessary circumstances for the authentic activity of care because the purpose of technology is to be useful to human life. Furthermore, the effect of digitization and virtual media, tools in and of themselves, is the representation of data as objects to be used. Cell phones, computers, and other technological devices are a means of summoning other people and things, forcing them to be present-at-hand rather than allowing for their own, discrete existences alongside us within the same world.

Finally, the virtual condition of the network community implicates the physical non-interaction of those participating. The virtual "I" is incapable of engaging with the virtual "them," so neither party can ever truly know the other. Heidegger claims that although Dasein requires time alone for personal reflection, it is only fulfilled by actual interaction: "Dasein's authentic self-relation is not a withdrawal from the world. The resoluteness of authentic existence involves actual commitments in the world and acting with concrete others to 'actualize' the original ontological community structured to Dasein's selfhood" (Cheah 125). It is true that the virtual-written "I" engendered by the alphabetic system posits a virtual reader just as unknowable as the technology user. However, it is because of the fractional and porous *para*-nature of virtual-tech entities that the interface of network media is unable to frame a conclusive world picture for the real-life human users. This argument does not deny the ability of the para-self to create a picture of the world, but it is nothing like the one that Heidegger describes as a product of *subiectum*. The world picture for the para-self corresponds to the advanced technology that was used to build it: the digital picture. Any digital representation, be it of an object, document, image, or sound, entails its conversion to discrete, discontinuous units (usually numbers or letters). Human history has known many digital systems, including our DNA genetic code, the abacus, Morse code, Braille, and even alphabetic writing. With the invention of computers and telecommunication, digitization has become standard practice because it allows for information of any kind to be stored and transmitted. The "pictures" we are accustomed to seeing today are part of the digital revolution.

In 1968, Philips Labs of New York invented the prototype of the digital camera. This device called the "All Solid State Radiation Imager" recorded an optical scene as an arrangement of photodiodes on a matrix. In 1975, Steven Sasson of Kodak produced the first digital camera, which took twenty three seconds to capture a scene in 100 x 100 pixels and could store up to thirty black-and-white images on a cassette tape. The ubiquitous digital photographs of today are essentially numerical compositions produced by photoelectric and mechanical techniques using a computer or camera. In the year 1938, Heidegger could only refer to photographs made by wet bath chemical process, which requires a human agent.[20] Certainly, humans are sometimes responsible for the editing of digital images, but they do not execute the

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[20]Heidegger could also be referring to pictures made by drawing or painting, which typically entail a system of perspective. The paper already discusses how this Renaissance-style picture requires an artist-who-draws/paints and incarnates its subject-observer (be it the artist or any viewer) as a visible object located in the invisible, unoccupiable vanishing point.

initial capture of the image. The difference between our contemporary understanding of a picture is crucial, for it correlates to the way that virtual technology and network media alter the subjective consciousness of the previously photographic/alphabetic/perspective self. Written texts, perspective art, and photography allow for the hypostatization of the *subiectum* with a corresponding virtual subject "I" directing the narrative or vanishing point organizing space. Each represents a "world picture," or a sort-of truth about the real world. Rotman describes how the evolution of photography to digital imaging inauthenticates the scene it produces. Digitization replaces the chemical fixation of light on film, which indicates the presence of the camera at the scene, with the ability to edit the scene without limit and without having been present at the time of the shooting. Such an image would be a "visual polyphony" serviced by the "now ubiquitous devices and apparatuses of visual parallelism which actively displace linear optic" (*Becoming* 98). Thus arbitrary, digitized data usurps the verisimilitude of the photograph. The virtual subject indicated by perspective lines and the camera (correlating to the written "I") has disappeared, as well as the self-who-sees:

> But digitization, substituting pixels for points, replaces the psychic architecture and 'metaphysic of interiority' of the Renaissance individual by an architecture that, because it must be specified in relation to the physiologically meaningful substrate of the pixilated image, cannot transcend the space it physically occupies, and so cannot enact a metaphysical drama of viewing the world from a position outside it. (97)

Digital imaging, like parallel computing, is able to represent multiple events simultaneously. It therefore defies the logic of the Heideggerian "world" grounded in temporality. The digital picture is not prior to existence but rather occasions it as a purely spatial encounter. Moreover, an "I" experientially appropriate to such a media must be a denaturing of the alphabetic "I" and accordingly reconfigure the "other" against which it is defined. Unknowing of its proper self or of its relation to the world, this "I" cannot enact the *subiectum.* It cannot produce a (digital) world picture like the world picture that Heidegger proposes, one conceived by a human consciousness fashioned according to the technology of its time, be it text, chemical photograph, or perspective art.

The fact is that the contemporary para-human is moving away from words (especially poetry and literature) and into the nebulous domain of the after-picture, the image gone digital[21]: "A post-literate

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[21]*Digitalization* takes digitization a step further. Originally used just for business models, it now refers to the process of digitizing all things possible. Essentially, it is

self is emerging, patterned not on the word – stable, integral, fixed, discrete, enclosing a unique, interior meaning, ordered, sequential – but on the fluid and unordered multiplicities of the visual image" (94–95). Such a self is made to navigate the infinite and invisible pathways of the worldwide web, to be "present" on numerous sites all overlapping on one computer screen, to be accessible, and to have available all lines of communication. Such a self might deprecate books as superannuated resources with a limited scope of information in favor of researching through web pages and reading electronic text. Such a self would prefer typing (quickly constructed and instantly transmitted) to writing (laboriously lettered and slowly circulated, if at all).

The after-picture offered by a digital image is far removed from the picture offered by a literary text. Essentially, it is not a "world" with any integrity. Without temporal process and without a direct human subject-agent, it represents but an instantaneous collectivity made not of continuous parts but of separate units. Like the interconnected communities of para-selves populating cyberspace, the digital image does not express a meaningful composition. It precludes the philosophy of Dasein (a temporal/serial state of becoming), which therefore disqualifies it from being a true work of art. While "the work of art exemplifies world entry – it brings the earth into the opening that is world and maintains this opening" (Cheah 129), the after-picture expresses unworlding, the closing of that original openness that incarnates subject and object in their nonsubjective and nonobjective transcendent forms into a set of pixilated points, individually finite but infinite in combinatory potential.

Network ability and digitization, involving virtual reality, may seem empowering, but actually threaten the value of the human subject-agent and the world picture of its *subiectum*. According to Heidegger's discussion of the world picture, the digital image may be considered an instance of the *gigantic,* a phenomenon that implies quality in the guise of quantity. He warns that as soon as the enormous and extensive things we tend to consider "great" actually become incalculable, the human agent loses the power of representation: "This becoming incalculable remains the invisible shadow that is cast around all things everywhere when man has been transformed into *subiectum* and the world into picture" (*Age* 135). This is not to say that we should avoid the clever innovations that may improve certain tasks or disavow the "selves" we have created on the World Wide Web, but we must remain diligent and judicious about the relationship they have to our essential Being. As Heidegger cautions of modern science: "Man will know […] that which

the integration of digital technologies into everyday life. Some examples include smart devices and smart city infrastructures. This paper does not comment on the particular consequences of digitalization but only mentions its rise in the contemporary world.

is incalculable, only in creative questioning and shaping out of the power of genuine reflection" (136). Only with active awareness and honest decision-making can we maintain any kind of authority over and authorship of our lives.

Should we allow ourselves to be seduced by the charms of speed, magnitude, and overabundance promised by digital media, we must expect alterations to our cognitive profile, as occurred during the transitions from gestures to speech and speech to writing. Should we abandon literature, face-to-face interaction, and the alphabet itself, we must be prepared to relinquish the *subiectum* that acts in ultimate freedom: the self-freeing from the bonds of subject and object that determine selfhood. Should we lose sight of the world picture, the "big picture," the meaningful sum of all relational things, then we must resign ourselves to the unworlded blindness that prevents us from living and knowing the unconcealed truth of who we are in communion with others, of Being-in-the world as Dasein.

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Of Efficient Fragments: Reification and British Aestheticism

Yannis Kanarakis

Abstract

This paper utilizes Fredric Jameson's work on the concept of "reification" as a means of considering the artistic movement of aestheticism as the cultural logic of late nineteenth century capitalism. The paper intends to show that Jameson's concept can help us approach this paradoxical relation in a systematic way, where, on the one hand, the aesthetes propounded artistic autonomy, while, on the other, they were actively engaged with market policies. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate that fragmentation in aestheticist works through the concept of reification which functions as a means of intensifying emotional response and of increasing the efficiency, and thus the impact of the work, in a manner that is reminiscent of advertising or even market practices, rendering the movement a cultural counterpart of late nineteenth century capitalism.

The nineteenth century movement of Aestheticism has recently been the object of much lively interest both "as an object of historical study" and "as a mode of contemporary critical thought," as Nicholas Shrimpton asserts, while discussing the rise of the so called "New Formalism" or "New Aestheticism" in the States (1). As an object of historical study, the interest in aestheticism has resurfaced due to the fact that consumerism and commodification have dominated nineteenth century historiography (Guy 143), resulting in "[o]ne of the more improbable partnerships to have emerged in recent literary history"—the joining of aestheticism with radical social thought (Graff 311). This relation between commodity culture and the nineteenth century movement of art for art's sake has opened up a new field of inquiry, which can provide us with a deeper understanding of this peculiar artistic phenomenon, since its ambiguous association with commodification has always been a source of anxiety for critics working in the field. How can a movement endorse art's autonomy from the market, yet at the same time promote consumption, fashion, advertising, and decoration? This paradox has long been detected by a series of theorists, such as Lukács, Bürger, Adorno, Benjamin, or critics like Bell-Villada, Freedman, and Gagnier,

to name a few, but none of them has either discussed the phenomenon in detail or has accounted for the insurmountable conflicts that this peculiar co-existence engulfs. What is even more significant is that none has suggested a theoretical tool within which this contradiction can be systematically approached or analyzed. This is precisely the gap to which this study aims to contribute.[1]

The situation gets even more perplexing because aestheticism has been used as a "catch-all" word to include within it a heterogeneous group of figures, such as Ruskin, the early Pre-Raphaelites, the Symbolists, the exponents of the Arts and Crafts movement, some early modernists, the Decadents—some of them proto-Marxists, some others conservative (Shrimpton 3–4). So, what is really lacking is a theoretical model able to systematize the study of aestheticism and provide new insights on it as a movement that shared certain characteristics despite the differences within its exponents. In view of this gap in the literature, the goal of this paper is to methodically explore the relation between aestheticism and commodification through a theoretical approach able to embrace the majority of the aesthetes and bring to light how a specific economic structure at a given historical time led to a new cultural logic, a new "structure of feeling" as Raymond Williams would have put it. Taking into consideration the fact that the relation between economy and aesthetics as a rule has been the main focus of Marxist criticism, this study will approach the matter through the notion of reification. Reification has been traditionally utilized by Marxists as the fundamental theoretical concept in their analyses of the interconnection between economy and aesthetics. The objective is to show that through the concept of reification aestheticism's association with commo-dification, and by implication capitalism, can be highlighted in an illuminating way. The term facilitates our understanding of how the

