

*Interdisciplinary Research in Gender*

# **THE PLANETARY HUMANISM OF EUROPEAN WOMEN'S SCIENCE FICTION**

**AN EXPERIENCE OF THE IMPOSSIBLE**

Eleanor Drage



# The Planetary Humanism of European Women's Science Fiction

*The Planetary Humanism of European Women's Science Fiction* argues that utopian science fiction written by European women has, since the seventeenth century, played an important role in exploring the racial and gender possibilities of the outer limits of the humanist imagination.

This book focuses on six works of science fiction from the UK, France, Spain, and Italy: Jennifer Marie Brissett's *Elysium*; Nicoletta Vallorani's *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* and *Il Cuore Finto di DR*; Aliette de Bodard's *Xuya Universe* series; Elia Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales*; and *Historias del Crazy Bar*, a collection of stories by Lola Robles and Maria Concepción Regueiro. It sets these in conversation with key gender and critical race scholars: Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Paul Gilroy, and Jack Halberstam. It asserts that a key concern for feminism, anti-racism, and science fiction now is to seek inventive ways of returning to the question of the human in the context of increasing racial and gender divisions.

Offering unique access to contemporary and historical women writers who have mobilised the utopian imagination to rethink the human, this book is of use to those conducting research in Gender Studies, Philosophy, History, and Literature.

**Eleanor Drage** is Senior Research Fellow at the University of Cambridge Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, where she applies feminism and anti-racism to the ethics of artificial intelligence.

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# Introduction and Roadmap

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, science fiction (SF) written by women has been dominated by dystopia. Writers and readers alike struggle to imagine better times and places in an increasingly apocalyptic present moment, where crowning artificial intelligence technologies appear to confirm blockbuster SF's predictions of masculinised and misogynistic technological futures. Feminist and anti-racist movements too, fatigued with pushing back against gradual and abrupt repeals of equality legislation, are in need of blueprints for alternative ways of being and living together. It is now of key concern for feminism and anti-racism—and for SF—to seek inventive ways of returning to the question of the human in the context of increasing racial and gender divisions. This book offers rare insight into how this question is being tackled by utopian SF writers across Europe, and indeed has been since at least the mid-17th century. While conversations around women's SF often only engage with a 40-year timeframe, this move to contextualise contemporary works within a history almost ten times longer shows that new forms of planetary humanism—as discussed in this book—require temporal as well as spatial adjustments. This book therefore offers unique access to contemporary and historical women writers who have mobilised the utopian imagination to rethink the human. These writers have broken into unfamiliar ontological territory in ways that radicalise the work of anti-racist and gender scholars today.

I argue that utopian SF written by European women has, since the seventeenth century, played an important role in exploring the racial and gender possibilities of the outer limits of the humanist imagination. It has asked what becomes of race, gender, and humanity's internal divisions when what it means to be human is defamiliarised and pushed to its logical extreme in outer space. In doing so, it amplifies the achievements of new philosophical ideas about race, gender, and the human and communicates them in imaginative ways to the wider public. The widespread popularity

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of SF makes it an extremely effective medium through which to create, disseminate, transform, and deploy contemporary academic thought. By showcasing shifts in technologies and radical critical thinking, works of contemporary women's SF provide new possibilities grounded in action, allowing for the transgression of conventional gender roles while offering new lenses for the reception and deployment of official European equality discourses. Raymond Williams has defined SF as a "distinctly modern form of utopia and dystopia", its purpose "some positive [utopian] or negative [dystopian] leverage on the present" (Milner 93). Lyman Tower Sargent ("The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited", 1994), Raffaella Baccolini ("Gender and Genre", 2000; "In-Between Subjects", 2005), Jane L. Donawerth (*Utopian and SF by Women*, 1994), Carol A. Kolmerten (*Women in Utopia*, 1998), and others have highlighted how women's utopian SF appropriates and reforms both the genre itself and the normative gender roles and identities that are typical of early "masculinist" models of SF.<sup>1</sup> Joanna Russ, who has called SF "*What if* literature", believes that the genre is "the perfect literary mode in which to explore (and explode) our assumptions about 'innate' values and 'natural' social arrangements ... about differences between men and women, about family structure, about sex ... about gender roles" ("Image" 79–80). Women writers have found utopian and dystopian SF to be a particularly fertile ground for the formulation of political theory which systematically deconstructs oppressive gender roles, reconfigures the borderlines of nation, state, and territory, and addresses eco-feminist concerns with environmental ethics and the harmful consequences of the human/nature divide. The subversive quality of this marginal genre allows for not only the emergence of "themes and obsessions which are repressed in high culture", as social theorist Marc Angenot puts it, but generates political theory that serves the marginal, the dispossessed, and the misrecognised (Parrinder 46). At the fringes of the real and the imagined, SF's spatial explorations allow writers to seek beyond the limitations of the present and discover spaces where embodied humanity can be opened to infinite reformulations.

By way of example, this book focuses on six works of contemporary SF: Jennifer Marie Brissett's *Elysium* (2014); Nicoletta Vallorani's *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* (2011) and *Il Cuore Finto di DR* (1993); Aliette de Bodard's *Xuya Universe* series (2013–2022); Elia Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales* (1994); and *Historias del Crazy Bar* (2013), a collection of stories by Lola Robles and Maria Regueiro. These works are exemplar of the hugely innovative and yet undertheorised and largely untranslated works of SF written by women across Europe. While these writers are based in Europe, due to the racial formations of European nation-states they are often still positioned as not fully belonging; Brissett is British Jamaican and now resides in New York, Bodard is French Vietnamese, and Elia Barceló is

Spanish but lives and works in Austria. The diasporic experiences that influence their work speak of the importance of a planetary humanism. They have also been chosen because they communicate political concerns specific to Italy, Spain, France, and the UK, and use the genre to rethink those concerns as they relate to issues of race, gender, and the human. They reflect on race within the frame of histories of European colonisation, so that race emerges as the product of processes of racialisation that occur both during intergalactic colonial enterprises and post-colonial migration flows into European bodies and spaces. Therefore, while their writers are based in Europe, their stories problematise its borders and offer crucial insights into the global impact of contemporary Europe. This also means that they can be read as negotiating with and problematising the conditions by which new forms of humanism might ethically arise.

While they received critical acclaim in SF communities, these texts are rarely spotlighted in the mainstream or in SF criticism. Yet, they are an indispensable resource for imagining radical new forms of humanism through their critique and reformulation of race and gender. They are also exemplary of women's SF both within and beyond Europe that engages with embodiment, ethical relations, and advancements in science and technology. They elaborate and update these themes with inquiries into the posthuman bodies of tomorrow, comprised of both human flesh and technological materialities and practices; possibilities for the future of reproductive sexuality in the dawning age of commercial space travel; and the state of kinship, biological and chosen, in times where increased divorce rates, war, and diaspora are re-configuring family dynamics.

To contextualise these works, the book begins by tracing a genealogy of SF written by women in Europe, with a focus on France, Italy, Spain, and UK: four divergent contexts with their own genre conventions and political priorities regarding race and gender. It also makes reference to texts from the USA which were highly influential in the rise of SF written by women in Europe. It then introduces the question of why and how SF appeals to the women writers who embrace the genre's anti-racist, anti-sexist, and humanistic potential. The second half of this book enters my selected works of SF into conversation with key gender and critical race scholars: Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti, Gayatri Spivak, Paul Gilroy, and Jack Halberstam. I explore how these works of SF allow readers to visualise potent philosophical ideas and project them into a tangible planetary system. These vibrant, multicultural SF narratives direct readers to new forms of humanism through reparative re-historicisations of key events in European history; hybrid, nomadic, and species- and gender-transgressive entities; the queering of normative consequences of sexual intercourse in outer-space; and the failure of certain characters to perform race and gender-based kinship roles. These themes correspond in particular to the following



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innovations in anti-racist and gender studies: Judith Butler's conception of subjects who "become" through affective encounters; Rosi Braidotti's critical posthumanism; Gayatri Spivak's and Paul Gilroy's respective notions of "planetary"; and Jack Halberstam's theory of a "queer art of failure" (see extract from Chapter 1). By staging a conversation between six works of contemporary science fiction (SF) written by women in Europe, and five acclaimed theorists in the fields of "race" and gender studies, Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Paul Gilroy, and Jack Halberstam, this book aims to demonstrate the complementarity of fictional and academic forays into new forms of humanism grounded in an interrogation of systems of "race" and gender. This analysis of the correspondences between the work of these theorists and my corpus of women's SF highlights the politically valuable strategies employed by both modes of writing as they make visible the production, reproduction, disciplining, and policing of practices connected with gender roles.<sup>2</sup> I investigate how critical energy is deployed in both theoretical and fictional texts as they, on the one hand, decry hierarchical society's creation of symbolically legitimated racial and gender identities as symbolic capital,<sup>3</sup> and, on the other hand, provide important arenas for the transgression of and resistance to the violence imposed by gender and racial normativity. Through a reparative critique,<sup>4</sup> I aim to explore how SF can reassemble and amplify the achievements of feminist, queer, and anti-racist theory and their claims for a more equitable world. SF's unique spatial attributes, paired with the extraordinarily imaginative and ethical capacity of women's writing, probe the borders of a planetary humanism that retains the anxieties and complexities of these interrogations of humanism and sets the stage for a transformative politics. By casting the planet into radical alterity, women's SF transcends the constraints of contemporary systems of race and gender and directs its readers to new and transformative possibilities.

This book focuses on race and gender or queerness as a way of garnering insight into power structures, norms, and axes of oppression. The queer theory that I draw on is informed by queer studies, women's studies, lesbian and gay activism, and queer of colour critique from Roderick Ferguson, Gayatri Gopinath, and Sara Ahmed. Queer theory has also, since its inception, intersected with other forms of anti-racist, utopian, and eco-feminist scholarship, including the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Siobhan B. Somerville, and De Witt Douglas Kilgore. The transnational focus of this book enables the term "queer" to be employed while taking into account its avoidance of a single meaning or a linear evolution because of its adoption and rejection by different communities across Europe. In the spaces of discomfort and estrangement that constitute SF's borders of the planetary, these concepts are reconfigured in such a way that renders humanity unrecognisable. Whether in the bodily transformations

prompted by the warped materiality of a resurrected city, or in the biological anomalies of bacteria-induced lesbian pregnancy and male conception, the disorientating positions of alterity enable ethical relations with the world and with those around us.

These ethical relationships require a negotiation with rather than a smoothing over of the issues associated with philosophical formations of new forms of humanism. In my analysis I turn to critiques and elaborations of posthumanism from African-American and Black studies, notably Sylvia Wynter, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, and Alexander G. Weheliye's attempts to dislodge Enlightenment-based humanism's basic unit of analysis (white) "Man". Instances where humanity is radically "othered" in European women's SF offer new insight into this work, and in turn, these caveats to and concerns regarding posthumanism are indispensable for negotiating and problematising the conditions by which new forms of humanism might ethically arise. Keeping critique at the centre of new forms of humanism is crucial: utopia should always incorporate doubt, autocritique, and compromise to avoid exclusion and ideological closure. This is the leap of faith we take when we venture into experiences of the impossible.

## 2 Roadmap

The opening chapter introduces the gender, anti-racist, queer, and geocritical theory that underpins this monograph. It explains why Butler's, Braidotti's, Spivak's, and Gilroy's anti-racist and feminist work is complementary. In the following section, I briefly clarify, with the addition of Halberstam, how these theorists and philosophers define and navigate the terms "race" and "gender", why I choose to focus on these concepts, and how this relates to the methodologies employed by this book ("**Queer, Race, and Intersectionality**").

I go on to trace the development of Butler's recent publications on assembly, interpellation, and vulnerability alongside Gilroy's work on Frantz Fanon's theory of racial interpellation ("**Humanus Ex Machina**"). Read together, they contest humanistic notions of self-creation and draw attention to humanity's exposure to unsolicited interactions with others. Political theorist Nikita Dhawan's cautionary response to Butler's work forms an antithesis to this section. Another long-standing critique of Butler's theorisation of agentic, relational, and accountable entities has been levelled by Braidotti, who distinguishes Butler's reformulation of vulnerability and interrelational experience from her own affirmative Deleuzian-Spinozist and posthumanist vision of agency. I explore where the value might lie in an analysis of Butler and Braidotti's antithetical formulations of affective entities that are driven by an impetus to ethically encounter other beings and actants.

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The relationship between Spivak's and Gilroy's works on issues of race and gender holds similarly constructive differences. In the fourth section of the first chapter I explore their respective theorisations of "planetary"—which is for Gilroy also a "planetary humanism"—founded in an intersectional interrogation of global systems of race and gender ("**Race, Gender, and the Apocalypse of the Anthropocene in Spivak and Gilroy**"). By urging for the globe to be seen again in terms of a "planetary" alterity, Spivak and Gilroy advocate an ethically responsible position that moves away from thinking race and gender in terms of otherness. They make the claim that "planetary" thought is crucial to building solidarities that overstep the racialised, gender-divisive, and environmentally harmful policies that have been aggravated by the "border talk" of increasingly defensive nation-states.

I follow this section with an overview of key concepts from Halberstam's queer theory that are drawn on in this book, with reference to other prominent and related works in the field, such as those of De Witt Douglas Kilgore and José Esteban Muñoz ("**Queering the Human**"). I clarify Halberstam's work on "the queer art of failure" and the "forgetting of family", which underpin, in particular, Chapters 5 and 6 of this book. Next, I trace a brief history of geocritical analysis and its historically productive affinities with theorisations of science fictional, utopian, gendered, and racialised spaces ("**Geocriticism, SF, and Utopia**"). The spatial discipline of geocriticism informs my move towards new forms of planetary humanism by demonstrating how new ways of being emerge from SF evades the fixity of regulated spaces.

This second chapter begins by tracing a brief history of utopia as criticism, a discipline which addresses the planetary character of utopia, crossing national borders and global interests. This is a crucial area of study because while women's SF continues to be marginalised and sometimes stigmatised in Italy, the country is a leader in utopian criticism that engages with women's contributions to SF and utopian genres. This book is indebted to this history; much of it was written at the Centre for Utopian Studies at the University of Bologna, an attic room in an old convent building that now forms the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures.

In this section on utopian criticism I also include influential non-European writers such as Di Adilifu Nama, Kilgore, Isiah Lavender, and Ytasha Womack, who have drawn on the genre of SF to compellingly suggest that "Blackness" is a technology, as well as artists and writers who move SF beyond its conservative parameters to formulate a future characterised by belonging. The second half of this section introduces the relationship between utopia and SF, and then gives an overview of the stakes that European women writers have historically had in speculative fiction. I argue that the anticipatory power of utopia or eutopia, the

umbrella term that includes utopian fiction (which, to simplify, imagines a better place), and dystopian fiction (a worse one), is a productive tool with which to reformulate race and gender in science fictional worldbuilding.

The next section offers a genealogy of early women's utopian fiction globally proposal ("**Overview of Early Women's Utopian/Dystopian SF**"). I then make a brief account of some trends in women's SF that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s, explaining the different relationships that France, Spain, Italy, and the UK had with SF from that period onwards ("**Women's SF from the 1960s Onwards**"). In Italy, for example, speculative modes of writing are blended with romance, mystery, noir, and historical literature, as demonstrated by the work of Nicoletta Vallorani explored in this monograph. The following section details the feminist and antiracist approach I adopt when defining what constitutes SF ("**A Feminist and Anti-racist Approach to SF**"). This section is followed by an abridged genealogy of the evolution of queer characters in SF ("**The Rise of Queer Characters**"). Beyond queer characters, people are still often surprised that women, people of colour, and queer writers thrive within the genre and are building their own distinctive communities, so I end this chapter by providing an overview of the many anti-racist and pro-inclusive groups currently at large in SF, the struggles they face, and the reasons they give for engaging with a genre that is widely considered to be white and male, and can still be highly discriminatory ("**Race, Gender, and Community**").

The hypothesis of this book—that new forms of humanism can emerge from critiques of race and gender in SF—is partly based on the premise that race and gender are also cultural products that form and evolve through time and space. Chapter 3 highlights works of SF from my corpus that negotiate differently with this possibility of unveiling a futurity that might diverge from the present. The “alternative histories” that form Bodard's SF, for example, suggest that the future cannot be inconsistent with the past and present: that Vietnam is an intergalactic power in the far future of the *Xuya Universe* depends on an entirely different historical narrative. Similarly, Bodard's work suggests that changing the future depends on tackling the way Europe's colonial history has metamorphosed into contemporary colonial practices. Her stories critique an imperialism that is often propounded by the most mainstream works of SF, while providing historical evidence of European colonial rule that suggests that a future space age is likely to reproduce this violent past. Four of the stories that comprise Regueiro and Robles' *Historias del Crazy Bar* also explore instances of colonialism in the future that are anchored in Europe's “real” history of colonial exploitation.

My reading of these texts shows that re-imagining the position and purpose of humanity depends on tracing the production of gender and race-based thinking across time and space. I set them in conversation with

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Spivak's humanistic concept of the "planetary"—which is triggered by a reflection on the historicity of race and gender—and Gilroy's anti-racist reprisal of humanism, which critically re-reads the racist tendencies of the Enlightenment. In keeping with works of dystopian women's SF detailed in the opening chapter that are also located in the shifting temporality of a science fictional past, contemporary women's SF often suggests that extreme racist and sexist political agendas are in danger of dominating subsequent centuries unless we imagine our futures "otherwise".

The fourth chapter centres around the protagonists of these visionary worlds: amalgamations of human flesh, machinic internals, and resurrected spirits. In bearing witness to the meeting of technology and cultural artefacts belonging to different epochs and geographies, they are also manifestations of Braidotti's posthuman subjects, "the subjects of desire we have already become". For example, the pockets of "deep space" in Bodard's *Citadel*, where space and time converge, trigger encounters between bodies in ways that radically invoke Butler and Braidotti's respective theorisations of the interdependence of vulnerable bodies and the instability of dynamic and nomadic subjects. Subsequently, the shifting (non)human entities that occupy its perilous spatiotemporalities become visible as a series of precarious encounters. These are beings that are brought to life at their extremity, so that they remain, in motion, on the hazardous peripheries of animal, machine, and human. In space, sometime in the far-future, the boundaries that delineate difference both between various life forms and within individual species are exposed as irrelevant and archaic modes of subject identification.

I then elaborate on this idea of nomadic subjects that act in disharmonic, awkward, and unsettling consonance through a reading of Jennifer Marie Brissett's *Elysium*, in which queer love and solidarity create interconnections between characters in a broken and fragmented post-apocalyptic computer script. In doing so, I extend my reading of Braidotti's Deleuzian-Spinozist approach to subject nomadism, which emphasises that desire is that which "propels forward" the subject into "a shifting horizon of multiple other encounters". I argue that in these texts, Braidotti's posthuman subject approaches Butler's conception of a "you" located on the queer horizon, which is always "becoming-other" to itself. Dystopia is, in *Elysium*, the medium through which the "self" can be written at its "othermost", where configurations of inter- and intra-species race and gender lose their potency.

Finally, I explore how the protagonist of Vallorani's *Il Cuore Finto di DR*, a Replicant inspired by the work of Philip K. Dick, injects a narcotic to access human memories and "become other" to herself. By seeking to feel and remember as humans do, DR embraces the unidentifiable "you" theorised by Butler as a transgression and reformulation of the insular and self-serving subject propounded by Enlightenment humanism. Her

encroachment on human memory triggers the formation of an ethically fraught viewpoint, one that draws together an assemblage of human, android, and alien perspectives both within and beyond the space of the memory.

Norms, it appears, do not travel well between galaxies. The fifth chapter explores how Regueiro and Barceló's stories humorously upset the standardisation of sexuality through unexpected and mistake-laden sexual encounters with extraterrestrial species. During these human/extraterrestrial encounters in interstellar space, the heterosexual bind unravels as spatially segregated species cease to exist at a remove from one another. In Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales*, a macho engineer in Spain's space programme is confronted with the fact that alien bodies are, despite his best efforts, un-mappable within human formations of racial hierarchy and binary gender identity. When his sexual encounter with an alien "woman" gets him pregnant, it disables the hierarchical and violent power relations that he assumes it will reinforce. The "baby" that grows inside its unwilling father is the utopian evocation of an entity that simultaneously undercuts the clarity of species differentiation and racist conceptions of ethnic divides.

I then explore how an unknown bacteria in Regueiro's "Planetoide de Oportunidades" impregnates a lesbian couple, subsequently creating a hybrid species that undermines the humans' colonising efforts to eradicate them from the planetoid. This confronts and resists humanity's violent history as "custodians" of planet Earth, while also suggesting that, somewhat paradoxically, humanity's only means of survival is extinction in the form of merging and metamorphosing with another species (I refer Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* here). The chapter considers, then, that Kilgore's question of "queering the coming race?" is perhaps not merely a possibility for the future, but the essential and sole means of preserving some form of the "human race" within the unthinkable materiality of a mixed-species entity. I suggest that these "alternative figurations of subjects-in-becoming", which Braidotti also conceptualises in terms of the "unthinkable", can be usefully understood as the consequences of "queer errors" or "queer failures" in the systems within which race and "gender" gain meaning. I explore this idea through an elaboration of Halberstam's work on the queer art of failure, which exposes how strangely procreative extra-terrestrial sex amounts to the undoing of heteropatriarchal notions of lineage, inherited identity, and reproductive heterosexuality. Gender becomes visible as an abstraction, while the markers of race are presented as a remnant of a violent "humanity" near the brink of extinction. Through a reading of queer, eco-feminist, and subversive modes of humanism, sexual failure appears in these works of SF as a generative model of unveiling the unthinkable.

Moving from reproductive sexuality to non-reproductive forms of kinship, Chapter 6 also relies on a reading of Halberstam's work on the

queer art of failure, in particular, his investigation into the kinds of adaptive affiliative processes that can arise through the refusal of heteronormative models of growth and development. Halberstam's critique of an "authenticating notion of longevity" that defends the validity of the nuclear family through an emphasis on long-term bonds and blood ties above other kinds of intimacies elucidates the anti-racist and gender-inclusive potential of collective and non-reproductive kinship structures in my chosen works of SF. Through a reading of Nicoletta Vallorani's *Il Cuore Finto di DR* and *Sulla Sabbia di Sur*, I explore how the agentic capabilities of science fictional kinship groups that thrive in hostile environments can elucidate Butler's conception of collective political mobilisations motivated by uneven experiences of human vulnerability, and the fluid, non-reproductive forms of kinship suggested by Gilroy, based in "will, inclination, mood, and affinity" and unfettered by historical and familial ties. Literally as well as metaphorically synthetic and disorganic, the kinship groups illustrated by these works of SF simultaneously de-essentialise the family and remove race as the biologising frame of social intimacy. These malleable and open alliances demonstrate the kinds of solidarities that are at the heart of "planetary" humanisms. Such collectivities demonstrate modes of community-building that respond to the precarity and uncertainty of life in dystopian worlds. Whether (non)humans residing in conflict-driven diasporas, low-standing citizens in segregated cities, or synthetic life forms illegally roaming public space, all participate in modes of kinship that navigate the spatial discontinuities of war-torn and post-apocalyptic planets. In doing so, they also counter the re-appearance and crystallisation of class- and race-based borders.

Chapter 7 argues that SF's queer, interspecies intimacies—which oppose kinship structures grounded in racialised and gendered identity-formation—tentatively delineate the borders of what I have called "planetary" humanism. When this manifests in SF, the human race of *Elysium* is on the brink of expulsion from its planet, past and present conjoin in the deep spaces of *The Citadel*, and the native bacteria of "Planetoide de Oportunidades" make their claim to the right to exist by broaching the bodies of lesbian women. I explore how within these spaces of alterity, humanity paradoxically takes shape as what Gilroy might term a "species that differs from itself". I demonstrate how, unlike Blockbuster science fiction, these works invoke not the human apocalypse but the apocalypse of anthropocentrism, by which the human no longer perceives itself as the centre of the universe. They reformulate existential risk both as solicitations for nuclear war and ongoing claims to territory that make life unlivable for minoritised and subaltern peoples. When read as evocations of new forms of planetary humanism, I demonstrate how *Citadel*, *Elysium*, and "Planetoide de Oportunidades" confront humanity's ego with the



precariousness of its planetary position. This is the outer reaches of the humanist imagination, where systems of race and gender can finally be reconfigured.

Yet, this chapter exposes how in this incipient state, humanistic contradictions proliferate. Both wildly promising and problematic, the radical “othering” of humanity raises a range of concerns and conditions that dictate how potentially reparative and inclusive humanisms can ethically come into fruition. When the human body is violently penetrated, and its pleasurable permeability is evidenced in queasy ways, the problematic and non-consensual aspects of border-crossing come to the fore. I explore Spivak’s open and permanent question of “a borderlessness world?” through an investigation of how the permeability of the bordered body is rendered in SF. This section evidences how globalisation’s promise of open borders is extended only towards the privileged few, but “planetary”, or in Gilroy’s case, “planetary humanism”, experiments with formulations of borderlessness that override globalisation’s “imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere”, and does so by reconfiguring the discriminating “globalisers” of race and gender. I conclude that at the borders of the planetary, communities forged in precarious, dystopian worlds are forced to explore the limits of what it means to be alive together.

In the final and conclusory chapter of this monograph, I aim to consolidate how SF generally, and works by my chosen writers in particular, proposes new forms of radical humanism or “planetarities” that exemplify the creativity, magnitude, and political value of those formulated by critical theory. SF’s planetary perspective offers new insight into the operation of racial, gender, and sexual formations on Earth. I emphasise that it is not my claim that SF in general points towards new forms of humanism, but that productive planetary perspectives can be found specifically in SF that discusses and reformulates issues of race and gender in relation to humanity pushed to its logical extreme. These modes of planetarity are not merely illustrations of the kinds of humanisms that I have argued are visible in the works of Butler, Braidotti, Spivak, and Gilroy, but, as was distinctly the case for utopian and dystopian SF from the 1960s onwards, constitute forms of political theory in themselves. I therefore conclude this book by suggesting that the new forms of humanisms or “planetarities” visible in these works of SF radicalise those put forward by critical theory. The value of these fictional inquiries into humanisms that are grounded in gender and racial critique is also their ability to reconcile even the contradictory elements in Butler, Braidotti, Spivak, and Gilroy’s theoretical work without “resolving” them into simplified readings. Perhaps my chosen works of SF can elucidate what theory still struggles to describe, and what the utopian claims of the European Union’s Charter of Fundamental Rights



## 12 Introduction and Roadmap

long to engender: a crosshatched access to a utopianism that generates a “a version of equality that travels”.

Viewing these works of SF as radicalisations of new and planetary humanisms also suggests that critical theory should engage with the discontinuities of posthumanism, planetary humanisms, and other radical new forms of humanism. I would argue that this beneficially heightens the perceived vulnerability of the very notion of humanism in a way that is also in keeping with the reformulation of vulnerability engaged with by new forms of humanism. In order to remain nomadic, uneven, and contested, resisting closure, sedimentation, and ideological captivity, new forms of humanism must remain vulnerable to different interpretations. A reading of SF alongside what sometimes appears to be incompatible moves towards different modes of being with other entities, therefore, demonstrates that new forms of humanism must coexist, mutually vulnerable, in a relation of reciprocity and interdependency.

### Notes

- 1 SF critics, such as Dunja M. Mohr (*Worlds Apart?* 2005), Michael Levy (“Transgressing Dualism,” 2006), and Sharona Ben-Tov (*The Artificial Paradise*, 1995) have suggested that “masculinist” modes of science fictional worldbuilding are those which, for example, position “man at the centre and woman on the periphery” (Levy 537); contain “misogynist depictions of the female/cultural *other*” (Mohr 42); or describe futures in which “war is enlisted for the masculine ‘birth’ of an alternative nature” (Ben-Tov 779).
- 2 By “women’s SF”, I refer to SF written by women, rather than SF directed at a female readership or SF which addresses issues related to women.
- 3 In suggesting that “race” and “gender” can be forms of symbolic capital, I follow elaborations of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural, social, economic, and symbolic capital by several contemporary sociologists and cultural theorists. Beverley Skeggs, for example, suggests that “gender can be a form of cultural capital, but only *if* it is symbolically *legitimated*” (“Context and Background” 23–24). Viet Thanh Nguyen has demonstrated that race can also acquire symbolic capital in the context of the attempted resistance of the Asian American intellectual class to capitalist exploitation (*Race and Resistance* 5).
- 4 I refer here to Sedgwick’s suggestion of a “reparative reading” strategy, one that distances itself from the psychoanalytical tradition and its paranoid interpretations of the homosexual “affliction” that came to influence early queer theory. I find in Sedgwick’s practice of reparative reading a feminist impetus to recognise that, as she puts it, “selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them” (*Touching Feeling* 150–151). In this vein, my analysis seeks to act as a critical ally or accomplice to texts which might otherwise obscure or misrecognise systems of “race” and gender.

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# 1 Towards New Forms of Humanism

## 1 Introduction

In April 2013, four acclaimed theorists in different fields of gender and race studies who commit their philosophy to issues of social justice, namely Butler, Braidotti, Spivak, and Gilroy, came together to lecture on the humanism of Edward Said at the Edward Said Memorial Conference in Utrecht. Their homages to the great humanist and post-colonial philosopher have been printed together in *Conflicting Humanities*, edited by Braidotti and Gilroy, which also features essays from ten additional contributors. Its mission is to explore “what might be involved in the reinvention of notions of the human in today’s world and more especially in the critical practice of the humanities” (Braidotti and Gilroy, “Introduction” 1). “Conflicting”, because though these essays share Said’s concern for both the future of the humanities and the revisioning of human hierarchies, they differ in ways in which they approach the question of how to reinvent the humanities as an area of study. This is partly because each of them relates differently to the term “humanism”. In *Nomadic Theory* (2011), Braidotti details the ways in which her posthumanism lies in a Foucauldian poststructuralist critique of humanism, while in *The Posthuman: On Nomadic Ethics* (2013) she also claims that her conception of nomadic ethics draws on the “activist brand of antihumanism” (16) that gained traction during the 1960s and 1970s. She is interested less by the humanism–antihumanism debate and more by “how the multilayered critique of humanism comes to bear on contemporary concerns about the dislocation of the human” (19). She subsequently looks beyond both humanism and antihumanism in her investigation of the “multiple opportunities offered by the posthuman condition” (23).

Gilroy makes a contending call for further investigation of Said’s humanism, which, though descended from “eighteenth-century Europe’s ‘efflorescence of secular anthropology’”, can counter the “imperial and colonial politics of race and ethnicity” (Said quoted in “Not Yet

Humanism”, *Conflicting Humanities* 95, 105). His position even appears to be invigorated by the anti-humanist sentiment that he believes was the order of the day at the Edward Said Memorial Conference, where both Spivak and Butler spoke, admitting in his concluding remarks that:

I feel a little bit uncomfortable in what I want to say because I feel there’s been a sort of truce declared in the presentations that we’ve heard and that truce is really, if I can characterise it crudely, between the humanists who remain as I see it, close to Edward Said’s own understanding of humanism’s mission, and those who are antihumanist, avowedly to the core, to the bottom of their socks, and I’m interested in that truce, and I want to be indiscreet enough to violate it a little bit in the hope that that might be interesting.

(“Not Yet Humanism” [Edward Said Memorial Conference] 00:01:06)

Unlike Braidotti, Gilroy is interested in the humanist–antihumanist debate, in particular, the “truce” he perceives between the two camps. As such, on the occasion of Said’s memorial conference, he attempts to convince the antihumanists in the audience of the value of Said’s “democratic humanism” (00:04:00), based on the premise that humanism is still able to forge alternative modes of connectivity that extend beyond “the colour line”.

Where Gilroy openly reckons with new forms of humanism, Butler has explained elsewhere that she “quarrelled internally with [Said’s] insistence on humanism” (“What Shall We Do Without Exile?” 30) and, in her discussion of the agentic possibilities of precarity, emphasises that “my point is not to rehabilitate humanism” (*Theory of Assembly* 148). Indeed, her work remains fundamentally within a poststructuralist critique of “humanism” as it developed in Europe. In her essay “Dynamic Conclusions” (2000) and in the context of Žižek’s work on the relationship between truth and discourse, Butler identifies with a posthumanist critique, posing the following question: “Indeed, we can—and must—ask: what can the human mean within posthumanism?” (279). Her inquiry into the disciplinary move beyond humanism is based on a critique of both “imperialist” and “liberal” forms of humanism, as outlined in *Bodies that Matter* (118), and elaborated within the context of colonialism in her 2015 *Senses of the Subject*. In the latter work, “humanism” is still theorised as a mode of exclusion that, at its most violent, underpinned colonial endeavours (*Senses of the Subject* 38). She argues that the violent legacies of traditional humanism are not sufficiently problematised by liberal European humanists, who, she claims, “can oppose suffering under colonialism without necessarily engaging in a critique of the state formation that outsources its violence to preserve its spuriously humanist

self-definition” (179). Nevertheless, her paper, “Versions of Binationalism in Said and Buber”, is indebted to the humanistic reflections that underlie Said’s critique of the Zionist call for a state founded on biblical prophecy and racial particularity. Furthermore, Butler’s inquiry into which humans are recognised as humans and which are not, one of the central questions of *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), is, in my view, an intrinsically humanist concern. To posit, as she has done since *Undoing Gender* (2004), a shared ontological condition of vulnerability as the springboard for a new and effective politics of recognition, seems to me antithetical to her assertion that “the rethinking of the human in these terms does not entail a return to humanism” (13). Indeed, Gilroy has argued quite the opposite:

[Our species’] signature is provided by a grim determination to make that predicament of fundamentally fragile, corporeal existence into the key to a version of humanism that contradicts triumphal overtones of the anthropological discourses that were enthusiastically supportive of race-thinking in earlier, imperial times.

(Against Race 17)

For Gilroy, humanism that embraces human frailty and vulnerability stands in opposition to the anthropological discourses that characterised traditional humanisms of the Enlightenment era. Gilroy approaches Butler’s theorisation of the reality of subject interrelationality to oppose notions of individual autonomy and to form the basis of his planetary humanism. Gilroy embraces humanism as a term that can be critically employed to contest racist and sexist formations of power, even in view of its racist origins, by dedicating himself to what he considers to be a reparative re-rendering of humanistic philosophy (*Against Race* 220). Drawing on the “utopian visions” of cultural critics such as Richard Wright, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Fanon, who furnish “an index for evaluating what substantive progress might be”, Gilroy argues for the healing and restorative potential at stake in the process of imbuing the term with new meaning (*Black Atlantic* 148–9).

Like Butler, Spivak uses the occasion of Said’s memorial conference not to agree with Said’s humanist ambitions but to emphasise that: “My relationship with [Said] was somewhat divided on the grounds of humanism” (“A Borderless World?” 49). She claims, however, that “two topics tied me to him” (49): the issue of how public awareness is formed about “the cruelties of colonial modernity” (50) and who it is devised by, and the contribution of the intellectual to the making of peace treaties (52), particularly with regard to the possibility of a non-violent terminus of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. She views Butler’s analysis of both Said and

Martin Buber's conceptions of binationalism in the context of this seemingly interminable struggle, which has rendered co-habitation almost impossible, as an example of the kind of double bind politics that the humanities must "train the future citizen into" ("A Borderless World?" 54).<sup>1</sup> However, while Butler does not question the place of humanity in the network of animals, machines, and other creatures, Spivak aims to surpass the limits of humanisms of Enlightenment descent by looking beyond the Anthropocene, a notion shared by Gilroy, and somewhat more radically, by Braidotti.

In this way, though their methods and ambitions vary greatly, and while only Gilroy's work has explicitly humanist ambitions, this book argues that the way in which Spivak, Braidotti, and Butler—in addition to Gilroy, and by way of an analysis of Halberstam's queer critique—theorise issues of race and gender does indeed lay the foundations of new forms of humanist thought—whether or not this be the intention of these theorists—based on the interrelationality and mutual dependency of human and non-human entities. I therefore apply the phrase "new forms of humanism" in this book to refer to the humanisms I identify in the works of Spivak, Braidotti, Butler, and Gilroy. While Spivak does not consider herself a humanist, I use the terms "planetary humanism" and "planetary" interchangeably to describe the humanisms I identify in both her and Gilroy's work. I do this because my analysis of selected texts of SF written by women in Europe, which is conducted alongside a reading also of Spivak's critique, suggests that there is a "humanistic" purpose to Spivak's mode of planetary.

My analysis of this conflictual yet complementary conversation begins before and beyond the publication of *Conflicting Humanities*, in the lectures, blogs, interviews, and longer publications in which their discussions of race and gender have led to an exploration of new forms of humanism. Braidotti, grounded in the posthuman, continues to argue that race and gender theory have contributed to the revision of insufficiently queried assumptions about humanity and human subjectivity that lie at the core of humanism and anthropocentrism ("The Contested Posthumanities" 16). In the past decade, Butler's episteme-shattering queer theory, as presented in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), has led to an exploration of a humanism based on collectivity and shared human precarity, as demonstrated by, for example, *Senses of the Subject* (2015) and *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015). Spivak's work, notably *In Other Worlds* (1987) and *Death of a Discipline* (2003) as well as her influential earlier essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), positions gender as "the possibility of abstraction" (46) that allows for a re-conceptualisation of the borders of race and nation. She locates the critical force of her work in Subaltern studies "in the energy of the questioning of humanism in the post-Nietzschean sector of Western

European structuralism” (*In Other Worlds* 277), and, 15 years later in *Death of a Discipline*, notes that humanism will not simply disappear and must constantly “be negotiated with” (121). For Gilroy, the most fruitful way of dealing with Enlightenment humanism and the colonial crimes it supported is to engage in a reworking of humanism based on a refusal of the very same “fragile universals” which underpinned the Enlightenment’s claim to moral authority: race, sex, and gender (*Darker Than Blue* 59).

I want to suggest that possible new forms of humanism based on feminist and anti-racist enquiry, and that appear in various divergent forms, must speak to one another and move away from one singular conception of humanism. This comparative approach to identifying new forms of humanism in and between the works of Braidotti, Butler, Spivak, Gilroy, and Halberstam (that have sprung from the feminist and anti-racist methodologies offered by queer theory, gender studies, post-colonial theory, subaltern studies, and race theory) therefore enacts this trajectory of interdependent and coexisting new humanisms at a theoretical level. This book will investigate whether, as Butler has asked of binationalism, we can think and practise new forms of humanism that move in multiple directions at once, and, by positioning the area of study “within a shifting set of frames” (“Versions of Binationalism in Said and Buber” 209), ensure that “humanism” is constantly upended and redefined. The breadth of scope offered by the combination of Butler, Braidotti, Spivak, Gilroy, and Halberstam hopefully makes for a richer reflection of the way in which my chosen works of British, Italian, Spanish, and French women’s SF re-imagine race and gender in ways that allow for these new forms of humanism to emerge.

In this introduction to the theoretical basis of my book, I have grouped Braidotti with Butler and Spivak with Gilroy because of a particular complementarity that I have identified in these pairings. The work of Halberstam will be discussed later in the fifth section of Chapter 2, which expounds the queer theory employed by this book in the context of attempts to “queer the human”. While sometimes contradictory, Braidotti’s and Butler’s respective critiques of gendered and racial identity formation both put their emphasis on self-dispossession and “becoming-other” in their theorisation of new forms of constitutive sociality. The hybrid and multiple subjects of new forms of humanism formulated by these theorists exercise agency through collective assembly and productive encounters. Braidotti’s and Butler’s mutual critique of each other’s work offers useful insight into their different methods: in *Metamorphoses* (2002), Braidotti criticises Butler for her emphasis on mourning and melancholia, as well as for her focus on heteronormativity as the predominant system of power; in *Nomadic Subjects* (2011), she suggests that she and Butler “work with different paradigms” (290). Butler has responded (*Undoing Gender* 15; *Senses of*

*the Subject* 6) by suggesting that Braidotti's need to overcome loss and displacement through regeneration and transformation means that she also misses opportunities to identify agency *within* vulnerability. It is exactly this variation in approach within the themes that I explore that provides texture and scope to my analysis of how an intersectional approach to the study of race and gender can also develop new forms of humanism.

The relationship between Spivak's and Gilroy's works holds similarly constructive differences. They can, in particular, be usefully compared in their strategies to introduce their respective conceptions of planetary humanism through an intersectional interrogation of race and gender on a global scale. Gilroy's anti-racist vision, though focusing more on a critique of race than of gender, requires an analysis of gender as "the modality through which race is lived" (*The Black Atlantic* 85). Spivak reflects less on race and gender as constructs and more on how "the abstract structures" of the state inform the experience of gendered and racialised subjects (*Who Sings the Nation State* 94). The planetary, in both their conceptions of it, moves beyond solidarities forged within dialectics of difference—for example, imaginary notions of nationalism that create particular formations of ethnic difference—to offer transcultural interconnections that keep European universalism in check.

In the coming chapters of close analysis of my chosen works of British, Italian, Spanish, and French SF written by women, I analyse the ways in which the reformulation of race and gender in science fictional settings offer new forms of humanism that can be usefully elaborated through Spivak's and Gilroy's own conceptions of planetary humanism. Intergalactic SF wars and post-apocalyptic dystopias surface issues at the heart of Butler's theory of assembly, while the hybrid bodies of far-future spaces illuminate Braidotti's critical posthumanism. The fragmentary forms of post-apocalyptic embodiment grapple with Spivak's understanding of borderlessness as negotiation between respecting the borders of bodies and creating a less divided world. Reformulations of race and gender in SF thus draw humanism away from the Anthropocene and towards forms of subjectivity that demonstrate an investment in a sustainable ethics. These "subjects" are not intended to be unitary wholes, but interconnected networks that incorporate all alterity within themselves, enabling community and solidarity to be forged through placeless connections throughout space and time.

## 2 "Queer" and "Race"

This section clarifies how Butler, Braidotti, Spivak, Gilroy, and Halberstam define and navigate these two terms, and how this relates to the methodologies employed by this book. I aim to, in the spirit of this book's spatial



thread, which will be clarified in the section on geocriticism, and in keeping with Butler, Braidotti, and Spivak's Deleuzian attempts to deterritorialise the globalised systems of race and gender, counter the processes of cultural globalisation that make queer and race understood as universalised categories rather than culturally contingent terms. For the length of this section, I leave these concepts in inverted commas to signal this contingency.

The queer theory that I draw on is informed by the field of critical enquiry born from queer studies, women's studies, and lesbian and gay activism, and whose founding voices include Teresa de Lauretis, Lauren Berlant, Edelman, Sedgwick, Halberstam, and David Halperin. In *Aberrations in Black* (2003), Roderick Ferguson coined the term "queer of colour critique", drawing on the intersectional approach of "Afrocentric black feminist" organisations such as the Combahee River Collective to address the need for further intersectional queer critique.<sup>2</sup> Ferguson's mode of critique has influenced a host of theorists, including Gayatri Gopinath and Sara Ahmed.<sup>3</sup> Queer theory has also, since its inception, intersected with other forms of anti-racist, utopian, and eco-feminist scholarship, including the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Siobhan B. Somerville, and De Witt Douglas Kilgore, and the queer, eco-feminist scholarship of Greta Gaard and Helen Merrick, whose conception of the queer I use to complicate the idea of "natural" sexuality and kinship.<sup>4</sup>

As I explore in the opening chapter of this book, queer is a historically and geographically situated term that has not escaped controversy since its reclamation by activists and scholars in the late 1980s. It is a term often associated with the work of Butler, in particular, her early work on gender performativity, but less so with Braidotti, Spivak, and Gilroy. Her theory of performativity is perhaps the most closely associated with the term "queer", with *Gender Trouble* (1990) often cited as one of the founding texts of the discipline of queer theory. Its widely lauded reception and continued influence in academic communities has provoked the question, as Butler puts it, "of whether or not the theory of performativity can be transposed onto matters of race", one that has been raised and explored by multiple critics in the past two decades, from Ann Pellegrini's *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* (1997) to Bettina Hofmann and Monika Mueller's *Performing Ethnicity, Performing Gender: Transcultural Perspectives* (2016). The impetus to transfer performativity theory into a study of the process of racialisation is perhaps enhanced by Butler's open-ended interpretation of the meaning of the term "queer". In *Undoing Gender* (2004), she states that "queer" might be "understood, by definition, to oppose all identity claims" (7). While Butler does not, for the most part, engage with the term "race", she has summarised the dangers and potentialities of the convergences of queer theory with issues of race as follows:

I would note here not only that racial presumptions invariably underwrite the discourse on gender in ways that need to be made explicit, but that race and gender ought not to be treated as simple analogies. I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race. Many of these debates have centred on the status of “construction,” whether race is constructed in the same way as gender. My view is that no single account of construction will do, and that these categories always work as background for one another, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another. Thus, the sexualisation of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once, and the analysis surely illuminates the limits of gender as an exclusive category of analysis.

(Gender Trouble xvi)

Analogising race with gender, Butler warns, runs the risk of positioning them as separate and distinct entities that are simply constructed “in the same way”. Instead, Butler seems to advocate a similar perspective to the logic Gilroy exercises when he states that “gender is the modality through which race is lived”: our perception of the way in which we relate to race is often informed or mediated by experiences of sexism and homophobia (*The Black Atlantic* 85). This book, therefore, builds on Butler’s proposition that categories of symbolic capital—including but not limited to race and gender—“often find their most powerful articulation through one another”. The methodologies employed by this book recognise the need for “multiple lenses” through which to read issues of race and gender, so that, as Butler has articulated, they can be viewed as heterogeneous configurations. Indeed, her use of the phrase “the sexualisation of racial gender norms” offers a discursive demonstration of this layering.

Halberstam also positions his queer theory within an analysis of interlocking systems of power. While I will discuss Halberstam’s queer critique in detail in Section 5 of this chapter, it is worth noting here that as with Butler, his queer theory is fundamentally intersectional, resulting in several of his studies of gender variance explicitly detailing the interrelation of gender with race. In his discussion of issues of race and masculinity raised by the O.J. Simpson case, for example, he notes that “of course, race and masculinity, especially in the cast of O.J., are not separable into tidy categories” (*Female Masculinity* 18). In *Trans\** (2017), Halberstam historicises this refusal of the notion that identity can be classified into distinct and delineated component parts by tracing the way in which North American notions of race informed the study of gender and sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century. In doing so, he argues that:

Ideas of racial identity that had long been deployed within colonialism in order to justify brutal forms of rule now became a part of the logic of governance and racial difference, and racial categories, in turn, fed into the new understandings of gender and sexuality that were circulating courtesy of doctors, medical researchers, and the new discipline of psychoanalysis.

(6)

Halberstam's critical analysis of the construction of difference and inequality among gendered bodies makes visible the workings of power at large in the accrual of knowledge in the late nineteenth century, particularly in the field of medicine, and which established a legacy of gender and sexual discrimination that has endured to the present day. His study of the contribution of notions of racial otherness to the pathologisation of "abnormal" bodies and sexualities thus provides the foundations to a demystification of trans and queer bodies, unfixing them from the sites of devalued difference to which they have become attached.

In contrast to Butler and Halberstam's positions in the field of queer theory, Spivak is careful to avoid what she perceives as the globalising tendencies of the queer, which threaten the imposition of "queer" as a system of homogeneous exchange in all parts of the planet. In the context of her Marxist conception of "a value theory of everything", that which makes all things commensurable, she notes that: "When Euro-US queer theory is imposed worldwide, this becomes important" (Spivak, *Other Asias* 253). Drawing the notion of queer into her analysis of subalternity, she states:

I believe that the metropolitan definition of homosexuality should not be imposed upon the heterogeneous histories of homosexual practices in the periphery even as the class-determined emergence of the metropolitan definition all over the world should be recognised rather than repudiated. Given my belief about reproductive heteronormativity, it is possible to learn a good deal from queer theory. I should also mention that two very strong sources of my enlightenment are Luce Irigaray and Michel Foucault. I have also spoken of the possibility of an "originary queerness" in the aboriginal areas of Western West Bengal, where I train teachers, but I do not know how to theorise this.