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[1]Bell-Villada discusses the interaction between aestheticism and the market in a rather abstract way, refraining from any detailed analysis, whereas Freedman, in *Professions of Taste*, focuses mainly on Henry James, exploring the co-existence of contradictory trends within the movement which are, nevertheless, only marginally acknowledged. In *The Insatiability of Human Wants*, a thorough exploration of the interconnection between economics and aesthetics, Gagnier illustrates how Marginalism resulted, among others, in the aestheticist hedonic subjectivism, materialism, and the call for the consumption of art (rather than its production), which are regarded as symptomatic of the movement's compliance with consumerism. The present study is heavily indebted to Gagnier's work, yet it suggests the concept of reification as a more effective means of investigating the phenomenon, since the term allows detailed insight into how the aesthetes codified economic and market principles into artistic form, despite their apparent aversion for the commodification or the *vulgarization* of art. In this sense, the term can help us conceptualize the aesthetes' conflicting attitude towards the market, and thus supplement Gagnier's approach by providing a means of accounting for the paradoxes inherent in the aestheticist stance that some critics might—and have—considered as a contradiction in terms.

movement formally appropriated certain market principles by codifying them into aesthetic form despite an apparent aversion for capitalist materialism and can thus account for, in a very comprehensive way, the movement's conflicting response to it. Furthermore, as we shall see, the highly versatile character of the notion of reification will allow us to trace its workings in nearly all exponents of the aesthetic movement, bringing them together without any subsequent abstractions.

Before exploring in detail the representation of reification in the work of certain aesthetes, let us consider very briefly the origins and definition of this term. Reification, "that special bugbear of Hegelian Marxism," as Jay puts it (267), is a central concept of Marxist thought even though Marx himself never used the term (Pitkin 264). It was originally developed by Marx in the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867 163–77), while analyzing commodity fetishism to consider capitalist production, within which labor is stripped of its social or human qualities and acquires the status of a *thing*—of a commodity to be sold, circulating autonomously in the market according to laws beyond human control. In other words, Marx claimed that the mechanization, division, and specialization of labor power actually lead to its reduction into an abstract figure subjected to the quantitative measurements of the market, where social relations are replaced by relations between things.

Later on, Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1971) identified Marx's notion with Max Weber's concept of "rationalization" extending its scope. Following Marx's thread of commodity fetishism, Lukács holds that the mechanization of work results in people losing their capacity for independent, creative agency and, in the face of a mystifying process they cannot control, they adopt the attitude of a contemplative observer (98, 97, 204).[2] Commodity production, in this sense, grows to be "the model for all the objective forms of bourgeois society, together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them" (170), and reification becomes for Lukács the basic structural characteristic of capitalism (177) as "the necessary and immediate reality of every person living under capitalism" (87). The overcoming of the separation between object and subject that the capitalist mode of production has brought about is what modern philosophy and literature are unsuccessfully engaged with, Lukács claims (104–49), since in their attempt to resolve the conflicts and contradictions of capitalist economy they actually end up promoting and legitimating it by reproducing its form (83–97).

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[2]As Lukács puts it, "people's own activity, their own labor confronts them as something objective, independent of them, dominating them through an autonomy alien to human beings" (87).

Nevertheless, as Gartman points out, Lukács does not "deal systematically with the extension of reification into the realm of material culture and its effects upon the consciousness of the proletariat" (169). This task is subsequently followed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who, drawing on Lukács' notion, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* argue that culture in modern consumer capitalism has been transformed into an industry, subordinated to the reifying, dehumanizing, and abstracting logic of mass production, where culture ultimately functions as a form of an antidote to the alienation that this very same mechanism has brought about. Later on Herbert Marcuse extends Lukács' analysis of reified culture and claims that the reifying logic of abstraction, quantification, and manipulation results in a one-dimensional society dominated from top to bottom by technological rationality.

Fredric Jameson appropriates the Lukácsian category of reification throughout his work in order to analyze culture in contemporary capitalism and postmodernist thought, thus, reviving the interest in an old Marxist concept by modernizing its use. The term occupies a preeminent role in Jameson's critical vocabulary since reification remains for him "one of the most pressing theoretical, philosophical and political concerns today" (Homer 166). Even though Jameson uses the term in a highly versatile way, reification for Jameson, just like his Marxist predecessors, invokes the fragmentation of the social web as a means of achieving more and more efficiency, but it also implies that there is inherent in it a process of aestheticization as a form of compensation, since it engenders a re-ordering of experience, a new aesthetic distribution of reality, which replaces any former unity as an outdated way of engaging with the world. The older sense of unity is thus substituted by the aesthetics of modern autonomy (or semi-autonomy).[3]

By incorporating elements from nearly all movements of contemporary thought, Jameson "has rigorously and persuasively sought to produce a sophisticated, non-reductionist, non-mechanistic form of Marxism" (Homer 5), which, in its breadth and flexibility, will prove to be invaluable in our consideration of the complex relation

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[3]Jameson comes close to defining reification in *The Political Unconscious* (1981): "[the term] is a complex one in which the traditional or 'natural' […] unities, social forms, human relations, cultural events, even religious systems, are systematically broken up in order to be reconstructed more efficiently; in the form of new post-natural processes or mechanisms; but in which, at the same time, these now isolated broken bits and pieces of older unities acquire a certain autonomy of their own, a semi-autonomous coherence which, not merely a reflex of capitalist reification and rationalization, also in some measure serves to compensate for the dehumanization of experience reification brings with it, and to rectify the otherwise intolerable effects of the new process" (62–3).

between aestheticism and commodification. Moreover, Jameson explores the historical development of capitalism, which produces in each one of its stages (free market capitalism, monopoly capitalism, late capitalism) a different cultural logic (realism, modernism, post-modernism), providing us through this dialectical viewpoint with the necessary theoretical tools to explore the interrelation between the aesthetics of aestheticism as a cultural logic and the economic, psychological, and phenomenological structures of capitalism. In this sense, the notion of reification can be strategically employed as a means of sketching the imprint of the economy of the time on aesthetic form as "a mode of experiencing the world" (Dowling 27) and of illustrating the way this was ideologically codified in an artistic movement in which society, politics, and history were deliberately and persistently blocked off. Given the manifested Marxist aversion for aestheticism (Shrimpton 4), Jameson's deviation from the rigidity of a "vulgar" Marxism and his re-engagement with certain writers and thinkers who have so long been considered an anathema for traditional Marxist thought can provide fertile ground for novel associations that can prove to be mutually beneficial.

Aestheticism developed in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century against the backdrop of an overpowering reorganization in industrial production. Late nineteenth century, the age of monopoly capitalism, was a time when industrial systems sought the achievement of the greatest and quickest possible efficiency through the breaking down of production and distribution into smaller and more manageable units. This systemic instrumentalization of "the internal organization of a factory" was soon extended beyond the realm of industrial production to include the whole of the social, since, as Lukács remarks, "it contained in a concentrated form the whole structure of capitalist society" (90). The society of the time thus experienced a profound form of rationalization and reification that was structured along the lines of factory production, which brought about "the exact breakdown of every complex into its elements," where "the parts, the aspects of the total process […] have been broken off, artificially isolated and ossified," so that it was possible "to predict with ever greater precision all the results to be achieved" (Lukács 88). Indicative of this remodeling of the social whole according to the structural composition and form of industry production or the commodity was the fact that in the late nineteenth century we also have the proliferation of the aesthetics of fragmentation.

The fact that the aesthetes were highly aware of the publishing market and appropriated their way of writing to the givens of this market and to the demands of their reading public has long been established by

a series of critics.[4] As this paper attempts to illustrate, this appropriation of market policy and commodity structure can nevertheless be detected *formally* in the way the aesthetes handled language, narrative, plot, diction, and imagery in their work. As Marx has remarked while discussing the enigma of commodity fetishism,[5] it is after all in the form that the secret of the mystery lies. This "secret" in our case involves the fragmentary organization of the aestheticist discourse, which evidently replicates the fragmentary form of the commodity.

In the essay, "Style" (1888), Walter Pater, the writer who laid the philosophical foundations of Aestheticism in Britain, alludes explicitly to an economic discourse in order to discuss what he considers to be a successful form of writing. Pater begins his essay by defining "progress" as the "resolution of an obscure and complex object into its component aspects" (5). Drawing on Flaubert's "tardy and painful" type of writing (32), who used to work his style "like a true working man […], with sleeves turned up, in the sweat of his brow, beat[ing] away at his anvil" (29), Pater repeatedly stresses throughout his essay the need for "self-restraint, a skillful economy of means, ascesis" (17) in order for "surplusage" to be avoided. Such discipline, the critic argues will result in "that absolute accordance of expression to idea" (34), in "expressing a thing, in all its intensity and colour" (37), so that the reader will enjoy "an aesthetic satisfaction in that frugal closeness of style which makes the most of a word, in the exaction from every sentence of a precise relief, in the just spacing out of word to thought, in the logically filled space connected always with the delightful sense of difficulty overcome" (17).

Pater is here explicitly adopting the economic rhetoric of efficiency as if he is applying the rules of successful market production

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[4]See for example Regenia *Gagnier's Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde & the Victorian Reading Public*; Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition, 1850-1910: Studies in Media and Book History*; Ian Small, *Conditions for Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century*; and Bell-Villada, *Art for Art's Sake and Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology & Culture of Aestheticism, 1790-1990.*

[5]Freud follows a similar pattern in his writings on the dream structure some years later. While analyzing the fragmentary character of dream imagery, Freud claims that the meaning of the dream can be accessed through analysis of its form, that is, by focusing on condensation and displacement, on metaphor and metonymy, which are the mechanisms responsible for the unexpected dream imagery. Both thinkers, in more or less the same period, were, therefore, engaged with fragmentation, drawing attention to the fact that, either socially, economically, or psychologically, this new form of organization entailed a novel form of engaging with experience. In this sense, both thinkers implicitly contributed to the aesthetics of fragmentation that were gradually on the rise and that would prevail with Modernism.

to the writing of literature.[6] Alluding to Flaubert, whom Jameson calls "the privileged locus of this development, which the term reification in its strictest sense designates" (*Unconscious* 209), Pater suggests a process of instrumentalization and compartmentalization as a means of capturing these "unstable, flickering, inconsistent" impressions (*Renaissance* 151–2), of intensifying the impact of the text, of rendering it more effective for the reader. For Pater, such a process involves the utilization of the full capacities and potentials of the basic structural fragments, the fundamental units of literature, the word and the sentence,[7] in a spirit and language borrowed from production policies of the time.

This well-wrought, rationalized form of writing, nevertheless, will also have to result in an "impersonal" sense of style, so as to counterbalance the threat of personal "caprice," Pater claims (37). It is precisely this "depersonalization of the text," this "laundering of authorial intervention" that Jameson considers to be the source of Flaubert's reification (209). The effacement of authorial presence, Jameson implies, leads to the surfacing of the materiality, the "thingness" of language. In a similar fashion, Pater finishes his consideration of literary style by confessing that "the tendency of what has been here said is to bring literature […] under those conditions, by conformity to which music takes rank as the typically perfect art" (37). It is the materiality of the musical signifier, where "it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression" (37) that Pater wishes literary language to conform to.[8] It is thus that he, like the rest of his followers, the aesthetes, aimed to liberate writing from any (moral) constraints and, subsequently, emancipate the language, the rhythm, the music, the form of literature from any sense of limitation (or even didacticism).

Fragmentation and musicality are evinced in Pater's own literary writing as well. In *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of the Word* (2007), Angela Leighton discusses prosody and the formal aspects of Pater's work and she concludes that this well-wrought prose

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[6]Gagnier even claims that Pater was influenced by Jevons, the mathematical economist, in his "promotion of subjectivism, individualism, consumption, and ultimately formalism" (54).

[7]Referring to Flaubert, Pater commends, "[p]ossessed of an absolute belief that there exists but one way of expressing one thing, one word to call it by, one adjective to qualify, one verb to animate it, he gave himself to the superhuman labour for the discovery, in every phrase, of that word, that verb, that epithet" (29).

[8]"If music be the ideal of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression, then, literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic quality in things everywhere, of all good art." ("Style" 37–38)

rhythm, this "sense of music […] crosses and distracts from its sense of sense" (50). "[O]ne finds so often in Pater the isolated cadence or sentence making its impact by itself; one must pause after every sentence to adjust oneself to a new rhythm" (42), Fletcher claims, arguing that "the sustaining interest of reading [Pater] will be less the impetus, the sense of design, than the sudden recurring felicity of image or cadence" (45). Ohmann, in his turn, regards Pater's paragraph-length sentences and complains that he "fills his prose with syntactic interruptions and interpolations, almost to the point of affectation" (643).

What all these critics share in common is that Pater's model for the efficiency of the word or the sentence actually results in a fragmentary form of writing, manifested through the separation of signifier from signified, through the reified autonomization of rhythm "making its impact by itself," and through its lack of cohesion. Expounded within a discourse that explicitly alludes to the economy of efficiency, Pater's rationalizing technique of abstracting, fragmenting, and reifying language, via his association of literature with the material-like texture of the non-representational language of music, can be seen as an instance of the ideological coding of aesthetic means. It also marks his appropriation of the fragmentary structure of the commodity, which is reflected in his use of word and sentence, and the secret it holds in its form: the hiding of human labor; the effacement of authorial presence in this case.

Aestheticist fragmentation becomes even more explicit in the case of Swinburne, who was one of the first in England to employ the term "art for art's sake" and promote its ideals, deeply influencing the rest of the aesthetes. Such fragmentation is firstly noticed in the non-unified, polyphonic character of Swinburne's poetry, which can be seen as a collection of varied rhythmical bits-and-pieces, and poetic allusions. As Fletcher notes, his writing is fused with "many men's styles" and "numerous forms" (19), rendering Swinburne an "accomplished pasticheur" (7), whose style is "so deliberate[ly] a literary mosaic" (8). The fragmentary character of Swinburne's poetry, is, nevertheless, formally amplified through his use of musicality. To a much greater extent than Pater, Swinburne's poetic eloquence, his varied and accented rhythms, his obsessive abuse of alliteration, and love of repetition, his 'echolalia' results in an over-lush musical surface, which, as many critics acknowledge, lacks depth.[9] Grierson claims that

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[9]Musicality in Swinburne's poetry takes over and, in many instances, the poet's elaborate sound patterns are performed at the expense of meaning. In this prioritization of sound, content or the speaker as a subject position are no longer foregrounded, but are rather regarded as implications of form. In this sense, it could be argued that Swinburne also celebrates new forms of subjectivity, which deviates from traditional

Swinburne "sang always of the same themes, in the same high strain" but there was ""no progress" in his poetry "for there was no thought" (23). Fletcher argues that Swinburne "moves toward music" (5), Pekham talks of "a non-expressive aesthetic" (quoted in Fletcher 19), and T. S. Eliot of "the hallucination of meaning" in his works (149). Cassidy, in his turn, associates his "experimentation with meaning that may be extracted from the sounds of words" with James Joyce's work, and concludes that Swinburne "demonstrated that words have not only meanings but sounds which may be combined into music and rhythm to achieve a higher meaning than any lexicographer can express or than any message-hunting reader of poetry can ever comprehend" (162).

In its prioritization of form and rhythm at the expense of meaning, Swinburne's efficient use of musicality, which is actually a proto-modernist foregrounding of the materiality, of the texture of language, of aesthetic form rather than content, signals the separation of signifier from signified. Stemming from his materialist and atheist ideological goals that aimed to undermine Victorian morality in a manner similar to Pater's paganism in the *Renaissance*, Swinburne's repeated allusion to the senses throughout his work highlighted the role of the signified as a means of intensifying its sensual impact.[10] Within the context of aestheticist polemics, this separation of signifier from signified, nevertheless, can also be seen as a subversion of the instrumental cause-and-effect, means/ends organization of middle-class rationality, where the signifier is autonomized and becomes an end in itself in order to reach the full scope of its efficiency without being restricted by the burden, the "surplusage" of meaning. Such prioritization of form, thus, does not only reveal the subjection of literary discourse to a reifying textual economy modeled along the dictates of production, as in the case of Pater, but it also marks its structural kinship to the form of the commodity, where use-value of meaning, is absorbed and replaced by outward appearance as a new type of cultural capital.

Swinburne's politics of fragmentation can also be noted in the representation of the body, and especially the female body, which is, as a rule, objectified, reified, and commodified in aestheticist literature. In "Laus Veneris," a poem from the highly controversial *Poems and Ballads: First Series* (1866), Swinburne revisits the medieval legend of Tannhaüser, which was a recurrent motif in the works of the *fin de siècle*

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and Christian conceptions of the self as an entity with depth, but rather considers the self as surface, as matter.
[10]See, among others, Jerome McGann's *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism* and Thais Morgan's "Swinburne's Dramatic Monologues: Sex and Ideology."

aesthetes.[11] The myth involves the poet Tannhaüser's unsuccessful effort to be absolved by the Pope for the sin of the service he offered to Venus, and his eventual return to her. Despite the fact that Venus comprises the main focal point of the poem as the protagonist's object of desire, the reader is unable to visualize her, due to the fact that she is evasively represented through fragments of her body: "neck," "limbs," "eyelids," "hair," "mouth," "lip," "hands," "bosom," "breast," etc. Pearce links this fragmentary presentation to fetishism:

> In line with the codes of fetishization, we note that Venus is never seen in her entirety. Instead, her various bewitching parts are itemized and catalogued.[…] Despite this, the sum total of her parts refuses to add up to a physical entity.[…] Swinburne's Venus is an effectual photo-fit reconstruction of the 'ideal' sexual woman; an artful configuration of all the desirable elements. (132–3)

These autonomous body parts that fail to "add up" to a totality draw attention to their own seductiveness in the fragmentary manner of commodity fetishism. Swinburne's portrayal of Venus' desirability, in other words, draws on the technique of the representational fragment, a consummate piece encapsulating the essence of the whole, revealing not only a new economy of representation, but a new economy of desire as well, which are both tightly interlinked as a means of promoting consumption, of marketing beauty, and aesthetic form.

In his 1872 pamphlet, *The Fleshy School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day*, Robert Buchanan attacks Pre-Raphaelite and aestheticist poetry through a peculiar image, the "Leg." This fragment of the human body, which is meant to parody the prevailing strategy of representational fragmentation in current poetry, is furthermore linked to consumer culture: "[i]t has penetrated into the very sweetshops; and there, among the commoner sort of confectionary, may be seen this year models of the female Leg, the whole definite and elegant article as far as the thigh, with a fringe of paper cut in imitation of the female drawers and embroidered in female fashion" (3). Buchanan's comment highlights not only the predominance of autonomous fragments as the basic characteristic of aestheticist poetry, but also explicitly links this trend to commodity form, revealing its reifying policy, as a fetish displayed to be consumed in the market.

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[11]Baudelaire defended Wagner's opera on the legend in 1861. See also, among others, Pater's allusion to the myth in the unpublished sections of *Gaston de Latour*, Beardsley's *Venus and Tannhaüser*, Herbert E Clarke's *Tannhaüser and other Poems* (1896), and John Davidson's "A New Ballad of Tannhaüser" (1897).

Oscar Wilde, probably the most prominent of the aesthetes, was implicated in the market to a much greater extent than Pater, Swinburne, or the rest of the aesthetes. Being one of the first celebrities, he not only developed a pose and persona as a means of marketing himself, but he also edited *Woman's World* from 1887 to 1889, a magazine through which he actively shaped taste and fashion, participating, thus, in the commodity culture of the time. Even though Wilde did not share Pater's form of authorial modesty, he, nevertheless, shared his teacher's vision of textual economy. Like Pater, in *De Profundis* he confessed that he wanted his "words" to be "an absolute expression" of his thoughts that had nothing to do with "surplusage" (642). Such textual economy through a meticulous utilization of the rhythm of the word or sentence nevertheless did not result in beautiful musical fragments, as in the case of Pater or Swinburne but rather in Wilde's famous epigrams. As Basil tells Lord Henry Wotton, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "You cut life to pieces with your epigrams" (126).

Wilde's renowned aphorisms involve, in nearly all cases, statements of paradox. As Balfour argues, the paradox "at once demands and resists translation" (52), since the tension that it creates involves "a discrepancy between literal and figurative, letter and spirit" (54), where "one is momentarily halted […], wondering what it means" (55). Being instances of intensified elaborate meaning, Wilde's aphorisms act as little shocks that shatter the flow of the narrative, like Pater's alternation of rhythm, and force the reader to pause and contemplate by triggering a series of subversions of logic and common sense. As Lesjak states, "the epigram functions to tear things out of context while simultaneously maintaining the very concept wrenched out of place in an altered state" (189). Indicative of their fragmentary character is the fact that these aphoristic statements of paradox hold a semi-autonomous relation to the narrative they originate from, since they have the ability to maintain a life of their own outside it as self-reliant semantic wholes, as reified entities. The presence of countless collections and anthologies in the market of Wilde's sayings, of these "perfect instants," to borrow Roland Barthes' term, indisputably attests to that.[12] Very similar to the slogan-like language of advertising, which was on the rise during Wilde's time, these aphorisms manifest a striking economy of efficiency where the dynamics of a limited range of means (words) is fully exploited as a device that can achieve the greatest possible intensity— "the greatest possible yield of meaning" (70–3). As such, they also become "perfect instants" of a reified type of language, where fragmentation and efficiency go hand in hand in the market place.