(Manuel Asensi interviews Gayatri C. Spivak" 3)

Spivak emphasises the spatial and historical estrangement of the subaltern "periphery" from "the metropolitan definition of homosexuality". "Queer", perhaps, fails to be self-reflexive of both its "class-determined emergence" and the geographical specificity of its use. Indeed, in her presentation "They the People", she argues that "we must also realise the

possibility of claiming queerness is also linked to globalisation” (“They the People”). Despite the homologising dangers of its use, she does not dismiss the term nor the critical purpose which it often serves, citing the French theorists whose work laid the foundations for the emergence of queer theory in the 1970s as influential also to her own work on subalternity. She also signals to an “originary queerness”, first gestured to in *Death of a Discipline*, and later defined as “a position without identity” or a “non-identitarian queerness” that relates to the experience of people in a specific region of the Indian subcontinent (“They the People” 35). Speaking about “women who enter into marriage because I have not entered into it”, she explains that “In the weight of friendship I feel a kind of originally queerness which heteronormative reproductivity nestles in” (“They the People”). As opposed to the queering of normativity, she implies that, in the culture of this geographical region, the queer is overcome by normative gender performance and its imperative towards reproductive futurity. In a 2012 interview with postcolonial theorist Rahul K. Gairola in Seattle, Spivak expands on the relationship between the queer and subalternity, stating that:

“Queer” is a category which is susceptible to classing and racing [sic.]. Thus “subalternity”—lack of access to social mobility—is nested here. On the other hand, ‘queer’ intersects with “subalternity” in so far as queerness is identified as reason for lack of access.

(“Occupy Education”)

Spivak exposes the double bind of subalternity’s correspondence with the vulnerabilities associated with queerness, and the exclusion of subalternity from the queer. In this analysis, race emerges as the historical, cultural, and geographical divide between subalternity’s often “heterogeneous histories of homosexual practices” and a “metropolitan definition of homosexuality” (“Manuel Asensi interviews Gayatri C. Spivak”). The contingency of the queer is therefore perhaps best pointed to through a simultaneous analysis of race and queer, one that does not simply explore the relationship between these two terms but demonstrates the way in which their existence is mutually dependent.

Spivak’s suspicion of definition, in particular, in relation to the concept of “race”, can be traced back to her 1998 essay “Race before Racism: The Disappearance of the American”, which dialogues with American writer and scholar Jack D. Forbes’s *Black Africans and Native Americans*. She claims: “This is not a text of critical race theory. It is a bold book by someone who has suffered definition” (“Race before Racism” 52). The study of race cannot, for Spivak, be separated from analyses of other axes of discriminatory structural segregation. Using Forbes’s deconstructive

approach to the concept of race, Spivak suggests that, like the term “queer”, it is demarcated by historical contingency. This is made explicit in Forbes’s argument that in the Christian Middle Ages, “There was apparently no concern or need to identify persons of ‘mixed race,’ since the concept of ‘race’ (as we know it) did not exist and ‘race’ mixture among human beings was not an existent concept” (*Africans and Native Americans* 100). From this, Spivak concludes that “I have no doubt that the exercise in historicising rather than essentialising racism is absolutely crucial, and I am persuaded that Forbes gives us a model of the scrupulousness with which it must be performed” (“Race before Racism” 48.). Finally, Spivak concludes that race cannot be contained within a precise definition: “No such theoretical neatness for Forbes. We are left with the rocking back and forth of the vocabulary of racism until the very confusion mocks the structure of reference” (“Race before Racism” 42). As the “vocabulary of racism” evolves in Forbes’s work through time and space, from the Christian Middle Ages to the slave trade in the American colonies, so does the meaning of race. In Spivak’s more recent work, racism also emerges as a product of anthropocentrism, that which must be ushered “off stage entirely” (“A Borderless World?” 113).

Here we meet Gilroy’s definition and diagnosis of race, which he argues is made manifest through racism, and must be countered through an anti-anthropocentrism.<sup>5</sup> Gilroy rarely uses the term “queer”, preferring to explore the non-normative in terms of gender, sexualities, and the intersection of these with the complex relations of power that also govern the localised and culturally specific experiences of race, class, and disability. Perhaps this can be ascribed to his cross-cultural analysis when approaching issues of race, through which the term “queer” might appear too culturally contingent to usefully signify in his work. This is not to say that sexuality and gender do not feature in his analysis: these forms of symbolic capital are the “modality through which race is lived” and provide a more complex critique of the axes of intersectional marginalisation (*The Black Atlantic* 85). Indeed, Gilroy writes in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) that

fragmentation and differentiation of the black subject ...has recently been compounded further by the questions of gender, sexuality, and male domination which have been made unavoidable by the struggles of black women and the voices of black gay men and lesbians.

(35)

The “black women and the voices of black gay men and lesbians” that are the subjects of Gilroy’s planetary humanism do not, necessarily, identify with “queer”, a term which he treats with as much suspicion as he does with “race”. “Gay” and “lesbian” are instead suggested to be more specific

descriptors than the culturally contingent “queer”, and thus more suitable for a “planetary” deconstruction of the processes of race and racism.

Braidotti shares Gilroy’s and Spivak’s limited use of the term “queer”. When she has engaged in a discussion of the term, for example, in the 2006 interview “Deleuze, Feminism, and the New European Union”, she suggests that instances of the term’s use must be qualified with a genealogy of a particular usage or set of usages of it, through which it can be grounded in material locations (Braidotti, “Deleuze, Feminism” 10). She is also keen to propose that queerness should be de-mystified from its association with radical thinking: “Queer”, she claims, “does not automatically equate with subversive” (“Deleuze, Feminism” 11). Like Spivak, she argues against the universalisation of “queer” into a generic term. Drawing on Foucault, Braidotti argues that radical queerness does not necessarily stem from alternative sexualities: “The whole point of Foucault’s work is to urge us to liberate ourselves from the sovereignty of sex. This is the line we need to pursue: the de-sexualization of subject positions” (“Deleuze, Feminism” 11). Queer, according to this line of argument, should not always refer to non-normative sexuality, but also to modes of behaviour that upset established norms. In *Metamorphoses* (2002), she illustrates this point with the example of Princess Diana, who “transgresses and exceeds the heterosexual matrix, and thus joins forces with queer politics, though she’s clearly not gay herself” by “stepping out of the codified conventions of loveless upper-class marriage” (107). Diana’s defiance of the monarchy’s expectations with regard to her marriage is, for Braidotti, queer in its stubborn insistence on pursuing its own path. Braidotti identifies the “subversive moment” of queerness, therefore, not necessarily as the product of deviance from sexual norms, but instead “where we manage to re-ground some of the modes of deterritorialisation into constructive viable alternatives” (11). For Braidotti, this process of deterritorialisation and re-mapping can help construct new cartographies of “viable alternatives” to normative notions of identity construction (11). This spatialisation of the “queer” also contributes to her specification of its historical contingency: she states that, “somehow the imaginary of queer fits in with the imaginary of our times” (12).

Braidotti’s theory of nomadic subjectivity has also been elaborated by queer theorists who seek to illustrate the spatiality of queerness. Kellie Burns (2012) argues that Braidotti’s Deleuzian formulation of rhizomatic, interconnected, marginalised and hybrid bodies offers insight into the irregular lines of flight by which queer sexuality evades normative sexual frameworks (62–3). In the context of German literary studies, Emily Jeremiah proposes that prominent queer theorists such as Butler, Sedgwick, and de Lauretis gained inspiration from the work of scholars such as Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Foucault, and Jacques Lacan who reject

the notion of a complete, unified subject-self. She suggests that Braidotti's work on nomadic subjectivity, which describes a "contingent, split, and unstable" subject, influenced the way in which queer studies scholars reject the homosexual as "a stable or fixed category; rather, it is an effect of discourse" (99). She also argues that when read alongside Sarah Ahmed's proposal that the queer "does not have a relation of exteriority to that with which it comes into contact", the queer resembles Braidotti's conception of nomadic knowing (*Nomadic Theory* 99): indeed, Braidotti's enfolded, rhizomatic subject draws all external influences into itself while simultaneously unfolding of affective life. Consequently, this book draws on Braidotti's work to define the "queer" as both within and beyond sexuality, in particular, by conceptualising the hybrid, nomadic, historicised, and culturally and geographically specific subject as demonstrative of the process or method of "queering" normativity.

Braidotti's engagement with the concept of "race", meanwhile, estranges itself from the idea that the term describes all people equally (as in, "we all have a race"), and gestures instead towards the importance of recognising who the term makes visible, and who it makes invisible (as in the cliché of ignorance, "I don't see race"). Instead, she suggests that "the political economy of invisibility means that the only notion of race that our culture has produced, is in the mode of a minority. Race is synonymous with inferiority, or pejorative difference" (*Transpositions* 64). As with Gilroy's work, race here is deeply imbricated in racism, in the delineation of a minority to better oppress them (under a divide and rule strategy). Posthumanism provides the means for Braidotti's theoretical counterattack to racist formulations of nationhood, as well as into a theory of potential ethnic heterogeneity in Europe. Drawing on the work of Étienne Balibar (2001), she explores the kinds of "anti-racist political strategy" that can counter conceptions of Europe as a space of "whiteness", and of the European identity as "a fixed or given essence", through the geo-historical framing of the project of Europe and of the European Union (*Transpositions* 75).

### 3 "Humanus Ex Machina": De-centring the Human and Becoming-Other in Braidotti and Butler

Spanning gender, racial, queer, humanistic, linguistic, and performance studies, Butler's and Braidotti's respective quests to de-centre the "human" of Enlightenment humanism differ greatly in style and method. While Braidotti addresses the issue of humanism as a posthumanist and a new-materialist, claiming that the nomadic, posthuman subject "explodes the boundaries of humanism at skin level" (*Nomadic Theory* 35), Butler's radical social constructivist stance has been criticised by new materialists, including Lisa Mazzei, for its focus on language and culture, which



she claims re-inscribes the “knowing humanist subject” (“Materialist Mappings” 778). While Butler has admitted that she is “not a very good materialist” (*Undoing Gender* 198), she adopts a “corporeal humanist” approach (“Corporeal Vulnerability” 577) in *Senses of the Subject* (2015) and in her 2015 lecture at University College Dublin “The Difference of Philosophy | Notes on Impressions and Responsiveness” (2015), positioning the body as a cluster of interacting forces in constant relation with other entities: “humans, institutions, organic and inorganic processes, all impress themselves upon this ‘me’ who is at the outset susceptible in ways that are radically involuntary” (“The Difference of Philosophy” 00:14:47–00:15:14). While focusing less on the susceptibility or vulnerability of nomadic and hybrid entities, Braidotti also theorises the body as “a surface of intensities and an affective field in interaction with others” (*Nomadic Theory* 25). Butler and Braidotti’s collaborations in the field of contemporary philosophy have demonstrated that both theorists are interested in redefining the body as a set of relations rather than as a unitary being, with the purpose of subverting traditional humanist conceptions of the supremacy of the “white”, self-contained, and rational subject-agent.<sup>6</sup> This section explores how Braidotti and Butler theorise the interdependence of race and gender within heteropatriarchy’s systems of oppression, arguing that the concept of subject self-sufficiency can be undermined through the acknowledgment of queer subject interrelatedness. This section will therefore argue that Butler’s and Braidotti’s approaches to race and queer critique make visible variant but complementary new forms of humanism, ones that centre around a range of queer subjectivities that are continuously “becoming” in relation to others.

*Mobilising Interdependent Bodies: Interpellation, (Mis)recognition, and Resistance in the Work of Butler*

Butler has proposed that bodies are dependent and also interdependent: they rely on social institutions and support networks for support and recognition, without which the liveability of their existence is put at risk (*Theory of Assembly* 21). In cases of misrecognition during interpellation, some individuals are identified against their will and denied infrastructural support, leaving them homeless, destitute, or vulnerable to violence. But Butler believes that the interdependence to which we are vulnerable can also be the basis for a powerful means of resistance: embodied collectives can more powerfully express their rights to a humane existence than an individual can alone. These collectives constitute unexpected solidarities based on shared conditions of precarity and precariousness that straddle gender, race, and social oppression. But where Butler finds relational subjectivity in shared vulnerability, pain and precarity, Braidotti bases her formulation



of interconnected subjectivity on both Foucauldian *jouissance*: an intensive, fleeting pleasure, and Spinozist affects, in particular desire (*cupiditas*), defined by Spinoza as “appetite together with consciousness of the appetite”, where “appetite” is the natural will to strive for perseverance in being (*The Collected Works of Spinoza* 500). I explore how Braidotti’s desiring and nomadic subject paradoxically becomes itself by “becoming other-than-itself” (“The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible” 27). This will lead to a comparative discussion of Braidotti’s posthuman subject with the subject of Butler’s position on humanism, the elusive pronoun “you”, which must also be continually sought out by the self—now displaced of the primacy bestowed upon it by Enlightenment humanism—in a process of “becoming-other to itself” (*Undoing Gender* 149). I will finally argue that the interdependency of both Butler’s and Braidotti’s conceptions of the (multiple) humanist subject, an “I” also dependent on a “you”, successfully upset the self/other dialectic that produces harmful gendered and racial identities.

Following many years of investigation into how incomplete or misfired performances of gender can lead to violence and discrimination, Butler has transformed her theory of performativity laid out in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993) into one of collective agency through shared precarity. In her *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Butler argues that those affected by racial-gender destitution can transform into powerful collectives, within which individuals can more effectively assert their right to appear, as they are, in public, and lay claim to “a good life” (*Theory of Assembly* 219). Following Friedrich Hegel’s suggestion that the “Self” finds regeneration both in the “Other” (*Phenomenology of the Spirit*, 1977), and in the animating effects of grief and loss (*Early Theological Writings*, 1948),<sup>7</sup> *Theory of Assembly* explores manifestations of agency in the form of collective responses to the negative state of vulnerability. Though gender is Butler’s point of entry into her discussion of interpellation, I will explore the relevance of her critique to Gilroy’s commentary on racial interpellation, misrecognition in the criminal justice system—as highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement—and examples of racial interpellation in heightened security situations, such as the airport.

In *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997), Butler elaborates twentieth-century Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser’s conceptualisation of “interpellation” to argue that a person’s gender is repeatedly produced, reiterated, and reinforced when authority figures “hail” that person into their social position. Interpellation, as formulated by Althusser as part of his linguistic analyses of social formations, is the process by which ideology, embodied by influential social and political structures, “interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects”

(*Lenin and Philosophy* 73). A “concrete subject” is, as Butler puts it, a person that has been “hailed into social being” (*The Psychic Life of Power* 114), and often in the process, assigned an (often unchosen) gender and/or racial identity: in her example of early-stage medical interpellation, a hospital nurse ticks the F/M check box to decide the newborn’s sex, but this routine event—which significantly and indefinitely shapes that child’s subsequent interactions with society at large—often mis-identifies a queer child’s self-identified gender. Interpellation that results in mis-gendering is often targeted at queer bodies later in life, when, for example, a transgender woman is hailed on the street as a man—a (perhaps reoccurring) event that signals that they do not conform to the normative physical or behavioural expectations of their perceived gender. In this example, the transgender body is exposed to the “unwilled receptivity, susceptibility and vulnerability” shared by other bodies that are persecuted based on the “powerful citational force of gender norms” (*Theory of Assembly* 64). Similar to Butler’s theorisation of the uncomfortable and often dangerous consequences of mis-gendering a person during interpellation, in *Against Race* (2000), Gilroy elaborates Fanon’s theory of racial interpellation, when a person is hailed in such a way as “Look, a Negro!”—the first words of Fanon’s essay “The Fact of Blackness”, which forms the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* (89). While exploring the way in which race is formed during the process of political interpellation, Gilroy argues that identity is not a case of humanistic self-creation, but one that is socially performed through inevitable and sometimes unsolicited interactions with others (*Against Race* 593). If we read Gilroy’s work on political and racial interpellation alongside Butler, the racialised body, like the mis-identified queer body, can be seen as more than, and other than, the reductive, discriminatory, or violent modes of identification explored in Fanon’s analysis of the imperative mode. This has been evidenced by interactions between African Americans or Afro-British youths and the police, which all too often demonstrate the way in which interpellation bears witness to what Butler sees as a chiasmic relationship between speech and the body, in which speech depends on a body from which to speak—vocal interpellation is, she reminds us, dependent on the larynx or prosthetic that makes speech possible (*Theory of Assembly* 9)—but the body also exceeds the speech directed from or at it. The racialised body of the interpellated subject is both other than and more than the mis-placed accusation of criminal behaviour that is so often directed by the police towards them. That body is therefore not reducible to the speech act that seeks to define it as criminal; however, that same body has already been marked by a series of similar accusations that have, through time, sedimented the racialisation of bodies and equated those racialised bodies with acts of extra-legal violence and criminality. In *Police Brutality: An Anthology* (2000), African-American

journalist and novelist Jill Nelson explains that her parents offered her the advice given to many African-American children, “If a police officer stops you, don’t make any sudden moves, don’t talk back to him, and do all that he says” (209). The discursively marked body has already been spoken for by the narrative of prejudice that might be carried by a policeman who approaches an African-American. Denied further speech, that person is reduced to a body that has been misrecognised as criminal and exposed to a moment of extreme precarity.

Following the theorisation of recognition processes put forward by Lacan, Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Žižek, Butler suggests in *Bodies that Matter* (219) that the misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) that often occurs during interpellation—when the “hailee” is inadequately or prejudicially identified as a gendered or racialised subject—can also involve a certain disidentification on the part of that hailed subject, if the subject does not internalise the mode of identification with which they are hailed.<sup>8</sup> Seen in this way, the Black Lives Matter movement can be said to pursue the disidentification of the concept of criminality from racialised bodies. By refusing the criminal identity often projected upon African-Americans when they are hailed by the police, the movement has politicised the injustice of these violent and widespread instances of criminalisation and misrecognition.<sup>9</sup> Butler has also asked what the possibilities are of politicising disidentification, whether this might offer a means to resist and destabilise ideological interpellation based on the premise that misrecognition is made possible only by the partial failure to identify the subject that is always at the heart of the interpellation process (*Bodies that Matter* 219).<sup>10</sup> The fact of people being perceived as ineligible for humane treatment because of the racialisation of their bodies (during interpellation) has been theorised by Ghassan Hage (1998) and Malini Johar Schueller (2009), respectively, as “non-recognition”. Using the example of racial interpellation, this occurs when a subject is “negatively interpellated” as racially “other” (2017). For Butler, non-recognition occurs when “gender, race or status render [some] ineligible for public recognition” (*Theory of Assembly* 96).

Both the negative impacts and the potential political value of interpellation are made possible because the subject always exists in a “field of susceptibility and affect” (“Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance” 8).<sup>11</sup> This is what I hope to have shown in my analysis of interpellation: that the body, always at risk of being hailed by another, is, as Butler puts it, “less an entity than a living set of relations” (*Theory of Assembly* 65). As I have explored through her example of political interpellation, Butler has not merely argued that the body is a partially interrelational being, but that it “is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible” (*Theory of Assembly* 130). In this sense, the individuality of the human body and of the borders of the body are both preceded by and made possible through a network of dynamic relations within which the body

“becomes” itself. When we ask what the conditions are by which the body can be recognised, we must also, therefore, move towards a more nuanced understanding of the systems of interrelationality that simultaneously make the body a social being and one that is dependent, for better or for worse, on institutional recognition and other kinds of support networks. Butler has emphasised that this is not to say that the body is primarily vulnerable, nor primarily agentic, but that vulnerability and agency can be usefully thought together in order to understand the ways in which these networks of interrelationality can also be used as a positive source of affirmative action, collective agency, and resistance (*Theory of Assembly* 139). “If resistance is to enact the very principles of democracy for which it struggles”, she argues, “then resistance has to be *plural* and it has to be *embodied*” (*Theory of Assembly* 217). For Butler, resistance must be plural because, as demonstrated in the above analysis of her elaboration of Althusser’s conception of interpellation, she believes that “we cannot understand bodily vulnerability outside of this conception of relations” (*Theory of Assembly* 130). The crowd that exercises its democratic right in demonstrations of public assembly evidences the relationality of social life in two ways: in its purported reliance on the political or social institutions which they ask to recognise and respond to their claim to a better life; and through the collective nature of the protest, which indicates that the people present are also dependent on one another for community.

Butler’s claim is that while such a mobilisation physically demonstrates the bodies of the people that are exposed to precarity, and while that demonstration can expose them to further injury (if their mobilisation is stopped by the police, for example, and people are sent to prison—or attacked by an opposing political group, as was the case on 17 May 2017 when supporters of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoganhe violently charged a group of peaceful protestors outside the Turkish ambassador’s residence in Washington), they are also simultaneously resisting the social powers to which they are vulnerable. In this configuration, resistance is exercised by using the power of the collective assembly to demand change. Philosopher Nikita Dhawan, however, argues that public displays of common vulnerability are less effective than Butler makes out, noting that “deep asymmetries of power and wealth cannot be corrected simply by sharing the street or cyberspace for a common cause or facing police violence together” (Dhawan). The subject of the following section will be the political implications of this counterclaim.

### *A Counterclaim to Butler’s Theory of Assembly*

Butler’s *Theory of Assembly*, which is crucial to my reading of SF for its emphasis on the conditions of vulnerability and precarity, which are also key themes in my corpus of SF, has been met with widespread popularity

and holds notable transdisciplinary influence. It is interesting to note the absence of substantial critique of Butler's theory of assembly and the lack of significant dialogue around privileged modes of activism. For this reason, I interject at this point with an important counterclaim that has been levelled against the book by Nikita Dhawan.

Dhawan cautions against Butler's advocacy of spontaneous solidarity, arguing that both bodily messages of public solidarity and digital gestures of resistance (from "Facebook revolutions" to Twitter "storms" or "#insurgencies"), often play into what she terms an "erotics of resistance" ("The Unbearable Slowness of Change").<sup>12</sup> Dhawan's critique of horizontal solidarity draws inspiration from both Lacanian *jouissance* and Deleuze and Guattari's work on the erotics of capitalism, "the way a bureaucrat fondles his records ... the bourgeoisie fucks the proletariat. Flags, nations, armies, banks get a lot of people aroused" (Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 293). For Dhawan, the recent influx in the mainstream popularity of activism—from Spain's *indignados* movement to the Women's Marches in the USA—demonstrates the popularity of the "fantasies of radical change" that "are getting a lot of urban, class-privileged subjects very aroused" ("The Unbearable Slowness of Change"). This is troubling for Dhawan on several counts:

The romantic enthusiasm evoked by popular movements erases the exploitative and exclusionary material conditions that make possible the exercise of agency of the dissidents. When, for instance, an anti-capitalist protester tweets with his/her I-Pad, which is produced under super-exploitative working conditions in the global South, the phantasm of subverting capitalism reveals itself as a surreal moment of class-privileged *jouissance*. Such radical politics is marked by a discontinuity between those who resist and those who cannot.

("The Unbearable Slowness of Change")

The irony of the anti-capitalist who tweets their way towards a critique of the state is, Dhawan claims, lost on many well-intentioned campaigns. This is because, she argues, the *jouissance* evoked by popular movements often disguises the material conditions through which they are able to come into formation. The privilege of the bodies that are able to make it into the street and the devices with which they often rally support is obscured through the "romantic enthusiasm" they evoke in the spirit of protest. Worse, these movements often show little awareness of their deep imbrication, and even complicity, in the oppression and voicelessness of subaltern peoples: "The fact that they are complicit in the very structures that they are contesting is conveniently veiled by the rhetorics of the disenfranchised global demos" ("The Unbearable Slowness of Change"). As Dhawan pointed out in her

2018 lecture at the University of Budapest, the fact that *Time Magazine's* person of the year 2017 was the protestor suggests that even rebellious civil society has become “a safety valve of the state that releases pressure and de-escalates without fundamental transformation” (“Transnational Justice and Gendered Vulnerability” 00:38:15–00:38:31). Drawing on Gramsci’s work on passive civil revolution, within which “the old is dying but the new cannot be born”, Dhawan argues that many political movements that clamour for radical change falsely juxtapose the “wickedness of the state against the inherent goodness of civil society” (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 276; Dhawan, “The Unbearable Slowness of Change”). In doing so, they underestimate the way in which civil society’s ability to initiate change is forestalled by its implication in the creation and perpetration of injustice, even as it claims to resist it.<sup>13</sup>

I would like to briefly pivot in the direction of the various ways I have identified privileged bodies claiming rights on behalf of more vulnerable populations. These bodies illustrate Dhawan’s elaboration of Foucault’s mantra “là où il y a pouvoir, il y a résistance” [where there is power, there is resistance] into another formulation: “I would add [to that], where there is resistance, there is power (Foucault 125; Dhawan “The Unbearable Slowness of Change”). The inextricable entanglement between forms of power and resistance means that it is often those on the privileged side of transnationalism that are most vocal in their pronouncement of global inequality. This can be illustrated in the case of Ratajkowski, a model who gained status through her Instagram account, on which she now advertises the clothes she designs in collaboration with well-known brands. Ratajkowski gained further attention for identifying as a feminist and for arguing that women can be “Serious *and* Sexual” (Ratajkowski). Ratajkowski’s mode of activism, however, is self-directed, the images on her Instagram account that she posts as a kind of “activism” are almost exclusively of her, effectively boosting her status as a fashion influencer. It might be argued that Christie Turlington, through her non-profit Every Mother Counts,<sup>14</sup> manages to also direct attention elsewhere, to the plight of mothers in the Global South (the company offers aid to Bangladesh, India, Guatemala, Haiti, Tanzania, and Uganda, as well as the USA). Regardless, the glamour that both women project onto their roles of model-come-activist incurs what Dhawan describes as a kind of “class privileged *jouissance*” among their followers: their combined 18.5 million Instagram followers avidly await these women’s latest posts featuring the promise of change, the sexiness of caring, and the excitement of “progress” made progressing the feminist cause. This contagious *jouissance* arguably obscures the conditions by which these women are able to publicly resist their chosen causes.

What I believe underlies Dhawan’s analysis of the complicity between resistance and power is an awareness of the superficiality of much of

this kind of contemporary activism. There is little doubt that figures like Ratajkowski have made feminism “cool” (and subsequently ripe for commodification by brands like Dior, who in 2017 designed a bestselling t-shirt that reads “we should all be feminists”<sup>15</sup>—yours for €550.00). The implication is that when the wind of change blows, and the crowds cease to enjoy their idols’ dedication to a cause, the privileged will cease to care. Dhawan might not be opposed to this, given that she asks that the privileged might “unlearn the impulse to monopolise agency in the name of saving the world” (2015), which, as an impulse trapped within late capitalism, in fact “sustains the discontinuities between those who resist and those who cannot” (2015). Handed to them by the arm of capitalism, it is the global financial market that grants “activists” like Turlington and Ratajkowski the power to raise awareness for their chosen causes. Thus, the “celebratory discourses” evoked by capitalist notions of a philanthropic “giving back” overlook the way in which activism’s privileged few can buffer the state’s structuring forces, even as they claim to oppose them.

While Dhawan posits that “the fabricated fiction that all bodies are equal on the street or in cyberspace disavows the hierarchies that permeate social and political relations globally” (2015), my reading of Butler’s *Theory of Assembly* is not that she believes that “all bodies are equal on the street” or that embodied resistance obscures social hierarchies, but conversely that bodies on the street demonstrate in uneven equality, making visible the gaps and inconsistencies that make the social space inhabitable for some but not for others. Regardless of these discrepancies, I view Dhawan’s critique as a useful elaboration of Butler’s work in the sense that it raises the important question of how to avoid the frenzy of pleasure, verging on sexual excitement, that often arises in moments of resistance, whether during the material formations of a street protest or the digital territory marked by an imminent twitter revolution. Anti-state protests, Dhawan argues, “disregard the political implications of state-phobic positions”, and the state, she claims, is often crucial to the success of emancipatory progressive projects. This poses a question that she formulates as “how do we convert poison into counter poison”: how can we re-configure both the state and the acts of protest that claim to oppose it, so that protest culture does not take the form of a “state celebration”, but prioritises a long-term strategy that ensures an enduring project of change (“Transnational Justice and Gendered Vulnerability”).

I would suggest that Dhawan’s critique is a necessary addition to theories of collective agency and renegotiations of the concept of vulnerability, particularly for its suggestion that an adjustment in the temporality of acts of resistance can ensure that the stimulating aspects of resistance are not privileged at the expense of effective change. To this effect, following her lecture at the University of Budapest on 5 May 2018,



I asked Dhawan where she thought that her question of how to “convert poison into counter poison” sits in relation to the temporal bookends proposed by Spivak’s formulation of how change can be achieved: that is, the “short-haul” versus the “long-haul” (“Acting Bits/Identity Talk” 782). Using Spivak’s metaphor of daily maintenance in the face of inescapable mortality, or what Laura E. Donaldson humorously terms “political tartar control” (192), Dhawan explains that making change can be understood through the metaphor of brushing one’s teeth daily. This simple, daily task illustrates the consistent, regular acts of resistance and maintenance required to “convert poison into counter poison”. Her conception of the laborious, incremental, and often deeply unstimulating process of making change resonates with the way in which Mother Teresa conducted her acts of charity: instead of trying to save the world with immediate effect, she encouraged people to “help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you”.<sup>16</sup>

Whether or not public assembly is as effective or powerful as Butler proposes, both she and Dhawan share an interest in the conditions by which collective action comes into effect (“Affirmative Sabotage of the Master’s Tools” 61), and converge in their respective investigations of what it means to be human: Butler in her interrogation of which humans are recognised as humans and which are not, and Dhawan in her extensive work on decolonising writing in relation to Enlightenment modes of thinking (“Affirmative Sabotage of the Master’s Tools”). This evidences both the topicality of anti-Enlightenment critique and an increase in theorisations of subjectivity that attempt to counter notions of the singular and self-contained European male subject of Enlightenment humanism. Butler’s hybrid and multiple “I” is always reliant on the other. This kind of collective resistance is embodied and inclusive, rather than homogeneous and universal. In this section, I explore the ways in which Braidotti’s divergent appeal to reject the universalism of the Enlightenment subject champions an alternative mode of “embedded and embodied relational forms of knowledge production” (“The Contested Posthumanities” 10), and thus complements Butler’s understanding of the role of the relational subject in collective assembly.

### *Inter-relationality and Collectivity in Braidotti and Butler*

Where Butler explores the forms of agency that can be collectively exercised in the negative state of vulnerability, Braidotti’s Spinozist conception of *conatus* as “pure affirmative affectivity” (“Affirming the Affirmative”) offers an alternative theorisation of the way in which interconnected assemblages of embodied subjects can assert agency. A reading of this divergence and complementarity is foundational to my later analysis of primary texts from



my corpus of SF, explores the anti-racist and gender-inclusive potential of communities forged between nomadic and interrelational entities.

Braidotti's new materialist approach is grounded in a Deleuzian vitalism "resting on a Spinozist ontology" ("Affirming the Affirmative"), part of a "surge of academic work on Deleuze" that signals "the end of the linguistic turn" ("Transitzone"). Braidotti believes that the linguistic turn, which includes Butler's discursive analysis of the speech act at the heart of Althusserian interpellation, has led Butler to weigh down Spinoza's theory of self-preservation in an unnecessary reflection on vulnerability and loss. She states that: "My loving quarrel with Butler is that she pushes the linguistic turn to extremes. And the only place where this gets us to is mourning and melancholia, the aporetic" ("Transitzone"). Braidotti thus critiques Butler's means of approach to a relational and accountable entity, arguing that this "logic of irreparable loss, unpayable debt and perpetual mourning", which is applied to her theorisation of the way in which agentic collectives can be forged in shared vulnerability, pain, and precarity, misreads Spinoza's work on the instinct of the conatus towards self-preservation. Braidotti believes that her own Deleuzian approach to Spinoza's *Ethics*, which attempts to theorise a way to overcome vulnerability by transforming negative affects into "something active and productive", stands in contradiction to Butler's method ("Affirmation Versus Vulnerability" 14). However, as I will argue, when read together in a complementary analysis, their re-evaluations of affect and collective resistance, grounded in queer and gender theory and with feminist and anti-racist intentions as their corollary, make visible variant but corroborative new forms of humanism. These humanistic gestures negate the traditional humanist notion of a unitary "self" while simultaneously forwarding the idea of collective resistance.

Braidotti claims that a "Deleuzian Spinozist approach" (*Metamorphoses* 108) to conceptualising the interdependency of the posthuman subject takes multi-directional desire as that which propels the subject onwards, driving it towards encounters and transgressions:

Thus, a nomadic or Deleuzian Spinozist approach stresses that the affectivity (conatus) is indeed at the heart of the subject, but that it is equally the case that this desire is not internalised, but external. It happens in the encounter between different embodied and embedded subjects who are joined in the sameness of the forces that drive them. Intensive, affective, eternal resonances make desire into a force that propels forward, but also always remains in front of us, as a dynamic, shifting horizon of multiple other encounters, of territorial and border crossings of all kinds.

(*Metamorphoses* 108)

Braidotti's understanding of the plurality of embodied existence also relies, as Butler does, on a theory of affect: embodied subjects are both united by the shared "forces that drive them", and are made and remade through repeated encounters with each other. Braidotti accuses Butler of focusing on a "negative, mournful theory of desire" (*Metamorphoses* 52) that corresponds with the "Hegelian-Lacanian vision of the constitution of the subject" (*Metamorphoses* 53). Where Braidotti believes that Butler engages in an "explicit rejection of Deleuze's theory of desire" (*Metamorphoses* 57), she claims throughout *Metamorphoses* to draw heavily on Deleuze's objection to the Freudian conception of desire as lack, as well as Spinoza's understanding of desire as the most powerful invocation of connections between and within subjects. But Braidotti's Deleuzian Spinozist conception of affective desire is, I would argue, not antithetical to Butler's own affective theory of assembly: the interrelationality of all entities is, in both their work, the condition by which those subjectivities are entered into a never-ending matrix of encounters.

Desire has, for Braidotti, the capacity to both incorporate cultural capital and move beyond them as demarcations of identity with which a subject's value is measured. Invoking the concept of *jouissance* that has been employed in, for example, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Hélène Cixous's poststructuralist feminist theory, and Foucault's work on new strategies of *jouissance* that counter the normalisation of pleasure, Braidotti views desire as an "excessive, transgressive and boundary-breaking pleasure" (*Metamorphoses* 53), which enables the nomadic subject to contravene and disaffirm the boundaries of race and gender, and self and other. Desire is the momentum that instigates the process of becoming-other, so that the subject can persistently advance, or "shift horizons" (*Metamorphoses* 100). In this sense, desire is for Braidotti a not yet, that which "always remains in front of us" (100). This is both a queer and utopian formulation of becoming-other—utopian in its imagining of new horizons and its constant deferral of the end of the process of becoming-other, and queer because of the shifting and proliferating desire of its subjectivities. The queer utopianism of Braidotti's nomadic subject speaks to the work of Muñoz, for whom the momentum found in the utopian not yet is central to a conception of queer futurity: "Queerness, if it is to have any political resonance, needs to be more than an identitarian marker and to articulate a forward-dawning futurity" (*Cruising Utopia* 87). Muñoz believed that "queerness" has the capacity to reach beyond the markers of what makes us "us" in the now, to incorporate into itself possible subject positions belonging to a future time. Indeed, the malleable parameters of Braidotti's posthuman, which reach out towards future encounters and Deleuzian becomings, are fuelled by an arguably queer brand of desire that persistently evades fixity. Braidotti's nomadic

subjectivities can, therefore, be seen to be characterised by a “queerness”. They disrupt the normative to construct what I would consider as possible queer utopias that straddle past, present, and future: “Becomings are un-programmed as mutations, disruptions, and points of resistance. Their time frame is always the future anterior, that is to say a linkage across present and past in the act of constructing and actualising possible futures” (“Affirming the Affirmative”). Always unfinished, these desiring and agentic becomings “queer” the fixity of the complete and impermeable subject of Enlightenment humanism. Located in the future anterior—between that which is “no longer” and that which is “not yet”—the “flows of patterns” that make up Braidotti’s posthuman “becomings” straddle the tenses, defying linear time by retrieving new possible pasts. The future anterior resists the stagnation and inevitability of the present moment by asking what we will need to have done to achieve a different future. Nomadic subjectivities thus reach beyond their temporal and social frames to explore the “otherwise” offered by the future anterior, which is less a tense than a desire for change, “disruption” and “resistance”. This temporal movement can therefore be seen as the product of a queer hermeneutic, one that denies historicism to instead ask the subject to constantly seek out for itself new presents and new futures.

I view Braidotti’s conception of a nomadic posthumanist subject who “works across differences and is also internally differentiated” (*The Posthuman* 49) as holding more similarities than differences to Butler’s own conception of subjectivity, which also counters the singularity of the substantive subject of traditional humanisms. In Butler’s case, this is achieved by conceptualising an “I” that is forever approaching a “you”. In *Senses of the Subject*, Butler elaborates Emmanuel Lévinas’s idea of ethical relations to claim that “moving beyond” the “self” is the condition for an ontological relation to oneself, which is always secondary to the self’s relation to others (*Senses of the Subject* 78).<sup>17</sup> The process of becoming is thus also a process of “becoming-other”, which inevitably also necessitates a kind of self-dispossession. Butler has articulated this in her reading of Spinoza’s conception of “self-preservation”, in which she suggests that the desire to “persevere in one’s own being” is also bound up in an “ethics” of bodies which “incite one another to live” (quoted in *Senses of the Subject* 64, 65). This analysis situates Butler within a group of philosophers who have called for a reprisal of a relational ontology, which argues that this conception of the “you” should be at the core of contemporary ethics and politics (*Senses of the Subject* 197). These theorists have turned towards the other to ask, “Who are you?” (Arendt 172); declared that the “I” returns not to itself but to the other and “for-the-other” (*Is it Righteous to Be?* 54); and criticised the fact that “the ‘you’ is ignored by the individualistic doctrines, which are too preoccupied with praising the rights of the I” (Cavarero

90). Importantly, the “you” is, as Butler puts it, even in heavily gendered Romance languages, a pronoun which is also “open-ended precisely on the question of gender” (*Senses of the Subject* 197). Therefore:

The “you” might as well take the place of “man” in the quest for a human beyond the constituted horizon of humanism. If there is a relation between this “you” whom I seek to know, whose gender cannot be determined, whose nationality cannot be presumed, and who compels me to relinquish violence, then this mode of address articulates not just a non-violent future for the human, but for a new conception of the human where some manner of touch other than violence is the precondition of that making.

(*Senses of the Subject* 197)

For Butler, this process of “becoming-other” (*Undoing Gender* 149) is always incomplete, because the “you” will always be just out of reach. The “yielding” of the “I” to the “you” not only undermines the stand-alone agency of the “I” of Enlightenment humanism—it can even substitute “man” entirely. As an always-unidentifiable humanist subject, the “you” also escapes possible misrecognition: if, in always being sought out, it can never be discovered, its identity therefore always remains elusive, and so it avoids possible interpellation. Unable to be hailed and subsequently classified within the categories of race and gender, the nomadic, wandering “you” is able to avoid the potential violence of gender and racial targeting and misrecognition. In Butler’s words, this second person pronoun also avoids being necessarily “assigned a gender [or, as I have argued above, a race] through pronominal reference or repeated treatment and practice” (*Senses of the Subject* 14). To reformulate her metaphor of interpellation, if the forever-unknown “you” is Althusser’s pedestrian on the street, they would be too distant for the policeman to hail, and therefore just beyond the grasp of interpellation.

Where Butler’s blurring of an “I” that becomes other than itself is a theorisation of human subjectivity, Braidotti’s conception of “becoming” is distinctly non-anthropocentric in its approach. She is keen to emphasise that the life form taken by the posthuman subject is “no longer ‘bios,’ but rather ‘zoe’: non-anthropocentric, but also non-anthropomorphic” (“Posthuman, All Too Human” 24). Braidotti’s nomadic becomings are complex assemblages and interactions that emerge through the “colossal hybridisation” of human, machine and insect (“Affirming the Affirmative”). Her critique of Enlightenment humanism is therefore founded in a theorisation of the interrelationality of both human and nonhuman forces. She claims that “Technologies induce a dislocation of the subject”, radically upending the “metaphysical cannibalism”<sup>18</sup> practised by the subject of

Enlightenment Humanism, who, to exist as a hierarchical superior to other Earthly creations, must “[feed] on what it excludes” (*Metamorphoses* 197).

Braidotti’s non-anthropocentric analysis is sensitive to the advancements in technology and scientific research that render the question of hybridity increasingly complex: while the subject of late twentieth-century postmodernity was already fluid and hybrid, the post-Anthropocene endows any given entity with a different kind of hybridity, one that is now engaged with technology, humanity, inanimate matter, and the assemblages formed between them. Political scientist Jane Bennett’s work *Vibrant Matter* (2010), for example, is one such theoretical innovation that has radicalised perceptions of human-other hybridity in the modern era. Bennett’s theory of “vibrant matter” does this by emphasising the interrelatedness of human and nonhuman agencies. The kind of matter that Western philosophy often theorises in terms of inanimateness is, when seen through Bennett’s vital materialism, a force that actively participates in events: the electronic power grid, for example, depends not only on “humans and their constructions”, but “some very powerful nonhumans: electrons, trees, wind, fire, electromagnetic fields” (*Vibrant Matter* 24). This notion of hybridity also reveals a sinister side: Bennett describes how waste dumped by human hands onto a hill in Norwich becomes an oozing, trickling “stew of oil and grease, of cyanide and arsenic, of cadmium, chromium, copper lead, nickel, silver, mercury and zinc” (*Vibrant Matter* 6). Accounts like this, of moving, oozing matter, contribute to a more nuanced discernment of the web of forces that govern events and situations. Bennett argues that this kind of analysis of human–nonhuman hybridity is more likely to provide a sound ecological politics than Enlightenment-descended philosophies, which she believes solely emphasise humanity’s agentic position in countering an environmental catastrophe of its own design. Political action, on the other hand, that draws on a conception of the interrelatedness of human and nonhuman agencies buffers, rather than counters, human exceptionalism and provides the framework for a sustainable ethics. This exploration of critiques of anthropocentrism by theorists who attempt to break down the polarity between the animate and the inanimate and to draw attention to the intersection of human and non-human processes would not be complete without mentioning the biologist and cultural theorist Donna Haraway<sup>19</sup> who has emphasised that “nonhumans are active, not passive, resources or products” and has used examples of science fictional eco-systems to illustrate this (*How Like a Leaf* 34), including Octavia Butler’s gene-trading community in her *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy (1987–1989), described in detail in the opening novel, *Dawn* (1987). Haraway comments that the Oankali, as these extraterrestrials call themselves, are “completely webbed into a universe of living machines, all of which are partners—not enemies—in their apparatus of bodily production, including the ship on which the action of

*Dawn* takes place” (*How Like a Leaf* 70). Haraway reads the text as a utopian invocation of a hybrid and inter-relational species, whose individual bodies constitute a “semipermeable self that is able to engage with others (human and nonhuman, inner and outer)” (*How Like a Leaf* 70). The Oankali do not, as humans do, “build non-living technologies to mediate their self-formation” (*How Like a Leaf* 70). Instead, they recognise that the life force in all entities (which, in another context, Braidotti has termed the “zoe-centred egalitarianism” at “the core of the postanthropocentric feminist turn”) is an essential component of their own existence (“The Posthuman in Feminist Theory” 686). In doing so, the Oankali also make it impossible for the humans to reduce them to entities that can be defined with certainty within their systems of race and gender. Haraway’s analysis attests to SF’s particular compatibility with these ventures into the overlooked interactions between life forms: it is a mode of writing which boldly demonstrates the reconfigurations of racialised and gendered subjectivity that are made possible by a non-anthropocentric humanism.

But while Bennett, Braidotti, and Haraway propose feminist theories within which systems of race and gender are lost within the matrix of non-anthropocentric difference and human inter-relationality, Mark Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism* (2009) warns of the way in which agency can be extracted from human–nonhuman assemblages. Fisher argues that “the consequence of being hooked into the entertainment matrix is twitchy, agitated interpassivity, an inability to concentrate or focus” (24). Braidotti does not underestimate the negative consequences of the kinds of hybridisations also formed “within the inflationary logic of advanced capitalism” (*Nomadic Theory* 12). However, even as she notes that “this proliferation of different subject formations perpetuates exploitation”, the focus of her analysis depends on the way in which this phenomenon “also expresses new emerging actors and positively self-defined ‘others’” (*Nomadic Theory*). But Braidotti’s theory of subject nomadism is, to its core, an affirmative one. Discarding the flexibility that emerges through late capitalism as “pseudo nomadism”, she positions her nomadic subject in the margins, where it can “destabilise and activate the centre” by “plunging its roots in feminist theory and antiracist politics” (*Nomadic Theory* 5). This political anchoring allows her to retain the focus of her nomadic theory on the potential of the technologically mediated world to break through the self/other dialectic of devalued difference and upend divisive and mutually exclusive identity categories, including black/white, male/female, and human/non-human. Drawing on the work of Indian environmental activist Vandana Shiva (1997), Braidotti claims that speciesism can be “held accountable as an undue privilege to the same degree as sexism and racism” (*The Posthuman* 77). Braidotti believes that nomadic theory can counter speciesism by focusing on “the complexity of

the network of forces that come to bear on the subject”, displacing the idea of the sanctity of an autonomous human “I”, and effacing “established, that is to say hegemonic, distinctions of class, culture, race, sexual practice and others” (*Metamorphoses* 9). Braidotti’s blurring of species subsequently precipitates an ontological uncertainty within which “dissonant differences” and interdependences escape “dualistic modes of interrelation” (*Metamorphoses* 185).

The posthuman reveals that humanity, as defined by Enlightenment humanisms, is doubly divisive, separating a supposedly superior human kind from all other creations, while simultaneously creating internal demarcations within the category of “human” itself, such as race, sex, class, and gender. Belonging to no single species entirely, Braidotti’s nomadic subject de-centres the human, upending anthropological “certainties” of type, race, and sex, as well as non-anthropological categories relating to, for example, machines, plants, and animals. Cultural studies theorist Ien Ang has pointed to the destabilising potential of postmodern identity formation as simultaneous to both race and gender, arguing that the deterritorialisation performed by a nomadic, fragmented entity upsets the essentialist pigeonholing of individuals. She argues that:

in the midst of the postmodern flux of nomadic subjectivities we need to recognise the continuing and continuous operation of “fixing” performed by the categories of race and ethnicity, as well as class, gender, geography, etc. on the formation of “identity”.

(34)

Nomadic subjectivity thus “unfixes” the power relations that have sedimented racial and gender attributes onto certain bodies. The postmodern approach to analysing “subject formation” brings to the fore not only the interlinking web of cultural capital that connects race with gender, but the very process of “fixing” which covers its own tracks and leaves the effects of its processes (of racialising and gendering) invisible. As Rogers Brubaker has argued in *Trans* (2016), while gender is increasingly understood as a social formation, race is still rarely seen as the product of an intersectional process of racialisation. Brubaker points to the policing of race both by racist social institutions and activist communities (who might, for example, seek to affirm a “black political identity”) as reasons why race is rarely seen as a choice and a construction (111). Race, he argues, is seen instead as a sign of “history, lineage, or intergenerational continuity” (138), which are, in turn, often experienced by racial communities as “forms of property” (158). Slavery and other forms of racial domination, on the one hand, and cultural appropriation and racism, on the other hand, have contributed to this popular movement of retrieval and



re-assertion of certain cultural practices and styles as the “property” of a racialised person or community. As illustrated in his example of Rachel Dolezal’s “transraciality” (125), a person’s attempt to adopt the history, practices, and styles emblematic of racial identity as their own has led to a widespread declaration of “racial fraud” (62) and “cultural theft” (3), criticisms not often levied towards transgender people in contemporary Western media.

Brubaker asks whether transracial subjectivities, such as Dolezal, signal a movement into the “trans of beyond”, which opens up “forms of difference that would exist not only *between* genders or races but *beyond* gender and race as systems of social classification” (112). As Braidotti cautions, it is important that such a movement “beyond” the categories of race and gender does not also create “a future beyond difference” (*Nomadic Theory* 237). Her nomadic theory does not propose that we move beyond difference, but that difference is seen as a process. In his exploration of “the trans of beyond” as either “post-racial” or “neo-categorical”/“anti-categorical”, Brubaker’s approach to the “post-racial” aligns most closely with Braidotti’s conception of difference as constant transition and translation (118). For Brubaker, “post-racial” is a term which “[denotes] a direction of change, not an end state”. “Neo-categorical” or “anti-categorical” racial identities, on the other hand, indicate a form of “multiracial” identity that “functions as a kind of anti-categorical category”, thus still centring around one particular, fixed and complete subjectivity (127–8).