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[12]Barthes calls "perfect instant," a carefully chosen moment, extracted from a narrative whole and "promoted into essence, into light, into view" (70–3).

Fragmentation as a means of efficiency can, furthermore, be noted in Wilde's treatment of authorial presence in his texts because, as noted already, Wilde—his ego was too far too pompous to be deliberately effaced from his texts—did not share Pater's modesty as a writer. Yet, by abandoning "the Victorian convention of the critic speaking directly to the audience as a sage," Wilde resorts extensively to the dramatic convention of dialogue throughout his work, adopting different masks within a work in order to dramatize the presence of antithetical possibilities within a speaking voice (Sussman 115). This way, he also stages "the fragmented nature of the self," the "multiplicity of the individual psyche," as Sussman puts it (115). The conflicting views of Cyril and Vivian in "The Decay of Lying" and of Gilbert and Ernest in "The Critic as Artist," on the one hand serve as dramatic devices that facilitate the flow and efficiency of Wilde's argument, suggesting, on the other, the presence of a counter-argument within the main argumentative line itself, making it hard for the reader to clearly identify the author's position because of the ambiguous rhetoric of fragmentation. Such a treatment was also, in its turn, very much efficient for Wilde himself, since it functioned as an implicit mitigation of his extremist and controversial views in the publishing market.

To sum up, aestheticist representation is dominated by fragmentation, the fundamental principle of reification. As a matter of fact, our understanding of aestheticism and its reception is conditioned by such fragmentation. What else comes to one's mind while considering aestheticism: Pater's often-quoted purple extract about Mona Lisa; some scattered phrases from the "Conclusion" to the *Renaissance* (1873); Wilde's and Whistler's well-shaped, autonomous aphorisms; Flaubert's depersonalized, perfectly-wrought sentences and his constantly shifting point of view; Swinburne's patchy music; the fragmented bodies in Beardsley's paintings and in Gautier's stories! These fragments were generated through the transubstantiation of the capitalist logic of efficiency into an aesthetic form that, very much like laissez-fare economy, would emancipate it from any kind of moral interference or constraint and set it autonomous. It comes then as no surprise that aestheticism, the movement that the Marxists traditionally feel an ideological aversion to, appears to paradoxically provide the most fertile ground for Marxist research, since either by distancing itself from the market or by complying with it, the movement appears to be closely defined by it.

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"…town that doesn't keep showing up in books": Genre Reflexivity in Post-Millennial Metafictional Horror

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Abstract

Metafiction and horror can be traced back as far as classical antiquity and even the early ages of oral storytelling, but it is their relationship within a post-millennial readership with which this paper is concerned. Metafictional horror—as it appears towards the end of the twentieth century and, more specifically, the beginning of the twenty-first century—is written against a backdrop of unavoidable, mass-mediated horrors within the realm of the real. In the face of worldwide threats—which included, but were not limited to, pandemics, terrorism, extreme weather events, and economic crises—this essay asks what metafictional horror looks like in the shadow of such events which preceded and superseded the millennium, and what this post-millennial metafictional horror is trying to say about the horror genre itself. Deconstructing the terms horror, metafiction, and metahorror along etymological, historical, and cultural lines, this paper uses David Wong's *John Dies at the End* as a case study, which stylistically deploys genre reflexivity. Wong's text will form the basis of a horror genre analysis to show that his metahorror allows for the text to provide a nuanced discourse on horror fiction's traditional consumption across multiple mediums, notably in literature, film, and video-gaming.

At first glance, it might seem suspicious that the etymological roots of *horror* trace it back to the hedgehog (Harper). *Eris*, with which the term *hedgehog* was once affiliated in its Latin genitive form, soon became *ghers* for other ancient Indo-European languages, meaning "to bristle." *Ghers* was returned to by the Latin language, becoming *horrere* which meant "to bristle with fear, shudder," until officially becoming *horror* which, according to Latin utterance, could be separated into the figurative and the physical: "dread, veneration, religious awe" and "a shaking, trembling (as with cold or fear), shudder, chill." It is from hedgehog that figures of speech like "hair standing on end" are transposed onto the human experience of horror, just as the hedgehog's

spines point outward upon fright.[1] It might seem reasonable to assume then that horror fiction writes with a rhetoric of horror, insofar as the author aims to affect fear, dread, chills, among other stimuli within the readerly response. On the surface, this suggests that horror writings must be meticulously configured in order to elicit their intended, albeit niche response within the reader, and leads to the question as to what response is to be solicited from the reader when horror writings are infused with, say, comedy for example: is comedy horror supposed to make us reel with laughter, or shudder with fear?[2] Should we swoon at the romance between Julie and R in *Warm Bodies*, or be horrified by the fact that Julie is a human and R is among the undead? Do the fantastical elements of Guilllermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* take precedent, or do we succumb to the child-eating monsters and Francoist regime as a source of horror? Of course, there exists a multitude of stylistic hybridizations through which horror writers can frame their work, all of which allow the writer to exceed the boundaries of horror rhetoric and elicit a layered readerly response. This essay interests itself in the stylistic fusion of metafiction with horror, i.e., metafictional horror after the millennium, and the implications this fusion can have when, instead of exposing fictional constructs, the constructs of the horror genre are exposed through it. The study will first explore the stylistic categories of horror fiction and metafiction, then look at how metafictional horror fits into a broader cultural framework, and finally analyse the genre of the metafictional horror novel through David Wong's *John Dies at the End*.

Recalling *Macbeth*'s banquet scene, in which the ghost of Banquo manifests before the eyes of Macbeth, Ann Radcliffe motions towards a view of horror fiction as possessing inferiority, presenting its supposedly cheap scare tactics as a lesser experience to that of terror fictions: she writes that terror fiction "expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a higher degree of life" (150). Radcliffe frames terror through the lens of the sublime aesthetic which, as made famous in claims by Burke, "excite[s] the ideas of pain, and danger, […] is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects" (Radcliffe 150; Burke 13). In other words, it seems that terror remains fixed on a pre-meditative imagining of threat, whereas horror embodies the consequentiality of threat. Radcliffe confirms her opinions of horror's

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[1]See, for example, the following remark in Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked this Way Comes*: "Hair! I read it all my life. In scary stories, it stands on end! Mine's doing it – now!" (57).

[2]"Horror, in some sense oppresses; comedy liberates. Horror turns the screw; comedy releases it. Comedy elates; horror simulates depression, paranoia, and dread," according to Noel Carroll (147). Comedy horror is possibly the most polarized example of genre hybridity in fiction.

inferiority when she writes about our close encounters with it as "respecting the dreaded evil" (150). This recalls horror's Latin roots of inspiring "religious awe" in the sense that she believes horror to compromise one's religious sensibilities (Harper). Regardless of Radcliffe's disseminations between terror and horror fictions, the two terms have remained closely intertwined in later critical discussions.

In his late twentieth century non-fiction work *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King develops the hierarchy posed by Radcliffe, wherein terror is considered more dignified than horror, presenting "terror on top, horror below it, and lowest of all, the gag reflex of revulsion" (King 37). King's addition of "revulsion" presents a level of horror which, as mentioned, induces the gag reflex by gory means.[3] It seems, then, that revulsion and horror are closely linked, with the former often acting as a consequence, or impact, of the latter. Whilst useful in terms of setting a criterion for horror writing, King's level-based approach to horror exhausts the genre because it presumes that the prospective reader's interpretation can be predicted in advance, despite horror priding itself on affectivity, which will vary from one reader to the next. Noel Carroll writes in *The Philosophy of Horror* that instead of occurring in separate vacuums, horror, terror, and revulsion can and often occur simultaneously in horror fiction: "threat [or terror] is compounded with revulsion, nausea, and disgust" (22). He coins the term *art-horror* as a reminder that horror's containment within an artistic framework is not only artificial but mediated to us by the affected characters within the medium, thus being more viewable as horror by proxy (8). By extension, the addressee of horror in art has a somewhat detached experience, and it is the subject's psyche which will ultimately allow, or disallow, a terrified, horrified, or gag-induced reaction to *art-horror*. Therefore, it seems appropriate to acknowledge that horror, terror, and revulsion, among other styles of writing, are strands which represent the writing of horror fiction. If terror is to be regarded as a precursory experience to threat, horror is the realised experience of threat, and revulsion as a bodily consequence of horror—then horror fiction itself might be defined as a rhetorical writing which displays different stages of threat in order to affect fear within the reader.

Not unlike horror fiction, metafiction as a term is difficult to pin down. Whilst horror's reliance on affectivity renders it subject to interpretation, metafiction by its very nature is paradoxical, and hence suffers similar semantic drawbacks. A "direct and immediate concern with fiction-making" was what first characterized metafiction when it

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[3]King exemplifies revulsion by analysing a scene from *Alien* in which an extra-terrestrial bursts from a character's chest (37).

was entered into critical discussion by William H. Gass in the late twentieth century, alluding to a style of writing which is concerned with the topic of writing (qtd. in Currie 1). Gass may allude to the reflexivity apparent in metafiction, but the term has since been clarified by the likes of Patricia Waugh, who refers to "[…] fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact" (2). Metafiction is presented as a stylistic choice by Waugh, which is written with the intent of spotlighting the fictionality of fiction. It seems, however, that Waugh favours a postmodernist lens, claiming that metafiction "[…] poses questions between fiction and reality" (2). There is no denying that metafiction—through its breaking of the fourth wall with which it is commonly affiliated—is capable of facilitating a postmodern reading; and yet metafiction, by its paradoxical nature, cannot be restricted to solely one critique, which this essay will demonstrate by opting for a genre study of metafictional horror. In order for metafiction to highlight its own fictionality, it must first utilize and make topical the schema through which we typically understand and interact with traditional fictions, which metafiction accomplishes through its inherent "*self-awareness*."[4] This schema can take many forms but is often looked at spatially, as Linda Hutcheon among others[5] says, "self-sufficient and closed" narrative world (170). Of course there exists other lenses through which fiction is traditionally understood, but upon reflection of the previously established definitions, it might be worth reconsidering metafiction as a style of fiction-writing which exposes the schemata we typically use to interact with and understand fiction.[6] The interests of this essay, however, are with metafictional horror more specifically, and what happens when the schemata which are typically used to understand horror are exposed, with a focus on post-millennial fiction. In this regard, it seems appropriate to discuss metafiction and horror's pre-existing relationship and the horrors which surrounded the millennium event.

Metafictional devices within horror writing can be traced back to classical antiquity. In *Haunted Greece and Rome*, Debby Felton casts our attention towards a frame narrative in the play *Mostellaria* by

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[4]In my recent work, metafiction is characterized as a "*self-awareness and exploitation of fiction's artifice through an elaborate writing of the parts which make up fiction in its most conventional form*" (Thompson 17; italics in original).

[5]Wenche Ommundsen notes metafiction's "assum[ed] familiarity with historical and geographical conditions" (170).

[6]Metafiction was previously considered in terms of how it "*exploits*" the components of fiction. This is true in some cases, but to exploit is to perform an offensive manoeuvre, and is thus more applicable to antifiction. The antinovel, or new novel, resists traditional novelistic readings "[…] in that it ignores such elements as plot, dialogue, linear narrative, and human interest" (Encyclopaedia Brittanica).

Plautus, in which a slave invents a ghost story as a means of keeping his master distracted (51). Frame narratives, or *mise-en-abyme*, have since come to be an underlying feature of metafiction because they interrogate reality as a perspective. Metafiction's tendency towards intertextuality emerges when Felton charts parallels between Lucian's *Philopseudes* and the ghost stories contained within Pliny the Younger's letters, suggesting that the metafictional device is far from a modern concept in metafictional horror (82–83). As Felton notes at the beginning of her book though, the classical antiquity was a period where folklore took precedence; therefore, intertextuality was necessitated by the customs of shared oral storytelling (1). Even before horror had received its own categorization as a genre, ancient ghost stories were ahead of their time, making allusions to what has since been called metahorror.[7] "Lucian intentionally satirizes the irrational beliefs of gullible people," according to Felton, suggesting that early horror fictions sometimes reached a meta level vis-à-vis the tropes of the ghost story (87). Thus, it seems that metafiction emerged within early instances of horror fiction through the functionality of repeating stories so that authors could reach audiences far and wide—*mise-en-abyme* so that authors could intellectualize horror—and through self-criticism of the ghost story trope so that authors could, in some cases, debunk popular beliefs in ghosts. Metafictional horror also featured within penmanship of Gothic Horror during the Romantic Period.

The resurgence of metafictional devices coalesced with the arrival of Gothic Horror writings, which arguably began with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. The first edition, published in 1764, presents itself as "A Story Translated by William Marshal […] From the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto," which contains an entire preface dedicated to proving that the contents of the book are actually the translations of a rediscovered manuscript (i–ix). Through this self-performance as a historical account, it seems that Walpole aims to enhance the experience of horror by suggesting "the ground-work of the story is founded on truth" (viii).[8] Walpole was ahead of his time by experimenting with verisimilitude, predating what Linda Hutcheon later called "historiographic metafiction" (76–77).[9] Other notable

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[7]Metahorror is not to be confused with horror writings of metafiction. The former pertains to a story's self-awareness of what characterizes horror, whilst the latter stylistically performs as horror but offers a self-awareness of what characterizes fiction.

[8]The text's second edition has since debunked the claims of its predecessor, with Walpole outing himself as the pseudonymous translator William Marshal and admitting the fictionality of the Italian author Onuphrio Muralto (Walpole).

[9]She elaborates further that "[f]iction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames […], frames which historiographic metafiction first establishes then crosses."

deployments of the metafictional device in Romantic portrayals of Gothic Horror include the framing narratives of *Frankenstein*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Dracula*, and the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Their tendencies towards *mise-en-abyme* "[…] blur narrative and cognitive boundaries, producing a destabilizing effect that challenges rational epistemology and suggests a deeper "reality" than the realist novel can possibly achieve" (Carlyle 2). The classical antiquity and Romantic Period have offered only two cultural movements within which metafiction and horror have previously intersected, but there exist far more, which this essay aims to prove by discussing post-millennial metafictional horror and its introspective turn towards genre. The following section will offer some insight into the cultural horrors which appeared to orbit the nineties and the beginning of the new millennium, which facilitated and inadvertently demanded the post-millennial metafictional horror which followed.

Prior to the millennium, a momentous build-up of horrors in the nineties presented the public with a real sense of threat that no life was sacred or exempt from pain and suffering. For example, the horror of disease was inadvertently spread by organizations such as UNAIDS and the World Health Organization reporting the continued worldwide outbreak of HIV/AIDS (Schwartländer et al. 64). Terrorist attacks from Al-Qaeda, the IRA, etc., were manifesting horror within the everyday; natural disasters, such as the Midwestern United States Heat Wave and the Vargas Tragedy flash flood, began to publicize the horror of the extreme weather event.[10] The horrors of the nineties were multi-faceted and mass-mediated, exposing the fragility of human existence to all. All these events occurred alongside polarizing debates about when the third millennium, and the twenty-first century, should be ushered in.

Calendar experts reminded those intent on celebrating the beginning of a new millennium on 31 December 1999 that, theoretically, they were a year premature; there is no year zero in the commonly used Gregorian calendar, because it began with AD 1, so the accurate end of the second millennium was 31 December 2000 (Klöpffer 219; Wilkins 6.9). This personified the new millennium as a meta-event, so to speak. This cultural anxiety towards temporal uncertainty fuelled conspiracy theories which, in turn, prescribed a self-consciousness to the millennium: the event was widely feared for its

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[10]This is not an exhaustive list. The death of Diana, otherwise known by her coveted role as "The People's Princess," shattered the once untouchable, sovereign status of the Royal Family; the Dunblane massacre of primary school children in Scotland bred a culture of fear where a child's safety could not be ensured in a learning environment, which the 1999 Columbine Massacre confirmed on an international scale; a series of commercial plane crashes; and a comet's near miss of the Earth's atmosphere.

potential to cause technological disasters and even instigate nuclear annihilation (Lean). We need only turn to forums from the night of 31 December, 1999, to infer the sense of horror which underpinned the arrival of the 2000s:

> […] I intend to party on 31 Dec 2000. Mind you, I had read and heard so many dark predictions for 31 Dec 1999, that I was terrified that someone somewhere would really make this prediction come true by exploding some sort of doomsday device.

> – CD Baxter, Scotland, UK

> I've been stuck here at work since 7.30pm last night (it's now 11.28am on New Year's Day) looking after the non-existent bug for a major UK healthcare company. The only panic we had all night was when we heard about missiles being fired from Russia...false alarm!! […]

> – Tony Martin, England

> […] One woman on London Bridge cried happily at midnight, "We're alive! We made it!". So, for those of you who thought the apocalypse had started when the Russian missile launch was detected, isn't it a relief to know they weren't aimed at us?

> – Jeremy Fry, UK ("A New Millenium – How is it for you?" BBC News)

The paranoias of the nineties were not lost on the new millennium either—if anything, they intensified. As Catherine Spooner notes, "[r]eports of SARS, avian flu, global warming, the war on terror, economic breakdown, all contributed to a cultural climate in which the threat of annihilation constantly appeared to be shadowing the human race" (5). Indeed, it seems that the twenty-first century, whenever it marked its appearance, ushered in a population of post-millennials who, under constant threats to the spatiotemporality they exist in, are more critical of their existence within time and space and are thus more susceptible to fictions which expose constructs. "Knowledge is hot water on wool" writes Mark Z. Danielewski, "It shrinks time and space" (*House of Leaves* 167).

Danielewski's novel came out on the cusp of the twenty-first century and tapped into the increasing cultural self-awareness and metafictional behaviour that our understanding of the world is conducted through a series of frames. Danielewski's labyrinthine

approach to novel-writing, as Catherine Spooner puts it, "[…] allows the source of horror to remain nameless, shapeless […]," which sets the tone for a wave of varying metafictional horrors seeing a twenty-first century release (46). The meta- message is not only on the rise, but it is necessitated by a post-millennial culture: metafictional texts from the nineties with horrifying elements, such as Austin Wright's *Tony and Susan* (otherwise known as *Nocturnal Animals*) and *Funny Games*, saw a post-millennial re-release, suggesting an audience which is more than receptive to reflexive fictions, particularly those with a tendency toward horrific expression.

As post-millennial audiences become increasingly aware of fiction's components, they are "finding it fascinating how they can become so emotionally affected by horrific imagery," (Woodcock 317). In addition to being more receptive to reflexive horror fictions, the essay argues that post-millennial metafiction oftentimes comes with reflexive genres. At the turn of the millennium, and to much commercial success, came the *Scary Movie* saga, which assimilated and parodied an abundance of pre-existing popular horror cinema in the same narrative world, realising the extent to which horror genre conventions can be cross-referenced.[11] The Twenty Tens brought *Scream 4, The Cabin in the Woods*, *Tucker & Dale vs. Evil*, and *The Final Girls*, where each example foregrounded the typified rules for surviving a horror narrative, whilst simultaneously breathing new life into the horror genre. This movement is not strictly filmic either, with the multiplayer video game *Dead by Daylight* offering players the chance to play as a survivor or killer in a slasher film formula. Narrative-centric, single-player games like *Until Dawn* place users amid blatantly trope-ridden horror landscapes, wherein causality is thematised and decisions as futile as checking a fellow character's mobile phone can present multiple narrative directions. In television, *American Horror Story*'s most recent season, titled "1984," nostalgically recalls the horror Cinema of the eighties, where camp counsellors express an outward exhaustion with the clichés of the horror from which they have taken inspiration. Indeed, there seems to be emerging an abundance of horror fictions which are aware of their own composition, and by extension are aware of their own construction; to be 'meta-' about genre is to be 'meta-' about

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[11]This movement is not solely limited to Horror either. 2019 saw the release of *Isn't it Romantic*, within which Rebel Wilson's cynically single character wakes from a concussion in an alternative reality, her life riddled with the clichés of a romantic comedy. The suave, Bond-esque protagonist in espionage fictions has been reconfigured in recent years as well through spy-comedy genre hybrids from the likes of *Johnny English*, *Spy*, and *Austin Powers*. The *Shrek* saga, *Hoodwinked!*, and both the filmic and theatrical renditions of *Into the Woods* parody the tropes belonging to fairy-tales.

fiction, after all—'meta-horror,' thus, refers to these genre-reflexive fictions which place horror in their sights.