Entered together into a radically posthuman politics of difference, in which difference is positioned as “the principle of not-One, that is to say as differing” (*Transpositions* 145), race and gender are unfixed as part of the ontological re-evaluation of what it means to be human. As demonstrated in particular by my analysis of SF’s hybrid bodies in Chapter 4, nomadic theory opens up the possibility of different kinds of “beyonds” of race and gender only as part of its attempted defeat speciesism, so that race, gender, and the human are also bound up in machinic assemblages of organic and inorganic. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti uses the machinic to undo the dichotomy between man and machine and instead expresses a Deleuzian figuration of a materialist, monstrous expression of Ex Machina—“from the machine”—a dynamic and hybrid creation that is always under construction:

The model of the posthuman body proposed by the brand of nomadism I am defending is symbiotic inter-dependence. This points to the co-presence of different elements, from different stages of evolution, like inhabiting different time-zones simultaneously. The human organism is neither wholly human, as a person, nor just an organism. It is an



abstract machine, radically immanent, which captures, produces and transforms interconnections.

(“Affirming the Affirmative”)

Braidotti’s understanding of the spatiotemporality of the posthuman subject, which straddles “different time-zones simultaneously”, lends itself to a comparison with SF as a genre, which itself performs a temporal manoeuvre that often upsets the linearity of the spaces of past, present, and future. As I will later elucidate through a reading of SF texts, including Bodard’s *Citadel of Weeping Pearls*, the imminence of the Deleuzian “abstract machine” fuses together human, technological, and other earthy critters across time and space, pointing towards assemblages that are yet to be articulated.

Wandering between time zones, species, and planets, Braidotti proposes a conception of subjectivity that is at once situated and radically nomadic, echoing Butler’s formulation of a wandering, open-ended “you” that constitutes the self. Indeed, Butler also owes this formulation to Deleuze’s study of Spinoza: she proposes that “part of what the body does (to use the phrase of Deleuze, derived from his reading of Spinoza) is to open onto the body of another, or a set of others” (*Theory of Assembly* 114–15). While Butler does not explicitly speak of subject nomadism, her theory of assembly also explicitly relies on a Deleuzian configuration of the openness of bodies that create assemblages. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler engages with Braidotti’s point that the multiple locations inhabited by the nomadic subject of contemporaneity can “produce new sites for transformation” when comparing her own cross-cultural education with that of Braidotti (*Undoing Gender* 201). She claims that the similarities and differences incurred by a politics of location that assumes a different form in her and Braidotti’s writing can be productive: differing modes of global theory remain in open conversation so as to ensure that “The lines that we draw are invitations to cross over and that crossing over, as any nomadic subject knows, constitutes who we are” (*Undoing Gender* 203). This final invocation of Braidotti’s nomadic subject—she says, “as any nomadic subject knows”—suggests that she does not reject the concept from her theoretical parameter, and perhaps even partially defines herself as one. Regardless, the queer meanderings of her open-ended “you” constitute a radical form of subjectivity—embodied and abstract in equal measure—with the potential to debase the fixity of essentialist markers of identity, such as gender and race, indefinitely.

The durability of these new humanist subjectivities is another point of contact between Butler and Braidotti: Butler’s ever-evolving “you” and Braidotti’s nomadic entities are also “sustainable subjects”, continually formed by endless linkages, mutations, and nomadisms. Where

Enlightenment humanism proposed a stagnant conception of the self, grounded in the gender, race, and status of the male and privileged European who demanded “rational control and productive domination” (*Nomadic Subjects* 191) over his subjects, Braidotti’s posthumanism aims to be inter-relational, regenerative, and non-hierarchical. Paraphrasing Deleuze, Braidotti notes that “the primary movement of renewal of the subject is the dissolution of gender dichotomies and the identities that rest on them” (*Nomadic Subjects* 251). Free from the colonising force of the human/non-human divide and the gender binary, nomadic subjectivities can, in their queer temporality, endlessly evolve, transform, and project themselves into the future. For Braidotti, the temporal dimension to endurance, as in the extended timespan that the word implies, is what makes her posthumanism sustainable:

The concept of a sustainable self aims at endurance. Endurance has a temporal dimension: it has to do with lasting in time—hence duration and self-perpetuation. But it also has a spatial side to do with the space of the body. It means putting up with, tolerating hardship and physical pain. Ultimately, as Irigaray put, it requires a generous belief in the potentialities of a virtual future, also known as: “I had a dream”.

(“Between the No Longer and the Not Yet”)

Braidotti’s embodied, sustainable self has a combined ability to overcome time, space, pain, and doubts about the future. Her final point, that a durable self must have faith in various manifestations of the virtual future, as expressed through the past tense of Martin Luther King’s famous invocation of utopia, in which the dream has already been achieved, makes a claim for sustainable humanism. SF’s transgression of the human/machine, male/female, black/white, and human/animal divides depends on the utopian imaginary’s ability to deflect finality and constantly explore new material becomings in the future. A posthuman reading of these SF texts should, therefore, make clear the ways in which the genre of SF can offer sustainable futures for those affected by racial and gender oppression in the present. Rather than shrugging off the present entirely, however, and escaping into a radically alternative future, the nomadic subject aims at endurance and continuity, straddling “different stages of evolution, like inhabiting different time-zones simultaneously” (*Metamorphoses* 226). Thus, the nomadic subject takes its capacity for endurance from the co-presence of these elements from different time zones that inhabit it simultaneously. This simultaneity is the cornerstone of its sustainability. It does not only belong to the present, because it is not merely a product of the present, but also of other times and spaces. This fact that nomadic entities are not free from the authority of the past suggests that we cannot radically and

immediately break from the regulatory systems of sexuality, which require a certain context to transform: instead, we must be measured and consistent in our attempts at what Braidotti terms “in-depth transformations or metamorphoses” (*Metamorphoses* 38), guided by a “deeply embedded vision of the embodied subject (*Metamorphoses* 63). In this sense, these steady and continuous transformations are embedded in a politics of location and accountability, ensuring a process of continual becoming that persistently evades us. Braidotti’s nomadic subject can be described in terms of Muñoz’s conception of queer futurity, as that which “must be viewed as being visible only on the horizon” (*Cruising Utopia* 11).

Braidotti’s cautious hermeneutics speaks about the more restrained promise of change visible in Butler’s recent works, including *Senses of the Subject* and *Theory of Assembly* (2015). As we have seen in this analysis of Butler’s invocation of the “ou”, this subject is located on the queer horizon, always just out of reach. The “you” functions according to a Deleuzian rhizomatic and co-directional relation, adapting and evolving with the subject “I” to constantly enrich how the “I” comes to know itself (*Mille Plateaux* 25). Butler describes her own “self-formative activity” as an ongoing communal process achieved with and through others (*Senses of the Subject* 6), referencing Braidotti when she refers to this process as “what some would call self-fashioning” (*Senses of the Subject* 6)—a term that Braidotti has employed to describe the process of “cultivating and facilitating productive encounters” which are necessarily also dependent on others (“Affirmation Versus Vulnerability” 3). Their humanistic intentions for the process of self-fashioning echo Fanon: “In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 229). Fanon’s reparative humanism responds to the Enlightenment subject’s need to flex his agency in order to fulfil the agentic role required of that very subject position, but Fanon invests this desire in a radically different ontology, one based on lived experience and encounters. The process of constituting the self is here always more than singular identity, and always incomplete. Butler appears to pay homage to Fanon when she modifies her earlier work on performativity—that fragile process by which social subjects toe the identity line through the daily enactment of their assigned gender, according to the sex-gender continuum—to suggest that the “self” is never fully formed, always in need of encounter with others: it is characterised by its utopian potential, and its permanent state is incompleteness. Rather than zealously encouraging individual acts of subversion to deviate from expected gender performance, as she first suggested in her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” (1988), Butler emphasises in *Senses of the Subject* that while “gender can emerge in ways that break with, or deviate from, mechanical patterns of

repetition”, norms also always “precede us and act upon us” (*Senses of the Subject* 64). In an interview with Butler, and by way of a final question, Fiona Jenkins addresses the temporality and spatiality of Butler’s approach to this double bind faced by the vulnerable subject-in-relation:

How can the primary vulnerability of our constitution in relations that always precede and exceed ourselves come to be seen not as the constant stumbling block of morality but as the binding place of ethical life? ... How might reaction pause, and take on the burden of opening up a space of forgiving?.

(53)

The “space of forgiving” that Jenkins identifies within the formation of Butler’s “constitution in relations” suggests that the durability and sustainability of an interrelational humanism depend also on a “break” from “reaction”, even, perhaps, from the fruitfully reactive moment of the rupture of gender norms that Butler evokes in her early work on performativity. In this configuration of vulnerability, it is spatialised into an expression of not only the permanent experience of “our constitution”, one that extends across space and time, but also into a possible remedy: the “binding place of ethical life” and a “space of forgiving”. Butler’s configuration of vulnerability as “the binding place of ethical life”, when read in conjunction with several of my chosen works of SF, in particular Valloran’s *Il Cuore Finto di DR* and *Sulla Sabbia di Sur*, appears as situated and agentic, a space of congregation and action. These novels demonstrate that the combination of the mobility and permanence of Butler’s constellations of precarious lives makes for a humanism that is both plastic and durable enough to endure through time and space. Butler’s theorisation of the interdependency of human precarity, therefore, complements Braidotti’s interconnected nomadism by suggesting that an ethical responsibility towards the “other” can be fulfilled through an affective process, because precarity is in itself an affective concept. Also in Braidotti’s terms, the politics of affect is conceptualised as a spatialised set of social relations: the rhizomatic forms of her nomadic entities allow for affective encounters in densely material spaces. These subjects in flux, which take form and transform in relation to others, move across and destabilise the foundational lines of gender, ethnicity, and race.

I have, in this section, shown how Braidotti and Butler call for a world that is also humane and liveable for those oppressed by the exclusionary social criteria of gender and race. Looking to Deleuze and Haraway, Braidotti argues that this is a matter of retreating from the Anthropocene to question the “human” in humane. For Butler, a Hegelian approach to the potentialities of human vulnerability is key to demanding a “good life”

for all (humanity). Both are formulations of a reciprocal dependency based on the premise that the subject can both affect and be affected. They also have as their consequence the upending of the self/other dialectic, upon which gender and racial hierarchies rely, as well as the proliferation of subjectivity across the lines of gender, ethnicity, race, and class. In the sense of “affect” as “to move”, this proliferation is dependent on the subject being “in motion” and that movement being oriented towards the “other”. The passions—whether love, desire, or pain—are the driving force to this passage between self and other.

We have seen Braidotti’s rendition of Spinoza’s desiring assemblage alongside Butler’s agentic and vulnerable collective. To live and to want to live is the prerogative of both Braidotti’s nomadic subject and Butler’s pursuit of an “I” that can only be referenced in relation to a “you”. In a Spinozist matrix of desire from which no “I” can emerge, life force oscillates between the “I” and the “you” so that the “I” is forced to relinquish its centrality. As Braidotti puts it, “The life in ‘me’ does not answer to my name: ‘I’ is just passing” (“The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible” 8). This spatiotemporal in-between, which sets itself apart from the imperative towards linear evolution, is the setting for patient and sustainable humanisms that grow from collectivities that are formed through difference. These are the kinds of collectivities that are visible in my corpus of SF, as demonstrated in Chapter 4 of this book, where a range of entities in a future time—from humans in the midst of global apocalypse to warships comprised of human, animal, and spirit—exist as subjects-in-motion, the products of multiple and ongoing encounters with and through the other.

These stories elucidate the way in which Braidotti oversteps the human-assigned subject categorisations of race and gender by asking how the posthuman can transcend difference. My textual analysis also experiments with Butler’s exploration of how it is possible for agency to be gained in the face of inescapable precarity, given that subject agency can only ever be exercised in relation to pre-existing discursive powers. The need for these modes of agentic and collective action is made acutely visible in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic settings: at the height of alien invasion, for example, or at the dawn of an intergalactic war. Whichever way the question of how entities come together in difference to assert agency is framed, the works of SF that form my corpus demonstrate that the answer demands the same terms: that we embrace our complex interconnectivity as relational beings. Purpose-built for the eradication of racial and gender violence and exclusion, a reading of these “humanisms” through works of SF asks that we encourage life—that we “incite one another to live”—and that we make that life liveable for all.

#### 4 Race, Gender, and the Apocalypse of the Anthropocene in Spivak and Gilroy

This section forms a parallel discussion of the ways in which two contemporary philosophers discuss race and gender in varying degrees in order to formulate new forms of humanism. I have chosen to focus here on Spivak and Gilroy because their theorisation of non-racialised collectivities in their respective versions of “planetary” humanisms can be linked to Butler’s theory of assembly and to Braidotti’s elaboration of nomadic subjectivities, and can be supported by an analysis of Halberstam’s work on, in particular, flexible and short-term modes of kinship. In these five critics’ examination of global racial and gender inequalities, humanisms are developed which potentially counter systems of race and gender by fostering an understanding of the hybridity and interdependency of all entities.

While Gilroy demonstrates a more explicit concern with issues of race than with gender, both critics suggest that gender illuminates the wider systemic injustices of heteropatriarchal normativity, from racial hierarchies to nationalism, imperialism, and slavery. For Spivak, gender is the “first instrument of abstraction”, for Gilroy “the modality through which race is lived”<sup>20</sup> (Spivak, “Acting Bits/Identity Talk” 30; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 85). In both instances, gender is not the central question, but points outwards of itself towards the formation of other symbolic capital, such as race. Gilroy also views the concept of race as an abstraction that conceals the way in which it has been “reconfigured” over time, and, in so doing, presents itself as a historical given. He explains that the struggle against racism, “retains heavy investments in the explanatory capacity of race as an abstraction even when the nature of that abstraction has moved away from nineteenth-century bio-logic and towards newer kinds of political anatomy” (“Multiculture” 71). Thus, taking neither the concept of race nor of gender for granted, Spivak and Gilroy present these terms, in differing ways, as sentry posts: guarded towers from which the wider workings of heteronormativity are made visible, and where the performances of subjectivity are most saliently policed. In other words, race and gender become approaches and methodologies through which to pursue their humanistic ambitions. These include introducing a radical alterity into the process of self-identification and negotiating the formation of possible planetary solidarities. These discussions are part of a theoretical manoeuvre towards what both Spivak and Gilroy have termed “planetary” thinking. The planetary rejects the self-proclaimed superiority of the Anthropocene and the strategies of negative alterity that are used to maintain its internal hierarchies. A new form of radical planetary alterity oversteps these spatial and categorical borderlines—as well as the supposed “borderlessness” of

capitalist globalisation—enabling a positive utopian re-imagining of global solidarities.

Spivak tells us that all her writing is marked by “a pervasive feminism” (*Other Asias* 10), a feminism which is invested with personal interest and insight: “I am a woman, therefore, women. You work it out” (*An Aesthetic Education* 136). However, Spivak’s “pervasive feminism” presents itself as an affirmatively deconstructive mode of “negotiating with structures of violence” (*Other Asias* 10; *Outside the Teaching Machine* 144) that re-positions feminist thought in relation to a post-colonial context with the aim of producing “a new politics through critical intimacy” (*Outside the Teaching Machine* 144). Gender, therefore, is used as a way in which to frame larger questions of subalternity, capitalist imperialism, and the construction of subjectivity. It is the latter I wish to focus on in this demonstration of how she positions race and gender as the points of entry into a planetary humanism, which provides the setting for the emergence of collectivities comprised of multiple and hybrid subjectivities. Responding to the question of why she writes about women in order to explore the interrelationality of human subjectivity, she explains:

Why have I written largely of women to launch the question of the recognition of ceaselessly shifting collectivities in our disciplinary practice? Because women are not a special case, but can represent the human, with the asymmetries attendant upon any such representation. As simple as that.

(Death of a Discipline 70)

Spivak here argues that gender is just one pre-supposed structural difference among many: an analysis of gender is useful merely as a lens through which the construction of difference can be confronted. Gender is not self-referential, but rather points away from itself towards questions of what it means to be registered as either “human”, “non-human”, or “not-quite human”. And yet, it has a special function for Spivak, hosting her discussion of the formation of other damaging essentialist categories. Her much repeated statement that “gender is our first instrument of abstraction” signals exactly this, that gender is the point of departure for an exploration of how human hierarchies are created and maintained (“What Is It to Vote?” 8; “Crimes of Identity” 215; “Gender in the Global Utopia” 9; *An Aesthetic Education* 9).<sup>21</sup> This is also the subject of her 2006 lecture “What is Gender? Where is Europe? Walking with Balibar”, in which she argues, in the context of what she views as Europe’s insistence on emphasising that “gendering” in Europe is separate from the forms that “gendering” takes elsewhere, that



“gender is negotiating not only class but also race here” and that “the use of the word gender need not be marked by cultural difference; for it is marked by class-mobility ... Sex-gender systems exist all over”.

(5)

Gender is thus “a space of immense difference”, the locus of the expansive entanglement of not only race, but also class (79).

Gilroy is not far from here. While in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) gender is not explored with as much emphasis as issues of race and class, *The Black Atlantic* (1993) positions gender as central to an understanding of the formation of race. Gilroy explains here that “gender is the modality through which race is lived”, a construction that exists only through its iterated performance (*The Black Atlantic* 85). In his 1994 essay “‘After the Love Has Gone’: Bio-politics and Etho-poetics in the Black Public Sphere”, Gilroy situates his engagement with “issues of gender and sexuality” as central to his investigation of the construction of racial particularity:

We also need far more patient and careful attention to the issues of gender and sexuality than critics have been inclined to engage in so far. These are the conduits of crossover potential as well as the unstable core of spuriously naturalised racial particularity.

(52)

The essay reflects Gilroy’s position within the intersectional tradition of anti-racist work produced by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) from the 1970s onwards. These contributions to anti-racist theory discuss the relationship between race, gender, and class, critiquing Marxist approaches to anti-racist theory while emphasising the interrelation of race and gender within interlocking systems of oppression (Gilroy et al., *The Empire Strikes Back*, 1982). In *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, also published in 1993, Gilroy briefly discusses gender through an analysis of the gendering of the image of “blackness” on the covers of “black hip-hop” albums, concluding that “distinctive modes of masculinity and femininity” are produced during a process of racialisation that connects works of “black hip-hop” under the umbrella of “a common ‘racial’ identity” (248–9). But it is only in *Against Race* (2000) that Gilroy fully elaborates on the theme of gender as that which suggests and performs race:

Sex and gender are experienced—lived conflictually—at a heightened pitch that somehow connotes race. Gender difference and racialised gender codes provide a special cipher for a mode of racial authenticity



that is as evasive as it is desirable. In these circumstances, the iterative representation of gender, gender conflicts and sexualities contributes a supple confidence and stability to essentialist absolute notions of racial particularity.

(196)

Gilroy offers the example of the sexualisation of black women and the trope of the supreme virility and athletic prowess of black men to illustrate the way in which race is experienced through gender. As with the trope of the black man's muscular physique and athletic body, black female sexuality has been culturally manipulated to signify "racial authenticity" (204).<sup>22</sup> Gilroy argues that the aspirational, media-friendly images of black athletes and hip-hop artists who represent bodily strength—images then reproduced in the embodied re-enactment of black "power"—have perpetuated a fabricated image of what race and its associated male sexuality should look like (204). The claim echoes bell hooks's assertion that while allegations of innate sensuality have barred "the black woman" from social approval, in the struggle against racism, black men have been encouraged to claim physical prowess and "male competitiveness" as an entrance not only into heteropatriarchy but also into petit-bourgeois and bourgeois spheres—a social mobility that was central in defining post-slavery black masculinity (94). In his analysis of the way in which processes of gender contribute to racialisation, Gilroy also cites the "highly stylised ritual celebrations of heterosexual intimacy" performed by black rhythm and blues artists. He argues that the image put forward by these musicians, consumer-friendly stereotypes of lean and muscular African-American male bodies, for example, wash over the complexities and discontinuities of gender, and establish this form of heterosexual storytelling as a signifier for racial authenticity (197).<sup>23</sup>

For Gilroy and Spivak, gender becomes a question, one that engages with anti-racist struggles by prompting a re-understanding of the composition and endurance of systems of power. Gilroy believes that the formation of such a question can "persistently disrupt the body-coded solidarities based on race and gender" ("After the Love Has Gone" 51). Racial and gender communities, which he believes are founded on falsely essentialist terms—the belief that they share something exclusive to them—perpetuate racism and gender discrimination. Like Gilroy, Spivak has asserted that sexual essentialism has falsely implied that gender and race are the logical continuations of biological sex ("What is Gender?"). In this sense, sex becomes the point of visibility for a fabricated racial essentialism:

Gender can be the name of the tendency toward the spectral which produces the effect of the empirical, whose name can be sex. Indeed, it

is the empirical that makes explicit the mysteriousness of being-human, for it claims the field of production, makes difference felt as identity, necessity as freedom, keeping spectrality under control.

(“What is Gender?” 4)

Biological sex is, according to Spivak, an ontological fallacy that distracts from the spectrality of gender.<sup>24</sup> Positioned as the seed from which all other components of identity originate, it keeps the ambiguousness and potential discordances of gender and race at bay through the persuasive alignment of both within a regulated and naturalised sex-gender continuum. Spivak reminds us that gender serves to trace the way in which essentialised sex has claimed the position of identity-producer, keeping “spectrality under control” by denying gender non-conforming people the possibility of re-materialising in—or “haunting”—accepted identity practices. But rather than discuss the formation of gender in isolation, sex is here presented as “the effect of the empirical”, that which “makes explicit” the process of the formation of subjectivity. While tangibly “felt as identity”, sexual difference is little more than a tool to quash identity practices that stray from normative enactments of gender and sexuality.

Gilroy identifies this problematic alignment between “empirical” sex and “difference felt as identity” through a bio-political analysis of patriarchal power. In an intersectional critique of the violence experienced by women slaves, he explores how the woman’s body is the site of the perpetuation of racial bloodlines:

Gender differences become extremely important in nation-building activity because they are a sign of an irresistible natural hierarchy that belongs at the centre of civic life. The unholy forces of nationalist biopolitics intersect on the bodies of women charged with the reproduction of absolute difference and the continuance of the blood line.

(*Against Race* 127)

This point is suggestive of hooks’s claim that “white men in colonial America defined the primary function of all women to be that of breeding workers” (39), a contention that was especially punishing for slave women, who were forced to become vehicles for the production of a continued lineage of slaves. Slave women’s dual status as hard labourers and “breeding” workers forced upon them unimaginable violence and physical exhaustion in the name of maximum return on investment, upon which the colonising enterprise depended. The reproduction of racial difference also relied on the perpetuation of a “white” bloodline, a burden shouldered by the wives of slaveowners whose uteruses were, in effect, the property of the Empire. In these historical formulations, “white” purity thrives on a

dialectic of “white” man and his “other”, by which humanity is granted to one and denied to the other. Slavery’s dependence on sexual difference—on the sanctified “angel of the house” status of “white” women, as in Coventry Patmore’s infamous narrative poem published in 1862, versus the hyper-sexuality of African-American women—ensured uniformity elsewhere: unequivocal racial and class difference, and, in turn, a stable colonial economy. The violation of the bodies of these women in the name of Empire exemplifies Gilroy’s assertion that “Sex and gender are experienced—lived conflictually—at a heightened pitch that somehow connotes race” (*Against Race* 196). Slavery, and its continuing legacy, has proved the agony of essentialised gender used as a tool for racial supremacy. For Spivak, this kind of historical, global, and intersectional analysis is “the long haul, a process of re-learning human equality that goes beyond the word ‘gender,’ if anything can do so” (“What is Gender?” 5).

I have given some examples here of how both critics discuss gender in a way that reaches beyond the limits of gender itself to illuminate how cultural capital is experienced conjointly. I would now like to explore how, in recent years, Spivak and Gilroy have extended their analyses of racial and sexual difference to a critique of the Anthropocene’s self-positioning above other “non-human” entities. Systems of race and gender are, as I will subsequently demonstrate, at the foundations of humanity’s ability to situate itself in a dominant position *vis-à-vis* other entities, and subsequently, a critique of that self-appointed position can provide a way of resisting racial and gender oppression. The movement demonstrated by these theorists, from feminist and anti-racist work to the proposal of new forms of humanism, is also the trajectory of this book and its investigation into works of SF that demonstrate humanisms founded on a critique of issues of race and gender. The scope and magnitude of the “planetary” humanisms put forward by works of SF written by women depend, therefore, on a critical move “beyond” the human starting from a crucial critique of the human’s hierarchical position.

The critique of the human—of the stand-alone status of the Anthropocene—is one that Gilroy has engaged in again in relation to the slave trade in his lectures at Yale University in 2014. In these lectures, he re-explores Frederick Douglass’s rendering of slave life in animal terms,<sup>25</sup> focusing on Douglass’s description of how slaves were treated like “brute” animals:

the Negro’s relatively impenetrable hide should concern us for what it reveals—or conceals—about the uneven distribution of humanity in a world where race and slavery have been tightly associated. Their mutual connection underpinned the transformation of human beings into brutes—objects differentiated by the fact that their suffering was of

no consequence either for the calculus of capital accumulation or for the ethics of mercy, sympathy, and pity. The word brute can refer both to animals and to humans, but it is important that we do not place these infrahuman figures too neatly between those poles, as if they occupied a settled intermediate place in a rigid scale where “Caucasian” man appears at the top and animal life is ranged below.

(“Suffering and Infrahumanity” 35)

The interrelationality of oppressive forces of gender and racialisation has as its product the transformation of slave into inhuman beast, or as Du Bois puts it, “tertium quid”: a body located in what Gilroy calls the “infrahuman” position of less-than-human. Gilroy critiques the notion that the human is placed on a “rigid scale” where human life—that is, the life of the slave owner—is more valuable than animal life. For Gilroy, Douglass’s comparison of the treatment of the slave to that of the animal has at its basis the assumption that the comparison of a man’s life to that of an animal would engage with reader sympathy. Gilroy cautions against “placing these infrahuman figures too neatly between those poles”—by which “brute” humanity comes to occupy a position between “Caucasian” masculinity and animal life—suggesting that this might only reinforce the hierarchy of slave owner-slave-animal. The self-positioning of the “Caucasian man” at the top of the hierarchical pyramid is, therefore, also the product of an anthropological certainty in the superiority of the human, as Haraway attests in her claim that the myth of human superiority is an ideological tool used to prize some creatures—both human and machinic—above others (2003). Thus, “white” heteropatriarchy continues to justify its rule over not only animals and “inanimate” objects,<sup>26</sup> but also those humans deemed “lesser” creatures because of their position in the hierarchical structures of race or gender. The ranking system that sets apart “Caucasian man” from animal is therefore the framework within which it is possible for the slave to be “debased” to the status of animal. The well-being of that slave—of little importance within the logic of the human-other hierarchy—is therefore of no value aside from the physical strength needed to work for their master’s financial gain. It is not gender or racial-based inequality that decides who deserves to live a good life and who does not, but the human–animal–object continuum, in which human takes its place above, and distinct from, both animal and object. Citing Haraway, Gilroy counters typified otherness through a recognition of an existing and complex “assemblage of human and non-human”, separated out in the name of race, gender, and the rational man:

The discursive tie between the colonised, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal—all reduced to type, all Others to rational man, and

all essential to his bright constitution—is at the heart of racism and flourishes, lethally, in the entrails of humanism.

(quoted in Gilroy, *Suffering and Humanity* 36)

Enlightenment humanism's conflation of humankind with the Western male subject-agent makes human status unavailable to anyone or anything on the other side of its dialectical position with both women and the "colonised, enslaved, noncitizen, and the animal". The myth of singular humanity—a common essence shared by all *Homo sapiens*—permits gradations within the category of human, whether racial, gendered, classist, ethnic, or nationalist.<sup>27</sup> To reject the notion of a universal human essence, therefore, also debases the supremacy of the human, and, in turn, the hierarchical ordering of its racialised and gendered subjects.

Spivak engages with a similar critical move to undo racial and gender superiority through a decentring of the human. In the process, she introduces the "planetary" perspective that I argue constitutes a new form of anti-racist and anti-sexist—as well as ecological—humanism. In her 2016 paper "A Borderless World?" first presented at the Edward Said memorial conference in 2013, Spivak discusses the Anthropocene in the context of humanity's infliction of irreversible damage to the Earth and to its resources in the name of "global Capitalism". The paper signals a significant broadening of perspective beyond anthropocentric post-colonialisms and towards the notion of the "planetary", a term which both incorporates and exceeds humankind. In doing so, she concerns herself with, as she puts it in her 1998 paper "Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace", a "non-Eurocentric ecological justice"—the need not only to recognise that the damage wrought on the natural world is also harm caused to humanity itself, but also that the term "humanity" is misleading in its exclusivity from other species (339). She urges against moving "recklessly towards the Anthropocene", instead suggesting that we "supplement vanguardism, rather than taking yourself as an example of the human" ("A Borderless World?" 57, 59). I therefore explore how the development of Spivak's notion of the planetary has demonstrated a displacement of the human in its suggestion of a new form of non-anthropocentric humanism.

In Spivak's essay "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" (1985), she points to the present moment as a site of an apocalypse in which the old gives in to the new, which I view as her anticipation of a post-anthropocentric era. The apocalypse would subsequently be used by Spivak as a metaphor for both the effects of global capitalism and traditional Comparative Literature's destructive enforcement of globalisation, as explained in *Death of a Discipline* (2003), in which she calls on the "planetary" to defeat the standardised model of world literature. This form of comparative literature, she argues, is taught almost always in its

(English) translation, leaving no space for cultural and linguistic difference, especially difference within national literatures as well as between them (*Death of a Discipline* 19, 100). Her critique of disciplinary “apocalypse” finds its foundations in her 1985 essay’s elaboration of Derrida’s 1983 work *D’un Ton Apocalyptique Adopté Naguère en Philosophie*:

[The “apocalyptic tone”] announces the pluralised apocalypse of the present moment, in our particular case the set or ensemble of ideology-critical, aesthetic-troping, economically aware performative or operational value judgements. My careful language here should make clear that the practical moment is not a “fulfilment.” In the pluralised apocalypse, the body does not rise.

(“Scattered Speculations” 92)

Spivak takes inspiration from Derrida’s *D’un Ton Apocalyptique Adopté Naguère en Philosophie* in which she reads “in this obscure text a practical politics of the open end” (*In Other Worlds* 297). The open-mindedness of this politic is the essential clause for engagement with it, as demonstrated in “Can the Subaltern Speak”, in which she has argued that we must avoid the restoration of a “practical politics of the oppressed” within which the oppressed are “allowed” to “speak for themselves” (73), by instead achieving a rhetorical engagement with ideology. In her view, the subaltern cannot speak, for once they do, they cease to be subaltern (78). The pluralised apocalypse, therefore, achieves this practical and open-ended politics by way of what I view as its utopian invocation of perpetual openness and possibility. She clarifies this during the series of interviews that comprises *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (1990), explaining to the Medill Justice Project that a Derridian open-ended politic is not one that can be “followed”—it should not stand in for concrete political programmes, because, as we might infer from the quotation above, it does not offer fulfilment (Spivak and Harasym 47).

Instead, it occurs in an anticipatory temporality, in which the body “does not rise”.<sup>28</sup> It is in this mood of delayed fulfilment that Spivak grounds her notion of planetarity, one that allows for “a depoliticisation of the politics of hostility toward a politics of friendship to come” (*Death of a Discipline* 13). Drawing on the double etymology of the Derridian “teleiopoiesis”—a compound formed of the Greek *teleio*, derived from *telos* “end” (Passmore 20), and *poiesis*, defined by Martin Heidegger as “poetic creation” (*Marx* 165), together signifying “to compose the end”—Spivak evokes a self-fulfilling friendship, one whose prediction causes it to (almost) come about. Sustained as a promise in the future tense of “to come”, Spivak’s apocalyptic moment contains both the possibility of completeness and the endless potentiality of Derrida’s “poétique de la distance à distance qu’il s’agit ici”

[the poetics of distance at one remove (Derrida, *Politiques de l'Amitié* 50).<sup>29</sup> The continuous future-present moment of the apocalypse paradoxically amounts to the fulfilment of Derrida's friendship in the utopian temporality of "not yet": "‘Vous-mes-amis-soyez-mes-amis-et-bien-que-vous-ne-le-soyez-pas-encore-vous-l'êtes-déjà-puisque-je-vous-appelle-ainsi’" (*Politiques de l'Amitié* 262) [You-my-friends-be-my-friends-and-although-you-are-not-yet-my-friends-you-are-already, since-that-is-what-I-am-calling-you] (*Politics of Friendship* 235). Spivak's "politics of friendship to come" is therefore composed in a tense that straddles the subjunctive mood "soyez"; the absolute tense of the "not yet": "pas encore"; and the present tense "je vous appelle"/"vous-l'êtes-déjà". The combined effect is the urge to call (in the present) upon an unimaginable and undecidable future.<sup>30</sup> This is the future evoked by Spivak's ontological post-structuralist apocalypse and by works from my corpus of SF which enact a *teleiopoetic* convergence of temporalities: a future in which unexpected forms of emancipatory collectivity and filiation must and will appear.

It is also within the mood of a forthcoming apocalypse that Gilroy situates the possibility of new modes of a planetary humanism, which offer "friendship, happiness, and solidarity that are consequent on the overcoming of the racial oppression" (*The Black Atlantic* 38). The planetary, he argues, must be entered into from a space beyond anthropocentrism, a space that comes into formation:

After the end of natural evolution, after we have the Anthropocene in focus, in the era of genomics, in the face of irreversible climate change which will enforce its own regime of social and economic differences beyond the institutional and imaginative grasp of the national state, when the waters start to rise...

("Not Yet Humanism" [Edward Said Memorial Conference]  
00:29:40–00:30:02)

Gilroy does not finish this sentence, skipping to an anecdote about his train journey from Amsterdam to Utrecht. I read this ominous end to his concluding remarks as spoken in an apocalyptic tone, one that makes his words appear as if in a prophetic message, to signal to a time when we will finally "have the Anthropocene in focus", and thus know the full extent of the damage that it has caused. For Gilroy, we live in a moment when the "the spectre of human extinction" looms in the fore of the ecological damage of our planet. The humanistic gestures that we can achieve now are long overdue, but for Gilroy "Lateness is not merely the re-enchanting of the human, but the locating of that human in what I want to call the waiting room of death" ("Not Yet Humanism" [*Conflicting Humanities*] 106). In preparation for this apocalypse that has not yet happened, Gilroy



draws on Said's conception of "lateness" to suggest that though we are (too) late to the act, we must now invigorate our work to try to prevent the obliteration of our planet. Said has called this kind of belated activity "late works", the crucial actions that will be most remembered by those that come after us (*On Late Style* 12). Facing this not yet apocalypse squarely can, for Gilroy, issue a not yet humanism. Controversially, he formulates this new humanism through a post-apocalyptic revival of a "not yet" that has been salvaged from the wasteland of Enlightenment humanism.

At the Edward Said memorial conference, both Gilroy and Spivak contextualised their conceptions of the "planetary" in relation to Bloch's utopian formulation of the "not yet". I view Gilroy's "not yet" humanism as evoking, in a different temporality, the critical nostalgia of a Blochian past-conditional "what might have been" ("Not Yet Humanism" [Edward Said Memorial Conference] 00:09:15–00:09:30).<sup>31</sup> Gilroy's language therefore suggests that the resurrection of residue utopian potentiality in the "not yet" can radically reformulate the Enlightenment humanist equation. During his lecture, he emphasised the urgency of asking ourselves the question of whether we are humanists or not. For him, faith in humanism is the necessary response to the concrete issues experienced by humanity and beyond. Gilroy describes his reworking of traditional humanism as follows:

Certainly what we have here is an ambitious counter-anthropology, which notes the epiphany of that critical historical figure, but in refusing all dualistic styles of thought, this humanism is not content with simply reversing the unacceptable polarities of European domination. Instead it draws upon resources that descend from ancient sources via a distinctive critical re-reading of Enlightenment.

("Not Yet Humanism" [*Conflicting Humanities*] 100)

He does not doubt the restorative potential of possible new humanisms in freeing humanity from its seemingly indestructible ego. Drawing on the reparative humanisms of Fanon and Said, who enter what Gilroy terms "the forbidden zones of humanism" ("Not Yet Humanism" [*Conflicting Humanities*] 100), he points to the spaces where humanity can be glimpsed as more than the human. This is a humanism which retrieves connections with animals and the natural world. Gilroy presses the point that counter-anthropology is not a mere reversal of anthropocentrism: instead, it emphasises the need to critically historicise while crying out against the persistent self-importance that anthropology continues to allocate to humankind. Spivak takes up this call-to-action in her essay "A Borderless World?" (2016), when she praises Akeel Bilgrami's "beautiful metaphor" of ushering the central position of humanity within Enlightenment



humanism “off stage entirely” (113). Spivak, like Gilroy, also adds that, once transformed, we can re-introduce a non-anthropocentric variation on Enlightenment humanism “by the back door” (“A Borderless World?” 113).

Utopia is at the centre of his “planetary” humanism, which is both explicitly humanist and unapologetically utopian in tone (*Against Race* 334). Gilroy employs this utopian mood to motivate a project of future-wishing that directly addresses pressing and concrete issues of political and social crisis in today’s world. In this way, his planetary humanism moves in parallel with anti-racism and anti-racialism:

My own desire to see the end of raciology means that I, too, have invoked the unknowable future against the unforgiving present. In doing this, I urge a fundamental change of mood upon what used to be called “antiracism.” It has been asked in an explicitly utopian spirit to terminate its ambivalent relationship to the idea of “race” in the interest of a heterocultural, postanthropological, and cosmopolitan yet-to-come.  
(*Against Race* 334)

Gilroy draws on the mood of utopian potentiality to imagine a race-free future. In so doing, he generates a politics of radical change which can take over from the failures of the “antiracism” movement, within which “‘race’ is overshadowed by privatised, corporate multiculturalism and cultures of simulation in which racial alterity has acquired an important commercial value” (*Against Race* 52). Gilroy’s utopianism opens up the demand for an anti-racist society into a more ambitious invocation of an anti-racist planet, a struggle which necessarily involves a simultaneous preoccupation with both gender and class divides. Utopia is, for Gilroy, the engine that drives anti-racist thinking onwards into an unimaginable race-free future. His search for a rejuvenated humanism, founded in the residue of the not yet of Enlightenment humanism, follows a long lineage of utopian philosophy that identifies untapped energy in moments of unrealised emancipatory potential, from Nietzsche’s *Unzeitgemässe* to Bloch’s use of a cultural hermeneutic through which he discovers unrealised surplus in *The Principle of Hope* (152). This utopian energy, misdirected within Enlightenment humanism, is given its time again in Gilroy’s “unknowable future”. Projected beyond the dangerous grasp of anthropocentrism, which could potentially re-install these harmful hierarchies, Gilroy’s humanism is predicated on a post-anthropocentric planetary perspective, within which the abusive human dialectics of self/other, human/animal, black/white, and male/female will not be applicable.

Gilroy’s utopian and humanistic positioning has been criticised as an “insubstantial” contribution to concrete racial issues. Laura Chrisman has charged him with imagining a politics that favours the aesthetic over

materiality, “a black utopian aesthetic premised on a death-drive”(454).<sup>32</sup> Gilroy elaborates Edward Said’s critique of the antihumanist turn, suggesting that Said usefully and bravely declared the relevance of humanism in addressing the pressing issues of today. For Gilroy, Said’s not yet humanism is “bravely articulated in opposition to war, nationalism, racism and ethnic absolutism” because it retains its ambiguity against solidified markers of territory and identity: race, ethnicity, history, and nationality (“Not Yet Humanism”, *Conflicting Humanities* 9). A significant influence on Gilroy’s planetary humanism, Said’s not yet humanism reverberates in Gilroy’s fervent belief in a humanism that is, as yet, unthinkable, and, like Butler’s “you”, should never exist fully-formed.

Criticisms of opacity and abstraction have also been levelled at Spivak, who has made clear her intention to write with deliberate ambiguity on the theme of the “planetary”. She too suggests that the planetary is not yet: it can never “be”, because it must always exceed us. The problem of the “global” of globalisation, she argues, is that we can contain it: we can pour it into Google Maps, possess it on screens, and mark it with the flow of capital. Globalisation has been “achieved by the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere” (*Imperatives* 44), which includes the universalisation of markers of race and gender, the latter of which she later describes as “the tacit globaliser before we could think a globe” (“A Borderless World?” 47). Reaching from the affective to the public spheres, gender is even upstream from the ever-pervasive systems of capitalism and imperialism. For her, we cannot think the globe before gender. She has also recently defined gender in this context as “reproductive heteronormativity”, which is a globaliser in the sense that it “is the broadest and oldest institution for validation” (“Nietzsche/Derrida”).

Race and gender are the global “givens” that she intends to surpass when she contends “I propose the planet to overwrite the globe” (*Death of a Discipline* 72). The planetary, however, cannot be separate from or in opposition to globalisation, which will always be implicitly folded into the process of planetary thinking. Rather than fully break from this system, the asymmetry of the planet and the global—never directly set in opposition—will forever be caught in a double bind. Spivak’s planetary therefore inevitably contains the global while simultaneously exceeding it. As possible as it is impossible, its coming-to-be is definitively ambivalent and open-ended: “When I invoke the planet, I think of the effort required to figure the (im)possibility of this underived intuition” (*Death of a Discipline* 72). We cannot fully think it or contain it, as is demonstrated by my corpus of SF, for example, Bodard’s *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls*, which I read as radically spatialising the concept of the planetary within the multi-dimensional SF setting of “deep space”. These evasive and flickering spaces demonstrate Spivak’s suggestion that there is a “necessary impossibility of a

‘grounding’ in the planetary” (*Death of a Discipline* 82), which will always be not yet, its actualisation always deferred by the process of continuous becoming. In this sense, Spivak describes the planet in terms of a Derridian event, one which provokes the displacement of the centre—the Western male subject of Enlightenment humanism and the structures built to buffer his centrality—by the peripheral, so that the world becomes entirely characterised by radical alterity. For Derrida, “L’affirmation joyeuse du jeu du monde et de l’innocence du devenir” [the joyous affirmation of play of the world and of the innocence of becoming] allows *différence* to become a positive space, which he terms “une altérité radicale” (“La Structure, le Signe et le Jeu” 427). In the same way that Derrida signals that “Cette affirmation détermine alors le non-centre autrement que comme perte du centre” [this affirmation then determines the non-centre otherwise than as loss of the centre], Spivak’s understanding of the planetary as the displacement of the centre does not result in loss but in a “jeu du monde” [game of the world], which allows for an infinitely renewable view of a world in which *différence* constantly displaces the fixity of the centre (427). Spivak’s elaboration of Derrida’s conceptualisation of a differently interpreted world based on *différence* purposefully evades the naming of this world view: it remains an “underived intuition” that cannot be “grounded”, and which instead permanently negotiates the forever ‘not yet’ of what I read as a utopian methodology (*Death of a Discipline* 72).

Spivak suggests that the key to the substitution of an essentialist understanding of gender and racial difference with the transcendent play of Derridian “*différence*”, is the incorporated alterity at the heart of planetary-thinking. Spivak positions the planet itself as a “species of alterity” (*Death of a Discipline* 102), a place that despite its familiarity, we must view in terms of otherness, as is dramatically rendered by works from my corpus of SF, in particular Brissett’s *Elysium*, in which the narrative suggests that the Earth must be made unrecognisable in order for humanity to fully understand the extent of the devastation we have wrought. *Elysium* demonstrates Spivak’s contention that a world view based on radical alterity makes the planet unfamiliar by allowing the subject to approach it with fresh eyes, as if to say, this place does not belong to us, it precedes and exceeds us, we are merely stewards of it:

The “planet” is, here, as perhaps always, a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right. Its alterity, determining experience, is mysterious and discontinuous—an experience of the impossible. It is such collectivities that must be opened up with the question “How many are we?” when cultural origin is detranscendentalised into fiction—the toughest task in the diaspora.

(*Death of a Discipline* 102)

Spivak conjures the “planetary” space as a deeply evocative and ambivalent theorisation of a “mysterious”, “discontinuous”, and “impossible” alterity, which breaks the human/alien other dialectic by encapsulating everything within itself. It connotes a need for radically collective political action of a kind that breaks apart interspecies and interracial hierarchies and divisions through the way in which it situates the planet as, while occupied by humankind, more than and originating prior to it. Spivak’s planetary looks forward to the “end” of the Anthropocene in the sense that it asks for a de-centring of the anthropocentric ego. Humankind, in this formulation, does not “die” as such, but it can no longer behave as if it were separate from the rest of the world, living as it pleases, and must instead acknowledge collective responsibility for the well-being of the planet. The “alterity” of the planetary recalls Spivak’s suggestion that the “planetary” invokes a “defamiliarisation of familiar space”, during which the home of humanity becomes *unheimlich* (*Death of a Discipline* 77).<sup>33</sup> In Brissett’s *Elysium*, not only the Earth but also the familiar figure of the human is made uncanny by the impact of alien invasion. This can be read as an evocation of Spivak’s view that we must look at the world again and ask, “How many are we?”, an echo of Derrida’s question “Combien sommes-nous?” and the refrain to his *Politiques de l’Amitié* (1994). In this text, the notion of “accountability” meets the imperative to call on the other through the injunction “to count” who is present, or who is yet to be included, in the process of ethical friendship. Derrida’s “*nous*” that is “*encore si indéterminé*”, is the as yet undecided “we” that signifies the need to collectively exercise ethical responsibility towards one another. For Spivak, this “philosophical position of being called by the other ... accessed by its inscription into political responsibility” is a “risky political activity” (*Death of a Discipline* 30). Indeed, to see the planet as a space of transnational cosmopolitanism, as she attempts in her 1996 essay “Diasporas Old and New”, is to invoke an “interminable indeterminacy of epistemic change in the agent” (*Death of a Discipline* 29), in such a way that breaches the boundaries of nationhood and of globalisation. These are, for Spivak, merely “simple collectivities” whose “impossibility” to be properly inclusive is obscured by the “various ruses” of political philosophies which, as Hannah Lutz puts it in her analysis of Spivak, attempt to create “stable maps monitoring identities and positions” (*Death of a Discipline* 30; Hannah Lutz 208). Instead, Spivak proposes Derrida’s invocation of a model of impossible friendship and social bond grounded in “discorde”, “dé-liaison”, and “disjonction” (Derrida, *Politiques de l’Amitié* 73). Spivak’s invocation of these indirectly theorised collectives invites the participation of politically marginalised diasporic and subaltern voices often excluded from the global narrative.

For Gilroy, planetary humanism also constitutes an opportunity to create new global connectivities through a reworking of alterity. He views alterity as the product of racial and gender divisions, which, once complicated, might allow for new solidarities and connectivities to emerge. Unlike Spivak, he does not propose the planetary as a form of radical alterity, admitting that going “beyond” race runs the risk of losing sight of valuable transcultural linkages between peoples and places. He therefore demands a “new idiom”—a new way of speaking about hybridity that does not simply position the concept in an inverted relationship to the singularity and self-containment of the Enlightenment subject:

Finding this valuable new idiom does not require merely inverting the polarity of hybridity’s internal circuits so that what was previously seen in terms of loss, dilution and weakness becomes valuable instead and offers an opportunity to celebrate the vigorous cosmopolitanism endowed in modernity by transgressive and creative contacts with different people. Perhaps, pending a more complex organicity that comprehends difference in the forms of interarticulation and unremarkable interdependence suggested by the idea of symbiosis, we might begin to comprehend what is still best named “transcultural mixture,” and the assumptions about alterity that it promotes, as phenomena without any necessary or fixed value at all.