Contrary to the supposed free reign of reflexive genre fictions, it comes as a surprise to learn that metahorror, a term which denotes a self-awareness of the horror genre specifically, has suffered from an exclusively film-centric school of thought. Kimberley Jackson, for example, defines metahorror as a subgenre of "films overtly concerned with the horror genre and its conventions" (11). Firstly, it seems ironic that metahorror, by its very nature of transcending genre schematics, is reduced to the categorization of a "subgenre." Metahorror might be more appropriately viewed as a technique of the metafictional style, because genre is but one of many fictional components which metafiction makes topical, and metafiction as a term applies to all mediums. Jackson's strictly filmic criteria for metahorror falls into the popular critical trap where abstract concepts, in our efforts to understand them, become pigeonholed as terms. For frame-breaking phenomena like metahorror and metafiction, placing them within frameworks only creates more confusion, and limits metahorror's abilities to intellectually project insightful readings onto horror metafictions. Now that metahorror can be understood as an extension of metafiction, it will be examined as a technique favoured by David Wong in his metafictional horror novel *John Dies at the End*, with a view to explore the extent to which metahorror affects the horror genre within which it frames itself, and what metahorror is enabling post-millennial reflexive fictions to say. Whilst Wong's text takes a wholly novelistic form, *John Dies at the End* is a reflexive discourse which highlights the tropes of horror in literature, cinema, and video-gaming, and is thus representative of the trend of genre-reflexive horror fictions which shadows the millennium. In keeping with the idea that metahorror is available to all fictional mediums, the following case study will structure itself by drawing attention to the novelistic, filmic, and video-game horror conventions which are made topical by the metahorror in *John Dies at the End*, and will use pre-existing horror fictions to substantiate the existence of horror fiction tropes.

Prior to turning the first page, the title of Wong's text engages with the spoiler-alert discourse of popular culture. By announcing that John Dies at the End, the reader is subjected to what Johnson and Rosenbaum call the "premature and undesired information about how a narrative's arc will conclude," thus placing into question whether a novel can truly horrify if it cannot keep its own secrets (1089). Contrary to the beliefs of Sandra Laugier, who remarks that "the terror of the spoiler […] blocks reflexivity and introduces unbearable constraints" upon fiction, Wong's spoiler capitalizes on terror (Laugier 151). There

is a clear, underlying criticism of *deus-ex-machina*[12] for the use of extreme plot devices to tie up loose narrative ends, which Wong entertains by so apathetically announcing that John dies at the end. By highlighting the ending though, Wong announces terror by tempting a readerly, temporal curiosity towards the events which precede John's death; if the novel's destination speaks to horror, then so too must its yet unaccounted for journey. His spoiler-alert title fosters the reflexivity of fiction and lifts horror from its constraints, in spite of Laugier's comments, presenting a novelistic form which transcends both fictional and horror conventions, how the expectations of either are discussed in popular culture, and sets the novel up as a disruption to how horror is traditionally consumed. Furthermore, it might seem appropriate to reconsider the term *metahorror* as relating to the conventions behind horror's production and consumption as well. Attention to the novelistic form surfaces throughout the novel's structure as a method of critiquing the traditional horror novel.

Wong's novel begins in *medias res*, presenting the main characters David[13] and John at the peak of their successful career dealing with paranormal investigations. With a wealth of experience behind them, they are asked by Shelly, a victim of domestic abuse by the ghost of her ex-boyfriend, for their backstory, to which John responds that "[t]here was an incident. […] A series of incidents, I guess. A dead guy, another dead guy. Some drugs. It's kind of a long story" (8). The notion of beginning narratives in *medias res* typically provides an atmosphere which is eerie and unsettling: far less familiar than the delivery of traditionally chronologized storytelling. It can be recognized as a favoured structure within gothic horror literature as well; Catherine Spooner remarks that the Gothic "[…] can be thought of as interrogating the anxiety of influence of the past and present" (Spooner and McEvoy 36). Taking 'The Tell-Tale Heart' by Poe as an example, the narrator's deliberation over their current mental health state creates a readerly unease towards experiencing their past; "How, then, am I mad? Harken! And observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story" (691). John, however, shrugs off the temporal instability which can foster the horror in his story. He generalizes his history with death and drugs, underplays his story's relevance with the litotic "I guess," and "it's kind of a long story," and performs his narrative as unnecessarily long and insignificant. Indeed, Wong's text

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[12]The plot device through which a narrative's problems get resolved by an unexpected incident.
[13]To avoid confusion between David Wong, the author, and his eponymous protagonist called David, 'Wong' will refer to him in his authorial capacity, and 'David' will refer to his character within the novel.

may begin in *medias res*, but expresses an exhaustion with horror fiction's popularized approach of beginning non-chronologically.[14] For Wong, the beginnings of novelistic horror fit into the wider debate that novels, in and of themselves, are conventional means of framing horror.

In a conversation with Arnie, a reporter, whose desire for a story enables the grand-narrative to explore David's backstory prior to the novel's plot, the fictional realism element of novelistic horror is criticised when Arnie insinuates that David's backstory is fictional and should be fleshed out into a novel, prompting the following response from David: "A book? Meaning a work of fiction? Meaning it's all bullshit?" (77). Commentaries about the process of novelizing horror within a horror novel create a paradoxical conflict between horror's portrayal within the real and within fictional realism. Nevertheless, Wong challenges the novelistic dimensions through which horror is formally represented, suggesting that metahorror exceeds the novel. Such is the case when David suggests that he and John "[…] drive until we find a town that doesn't keep showing up in books" (210); metahorror, as much as it exposes the patterns in horror, appears to be actively seeking out uncharted territories for the horror novel too. This commentary of Wong's can be seen within the textual self-awareness and trivialisation of existing tropes within the horror novel, such as the Freudian uncanny.

> *There's a deer, complete with little hoofprints in the snow. A happy little cabin, the family in the yard…*
>
> As I took in those little details, my amazement began to sour, congealing into a cold dread.
>
> *The cabin on the mountainside, that's not a little tree out front. It's a makeshift cross, with a man hanging from it. His legs have been cut off. The woman standing next to it… look at the infant in her arms. It has a single, curved horn coming out of its skull. And unfortunately for the old man, the baby still looks hungry. The frozen pond in back, those aren't reeds sticking up through the ice all across the surface. Those are hands. And that deer? It has a huge cock, making a little trench in the snow behind it…* (Wong 90–91; italics in original)

David's interpretive approach to the aesthetic of a mural in a drug-dealer's trailer is textbook uncanny. At first, the familiar, idyllic setting

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[14]Interestingly, given the context of Wong's novel, our early introduction to the character of Shelly suggests an intertextual reference to the author Mary Shelley, whose monumental gothic novel, *Frankenstein*, also began in *medias res*.

of rustic life is established through imagery of a cabin, a mountainside and deer, recalling the uncanny's prerequisite as "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind" (Freud 241). However, David's dread, and ultimately the uncanny's alienation of the familiar, surfaces when a closer interpretation of the mural garners a horrified response (241). A discourse follows which pits seemingly similar instances of visual imagery together, as David refocuses on the images: a tree becomes a cross; reeds in water become outstretched hands; and a mother's new-born becomes the spawn of Satan. This familiar-unfamiliar paradox which characterizes the uncanny is a frequented approach of the literary horror genre, particularly in horror's spatial explorations. The uncanny is continually favoured by horror fiction-writers as a means of exploring the dissonance and the anxiety between the familiar and the unfamiliar. *The Haunting of Hill House*, for example, contrasts domesticity with the seemingly evil presence within Hill House, manifesting the uncanny;[15] Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* hovers over the uncanny threshold between life and death with a graveyard which possesses the ability to reanimate the dead; and Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy presents a cordoned off US coastline which becomes increasingly alien as its ecosystem mutates. In the case of Wong's text, however, his self-awareness of the parameters of the uncanny needed to create horror become purposefully parodied when David's interpretation of the mural ends with a hyperbolic depiction of a deer's genitalia. The uncanny makes way for a punchline which provides comic relief through phallic imagery, but not before Wong's text instils itself with an awareness of typified Freudian applications to horror writing.[16] Horror utilises the filmic form in the language of *John Dies at the End* as well, to express a self-awareness of horror's cinematic conventions.

As much as this essay aims to debunk the misconception that metahorror can only be filmic, there of course exists a hefty amount of references to filmic metahorror in the novel. Perhaps this is because genre conventions are made more readily available by the visual technologies of film and television; "people who wake up in the middle of the night and see those big-eyed alien abductors or a ghostly old woman … it's always something they saw in some movie, isn't it?"

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[15]"It was a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for hope" (Jackson 35).

[16]In *John Dies at the End*, the uncanny emerges in other instances to highlight not just self-aware horror, but self-aware books. Referencing a book by fictitious character Dr. Marconi, John quotes a section which says, "when you read the Bible, the Devil looks back at you through the pages" (195). The prescription of a malicious voyeurism to the Bible uncannily alienates the reader of Wong's text by interrogating the extent to which the consumer of a book is consumed by it.

(Wong 128). Wong's comments on archetypal horror villains not only allow him to draw on the lasting fear caused by simulated horror, but also to elevate the horror within the reality he has created because "here, somehow it becomes real" (128). By presenting the framed limitations of cinema's simulated horror, Wong uses metahorror to present the reader with a scenario of horror which transcends fictional boundaries. His allusion towards the clichéd performances of victims in horror cinema allow him to deepen his metahorror message.

Referring back to the character of Shelly, a victim of domestic abuse, Wong presents her as small in stature, having a "china doll look," and as having "the kind of self-conscious, pleading helplessness some guys go crazy for" (5). In other words, she is objectified, misogynised, and seemingly necessitated as a victim to propel the narrative. Such is the case in the late twentieth-century slasher film, notes Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, who posits "the immensely generative story of a psycho-killer who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims" (21). Instead, Shelly's role as the victim is short-lived and she is soon revealed to be a demonic apparition. "She burst[s] into snakes," and traps David and John in the basement with faecal matter which rises to fill the room (13). This refreshing, albeit revolting, inversion of the archetypal female-as-victim proves that Wong's text is as much concerned with re-examining performances in horror as it is with exposing them, particularly those relating to film.[17] In an effort to summon the demonized Shelly, John assumes one of many vulnerable positions made typical by horror cinema: "Oh, no! […] It's dark in here and here I am in the shower! Alone! I'm so naked and vulnerable" (14). Clearly reminiscing the death of Marion Crane in *Psycho*, among a wealth of other iconic on-screen bathroom deaths, Wong parodies a frequented horror trope which adds insult to injury by sexualizing victims as they fall prey to a murderous predator in the bathroom. John's dialogue speaks to an air of stupidity which often accompanies the dialogue of victims in horror films, and it reverberates throughout Wong's text.[18] By alluding to a subset of knowledge on filmic performance, the metahorror in *John Dies at the End* equips its characters with a rationale in the face of horror which filmic horror characters have previously lacked by comparison. This reinvigorates the appeal of horror because the reader is assured that characters make well-

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[17]Even before revealing her possession, Shelly is noted as 'playing the part' (12).