(Against Race 217)

Where Spivak, following Derrida, cannot name the “underived intuition” of her invocation of the planet, Gilroy preliminarily chooses “transcultural mixture” as a descriptor of the hybridity of the planetary. “Transcultural mixture” thus becomes the best-possible signifier for what must remain without fixed value: a “vigorous cosmopolitanism” of complex interconnections within and beyond the Anthropocene that counters the narrow set of biological determinisms associated with race (*Against Race* 263, 38). For Gilroy, forms of belonging such as racially “embodied social memory” and “closed, exclusive racialised cultures” are grounded in an exclusionary logic that ultimately helps to re-create the conditions for racism (*Against Race* 38). Sceptical of these formations that have offered subjects identity, purpose, and belonging, within the “imagined community that is the nation” (*Against Race* 155), *Against Race* also demonstrates Gilroy’s belief that non-racialised collectivities are forged through global music, jazz, and hip hop, transcending place and space, evolving as they travel across the globe. Bob Marley’s legacy of worldwide fans is one of Gilroy’s key examples of this: beyond the commercialisation of Marley products, created and sold by anyone seeking to cash in on his fame, fans connect with the artist and his legacy on the basis of his Jamaican, African,

and Pan-African status; like Bob Dylan, Marley was a “poet of the people” (Hausman, *The Kebra Nagast* 166), connecting with fans worldwide by speaking out on behalf of social and political injustice. Marley’s message of spiritual and political inclusivity, and the right to a good and worry-free life, continues to win him a wide range of followers from across the globe. Gilroy believes that his worldwide fandom is an example of the power of solidarities based on “will, inclination, mood, and affinity” (*Against Race* 133). These are the collectivities proposed by my corpus of SF, in particular, the nomadic, unconventional, and interspecies kinship groups of Vallorani’s works of fiction. In the not yet of these planetary collectivities lies a total re-figuring of race and gender within what Spivak terms an “unrestricted space of difference” (“What is Gender?” 7). The connection that I make between these scholars depends on this notion of anti-racist and gender inclusive collectivities proposed by my chosen works of SF, which I view as drawing together Butler’s theory of assembly and Braidotti’s elaboration of nomadic subjectivities with Spivak’s “politics of friendship to come” and Gilroy’s invocation of a broad spectrum of planetary solidarities (*Death of a Discipline* 13).

Edward Said has asked, “Can one divide human reality as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies even races and survive the consequently humanly?” (Said quoted in “Not Yet Humanism” [*Conflicting Humanities*] 97). These constructed divisions, born of an identity politics that Spivak defines as “a separation in the name of the undifferentiated identity of religion, nation, or subordination”, and then lumped together in the image of the “other”, are “big news and almost everywhere bad news” (“Acting Bits/Identity Talk” 774). For Spivak and Gilroy, to respond to Said’s question is not only to query the validity of the cultural, racial, and gender divisions with which “human reality” is divided, but to turn against the sanctity of the “human” itself. Gender, therefore, as a medium of analysis of racial and racist prejudice, critiques the centrality of the Anthropocene and raises the question of Armageddon—the era of the post-Anthropocene which brings to an end the fetishisation of sexual and racial difference. This is a question pursued by the works from my corpus of primary sources that exploit an apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic mode of SF. SF’s critique of systems of race and gender induces a demonstration of the necessity of new forms of humanism that might introduce alterity into that which is most familiar to us, re-constructing the planet in terms of its “otherwise”. By establishing a critical distance between apocalypse and the reader’s reality, these can be read as urgent invocations of the kinds of planetary humanisms proposed by Spivak and Gilroy and which might prevent the dystopian scenarios depicted in these narratives from being transferred onto the Earth of the “real world”. The planetary, when Spivak’s and Gilroy’s figurations of

it can be identified in works of women's SF, transgresses the separation and self-sufficiency of the subject of Enlightenment humanism and instead signals shifting forms of subjectivity that are always in the process of becoming.

## 5 Queering the Human

The use of queer theory in this book supports my analysis of (queer) SF within the theoretical framework of Braidotti's, Butler's, Spivak's, Gilroy's, and Halberstam's respective critiques on issues of race and gender. In Chapters 5 and 6 of this book, I also draw on queer theory to address two primary objectives: firstly, to explore the ways in which events that can be analysed in terms of Halberstam's conceptualisation of a "queer art of failure" in the representation of sexuality in outer space challenge the binary structure of the divisions between nature and queer, human and "other", as is particularly the case in Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales* and Regueiro's "Planetoide de Oportunidades"; and, secondly, to argue that queer kinship formations counter racialised and heterosexualised notions of the human family, and point towards a "planetary" mode of community-building, as demonstrated by Vallorani's *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* and *Il Cuore Finto di DR*.

### "The Queer Art of Failure"

In *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011),<sup>34</sup> Halberstam presents his approach to a 'queer art of failure' as an elaboration and subversion of the "Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism" outlined by Edelman in *No Future* (4).<sup>35</sup> Halberstam's invocation of the queer art of failure is not, unlike Edelman's disavowal of "futures", the invocation of the death drive to counter reproductive heteronormativity. Instead, its vitalist approach to failure signals a grammar of possibility expressed in the negative, one that closely resembles Braidotti's ethical vitalism than Edelman's radically negative politics. He explains the ambitions behind his mobilisation of Edelman's theory thus: "My attempt to link queerness to an aesthetic project organised around the logic of failure converses with Edelman's effort to detach queerness from the optimistic and humanistic activity of making meaning" (*Queer Art of Failure* 106). I view Halberstam's use of the concept of "the queer art of failure" to surface positive and agentic modes of re-modelling gender norms as corresponding to Braidotti's imperative to think through "something that hurts" in order to bring "into representation the unthinkable" ("Critical Humanities"; "Teratologies" 171). From this connection emerges an "unthinkable" future: that which cannot be thought through the "straight" paths of normative thinking.



Braidotti asks, “how do we think the unthinkable when linearity is blocking the trajectory of our thought?” (“Critical Humanities”). Tracing a genealogy of affirmative ethics through Deleuze to Spinoza, she endorses a mode of “thinking of something that hurts” that corresponds to the way in which Halberstam’s notion of a “grammar of possibility” emerges through a series of gerunds that indicate both positive and negative human processes: “dying, reuniting, growing, learning, unlearning, losing, searching, forgetting, rising . . .” (*Queer Art of Failure* 78). By reconciling parts of life that are painful and pleasurable, hopeful, and disheartening, Halberstam mobilises the failed action into an active conjugation, demonstrating the way in which vitality and agency can arise from the experience of (human) frailty. For Braidotti, physical injury, disillusionment, and despair can only become agentic when mobilised in an “ethical moment”: the point at which vulnerability becomes the cause and the condition for resistive action. This is what Braidotti has termed “the affirmative edge to Nietzsche’s nihilism” (“Critical Humanities”) in relation to Halberstam’s work on the queer art of failure.<sup>36</sup>

The paradoxically active process of negating heteronormative futurity can be identified in Halberstam’s conceptualisation of “the shame experienced by gay white men in childhood” (“Shame and White Gay Masculinity” 226) and the queer practice of “forgetting” (*Queer Art of Failure* 68–84). Halberstam views “gay shame” as that which “records in dramatic fashion (a blush, vertigo, overwhelming panic) a failure to be powerful, legitimate, proper—it records the exposure, in psychoanalytic terms, of the subject’s castration, be it racial, gendered, class-based, or sexual” (“Shame and White Gay Masculinity” 225). Halberstam has also critiqued the concept of gay shame, both for romanticising a queer past, and for its political bias, noting that: “the subject who emerges as the subject of gay shame is often a white and male self whose shame in part emerges from the experience of being denied access to privilege” (223). However, he concedes that “gay shame” can also be “a powerful tactic in the struggle to make privilege (whiteness, masculinity, wealth) visible” (220). Indeed, through a reading of my chosen texts of SF, I argue that this conception of gay shame and the particular affinity that “white and male” queer men have demonstrated towards the concept resonates with Braidotti and Butler’s work on two fronts.<sup>37</sup> Through the lens of Butler’s theory of performativity, for characters in outer space whose certain sense of gender identity and sexual orientation is challenged by encounters with extraterrestrials, queer shame can be experienced in the failure to perform (and conform) to race, gender, sexual, and class-based identity categories. Read in a broader sense through the lens of Braidotti’s posthumanist approach, queer shame might be evocative of “the pain of disengagement from Anthropos” (“Posthuman Critical Theory” 16), the necessary



violence incurred by multiplicitous hybrid creatures as they disengage from normative systems of gender and race.

*“Forgetting of Family”*

Halberstam suggests that a queer mode of “forgetting” is already implicit in “queer culture” in the USA, which puts emphasis on “forgetting of family” and “a refusal of adulthood” (*Queer Art of Failure* 70, 73). I would like to suggest here that the sense of “doing” implied in the present participle conjugation of “forget” corresponds to David Schneider’s (1984) conception of kinship as the active mode of “doing”, rather than a genealogical given, a critique that corresponds to Butler’s proposal that kinship is a mode of performance, one that, in keeping with the performative, “does not reflect a prior structure, but that can only be understood as an enacted practice” (*Undoing Gender* 123). Such an analysis, she argues: “would help us, I believe, move away from the situation in which a hypostatised structure of relations lurks behind any actual social arrangement and permit us to consider how modes of patterned and performative doing bring kinship categories into operation and become the means by which they undergo transformation and displacement” (123). Halberstam treats the “hypostatised structure” of kinship categories with equal suspicion as he deconstructs the “patterned” arrangement of the mother–daughter model upheld by women’s studies departments at US universities. In this scenario, “forgetting the family” allows for a disidentification from images of motherhood that are widespread in the context of this intergenerational mode of knowledge production. He argues that such a model of knowledge transfer is often “quite clearly invested in white, gendered, heteronormativity; indeed the system inevitably stalls in the face of these racialised and heterosexualised scenes of difference” (*Queer Art of Failure* 124). The image of the racialised family thus impedes on the production of knowledge in the university system while buffering conceptions of heteronormative motherhood. As an antidote, Halberstam endorses textual spaces that “refuse to think back through the mother” and can “produce a theoretical and imaginative space that is ‘not woman’ or that can only be occupied by unbecoming women” (125). These theoretical spaces that are “not woman” or that trigger an “unbecoming” demonstrate the use value of “negative power” to stall the production of the gendered and racialised image of the mother-teacher. The undoing of racial genealogies that implicitly reproduce heteroreproductive familial structures can, according to Halberstam, be achieved through “a refusal of adulthood” (73). Rather than argue that heterosexuality is queered by non-normative sexuality, he suggests that: “the child is always already queer and must therefore quickly be converted to a proto-heterosexual

by being pushed through a series of maturational models of growth that project the child as the future and the future as heterosexual” (73). He thus elaborates on the theme of the child’s maturity into compulsory heterosexuality that has been outlined in the iconic visions of queer ‘growth’ propounded by Edelman’s *No Future* (2004) and Kathryn Bon Stockton’s *Growing Sideways* (2009). New kinship structures, Halberstam claims, appear during “healthy doses of forgetting and disavowal which proceeds by way of a series of substitutions” (73). Indeed, I argue in the following chapters that Halberstam’s invocation of “forgetting of family” makes visible the emergence of anti-racist and queer planetary solidarities through a reading of SF texts alongside the additional theoretical work of Butler, Braidotti, Gilroy, and Spivak.

Halberstam’s conceptualisation of “forgetting of family” also invokes as its objective an emphasis on the importance of “short-term” bonds over the “permanence” of blood ties. He argues that family structures have been staged in Western society as the bearer of the most important bonds, both legally and socially, partly because of their invocation of “long-term” relationships. On the contrary, recent relationships, or queer relationships founded in alliances beyond blood ties, are often devalued because, as Halberstam puts it, “an authenticating notion of longevity renders all other relations meaningless and superficial, and family ties, by virtue of early bonds, seem more important than friendships” (*Queer Art of Failure* 72). By this logic, the long-term bond associated with the biological family is privileged over more recent relationships, such as friendships. Halberstam suggests that the concepts of lineage and heritage can be de-centralised and re-defined through a queer disidentification from the heteronormative family. Notions of lineage and heritage have also been critiqued by Gilroy for their foundational contribution to patriarchal and racialised claims to bloodlines, culture, and territory, which he believes fix “the borders of essentially homogeneous nation states” (*The Black Atlantic* 5). Halberstam’s analysis of short-term bonds, like Gilroy’s suggestion of planetary solidarities, displaces the racialised family as the biologising frame of social intimacy. This makes space for the emergence of the kinds of “surrogate, joyfully dis-organic and synthetic kin [groups]” (205) endorsed by Gilroy and demonstrated in the unexpected alliances that appear in some of my primary sources of SF, notably Vallorani’s *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* and *Il Cuore Finto di DR*, in which kinship is based not in an exclusionary logic but in “will, inclination, mood, and affinity” (*Against Race* 133). Bhabha, drawing on W. E. B. Du Bois, has stated that the contingent and indeterminate community that is built on these kinds of ties “disturbs the grand globalising narrative of capital, displaces the emphasis on production in ‘class’ collectivity, and disrupts the homogeneity of the imagined community of the nation” (*The Location of Culture* 330). From

the family unit to the national family, a “forgetting of the family” can be mobilised to counter racial and gender hierarchies that enable the formation of governable units of social organisation.

Halberstam’s conceptualisation of “the queer art of failure”, which counters a passive investment in blood relations, illuminates Kilgore’s contemporary utopian, queer, anti-racist, and anti-anthropocentric critique. In his essay “Queering the Coming Race?” (2008), Kilgore posits that there is “a ‘straight’ relationship between baseline humanity and any other race or culture” (244). As demonstrated in my analysis of queerly reproductive kinship in Chapter 5, queer reproductivity in extra-terrestrial spaces troubles race in two ways, offering a reconfiguration of humanity’s notions of race as a social demarcator alongside a rearranging of the supra-human implications of raciology. Framing the question of human descendance within the context of queer sexuality, Kilgore also points towards the need for a more extensive exploration of non-reproductive queer kinship in contemporary SF, which addresses an anti-racist politics that might undo the double meaning of race as the borders inferred both between ethnic groups and between humanity and its “other”. This analysis resonates with Butler’s claim that there is a link between the racialised, nuclear family and the notion of the “human race”. Claiming that the concepts of “human” and “family” are inextricably linked within the discourse of normativity, she argues that “to become human, for some, requires participation in the family in its normative sense” (*Antigone’s Claim* 22). This contention is demonstrated by DR of Vallorani’s *Il Cuore Finto di DR*, who refuses to engage with human reproductive strategies and instead subverts the performance of female sensuality and motherhood, as I will argue in Chapter 6. By Butler’s logic, the doubly racialised community of “the human race” is distinguished by this emphasis on reproductive and heterosexual kinship relations. As such, queers like DR are subsequently jettisoned into the realm of the infrahuman.

Kilgore offers a theoretical mode of resistance to the way in which racialised “humanity” is imbricated in notions of the heterosexual “family”. Drawing on utopian scholarship, Kilgore inquires whether SF that disturbs the dual definition of race can imagine anti-racist “human” communities that extend beyond the Anthropocene:

To ask if the universe may be queered is to inquire whether humankind’s understanding of itself and its place in the world can undergo a radical change. Can we imagine futures in which our descendants differ profoundly with ourselves while existing in a shared history?

(234)

Kilgore’s investigation into responses offered by works of SF to the question of whether it is possible to “queer” the concept of race thus offers

a way of looking at history that “leads us to futures alienated from historical progression” (234). Mobilising the utopian imaginary, Kilgore attempts to reconcile the idea of a “shared” future with one that is also heterogeneous, non-exclusionary, and non-linear. From its suggestion of a line that is “traced” through specifically demarcated people, “descent”, in the context of SF novels, comes to signify the interconnections, meeting points, and interdependencies that form in the shifting of kinship structures. The concept of the “natural family”, which, as Gilroy has also emphasised, is often the building block of the racially homogeneous community (*Against Race* 128), can therefore find itself remodelled through a queering of race-based kinship in SF.

*Queer Eco-feminist Theory: Complicating the “Natural”/“Unnatural” Divide*

Another attempt to de-sediment the concept of the natural family comes from the queer eco-feminist movement, which also uses the queer to move away from anthropocentric configurations of race by blurring and supplanting the “natural”/“unnatural” divide. In the words of Stacy Alaimo, the concepts of “nature and ‘the natural’ have long been waged against homosexuals, as well as women, people of colour, and indigenous peoples” (*Eluding Capture* 188). Coupled with the increasing threat of ecological catastrophe, queer theory has seen a shift away from appeals to the “naturalness” of homosexuality.<sup>38</sup> Five years after the publication of “Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health”, co-written with Lori Gruen, and which outlined an ecofeminist framework, Gaard’s influential “Towards a Queer Ecofeminism” (1997) expanded her critique of the hypocrisy of Western Culture’s attitude towards the natural world:

On the one hand, from a Queer perspective, we learn that the dominant culture charges Queers with transgressing the natural order, which in turn implies that nature is valued and must be obeyed. On the other hand, from an ecofeminist perspective, we learn that Western Culture has constructed nature as a force that must be dominated if culture is to prevail. Bringing these perspectives together indicates that, in effect, the “nature” queers are urged to comply with is none other than the dominant paradigm of heterosexuality—an identity and practice that is itself a cultural construction.

(“Towards a Queer Ecofeminism” 141)

Drawing together queer and eco-feminist critique, Gaard exposes the hypocritical invocation of the “natural” to justify homophobia on the one hand and claims to human supremacy on the other hand. What is a “cultural construction” and what is “essentialised” as “natural” is therefore

contingent on the motivations of the dominant ideology. In her 2008 essay “Queering Nature”, Merrick also explores the way in which nature can be codified to justify the way in which some people are included into or excluded from the rights afforded to those who count as human. Notions of sexuality subsequently become visible as dependent upon the way in which the human is conditionally defined. She argues that:

The ways in which we define “human” are obviously complexly intertwined with our definitions and codifications of “nature” and how we separate the “human” from the non-human/other. Human/other boundaries are also, of course, prime sites for contestations and reinforcements of notions of sexuality.

(“Queering Nature” 219)

Nature, sexuality, and the human/other divide appear in this context as contingent on the objectives of dominant ontology. SF, which complicates the borders between human and alien, and explores the conflict between the ontological assumptions by which they organise themselves differently, often demonstrates possibilities for alternative interactions between humanity and the natural environment. This, in turn, can provide a fertile ground for new and radical sexualities to emerge. The conditional relationship between gender, sexuality, and nature has also been analysed by Halberstam (2011) in the context of an “unbecoming” of naturalised notions of gender and sexuality. His interpretation of the collage-paintings of queer artist J. A. Nicholls, in particular *All of My Days*, *Higher Ground*, and *New Story* (2006),<sup>39</sup> suggests that a queer “misidentification” with the natural world can trigger a deconstructive relationship between subjectivity and the environment. He claims that: “these new paintings attempt to represent femininity as a blurring of the female form with the natural landscape and as a violent cutting out of the figure altogether. The surreal and often hyper-artificial landscapes represent a queer femininity as a refusal of conventional womanhood and a misidentification with the logic of gender variance as the other of normativity” (*Queer Art of Failure* 142). Disidentification from the trope of women’s association with the Earth is the subject of a sizeable body of feminist and eco-feminist critique, from Susan Griffin’s *Women and Nature* (1978), to Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey’s *Women and Nature?: Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body, and Environment* (2017). Griffin’s line of argument powerfully denounces the simultaneous subjugation of women and nature by patriarchal Western scientific and political ideologies. In a critique of Christian scripture and Platonist philosophy, Griffin elucidates the discursive construction of femininity and female identity in relation to nature. Within this tradition of contesting sedimented views on the

relationship between nature and gender, Halberstam interprets Nicholls's work as a queer refusal of conventional womanhood. She sees in the "gaping holes, empty landscapes, split silhouettes" of Nicholls's collages, spaces where "the self unravels, refuses to cohere, it will not speak, it will only be spoken" (144). For Halberstam, the female subject in Nicholls's art cannot be objectified or conflated with nature because the subject is cropped, lacerated, and deleted from the frame. The impetus to cut oneself out, to violently retract from an unchosen subject position, is the agentic counter-reaction to heteronormative restrictions proposed by Halberstam's theory of productive undoing. By engaging with the way in which the queer community is often exposed to violence and degradation, Halberstam points towards the possibility of evading the divisive logic of the normative/gender-variant binary.

### *Queer "Disidentifications"*

Halberstam has detailed another means of disengaging from the gender binary in *Female Masculinity*: he claims that a retracting and dislodging of the normative performance of gender occurs during instances of "misidentification" and "disidentification" (248). He attributes these terms to a pre-existing genealogy, notably Muñoz's work on the political impact of queer disidentifications. Muñoz first outlined the concept in his essay "Famous and Dandy Like B. 'n' Andy: Race, Pop, and Basquiat" (1996) and subsequently elaborated it in *Queer Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999). Muñoz aligns himself not only with the leading scholars of Western feminism and queer theory—Foucault, Butler, Wittig, and Lorde—but also Chicana scholars Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, whose approach to disidentification as a political strategy is demonstrated, for example, in their collaborative anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour* (1981). Muñoz's highly utopian mode of disidentification is a "hermeneutic, a process of production, and a mode of performance" (*Disidentifications* 25). He argues that, in the production of modes of disidentification, "we nonetheless need to hold on to and even risk utopianism" (*Cruising Utopia* 25). This is an unpredictable task of decoding and transforming heteronormative mundanity from the perspective of the queer subject. Also in the context of an intersectional, queer, and utopian critique, Kilgore argues that the utopian imperative must be accompanied by "the will to create political and economic arrangements uninflected by possessive investments in a status quo defined by a heteronormative whiteness" ("Queering the Coming Race?" 245). Critically engaged SF, as I will argue in the following chapters of this book, often takes upon itself the task of disidentifying with the racialised and heterosexual "status quo". In so doing, queer futurities emerge that

can perpetually queer the way in which race and gender are performed and demarcated in the present.

## 6 Geocriticism, Science Fiction, and Utopia

### *Introduction*

In 1967, at the height of the structuralist period in France, Foucault suggested that the twentieth century was characterised by a renewed interest in space. At a conference held at the Circle d'Etudes Architecturales in Paris on 14 March 1967, Foucault claimed that:

L'époque actuelle serait peut-être plutôt l'époque de l'espace. Nous sommes à l'époque du simultané, nous sommes à l'époque de la juxtaposition, à l'époque du proche et du lointain, du côté à côté, du dispersé (*Dits et Ecrits* 752)

[The current era should perhaps instead be considered above all the era of space. We are in the era of simultaneity, we are in the era of the juxtaposition, the era of the near and the far, of the side to side, of the scattered].<sup>40</sup>

On that day, Foucault also introduced his concept of heterotopia “l'hétérotopie”: set at a remove from the utopia, heterotopia designates “des emplacements absolument autres”, places that, while still located in time and space, are “absolutely other”. Drawing on Gaston Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'Espace* (1958), as well as his own work on internal spaces, Foucault suggested that the space in which humankind lives is not “une espace homogène et vide” [a homogeneous and empty space] but, on the contrary: “un espace qui est tout chargé de qualités, un espace qui est peut-être aussi hanté de fantasme; l'espace de notre perception première, celui de nos rêveries, celui de nos passions” (*Dits et Ecrits* 752) [a space which is loaded with qualities, a space which is perhaps also haunted with fantasies, the space of our initial perception, that of our reveries, that of our passions]. Foucault's conception of heterotopic space has been elaborated by many geocritics, including Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Soja in their respective conceptions of “third space” (*The Location of Culture*) and “thirdspace” (*Thirdspace*), a transdisciplinary conception of the spatiality of human life; and Michel Collot, who identifies a “tiers-espace” [third space] in literature, located between real and fictional space (“Pour une Géographie Littéraire” 89).

The twenty-first century saw a renewed interest in the increasing specialisation of literary studies, philosophy, and history as these disciplines developed an interdisciplinary dialogue with geographical studies. In 2005, Westphal, one of the founders of the field and author of the geocritical



“manifesto”, coined the neologism “geocriticism” in his geocritical “manifesto”, “Pour Une Approche Géocritique des Textes” (2005), prior to the publication of his critical work which spearheaded the rise of an international *Géocritique: La Géocritique: Réel, Fiction, Espace* (2007). Westphal’s study of the relationship between space and literature posits an undeniable link between textual spaces and the spaces of the “real”: “le ‘hors-texte’ est indissolublement lié au texte” (Lévy and Westphal 2) [the “beyond-the-text” is inextricably linked to the text],<sup>41</sup> to argue that literature plays an important role in both representing and shaping the way in which humans navigate the “referential” world (Westphal, *La Géocritique* 169–70). Literary and cultural critic Robert T. Tally, who translated Westphal’s work into English, has also played a fundamental role in highlighting the critical importance of geocriticism as a mode of literary analysis. Tally’s and Westphal’s mode of geocriticism continues the work of spatial analysis from the mid- to late-twentieth century onwards, by theorists including Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre, Foucault, Maurice Blanchot, Jameson, Franco Moretti, and Edward Soja. I define geocriticism in a general sense, using one of Westphal’s more general conceptions of the discipline: “l’analyse spatiale” [spatial analysis] that finds “son application naturelle dans l’Examen des représentations artistiques des référents géographiques” [its natural application in the study of artistic representations of geographical referents] (*La Géocritique* 110, 194).<sup>42</sup> For Westphal, “référents géographiques” do not have to exist purely in the real world but can also lie “à la croisée de la géologie et de la mythologie, du réel et d’une fiction plus ou moins reconnue” [at the intersection of geology and mythology, of reality and more or less recognisable fiction] (*La Géocritique* 193), as Maurice Blanchot has also explored in his study of literary spaces.<sup>43</sup> I employ geocriticism in my book to demonstrate how SF illustrates the ways in which race and gender are spatially and temporally constructed, hypothesising that racial ideologies are operated through the interaction between gendered bodies and state spaces. I have chosen to include geocriticism in my methodology because, as I will explore below, geocriticism shares with SF an interest in imaginary spaces, including those depicted in fictional narratives, that dialogue with spaces in the “real”. A geocritical study of space in SF therefore supports my analysis of how my chosen corpus of primary sources engages with the way in which race and gender are spatially constructed, while also explicating the way in which SF can transform how race and gender are lived in the spaces of the present.

### *Real, Imaginary, and Textual Spaces*

Westphal’s mode of geocriticism is of particular use to this book’s analysis of SF because of its focus on the way in which “real” space interacts



with processes of rhetorical and imaginative space creation. According to Westphal, space is “im-mense” (*Le Monde Plausible* 247), too expansive to be sufficiently rendered by the maps that attempt to contain it. He theorises the cartographic representation of space as a subjective, abstract, and imaginative art, offering as an example the variation in depictions of the globe put forward by historical maps, which differ according to the vision of the mapmaker: he concludes, “voilà pourquoi toutes les cartes sont différent” (*Le Monde Plausible* 247) [and that is why all maps are different].<sup>44</sup> While often incorrectly made synonymous with “place”, which can be made tangible when shrunken onto a map and represented using colour and other markings, it is impossible to fully contain space, for “L’essence de l’espace est inaccessible, car elle transgresse les limites du perceptible et du maîtrisable” (*Le Monde Plausible* 247) [The essence of space is inaccessible, for it transgresses the limits of the perceptible and the controllable].

For Westphal, the textual, the real, and the imaginary are deeply imbricated with one another. This is the premise of *La Géocritique*: that within the text, the real and the imaginary are engaged in a dialectic; they are two sides of the same coin, constantly referring back to one another. Elaborating on Lefebvre’s concept of *l’espace vécu* (*La Production de l’Espace* 49) [lived space],<sup>45</sup> Westphal argues that the space of the text is also a kind of “lived space”, replete with images and symbols through which it is interpreted and experienced: “les espaces de représentation, à savoir les espaces vécus à travers les images et les symboles qui les accompagnent” (*La Géocritique* 155) [the spaces of representation, namely the spaces lived through the images and the symbols that accompany them]. “L’Espace vécu” [lived space] is one of a triad of overlapping spaces conceptualised by Lefebvre as “le perçu, le conçu, le vécu” [perceived space, conceived space, and lived space] (332). *L’espace perçu* refers to our daily perception of the space in which we live, through the sensory phenomena that mediate our interaction with physical space, so that, for example, we do not collide with objects (*La Production de l’Espace* 203). “L’Espace conçu” is an abstract representation of space, as drawn up as by “des savants, des planificateurs, des urbanistes, des technocrates” [scientists, planners, town planners, and technocrats] (*La Production de l’Espace* 48) so that while conceived space “s’accorde sans autre examen un espace objectif, neutre, et vide” (45) [initially appears to be a neutral, objective, and empty space] but is in fact the facilitator of “the division labour, the division of needs and the division of objects”. “L’Espace vécu”, the third and most theorised of Lefebvre’s spaces, is a concrete, fragmented space, “directement vécu” [directly lived] by its subjects and comprised by images and symbols layered onto the physical space which then affect the user’s subjective experience of it (49, 13). This is the space that Westphal reflects upon in most detail, noting that “C’est alors que la littérature trouve son mot à dire, à dire, oui, et pas seulement

à transcrire dans le texte” (*La Géocritique* 129) [It is at this point that literature finds something to say, *to say*—yes, not only to transcribe onto the text]. Literature, when drawing on elements of the ‘real,’ lies at “l’interface entre le réel et la fiction” (*La Géocritique* 129) [the interface between reality and fiction] (Geocriticism 77) so that “le passage de la ville réelle à la ville imaginaire” (*La Géocritique* 129) [the passage from the real city to the imaginary city] can “rétablir” [restore] and “réinventer” [reinvent] the real (Geocriticism 77). Textual ‘lived space’ can thus be a space of utopian imagination and resistance to the dominant order, as Edward Soja (1996) also envisages when he argues that “l’Espace vécu” is also “a space of collective resistance, a *Thirdspace of political choice* that is also a meeting place for all peripheralised or marginalised ‘subjects’ wherever they may be located” (35). Soja’s “Thirdspace” denotes spaces which are, “vitaly filled with politics and ideology, with the real and imagined space intertwined, and with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and other material spaces that concretise the social relations of production, re-production, exploitation, domination, and subjection” (68). Soja argues that because this is a space of domination, it can also be one that rejects these same “authoritative and paradigmatic structures that suggest permanence or inviolability, invites contestation, and thereby keeps open the spatial debate to new and different possibilities” (107). This form of resistance is “textual and political practice”, one that I would argue is employed by my chosen works of SF which, engaging with both the real and the imaginary, conceptualise and actualise contestation in the present. The sub-section “Feminist and Anti-Racist Geocriticism” introduces the way in which geocriticism intersects with feminist and anti-racist theory. In particular, they converge in explorations of the images and symbols that saturate lived spaces and direct the way in which those spaces inform the experience of gendered and racialised subjectivity. The final sub-section explores the way in which the textual spaces of SF comment on the ways in which inequalities are shaped in the social spaces that constitute the domain of the real.

#### *A Geocritical Approach to Feminist, Queer, and Anti-racist Science Fiction*

Westphal’s mode of geocriticism is a particularly useful tool with which to read SF because it is reliant on and embroiled with the way in which the genre navigates “the real” and the “un-real” or “not yet real” to explore new ways of existing in space. He explains that:

À l’interface entre réel et imaginaire, là où des éléments mythiques déréalisants s’emparent d’un espace mal cartographié, voire vierge encore, se déploient les territoires qu’explore la science-fiction.

(*La Géocritique* 129)

[The territories explored by SF unfold at the interface between the real and imaginary, where mythic elements disconnect from reality and take possession of spaces that have been poorly mapped and are indeed still virgin territory].

For Westphal, a space that is “mal cartographié” (poorly mapped) is still potentially virgin territory in the sense that it can be re-mapped by those who subsequently imagine the configuration of that space differently. Westphal asks that we engage in this process of re-imagining space in order to travel beyond the limits of the mapped world and to seek out space in its infiniteness. He claims that the quests for new spaces undertaken by these men and women are “un nouvel acte de foi” (*Le Monde Plausible* 110):

Il se sera agi pour eux d’ouvrir une nouvelle perspective aussi fuyante que la ligne de l’horizon, aussi fragile que son fil. Il leur aura fallu comprendre, dans une intuition frôlant l’improbable et pour nous presque indicible, que l’horizon insaisissable était comme l’obscurité qui annonçait une lumière lointaine. Il s’agissait d’un nouvel acte de foi (110).

[For them, it will mean opening a new perspective as elusive as the horizon line, one as fragile as its thread. They will have had to understand, in an intuition bordering the unlikely and for us the almost indescribable, that the elusive horizon was like the darkness that heralded a distant light. It amounted to a new act of faith].

To the confined, man-made spaces of human confinement, Westphal prescribes world-building that imagines beyond the horizon line. Westphal’s mode of geocriticism, the study of real and imagined spaces, puts its emphasis on attempts to move beyond the horizon of what is imaginable, to challenge the world as we know it, in the hope of making new discoveries in unknown terrains. For some writers of SF, the act of writing new worlds—or seeking out “une lumière lointaine”—is also an act of survival. It is not without risk: for Westphal the horizon line is “aussi fragile que son fil”, easily lost sight of, and difficult to explain or justify to sceptics, a sight grounded only in the nameless “indicible” and “improbable” intuition of the explorer. The horizon’s guiding light, by which the explorer holds his/her course, must always be far off—“lointaine”—leading him/her beyond the confinement of the now.

This pursuit of uncertain spaces that lie beyond the horizon line has been conceptualised by queer theorists such as Wendy Gay Pearson (2010) as also a queer practice. Pearson argues that texts which escape the spaces of the real to lead the reader beyond the limitations of the horizon line can be read as engaging in a queer “quest” away from the heteronormative spaces

of the real. She argues that SF's queer potential is in its ability to produce an "alien cartography" (34) made accessible through a "queer viewpoint(s)" which can "provide a map or chart of those alien spaces—whether inner or outer—in which queers do, have, and will exist" (35). Pearson emphasises the importance of "alien spaces" above the mere presence of queer aliens, noting that it is the queer science fictional cartographies that bring those queer subjects into explicit existence, and without which queer characters can remain invisible. Indeed, she notes that a text that features queer characters is not necessarily "queer": the insertion of gay, lesbian, and "non-white" characters into heteronormative situations, set in the future, often fails to remap sexuality, gender, and race in any meaningful way. Pearson argues that even when presented "in plain sight", queer people can "escape the heterosexual or, perhaps more precisely, the heteronormative gaze", thus remaining "invisible and unrecognised" (25). Kilgore has also argued a similar point in relation to Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy (1992–1996), in which the reformulation of race and gender does not create a full-formed queer utopia: "elements of a queer future but not its full realisation" (Kilgore 245).

One central issue with crossing Westphal's "horizon line" to imagine and access queer and anti-racist spaces in SF is, as Kilgore sees it, "not in imagining what a queer future would look like but how we might get there from where we are" ("Queering the Coming Race?" 235). We might ask what map—or series of maps—would need to be consulted in order to seek out a path towards a queer future. If we can only "get there from where we are", then any cartographic exercise that seeks to map out a queer topography must conjoin that re-imagined future to the existing present and its past. For Kilgore, this can be achieved through "a reparative reading strategy" ("Queering the Coming Race?" 236). Following Jameson's directive to "always historicise" (*The Political Unconscious* 9), and Sedgwick's practice of "reparative reading" (1997), Kilgore explores how a reparative reading strategy "acknowledges oppressive pasts but recovers their utopian potential, allowing for the possibility of futures that are 'pleasurable' and 'ameliorative'" (236). Positioning, in particular, Robinson's *Mars* trilogy as a "reparative reading of modern history" (236), Kilgore argues that SF can induce an optimism from even the darkest historical moments by using as its tool the "liberatory potential" of SF conventions (238). Kilgore's analyses are written in Sedgwick's reparative mode of "seeking pleasure" ("Paranoid Reading" 16), allowing for joyful re-mapping of queer futurity onto and beyond the horizon line, in what he believes is nothing short of a paradoxical "rediscovery, in critical terms, of the future" ("Queering the Coming Race?" 235). To rediscover the future is, in the reparative mode, to simultaneously acknowledge the invisible actors of the past and present who have, on the grounds of gender, race, or sexuality, been denied

visibility in the spaces that they occupy. The utopian potential of the future is here embedded in the historical specificity of the multiple and intersecting processes of race, gender, and sexuality. Indeed, for the utopian spaces of multiple horizons to hold use value as queer, feminist, and anti-racist utopias, they must not be “placeless”, but hold a reactionary relationship with those spaces that already exist, transforming and repairing those spaces to form better futures.

In order to elaborate on this idea in the context of feminist spatial theory, I turn to Elizabeth Grosz’s work on the relationship between space and the body in virtual reality (VR), and Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman’s theorisations of race in the spaces of the internet. In *Race in Cyberspace* (2000), Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman contest the idea that the internet is a space wherein the user can be “invisible” (4), that their body disappears and is replaced with an online “identity” that is chosen freely.<sup>46</sup> Far from being empty of embodied humanity, the informational or digital world is as inflected with issues of race and gender as the “real” one. For Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman, when a user goes online, they arrive as a culturally, politically, and geographically embodied subject:

race matters in cyberspace precisely because all of us who spend time online are already shaped by the ways in which race matters offline and we can’t help but bring our own knowledge, experiences, and values with us when we log on.

(4–5)

Mark Poster, however, argues that in asserting that race also “matters in cyberspace”, Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman’s argument is “still haunted by the spectre of technological determinism, in that social problems tend to be seen as technology’s ‘fault’ (152). However, Poster concedes that Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman’s assertion that our “knowledge, experiences, and values” are brought into the virtual arena when we surf the internet still supports the widespread contention among many branches of critical theory that spaces do not exist in a vacuum, which is why cyberspace is as equally a racialised space as the spaces of the real world (Poster 152). The permeability of “offline” and “online” spaces can also be explored in relation to Westphal’s understanding of the interrelation between real and virtual spaces, which he has termed “le brouillage hétérotopique” (*La Géocritique* 104) [heterotopic interference]: “When such interference or blurring occurs, the connection between reality and fiction becomes precarious. The referent, which Westphal also calls the “realeme”, is the springboard into fictional worlds, so that the domains of the “virtual” and the “real” ultimately become indistinguishable. While, as Jennifer González

and Lisa Nakamura have pointed out, corporations such as Bodies© INC, IBM, Compaq, and Origin claim that cyberspace offers the possibility to construct virtual bodies and disembodied online subjectivities, completely detached from their “reality”, all fantasies or virtualities are a product of localised realities (González 45; Nakamura 22). The already problematic possibility of eliminating race or gender in a cybernetic virtuality is thus proved impossible, for:

Only in the absence of history and with a blindness to those cultural contexts where bodies are already dismembered through political torture, and those in which racial identities are fraught with a history of violent, forced miscegenation, can one imagine such fantasies operating freely.

(González 45)

Imagination, therefore, is always contaminated by “heterotopic interference”: the mediation of the subject’s arrival into virtuality by the systems of exchange and codification that operate in the “real”. The virtual cannot escape the matrices of power that control our realities, and to claim otherwise would, as González puts it, be to ignore the often violent processes that have created formations of race in the present. Race and racism, and gender and sexism, exist in as many variations in cyberspace as they do in “reality”.

In her exploration of the feminist potentialities and limitations of virtual reality (VR), Grosz argues that cyberspace and the newly developed spaces of VR should not emerge under the guise of “genderlessness”, but as accessible spaces which engage with localised, historicised, and geospecific discussions about issues of gender. Starting from the body, Grosz’s *Architecture from the Outside* (2010) is an investigation into her proposition that space and time can always be thought of in terms of corporeal or “exterior” surfaces: “Conceptions of space and time are necessary coordinates of a reinterrogation of the limits of corporeality” (31). The fantasy of disembodiment propounded by VR is, therefore, an empty one, for:

The body you have is still the one sitting there hooked up to the machine, regardless of the clothing or apparatus you put on it—the information glove is still designed for the human hand. So I understand the appeal of this technology, beyond the body, dominant in cyberspace, but it seems to me to be just unthought-out or fanciful. There can be no liberation from the body, or from space, or the real. They all have a nasty habit of recurring with great insistence, however much we try to fantasise their disappearance

(17)

The passage mirrors Westphal's own postulation that "L'Espace gravite autour du corps, de même qui le corps se situe dans l'Espace" (*La Géocritique* 109) [Space gravitates around the body, just as the body is situated in space]: for Grosz, space is corporeal, its features existing parallel to the historical and cultural particularities of the bodies that inhabit it. Imagination, the body, space, and the real exist in a symbiotic relationship, mutually informing the way that each is lived and experienced, both corporeally and consciously. Reality's "nasty habit" of making itself manifests in fantasy and virtuality is also the condition by which the feminist utopia might come into effect: only through a reactionary relationship with the real can the realm of fantasy seek to ameliorate the world we live in. Only when understood as deeply imbricated in reality can fantasy—visions of an "otherwise"—produce a positive return effect on the present. The virtual, therefore, can be used to surface and accentuate issues of embodiment in the real, leading to the possible enquiry of alternative subjectivities and corporealities and communities in the present. Indeed, as Westphal reminds us, "On n'oubliera pas que la littérature est un 'laboratoire du possible,' comme disait Paul Ricoeur, rien de plus, rien de moins—et c'est déjà considérable" ("Territoire et Littérature" 9) [We will not forget that literature is a 'laboratory of the possible,' as Paul Ricoeur said, nothing more, nothing less—to which a considerable contribution has already been made]. For women writers of SF who seek to bring new realities into existence, an experiment conducted in the science fictional laboratories "of the possible"—whether the laboratory where Mary Shelley's young scientist creates his monster, or the Light Laboratory that Shevek speaks of in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*—is a creative and intellectual exercise against the limitations of present reality which often, in Shevek's words, "proves something it wasn't meant to prove" (Le Guin 345).

### *Feminist and Anti-racist Geocriticism*

The geocritical method, then, allows for an exploration of the way in which the divisive systems that produce formations of race and gender are conjured within the heteropatriarchal imagination, and then spatially and temporally policed.<sup>47</sup> An inquiry into the way in which race and gender are spatialised through migration and diaspora is, in particular, gaining a growing body of criticism, not least from Gilroy and Butler, who have both explored, to similar effect, the way in which diaspora's negotiation of space impacts the notion of the racialised, biological family. In *Small Acts*, Gilroy asks:

If we are to think of ourselves as people whose black cultures and identities have grown from communicative webs that link several



nation-states, how do we understand the notions of space and spatiality, intimacy and distance, raised by the writing of diaspora history?  
(193)

He engages with this inquiry in works I have already discussed, including *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and later in *Against Race* (2000), in which he elaborates the claim that diasporic crossroads can be productively read as sites of anti-racist community building. For him, a critical analysis of the displacement and transferral of communities that are at the heart of diaspora movements can help shrug off cultural investments in “the pastoral black family”, as well as what he terms the “post-national variety of essentialism” that is prevalent in late twentieth-century “identity politics” (*Small Acts* 194). “To take diaspora intercultural seriously”, as he puts it, is to re-consider the way in which communities are formed in space by making race visible as a spectral, ideological force grounded in false notions of an intrinsic and unquestionable connection to the space of the nation (*Small Acts* 194). Race, therefore, can be thought in spatial terms, as is also demonstrated by Gilroy’s contention that the transnational movements of diaspora complicate the purified representations of community that he views as “a short-cut to solidarity” (*Small Acts* 203). When read through a geocritical lens, an exploration of issues of race and diaspora in the textual spaces of SF can illuminate Gilroy’s investigation into the relationship between space and intimacy, particularly in the context of his contention that an analysis of diasporic movements offers insight into incremental modes of building alliances in the long term. A geocritical approach to the way in which my primary sources of SF evoke the complex and uneven surfaces of diaspora, notably Vallorani’s *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* and Bodard’s *On a Red Station, Drifting*, therefore provides insights into “planetary” modes of community-building that undermine and overrun systems of race and gender.

Diasporic movement has also been brought into consideration by Butler in her exploration of how “migration, exile, and refugee status”, as well as more local forms of displacement (“divorce and marriage”), have impacted the spatialisation of kinship. She argues that we live in “a time in which kinship has become fragile, porous, and expansive”, demonstrated by the many children that “live, psychically, at the crossroads of the family, or in multiple layered family situations” due to “divorce and remarriage, because of migration, exile, and refugee status, because of global displacements of various kinds” (*Antigone’s Claim* 22). While Butler argues that the nuclear family has been unhinged by “global displacements” and made “fragile”, other critics have suggested that normative conceptions of the family have not only survived the spatial dislocation of kinship, but strengthened and thrived, by responding to the geographical phenomena of modernity with



ease and flexibility, as argued by literary critic Anca Parvulescu (*The Traffic in Women's Work* 30). It is likely that the uneven distribution of globalisation still favours the families of the privileged in their ability to remain visible when it counts to be visible, and invisible when it is better to be so: when escaping persecution, for example, or evading tax. Whichever way Butler is read, the re-spatialisation of the family also denotes the spatialisation of gender, race, and sexuality, and points towards the kind of ethics of deferral or detour that spatial studies can offer sedimented notions of the family. To be effective, the exploration of these kinds of spatial deviation from the nuclear kinship unit must, as cultural critic Mark Fisher claims radical theorists “from Brecht through to Foucault and Badiou” have emphasised, “destroy the appearance of ‘natural order’” (17). If the family, through its shared space, denotes a particular set of “family values”, then the de-naturalisation of those values might be made possible by highlighting the dis/connections and encounters triggered by the spatial dimension of diasporic movements.

When complicating the notion of the family as the naturalised space of kinship, this book does not attempt to equate “racialised” and “gendered” spaces as homologous, neither does it propose that there is such a thing as a universalising model of either “racialised” or “gendered” spaces. However, the consequences and practices of the racialisation and gendering of social spaces can be usefully compared, in that they illustrate ideological attempts to break down the expanses of space—which Westphal reminds us transgress “les limites du perceptible et du maîtrisable” (*Le Monde Plausible* 247) [the limits of the perceptible and the controllable]—into smaller parts wherein subjects can be categorised and set in their assigned hierarchical positions. From the cages of Katharine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night*, where women are confined from birth until death, to the claustrophobia experienced by Jeannine in Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*, SF written by women often reminds the reader of Said’s assertion that “[t]o be governed people must be counted, taxed, educated, and of course ruled in regulated places” (*Culture and Imperialism* 396). Geocriticism, as I have argued above, reveals that in the blurring of reality and fiction—so successfully demonstrated by, for example, Russ’s and Burdekin’s novels, which vehemently attack the spaces of the ‘real’ in a science fictional setting—various historical configurations of spatialised power structures can be made visible. On Earth, these regulated spaces are real-world dystopias, within which the oppressed inhabit spaces that were not built for them and temporalities that are not theirs to claim. Their work has illuminated the discriminatory and exclusionary everyday organisation of space and place. Leslie Kanés Weisman explores how the suburban home can, in geocritical terms, be seen as a metaphor for the gender-based division of labour, while also exploring possibilities for “pluralistic, flexible housing”

that can contribute to an environment that promotes equality (156). Daphne Spain's *Gendered Spaces* (1992) also experiments with ways to "de-gender" space, and thus reconfigure relationships between the bodies that occupy it. Sue Golding, meanwhile, has explored the spatial multiplicity of sexuality within the framework of a "fluid (and yet discrete) concept of time, but also a dynamic concept of space", which produces a "dynamic fourth dimension" (211). Patricia Price-Chalita (1994) explores the concepts of empowerment/disempowerment within spatial terms, using space as a textual tool to explore possible liberation within and outside of existing power relations. Elizabeth Grosz' *Architecture from the Outside* (2001) stresses the role of architecture in renegotiating the experience of gendered embodiment, namely "the critique of its own phallogocentrism that architecture must undertake" (148–9). Grosz identifies, in particular, architecture's failure to acknowledge sexual specificity within its spaces, posing the question of how the apparent neutrality of a building can fail to relate to the specificity of the subjects which occupy it, while also noting that space affects the specificity of subjectivity (168). Elaborating on Luce Irigaray's theory of sexual difference, Grosz asks that the question of sexual difference be raised again in relation to spatiality. She explains that:

Instead of this question, the question of women's place within an apparently neutral but visibly patriarchal and fraternal social order takes its place—the question of accommodating women within frameworks that have been devised according to what men think is sexually neutral.

(169)

The invisible systems that Grosz describes, which define and regulate sexual difference through women's occupation of space, can be made visible through SF's ability to cast the spaces of the real into radical alterity. This is also Spivak's ambition in her invocation of the planetary, a way of situating humans as planetary subjects that addresses "not only the materiality of the world but also our collective place and responsibility as humans within it" (557). Spivak elucidates this idea in her essay "From Haverstock Hill Flat to U.S. Classroom" (2000), in which she claims that through the lens of the planetary, which she describes as a "defracted view of ethics", space can be "the name of alterity, not time, not nation, not mother, not *visage* as intending" (18).<sup>48</sup> The space of the planetary evokes a sense of "visage", translated here from the French not as "face", as Spivak reminds her reader, but as "a nominal construction from *viser*, to be directed towards, the verb of intentionality" ("From Haverstock Hill" 11). Following Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of alterity, she contends that the spaces of the planetary open up an ethics that is directed towards the other, referred to by Spivak as "a re-constellated planetary imperative to

responsibility” (15). This planetary imperative to a responsible pragma, as I will argue in my final chapters, can be elucidated through a geocritical investigation of race and gender in the cognitively estranged spaces of SF.

## 7 Conclusion

From Lefebvre, Soja, and Said’s work on the production of social space, to Westphal’s formulation of a *géocritique* that navigates the relationship between real and imaginary spaces, and Grosz’s explorations into the spatialisation of patriarchal power, geocriticism offers important insight into the intricacies of the relationship between race, gender, and space. These theorists have proved that the discipline offers historicised and localised analyses of the way in which race and gender are spatially inhabited, segregated, policed, and valorised. Read alongside spatially informed racial and gender critique, women’s utopian SF both demonstrates a nuanced commentary on the spatialisation of cultural capital and creates worlds that evade the fixity of these regulated spaces. Beyond the boundaries of the real, earthly performances of race, gender, and sexuality can be geocritically reimagined in limber and borderless futures. These SF narratives both elaborate on, and as I will argue, radicalise contributions to forms of new and planetary humanisms.

## Notes

- 1 The double bind identified by Butler is the issue of Zionism’s relationship with Judaism; if to be a Jew is also to be a Zionist, then many Jews who stand against Israeli actions in Gaza fear that criticising Israeli military activity will incite further anti-Semitism, and thus provoke further violence (Butler, “Versions of Binationalism in Said and Buber”).
- 2 See Combahee River Collective.
- 3 See, for example, Gopinath 198; Ahmed 135.
- 4 See, for example, Anzaldúa 165–6; Moraga and Anzaldúa 206–62; Somerville 39–163; Kilgore 233–51; Gaard 114–37; Merrick 216–32.
- 5 This perspective also echoes Ruth Benedict’s (1940) and Henry Louis Gates’s (1994) respective conceptions of race as a product of racism. In Benedict’s words, “racism is a creation of our own time. It is a new way of separating the sheep from the goats” (5). In other words, it is racism that creates racial divisions, and not vice versa. Gates has noted that, “completely by the accident of racism, we have been bound together with people with whom we may or may not have something in common, just because we are ‘black’” (ix). For Louis Gates, race is thus a rhetorical category that can only be made to signify by racism.
- 6 Butler has recently contributed the paper “Versions of Binationalism in Said and Buber” to a collection of essays edited by Braidotti (*Conflicting Humanities*);

Braidotti and Butler engage in extensive dialogue in “Feminism by Another Name” (2014); and in 2014, they interviewed together an infamous anarchic Russian punk band, the result of which is “Pussy Riot meets Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti” (2014).

- 7 In *Senses of the Subject* (2015), Butler explains that “Hegel lets us know . . . that he seeks a condition in which ‘the infinite grief and whole gravity of the [spirit’s] discord is acknowledged’” (110). She subsequently explores the way in which “the idea of an aesthetic form animated and animating is not one that overcomes negativity” (110). For Butler, the animation that can be found in negativity can be usefully transformed into a political tool that, when exercised in assembly, can be a powerful mode of resistance. She claims that contrary to its usual association with a “deadening” feeling, grief or melancholy inversely hold “animating powers [which] indirectly testify to a persistent aliveness in the midst of loss” (110).
- 8 See, for example, Lacan’s *De la Psychose Paranoïaque dans ses Rapports avec la Personnalité* (1932); Pierre Bourdieu’s “What Makes a Social Class?” (1987); Alain Badiou’s *Théorie du Sujet* (1982); and Slavoj Žižek’s *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (1988).
- 9 For Butler’s theorisation of how some people are criminalised based on their public appearance, see, for example, “Performativity, Precarity, and Sexual Politics” (ii) and *Theory of Assembly* (59, 139, 186, 185).
- 10 To take another example of the political potential of disidentification is in terms of racial interpellation, I have a friend and colleague—a Roman man with a beard—who is regularly stopped by airport security when travelling in and out of Poland and questioned in such a way that implies that airport security identifies him as a potential terrorist. While the false accusation highlights the absurdity of airport racial profiling, Islamophobia, and the homogeneity of Polish society, spending many hours in an airport security room felt for my colleague very little like resistance. An example of racialised interpellation that might better illustrate the destabilising potential of the body is the case of Hessa Taft. Taft is a Latvian Jew who was born and raised in Berlin and became the Nazi’s poster child for the Aryan race after a well-known Berlin photographer entered her photograph into a competition to find the most Aryan-looking baby, whose image might be used for Nazi propaganda. Taft has admitted that, looking back, “I feel a little revenge” from the irony of the misidentification that is “something like satisfaction” (Blumberg). Had Taft’s baby photo suggested that she might have been Jewish, the consequence would have been very different: the photo would have been disqualified from the competition, and Taft and her family, and possibly the photographer, would most likely have been severely punished.
- 11 Butler’s work on affect is grounded in the writing of, among others, Spinoza, and so I base this analysis on his definition of affect as: “affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained” (*Ethics* 70). For a further analysis of Spinoza’s notion of affect, see Deleuze’s *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (49).

- 12 Online source.
- 13 An example of the complicity between the so-called social actors/activists and the production of hegemony might be found in the string of celebrities (and young imitators), who juggle high fashion with part-time activism. Models who define themselves on Instagram as much by their ethics as by their good-looks are British model of the moment Adwoa Aboah, whose tagline is “Activist, Model and founder of GURLS TALK”; 90s supermodel Christy Turlington, who opts for “global maternal health advocate/mom/traveler/model” as her Instagram bio; and It-Girl Emily Ratajkowski, who made her name in the controversial “Blurred Lines” music video, featuring the lyric “OK now he was close, tried to domesticate you/But you’re an animal, baby, it’s in your nature,” and promoted herself on Instagram in 2017 as “model/actress/activist.” The mainstreaming of activism has resulted in it becoming not just a social trend, but a fashion one. Indeed, the commercialisation of activism within European fashion was demonstrated to controversial effect by a billboard advert for the Arena shopping mall in Budapest, displayed on the prominent Parisi Udvar building in Spring 2018, featuring young women protesting in the street with loudspeakers and protest banners that read “VOTE FOR FASHION”. The fact of this advert’s success, even while it stirred controversy, demonstrates not only the trendiness of activism but a social blindness towards the conditions by which “activists” are able to protest or engage in awareness-raising activities in public spaces. Who speaks, and on behalf of whom, is, according to Dhawan, insufficiently problematised by the privileged protestors that make it into the public eye.
- 14 The non-profit claims it has “provided over \$3 million in grants that have impacted more than 400,000 people” (Robehmed).
- 15 Dior. “On the eve of #MariaGraziaChiuri’s first couture show for Dior, our muse Natalie Portman stood up for the rights of women everywhere while wearing our T-shirt inspired by our friend Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s powerfully resonant essay ‘We Should All be Feminists.’” *Instagram*, 22 January 2017, [www.instagram.com/p/BPkkNAUg3j-/](http://www.instagram.com/p/BPkkNAUg3j-/).
- 16 Popular quotation. See, for example, Church and Synagogue Library Association 19.
- 17 Butler explains that “For Lévinas, the human relation to the other is prior to the ontological relation to oneself” (*Senses of the Subject* 78). In this line, she paraphrases Richard Kearney’s 1982 interview with Emmanuel Lévinas, “Ethics of the Infinite”.
- 18 The term “metaphysical cannibalism”, coined by radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson in 1974 (*Amazon Odyssey* 48), describes, in Braidotti’s words, the “voracious violence that the dominant subject attributed to himself, to actually organise differences hierarchically and dialectically”. For Braidotti, the posthuman moment is an opportunity to renegotiate violently self-destructive “cannibalistic” relationships within the social symbolic (“Dictionary of Now” 00.12.18-00.13.01).
- 19 Haraway is particularly celebrated for her seminal work “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985). The cyborg, also a trope of SF, is in this essay the subject of what I view

- as a utopian invocation of a raceless and genderless creature. For an analysis of the cyborg in relation to women's SF, see, for example, Eleonora Federici's "Cyborgs and Women: Postmodern Narratives by Women Science Fiction Writers".
- 20 Here Gilroy echoes Stuart Hall's assertion that "race is thus ... the modality in which class is 'lived'" (see Hall 341). Robert Miles has reformulated this in the context of racism and migrant labour as "it is not 'race' but racism which, for Asian and Caribbean people can be the modality in which class is 'lived'" (Miles 7).
  - 21 Spivak's analysis of the gendered subaltern in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) has become an iconic illustration of the way in which gender, race, and class are compounded together in a blend of super-exploitation. In this essay, Spivak points away from gender-specific issues at stake during sati—the self-immolation of Hindu widow on her husband's pyre—and towards the more complex problem of these women's inflated exposure to class and racial divisions.
  - 22 The myth of the African American woman's hyper-sexuality has also been theorised by bell hooks, among others, in terms of "the tradition of Negro sensuality," one that has resulted in the "legitimised sexual exploitation of black females" since slavery, when slaveowners justified the rape of African American women with claims of their lasciviousness and hyper-sexuality. See hooks 29, 24.
  - 23 These examples bear witness to his intersectional approach in the examination of the construction of race and gender that was influenced by his time with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and by his interest in the "black cinema" that emerged in the UK from the 1970s onwards. From the films and essays of Pratibha Parmar and Kobena Mercer, and Isaac Julien's reflections in "De-Margin and De-Centre" (1988), to Isaac Julien and the Sankofa Film and Video Collective's work on gender, sexuality, and blackness (such as the 1986 feature-length *Passion of Remembrance*), these works responded to a need to situate historically the specific ways in which femininity and masculinity were racialised in twentieth-century Britain. Gilroy's implication in these cultural milieus has ultimately resulted in a more nuanced understanding of Asian, African, and Caribbean-British women's simultaneous experience of racial and gender oppression as part of his investigation of the production of race, nation, and national identity.
  - 24 Spivak's understanding of 'spectrality' appears to be modelled on Derrida's use of the term in his writing on "hauntology," notably in Karl Marx in *Spectres de Marx* (1993). For further evidence of this, see for example Spivak's "Ghostwriting." Derrida writes that, "as Marx himself spells out ... the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit" (*Specters of Marx* 5). My reading of Spivak suggests that for her the concept of gender is what makes this "becoming-body" an 'empirical' gendered body. These "spectral humans" are, as Butler puts it in an interview with Spivak, subsequently "deprived of ontological weight and failing the tests of social intelligibility" (*Who Sings the Nation State?* 15). Connecting

- this to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital, I view Spivak's employment of the term also as an illustration of the way in which gender 'haunts' reality so that symbolic capital such as race and gender are transformed into an embodied experience. For a further analysis of Derrida on Marx, see for example Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren's *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (2013), and Tim Fisk's essay "The Spectral Proletariat: Politics of Hauntology in *The Communist Manifesto*" (2011).
- 25 Gilroy has also analysed Douglass's writings in more detail in his *Black Atlantic*, 59–69.
- 26 Jane Bennett's (2010) *Vibrant Matter* provides a detailed study of vital materiality—the agency that emerges through configurations of nonhuman and human forces. She claims that agency is not only granted to humans by recognising the interdependency of humanity and other creatures, while also exploring the ways in which physical phenomena often visible in waste demonstrates the animacy of objects.
- 27 Also in the context of slavery and gender, hooks's *Ain't I a Woman* discusses African American abolitionist and women's activist Sojourner Truth's description of being treated like a "chattel, a thing, an animal" by an angry mob of white 'feminists' during a protest in Akron, Ohio at the second annual convention of the women's rights movement in 1852 (hooks 159). Publicly dragged down the hierarchical rungs of humanity, hooks argues that Truth epitomises the abuse and persecution of black women both before and after abolition, a violence justified using the following logic: "From such thinking emerged the stereotype of black women as sexual savages, and in sexist terms a sexual savage, a non-human, an animal cannot be raped" (hooks 52).
- 28 The incompleteness signalled by the invocation of an un-resurrected body echoes Derrida's concept of "le messianique sans messianisme," a messianism differently structured, so that the expectation connoted by "messianism" is never broken (*Spectres de Marx* 112). This reformulation of messianism is driven not by the Christian promise of everlasting life, but by the "performatif du promis" [the performative of the promise] (Derrida, *Le Toucher* 94).
- 29 Commenting on this notion of "the poetics of distance at one remove", Corinne Scheiner explains that:

In this passage, Derrida specifically evokes spatial distance, yet temporal distance is also central to his use of teleiopoiesis—recall he is discussing Nietzsche's notion of the philosophers of the future. In addition, teleiopoiesis accounts for the more metaphoric distance of alterity, as it is the signature of the other that initiates the utterance. The negotiation of these distances, their mediation, is the movement of teleiopoiesis.

(240)

These various modes of distancing are also essential to Spivak's creation of a mood of possibility and the invocation of alterity when she uses the phrase "a politics of friendship to come." For more on the exercise of distancing in Derridian teleiopoiesis, see for example, Hogan.



- 30 Sinéad Hogan also comments that “Derrida’s notion of *téléiopoièse* as ‘a poetics of distance at one remove’ may be read as putting a focus on how any future-producing-*techné* or ‘*poièse*’ must be constitutively undecidable” (116).
- 31 For further analysis of this temporality in Bloch’s work (primarily *The Principle of Hope*) in the context of utopia, see for example Rampley (177) and Gallope (108).
- 32 Utopian scholars like Robert Tally, Raffaella Baccolini, and Tom Moylan have argued, although in different contexts, that utopia has never been more essential, that is, utopia as methodology, as the imaginative capacity to resist a complex and all-consuming system which forecloses on the possibility of imagining a different future. See, for example, Tally’s *Geocritical Explorations* and Baccolini and Moylan’s *Utopia Method Vision*.
- 33 Taken from a section of *Death of a Discipline* in which Spivak employs a “feminist take” on Freud’s study of the *Heimlich/Unheimlich* (74–7). In a reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899). For her, “The uncanny is planetary” (80), a way to look at a familiar world in a different way. Indeed, the cause of Marlow’s anxiety is persuasively read as the natives’ “strange” familiarity, which is also the source of the racism uncovered by Chinua Achebe—the uncanny humanity of an alien other. Spivak offers Achebe’s essay a feminist twist by arguing that the planet can be the source of the uncanny. Instead of making the unfamiliar “other” familiar, planetary thinking conversely takes that which is perhaps most familiar to us—our planet—and makes it *unfamiliar*.
- 34 Halberstam’s account of queer failure is indebted to the work of Muñoz, in particular *Crusing Utopia* (2009). He has, as Halberstam puts it:

produced the most elaborate account of queer failure to date and he explains the connection between queers and failure in terms of a utopian “rejection of pragmatism,” on the one hand, and an equally utopian refusal of social norms on the other.

(Queer Art of Failure 89)

Indeed, Muñoz writes that “queer failure is not an aesthetic failure but, instead, a political refusal,” and envisages the spatiotemporality of queer failure in utopian terms: “queer utopia is not just a failure to achieve normative virtuosity; it is also a virtuosity that is born in the face of failure within straight time’s measure” (*Crusing Utopia* 177–8).

- 35 Halberstam came to critical acclaim for his 1998 *Female Masculinity*, a work which illuminates non-normative masculinities by claiming that female masculinity is “a specific gender with its own cultural history”, rather than an imitation of “male masculinity” (77).
- 36 This quotation is taken from Braidotti’s response to a question about the relationship between her and Halberstam’s work following her lecture at the university of Bologna in 2018, at which I was present (“Critical Humanities”).
- 37 While Halberstam uses the term “gay shame” to reference a concept which serves a particular political function through its inversion of “gay pride”, a movement which activist groups have critiqued on the basis of it having become “a massive consumer opportunity” (Halberstam, “Shame and White Gay



Masculinity” 223), the conference which inspired his paper, the “Gay Shame Conference” held at the University of Michigan in 2005, also used the term “queer shame” during its proceedings, which included panels such as “The Shame of Queer History/Queer Histories of Shame” (“Gay Shame Conference Schedule”). The term “queer shame” is also used alongside “gay shame” by theorists such as Muñoz (“Queer Minstrels for the Straight Eye,” 2005) and Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (“Beyond Gay Pride” 2009; “Gay Shame, Latina and Latino-Style,” 2011). La Fountain-Stokes even refers to the “Gay Shame Conference” as the “conference on queer shame at the University of Michigan” (“Beyond Gay Pride” 27), demonstrating that some theorists do use the terms interchangeably. Muñoz employs the term “gay shame” in reference to “the question of queer sex acts and shame,” demonstrating that “gay shame” can be induced by “queer sex acts” that might not necessarily be performed by people who identify as “gay” (“Queer Minstrels for the Straight Eye” 101). This corresponds in particular to the way in which I conceptualise “queer” shame’ in relation to SF, as I analyse instances of queer extraterrestrial sex and the feelings of shame experienced by participants as a result. The term “queer shame” within the contexts of Halberstam’s theorisation of “gay shame” is therefore of particular use to my reading of SF, in which “queer” references the queerness of these sex acts rather than the sexuality of those involved. In Regueiro’s “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, for example, I theorise Halberstam’s notion of “gay shame” in relation to two lesbian women, and in Barceló’s *Consecuencias Naturales*, I analyse the way in which a “white” man who does not identify as gay experiences a profound sense of shame following his intercourse with an alien of a different gender. In both cases, the narratives echo Halberstam’s critique of “gay shame,” but my employment of the term “queer shame” corresponds with broader humanistic issues that are triggered by the reformulation of issues of race and gender in scenes of unexpectedly reproductive sex set in outer-space.

- 38 Work that moves in this direction include Gaard’s analysis of the relationship between culture and nature (1997); Helen Merrick’s insight into the way the “human” is codified in relation to “nature” (2008); Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson’s anthology *Queer Ecologies* (2010); Tavia Nyong’o’s essay “Back to the Garden: Queer Ecology in Samuel Delany’s *Heavenly Breakfast*” (2012); Jeanne Vaccaro’s conceptualisation of the relationship between the political economy, the biosocial landscape of race and gender, and the materialities of water, animals, and flesh (2015); Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen’s “Has the Queer Ever Been Human?” (2015); and Haraway’s extensive invocation of a techno-organic subject.
- 39 These three works are landscapes of forests, rivers, and mountains, abstract in form and rendered in Fauvist colours using oil and acrylic.
- 40 This and all subsequent translations of Foucault’s *Dits et Ecrits* are my own translations from the original.
- 41 Translation my own.
- 42 This and all subsequent translations of Westphal’s *La Geocritique*, unless otherwise specified, are my own translations from the original.

- 43 See, for example, Blanchot.
- 44 This and all subsequent translations of Westphal's *Le Monde Plausible*, unless otherwise specified, are my own translations from the original.
- 45 This and all subsequent translations of Lefebvre's *La Production de l'Espace* are my own translations from the original.
- 46 Two decades of polemics over cybersecurity and surveillance have passed since the work's publication, proving that the internet often makes users more, not less, visible: in 2012, the 0XOMAR hacker leaked 400,000 credit cards online; in 2015, the social security numbers, addresses, fingerprints, and other personal data belonging to 21.5 million people were stolen from the United States Office of Personnel Management and published online; in 2017, 25,000 digital photos and ID scans of patients from a Lithuanian cosmetic surgery clinic were published online, affecting clients from over 60 countries.
- 47 In the past two decades, urban sociologists and geocritics, such as Edward Soja (1989), have employed a spatial analysis of the gendering of physical and virtual spaces. There is also a substantial body of work which analyses race in relation to space, including residential segregation in and from the metropolis (Rex and Moore 1967; Smith 1993; Farrar 1997; Somerville and Steele 2002; Adelman and Mele 2014; Burdsey 2016); queer temporality's relationship to spatiality (Halberstam 2005; Muñoz 2009); mapping queer spaces (Betsky 1997; Bousiou 2008; Romanow 2009; Campos 2014; Doan 2015; McNeil et al., 2017); employment and health (Immergluck 1998; Jennings 2007; Ozdenerol 2016; Slocum and Saldanha 2016); race, space and the law (Razack 2002); race and cyberspace (Kollock and Smith 2002; Everett 2009; Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman 2010); crime (Rose and McClain 1990; Rice and White 2010); racial alliances and antagonisms in the cityscape, educational inequity (Morrison, Annamma, and Jackson 2017); interracial conflict (Johnson 2013); migration and diaspora (Marouan and Simmons 2013; Frazier, Tettey-Fio, and Henry 2016; Gilroy 1997; 2000) and racialised youth cultures (Bressey and Dwyer 2016; Nayak 2016).
- 48 Here "*visage*" signifies intent, in accordance with English translations of Merleau-Ponty that interpret the vern "*viser*" as "to intend." See, for example, Heidi Bostic's translation of Fontanille (xiii).

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## 2 Contextualising the History of Science Fiction

### 1 Utopia and Science Fiction

Utopia or eutopia,<sup>1</sup> the umbrella term that includes utopian fiction (which, to simplify, imagines a better place), and dystopian fiction (a worse one), has a complex and intimate relationship with works of SF that explore issues of race and gender. This is because, as theorists such as Kilgore have demonstrated, the anticipatory power of utopian speculation is a productive tool with which to reformulate race and gender in science fictional worldbuilding. Indeed, SF, which often offers a space beyond the impediments of the present, including the systemic crises issued by racial and gender oppression, engages in a utopian retrieval of alternative universes. The affinity between utopia and SF, as they seek other places, spaces, and realities, presents itself as akin to a Venn diagram: their methods and ambitions overlap at times and disunite at others. This relationship has been described at length by utopian scholars from Darko Suvin and Raymond Williams to Frederic Jameson and Edward Chan.

For Suvin, utopia is specifically the “sociopolitical subgenre of SF” (61). Where utopia locates an unchartered place in “this world”, Suvin suggests that SF occupies itself instead with the extraterrestrial, the spaces beyond this earth (42). Raymond Williams’ 1978 essay “Utopia and SF” extends the differences between SF and utopia beyond geographical ones, identifying four categorical certainties to describe and delineate what distinguishes SF from utopia, and where the overlaps occur. Though Williams advises that it is “tempting to extend both categories until they are loosely identical, and it is true that the presentation of *otherness* appears to link them”, he adds that their shared “discontinuity from ordinary ‘realism’ ... is fundamentally variable” (97). Concerned with what is “properly utopian or dystopian fiction”, Williams goes on to identify four “types”; “(a) the paradise”/“the hell”, “(b) the externally altered world”, “(c) the willed transformation”, and “(d) the technological transformation” (97–98). These can also be reversed into their negative forms to describe various



characteristics of dystopia. While all four, but in particular (a), (b), and (d), can be continuous with SF, for Williams, SF is distinct from utopian fiction in that it connects with the present in a technological or scientific sense. Following the dystopian turn of the late 1960s, Williams suggests that the works of SF which fall into category (a), “the projection of new heavens and new hells”, often both surpass and fall short of utopia. In this dystopian mode, a mutation of human nature rather than a utopian moral and social transformation results in crisis.

Arguably the most significant commentary on the relationship between utopia and SF is Jameson’s 1982 essay “Progress versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?” in which he argues that not only does SF help imagine the steps towards utopia, it also warns us of our inability to imagine utopia:

[Science fiction’s] deepest vocation is over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatise our incapacity to imagine the future, to body forth, through apparently full representations which prove on closer inspection to be structurally and constitutively impoverished, the atrophy in our time of what Marcuse has called the *utopian imagination*, the imagination of otherness and radical difference; to succeed by failure, and to serve as unwitting and even unwilling vehicles for a meditation, which, setting forth for the unknown, finds itself irrevocably mired in the all-too-familiar, and thereby becomes unexpectedly transformed into a contemplation of our own absolute limits.

(153)

For Jameson as for Chan, SF’s escapist qualities do not make it necessarily able to avoid a political resonance with reality. Instead, he claims that SF is tied to the present, even as it takes the reader on an uncertain trajectory into the future. SF thus offers a reminder that the utopian imagination is always already mired in the present: it cannot fully break into radically unfamiliar spaces. Instead of offering blueprints of a future that has shrugged off the limitations of the present, the use-value of the utopian impulse, when applied to SF, is that it “enacts and enables a structurally unique ‘method’ for apprehending the present as history” (153). Moylan and Baccolini have also explored the temporal dynamics of utopia seen as “method” (*Utopia Method Vision*), a process which Ruth Levitas terms “The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society” or “IROS”. Levitas’ notion of “IROS” is an “archaeological” practice which she argues is “based on a mixture of evidence, deduction and imagination” (61). In this sense, utopia as method is a trial-and-error process with an emphasis on failure, an unpalatable result that enables the emergence of a better future. For Chan, the continual and never-ending purpose of utopia as a method is to make issues of race and gender persistently the subject of questioning: utopian SF can

subsequently counter “the abstract individual and the irrational erasure of racial (and other forms of) particularity” (201). Chan argues that utopian and dystopian SF which fails to do this because it contains characters that represent a universalised individual who is neither historically, geographically, or culturally located, and in so doing might purport to be colour-blind, tend to bypass the struggle against racism by simply deleting that struggle. Instead, SF that employs utopia as a method might refigure the way in which race and gender come into formation in the present to offer a transformation of cultural capital, and a sense of direction, sustenance, and momentum to anti-racist and feminist movements. Indeed, Levitas claims that the “strength of IROS or the utopian method is precisely that it deals with the concrete instantiation of values, enabling a real exploration and judgement” (57). More than simply an expression of desire for change, the utopian method grapples head-on with the problems of the present, refusing to leave them by the wayside as it seeks out a better world.

Conceptualising utopia as a method establishes itself as a methodology that must be practised now, and with urgency. It recommends that, in doing so, the impulse towards the creation of blueprint utopias is constantly deferred. Indeed, Chan’s reading of Moylan and Baccolini’s method vision is that they propose that: “utopia isn’t a dream to be deferred to a distant future ... Utopia begins here and now, with us: how we live, how we treat one another, and what we do with the means available” (xiii). I have found that only the urgency of utopia as a method reflects the pragmatic hopefulness, and the energy, pain, and purpose of the primary texts I will explore in this book. It is with this allocation of importance to process, rather than finitude, that I begin my analysis of women’s utopian and dystopian SF.

## 2 A Brief History of Utopia as Criticism

Utopian social theory emerged as an area of study centuries before the word “utopia” came to define a genre of literature. As Peter Fitting has argued, the early commentaries on More’s *Utopia* (1516) and studies on the concept of the ‘Imaginary Voyage’ contributed to the compilation of a body of literature concerned with spiritual and geographical discovery, imagination, and ethics without using the label of “utopian fiction”.<sup>2</sup> Between 1787 and 1789, eighteenth-century French barrister and anthologist Charles-Georges-Thomas Garnier edited 36 volumes of what are now considered to be works that are part of the utopian tradition, including Denis Veiras’s *Histoire des Sévarambes* (1681) and Ludvig Holberg’s “The Voyage of Niels Klim to the World Underground” (1741). Rather than labelling them as utopias, he called them “romans philosophiques et moraux” (*Voyages Imaginaires* iv), at once connected to and estranged

from reality through the use of “analogie” and “rassemblence” (ix). Veiras’ own introduction to his *Histoire des Sévarambes* can also be seen as a piece of early criticism because it explores the purpose and value of utopian literature as a means of reflecting on the prevailing scientific, philosophical, and theological conjectures of the day, while also staging the utopian novel as a setting for the exploration of possible alternative realities. Veiras argues that alternative-reality scenarios are more plausible than we think, because the ‘real world’ is full of “truths” that initially appear to be fabrications:

Plusieurs choses on [sic.] aussi passé longtems [sic.] pour fabuleuses, qui, dans la suite des tems [sic.], se sont établies comme des vérités si constantes, que celui qui oseroit les révoquer en doute, passeroit pour un ignorant, un stupide, & un ridicule (“Avertissement,” vol. 5, xi)

[Many things that were seen as fabrication have, as time passed, been established as truths, so that those who dared doubt them were ultimately revealed as ignorant and stupid].<sup>3</sup>

Veiras gives the example of Virgilius of Cologne,<sup>4</sup> whose early prediction that the Earth was spherical and that antipodes existed put him in a difficult position with the Church. While Virgilius “courut la risque de perdre la vie”, Christopher Columbus, in his much later bid for patronage by the European monarchs “passa pour un visionnaire en Angleterre, puis au Portugal” when he told tales of possible lands to the West (xii). What Veiras—who positions *Histoire des Sévarambes* in the same category as Plato’s *Republic*, More’s *Utopia*, and Bacon’s *Atlantis* (xi)—seems to suggest is that utopian fiction reveals the historical positioning, socio-cultural settings, and ideological persuasions that lay claim to certain conceptions of the cosmos, on one hand, and the future, on the other.

Nineteenth-century utopian criticism in the UK, France, and Germany continued to explore the potential of utopian fiction to unsettle the religious and political status quo. Scottish historian John Colin Dunlop’s 1814 *History of Fiction* (reprinted as *History of Prose Fiction* in 1896) explored the “visionary” quality of the utopian novel (491), which transforms Thomas More’s *Utopia* from an enjoyable fantasy (a “political romance”) into a “political treatise” (132). In France, Louis Reybaud’s *Etudes sur les Réformateurs ou Socialistes Modernes* (1840) identified the subversive nature of the genre’s “utopies sociales” (33), a term which would come to describe the social utopias of Marx’ *Communist Manifesto* and Engels’ *Anti-Dühring*. Soon after, German jurist Robert von Mohl’s 1845 essay “Die Staats-Romane” analysed the utopian potential of a perfectly symbiotic relationship between man and state. James T. Presley’s 1873 essay “Bibliography of Utopias and Imaginary Travels and Histories” compiled

and analysed works of fiction that he felt were comparable to More's *Utopia*. In doing so, he also unveiled a community of utopist readers of the journal who responded to his fragments with additions to his bibliographical collection of utopian novels and critics.<sup>5</sup>

Prominent utopian scholarship of the early twentieth century included Joyce Hertzler's *The History of Utopian Thought* (1923), which examined the contribution of utopian criticism to gender equality, the ethical practice of medicine, and religious tolerance; Karl Mannheim's 1936 *Ideology and Utopia*, which suggested that ideology supports privileged groups while utopian ideas raise up underprivileged groups; and Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick's 1952 *The Quest for Utopia: An Anthology of Imaginary Societies*, which considered the relationship between utopian fiction and other genres, claiming that SF has "about the same resemblance to utopian speculation that the tales of Horatio Alger bore to the economic theories of Adam Smith" (588). A number of key works of utopian criticism also appeared in the 1970s, notably Robert Elliott's *The Shape of Utopia* (1970) and Suvin's essays "Estrangement and Cognition" (1972) and "Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia" (1973), which emphasised the closeness and complexity of the relationship between SF and utopia.<sup>6</sup>

In the Anglophone world, women's contribution to this area of academic study is usually agreed to have begun in 1975 with the founding of The Society for Utopian Studies (SUS). In 1988, a sister group was founded: The Utopian Studies Society.<sup>7</sup> Since, utopia has proved itself to be an area of study not only suited to male, European writers' attempts to advance a "universal" bettering of human conditions, but also one that women could engage with to imagine beyond the limits of heteropatriarchy. An inexhaustive selection of prominent female utopian studies scholars might include Carol Farley Kessler ("Bibliography of Utopian Fiction by United States Women", 1984); Oriana Palusci (*Terra di Lei*, 1990; 19 entries in Fortunati et al. (eds.) *Dictionary of Literary Utopias*, 2000); Ruth Levitas (*The Concept of Utopia*, 1990; "Towards a Utopian Ontology: Secularism and Post-secularism in Ernst Bloch and Roberto Unger", 2010; "Be Realistic: Demand the Impossible", 2008); Paola Spinozzi (*Utopianism / Literary Utopias and National Cultural Identities: A Comparative Perspective* (ed.), 2001; *Histoire Transnationale de l'Utopie Littéraire et de l'Utopisme* (ed.), 2008); Lucy Sargisson (*Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, 1996; *Living in Utopia: New Zealand's Intentional Communities*, 2004, co-authored with Lyman Tower Sargent); Raffaella Baccolini (*Utopia-Method-Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*, 2007, co-authored with Tom Moylan; "Feminism and Utopianism, Then and Now—A Roundtable Dialogue", 2015); Eleonora Federici (*Quando la Fantascienza è Donna*, 2015); Rita Monticelli ("Utopie, Utopisme, et Féminisme", 2008; "Utopian Visions and Gender

Imaginaries in Nineteenth-Century Travel Literature on the ‘Orient’”, 2017); and Maria do Rosário Monteiro (*Utopia(s) – Worlds and Frontiers of the Imaginary*, 2016, co-authored with Mário S. Ming Kong and Maria João Pereira Neto).

There is also a rich array of contemporary utopian criticism by non-European writers, including Di Adilifu Nama (*Black Space: Imagining Race in SF Film*, 2010); Kilgore (*Astrofuturism Science, Race, and Visions of Utopia in Space*, 2010); Isiah Lavender (*Race in American Science Fiction*, 2011); and Ytasha Womack (*Afrofuturism: The World of Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, 2013). These writers have drawn on the genre of SF to compellingly suggest that “blackness” is a technology, a social and political creation used to serve the prevailing ideology.<sup>8</sup> The utopian spaces of Afrofuturism and Astrofuturism offer transformations and variations on the SF genre, with the aim of taking back technology from the hands of white oppressors and eliminating racial discrimination in the process. They direct readers towards an unconventional version of the science fictional imaginary that is both radical and eccentric. Coined by Mark Dery in his 1994 essay “Black to the Future”, Afrofuturism displays a deep concern both for the status of race in the future and the way in which science and technology can be employed to imagine social change. Its philosophy has given birth to a set of prolific musicians, from Sun Ra, George Clinton to Janelle Monáe, the latter of whom is also a critically acclaimed actress: her recent roles include NASA engineer Mary Jackson in the Oscar-nominated film *Hidden Figures* (2016) and Teresa in the multiple Academy Award winning *Moonlight* (2017). The term “astrofuturism” came later, originating with Kilgore’s book of the same name. For Kilgore: “[Astrofuturism] is also the space of utopian desire. Astrofuturist speculation on space-based exploration, exploitation, and colonisation is capacious enough to contain imperialist, capitalist ambitions and utopian, socialist hopes” (2). These ambitious desires are then given the space to probe the boundaries of the possible by being “recast in the elsewhere and *elsewhen* of outer space” (2). Unlike Afrofuturism, which promotes inclusivity in the future, astrofuturism is a spatial movement that is more concerned with a utopian escape towards the limits of the universe. Both Astro- and Afrofuturism are examples of the appropriation of SF by minority communities that have expanded the genre beyond its original parameters, to formulate a future characterised by inclusivity.

Outside of academia utopia is once again beginning to gain traction. Akash Kapur’s review of two non-fiction utopian publications in the FT Weekend (“Money for Nothing”) began with the line “We live in implausible times”, as he persuades the reader to consider the political use of utopia in the less-than-utopian present day by reading Roger Bregman’s defiant utopian manifesto *Utopia for Realists: And How We Can Get*

*There* (2014), and Yannick Vanderborough and Philippe Van Parijs's *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (2017). Kapur sees the real value of these books not in their proposed blueprints for a fairer political system, but in their confrontation of the present, and the way in which they acknowledge that we need a better future than simply a protraction of the present. For Kapur "these books are more interesting as diagnoses than prescriptions: they tell us we're at an impasse, and they make a compelling—even devastating—case for the insufficiency of business as usual" ("Money for Nothing"). Utopia also takes the form of a warning in my corpus of utopian women's SF as they denounce the status quo that determines the future that humanity is heading towards.

Directed towards resolving issues of race and gender, as well as other forms of ideological governance, utopian criticism has endured as a useful mode of theorising structural oppression and pointing towards possible resolutions. Disseminated through Monáe's Afrofuturist music and Bregman's bestselling non-fiction alike, utopian critique is gaining traction in the public eye and looks to find increasing relevance in times of increasing ecological crisis and global inequality.

### 3 Overview of Early Women's Utopian/Dystopian Science Fiction

As Eleonora Federici has noted, utopia is at the core of women's SF: "The utopian vein, then, runs through all of women's production of SF, characterising it and offering models for critical and proactive writing"<sup>9</sup> (33). SF now has a well-established tradition of contributions to the genre by women writers—including those whose texts comprise my primary sources of SF—whose configurations of utopia are preoccupied by a critique of the present and a desire to draw on SF to transform their current reality. Utopia is deeply imbricated with the present and its possible reformulations. These speculations are as diverse as reality itself, an issue that has led Fortunati, Spinozzi, and Trousson to suggest that a history of utopia "is not synonymous with a monolithic work which excludes or evades provocative and controversial questions" (20). Because utopian narrative forms and expressions are fundamentally heterogeneous, when exploring the utopian SF tradition across a number of countries it is worth noting, as Lyman Tower Sargent has done, that this tradition is also a set of "multiple traditions" (*Utopia Method Vision* 308) that vary not only from country to country but also within a single nation.<sup>10</sup>

Utopian fiction written by women in Europe and North America dates back to at least 1666, with Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*,<sup>11</sup> the story of a young woman who becomes the Empress of a utopian planet that can only be accessed through the North Pole ("Newcastle, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of", 293–4). Earlier still, though perhaps outside

of the boundaries of stricter contemporary definitions of SF, were the utopias of seventeenth-century French aristocratic writers, including Mme. d'Aulnoy (*l'Île de la Félicité*, 1690; *l'Oranger et l'Abeille*, 1650–1705), Mlle. de Scudéry (*Clélie*, 1654–1660; Mathilde d'Aguilar, 1667), Mlle. de Montpensier (*Mémoires*, 1735), Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert (*Voyage de Milord Céton dans les Sept Planètes*, 1765), and Françoise de Graffigny (*Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, 1747). The latter is an epistolary novel that follows a typical eighteenth-century utopian trajectory: an Incan princess is first kidnapped by Spaniards and then 'rescued' by the French and taken to Europe, where she chooses to abstain from marriage and live a blissfully and impossibly utopian existence for a woman of her era, alone on a country estate with a large library and no husband. It was, unsurprisingly, a popular theme; in Mlle. de Scudéry's *Clélie*, the protagonist bans love from her salon, while in Mathilde d'Aguilar (1654) marriage is a source of suffering that ultimately leads to the loss of the characters' freedom.<sup>12</sup>

My readings of Scudéry, Aulnoy, and Roumier-Robert's utopias lead me to consider that the spatial estrangement of their works positions them closer to the SF category than their contemporaries; all use the island utopia setting as a place where (aristocratic) women enjoy thorough educations and sexual freedom, until men come along and ruin it for everyone. Their utopias therefore rely on an exclusionary tactic, by which the oppressor—men—are kept out of the equation. In a letter detailing her utopia to a friend, Mlle. de Montpensier—a cousin of Louis XIV famed for her public arguments with the King—notes that, “admittance would be denied to married couples, and falling in love would be cause for expulsion” (quoted in Donawerth 43).<sup>13</sup> A good education and exemption from marriage remained tropes of utopian novels written by women in the nineteenth century, notably Elizabeth Gaskell's exemplar nineteenth-century novel, *Cranford* (1853). Other prominent contributions to women's utopias include Sarah Scott's *Millennium Hall* (1762), Lady Florence Dixie's *Gloriana, or The Revolution of 1900* (1890), poet and novelist Frances Harper's 1892 novel *Iola Leroy*, Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood* (1902), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915). Nan Bowman Albinski's exploration of women's SF between 1830 and 1919, *Women's Utopia in British and American Fiction* (1988), has identified in both women's SF in the UK and the USA a desire to formulate new understandings of gender identity and overcome forms of sexist oppression. However, she claims that while British writers take a left-wing approach in their emphasis of women's right to vote and work, US authors focus on “technology and commercialisation” as the key to women's liberation and different conceptions of the nuclear family (54). Rita Monticelli has drawn attention to the fact that these differences within women's utopias also helpfully elucidate divergences within feminist politics, while highlighting “the ethical



commitment and responsibility of female utopists and feminist movements in relation to reality” (1127). This is particularly evident when tracing a genealogy of European and North American women’s utopias that include non-white women characters, of which there are few. While these works do demonstrably pursue an “ethical commitment” to a particular aspect of women’s liberation within a particular cultural context, they still demonstrate the “whiteness” of these late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century feminist movements. There are, however, some allusions to issues of race in these utopias: Gaskell’s *Lois the Witch* (1859) briefly explores the dynamic between Nattee, an Indian servant, and the “young girls of the oppressing race” for whom she works (406), while for critic Edward K. Chan, the repeated use of the word “savage” in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915) situates the “othering” created by the gender binary in terms of race and racism (The Racial Horizon of Utopia 10). However, allusion to race can be viewed as merely a device used by Perkins Gilman to better illustrate her argument regarding gender: the specificity of racial oppression is of little concern to the women who subsist in the estranged lands of her eugenics-oriented utopia. By contrast, Hopkins and Harper’s novels both focus on the plight of African-American women in view of systemic racism in North America in the late nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, engaging in what Maria Giulia Fabi has termed “a complementary critique of contemporary racist practices” (56). However, where the freedom of Gilman’s utopia depends on the eradication of men, as did many of the utopias written by women in France in the seventeenth century, Harper’s *Iola Leroy* draws on utopia to attempt reconciliation between former slaves and slave owners. Fabi claims that this mode of utopian storytelling is “truly utopian, because it is thematically and formally structured by Harper’s anticipatory vision and depiction of an alternative, better social system” (56).

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the attainment of utopia took a different form: the pursuit of scientific discoveries and inventions, which had begun to progress at an accelerated rate. British women writers of SF responded to scientific advances by incorporating within their literature a concern for possible ethical implications. Writers Naomi Mitchison and Rose Macaulay both explored the field of eugenics as another means for scientists to reinstate patriarchal control through stricter social organisation. Mitchison’s dystopian play *Saumes Bairos* (1913) and Macaulay’s novel *What Not* (1919) predate Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* by more than a decade and similarly address the possible outcomes of global eugenics programmes in Britain.<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Haldane’s *Man’s World* (1926) negotiates various aspects of eugenics, including how it can lend itself to sexist and racist design, so that scientists can subsequently breed generations of humans with homogeneous skin tones and

physical features. In this instance, eugenics is given a dual application: some women are forced to occupy an exclusively reproductive role, while other women are given the option to liberate themselves from child-rearing to pursue a career.<sup>15</sup> This interrogation of gender, race, and science in utopian SF lasted well into the 1940s, when Welsh author Bridget Chetwynd's *Future Imperfect* (1946) explored the failure of reproductive technologies to secure sufficient social change. The novel suggests that these scientific advancements re-embed an existing hierarchy of gender roles. Inspired by advances in the women's liberation movement in Britain following the Second World War, the story is set in a gender-reversed society in which women dominate the public sphere and men occupy a domestic role.

During the 1950s, British women's contributions to SF blended a critique of technology with the threat of imminent global disaster posed by the Cold War. Jacquetta Hawkes' *Providence Island* (1959), for example, is the tale of an island that is invisible to the outside world, and is only discovered when soldiers from the USA seek a place to store and test nuclear arms ("Hawkes, Jacquetta"). Marghanita Laski's play *The Offshore Island* (1954) is set in post-nuclear holocaust Great Britain, where groups of survivors exist by farming patches of uncontaminated land, unbeknown to the Russian and US soldiers who have destroyed the Earth. When the Russians and the Americans arrive in England, the play sets the soullessness of militaristic super-powers in opposition to a romanticised pastoral Britain and the idealised family values of its rural communities (Weart 248–9).

While in 1950s Italy SF was not a major genre,<sup>16</sup> as is the case today with e-books and online magazines, prominent SF writers and editors attempted to launch SF stories into the mainstream through magazines such as *Urania*, founded in 1952, *Interplanet* (1962–1965), *Futuro* (1963–1964), and *Gamma* (1965–1968). These magazines helped to increase the porosity of the border between the so-called "SF ghetto and mainstream fiction" (Gallo "About Us" 251). Some women writers were also contributing to SF anthologies with stories that often centred around alien invasions on Earth or alien attacks in outer space ("Italy"). Roberta Rambelli's "I Creatori di Mostri" (1959) concerns itself with humanistic issues that are similar to those discussed in the works of Vallorani discussed in this book: the possible "humanity" of entities labelled monstrous, for example, and the penetration of nonhuman entities into the psyche of humans. In this story, the explorers of a spaceship find themselves inflicted by a disease where they hallucinate about monsters, but the sickness turns out to be a psychological attack by a strange alien race. These alien invasions formed the basis of a humanistic storytelling that would be particularly characteristic of Italian SF from the 1960s onwards, when narratives emphasised the need to be sympathetic towards the monster, and to acknowledge its "humanity" ("Italy"). Giovanna Cecchini, a writer who gained popularity

for short stories that she wrote for over half a century, though most prolifically in the 1950s, also offers a particularly strong example of this theme in Italian SF in her story “Mio Figlio non è un Mostro” [My Son is not a Monster] (1959). The tale follows a group of colonisers from Earth who settle on a distant planet. When one of the couples has a child, it is born a mutant, changed by the planet during gestation, and is perceived as “monstrous” by the rest of the group. The child is, of course, only deviant in the eyes of the humans: his physical form is perfectly suited to the atmosphere and characteristics of the planet.<sup>17</sup> This theme of interrogating the “monstrous” within a science fictional setting is particularly visible in the 1964 anthology *I Labirinti del Terzo Pianeta* [The Mazes of the Third Planet], edited by Gilda Musa and Inisero Cremaschi, which marked the beginning of the mainstream public availability of SF in Italy, alongside the inaugural edition of the anthology *Futuro* (1963–1964). *Futuro* exclusively published Italian authors as opposed to translations of anglophone stories (Vegetti). Aside from these writers, however, SF penned by Italian women before the 1960s is difficult to track down, partly because they wrote under a variety of Italian and anglophone male pen names, and often used more than one: Maria “Mutti” Teresa Maglione wrote as Lionel Stern, Elisabeth Stern, Patrizia Dalloro, and Esther Scott, pseudonyms also shared with SF writer Lina Gerelli who went by both Ester Scott and Elizabeth Stern; Maria De Barba wrote as Marren Bagels; Leonia Celli as Lionel Cayle; Bianca Nulli as Norah Bolton and Beryl Norton; Nora de Siebert as Norman McKennedy; Laura Pallavicini as Lorraine Parr; Vera Cagnoli as John Sigma, a pseudonym also used by Italian writer Ubaldo Tambini; and finally, Roberta Rambelli wrote as Rocky Docson, Hunk Hanover, Joe C. Karpať, and Igor Latychev (Pizzo). Confusion still reigns when unravelling ownership of various stories and distinguishing real writers from their nom de plumes. For this, we can blame the patriarchy.