[18]In reaction to a growing lump filled with cockroaches in the driver's seat of his car, David compares his experience to "people in horror movies standing there stupidly while some special effect takes shape before them, the dumb-asses gawking at it instead of turning and running like the wind" which, by using horror film performances as a framework to model his own behaviour, adds an air of reality to the situation (217–218).

informed decisions based upon an archive of pre-existing horror fiction knowledge. Even when rationale is lost in Wong's text, characters are astutely aware of their lack of judgement: "[*y*]*ou've found [drugs] in the home of a dead man, after following a trail of dead bodies to get here. So go ahead, put it right in your mouth, dipshit*" (98; italics in original). David's innermost thoughts, as displayed in moments of italicised text, can provide commentary on horror character performance, but are also known to critique the conventions of horror cinematography as well.

Recalling his pursuit of a creature in a deserted car park, John casts the following remark: "Black as pitch out here. I glanced up and noticed the lights were off in the lot – *of course they* are –" (215; italics in original).[19] It is crucial to acknowledge Wong's switch from a past tense recollection of events to the interrogation of past events in the present, because it reminds the reader that this is a framed narrative being relayed by John to a reporter. Although it is not clear whether John or Arnie (the reporter) is providing the critique in italics, it speaks to how "[m]etafiction assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself," in this case a criticism of the horror genre's manipulation of lighting (Scholes 106). Contrasts between light and dark images in horror can be traced back to the silent horror film as a semiotic point of contact between the good-versus-evil binary signifiers (Powell 120). Lighting has always facilitated the meaning-making process of threat in horror cinema, beginning in the German Expressionist shadows of *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, continuing into the colour motion picture filmed evils of *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Omen*, to name a few examples, and lasting long into horror's current state within digital cinematography.[20] Nevertheless, Wong imbues his text with a cynical self-awareness of it being commonplace, in horror cinema particularly, to house dark forces in dark spaces. Arnie, whilst doubting the truth of John's story, provides the reader with a micro-narrative of horror lighting which nearly makes him privy to belief in the supernatural:

> One time, […] I was down in my basement and there's just a couple of bare lightbulbs that hang down, you know? So it's all shadows, and your shadow kind of stretches out across the floor. Anyway, one time, out the corner of my eye, you know, it sort of looked like my shadow back there was movin' without me. I don't mean the bulb was swinging and the shadow was just

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[19]Grady Hendrix, in his novel *Horrorstör*, also criticizes the tropes of horror spaces: "She walked to the main entrance and found that the doors had closed and dead-bolted themselves. Of course they had" (171–172).
[20]For examples of lighting in digital cinematography horror, see the *Paranormal Activity* or the *Unfriended* franchises.

wavering back and forth, I mean the limbs were, like, flailing around. Real fast, too. It was just for a second and like I said, it was just one of those tricks of light you get out the corner of your eye. (78)

In a scene which recalls a culmination of horror film symbols, such as the manipulated shadows of German Expressionism, or the swinging lightbulb towards the end of *Psycho*, Arnie temporarily interrogates the frame which exists between fictional horror's "tricks of light," and a real-life experience of horror. As the reader later learns, Arnie's account of sentient shadows does not seem too irrational in a novel where shadow people are the main antagonists, preying on those who have taken the novel's fictitious drug, soy sauce.[21] From this, a working assumption can be made that the horror film's placement of objects, or *mise-en-scène*, is exposed in *John Dies at the End* in equal measure to cinematography.

In an interrogation room, David is handed crime scene photos which the recreational use of soy sauce caused, prompting the following micro-narrative:

> Once, when I was twelve, for reasons that made sense at the time I filled a blender with some ice cubes and three cans of maraschino cherries. I didn't know you had to use a lid on one of those things, so I hit the button and watched it erupt like a volcano. The room in the cop's photographs looked like the resulting mess in our kitchen that day, everything a red spray with lumps. (Wong 74)

Linking the spatter of maraschino cherries to a grotesque depiction of drug misuse suggests a concern by Wong, and his characters, with the composition of horror as a visual image. It recalls the golden age of special effects in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which gave rise to films like *An American Werewolf in London* and *The Thing* in a new wave of horror films showcasing the potential for graphic realism (Abbott 123–125). However, this renaissance of special effects often required unconventional ingredients, such as jam, heated bubble-gum and other household items (Holmes). Thus, Wong's simile likening blended, maraschino cherries to gore seems to act as a parodic response to the prosthetics of horror and their makeshift origins, but Wong is able to horrify by making a scene of unimaginable gore conceivably imaginable to the readers through imagery with which they are more likely to be

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[21]For a description of shadow people, see page 322 when David describes them as "[…] walking death. They take you and you're gone and nobody knows you were ever there."

familiar. It seems that metahorror, even when it is contained within a novelistic framework, cannot escape filmic representation. Even David and John's characters both work at a video rental store, which turns the novel into a faucet of intertextual, filmic reference.[22] And when the novel somehow lacks in allusions to filmic texts, it makes up for it by implying the worldview of its characters has been framed by movies: "Hollywood raised us. Your mind processes the world through a filter formed by comic books and action movies on Cinemax. That's why kids put on trench coats and take guns to schools" (128).[23] But among the array of filmic and novelistic metahorror, there is also an awareness of video-game horror conventions in Wong's text.

It is made clear from the start that *John Dies at the End* will make commentary on the abundance of media in the digital age, but when John and David are described "in a room dominated by a huge plasma-screen TV with four video game systems wired to it," it seems that a discourse on video games will feature at some point (5). Such is the case when John passes the following remark, after a battle with coyotes suspiciously leads to the discovery of a key:

> "A key," said John, clicking shells into his shotgun. "Good. Now, if I know what's going on here, and I think I do, we'll have to wander around looking for that door. Behind it we'll meet a series of monsters or, more likely a whole bunch of the same one. We'll kill them, get another key, and then it'll open a really big door. Now right before that we'll probably get nicer guns. It may require us to backtrack some and it might get really tedious and annoying." (234–235)

John's dialogue, which presumes to "know what's going on here," is undoubtedly making contact with the processes involved in video game design, namely how simulated worlds are segmented into levels. Like acts in a play, chapters in a book, or movements in a symphony, Richard Rouse remarks that the video game structurally emerges with its own compartments, called levels, which appear as microcosms of the larger

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[22]For evidence of John and David's video-rental jobs, see page 252 when David "[…] had just left a nightmarish sixteen-hour, soul-numbing shift at Wally's Video Rental Orifice." For examples of intertextual reference in the text, see page 141 when "[m]aybe he had thought he'd burst in and we'd all be in *Alien*-style cocoons and he could just torch the place and declare it mission accomplished"; "It looks like – like the end of the world.[…] Like those huge, scary future buildings in *Blade Runner*" (155); "[…] three of the five investors disappeared (I always imagined that all three simultaneously shot each other, like in the movie *Reservoir Dogs)*" (223).

[23]Let it also be noted that "it looked like the world outside [John's] window had lost its signal and gone to static" (360), which suggests that even characters' perceptions of the world allude to the cinematic.

work and can serve as temporal junctions, so that the player is aware of their progression within the grand-narrative (409). John's repetitive mentioning of doors, which unlock rooms containing monsters, spatially represents the rooms as levels in this analogy. He draws attention to the increasing levels of difficulty which will ensue throughout the mall, presenting possible navigational problems as they seek the appropriate keyhole for their key, and the fact that they might be faced with an increasing number of enemies. Equally, "[w]ell-designed levels are set up such that difficulty and tension ramp upward […]," according to Rouse, and John's dialogue expresses an astute awareness of this convention by interrogating the typical flow of a gameplayer's level-based experience (409). John is holding a shotgun during this narration, but suggests that, at some point, the group's arsenal may be conveniently upgraded, which is similar to the reward system in video games, whereby players gain achievements, incentives, or items in receipt of their participation in a level (Johnson et al. 69; Balkaya and Catak 22). The upgraded arsenal is described in accessory with the task of unlocking a "really big door" which foreshadows the video game's popularized concept of the boss battle.[24] There is something profoundly horrifying about the boss battle, with Rouse referencing the "Boss Monster," who is resistant to typical gameplay tactics and requires a rethinking of one's strategy, and Mia Consalvo mentioning the seemingly unbeatable nature of the boss (Rouse 517; Consalvo 155). Thus, a transcendent sort of evil manifests in the reading of this passage, prompting a reading into John's narration which is as much metahorror as it is meta- about gaming. Monsters are discussed as lurking behind closed doors in the above quotation; a theme of isolation is apparent through the wanderings of John's group in the mall; and there is a fear attached to opening the really big door.

Canonical video game horror texts such as the *Resident Evil* franchise, *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* and *Little Nightmares* come to mind, each deploying a usage of keys, labyrinthine mapping, and monsters. John's reference to "a whole bunch of the same" monster, however, interrogates the design approach taken in horror games where, to save time, the same character model is used to texture most, if not all, monsters (Knapp). This is especially true in zombie games where, in order to save time whilst satisfying a growing cultural fixation with hordes, there is little variation in the appearance of zombies within the horde itself (Stratton 264). If we take the recently released *World War*

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[24]"[T]he boss challenge is usually the culmination of the game," notes Martin Picard, "representing a unique and highest form of challenge," not too dissimilar from the "really big door" which John and others are faced with, and their ominous, precursory reward of higher calibre guns (Picard 105).

Z game, for example, only a handful of enemy archetypes can be counted despite each level containing thousands of zombies. John highlights the redundancies of video game design through its apparent inability to make a game's antagonists look different from another, thus positioning Wong's novel as an example of post-millennial reflexive fiction which is in one sense exhausted with media-wide genre convention, and in another sense concerned with reapproaching convention by engaging in a playful dialogue with these tropes.

Throughout *John Dies at the End*, Wong draws attention to how novelistic, filmic, and video-gaming frameworks mediate our experience of horror by providing a reflexive discourse which interrogates the schemata through which we typically understand horror. However, Wong also comments on the profound sense of horror which orbits our consumption of these frameworks. On video-gaming, for example, Wong remarks on how a "kid said he had made a pact with Satan to kill both his parents, then backed out of it when his mom unexpectedly bought him a video game console" (315); in the novel, David suggests that we "[…] keep driving until we find a town that doesn't keep showing up in books" (210); and on Cinema, "Hollywood raised us. Your mind processes the world through a filter formed by comic books and action movies on Cinemax. That's why kids put on trench coats and take guns to school" (128). As much as it possesses the ability to horrify within its textual constraints, horror fiction has the ability to transcend the textual space and create a culture of horror. Likewise, *John Dies at the End* explores this very idea that, following the millennium, the reimagination of horror occurs when it becomes aware of its own genre schematics and transcends them.