Even in North America, which has a more substantial SF tradition and a larger community of women writers, Ursula K. Le Guin notes that “With the exception of just a few feminists like Joanna Russ, SF was pretty much male-dominated up to the 1960s. Women who wrote in that field often used [male] pen names” (“Coming Back from the Silence”). Indeed, Howard Hawks, director of *The Big Sleep* (1964) and *Scarface* (1984) admitted that he had hired Leigh Brackett, the American SF author and screenplay writer for *The Big Sleep* (1974), who was later famed for writing the script to *The Empire Strikes Back* in 1980, because: “She wrote that like a man. She writes good ... I hired her through an agent, and I thought I was hiring a man” (quoted in McBride 170). Brackett overcame this adversity not only to write one of the most popular episodes ever made of the Star Wars saga six years later, but also to pen several experimental SF short stories and novels during the 1940s that anticipated the style and preoccupations

of the New Wave movement of the 1960s, including “Martian Quest” (1940), and *Shadow over Mars* (1944). In the 1970s, after breaking from literature to write screenplays, Brackett published the Book of Skiath series (1974–1976). Set on the dying planet of Skiath, this trilogy’s focus on the “homeless, hungry, and resourceless” people of Skaith, exploited by theocratic leaders, reckons with class-based discrimination and the relationship between church and state (Redhead). Though the majority of Leigh’s protagonists are male, Robin Roberts has noted that “Leigh Brackett wrote a number of fine stories focusing on mysterious and powerful female aliens”, which he believes is part of a larger trend of American “woman SF writers [who] endorsed the portrait of the strong female alien” (49). Indeed, Ciara, the alien queen in “Black Amazon of Mars”, a short story first published in American pulp SF magazine *Planet Stories* in 1951, is at least equal in power and status to protagonist Eric John Stark, who beholds Ciara “clad all in her black armour, the great axe swinging high” (Brackett 98) and feels “his hands strong on her strong arms” in a moment of affirmative and chiasmic mutual respect (94).

Female authors increasingly wrote under their own names in the late 1960s, when utopia itself—as well as notions of gender, race, and equality—came under greater scrutiny, and feminist debates and queer characters subsequently flared up in SF novels. This is the moment from which my own examination of SF emerges, a period when utopian and dystopian SF with gender on the agenda emerged on a greater scale. As women writers increasingly addressed feminist issues in their SF, the genre also became “self-reflexive”, “critical”, “unsutured”, and “open-ended.” Tom Moylan coined the term “critical utopia” (1986), to describe the doubly “critical” nature of some of these novels, including Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Marge Percy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). For Moylan, “the 1960s and 1970s occasioned a revival of distinctly eutopian writing”, which “found a new form in the ‘critical utopia’” (Dark Horizons 2). He describes these North American works of “critical utopia” as at once “critical” in the sense of a postmodern self-reflexivity, “critical” in the “Enlightenment sense of critique”, and “critical” as in possessing the potential explosiveness of “critical mass” (Dark Horizons 2). Moylan suggests that this utopian revival rejected the idea that utopias had to be neatly mapped blueprints of “ideal” places, instead pointing to utopia as a process of freedom-seeking: “authors of critical utopias reclaimed the emancipatory imagination while they simultaneously challenged the political and formal limits of the traditional utopia” (Dark Horizons 2). These kinds of utopian narratives are perhaps most emblematically illustrated by Joanna Russ’ ironic comedy *The Female Man* (1975), Monique Wittig’s *Les Guérillères* (1969), James Tiptree Jr’s *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* (1976), Christine Renard’s “Aux Creux des Arches” (1975), and more

recently, Gabriela Bustelo's *La Planeta Hembra* (2000), all of which reverse dominant power structures so that, following decades of intergender warfare, women have won the battle of the sexes and rule problematically over a not-so-perfect universe. Offering a satirical commentary on feminism, these works complicate the simple reversal of patriarchy into matriarchy, a thematic trend in early women's utopian literature, from Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's fairy tales to Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. Instead of imagining utopia within the patriarchal framework of dominance and subjugation or eradication, these critical utopias ask the reader to imagine beyond the boundaries of a static utopia and towards a conception of equality that lies outside the limits of what can be achieved in the novel. In doing so, they encourage the reader to critically participate in the production of new utopian horizons, both anti-racist and gender-inclusive.

#### 4 Women's Science Fiction from the 1960s Onwards in France, Italy, Spain, the UK, and the USA

The critical responses to sexism in Europe—and in North America, France, and the UK, to race—announced a new phase of utopian and dystopian literature that would more rigorously complicate essentialist conceptions of racialised identity, femininity, and womanhood. This section provides an overview of those voices and key themes in women's SF in France, Spain, Italy, and North America from the 1960s onwards. In particular, the themes and concerns raised by these novels corroborate with those visible in the works that form the corpus of primary texts in this book, including, for example, an overarching trend towards dystopia. I have also included North America here in order to provide some context from a country that continues to be highly influential for SF writers across the globe in terms of its SF output.

##### *France*

In France, dystopian and post-apocalyptic SF was popular among women writers in the 1960s who sought to address issues of race and gender and to express a concern for environmental disaster and for the status of humanity in the future: Françoise d'Eaubonne, founder of the term “eco-feminism”, published a series of post-apocalyptic and environmentally conscious dystopias from the 1960s to the 1980s. Her post-apocalyptic *l'Échiquier du Temps* (1962) centres around the possibility of a posthuman race, the result of humans mating with another intergalactic species that is described as humankind's monstrous Other. Two years later she published *Rêve de Feu* (1964), a post-apocalyptic space opera that features a female protagonist who awakens in a nightmare city after the third world war,

by which time the world has been destroyed beyond all recognition by atomic war (“Rêve de Feu”). Her 1978 novel *Les Bérigères de l’Apocalypse* (1978), takes place in a world where men use nuclear power to destroy each other and in the process demolish the globe, and women are therefore forced to engage in their own seventeen year-long war against them, which once won allows them to preserve the natural ecosystem (Bouchard, “Science-Fiction, Utopie et Philosophie” 61). One of d’Eaubonne’s contemporaries was writer Éliane Taïeb (*née* Grimaître), who published using the pen names Julia Verlanger and Gilles Thomas. Her novels are mostly post-apocalyptic dystopias, perhaps exemplified by the *La Terre Sauvage* trilogy, comprised of *L’Autoroute Sauvage* (1976), *La Mort en Billes* (1977), and *l’Île Brûlée* (1979), published under the nom de plume Gilles Thomas for the publisher Fleuve Noir, with *L’Autoroute Sauvage* in particular as the archetypal post-apocalyptic novel (Bréan 48). In these stories, three young people join forces to survive the precarious route back to Paris after France is destroyed by a sea of toxic bacteria: Annie, an ex-military man named Gérald, and Thomas, an Asian man (Bréan 48). Another prominent SF writer in France in the 1970s and 80s was Christine Renard, who in 1972 published *La Fenêtre*, a critique of antisemitism in an intergalactic future (Andrevon). One of Renard’s most famous short-stories, “Au Creux des Arches” (1975), details a separatist feminist utopia set on the utopian planet of Ère, and points straightforwardly to the dystopia of the environmental crisis that began to unfold publicly in the twentieth century. In this science fictional future, women live in symbiosis with vegetation, which attends to all their needs, including nutrition, warmth, and touch, while men live in prison-like constructions they must build for themselves and have to beg for small rations of food in a communal canteen (Bouchard “La Métaphore” 29–30). Parisian SF writer Élisabeth Vonarburg’s best-known work *le Silence de la Cité* (1981), winner of the Prix Rosny-Aîné, is another post-apocalyptic dystopia that tells the tale of the last human child, Elisa, who must use her knowledge of genetics to regrow the human race (Colson and Ruaud 148). SF legend Sylvie Denis, whose early works appear as short stories, has explored the full spectrum of utopia and dystopia in her prolific career, winning the Rosny prize for her utopian short-story “Le Chemin de la Rencontre” (1987) and then again for her later dystopian novel *Dedans, Dehors* (2000), the story of a talented young girl who seeks freedom from an ultra-religious community (“Sylvie Denis-Jardins Virtuels”). Since, she has published the anti-utopian *Espaces Insécables* (2013), and most recently, the critically acclaimed collection of utopian, anti-utopian, and dystopian short stories *Fidèle à Ton Pas Balancé* (2016), particularly important for its emphasis on the perspective of extraterrestrials during human-alien encounters, exemplified by the story “Petits Arrangements Intergalactiques”, as well

as its depiction of possible chaos on Earth orchestrated by AI, as in subject of the story “Le Karma du Chat” (Buggenhout). Similarly, SF giant Joëlle Wintrebert published a string of dystopias in the 1980s, notably *Les Olympiades Truquées* (1980), in which advances in genetics in the near future have resulted in a world populated by twice as many men as women,<sup>18</sup> and *Le Créateur Chimérique* (1988), set in an aquatic world of black creatures who reproduce through scissiparity, in which one of their kind, Damballah “gives birth” unexpectedly to a white clone.<sup>19</sup> Bodard, an award-winning French-Vietnamese SF writer, also focuses on dystopia, which she divides between “mild dystopian fictions”, which describe worlds that might offend the personal values of the reader, and stronger variations on dystopia, in which environmental catastrophe and disease makes the world “objectively” worse than the one we currently live in (Bodard). In a 2016 interview, she told *Publishing Perspectives* that she can still see the same appetite for dystopia among young people in France as in the 1980s, because

the world isn't looking great, their prospects aren't going to be as good as their parents ... [in] the short term, their jobs are precarious or there are no jobs at all. In the longer term there is global warming or viruses, over which they have little or no control.

(Bodard)

Bodard's work incorporates themes of economic insecurity and environmental disaster alongside a complex reworking of France's colonial history. I will, in the forthcoming chapter, focus on her novels, novellas, and short stories set in the Universe of Xuya—a space age-dominated by Vietnamese and Chinese galactic empires—in particular her Nebula Award Winner *On a Red Station Drifting* (2012), *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls* (2017)<sup>20</sup> and the Nebula and Locus Award-winning “Immersion” (2012). Bodard, who is of French and Vietnamese descent, was born in America, grew up in Paris, and writes almost exclusively in English, explores how the formations of race and gender appear under specific futuristic conditions as a set of ideological, political, and economic practices that are articulated together with other societal formations, such as mythologies (often a mix of Vietnamese and Christian) and scientific paradigms (which in many of her works appear as multiple and simultaneous, practised in a variety of ways across a single world). Her exploration of the processes of race and gender leads to the appearance of interconnected subjectivities, from technological “meme-implants” that re-form kinship groups, to children born as telepathic spaceships. In this way, her work is a particularly interesting example of the contribution of French women writers to innovative forms of SF.



*Italy*

Though, as has been mentioned above, SF was not a prominent genre of literature in late twentieth-century Italy, a young group of Italian female SF writers emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Some of these writers discuss issues of race and gender in their works, notably Gilda Musa and Daniela Piegai. Musa's novels, from *Festa sull'Asteroide* (1972) to *Esperimento Donna* (1979), related the question of women's social position to the broader humanistic issue of the role of humankind in the universe (Marrone 1720). Musa's *Festa sull'Asteroide* is the story of a human man who is held hostage on a planetoid by aliens who physically resemble humans; *Esperimento Donna* addresses openly feminist and humanist themes in its plotline of a Milanese professor who falls in love with a beautiful alien while journeying to an asteroid and tries to make her human (Preianò). Italy's Piegai's best received novels include *Parola di Alieno* (1978), in which an extraterrestrial species travel to Earth in search of a 'logical machine' which will save their species from extinction (Avellis) and *Ballata per Lima* (1989), in which technology allows different species to communicate with one another (Spinelli 105). Gaetana Marrone has commented that Piegai was particularly proficient in creating "convincing alien civilisations with the coherence and the 'sense of wonder' of classical SF". Marrone highlights the importance of Editrice Nord, who published both Piegai's and Musa's work, in focusing attention on women writers of SF in Italy (Marrone 1720). Vallorani emerged later in the 1990s with *Il Cuore Finto di DR* (1992), for which she won the Urania prize for SF, *Dream Box* (1997) and *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* (2011). In these novels, the radical utopias of the 1960s and 1970s are substituted by dystopian worlds in which a daily struggle to survive meets an imaginative re-shaping of racial and gender identities. These tales demonstrate how solidarity across difference can help resist a stifling and unjust social order. Whether crying out against the injustice of the present, or demonstrating the energy necessary to transform it, Italian examples of critical dystopia point to a utopia beyond their pages, a utopia that must be sought out in order to cast off the prevailing narrative dystopia.

*Spain*

In her investigation of Spanish female SF writers who emerged during the 1960s and 1970s, queer Spanish SF writer Lola Robles demonstrated the desire to trace a genealogy of women writers that, as she does in her own fiction, used their works to critique the status quo (Robles, "Sobre María Guéra y Arturo Mengotti").<sup>21</sup> When she tried to track down authors whose real names and dates of birth have not been documented, Robles discovered

that those female writers who did succeed in selling SF stories to magazines in the 1960s have been credited to, at most, one or two short stories or novels for children published under a pseudonym or in collaboration with a male author (Robles, “Sobre María Guéra y Arturo Mengotti”). One writer who Robles did manage to unearth from the archives was María Guéra, who, writing with her son Arturo Mengotti, published at least eleven original and innovative short stories in major Spanish SF magazine *Nueva Dimensión* during the 1960s and 1970s (Robles, “Escritoras Españolas de Ciencia Ficción” 182). One of their stories in particular offers a sound critique of colonialism and the inheritance of patriarchy: in “Aborrece la Sal”, a father and his two children, a twin girl and boy, colonise a planet whose thick jungle and scorching sun make it barely habitable for the poorly adapted humans (Peregrina Castaños 372). The story pays close attention to the father’s mistreatment of his children, and signals that in the absence of the father, a similar performance of authority would be taken on by the boy over his twin sister (Peregrina Castaños 372). It was published in 1971 in *Nueva Dimensión*, a Spanish SF magazine that played an important role in the mainstreaming of Spanish SF, pushing the genre away from dime novels into stories with more mature, philosophical plots (Mohorte Medina & Nieto). From 1992 onwards, the magazine also organised meetups for its authors, remembered by Robles as moments of “*euforia absoluta*” when given the opportunity to get to know other authors interested in the same genres (Robles, “Sobre María Guéra y Arturo Mengotti”). In an interview with *Factory* magazine, Robles claims that partnerships like Guéra’s, in which women wrote with their husband or son, encouraged publishers to print women’s work (Robles, “Están Utilizando Contra Nosotros”). She also notes that the majority of early (printed) SF female writers came from Cataluña, including Montserrat Galícia i Gorritz, Teresa Inglés, Montserrat Fabregat, Montserrat Julió, Blanca Martínez, and Rosa Fabregat. Galícia i Gorritz was the most prolific of these, publishing two dozen novels for young adults in the 1990s and 2000s. The reality was, however, that it was incredibly difficult for unknown female Spanish authors to establish themselves in the genre. Robles claims that this is partly due to the fact that well-known SF editorials preferred to publish Anglo-Saxon writers in translation than authors who wrote in Castilian Spanish, setting up a later generation of Spanish SF fans to be disappointed when Spanish authors began to write stories set in future versions of Madrid and Malaga rather than New York and San Francisco, because these locations in Spain appeared to be less spatially and temporally dislocated from their own realities than the North American cities that typically provide the setting for SF books and films (Robles, “Alucinadas”). If Spanish male writers were suffering from the bias towards Anglophone SF, Spanish women writers of SF were published in even smaller numbers, with very few writers publicly prolific enough

to serve as a referent for future female authors (Barceló, “Elements of the Fantastic”). Elia Barceló, a key voice in SF written in Castilian Spanish, has also noted that Spanish SF before the 1990s followed:

an English-language model and, instead of innovating, what it frequently did was repeat and, hopefully, add original elements that were personal but not immediately recognisable as Spanish. For a long time being Spanish left us feeling a sort of shame, our inheritance from the dictatorship.

(Barceló, “Elements of the Fantastic”)

When Barceló entered the genre in 1980, the Alecantan professor of Spanish literature at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, broke through relative female authorial obscurity to critical acclaim. Following the publication of a dozen short stories in the 1980s, she wrote the prize-winning *La Estrella* (1991) and *El Mundo de Yarek* (1993) in the early 1990s. Alongside the Cuban and Argentinian SF writers Daína Chaviano and Angélica Gorodischer, Barceló is one-third of the holy trinity of female Spanish SF authors writing in Castellan Spanish who have paved the way for a “massive irruption of women authors and readers in a world that has traditionally and unjustly been dominated by men” (Barceló, “Elements of the Fantastic”). The writers that followed include Robles, Gabriela Bustelo, Felicidad Martínez, Laura Ponce, and Yolanda Espiñeira. Barceló’s dystopia *La Rosa de las Nieblas* (1999), which takes race as its starting point to interrogate questions of sexual sameness and the creation of otherness, is often compared to Barceló’s *Consecuencias Naturales* (1994), which deliberately interrogates sedimented essentialist gender stereotypes through an enquiry into both reproductive norms and the relationship between gender and language, the latter of which she explores in more detail in *El Informe Monteverde* (2014). Since, Barceló’s novels have addressed themes of social exclusion, consumerism, and abandonment of the elderly, as in “Después de la Revolución”, a short story that forms part of *Mañana Todavía: Doce Distopías para el Siglo XXI en Español* (2014), a collection of anti-utopias and dystopias, a third of which have been written by women, including Laura Gallego, Rosa Montero, and Susana Vallejo. For Barceló, the dystopian turn can be attributed to “a worldwide situation of insecurity, of a lack of optimism” (Barceló, “Elements of the Fantastic”), as she compares today’s SF to the pessimism of the novels written during the Cold War. She elaborates:

Before, it was the danger of nuclear war, of overpopulation, of the rise of machines and their victory over humans... Now we speak of the destruction of the planet by natural catastrophes that we’ve produced ourselves, of the end of civilisation, of the barbarism of religions ... and

our only glimmer of optimism is in the alternate histories, that is to say, if things had been different, we'd be even worse off.

(Barceló, "Elements of the Fantastic")

In keeping with this internationally felt trend in SF, Barceló's SF has become increasingly dystopian in recent years. She explains that her texts are now, "more critical, more political, perhaps more admonitory" (Barceló, "Elements of the Fantastic"). She believes that these dystopias more persuasively offer the reader the "fears and hopes of our position versus the modern world, of the new themes that are arising now and which hadn't existed before (computing, robotics, domotics, genetics, mass manipulation, etc.)" (Barceló, "Elements of the Fantastic"). Indeed, Barceló claims that SF dystopias will be looked back on by readers in the future as the most powerful historical critique of our present condition as can be found anywhere, and much more so than realist novels (Barceló, "Elements of the Fantastic"). It is in this vein that she has written the short story "Mil Euros por tu Vida" (2008), a dystopia about young people living in relative poverty that support themselves by selling their bodies to wealthy pensioners, that was subsequently adapted as a feature-length film in German directed by Damir Lukacevic (*Transfer* 2010), demonstrating that these themes appeal to a wider European audience. As well as contributing this short story to the dystopian anthology *Futuros Peligrosos* (2008), for which Barceló was also an editor, she has written a short story for *Alucinadas* (2014), the first anthology of Spanish women's SF, in which eight of the ten short stories featured are set in future worlds marred by the destruction of our present one.<sup>22</sup> SF author Ricard Ruiz Garzón believes that the Spanish SF community should do more to engage readers worldwide, asking authors to "search their roots" and write SF that stands out as "Spanish" (Barceló, "Elements of the Fantastic"). For Ruiz Garzón, Spanish SF can de-centre the primacy of English-language SF by encouraging authors to enrich the genre with Spanish-specific variations and nuances. Barceló, on the other hand, believes that Spaniards are less concerned with purely "Spanish" issues and more with "global human concerns":

I am not particularly interested in creating a "Spanish" literature of the fantastic nor do I think that this could be of use to anyone else in other countries. Aside from anything else, it would be very difficult to define what that contribution consists of: would we use flamboyantly flamenco or Almodovarian characters? Would we need to mould ourselves to the stereotypes of ourselves created by other countries? Would we need to make a national social critique instead of speaking of global human concerns?

(Barceló, "Elements of the Fantastic")

Like much of Spanish SF, Barceló's work does not reflect a singularly Spanish world view but explores the real experience of many Spaniards today, living a cosmopolitan and European identity. While Barceló readily fights for a greater awareness of Spanish SF's rich contributions to the genre, her work is largely free from Spanish tropes and instead addresses common themes in women's dystopian SF, such as the future of gender and reproduction, as is visible in *Consecuencias Naturales*. Whether Barceló's or Ruiz Garzón's way of promoting Spanish SF works best, the fact that they were invited for an interview by the Utah-based online SF journal *Strange Horizons* speaks volumes about the status of their entry into the international stage. With a current boom in the production of Spanish speculative fiction (Fernández), and an increase in both the quality of translations and the options that writers have available to them if they want to have their work translated (Charnock, "Spain"), Barceló sets to be joined on the international stage by an increasing number of Spanish SF writers.

#### UK

In the 1960s, a new, experimental mode of SF emerged in Britain. Under the guiding hand of editor Michael Moorcock, who took up the post in 1964, British magazine *New Worlds* introduced an *avant garde* SF style which defied categorisation and closed the divide between SF and other fictional forms. New Wave writers aimed to develop a literary variety of SF that would move the genre away from the tropes and writing style of pre-Golden Age pulp fiction that had been destined for mass-circulation. Where SF writers had previously—often at the expense of literary technique and character development—focused on the possibilities that physics, chemistry, and biology afforded the future of humanity, New Wave writers were interested in style, emotion, and new knowledges surrounding human behaviour that were created by sociology and psychology, which began to gain greater recognition in the 1960s. The New Wave also triggered a transition in the way SF stories were published; increasingly SF was written in novel format or published as an anthology as opposed to printed in magazines, which attracted a different kind of readership.

British women writers who experimented within this trend of "New Wave" SF included Josephine Saxton ("Ne Déjà vu Pas", 1967), Daphne R. Castell ("Who's in There with Me?", 1968), and Hilary Bailey ("Dr. Gelabius", 1968), who were also published in Judith Merrill's *England Swings SF: Stories of Speculative Fiction* (1968). This anthology was, according to Donald Allen Wollheim, the primary editor for its publisher, ACE books, and an SF writer in his own right, "the turning point of that New Wave" (Wollheim 2). The New Wave rejected the writing style typical of traditional SF, wherein events must be justified by plausible

scientific explanation, and instead focused on exploring “inner-space”—the voice of the character’s consciousness as they navigate not outer space, but the domestic sphere or suburban landscape (Masson 363).<sup>23</sup> Merrill’s anthology contributed both to the international recognition of innovations in British SF and to the popularity of the term “speculative fiction”, which, according to the editor of ACE books, who published the anthology, was the term these writers preferred to use when categorising their work.<sup>24</sup> British New Wave writer Josephine Saxton, author of *Vector for Seven* (1970) and *Queen of the States* (1986), expressed, in the opening to her short story contribution to the anthology, that “generally speaking, British writers [of SF] are in the vanguard ... one thing they do is make much American S.F. look old-fashioned” (42). Whether or not this was the case, Saxton’s confidence shows that British women writers were at the heart of British trends in SF that were felt at an international level.

Other women SF novelists of the 1960s were also experimenting with alternative styles of SF. Scottish biologist and novelist Naomi Mitchison’s *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (1962) explored issues of gender, race, and sexuality through a tale of haploid human characters born from sexual interactions with hermaphrodite Martians. The protagonist, Mary, is a biologist herself who witnesses and appreciates the equal division of Martian leadership roles between women and men. The story also has eco-feminist concerns: scientists are banned from interfering with the environments they explore, and Mitchison includes detailed explanations of the super-intelligence of insect species like butterflies and caterpillars. Women writers in the fantasy and realism genres in the 1960s also experimented with SF tropes, from Angela Carter’s postmodern *Heroes and Villains* (1969) to Daphne du Maurier’s *Rule Britannia* (1972), which is set in a near-future Cornwall following the UK’s break from the “Common Market”—a free market union strongly resembling the European Union—where pockets of resistant groups defend the country against the invasion of the US military. A flop at the time of publication, the book’s bitter irony when read in 2017 has led some literary critics to humorously wonder whether du Maurier predicted Brexit (Thorn). In 1979, Welsh writer Esmé Dodderidge’s *New Gulliver* (1979) ironically interrogated the possibility of the reversal of gender roles by having her women protagonists dress as men and assume “patriarchal” control.

This brief overview of women’s SF would not be complete without mentioning Doris Lessing, who was born to British parents in Iran, and was raised in present-day Zimbabwe where she remained until she moved to London in 1949. In 2007, Lessing was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her brief foray into speculative fiction, which she called “space fiction” (Fahim 1994, 146), in the 1970s and early 1980s resulted in *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) and the *Canopus in Argos: Archives* series

(1979–1983). Clare Sprague argues that her interest in “the individual in the post-humanist world” led her into the genre of SF and “placed [her work] in the context of the theory of critics such as Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida” (68). Like the New Wave writers, Lessing rejected the hierarchy of the realistic novel over fantastical modes of storytelling and instead combined the two to add psychological and philosophical elements to her SF. In response to those who criticised her experimentation with the genre, Lessing responded that “What they didn’t realise was that in SF is some of the best social fiction of our time” (Blume 4–6). Indeed, the *Canopus in Argos* sequence engages with twentieth-century science to interrogate models of motherhood and lineage, while also using the trope of space travel to develop a critique of colonialism.

By the 1980s, the London-based Women’s Press had published a list of SF that acknowledged an important body of work that could be defined as feminist SF. For Nickianne Moody, while anglophone women SF writers in the 1980s did contribute to “fiction which addressed and explored contemporary science and scientific practice, new technology and social change”, their work also “offered the possibility of a collective pastoral guild-ordered life in the fictional future which may or may not utilise new technology” (179–80). In Britain, as in America and Italy, these possibilities were articulated through a critical utopian or dystopian frame; British Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta’s *The Rape of Shavi* (1983),<sup>25</sup> for example, is set in a near-future Africa and tells the story of a tribe which lives peacefully until survivors of a European holocaust descend on their space, bringing with them the weapons and technology that destroyed their own people. Caroline Forbes’s short story “London Fields” (1985), published in an anthology of lesbian feminist SF in 1985, depicts the city as a post-apocalyptic pastoral idyll following the onset of a disease that has apparently eliminated all men, resulting in the establishment of a female, lesbian utopia. But when it becomes clear that some men have survived, as is also the case in James Tiptree Jr.’s *Houston, Houston, Do You Read* (1977), the possibility of male domination is so terrible that the women decide that the only solution is to exterminate them.

In 1990, Women’s Press published a collection of horror/SF short stories for teenagers by a writer who was to become one of the most prominent British authors of teenage fiction that decade: Malorie Blackman. These stories, which feature clever and resilient young women as the protagonists, are written with anger and urgency: in one, a girl struggles to survive during an apocalypse, dressing like a boy to secure shelter and avoid rape. When she does end up being sexually assaulted by a man she trusted, she kills him and moves on to find another sanctuary. The collection was selected for the 1991 Feminist Book Fortnight, while that same year, Blackman participated in BBC TV’s first ever *Black Women’s Screenwriting Workshop*. The stories



do not immediately address issues of race as explicitly as in her later and better known works of fiction, which brought race to the centre stage of YA British dystopian fiction (*Pig-Heart Boy*, 1997; the *Noughts and Crosses* series, 2001–2008). Since, several British women authors have published critically acclaimed works of SF, from Jamaican-British American author Brissett (*Elysium*, 2014), whose novel addresses issues of race and gender in the midst of a global apocalypse, to Margaret Atwood's protégé Naomi Alderman, who won a Bailey's Prize for her work of feminist SF, *The Power* (2016). The novel explores what would happen if, overnight, women around the globe developed electricity-producing glands in the palms of their hands and began to use them to resist the patriarchy.

International SF anthologies, magazines, and journals are playing an important role in publishing the works of younger, lesser-known British women. British-Malay writer Shweta Narayan, the 2007 winner of the Octavia Butler Memorial Scholarship, which supports "Clarion and Clarion West students of colour",<sup>26</sup> had her story "The Arrangement of Their Parts" included in the postcolonial speculative fiction anthology *We See a Different Frontier* (2012), while another of her short stories "Falling into the Earth" was published by Zubaan, an independent feminist publisher in New Delhi, as part of the anthology *Breaking the Bow: Speculative Fiction Inspired by the Ramayana* (2012). London-born Isha Karki has recently edited the "WOC [Women of Colour] Special" of the 2017 *Mithila Review*, a free online international SF and fantasy magazine published by Massachusetts-based Weightless Books; Priya Sharma, who lives and works in the UK, has had her short stories "Rag and Bone" (2013) and "Fabulous Beasts" (2015) published by *Tor.com*, the US-based online journal and publishing subsidiary of Tor Books. "Rag and Bone" and "Fabulous Beasts" have subsequently been reprinted in hard copy for *The Best SF and Fantasy Volume 8* (2014) and *Heiresses of Russ 2016: The Year's Best Lesbian Speculative Fiction* (2016). These young authors are, for the most part, producing works of dystopian fiction in which aspects of women's social inequality are explored through an interrogation of possible alternative forms of social organisation.

#### *North America: Native American, African American, and South Asian American Women Writers*

While SF was not a mainstream genre in many European countries in the second half of the twentieth century, by the 1970s, "the genre's place on library shelves became well established" in North America, and "leading library publishers began to offer reference books on SF" (Lerner 140). Upon its publication of a *Science Fiction* volume in its Twentieth Century Views (1976), major US publishing house Prentice-Hall declared that the

genre was now “a fully-fledged, critically acknowledged genre” (quoted in Punter 169). By the late 1970s, there was also an increase in writers explicitly discussing issues of race and gender in North American SF. This was due, in part, to the increased visibility of Native American SF and the emergence of prominent African-American SF writers. As I will discuss below, South Asian American writers are now also increasingly acknowledged as important voices in North American women’s SF, though they only began to appear in greater numbers in the early 2000s.

With regard to Native American writers of SF, whose works often combine issues of race, gender, indigenous mythology, and ecology in their imagining of possible futures,<sup>27</sup> the message of their stories is unambivalent: North America’s greed for oil and its insistence on environmental exploitation will result in unimaginable ecological apocalypse; patriarchal society has inflicted a culture of gender violence and oppression onto what Toni Flores has termed “the fine Indian balance between male and female, the mutual respect and sense of equality” (54); and the colonial imagination prevalent in SF has excluded native communities from the opportunity to imagine their own future.<sup>28</sup> Contributions to the SF genre from Native American writers in the past two decades include Zainab Amadahy’s *The Moons of Palmares* (1997), the story of slavery and bondage in a future world (Wheeler 231); Misha Nogha’s *Red Spider White Web* (1999), the story of a Métis/Nordic woman living in a dangerous and poverty-stricken city who makes money by selling holograms on the street (Na Gomi 630); and *Walk the Red Road* (2013), a collection of dystopian stories where animal avatars, spirits, and humans co-exist (“Walk the Red Road”). The publication of recent anthologies of Native American SF has also directed attention towards these and other writers, notably Grace L. Dillon’s important anthology of Indigenous SF *Walking the Clouds* (2012), and Drew Hayden Taylor’s collection of native SF stories *Take Us to Your Chief* (2017).

Two prominent African-American writers of SF also emerged in the 1960s who dedicated their works in particular to issues of race and gender, gaining greater celebrity than Pauline Hopkins and Frances Harper had achieved in the first half of the twentieth century: Octavia E. Butler and Samuel R. Delaney. The first novel of Butler’s Patternist series, *Patternmaster*, was published in 1976, and the critically acclaimed *Kindred* in 1979, which directly addresses issues of race, gender, and genealogy, but it was not until 1984 that she was recognised with an award, this time for her short story “Speech Sounds”, which won a Hugo Award for Best Short Story and *Bloodchild* (1984), which won Hugo and Nebula Awards for best novelette. Butler remains an iconic and influential name in SF, and continues to be honoured posthumously: in 2010, she was awarded a place in the SF Hall of Fame; in 2012, the SF and Fantasy Writers of America

recognised her work with a Solstice Award. Prominent African American and Afro-Caribbean American and Canadian SF writers such as Nalo Hopkinson and N.K. Jemisin cite Butler as the reason they got into writing SF,<sup>29</sup> with Jemisin referring to Butler as “my role model” and “my own personal grandmaster” (N.K. Jemisin on Craft, Advocacy, and Ignoring the Naysayers).<sup>30</sup> But Butler’s prominence in the genre, however, should not be indicative of sufficient inclusion in American SF; as Jemisin also notes, up-and-coming African-American SF writers are often lauded as “the next Octavia Butler”, which Jemisin interprets as a suggestion that “there’s one position for black woman, and it has to be filled by one person. It’s almost as though we have to choose between tokenism and exclusion, and neither is good, obviously” (Jemisin, “N.K. Jemisin on Craft, Advocacy, and Ignoring the Naysayers”). Contemporary SF written by African-American woman writers that explicitly confronts issues of race and gender include Jewelle Gomez’s “Lynx and Strand” (1998), which addresses homophobia and despotic future governments (“Stephanie Reviews”); Nisi Shawl’s “Deep End” (2004), the story of a bisexual slave who spends most of her life in a virtual reality before being forced to download into a “strangely *white*” body (Drayden), and *Everfair* (2016), a critically acclaimed novel that takes place in an alternate history: a futuristic and utopian re-working of the late nineteenth-century Belgian Congo (Hand). Shawl also founded the Carl Brandon Society, a non-profit “dedicated to issues of race and ethnicity in speculative fiction” (@carlbrandon). Other stories of note include, for example, Andrea Hairston’s *Redwood and Wildfire*, winner of the James Tiptree, Jr. Award 2011, the story of an African-American woman and a Seminole Irish man who journey away from violent racism in Georgia, USA, and towards a city of the future (Burnham); Alaya Dawn Johnson’s *The Summer Prince* (2013), a tale of young and sexually fluid characters in a far-future Brazilian city that still suffers from stringent class and racial segregation (Mayer); Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu’s *Lagoon* (2014), in which a marine biologist, a soldier, and a famous rapper are forced to band together when aliens invade the city of Lagos, Nigeria (Okorafor-Mbachu, “Insight into the Lagoon”), and *Binti*, winner of the 2016 Nebula Award and 2016 Hugo Award for best novella, the tale of a woman whose dream to study at the finest university in the galaxy forces her to travel light years away from her home in a journey during which she must use mathematics to solve an internecine war (“Okorafor, Nnedi”); Khaalidah Muhammad-Ali’s “Five Lessons in the Fattening Room” (2016), the story of a Muslim woman who navigates a mix of dangerous AI, religious intolerance, and black market organ harvesting in a dystopian city (Muhammad-Ali, “Interview”); and Kiini Ibura Salaam’s collection of stories *Ancient, Ancient*, winner of the James Tiptree, Jr. Award 2012, are sexuality explicit tales of Afro-diasporisation. Anthologies such as

*Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory* (2008) and the *Dark Matter* series (2000–2004), edited by Sheree R. Thomas, have also contributed to creating spaces for the work of African-American women writers who discuss issues of race and gender.<sup>31</sup>

In the early 2000s, South Asian American women writers of SF began to claim their position within the American SF community, with works that openly address issues of race, gender, and sexuality. These stories include Indian-American writer Vandana Sing's collection of short stories *The Woman Who Thought She Was A Planet and Other Stories* (2008), including a tale of a woman who discovers that her body is inhabited by tiny extraterrestrials; Marie Lu's *Legend* (2011), a story of social conflict and colonisation that centres around one young woman's participation in a war between "the Colonies" and "the Republic" (Pearson); Alice Sola Kim's "Beautiful White Bodies" (2011), which "provides a textbook example of intersectionality, particularly with regard to race" (Notkin); Sri-Lankan-American writer Mary Anne Mohanraj's *The Stars Change* (2013), a work of SF erotica that explores interspecies sexual relationships and non-normative human partnerships; S.B. Divya's *Runtime* (2016), a story about a young woman entering a cyborg race with the hope of bettering herself and achieving a more secure future (S.B. Divya "Book Review"); San-Francisco-based Philippine writer Isabel Yap's "Serenade" (2016), which explores the meeting of cultures in the digital age ("Cyber World"); and E. Lily Yu's "The White-Throated Transmigrant" (2017), the story of a woman caught between two worlds. South Asian American women writers of other kinds of fiction are also delving into SF, for example, Tanwi Nandni Islam (Rao). The work of Nandni Islam, who is set to release a SF novel this year, grapples with issues of sexuality and immigration (Rao). With panels on Southeast Asian SF appearing with greater frequency at American SF conferences, such as Con-Volution, these writers are set to attract greater attention in the coming years (Thao Worra).

## 5 The Rise of Queer Characters in North America, the UK, and France

The 1970s marked the arrival of a stream of American women's SF outside that experimented with deconstructions of gender. From Joanna Russ to Ursula K. Le Guin and Octavia Butler, women writers ventured into (im)possible science fictional realms to ask what it means to be a woman, or indeed, a man. For Le Guin, "It's a hard question, so in *The Left Hand of Darkness* I eliminated gender to find out what would be left. SF is a wonderful opportunity to play this kind of game" ("Coming Back from the Silence"). Utopia thus ceased to be an enactment of a specific desire and instead became imbricated with a more complex wish for something

that is still, though perhaps not unthinkable, largely inarticulable in human vocabulary. Gender was further interrogated through the queer characters and genderqueer societies that emerged in greater numbers in women's speculative fiction from the late 1960s onwards: the Gethenians in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) are ambisexual; Octavia Butler's *Patternmaster* has a bisexual protagonist (1976); Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines* (1978) is the story of Amazon-like lesbian 'Riding Women' who reproduce without men (Griffin Crowder 22); Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Shattered Chain* (1976), *The Heritage of Hastur* (1975), and *Darkover Series* (1962–1988) contain a host of lesbian protagonists; Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978) is a separatist community of women with psychic powers;<sup>32</sup> and Diane Duane's *The Door Into Fire* (1979) features several bisexual characters. By the 1980s, American and Canadian women writers were creating well-rounded and prominent queer female characters or genderqueer societies for tales of violent and unstable alternate universes. These include Isobelle Carmody's Obernewtyn Chronicles (1987–2008), Mercedes Lackey's Heralds of Valdemar trilogy (1987–1988), Octavia Butler's Lilith's Brood trilogy and *The Parable of the Sower* (1987–1989; 1993), Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Shelia Finch's *Infinity's Web* (1985), and Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* (1988). Intentional, real, and complex queer characters in these oeuvres save readers from having to search in the subtext for the queer relationship (and wondering whether Xena and Gabrielle are really a couple in *Xena: Warrior Princess*). However, as SF writer Cedar Rae Duke notes, the genre still suffers from a lack of representation of the full range of queer material cultures, and "transgender, asexual, intersex, and agender/neutrois" protagonists remain "few and far between" (338). However, asexual and intersex characters often problematically appear as extraterrestrials encountered from the perspective of the human explorer-coloniser,<sup>33</sup> with one notable exception coming from R.J. Anderson's fantasy/SF YA novel, *Quicksilver* (2011), which features a female protagonist whose asexuality is "incidental" to the plot (QueenieOfAces). However, there are many more examples of SF characters—usually extraterrestrial—whose bodies conform to the World Association for Sexual Health's definition of the term "intersex" as "people whose innate physical sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, gonads, and genitals) are considered to be either male or female at the same time, only partially male or partially female, or neither male nor female" (Health Policy Project, 2015): these include Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed* (1980) and *Imago* (1989); and Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales* (1994). Trans characters in speculative fiction appeared later and are still more frequently encountered in fantasy than in SF. Examples include Lois McMaster Bujold's *A Civil*

*Campaign* (1999), Alison Goodman's *Eon: Rise of the Dragoneye* (2008), Libba Bray's *Beauty Queens* (2011), RoAnna Slyver's *Chameleon Moon* (2014), Robles's "Mares que Cambian" (2014), Brissett's *Elysium* (2014), and April Daniels' *Dreadnought: Nemesis* (2017). N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season*, which features a transgender woman "as a regular person", to cite one fan, "someone who needed to be explained or who has something tragic happen to them", is also an exciting and overdue boon for the genre (Rebecca).<sup>34</sup>

A further issue with the presentation of queer characters in SF has been identified by Canadian SF author Jennifer Cross, who has accused the genre of "whitewashing". Cross notes that:

Within the multiverse whose very existence is dependent on transcending boundaries, the instances of whitewashing, alienating, destroying, and otherwise shovelling queer folk into white boxes typically perpetrated by mainstream media have been pervasive and disheartening.

(331)

Writers who do incorporate a range of queer characters in their novels include Nalo Hopkinson (*Brown Girl in the Ring*, 1998); Shira Glassman (*The Second Mango*, 2013); Brissett (*Elysium*, 2014; *Falling in Love with Hominids*, 2015); Bodard (*The House of Shattered Wings*, 2015); and Nisi Shawl (*Everfair*, 2016). The *Queers Destroy SF!* anthology (2015) also features a number of short stories with queer, non-Western female protagonists, by authors including Kate M. Galey, Felicia Davin, Rose Lemberg, Jessica Yang, Amal El-Mohtar, and Bonnie Jo Stufflebeam. These writers make the ethnicity and sexuality of the characters incidental to the plot, rather than the focal point of the narrative. For Bodard, who is of French and Vietnamese descent, this approach to characterisation is essential for it to be plausible that a queer, Vietnamese character is as likely to "save the world" as a heterosexual male from North America:

It's not so great when the book hinges on the big issue being the gay couple. And ... you get told that you can have a racial issues narrative, but you also get told you can't have a narrative where the person of colour goes on to save the world.

(Bodard, "Featured Author Interview")

Indeed, Bodard often presents the sexuality and ethnicity of her protagonists as incidental facets of their identity. In doing so, her writing contributes to a change in the expectations of the SF readership: Western, heterosexual, and male post-apocalyptic heroes are substituted by a heterogeneity of SF heroines. For Bodard, avoiding a "racial issues narrative" frees a story

from “the types of prejudice against oppressed groups that we see in [our world]”, which helps the narrative feel fresher and less “tired” (Bodard, “Featured Author Interview”). Indeed, her science fictional “world-building” conjures successful and agentic characters that avoid the stereotypes of non-Western or “interracial” romances.

This attempt to compile an abridged genealogy of the evolution of queer characters in SF suggests a correspondence between women’s SF and trends in feminist and anti-racist critical theory. As greater attention is paid in Western feminisms to intersectional issues of inclusion and privilege, SF has, perhaps consequently, responded with a greater variety of queer characters.

## **6 A Feminist and Anti-racist Approach to Science Fiction**

My feminist and anti-racist approach to defining SF makes a case for women’s presence in the genre, while also questioning what a genre piece looks and feels like in relation to other genres. This method navigates the much-disputed relationship between science and SF to dispute the position taken by many fans of “hard” SF, who believe that some novels that are shelved in book stores in the SF section are not “science-y” enough to warrant the label.<sup>35</sup> I view the subsequent discussions over what “is” and what “is not” “proper SF” as illustrative of many aspects of the ideological control of the genre by heteropatriarchal paradigms and Western scientific ontologies. This leads into an analysis of how a feminist and anti-racist approach to SF might stage the relationship between the genre and other fantastical or realistic modes of writing. I conclude this section by exploring how women writers who set local mythologies and spirituality against a backdrop of science and technology not only specifically stress the relevance of a different kinds of women in the future but allow SF to return to its roots as a genre that has for centuries blended with other speculative genres. I therefore view SF as a genre that is characterised by hybridity and intertextuality and is therefore neither entirely distinct from fantasy, nor incompatible with other genres: SF, by this definition, can incorporate both genres of speculative fiction and of realist modes of writing.

### *Race, Gender, Science Fiction, and Science*

An analysis of how the SF community defines science in relation to SF can illuminate the way in which SF brings to the fore processes of gender and race. The relationship between science and SF reveals both a marked sexism within the SF community and a Eurocentric view of the genre and of contemporary scientific literacies. The genre’s self-separation from other fantastic genres, such as fantasy, science fantasy, and magic realism, which



are not necessarily based in contemporary scientific discourse, is largely due to an existing hierarchy of disciplines that places dominant forms of the “Western” scientific method, namely prediction and cognitively deduced explanation, above other ways of imagining the future. But the connection between science and SF is also strong in SF written by women: for the enduringly influential Octavia Butler, SF must be embedded in science. She explains, “I mean, if I was told that something was SF I would expect to find something dealing with science in it” (Butler 495). As is the case with some SF written by men, women writers of SF come to writing from diverse careers in science: J.Y. Yang is a molecular biologist, and Brissett, Alice B. Sheldon, and Lisa Nohealani Morton are software engineers and computer scientists. Examples of their innovative approaches to writing science into SF range from Brissett’s *Elysium* (2014), which creates a narrative using code as prose, to J.Y. Yang’s bio-technologically advanced society in *The Black Tides of Heaven* (2017).

While there are many women who write traditional modes of SF based on “Western” scientific paradigms, I am also interested in the women writers who, through an interrogation of race and gender in their work, upset the tropes of “hard” SF. My analysis of these writers and of their transgressions within the genre can be usefully foregrounded in an exploration of how influential SF criticism has defined SF in relation to science. The tradition of “hard” science in SF is strongly supported by critics such as Carl D. Malmgren, for whom, writing in 1991, SF is “necessarily tied to the scientific paradigms of the day, to the ideational climate in which it is written” (Malmgren 175). The work of utopian scholar Edward K. Chan demonstrates that Malmgren’s emphasis on the connection between SF and the “scientific paradigms of the day” is still at the heart of SF criticism in 2016: tapping into a legacy of similar statements by SF critics, Chan argues that SF “is not a magical incantation invoking the novum but instead a something-else produced rationally through the logical and empirical knowledge of the times” (*The Racial Horizon of Utopia* 5). Here Chan also echoes Suvin’s suggestion that SF is “the literature of cognitive estrangement” (*Metamorphoses* 12), a statement that is still common consensus among the giants of contemporary utopian and SF criticism. Chan argues that by drawing on these legitimised forms of scientific reasoning, SF can be experienced as an extension of realist writing. In doing so, he allots to the genre a greater relevance and timeliness than other “magical” forms of estrangement, which for him are not, by implication, “of the times”. For Chan, as for Malmgren and Suvin before him, the realism of SF and its emphasis on science make SF the genre of fantastical literature that most seriously addresses the issues of the present moment. Like Chan, Eric S. Rabkin, author of the *SF: A Historical Anthology* (1983), draws on Suvin’s original statement about the cognitive element of SF that was

explicated in *Metamorphoses* (1920) to claim that SF authors must adhere to the laws of realism. For Rabkin, writers “cannot contravene a known and accepted principle of science unless [he/she has] a logical explanation based on other known and accepted principles” (*SF: A Historical Anthology* 121). Such is the prevailing rational within the SF community as it goes about including or excluding texts from the genre depending on their “cognitive believability”, a status that signifies authenticity within a cognitive model that has been geographically and culturally particularised.

However, a group of women writers of SF are using their work to explicitly defy the norms of dominant scientific methods: Hopkinson, for example, is part of a stream of writers of mixed heritage whose incorporation of African and Afro-Caribbean scientific paradigms and female protagonists is unsettling traditional frameworks of writing science into SF. In her work, women protagonists rely on cutting-edge technology influenced by Afro-Caribbean mythology to survive in dystopian futures, as in *Midnight Robber* (2000). This mode of writing SF undoes the polarity between science and mythology while demonstrating that modern technology is not the product of an objective set of values but those that underpin validated approaches to scientific practice. As Uppinder Mehan, Hopkinson’s co-editor for the SF anthology *So Long Been Dreaming* (2004) argues: “in the Orientalist scheme the West is rational and scientific; the East is mystical and fantastic. Technology is a cultural artefact: it is value laden as well as instrumental” (54). Zainab Amadahy, a SF writer and social worker with mixed Cherokee, African-American, and European heritage, has also been instrumental in contributing to a change in the culture of science in SF. For Amadahy, working with issues of race and gender in SF has meant creating new and different SF narratives that draw on scientific methods that have been “rejected” from mainstream science. “When I started reading about biofield research”, she explains, “I couldn’t help but note the parallels between the theoretical science and wellness paradigms offered by many wisdom and indigenous knowledge traditions ... that have generally not been taken seriously by the world of science” (“Music Medicine” 359). Amadahy is not alone in her incorporation of indigenous sciences into SF. For SF writer Misha Nogha, who lists her ancestry as mixed Nordic and Metis, SF can include ways of knowing the universe that precede contemporary astrophysics. She posits that “examining the Pleiadean original tales from indigenous peoples points to a pre-historical understanding of the wormhole possibility long before it was denied by mathematics” (“The Thunderbird’s Path” 352). Indeed, she claims that indigenous Nordic tribes were interested in SF long before it became a discipline, citing the “ancient cosmic maps” that have been found drawn onto “rocks, walls, parietal pictographs” (355) of the caves which belonged to these tribes. These maps illustrate stories about “Pleiadean aliens” from

the Pleiadean star cluster set in the constellation of Taurus (355). Nogha's holistic approach to science has made its way into her SF, where works like *Walk the Red Road* (2013) and *Red Spider White Web* (1999) incorporate a rich and textured deployment of the many manifestations of science (Na Gomi 60). In these novels, science defines itself as the pursuit of knowledge, rather than the selective organisation of that knowledge into a specific scientific paradigm. Nogha has accused the SF community of having excluded many great works of indigenous SF from the canon based on a prejudicial definition of science. She reasons that:

In the end, a person could argue that the myths and tales of indigenous people do not fall into the category of SF, which according to the *Wesleyan Anthology of SF* suggests that the first SF story was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published in 1818. Yet undeniably many of the elements popular in modern SF, such as wormholes, star travel, and aliens, do appear in these tales, and from these myths a lot of our modern themes spring forth.

(356)

For Nogha, the “myths and tales of indigenous people” have not been deemed as illustrative of the genre, despite containing many of the tropes that signal a work as being SF, such as space travel and extraterrestrials. Like Nogha, Bodard, who is of French/Vietnamese descent, has argued for the relevance of Vietnamese mythologies and literary heritage within contemporary SF. In her 2016 essay “Pushing Back against the Wall”, she explains that when she was a young SF fan, she absorbed the discourse that ancestor worship and spirituality was a “quaint/harmful/irrational custom” that has no place in SF (388). As Bodard remonstrates, even in a genre where readers look for an escape into the cultures and ideas of alien peoples, the “this isn't right, this isn't proper” narrative prevails (388).

The distinction between what is knowable and what is not, and what “might be true” and what “couldn't possibly be true”, has proved difficult to pin down, increasingly seen to be tilted towards “Western” ideas of truth, rationality, science, and atheism. As American SF writer Juliette Wade attests, the question of what can be included and excluded from SF is deeply imbricated with the hierarchies of symbolic capital more broadly: “What is the difference between fantasy and SF? What is ‘hard’ SF? Many of these discussions boil down to a sadly familiar question: Who counts? And the answer to that question depends on whom you ask” (“Women Are the Future of SF” 423–4). The definition of SF thus not only relies on a subjective interpretation of these authenticated pillars of knowledge, it also begs the question of who has historically been part of the formation of scientific ontology. The debate between science and SF therefore

provides useful insight into the friction between minority and dominant, and local and global ways of thinking science.

### *Genre Trouble*

The above discussion of the way in which SF is embedded in a particular understanding of science can be read in conjunction with the way in which the SF community defines the genre as a “realistic” or cognitive mode of speculation. As I will argue, what the SF community accepts as SF is based on the premise that the future posited by any given work is possible, or as Suvin puts it, can be “cognitively arrived at” (*Metamorphoses* 5). What is and is not accepted as a plausible future by both writers and critics of SF reflects the way in which alternate realities are conjured from a distinctly European speculative mode, one that attempts to dominate the science fictional imagination in its desire to shape the future. As stated above, the aforementioned works of women’s SF are attempting to overwrite Eurocentric understandings of what is “possible” and “plausible”, freeing the genre from the processes of territorialisation at work when SF is repeatedly defined as distinct from other speculative genres. This section will therefore briefly summarise the way in which women authors of SF perceive the relationship between SF and other speculative genres.

Ursula K. Le Guin exemplifies the position of many members of the SF community, who view SF as fundamentally distinct from fantasy. She states that SF is:

a child of realism, not of fantasy. A realistic story deals with something that might have happened but didn’t, right? Many science fiction stories are about worlds that don’t exist, but could exist in the future. Both realism and science fiction deal with stories that might be true. Fantasy, on the other hand, tells a story that couldn’t possibly be true. With fantasy, we simply agree to lift the ban on the imagination and follow the story, no matter how implausible it may be.

(“Coming Back from the Silence” 103)

The way in which Le Guin defines SF as a mode of realist literature bears resemblances to the arguments posited by those who define SF in relation to dominant scientific paradigms in the West. While suggesting that realism can be defined as that which “might have happened”, Le Guin does not interrogate the position from which she determines the plausibility of any given speculative event. Indeed, “the ban on the imagination” that Le Guin identifies at the limits of SF, as that which distinguishes the genre from fantasy, is revealed to be problematic when considered in relation to the way in which works of SF with non-Western elements take a peripheral position

in the genre. Nalo Hopkinson's work is one such example of SF that is often defined as "fantastical" through the lens of European mythology and scientific ontologies.

Set on the planet Toussaint, Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000) takes place in a future where "All the bloods [flow] into one river, making a new home a new planet" (18). The planet has been colonised by "Taino, Carib and Arawak; African; Asian; Indian; even the Euro, though some wasn't too happy to acknowledge that-there bloodline" (18). Where European ancestry is shameful to some members of its mixed origin population, variations of Caribbean creole are an official set of respected languages. The people of Toussaint use advanced technology while interacting with the spirits, gods and demons from Caribbean mythology, and much of this technology takes its name from spirit gods: the *eshu*, for example, is a hologram housekeeper—and variation on the SF trope of the artificial intelligence robot—which is named after the cunning and playful god from Yoruba mythology. The hybridisation of science with Afro-Caribbean religion and mythology is, for many critics, a reason to position the novel outside of the SF genre, based on the premise that myth is not already a component of science. Even while *The Science Fiction Handbook* of 2009 recognises that Hopkinson is "at the forefront of postcolonial science fiction writers" (Booker & Thomas 157), in British SF writer Brian Stableford's *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature* (2009), he states that "most of her work is chimerical/science fantasy" because of the "mythical elements of voodoo in exotic settings" and "fantasies based in Afro-Caribbean folklore" (203). This exoticisation of the settings, mythology, and religious and scientific practices described in her work reveals the European lens through which Stableford defines Hopkinson's work as science fantasy. Hopkinson's writing has, by this act of categorisation, been racialised as science "fantasy" or "chimera" rather than SF because it contains elements of non-Western world-building that has rendered it ineligible for recognition within the boundaries of SF.

Brissett's short story "Kamanti's Child" (2016) explores the way in which fantasy and SF have been codified according to Western conceptions of the genres. In an interview with *Uncanny* magazine, Brissett explains that the story illustrates the often prejudicial way in which the future of technology is imagined—both in terms of who possesses technology, and the forms that technology takes. Kamanti, the story's heroine, wears a globe around her neck called a *nanathi*, which we later discover is a piece long-lost technology. Brissett explains that in "Kamanti's Child":

I wanted to develop the idea of Kamanti's race being old and far more advanced than how they seem by first appearance. So I wouldn't call

what is happening in the story as magic. To paraphrase Clarke, any technology might very well seem magical to those who didn't understand it. The *nanathi* is not magical, it's lost technology, a remnant of knowledge that Kamanti's people once possessed but that her particular tribe has chosen to forget.

(“Interview”)

The orb-like *nanathi*, which from a European standpoint might be evocative of fortune telling or the early-modern cosmological models used in Ancient Greece, though is neither, asks why futuristic technology so often appears in SF as all clean lines and modern design. The *nanathi* also troubles our association with technology and futurity: the ancient *nanathi* is high-tech from the past that Kamanti's people chose to forget. Most importantly, in the vein of Afrofuturism, Brissett describes technology in the hands of non-Western protagonists, countering an image of the future where, as Sean Redmond puts it in the context of SF cinema, “All forms of progress are found to come from the activities of white people” (“Interview” 56). Technology here is firmly in the grasp of Kamanti's “race”, who have known and used advanced technology for centuries.

For Brissett, what is often interpreted as myth and magic is often a reformulation of “real events”: “myths start out as real events and over the course of time, through retelling, the events and people become ... more magical than they actually were” (“Victory Lap”). Like many works of SF, Brissett's writing crosses the borders of genre: stories such as “The Executioner” (2009) question whether either myth or magic can be entirely disassociated from the real, argue for a future that interweaves myth and technology, and features protagonists which reflect the various ethnicities of SF readers. For Spanish SF writer Ricard Ruiz Garzón, SF has always been a mongrel of many genres: “I, in any event, don't see hybridisation as an absolute novelty (because it has always existed, and in fact the genre was born from it) but instead as a natural process derived from that generational change” (Barceló, “Elements of the Fantastic”). As Garzón attests, SF was not immediately classified as a genre from its inception: it was not part of a movement that aimed to create a certain style of literature. The early genre works, he argues, are a blend of fantasy, myth, and experimental science. SF editor Ellen Datlow identifies a return of this hybridisation:

What I see is that some of the best writers mix up their story production—moving with ease from SF to fantasy and horror and back again. This provides them with many more outlets for their work and recognition in more than one field.

(Kowal 370)

The commercial benefits of mixing genres are significant. As Nancy Kress notes, while in the 1970s SF outsold most fantasy, won the most awards, and had the loudest fan base, today “nearly every work of fiction on the Nebula ballot is fantasy, not SF” (Kowal 370). In 2005, almost twenty percent of all romance novels sold in America had paranormal story lines, of which vampire romance was one of the most popular subgenres (“Romance Reader Statistics”). The vampire romance also proved compatible with SF elements, as proved by Octavia Butler’s final novel *The Fledgling* (2005) and Karen Fainges’s *The Shayton Chronicles* (2010), which mix SF tropes with a vampire romance narrative. SF authors outside of the US have also stated their preference for genre hybridisation, with Indian SF writer Vandana Singh explaining that “I don’t think of genre at all when I’m writing” (341), while Ukrainian speculative fiction author Rose Lemberg prefers to write “a variety of speculative genres from magic realism to surrealism to fantasy to SF” (278). These authors bear witness to a community of writers who do not feel constrained to keep the SF genre “pure”, as many in the SF community might prefer.<sup>36</sup>

Correcting myopic understandings of the genre requires not only a systematic and critical historicisation of the genre’s hybridity since its inception, but also the act of drawing attention to narratives from around the globe that contain characters with a range of ethnicities and sexualities. This will aid the emergence of “healthy reinventions” of SF and the celebration of difference within the genre (Barceló, “Elements of the Fantastic”). I hope to cast a light on these innovative, future-oriented, and hybridised narratives through this book’s analysis of women’s SF from Europe and beyond. These voices are not only the future of SF, but also its present.

## 7 Race, Gender, and Community in Contemporary Women’s Science Fiction

In the previous section, I have attempted to trace a particular genealogy of utopian and dystopian women’s SF that demonstrates the way in which SF as a genre has been used to interrogate systems of race and gender and to point towards alternative models of society. This section focuses on the health of the genre in the present day, and the opportunities and obstacles faced by writers when engaging with the genre to contest and re-imagine issues of race and gender.

SF has been, in recent years, able to disseminate innovative and future-forward approaches to gender, race, and sexuality *en masse* to a sometimes-unsuspecting public through both traditional media and digitally innovative dissemination methods. This popular, marginal, and low-brow genre’s readership, which straddles a spread of age-groups and social classes, reaches readers who might not otherwise be consuming literature.



It is, as Pat Cadigan attests, through popular culture rather than during formal education that we find “answers to most of their ethical and moral questions” (Cadigan 369).<sup>37</sup> But SF is not only a medium through which issues that affect gender, sexual, and ethnic minority groups are being broadcast to larger swathes of the population. I will also reflect on the way in which, in recent years, the internet has offered an alternative way of broadcasting the work of women writers, who often experience discrimination when publishing SF through the formal publication process. Contact with a digitally active fan base, who are increasingly reading SF online, has kept the genre, and the work of women writers, popular amid a worldwide decrease in literature readership. The following section, “Women Gather Here”, explores how communities of queer/women writers are finding community and solidarity in the SF genre, which subsequently opens the issue of why it is important that writers from around the globe are imagining the future, and why it is so vital that SF characters reflect the heterogeneity of these writers (“Visibility Matters: Towards Greater Diversity in Science Fiction”). I then go on to look at some of the ways in which the genre often excludes and undervalues contributions made by queer/women writers (“Discrimination”). SF, however, has always hosted stories about intergalactic wars in which the subjugated struggle to survive, and so, the following section “Forum for a Fight”, positions the genre of SF as a medium through which authors demonstrate defiance against racial and gender oppression. In “Alien No More”, I explore the negotiation of the trope of alien-as-other; in “SF is Queer”, I assess the queer SF community’s argument that SF has always been home to the queer; and finally, in “From Fear to Awe”, I investigate some of the ways in which queer/women writers use the genre to encourage a positive reception of the concerns of feminist, anti-racist, and genderqueer communities. The collection of issues I analyse here serves to underline my hypothesis that SF represents an effective tool with which to disseminate issues of race and gender within and beyond Europe.

As a future-forward genre, SF is unique in its ability to re-negotiate the terms within which we live, to create worlds that are not necessarily explored through the eyes of male protagonists. This explains why for many women writers, SF is “my playground, my toolbox, the literature of the future, the literature of ideas, of dreams, and I dream a utopian future” (Welser 386–7). Utopia echoes throughout the majority of similar interviews given by women who are writing SF, including Cedar Rae Duke, who in her non-fiction essay “Not Android, Not Alien, Not Accident: Asexual and Agender” repeats the well-worn mantra of the under-represented: “We need to dream, to see ourselves in the future—a future worth living in” (Rae Duke 338). Utopian SF is still the genre of choice for women authors to not only dream a better life, but also to fight for it.

Indeed, Welser notes that SF is becoming “increasingly feminist” (Welser 386). The reality here is not that the genre is seeing an increase in women writers—the “Overview of Early Women’s Utopian/Dystopian Science Fiction” section of this book attests to the fact that women writing SF is no novelty. The difference now is that works of feminist SF, which were once exceptions to rule of classic SF plot lines, are now emerging in far greater numbers than they were when they appeared in the late 1960s. The current abundant supply of feminist SF exists alongside a slow but steady increase in non-heterosexual and non-Caucasian characters in SF stories. The media is now picking up on the influx of women writers to the genre, and is shining a light onto the genealogy of feminist SF. In March 2017, a recent editorial (“How Feminist SF Predicted the Future”) included a photo of a woman at an anti-Trump rally holding a sign reading “Make Margaret Atwood Fiction Again” (Alderman). The article follows Bruce Miller’s recent revival of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which has been re-made into a successful television series, the first episode of which aired on 26 April 2017. The article suggests that, as proved by the nationwide popularity and critical acclaim of the new television series remake, Atwood’s story is as relevant today as it was in 1985. This genre classic, alongside those by Butler, Le Guin, Burdekin, and Joanna Russ, among others, has set the tone for the current generation of SF authors that have taken to the genre to critique and to re-imagine race, gender, and sexuality. The popularity of the feminist dystopia—arguably greater now than when Burdekin’s classic *Swastika Night* was first appeared in 1937—attests to the fact that, as Bodard puts it: “the field is expanding ever outwards, to be more and more inclusive. And we’re more and more supported, more and more listened to, more and more recognised” (389). Women are gathering within the genre with the aim of defending the need for a better future. Brought together by a shared love for SF, communities are being forged in a genre which now not only comprises a group of women writers from around the globe but is being purpose-(re)built by them.

Networks of solidarity for women writers continue to appear in the SF community. On 11 August 2017 at the Helsinki WorldCon, a panel was held for the first time in WorldCon history on Caribbean SF, led by Karen Lord, Brandon O’Brien, and Nalo Hopkinson. The event marked an insistence within the SF community on the value of women Caribbean writers of SF, from Hopkinson, who lives and works in Canada, to Lord, who is based in Barbados. For African-American writer, editor, and journalist Nisi Shawl, “There are significant connections between the rise of feminist SF and the rise of POC [people of colour] SF, though the timelines aren’t exactly concurrent” (431). Major SF publications like Tin House, Lightspeed, and Tor Books are now simultaneously supporting an increase in both feminist SF and SF that deals with issues of race. Their “pro-diversity” stance has resulted in stories specifically addressing race, sexuality, and

feminism being displayed on the homepage of their websites and other prominent places throughout their digital media platforms. Furthermore, these publishers have pursued a drive to publish e-books and hard copy anthologies which specifically address issues of race and gender, such as the ironically titled *Women Destroy Science Fiction!* (Yant) and *Queers Destroy Science Fiction!* (McGuire).<sup>38</sup> The non-concurrent timeline of the rise in feminist, queer, and anti-racist SF can be illustrated by the order of Lightspeed's publication of themed anthologies: *Women Destroy Science Fiction!* appeared first in 2014, followed by *Queers Destroy Science Fiction!* in 2015, and *People of Colo(u)r Destroy Science Fiction!* in 2016. The first anthology paid homage to what SF writer Juliette Wade has identified as: "a diverse community of writers and editors of multiple genders and ethnicities" (423). *People of Colo(u)r Destroy Science Fiction!* was edited by Caribbean-Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson, who was the guest of honour at the 2017 WorldCon in Helsinki, with Philippine-based writer Kristine Ong Muslim, and women make up the majority of the contributors. For Nebula award-winning "Canadian/Mediterranean" author Amal El-Mohtar, who contributed to the *Queers Destroy SF!* anthology, these volumes constitute an act of solidarity for the "Women" "Queers" and "People of Colour" who are involved in these projects. She comments that her participation in *Queers Destroy SF!* means standing "shoulder to shoulder, with women and queer people and people of colour against the fiction that things are fine as they are" (288). For El-Mohtar, the fact that women writers of SF are still sometimes met with repudiation calls for an increase in alliances between women writers of SF. Such solidarities might also reflect the instinct for survival fostered by many protagonists of classic works of SF: as an editor at *Lightspeed* magazine Samantha L. Taylor affirms, "What is more SF than surviving and thriving (and writing!) in a world in which we were never meant to exist?" (Taylor 348).

## 8 Conclusion

The genre of SF has demonstrated five centuries of resistance to the status quo, from Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666) to Karki's "Firebird" (2016). The above analysis demonstrates, however, a recent development for writers who turn to the genre to address issues of race and gender: a perceptible increase in vocal, public-facing communities dedicated to supporting anti-racist and pro-gender inclusive themes in SF, such as the *Islam and Science Fiction* website and the crowdfunding community that made the *Destroy Science Fiction!* anthology series possible. These radical storytellers have therefore used new technologies and modes of occupying the internet to their advantage, so as to extend the genre's legacy of writers who pursue queer, feminist, and anti-racist alternatives to

the present. Ongoing discussions and disagreements over which works of fiction can be labelled as SF offer healthy reprisals of a traditional dispute, resisting a form of genre stagnation that might result in SF becoming an untouchable, codified relic of bygone culture. Mythology, spirituality, and different kinds of scientific method continue to break into the mainstream, where they announce a planetary perspective on possible futures. Amid these developments, the genre remains at the fringes of the mainstream, a position that permits it to innovate with greater freedom, particularly regarding issues of race and gender, and thus more faithfully disseminating the speed at which the cultural, historical, and geographical foundations of these issues shift. All this is done with great joy, hope, and perseverance, standing out against the seeming hopelessness of the status of many current issues of race and gender currently in debate in global politics by persevering with the utopian claim that change is possible.

## Notes

- 1 Scholars usually trace the word eutopia back to More's neologism deriving from the Greek prefix "eu" (good) and "u/ou" (no/not) and the noun "topos" (place). See, for example, Mohr (11).
- 2 Early commentaries of note on *Utopia* include William Tyndale's 1801 work *An Answer to Sir T. More's Dialogue*, which argues that the novel "trifled out the truth with taunts and mocks" (263), as well as Nicholas Harpsfield's (1963) *The Life and Death of Sr. Thomas More*, and Thomas Wilson's *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553).
- 3 Translation is mine from the original.
- 4 It is unclear if Veiras refers here to Irish churchman and astronomer Fergal "Vergilius" (Archbishop) of Salzburg (700–84) or Wolfhelm of Brauweiler (1020–91), a Benedictine abbot at Brauweiler Abbey, near Cologne. Both supported a theory of antipodes that ran contrary to the Catholic Church's opinion (St. Augustine referred to the matter in *City of God* XVI.9 as "the fable that there are Antipodes"). It is less likely, however, that it is the former, because, as per Joseph Wheless's account (362), Pope St. Zachary sent a letter to St. Boniface dated 1 May 748, to put a stop to Vergilius's teaching on the antipodes, and, on refusal, to excommunicate him. If Vergilius, who was at the time a missionary in Bavaria, did indeed go on to become Archbishop of Salzburg, then he may have succeeded in changing the Church's mind, though it is also possible that the Pope's letter was addressed to another Vergilius.
- 5 Reader responses published in Gould (78–9, 237).
- 6 In 1979, these essays were published with additional material as *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. In *Metamorphoses*, Suvin repeatedly contends that SF is the genre from which utopian fiction was born. This statement was contradicted by Sargent's 1994 essay, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited", which inversely saw utopia as the "well-spring" and SF only one of many "rivers that flow from the source" (11).

- 7 Men still outnumber women in utopian studies: the Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies at the University of Limerick lists almost twice as many male visitors as female, and only a third of publications by members of the centre are written by women. Perhaps these statistics are set to change; of the university's five PhD students that have written or are in the process of writing theses involving utopian studies, four are female, with one current student's book concerning "Picturing Women in Gyno-Centred Utopias: Anthropology and Utopia in France in the 17th and 18th Centuries". The Centre for Utopian Studies at the University of Bologna was founded by Vita Fortunati in 1989 and is situated in the Foreign Languages and Literatures Department. The centre provided the space for a stream of important female utopists to emerge, including Giovanna Franci, Nadia Minerva, Lucia Gunella, Rita Monticelli, Gilberta Golinelli, Raffaella Baccolini, Giovanna Silvani, Maria Cristina Vio, and Beatrice Battaglia, who have all published on behalf of the centre, which continues to be women-run and has a strong focus on women's studies. The Interdepartmental Centre for Utopian Studies at the University of Salento (half female members), and the Utopian Studies Society at the University of Gdańsk (one quarter female committee members including chair and treasurer) also continue to publish and host conferences. The University of Lisbon hosted a successful 2016 conference 500 Years of Utopias, its 20-strong committee comprised of three-quarters female members. On 20 January 2017, the University of Bologna hosted the conference "A Utopian Matinée: Projects and Reflections Between Lisboa and Bologna", with a fully-female attendance.
- 8 From a conversation between artist and filmmaker Cauleen Smith and Womack (Womack 27).
- 9 Translations my own.
- 10 In *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe*, M. B. Campbell argues that the early modern texts that we might today categorise as SF developed into a realist tradition, due to a "changing management of knowledge" (112). Prior to this, astronomy and imagination prevailed, and SF was the realist writing of the moment. Indeed, in *The Road to SF* (1977), James Gunn identifies the Mesopotamian "Epic of Gilgamesh" (2000 BC) and the Hindu epic poem *Ramayana* (5–4 BC) as proto-SF, because of their employment of tropes of contemporary SF, such as flying machines that penetrate outer space, and advanced weapons of mass destruction (xi).
- 11 Dale Spender argues in *Mothers of the Novel: A Hundred Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (1986) that Cavendish's novel is one of the earliest examples of SF written by women.
- 12 For further analysis of Scudery's work, see Goldsmith (345).
- 13 The theme is still fresh today, with the critically acclaimed 2015 film *The Lobster*, starring Colin Farrell and Rachel Weisz, telling the tale of a dystopian society of forced coupledom, where a band of renegades fight to remain single, and ultimately torture two members of their own band for falling in love.
- 14 For further analysis of these works, see Bigman.
- 15 For further analysis of Charlotte Haldane's *Man's World*, see Beer (208–11).
- 16 It must be noted that Italy does not have an SF tradition with the same scope or scale as that of the USA or the UK. As Domenico Gallo has noted, while the

term *fantascienza* was coined by Giorgio Monicelli in 1952, the “Italian literary establishment found it so difficult to include SF in the complex mosaic of intellectual experiences of post-WWII Italy” (“Fantascienza” 251). Gallo concludes that there is still “stigma associated with the genre in Italy” inherited from this prejudice, and “the relation between Italian SF and the mainstream is further complicated by the fact that the mainstream often ignored (and sometimes still ignores) the existence of this genre or had a partial and superficial knowledge of it” (“Fantascienza” 251).

- 17 For further analysis of this story, see for example, Catani<sup>11</sup> and Curtoni (223).  
 18 For further analysis, see Beurg et al.  
 19 For further analysis of this novel, see Combailot et al.  
 20 First published in the SF magazine *Asimov's* (2015) and republished as a novella in 2017.  
 21 As is the case with Italy, SF is not a major genre in Spain. Cultural critic Sara Martín's contribution to the Spanish SF edition of the *Science Fiction Studies* journal states that even though “Spain has failed to impress the international SF readership with a universally embraced classic”, there is “an already long tradition of Spanish SF, though this tradition has been wilfully ignored” (Martín). Indeed, Spanish newspaper ABC reported in 2015 that “A diferencia del mundo literario anglosajón, donde es muy común que los libros de ciencia ficción encabezen las listas de los más vendidos, en España durante muchos años el género se ha visto relegado a una esquina minúscula en las librerías” [Unlike in the Anglophone literary world, where it is very common for SF books to be among the most sold, in Spain for many years the genre was relegated to a tiny section in bookshops] (Gómez-Jurado). On the subject of the academic reception of SF in Spain, Martín notes that despite Spanish academia treating translations of SF “as an wanted intrusion ... while the subsequent generation of a local tradition is perceived as demeaning local parastism”, the success of Anglophone SF films and TV series in Spain do suggest that “Spaniards do love SF” (Martín). While visual media has broken into the mainstream, SF book sales in Spain suggest that popular fiction within the genre is also gaining force: Anne Charnock notes that

while the number of new releases of Fantasy books has fallen almost fifty percent, science fiction has experienced an increase of fifty percent in new titles, equaling a third of the total genre market, since horror books suffer a fall similar to that of fantasy.

(Charnock, “Spain”)

Spanish SF writer Cristina Jurado attributes this to “smaller print runs and has a loyal and stable audience” (quoted in Charnock, “Spain”), while Miguel Marceló, editor of. ... attributes this to the fact that “Los temas que hace treinta años eran solo de un grupo reducido de gente, hoy los encuentras por todas partes” [the themes that only appealed to a small group thirty years ago can be found everywhere today] (quoted in Gómez-Jurado). The *Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* also notes that, in Spain, “Science fiction production is alive and well in the twenty-first century” and that “Mainstream authors have begun to incorporate science-fictional elements into their work, or even write genre SF itself” (“Spain”).

- 22 Believing that the supposed lack of women in Spanish SF was actually just an issue of women's (in)visibility in the genre, *Alucinadas* was a project López-Pellisa undertook to support and orient public attention towards Spanish women writers (Burke).
- 23 The division between “inner” and “outer” space within the context of the New Wave SF movement has been attributed to J. G. Ballard's guest editorial in the May 1962 edition of *New Worlds*, entitled “Which Way to Inner Space?” (Ballard).
- 24 Donald Allen Wollheim notes in his introduction to the 1970 edition that British authors of New Wave SF “prefer to call it Speculative Fiction” (1). The origin of the term “speculative fiction” will be explored in more detail in the “Speculative Fiction and Beyond” section of this chapter.
- 25 Emecheta was born in Nigeria and has been based in the UK since 1962, when she left Nigeria with her two young children. She began writing in a regular column in the *The New Statesman*, and her novels *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) are based on her personal experiences of navigating racism, economic difficulties, and motherhood as a Nigerian-born woman living in London (Fuller 319).
- 26 Clarion is a prodigious SF and fantasy workshop based at UC San Diego, whose distinguished alumni include Octavia Butler, Pat Murphy and Kim Stanley Robinson. For more information, see the Clarion website: <http://clarion.ucsd.edu/scholarships.html>
- 27 However, as Drew Hayden Taylor notes, indigenous SF belongs to a tradition that precedes even these early twentieth-century works. He explains that

When I started writing, Native SF was, by definition, a contradiction in terms ... I never felt this was right ... Within the Native community, our imagination, our sense of what is possible was as wide, as expressive and as detailed as any other people on the face of the Earth. Why couldn't we write SF? Many of our traditional stories could easily be classified as such.

(Hayden Taylor)

- 28 My analysis from a reading of the stories that comprise Grace L. Dillon's anthology of Indigenous SF *Walking the Clouds* (2012).
- 29 Nalo Hopkinson speaking at the 2017 WorldCon Helsinki, on Saturday 12 August at 2 pm during the panel “Octavia Butler”, alongside Anna Bark Persson, Alexandra Pierce, and Caroline Mullan. The panel discussed the enduring legacy of Butler's work.
- 30 Jemisin has stated that: “I would love to just write and not have everything turned into a political battle” (“I Would Love to Just Write”).
- 31 For further analysis of the latter anthology series, see Edwards (12).
- 32 For an in-depth analysis of Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground*, see, for example, Rita Monticelli's *Politics of the Body* (2012).
- 33 Notable examples of women's SF that features asexual aliens include Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The World Wreckers* (1971).
- 34 SF has also been a recent source of inspiration to the drag community. Justin Andrew Honard, runner-up on the fifth season of RuPaul's Drag Race, describes



- his drag persona Alaska Thunderfuck 5000 as “a well-traveled, campy extra-terrestrial” (Thunderfuck).
- 35 Taken from remarks during the discussion stage of the seminar “Has ‘Hard SF’ Changed as a Genre?” held on the 10 August at the 2017 Helsinki WorldCon.
- 36 At a seminar held on the 10 August at the 2017 Helsinki WorldCon, “Has “hard SF” changed as a genre?” the panel answered the seminar’s title question with a resounding “yes” before mourning the coupling of fantasy with SF, a combination that they believed had grown in popularity over the past decade to the detriment of the genre.
- 37 Cadigan explains,
- While *Literaturia* is universally revered as producing the finest works of art, people look to popular culture—i.e., genre—for answers to most of their ethical and moral questions. Everything they ever needed to know, they have learned in kindergarten ... and then from *Star Trek*.
- (Cadigan 374)
- 38 The notion of “destroying” SF here references the way in which some readers of SF “have even gone so far as to accuse women of destroying science fiction with their girl cooties” (“Women Destroy Science Fiction!”). As the Kickstarter page for the *Women Destroy Science Fiction!* explains, the title of these anthologies demonstrates “how silly that notion is”.

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# 3 Re-historicising the Future

## Re-contextualising Systems of Race and Gender in Women's SF

### 1 Prefatory Remarks

The previous chapters have been dedicated to explicating the historical and theoretical foundations of this book. The works of contemporary women's SF that will be discussed in the following chapters and which form the corpus of primary sources for this book are the product of the complex, uneven, and disjointed genealogy of European SF written by women that I have attempted to trace in the opening chapter. My commitment to reading my chosen primary sources of SF within such a setting is based on a feminist politics of location, by which logic the contributions of these texts to the production and transformation of cultures of gender equality can only be properly understood when geographically, socially, and culturally contextualised.

I follow the opening chapter by exploring the ways in which new forms of humanism arise through a critique of issues of race and gender in the work of Butler, Braidotti, Spivak, Gilroy, and Halberstam with the purpose of establishing the theoretical framework through which issues of race, gender, space, and humanism can be analysed in relation to contemporary SF. The second part of this book draws together European SF with this analysis of contemporary anti-racist, gender, and humanistic theory.

The following chapters experiment with the hypothesis that my chosen works of contemporary European SF written by women explore and elaborate on Butler, Braidotti, Spivak, Gilroy, and Halberstam's gender and race-based analyses so as to foreground new forms of humanism, deconstructing and criticising oppressive systems of race and gender. This chapter argues that race and gender are a product of time and space, and so it must follow that inclusive and sustainable anti-racist and gender-inclusive new humanisms should be based on a historicisation of the formation of these symbolic capital. In other words, envisaging the position and purpose of humanity in the future depends not only on an ethical reformulation of race and gender, but also on the act of tracing the production of gender and

race-based thinking across time and space. This is supported by each of my chosen theorists, but I highlight in particular Spivak's humanistic notion of the "planetary" as being triggered by a reflection on the historicity of race and gender, and Gilroy's anti-racist reprisal of humanism as dependent on a critical re-reading of the racist tendencies of the Enlightenment. In keeping with works of dystopian women's SF detailed in the opening chapter that are also located in the shifting temporality of a science fictional past, contemporary women's SF often suggests that extreme racist and sexist political agendas have not been left behind in the twentieth century and are in danger of dominating subsequent centuries unless we imagine our futures otherwise.

Chapter 4 asks what kind of humanistic modes of interrelation are made visible when race and gender are radically re-imagined in the SF future. The strange critters that wander dystopian universes evoke and elucidate Braidotti's and Butler's attempts to de-centre that autonomous "I" of traditional humanism. Butler's gender-indeterminate pronominal "you" that appears beyond the scope of interpellation and Braidotti's Deleuzian-Spinozist formulation of subject nomadism find different textual configurations in the post-apocalyptic future, forging new ground. I view these entities as the progeny of the queer characters that emerged in synchrony with the dystopian turn in women's SF that began at the end of the 1960s. The form that they take in these narratives, however, corresponds to current trends in feminist and anti-racist critical theory, advances in technology and bio-genetics, and the demand for greater representation of, for example, Asian, British Caribbean, African-American, and Hispanic characters and mythologies in European SF.

Chapter 5 explores how instances of failure in the normative functioning of systems of race and gender can be the opening for new forms of humanism. Sex "gone wrong" allows for a de-centring of the privileged subject of Enlightenment humanism and its emphasis on autonomous selfhood and human supremacy. This analysis of the failure of normative heteroreproductivity, as lesbian sex becomes procreative and male bodies become the carriers for future offspring, echoes Halberstam's theory of "the queer art of failure" and other works of contemporary queer and eco-feminism, from Helen Merrick's "Queering Nature" (2008) to De Witt Douglas Kilgore's "Queering the Coming Race?" (2008). Through a reading of Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales* and Regueiro's "Planetoide de Oportunidades" I focus in particular on how the resultant offspring, which might be read in Braidotti's terms as "alternative figurations of subjects-in-becoming", disengage from human systems of race and gender as they propose new modes of being and thinking the human. I make additional reference here to Spivak's notion of "othering the self" and Butler's conception of becoming with and through the other (Spivak, *Death of a*

*Discipline* 91). This section also responds to the material urgencies of lesbian couples in Europe who face financial and legislative obstacles when seeking to reproduce with their partners, with particular emphasis on reproductive issues in contemporary Spain.

Chapter 6 explores two works of critical dystopian SF by Italian writer Nicoletta Vallorani which align with the tradition of humanistic storytelling that characterised Italian SF from the 1960s onwards that demonstrated a sympathy and proximity towards the monstrous “other”. This analysis demonstrates how this idea has developed in contemporary Italian SF to suggest new forms of kinship that welcome otherness into its fold. These new humanistic demonstrations of collectivity become possible through a process of forgetting and disavowal of gender roles and racialised models of traditional family structures. My reading of these novels is therefore in dialogue with Halberstam’s work on “forgetting” heteronormative forms of kinship and making space for other kinds of proximities and friendships. I read the uneven and unexpected kinship groups of Vallorani’s *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* and *Il Cuore Finto di DR* in terms of Judith Butler’s conception of collective political mobilisations motivated by mutual yet uneven experiences of human vulnerability, Spivak’s Derridian-inspired invocation of a forwards-reaching friendship, and the “not yet” friendship explicated by Gilroy in his theorisation of a utopian and anti-racist mode of incipient togetherness.

Chapters 7 and 8 attempt a final theoretical push into the kinds of humanisms that emerge when grounded in a critique of systems of race and gender. In Chapter 7, I suggest that these “planetary” humanisms are actuated in Brissett’s *Elysium* and Regueiro’s short story “Planetoide de Oportunidades” when read alongside the kinds of “planetary” that have been outlined by Spivak and Gilroy. In *Elysium* and “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, the borders of a planetary humanism become visible in the midst of impending apocalypse, when humans are forced to flee their planets and start anew. In doing so, they are forced to metamorphose into and/or reproduce posthuman and post-apocalyptic entities, demonstrating their unequivocal permeability to alien bodies. I focus here on the way in which the humanistic implications of Spivak’s suggestion of “borderlessness”, a question at the heart of her conception of planetary, are elucidated and even challenged through images of the permeable borders of the human body in SF. I also read *Elysium* and “Planetoide de Oportunidades” as evocative of Gilroy’s request to think planetary in order to overwrite the discriminating “globalisers” of race and gender, arguing that a reading of these texts demonstrates that the new forms of humanisms that might necessitate a radical shift in systems of race and gender are not those that merely reverse traditional European humanisms, but which venture into the precarious and uneven edges of what Gilroy terms “the forbidden zones of humanism” (“Not yet Humanism” 106).

By way of a conclusion, Chapter 8 proposes that the new and “planetary” humanisms evoked by works of contemporary SF written by women in Europe radicalise those formulated by critical theory, as SF as a genre allows the exploration of radical reconceptualisations of systems of race and gender. True to the genealogy of women’s SF traced in the opening chapter, I argue that the rebelliousness of contemporary women’s SF enriches and nuances contemporary debates on issues of race, gender, and humanism in gender and women’s studies and in postcolonial theory.

## 2 Introduction

The hypothesis of this book, that new forms of humanism can emerge from critiques of race and gender in SF, is partly based on the premise that race and gender are also cultural products that form and evolve through time and space. To view them as cultural products or artefacts is, then, also to contextualise the way in which they take shape and naturalise within various social, geographical, and historical contexts. As Alex Callincos puts it, cultural products are, “quite simply, unintelligible unless placed within the broader set of historically contingent social relationships from which they emerged” (89). The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how SF conducts a historical grounding of oppressive cultural systems that produce and sediment race and gender, while also offering alternative worlds in which race and gender are reformulated in a historical “otherwise”. This should serve as an introduction to the way in which race and gender appear within my chosen works of SF, as well as lay the foundations for the following sections of critical discussion, which explore the humanistic possibilities afforded by hybrid entities that emerge in the futures that rebel against the confines of historical inevitability.

I have, in part, demonstrated in the second chapter of this book how Spivak, Gilroy, Braidotti, Butler, and Halberstam’s respective critiques of formations of race and gender are grounded in a historical analysis of the cultural models from which cultural capital emerges. Embodied, embedded, and historically situated entities are, as we have seen, an essential condition of Butler’s theory of gender performativity, while Braidotti conceptualises the posthuman in relation to Deleuze’s emphasis on the “link between historical processes and the flows of becoming” (*Transpositions* 147). Halberstam, for his part, looks to the process of historical change when critiquing the way in which progression and succession is established through heteronormative genealogies (*Queer Art of Failure* 70). I have additionally demonstrated how the explorations that these five theorists conduct into new forms of humanism are embedded in a historical critique of the formation of humanist ideology in Europe. Gilroy’s pursuit of new forms of humanism, for example, requires a critical re-reading of the

Enlightenment: a historicisation of humanist thought that must precede the reprisal of humanist study in the form of a new humanism. Spivak's work also calls for a historical, global (formulated as "planetary"), and intersectional analysis to render visible the structures from which race and gender have emerged, in particular, through the "civilising" mission of colonialism. Her advocacy of "planetary" is also a reflection on what the historian Ritu Birla has termed "the irreducible difference of historicity" in her reflection on the legacy of Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which postcolonial voices refuse to be the victims of history (87). Instead of attempting to recover a pre-colonial past, this notion of historicity evokes what is considered as a utopian pluralisation of post-colonial futures.

In his elaboration of Eve Sedgwick's reparative reading strategy, outlined in *Touching Feeling* (2002), Kilgore has suggested that critics of SF who engage with the genre in a "reparative mode" can be confronted with surprising visions of the future. These moves towards radically different futures imagine beyond the oppressive systems that seem to be permanently affixed within the historically realist narrative:

Sedgwick gestures towards a history that is never simply a repository of oppressions to be repeated endlessly but is also a chorale of voices that have not achieved harmonious closure. Such a model of history is very much in tune with certain strands of progressive, anti-capitalist science fiction. For our present purposes, Sedgwick opens a space in which we may reconsider the legacy of certain calcified ideas in science fiction and their reconstitution by writers for whom Fredric Jameson's difficult injunction, 'always historicise,' is the catalyst for new stories.

(Kilgore 236)

With reference to Jameson's challenging imperative to "always historicise", Kilgore, for example, pays homage to the writers of who have responded to Jameson by engaging in a "decalcification" of stagnated models of SF. These writers use SF to not only make visible the machinations that produce and sediment race and gender over time within the social fabric, but also to allow alternative histories to surface: stories set in spatiotemporalities within which the formation of cultural capital has materialised differently. Such variations not only to world history but also to the way in which alternative spaces and societies are depicted in SF make the often-invisible formations of race and gender intelligible and open to critique, challenging the way in which they are experienced and embodied in our own histories. This science fictional practice of historicising its events in the de-familiarised spaces of the "otherwise" triggers new perspectives on the formation of symbolic capital in the "real world".



By cultivating alternatives, the genre of SF, argues Kilgore, can point to a possible breakdown in the cycle of mistakes and oppressions collected by history. He suggests that the recognition of history as a “chorale” of divergent voices rather than as a closed case—an inevitability—is the springboard for the utopian imagination to rectify the wrongs of the present. In this sense, the dissenting voices of the past provide what Spivak has termed, in her advocacy of “planetarity”, “a very crosshatched access to utopianism of various sorts” (“Planetary Utopias” 2:31:59–2:32:10). The kind of history, that Kilgore views as a collection of frictional voices, harbours a multi-dimensional utopianism that upsets the notion that history is merely a “repository of oppressions”, suggesting instead that history is alive, rebellious, and disinclined to be organised into the neat alignment of sequential progression. Such a vocal refusal of a historically determined future is dependent on the pragmatic hopefulness of utopia, the driving force of Sedgwick’s reparative readings and that which, in her own words, “allows the reader to realise that the future may be different from the present” (*Touching* 146). The works that comprise my corpus of SF negotiate differently with this possibility of unveiling a futurity that might diverge from the present. The “alternative histories” that form Bodard’s SF, for example, suggest that the future cannot be inconsistent with the past and the present: the fact that Asia is an intergalactic power in the far-future of the *Xuya Universe* depends on an entirely different historical narrative. Similarly, her work suggests that changing the future depends on tackling head-on the legacy of Europe’s colonial history in the present. Her stories critique the imperialism often propounded by traditional works of SF while providing historical evidence of European colonial rule that suggests that a future space age is likely to reproduce this violent past.

### 3 Re-historicising the Future in the Stories of Aliette de Bodard

Bodard’s *Xuya Universe* stories, in particular “Immersion” (2012) and *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls* (2017), offer interesting examples of science fictional projects of futurity that are embedded in histories that resist closure. These works of SF critically re-imagine and draw attention to moments in the past in which systems of race and gender were particularly violent in their operational activities. Bodard’s detailed chronology of an alternative world history, for example, which forms the setting for her *Xuya Universe* stories, illustrates her deep concern for the effects of postcolonial racialisation on South East Asian ex-French colonies. Her explanatory timeframe connects the formation of these societies to “real time”,<sup>1</sup> making clear the consistencies and discrepancies between “real” moments in time and hypothetical ones. This offers opportunities for different relationships between history, culture, and gender equality to

emerge: nineteenth-century China, for example, experienced less conflict in the *Xuya Universe* than in “real time”, and by the twentieth century, was in a position to both endorse gender equality measures in the workforce and authorise polyandry. China has, in this universe, colonised a large portion of the Americas, which is known as “Xuya”, the name given to the continent by the Chinese when they arrived there via the Pacific Ocean centuries before European explorers. This “new country of Chinese Ancestry on the West Coast” reaches from North America’s Pacific Coast to the Rocky Mountains. Its capital, a city called Dongjing, lies in the middle of the Continent, but the most populated of Xuya’s cities is Fenliu, located in roughly the same position as San Francisco is on the Earth of today.<sup>2</sup>

The Xuya government is modelled on the governments of ancient China, with an Emperor, a Grand Secretariat, and a group of meritocratically elected scholars. Thus, Xuya reclaims the image of Eastern powers from Western historical narratives in which they are depicted as parasitic communist forces that must be made to retreat into their designated territory. Xuya’s balance of cutting-edge technology and dedication to ancient tradition is highlighted throughout the collection, with stories heavily invested in the narration of how Xuya navigates “modernity” differently from the China or the Europe of today: in this version of the future, science and liberal philosophy buffer rather than disqualify the relevance of ancient traditions, notably ancestor worship. *Xuya Universe* thus illustrates the specificity of their interpretation of “progress”, one that has been sculpted from visions of the future and notions of historical development fostered by Eastern cultures, while shrugging off the caricatured depiction of an evil Asian Empire that lays claim to world dominance.<sup>3</sup>

By the twenty-first century, human technology in Xuya has created large entities from artificial intelligence called “Minds”, fleshy machines birthed by human women that are able to pilot ships into “deep space”. This enables “the colonisation of space” by both Galactic (European) cultures and imperial Chinese/Vietnamese cultures. But the Đại Việt Empire’s ambitions and aesthetic in space diverge from the “traditional” Western portrayal of how space travellers think, speak, and behave. Đại Việt gains its strength from a tight-knit matriarchal genealogy comprised of hybrid subjectivities strung together from human flesh, machine, animals, and mysticism. Indeed, Bodard is keen to differentiate her account of the spacefaring Đại Việt Empire from SF that is “modelled on the Roman Empire” and “based on the colonial ethos of America and the Conquest of the West: rugged pioneers striking out for themselves, democracies, capitalism (because that is the only possible society of the future)” (“History, Erasure”). The stories that detail life in the Đại Việt Empire thus resist oppressive and racist depictions of Asians in late-twentieth-century Western SF that emerged, in particular, from the USA, while also proposing different kinds of entities

and new models of kinship inspired and animated by Asian traditions and materialities.

### *Immersed in Another Past*

“Immersion” (2012), Bodard’s Hugo-Award winning short story from the *Xuya Universe* collection, is particularly successful in its interrogation of the way in which one of the legacies of French colonialism, the attempt to frame Vietnamese peoples within European standards of race and gender, retains its influence in post-independent Vietnam. In doing so, it explicates Braidotti’s exploration of the invisibility of European “whiteness”, Gilroy’s understanding of the way in which the concept of racial authenticity is constructed through gender codes, and Spivak’s notion of “planetary”. The story, which allegorises France’s continued cultural and economic hold over its ex-colonies, takes place on Longevity Station following its victory over its pale-skinned Western colonisers, the Galactics. Galactic culture remains popular on Longevity, where it is consumed through a variety of media channels and high technology products. The most important of these technologies is a device known as an “immerser,” which “takes existing cultural norms, and puts them into a cohesive, satisfying narrative” (“Immersion”). The device is used as a translator of culture and language and is available for retail at varying degrees of quality and a range of price points. It operates by manipulating the body of its user so that their appearance is altered and they can interact with their environment as would a person from another station or planet. Though the device is also sold to Galactics, who use it to communicate with locals while vacationing on other territories, it is mostly intended for—and functions most intensely while modifying the appearance and behaviour of—“foreign” peoples who intend to imitate Galactics. The story reveals that while some Galactics do make use of the device to inform themselves about Longevity tradition and language, their dependence on the immerser is mostly superficial, as these tourists require only a minimum of information to navigate their way around their holiday destination. By contrast, many people from Longevity station are socially and economically dependent on the device: it aids those who seek work in Galactic territories, and it permits those who work in the tourist industry on Longevity to interact with Galactic tourists. Tourism is the station’s predominant source of income and hosts are expected to have a proficient understanding of Galactic culture and language when they communicate with their guests.