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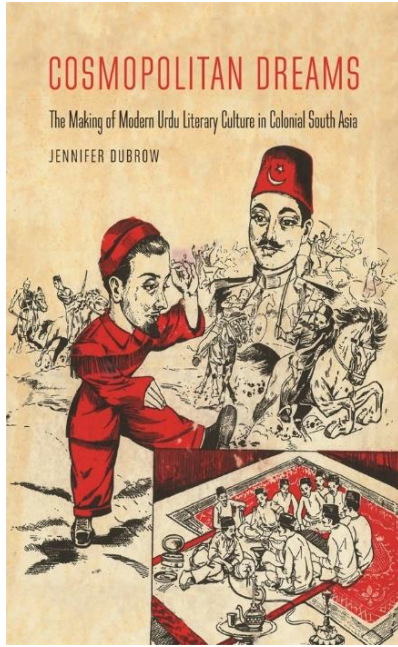
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Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Making of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia by Jennifer Dubrow

Reviewed by *Ayesha Abrar*

Among the diverse vernacular literary cultures of the Indian subcontinent, Urdu as a language stands out for its ability to reveal as much about the colonial past as about the globalized present. Jennifer Dubrow, an associate professor of Urdu at the Washington University, presents an incisive account of Urdu literary cultures of nineteenth century colonial India in *Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Making of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia.* In the introduction to her book Dubrow states, "Through print, Urdu readers and writers created a transregional, transnational language community that eschewed identities of religion, caste, and class" (2). While her perspective circumvents the route taken by other scholars like Kavita Datla (*The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India*, 2013), who places Urdu pedagogy at the centre stage of the Indian nationalist struggle, Dubrow chooses for her study a stage in the history of Urdu print when its novelty and accessibility made it immensely popular. This era, i.e., the second half of the nineteenth century, was the defining period for Urdu not just as a popular language but also as a means to assert new identities. Her study of Urdu print culture provides unprecedented insights into the modern sensibilities of the milieu.

Theorists of nationalism, postcoloniality, and vernacular modernities—Frances Pritchett, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, C. M. Naim, and Gail Minault—have come up with frameworks for locating Urdu within the matrices of linguistic cultures and aesthetic sensibilities that grappled with colonial modernity. In the last two decades especially, there has been a growing interest in the study of both the subversive

potential of vernacular modernities and the role of Urdu in South Asian modernity. Popular satirical literature like the 'Punch' magazines have drawn the attention of scholars like Mushirul Hasan (*The Avadh Punch: Wit and Humour in Colonial North India*, 2007) and Barbara Mittler (*Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair*, co-authored with Hans Harder, 2013) who have studied these genres as crucial players in vernacular print modernity. Dubrow's work adds to this tradition of scholarship. Her archival research, being a significant intervention in the tradition by virtue of its rigorous methodology, into periodicals and punches of the era give her access to the writers and readers of the age. Moreover, her analysis encompasses previously untranslated articles, 'satirical vignettes,' and classic as well as topical literary works to provide a comprehensive view of Urdu print production.

Dubrow's succinct and lucid writing engages with the interactive, self-reflexive (and therefore 'modern') Urdu print culture. In the first chapter, "Printing the Cosmopolis: Authors and Journals in the Age of Print," she argues that with the coming of print technology a new class of capitalist entrepreneurs, authors, and readers rose, transforming the nature of previously patron-sponsored literary activity to a more heterogenous and democratic reading public. This influence is visible in the letters to the editors (which she quotes generously to support her arguments) published in periodicals as much as in the responses to the serialized novel *Fasana-e-Azad* published in the *Awadh Akhbar* in 1880. The second chapter "The Novel in Instalments: *Fasana-e-Azad* and Literary Modernity," extends the argument to the serialized novel which, like the Punch format, sought to bring together entertainment and *akhlaq* or cultural etiquette. The serialized novel was experimental, influenced by topical concerns and responses from the readers. An example of the readers' interaction with the writer is indicated in the excerpt taken from a letter to the writer of *Fasana-e-Azad*, which begins with "I agree with the opinions you gave in your September 15 article called Dastan-e-Azad […] You should publish this as a book so it will be preserved, and our fellow countrymen [*hamvatan*] will keep benefitting from it […]" (86). She draws from a comprehensive sweep of references ranging from nineteenth century Japanese novels to Chinese print culture, from Korean periodicals to Arab cosmopolitanism. The context of Urdu modernity is firmly located in print capitalism and the way it opened the world to the readers' scrutiny. Furthermore, the interactions between authors/editors and readers not only shaped the literature of the time but also built a cosmopolitan community of Urdu speakers who contested accepted social values and norms.

The notion of cosmopolitanism that Dubrow formulates is distinct from national, communal, or regional communities. The nineteenth century Urdu readers belonged to different religions, communities, classes, regions, and political beliefs. The sheer revolutionary potential of satirical journals as spaces for dissent couched in aesthetic idiom is apparent in Dubrow's critique of the 'Punch' magazine in the third chapter, "Experiments with Form: *Avadh Punch*, Satirical Journalism, and Colonial Critique." Coded language, lampoons, and visual modes such as topical cartoons about contemporary issues targeted the colonial establishment and their cultural as well as literary practices. An example from the *Avadh Punch*, that Dubrow gives, is Navab Sayyid Muhammad Azad's recurring segment 'Mr. Azad's New Dictionary' where he parodies the modern dictionary. He attacks terms like 'policy,' calling it the "[…] showing off of one's imagined power rather than political negotiation or diplomacy" (70). He also censures the popular term of the time 'civilization' defining it as sycophancy and mimicry of English ways (71).

Dubrow dedicates the entire fourth chapter "Reading the World: The Urdu Print Public Sphere and Hindi/Urdu Divide," to the politics of the Hindi-Urdu divide, where she locates this division firmly in the 1860s when partisans began to argue for the Devnagiri script and the Hindi language as the language of Hindus. The 'modern' bourgeois audiences and readerships of these times were not as secular as one would believe looking at the general picture. What precisely led to the crystallization of Urdu as a Muslim language? Dubrow hints at a possible answer in the rivalry between *Awadh Akhbar* and *Awadh Punch*, when the latter targeted the editor of the former (Ratan Nath 'Sarshar') for not knowing the proper Urdu idiom because he is a Kashmiri Hindu. This was perhaps but one of the blows to which the 'cosmopolis' eventually succumbed. It could indeed be one of the factors contributing to the build-up to the eventual ideological split between Urdu and Hindi languages in the later decades. Scholars like Francesca Orsini (in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, 2010) have undertaken more nuanced studies to reveal the overlapping genres and influences that both the languages have shared throughout. The association with religious communities do not make for a convincing argument because Urdu was never a pan-Islamic language. It was born in and it flourished in the subcontinent as a result of social, political, and cultural changes. Dubrow's explanation is nevertheless a useful insight with respect to the development of rivalries and competition among punch magazines and periodicals in their pursuit of linguistic superiority.

Dubrow draws a concluding chapter that concerns itself with contemporary globalized Urdu cosmopolis in cinema, television, and digital media. Through instances from Pakistani 'drama' genre of serialized TV shows, she presents a critique of contemporary author/director and viewer interactivity. She discusses blogs and online forums that passionately review each episode of serials like *Humsafar* (aired in Pakistan from 2011 to 2012) connecting audiences from across the subcontinent to the UK and UAE. In some instances, the directors/scriptwriters also participate in these discussions and address audience's concerns regarding character and plot development. This process is reminiscent of the 'letters to the editor' in the print periodicals of the previous century, thus forming a connection between the seemingly disparate formats of periodical, novel, and television drama through the idea of author-audience interactivity and the diversity of cosmopolitan audiences. The concluding chapter may initially seem like a discontinuous leap in the chronology of the argument, but Dubrow seamlessly sews the two contexts together with the thread of common elements and shared modes of operation in the universe of Urdu speakers, writers, and audiences. Readers will connect to this chapter because it makes the trajectory of the evolution of print media relatable to the visually and virtually oriented audiences of today.

Dubrow's research is thorough and well argued. There are however a few gaps in her story that surface upon closer scrutiny. In her exploration of the 'community of language' in question, she begins tracing Urdu literary modes from the 1830s to roughly the turn of the century. It is precisely at this juncture that a watershed moment appeared—Mirza Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899). This novel and the changes in literary trends that followed, would have carried Dubrow's argument further to include a new dimension of readership and stylistic modes. To her credit, she does address the Progressive Writer's Movement and its commitment to secularism and social realism. But one gets a sense of a delicate skirting of the issue of nationalism in her study, which becomes all the more glaring when one reads it in the political climate of today, where nationalist ideals have become a hot topic of debate. Rather than the note of lament for the crumbling of the Urdu cosmopolis from the 1860s onwards, a focus upon the different formulations of national consciousness by poets, writers, and audiences at this time would give a richer perspective upon the Urdu cosmopolis of the nineteenth century.

The book bears testimony to Dubrow's genuine interest in archival material, her novel methodology, and commitment to painstakingly thorough research. The expectations sown in the introduction find fruition in the discussions in the following chapters,
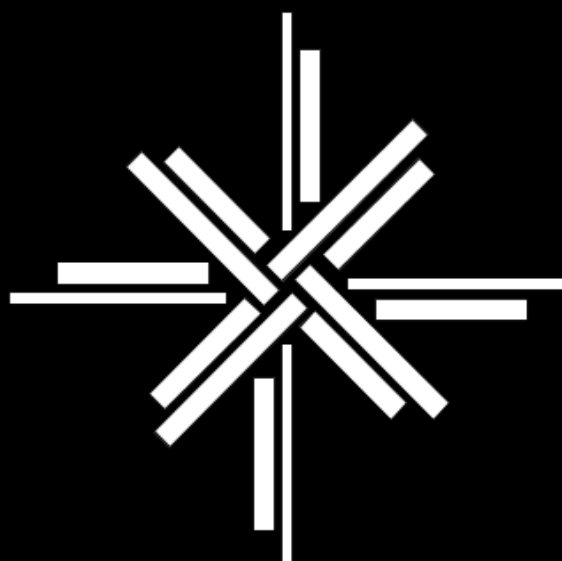
and edifyingly so. It ought to be mentioned here that *Cosmopolitan Dreams* is written entirely in lucid English, and wherever quotes have been borrowed from Urdu, they have been aptly translated into English; therefore, this book does not require prior knowledge of the *nastaliq* script or of Urdu literature. Accompanied by her accessible and eloquent writing style, *Cosmopolitan Dreams* stands out among its peers as an engaging and insightful read. These factors make Dubrow's book eligible for recommendation to not just enthusiasts of colonial literary history and Urdu literary history but it will also interest the lay reader who can enjoy the witty factual anecdotes and translated pieces from nineteenth century periodicals. The re-printed illustrations are an added bonus. The visual text, be it in the illustrated punch magazines that lent a humorous and satirical edge to the narratives or the television shows in contemporary times that enjoy a far wider audience across the world than print, makes Urdu a truly cosmopolitan medium. As Dubrow's concluding sentence in this book states, "Especially now, we must continue to recognize the power of literature and the arts to allow us to think and dream anew" (120).

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