On an individual basis, some Longevity people are physically addicted to assuming the appearance of the station’s former colonisers. One such “immerser junkie” is a woman named Agnes. Born and raised in Longevity, she is now the silent wife of a rich Galactic man. While Agnes’s story is set

on a space station in the far-future, it takes the historical view that, given the conditions of the present moment from which Bodard writes, the phenomenon of cultural erasure is not likely to be extinct at that future time. Instead, the narrative propounds an all-too familiar discourse in which beauty is a measure of racial superiority:

He's tall, with dark hair and pale skin—his immerser avatar isn't much different from his real self; Galactic avatars seldom are. It's people like you who have to work the hardest to adjust—because so much about you draws attention to itself—the stretched eyes that crinkle in the shape of moths, the darker skin, the smaller, squatter shape more reminiscent of jackfruits than swaying fronds. But no matter: you can be made perfect; you can put on the immerser and become someone else, someone pale-skinned and tall and beautiful.

(“Immersion”)<sup>4</sup>

The textual “you” is the referent of multiple narrative voices. In the form of the inner voice of Agnes, the woman who wears the immerser to obscure material evidence of her Longevity roots, the “you” reminds Agnes of her “deficiencies”; as a direct address to the reader, the “you” interpellates that reader as subject, asking that they succumb to the desire to be absorbed into the dominant culture. So addicted is Agnes to her immerser, and to the “avatar” skin it has formed around her body, that her own skin has become partly effaced by the illusion of the holo. Indeed, she has now become “just a thick layer of avatar, so dense and so complex that she couldn't even guess at the body hidden within” (“Immersion”). Agnes is keen to escape her Longevity body: her “stretched eyes” and “darker skin”, comparative to Galactic culture, have been negatively racialised as signifiers of inferiority. The pressure she feels to “adjust”, to take on a Galactic body and cultural traits, echoes the way in which Vietnamese women's bodies were deemed unseemly or improper under French colonial rule, as has been explored by historian Micheline R. Lessard in *Women and the Colonial Gaze* (2002). Lessard contends that “French colonial authorities sexualised the Vietnamese” as salacious and “promiscuous” (160). As a result of their own propaganda, French colonial authorities took it upon themselves to “educate Vietnamese women in a way that would counter such promiscuity” such that they could become “suitable” wives and mothers to French migrants in the colony (160). Just as Agnes's body becomes a site for the validation of the benefits of Galactic culture upon the behaviour and appearance of Longevity women, the sexualisation of Vietnamese women's bodies in French Indochina vindicated the “education” and transformation of those bodies into ones that were “acceptable” to European sensibilities. Lessard cites a 1922 report reviewing the

Lycée de Hanoi on behalf of colonial authorities to demonstrate the ways in which the French positioned the bodies of Vietnamese schoolgirls as vehicles through which to assert cultural dominance. The report claims that “the sense of morality is not the highest” in the “inferior classes of the indigenous *urban* population” because of the “promiscuity within which the Annamite live<sup>5</sup>” (“Rapport sur l’Enseignement”). This mode of controlling colonised populations through the construction of intersecting racial, gender, and class divisions demonstrates Gilroy’s assertion that:

Gender difference and racialised gender codes provide a special cipher for a mode of racial authenticity that is as evasive as it is desirable. In these circumstances, the iterative representation of gender, gender conflicts and sexualities contributes a supple confidence and stability to essentialist absolute notions of racial particularity.<sup>6</sup>

(Against Race 196)

Indeed, and as is demonstrated to similar effect in “Immersion”, where Galactic notions of racial superiority are performed through the cultural possession of Longevity women’s bodies, the sexual deviance of the Annamite women, in the form of alleged “promiscuity”, is both an indicator and proof of racial inferiority. The sense of superiority assumed by the French, therefore, is grounded in the construction of a discriminatory intersectional logic which underpins racial supremacy, specifically, “gender difference and racialised gender codes”. This phenomenon explains why Agnes, a woman from an ex-colony, is addicted to her immerser, which “corrects” her materiality within the intersectional codification of race and gender. Indeed, Agnes so entirely surrenders herself to the influence of Galactic culture that she is psychologically and physically unable to repeal the immerser device from her body. Seemingly disgusted by the physical features that make her signify as a Longevity woman, she allows herself to be cannibalised by the immerser’s hologram. By literally “immersing” herself in Galactic culture, which unrelentingly and intimately channelled into her, Agnes radically interiorises her ex-coloniser’s systems of race in a way that conforms to cultural theorist Maria Walsh’s suggestion that: “The black man internalises the inscription of race on the skin, epidermalising this relation which casts him as other, inferior and invisible in his all-too-visible visibility” (84). Walsh explicates what has been suggestively termed the paradox of “visible invisibility” by scholars who analyse systems of race in a range of disciplines, from academia to law,<sup>7</sup> and what feminist architect Marie-Louise Richards has called, in the context of racialised spaces, a “hyper-visible invisibility” (39). Indeed, stranded in liminal territory between visibility and invisibility, Agnes is too visibly “other” to be free from the power of the abusive racialising gaze, and, as a translucent hologram, too invisible to be assertive and agentic.

Demonised and imprisoned within the all-consuming confines of Galactic culture, she becomes the sacrificial victim to a patriarchal postcolonial nation-state. This demonstrates Braidotti's suggestion, similar to that made by Gilroy's work which also argues that race is dependent on racism, that the way in which we conceive of race within "our culture" is the product of racist processes and practices: "the political economy of invisibility means that the only notion of race that our culture has produced, is in the mode of a minority. Race is synonymous with inferiority, or pejorative difference" (*Transpositions* 64). In the spaces of Galactic "whiteness" within which she resides, in which "white" is the norm, Agnes is all-too visible. Indeed, she uses the immerser with the goal of making herself racially invisible. Bypassing racism, to her, equates to destroying herself utterly, from inside out. Race, when formulated as something that can be refigured using the immerser's technology, is presented as a construction of Imperialist and capitalist domination. In this way, the novel's deconstruction of the immerser, by illustrating how it functions and to whom it serves, can be viewed as the kind of "anti-racist political strategy" Braidotti believes can be issued from a "geo-historical framing of the project of Europe" in order to depict "European identity as an open and multi-layered project, not as a fixed or given essence" (*Transpositions* 75). While Agnes cannot be saved, a future generation of Longevity women can be warned of the falsity of the racial dichotomy between the people of Longevity and the Galactics, who, if the story's analogy of the Galactics with the French is consistent, are themselves a patchwork of racial difference.<sup>8</sup>

The narrative also suggests that Agnes has been driven to immerser addiction by her husband, Galen, and his barely disguised contempt for Longevity's culture. Galen, "always rants about the outdated customs aboard Longevity, the inequalities and the lack of democratic government—he thinks it's only a matter of time before they change, adapt themselves to fit into Galactic society" ("Immersion"). As his wife, Agnes must embody the role of emissary of a superior culture, "living" proof that Vietnamese people can assist in the creation of a "modern" and "democratic" nation. As such, her attachment to the immerser is highly suggestive of the performances rendered by many Vietnamese women in the early twentieth century, who were "called upon to create a home" for European men, who at that time outnumbered European women in Vietnam 14,000 to 3,000 (Lessard 161). Called to be "wives and mothers", and to "promote the benefits of French colonial rule in Vietnam", both a physical and behavioural change was required by these women if they were to be proficient ambassadors of French culture to Vietnamese society (Lessard 161). The growth of French settler communities in the early to mid-twentieth century thus depended, in part, on Vietnamese women's performance of gender according to the expected norms of a European brand of womanhood.

Galen's conviction of Galactic superiority evokes a passage from a 1997/1998 report on how to best disseminate French culture in Vietnam. The 28-page document, commissioned by the French Senate, concludes that:

C'est bien ainsi, d'ailleurs, que le français était devenu, pendant la première moitié de ce siècle, la langue des élites intellectuelles vietnamiennes, pour lesquelles il représentait une voie d'accès à ce que la société et la pensée occidentales pouvaient apporter à leur pays, bridé par des coutumes archaïques, en termes de progrès scientifique et économique, d'édification d'une société et d'un Etat modernes et, finalement, d'émancipation nationale.

(Gouteyron et al.)

[It is also good that the French language has, during the first half of this century, become the language of the Vietnamese intellectual elite. In this way, they can share Western thought and society with their country—which is full of archaic customs—with scientific and economic progress, contributing to the edification of a society and a modern state and, finally, national emancipation].<sup>9</sup>

Agnes's husband's patronising endorsement of the “change” that needs to be seen in Longevity culture, for it to more closely resemble Galactic society, is explicitly and unselfconsciously demonstrated by contemporary French foreign policy. The Galactics's economic and cultural prerogatives, from the profitable exportation of their technologies to their ex-colonies, to their ambition to maintain cultural and political influence there, are thinly veiled under the pretence of offering a charitable and productive helping hand. The French, as per the French Senate's report, also claim that they can aid Vietnam in seeking out “progress”, “edification”, and “emancipation”: the latter of which reads as darkly comic in the sincerity of its hypocrisy, given that France fought bitterly against Vietnamese self-governance until 1954. To this day, France continues to reap economic benefits from post-independent Vietnam: beneficial tariff agreements for trade with its ex-colony allow France to purchase raw materials such as rice at lower prices. Indeed, for the Galactics, Longevity remains “a tidy source of profit” (“Immersion”).

The report's emphasis on the importance of the tie between language and culture also exposes the strategy employed by the French when enticing the Vietnamese into, as Pierre Bourdieu puts it, “l'honneur au sens de réputation, de prestige, et qu'il y a donc une logique spécifique de l'accumulation du capital symbolique, comme capital fondé sur la connaissance et la reconnaissance” (33) [honour in the sense of reputation, prestige, so that there is a specific logic of the accumulation of symbolic capital, as capital founded



on knowledge and recognition].<sup>10</sup> By ensuring that the French language is *la langue officielle de choix* of Vietnamese intellectuals, France can continue to be representative of high culture in Vietnam. By establishing for itself an elite status, *la francophonie* subsequently grants itself the right to discriminate between those who can enter into a space of discursive power, and those who cannot. In a process of discursive colonisation, the notion of a “superior” French language carries with it a marketable package of “superior” cultural artefacts that can replace what the French Senate consider to be Vietnam’s “archaic customs”.

Bodard’s narrative forms a direct critique of these elements of France’s economic and cultural colonisation of Southeast Asia: the people of Longevity are “immersed” in Galactic culture, both through the influx of Galactic tourism to the station and by way of its continued and substantial importation of Galactic goods. The story’s heroines, Tam and Quy, two generous and vivacious teenage sisters from Longevity, perform a deconstructive undoing of Galactic commercial produce by literally taking apart an immerser to better understand how it functions. In doing so, they demonstrate the narrative’s re-contextualisation of utopian hopes for a better future within a setting of future colonial exploitation. As Kilgore has stated in the context of astrofuturism, ambitious utopianism can be “recast in the elsewhere and *elsewhen* of outer space”, where capitalism’s exploitative ambitions meet a powerful invocation of utopian possibility for a changed world (2). Indeed, the girls exercise a bold attempt to discover the limit to the immerser’s power, the Achilles heel of its correct functioning, and to exploit it to bring an end to cultural domination. The narrative suggests that these capacious hopes for change can always be found in the midst of exploitation. While the immerser’s power seems irrevocable, the hope that these girls foster is positioned by the narrative as the fuel for an incremental movement towards the exposure of silent systems of oppression within which they are bound. Though the girls are aware that it is impossible to “re-wire” the gadgets, which are inextricably linked to an already existing sense of Galactic cultural supremacy, the act of disassembling them signifies an important move in resisting physical, behavioural, and psychological colonisation. In an extended metaphor of the violence of the preceding colonial years and the subsequent battle for independence, the immerser is described by Tam, the younger sister, in terms of war:

“It’s their weapon, too.” Tam pushed at the entertainment unit. “Just like their books and their holos and their live games. It’s fine for them—they put the immersers on tourist settings, they get just what they need to navigate a foreign environment from whatever idiot’s written the Rong script for that thing. But we—we worship them. We wear the immersers

on Galactic all the time. We make ourselves like them, because they push, and because we're naive enough to give in.

(“Immersion”)

Tam's concern with continued Galactic hold over the people of Longevity directly reflects France's persistent attempts to culturally colonise Vietnam through the export of cultural goods. Tam complains that the Galactics continue to displace the importance of Longevity's own cultural artefacts through imported Galactic “books”, “holos”, and “live games”. These cultural exports uphold what Balibar has termed “un racism sans race” [racism without race]: social domination performed through the racialisation of culture (37). Wielding its influence across literature, virtual reality entertainment, and technology, dominant culture is here engaged in a strategy of mixed-medium cultural colonisation. Indeed, inspired by French film and music, aspects of French culture were keenly consumed by young Vietnamese women from the early 1920s onwards: Lessard includes in her analysis excerpts from reports issued by colonial officials in Vietnam, stating that: “some Vietnamese girls were wearing Western clothes, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and dancing the tango” (quoted in Lessard 160). The 1997/1998 French Senate report suggests a more deliberate effort by the French to ensure that their culture and language are consumed in Vietnam:

Le renforcement de la francophonie et du rayonnement de la culture française au Vietnam ne peut s'opérer sans un effort accru de ‘présence’ de la langue et de la culture française. L'accès au livre, au film ou à la chanson, le contact avec la culture française, la présence de la France et du français dans les médias et dans l'environnement quotidien sont indispensables pour faire naître et soutenir l'intérêt pour notre langue et notre pays, en particulier parmi les jeunes, et pour actualiser l'image de la France et de la culture française.

(Gouteyron et al.)

[Re-enforcing the French language and safeguarding the diffusion of French culture in Vietnam cannot take place without an increased effort to ensure the ‘presence’ of the French language and culture there. Access to French literature, film and music, contact with French culture, and the presence of France and the French language in Vietnamese media and daily environment are indispensable if we wish for Vietnam to grow and maintain an interest in our language and our country, in particular among young people, as well as to update the image of France and French culture.]

The Senate's report reveals, by means of dedicated repetition, France's commitment to imposing its language and culture onto its ex-colonies. Emphasis is placed on the "interest" the Vietnamese should and will take in all things French if their cultural exports are successfully packaged as attractive and useful. The Senate's desire to "actualiser l'image de la France et de la culture française" discloses their barely disguised motive to overwrite France's history of problematic colonial exploits in favour of a more pleasant and de-historicised depiction of *l'Hexagone*. Bodard's narrative therefore demonstrates a historically accurate account of the perpetuation of racism through the exportation of cultural artefacts that transport the message that the receiving culture is inferior. This ambition is consistent with Spivak's reading of Jack D. Forbes's *Black Africans and Native Americans* (1981) in her essay "Race before Racism", which she concludes by saying that "I have no doubt that the exercise in historicising rather than essentialising racism is absolutely crucial" ("Race before Racism" 48). Spivak believes that Forbes's historicisation of race unearths the "theoretical neatness" of the term so that the "vocabulary of racism" becomes visible not as essentialised truth, but as a construction that has undergone various manifestations through time and space ("Race before Racism" 48). In "Immersion", France's ongoing imperialistic activities, largely invisible and unknown to people living in France today, are made visible through their re-historicisation in the *Xuya Universe*. "Immersion" reminds its readers that French ideological influence has not been eradicated in the era of the postcolonial: that part of the historical narrative has not been closed. Instead, the concept of colonial modernity is refigured in post-colonial spaces.

Bodard's reparative reading of history through an intimate account of three women's experiences of the cultural, economic, and ideological post-colonial emphasises the specificity of the legacy of French Imperialism in Vietnam. "Immersion" is but one of dozens of "colonised space stations" stories "which take place in a corner of space where a Galactic (Western) culture rubs against a diminished imperial Chinese/Vietnamese culture" ("The Universe of Xuya"). The result is a miscellany of entrances into issues of colonialism that make visible just how divergent the experiences of post-colonial subjects can be ("The Universe of Xuya"). This also demonstrates a desire to undo what Spivak has termed, in the context of her explication of the notion of planetarity in relation to tribal Islam, the "shrinking" of the postcolonial into a "historically undifferentiated" concept: "Today, the imperative is brought about by external circumstances, that obligate the dominant European subject to shrink the planetary into historically undifferentiated postcolonial" ("Planetary Utopias" 1.37.53–1.38.06).<sup>11</sup> The attempts of the "dominant European subject" to demarcate postcolonial

subjects as the victims of history by reducing postcolonial spaces into a single, smaller, and more containable package, “the postcolonial”, are fervently contested by Bodard and, as will be the subject of the following section, by works of contemporary Spanish women’s SF. By projecting postcolonial realities onto pluralised science fictional temporalities, these writers draw attention to the heterogeneity of postcolonial spaces and the issues that affect them, challenging the notion that violent European regimes—whether imperialist, or, as will subsequently be demonstrated, fascist—are “over”. SF, then, is a practice of (spatially) historicising, taking what Spivak in another context terms “external circumstances” and using them to “re-imagine the planet”. The utopian invocation of pluralisation as planetarity, in Spivak’s sense of the term, thus finds its home in the many futures of SF.

#### 4 Imperatives to Re-imagine the Planet in María Regueiro and Lola Robles’s *Historias del Crazy Bar*

The second of my primary sources that I wish to analyse is a work that ambitiously engages with an attempt to make visible the “external circumstances,” to borrow Spivak’s term, by which vulnerable populations have suffered throughout history, and the pluralities of the postcolonial. These issues are engaged with for the explicit purpose of justifying a science fictional re-imagining of the planet, of the kind that Spivak believes is “imperative” in order to “imagine the other responsibly” (*An Aesthetic Education* XIV). Four of the stories that comprise Regueiro and Robles’s *Historias del Crazy Bar* explore, in particular, instances of colonialism in the future that are anchored in Europe’s “real” history of colonial exploitation. In “Motivos para Viajar”, “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, “Las Houstonianas”, and “Historias del Crazy Bar I: El Tiempo es un Caballo de Luz”, Europe is a symbol of power, expedition, and human achievement. “Historias del Crazy Bar I” is the tale of an astronaut aboard a spaceship called the Europa III: “la Europa III era una nave expedicionaria qui viajaba a Neptuno para instalar en Tritón los primeros asentamientos de una base futura” (188) [Europe III was an expeditionary vessel that went to Neptune to install the first settlements of a future base on Triton].<sup>12</sup> Thus christened, the spaceship, which brought the first settlers of an extraterrestrial base to Triton, suggests Europe’s synonymity with trans-border population mobility, globally-consumed technology, and an inclination towards colonial quests to “discover” new territories. It is a view of Europe that prevails throughout many of the other stories, including “Motivos para Viajar”, in which an unnamed city in Spain “se convertiría sin duda en uno [espaciouerto] de los más importantes y transitados de Europa” (41) [has become without doubt one of the busiest and most important spaceports in

Europe]. In this tale of lesbian love between an astronaut and a geologist, Europe is a dominant player in the race to inhabit outer space, and Spain is a major power within Europe: the nation's cities are important portals between Earth and Europe's space colonies. European spaceships are also operated either exclusively or predominantly by Spanish astronauts. The reality of Spain's technological and economic success is depicted as deeply problematic. "Planetoide de Oportunidades" and "Las Houstonianas" project Spain's history of settler colonialism into the future, with descriptions of ecological wastelands recalling the impact of the economies of European colonisation, from sugar plantations to the mining of silver and gold ore. In Regueiro's short story "Planetoide de Oportunidades," the ecological devastation inflicted upon extraterrestrial colonies is grounded in a re-historicisation of the natural disasters that took place in Central America as a result of twentieth-century Spanish colonisation: the exploitation of gold and silver in Mexico, for example, required over 315,000 km<sup>2</sup> of deforestation, which "denuded the Mexican landscape, profoundly changed its ecology and caused deaths and disease" (Haberl 161). In Brazil and several of the Caribbean islands, the establishment of sugar plantations "led to local extinctions for animals" and, ultimately, ended in disaster for both local and colonial economies when their "resources [were] squeezed dry, like sugarcane at the mill, leaving them a husk" (Miller 119–20).

The story explores these ecological issues in order to surface humanist themes, notably the agentic capabilities of the microorganisms that resist the humans' attempts to eradicate them from the planetoid's outer crust with nuclear weapons. While the narrative exposes the humans' sense of unquestioned entitlement to be the sole occupants of new territories, it also offers, in the words of Helen Merrick, "a non-hierarchical and non-colonising way of thinking about 'nature'" (225). In Regueiro's re-writing of European colonialism, the "colonised" bacteria advance what can be seen as a form of benign guerrilla warfare against the humans: due to their microscopic bodies, they are able to impregnate lesbian couples with hybrid human-alien offspring. The bacteria are "los seres más antiguos del mundo" (93) [the oldest beings in the world], which, threatened by the humans' use of nuclear weaponry in order to excavate the planetoid, begin to make lesbian human women pregnant. There are several reasons offered by the narrative to explain why they choose to do this: firstly, that they seek to make the humans less self-centred by asserting their permanent presence on the planetoid; secondly, that they desire to demonstrate a potentially harmonious symbiosis with lesbian women who would like to have a child without male intervention; and thirdly, that the innate hybridity of a new human-bacteria species might foreclose humanity's seemingly insatiable desire to murder other beings in order to safeguard its own existence. The bacteria's strategy is to "infectan a unas personas

determinadas ... y después consiguen introducirse en otra dirigiendo a la primera” (94) [infect certain people ... and then enter other people through the infected ones]: when an “infected” lesbian woman has sex with her partner, the bacteria then impregnates the other woman. The humans are subsequently forced to evolve the way in which they perceive the separateness of the human species in relation to other organisms, simultaneous to becoming aware of groundbreaking changes to reproductive sexuality. Able to conceive without technological intervention, lesbian-bacteria sex complicates both the possibility of human ethnic or species homogeneity in newly conquered territory and the “naturalness” of heterosexual reproduction. Thus, issues of race that are at the heart of Spain’s colonial history in the Americas are conjoined to current questions of lesbian procreation in contemporary Spain, concerns that have been heavily inflected with religious and conservative anxieties.

The story also looks back to, and warns against, a future reprisal of Spain’s history of settler colonialism, a history which surpasses that of Great Britain in terms of volume.<sup>13</sup> Robles expands upon the theme in her short story “Las Houstonianas”: like the “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, the mineral planet is hostile to human life, with sub-zero temperatures and low oxygen levels. The story centres around three women who run teams of android labourers on a planet colonised for its mineral resources. These robotic labourers take on the burden of dangerous outdoor work in cold conditions (Robles & Regueiro 205), ensuring the smooth operation of colonial rule. The names used by the humans to designate places on the planetoid recall areas of the globe upon which Spanish Empires set their sights centuries earlier in the “real world”, from “Nueva Bogotá” (103), after the Columbian capital, first colonised by Spain in 1499 with the intention of benefitting from new territory and its geology of gold ore deposits, and “Tahití Blanca” (104), after the French Polynesian island that Spain attempted but failed to conquer in 1774. Aside from the commercial attraction of colonising enterprises, the story also draws attention to one of its major bi-products: war between colonising nations that compete for dominance in foreign territory. The narrative is framed by political tension between the two world powers that operate the colony-planetoid: South America and the “Estados Confederados de América Central” (106), with Europe taking the side of the latter. But it is also within this context of social and political unease that three lesbian women are able to launch a peace offensive between European and South American powers. Robles’s re-historicisation of European colonial history, therefore, presents lesbian love as an antidote both to the anthropocentric domination of extraterrestrial colonies and to interracial tensions within the conquered territory.

These reformulations of European colonisation are historically situated in the collection’s opening story, which explores the impact of Europe’s

legacy of fascist politics on systems of race and gender in contemporary Spain. Events mentioned in the tale, “El Enemigo en Casa”, suggest that it is set in a space and time akin to Spain in the late 1930s: the country is on the brink of fascism, Calvo Sotelo has recently been assassinated by the Guardia de Asalto, who are attempting to crush military insurgency in the face of a potential Civil War; Hitler is set to imminently invade; and Spain’s right wing grows increasingly popular, with many prepared to even welcome German invasion. The narrative of this alternate history initially seems at odds with the futuristic setting of the rest of *Crazy Bar’s* collection of stories, but this reprisal of the past illuminates a pressing fear put forward by Robles and Regueiro: fascism and conservatism are not ideologies left behind in the 1930s: sexism and xenophobia still hold their sway in the Spain of today. “El Enemigo en Casa” suggests that if change is not imagined imminently, “progressive” values could well dissipate into a swift and forceful return to national and authoritarian conservatism, ideologies hostile to LGBTQ\* rights, and even more widespread cases of police abuse of minority ethnic groups.

The story centres around five women: Alicia Gurméndez, Spain’s Minister for Education and the figurehead of the “proyecto de la Nueva España”, which includes a new education reform that would exact a libertarian orthodoxy on Spain’s education system; Alicia’s lover Lucia; Virginia, a supporter of Gurméndez who teaches “Cultura General” to the working classes (27); Virginia’s sister Azucena, who is engaged to a Nazi sympathising thug named Ignacio; and Virginia’s girlfriend Mercedes. The story climaxes with a dinner held in celebration of Azucena’s engagement, during which a row ensues between Virginia and the rest of her family, who disagree with Virginia’s feminist vision for equal rights. Ignacio, in particular, maintains strong support for traditional values, associating the country’s economic decline with a deterioration of “morality”: “El país se va a la ruina, no ya económica, sino moral” (33) [The country is facing ruin, not only regarding the economy, but also morality]. The story’s most palpable example of immorality is, however, the assassination of Gurméndez by Ignacio’s thugs. This final act of vengeance against the rise of “modern values” reflects the presence of a physical and discursive violence aimed against vulnerable populations in Spain today in the name of *machismo*, sanctified gender roles, gendered language, and religious conservatism. Regueiro rejects these as inessential components of Spanish “identity” in the hope of offering a future way of enacting “Spanishness” that diverges from an inevitable extension of the present. The story, which reminds its readers of the essentialised roles women were required to adopt under Franco as breeders of their race and nation, suggests the imminence of a potential resurgence of these values. At a spatial remove from, and yet born out of resistance to fascism, the narrative claims utopia to imagine



other “Spains” in other galaxies, in which fascist conceptions of racialised and gendered identities no longer find a receptive audience.

Robles and Regueiro’s critical SF decries the effacement of the historical narrative while offering what Kilgore, drawing on Sedgwick’s practice of reparative reading and in the context of his analysis of Robinson’s *Mars* trilogy, terms a “reparative reading of modern history” (236). Such a reparative reading depends on resisting historical “closure” to make Jameson’s injunction to “always historicise” “the catalyst for new stories” (Kilgore 236). Freedom of sexuality and reproductive possibilities for lesbian couples in the future are depicted as reliant on the mapping of better futures in relation to violent pasts, so that we know how to, as Kilgore puts it, “get there from where we are” (“Queering the Coming Race?” 236). Even amid the dystopic reprisal of fascism in “El Enemigo en Casa”, the story demonstrates a fervent optimism in its suggestion of the “liberatory potential” of SF to, in addressing the issue of existing political violence in the present, imagine otherwise. As I have explored in the second chapter of this book, the utopian potential that can be drawn from imagining the future depends on a reactionary relationship with the spaces of the past and of the present. To do otherwise runs the risk of proposing the kinds of fantasies of dismemberment that González suggests are sometimes propounded by Virtual Reality (VR) when it offers its users a future without racialised or gendered bodies. He claims that these gender- and colour-blind futures are possible “only in the absence of history and with a blindness to those cultural contexts ... in which racial identities are fraught with a history of violent, forced miscegenation, can one imagine such fantasies operating freely” (González 45). Only through what Westphal terms “le brouillage hétérotopique” [heterotopic interference], drawing on Foucault’s conceptualisation of heterotopia, can fiction and reality combine in the process of imagining the future and recollecting the past (*La Géocritique* 104). Moving in and out of real events and imagined alternatives, Robles and Regueiro’s invocations of possible futures directly respond to concrete issues of race and gender in the present.

## 5 Conclusion

Bodard’s, Regueiro’s, and Robles’s examples of critical SF ground their utopian ambitions in a historical analysis of how race has come to signify as “pejorative difference” through systems of “gender difference and racialised gender codes” (Braidotti, *Transpositions* 64; Gilroy, *Against Race* 196). In refusing to overlook the formation of these historical phenomena, these stories also surface issues of the effacement of the historical narrative in ways that evoke Spivak’s conception of the necessity of a “pluralised” postcolonial, which allows the “dissenting voices” of the past to call for “a very crosshatched access to utopianism of various sorts”

(“Planetary Utopias” 2:31:59–2:32:10). The planetary humanisms that are formulated from these narratives, and that will be explored in the subsequent chapters, are dependent on such a critical re-reading of the past. Indeed, Gilroy has emphasised that his own entrance into the study of new form of reparative humanism depends on a “critical historical figure” that engages in “a distinctive critical re-reading of Enlightenment (“Not Yet Humanism” [*Conflicting Humanities*] 100). These reparative re-writings of oppressive historical formations, whose legacies still endure today, demonstrate the way in which women writers of SF in Europe have based their futuristic world-building on a critical historicisation of the issues that continue to aggravate minority communities. Without these reparative attempts to free the past from racial and gender ideologies, the humanistic invocation of other kinds of being loses its political suggestiveness. The hybrid, embodied, and nomadic beings explored in the following chapter as the subjects of new forms of humanism are born of this necessary solicitation of a future that is radically different from its associated past.

## Notes

- 1 See Bodard, “The Universe of Xuya.”
- 2 The United States of America does exist in the *Xuya Universe*, and indeed, Bodard notes that the USA’s history remains the same as it is in the “real world” until the end of the eighteenth century. The USA is, however, much smaller, made up of only the North-Easternmost slice of states along the Atlantic coast. The rest of North America is an Aztec autocracy called “Greater Mexica”, which covers today’s Mexico and the Southern States, including Texas, Arizona, Louisiana, Florida, and New Mexico. Its capital, Tenochtitlan, stands in place of what is today Mexico City.
- 3 Indeed, Bodard has made clear her intention not to “reinforce negative portrayals of an ossified, exotically cruel empire” that have been constructed and maintained by classic works of SF that racialise Asians as evil “others” (“History, Erasure”). Notable examples include Kenneth Mackay’s *The Yellow Wave* (1895), Philip Francis Nowlan’s *Armageddon 2419 A.D.* (1928), Robert A. Heinlein’s *Sixth Column* (1949), and Glen Cook’s *A Shadow of All Night Falling* (1978).
- 4 Electronic source.
- 5 Spivak also emphasises the way in which gender is marked by race and class, as it is in this passage, within which the Annamites’s “promiscuity” reflects their status as the “inferior classes” of an “indigenous” peoples. In the context of her critique that the notion of “gendering” in Europe is widely viewed at an institutional level as separate from “gendering” elsewhere, Spivak argues that “gender is negotiating not only class but also race here”, demonstrating the racial basis on which Europe advertises itself as “good for women” (“What is Gender?” 5). The term “Annamite” was used by the French to refer to the central region of Vietnam, a French protectorate between 1887 and 1954.

- 6 See also hooks's critique of the representation of "black women as sexual savages" during slavery (52).
- 7 See American Bar Association for an example of the concept's application to the experience of women in law firms in North America, and for a study of the concept in relation to African-American women in academia, see Davenport.
- 8 See, for example, Lebovics.
- 9 This and all subsequent translations of the report by Gouteyron et al. "Rapport d'Information n° 1 – Mission d'Information Effectuée en République Socialiste du Vietnam sur la Francophonie et l'Enseignement du Français" are my own translations from the original.
- 10 Translation my own. For further analysis of Bourdieu's notion of the accumulation of symbolic capital, see, for example, John B. Thompson's introduction to the 1991 edition of Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (7).
- 11 Spivak claims that she wrote "Imperatives to Re-imagine the Planet" from the perspective of "the Resident Alien, a vestigial postcolonial figure" which she sees as a "useful stereotype of myself" (*An Aesthetic Education* 302), perhaps not unlike Bodard's own approach to her writing, within which she often metaphorises her experience as a French-Vietnamese woman living in Paris. See, for example, Bodard's *The House of Shattered Wings*, which, set in post-apocalyptic Paris, describes the remaining Annamites living there as "citizens of France, after all, albeit, like all colonial subjects, second-rate ones" (12).
- 12 This and all subsequent translations of Robles and Regueiro's *Historias del Crazy Bar* are my own translations from the original.
- 13 Compared to the estimated 4 million Britons that emigrated to former British colonies up until 1890 (Piesse 1), in the four-and-a-half centuries that followed Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean in 1492 on behalf of the Crown of Castile, an estimated 5.36 million Spaniards migrated across South, Central, and North America, and the Caribbean islands (Benjamin 398).

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## 4 Embodying New Forms of Humanism

### The Fate of Race and Gender in Queer Assemblages

Rooted in the contradictions, mutations, and processes of our time, the inherently hybridised entities that appear in Bodard's *Xuya Universe* series, Brissett's *Elysium* (2014), and Vallorani's *Il Cuore Finto di DR* (2003) are responses to specific historical and geopolitical locations in the present. By exploring possible structures of subjectivity in different futures, these bodies proffer a possible way out of racist and sexist ontologies that govern bodies in the present day. These amalgamations of human flesh, machinic internals, and resurrected spirits, which bear witness to the meeting of technology and cultural artefacts belonging to different epochs and geographies, are also manifestations of Braidotti's posthuman subjects, "the subjects of desire we have already become": assemblages of human, animal, and surrounding natural ecosystem, bound together with technology ("Affirmation" 9). This hypothesis relies on an analysis of the conditions by which these nomadic and multiple subjectivities are able to deconstruct sedimented notions of race and gender to de-stabilise the centrality of the human. In my exploration of these multiplicitous and affective subjects-in-motion, I extend my reading of Braidotti's and Butler's attempts to de-centre the autonomous "I" of traditional humanism. Braidotti does so through a Deleuzian-Spinozist formulation of subject nomadism, while Butler reflects on how the subject "I" engages in an ethical mode of relation with a "you" that is situated beyond the scope of interpellation. For Braidotti, the subject is propelled forwards into "a shifting horizon of multiple other encounters" by the force of desire (*Metamorphoses* 108), while for Butler, the subject "I" is already in and of itself engaged in a process of "becoming-other", for the self is "always finding itself as the Other" (*Undoing Gender* 149). These affective and relational entities take the form of both posthuman bodies and certain kinds of spaces in the far-future: in Bodard's *Xuya Universe*, they appear as both machine-human-spirit hybrid forms and pockets of deep space that warp the bodies that enter them; in Brissett's *Elysium*, as queer and desiring bodies that transform through and

into one another, as well as apocalyptic spaces that invalidate the markers of race and gender; and in Vallorani's *Il Cuore Finto di DR* as the memory-addicted, gender-defying anti-heroine. In each case, these beings, which I read as the subjects of new forms of humanism, favour multiplicity over singularity, inherent vulnerability and nomadism over a fixed or essential identity, and transformative contact and encounter with others over a fixed conception of an autonomous self.

Bodard's *Xuya Universe* is populated by hybrid, nomadic creatures: the Đại Việt stations or "Mindships" are themselves formations which exceed the limitations of machine and human flesh. These can only properly function when installed with a "Mind", an entity that holds and operates the Đại Việt space station: they are born of human women but birthed into machines. The Mindships also harbour a myriad of hybrid entities themselves, including the Honoured Ancestress, an elderly descendent of the ruling family whose life has been technologically extended to make her the semi-immortal "soul" of the ship. The Mindship's hybridity is dependent on the balance of these composite elements that mutually support the proper functioning of the ship. This hybridity, however, makes these nomadic entities inherently fragile. It is, I would claim, the very discontinuity, fragility, and queerness of these assemblages that foster new ontologies, deviate from normative notions of race and gender, and forge a valuable sense of queer community. I aim to see how this hypothesis fits with Braidotti's view that the "vulnerability" of a "high-intensity" nomadic subject has the potential to deconstruct racialised and gendered subject-formation ("The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible" 236).

As part of her conjecture that the human is "neither wholly human, as a person, nor just an organism", but an "abstract machine" ("Affirming the Affirmative"), Braidotti sees the posthuman body as one of "symbiotic interdependence". She believes that:

The model of the posthuman body proposed by the brand of nomadism I am defending is one of symbiotic interdependence. This points to the co-presence of different elements, from different stages of evolution, like inhabiting different time-zones simultaneously. The human organism is neither wholly human, as a person, nor just an organism. It is an abstract machine, radically immanent, which captures, produces and transforms interconnections.

("Affirming the Affirmative")

This is the nature of the production of the Minds or Mindships that operate the Đại Việt space station, technological entities formed and released into the world by way of traditional human gestation and childbirth. Parturition has evolved in synchrony with developments in artificial intelligence (AI),

so that organisms are neither fully human nor fully machine. Defying the borderlines of materiality and the limits of the spirit world, Minds are described by Linh, a Magistrate from the first novel of the *Xuya Universe* series, *On a Red Station, Drifting* (2012), as a network of impossible and transformational spaces:

She'd read all about the stations, all about the Minds that held and regulated them, all about stations like Prosper and its Honoured Ancestress, and the family that peopled its core. But the truth of a Mind's presence shattered the easy descriptions, the facile, clever similes written as glibly as inferior poems: it was its own self, the vast, dark presence that seemed to fold the air around itself, wrapped around the contraption in the centre of the room that might have been a throne, that might have been a tree with too many thorns; metal, twisting and buckling like a fish caught on land, its shifting reflexions hurting her eyes.

(5)

Linh, who has abandoned her war-torn planet for the safety of her extended family's space station, does not yet understand the technology behind the "dark presence" of the Mindships. On this space station, in a foreign corner of the universe, the laws of Physics that applied on Linh's former planet are contravened, exposing the spatiotemporal conditions upon which scientific cognition is dependent. Unable to think "the truth of a Mind's presence" in terms of a scientific explanation, one that might shatter attempted literary illustrations of the creature, Linh describes the ship in sensorial and evocative language. This irrational experience of the "impossible" supplants and deprivileges the scientific discourses traditional of SF which introduce new technologies: instead of putting emphasis on, as Suvin puts it in the context of cognitive estrangement in SF, "the logical and empirical knowledge of the times" (5), the narrative stages a philosophical enquiry into the kinds of hybrid and nomadic entities invoked by the genre of SF. Appearing to Linh as at once "tree", "metal", and "fish", the Mind is nomadic, flexible, multiple, and simultaneous. Both its "own self" and an amalgamation of metallic "contraption", human family, and a semi-immortal Honoured Ancestress, a Mind's uniqueness stems from its particular relationship with the human, the machinic and the in-between. Its hybridity "captures, produces and transforms" interconnections with an entourage of other multiplicitous beings, from the Honoured Ancestress to the fleshy Station itself. When populated with citizens, a Mind, and a governing spirit-Ancestress, the station appears as many layers of eugenically engineered flesh, spirit, and technology. This complex, ever-evolving organism renders all attempted descriptions of it, by the many poets that populate the partially academic-governed Đại Việt Empire, invalid in their



over-simplifications. It cannot be represented, for as a hybrid creature it is always in a state of flux. This variability is crucial to its ability to function properly in relation to other entities, upon which it is “symbiotically dependent”.

The health of the Mindship, for example, depends on the mental state of the Honoured Ancestress, the semi-immortal spirit-human who forms a connection between the ruling family and the Mindship. The Ancestress’s health can be assessed through a diagnosis of whether the Mind’s “*khi*-elements” are in balance, as Prosper’s Station Mistress, Quyen, discovers when Lady Oanh introduces her to a Mind named Pham Lê Thi Mot:

“Pham Lê Thi Mot,” Lady Oanh said, slowly. “Conceived by Pham Van Vu, borne by Lê Thi Phuoc in her womb. Awakened for five generations.” Her gaze was distant, as if she were already composing an official report. “I have conducted a thorough examination, given what was allotted to me, and I see no flaw of design. The five humours are properly anchored within the heart room, and the station itself was well prepared to welcome its Mind, everything in proper balance”.

(93)

Balance is key to the proper functioning of the Mindship. Bodard’s conception of “balance” is, however, both hybrid and uneven, drawing on both early Western medicine’s philosophy of the “humours” and Confucian metaphysics understanding of “balance”: *khi* being the Vietnamese word for the notion of “essence” or “material force” at the heart of Confucian metaphysics (Dutton et al. 170). Balance between the ship’s many elements must be carefully regulated, suggesting that hybridity is an inherently fragile state. Its existence as an uneven collective is strongly suggestive of Donna Haraway’s formulation of human nature as a series of “high stake balancing acts” (47). Indeed, when the ship’s balance is amiss, the reader is presented with all that is at risk: a delicate, mosaic-like, and highly adaptive entity.

Lady Oanh witnesses the dismantling of the Mindship’s balance when she recounts the sickness of the Ancient Ancestress, whose malady is symptomatic of the ship’s loss of equilibrium: “The *khi* flow has stagnated within the outer rings, and the elements are slowly freezing in place. She’s losing her integrity, little by little” (70). Elemental balance is what makes the ship a “woman” of “integrity”: described in these terms, the ship’s emotional vector, “integrity”, is the product of well-executed high-tech engineering and ancient Confucian metaphysics. “Woman” is subsequently deconstructed into its component parts, in other words, as a product of both manufactured metal, genetic engineering and spiritual well-being. The ship-woman therefore enters into the feminist imaginary as Haraway’s

gender-defying cyborg, a blurring of species that precipitates an ontological uncertainty which destabilises both human and gendered subject. Described in Braidotti's terms, the subject's "dissonant differences" and interdependences escape the "dualistic modes of interrelation" (*Metamorphoses* 185) that characterise both the gender binary and the dichotomy between human and "other". Furthermore, its complex construction is suggestive of Butler's notion of the queer, which can be "understood, by definition, to oppose all identity claims" (*Undoing Gender* 7). Indeed, descriptors of woman, vehicle, and technology are suggestive of what the Mindship is, but they cannot fully trace the limits of its "being". As Butler comments in relation to attempts to transpose her theory of performativity onto issues of race:

no single account of construction will do, and that these categories always work as background for one another, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another. Thus, the sexualization of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once.  
(*Gender Trouble* xvi)

The Mindship can be read as an entity that offers the multiple "lenses" and "accounts of construction" that Butler believes are necessary for a nuanced understanding of how the categories of race and gender come to be expressed through one another. Drawing together a fashioned and fabricated body with normative notions of an identity given at birth, this multifaceted entity explores the intersections of gender and species from a plurality of viewpoints. The Mindship asks, for example, how national and (post-)colonial identities in the *Xuya Universe* take shape through the performance of a posthuman female identity. Equally, to read the Mindship through Butler's notion of the queer interrogates how technology might transform female identity and with it, the sedimented demarcations of racial and species divides.

While this radical mode of constituting the subject queerly avoids the stable markers of either "human" or extraterrestrial identity, it is also what exposes these creatures to acute fragility. The composition of these SF entities, and their demonstration of the relationship between nomadic subjectivity and fragility, can be illuminated by Braidotti's theorisation of vulnerability as an inevitable bi-product of nomadism and Butler's re-evaluation of the state of vulnerability. Elaborating on Deleuze, she explains that: "A high-intensity subject is also animated by unparalleled levels of vulnerability. With nomadic patterns comes also a fundamental fragility" (*Transpositions* 236). She clarifies: "This fragility concerns mostly the pitch of the synchronisation efforts, the lines of demarcation

between the different bodily boundaries, the borders that are the thresholds of encounter and connection with other forces, the standard term for which is ‘limits’” (*Transpositions* 161). When an interconnection of forces occurs, she claims, the demarcations of bodily boundaries no longer constitute distinct and certain dividing lines. Bodard’s interrelational Mindships extend beyond the horizon of traditional humanisms to read as these kinds of “thresholds of encounter” between human, machinic, and animal elements. Moving to and fro across the demarcations of bodily boundaries, these queer assemblages are engaged in a constant process of re-synchronisation that is highly adaptive to the needs of Prosper’s human and machinic family. It is a family that enlarges the definition of the “self” into a dense and expansive conception of individuality: even the very essence of a single ship is inconceivable, described as at once a “twisting and buckling” fish out of water, a machine of “shifting reflexions”, and a tree with “too many thorns”. Depicted in terms of discomfort, movement, and imperfection, the totality of the ship is confounding, unsettling: the squirming fish, forced out of its prescribed element; the dance of light on metal, uncomfortable to human eyes; the ugliness and violence of the plant world. It is this series of shortcomings and asymmetries that ironically gives Prosper its “balance”.

In Brissett’s *Elysium*, nomadic subjects undo sedimented systems of race and gender by emerging in a similarly “disharmonic”, awkward, or unsettling harmony. In this novel, queer love and solidarity create interconnections between characters in a broken post-apocalyptic computer script. The proximity of the novel’s characters, who appear to be nested within one another in an expansive conception of individuality, somewhat like the complexly imbricated group of alive and spirit family members that collectively form a single Mindship in Bodard’s *Xuya Universe*, is at odds with the inward-looking “self” of traditional humanism. This positive displacement of fixed conceptions of an entitled, autonomous human “I”, calls for a malleable, historicised, and durable humanism that indefinitely deconstructs categories of race and gender while still addressing their particular and localised formations.

*Elysium* skilfully navigates these modes of embodiment with the purpose of deterritorialising sexual and racial difference. The novel demonstrates the way in which science fictional bodies in treacherous, high-energy spaces can, by way of systematic subterfuge and evasion, render the mobile markers of racial and gender identity illegible and inadequate. Transgression comes in the form of a queerly science fictional mode of lovemaking, which helpfully elucidates the radically materialist approach of Braidotti’s nomadic philosophy and the way in which Butler’s ethical subject recognises its reciprocity with the other.

On the subject of affective encounters, Braidotti writes:

Thus, a nomadic or Deleuzian Spinozist approach stresses that the affectivity (*conatus*) is indeed at the heart of the subject, but that it is equally the case that this desire is not internalised, but external. It happens in the encounter between different embodied and embedded subjects who are joined in the sameness of the forces that drive them. Intensive, affective, eternal resonances make desire into a force that propels forward, but also always remains in front of us, as a shifting horizon of multiple other encounters, of territorial and border-crossings of all kind.

(Metamorphoses 108)

These nomadic entities are animated by a series of encounters that are characterised by *jouissance* and by desire. For Braidotti, the desire to be alive and to survive, perhaps best expressed in the French as *survivre*—literally, to live beyond/above—does not come from within, but through a set of dynamic willed encounters that establishes the nomadic subject as at once complete and incomplete, open and closed: a revolving door mechanism. Indeed, *Elysium* offers an interrogation of the way in which queer desire provokes a set of dynamic, shifting horizons, reterritorialisations, and border crossings, as Butler has envisaged in her queer theory.<sup>1</sup> Hector, Helen, Adrian, Adrienne, Antoine, and Antoinette come into formation as “embodied and embedded” subjects because of their love and desire for one another, which “propels” them forwards into a series of unexpected encounters. In one of the novel’s opening scenes, Adrian, a “brown boy” (81), reluctantly kisses his bedridden boyfriend Antoine and, with a heavy heart, heads to the apartment of his lover, a young Puerto Rican man named Hector, who later in the novel (or in another manifestation of Hector) is a trans woman called Helen. While Hector is with Adrienne, his body transforms into Helen’s, as experienced through the eyes of Adrian:

Adrian closed his eyes and fell into the moment. Sinking into the couch, he felt Hector’s tongue on him and then the condom came slowly rolling down, then a whole mouth. Hector slurped and slurped and gently pulled. When Adrian opened his eyes, it was to stare out the window. An owl was there. Its white heart-shaped face blinked. Adrian closed his eyes again. Her long legs surrounded him. Her soft breasts brushed his chest. She opened and forced herself down on his member to grind. God, it felt so good. Adrian reached up to cup her breasts. Her nipples were hard in his palms.

(15)

Male, female, and animal merge in images of bodies that are unstably bound to one another in the heat of desire. Only coming into formation through his interaction with other fluid bodies, Hector's materiality is radical dependent on his proximity to those whom he desires and who desire him in return. At the blink of the owl, which signals a re-vision of the scene, the sexual act is transformed: Adrian reopens his eyes and Hector's legs have become those of a long-legged female. This change can be seen as the product of what Braidotti terms "intensive, affective, eternal resonances": the potency of queer lust, the sensations of touch, which draw one gendered character into another so that they become only partly distinguishable. Each caress in this multifaceted moment of physical encounter provokes another series of cuts and reboots, in which desire "resonates" into multiple strands of human want and need for another. In "About Chinese Women", Julia Kristeva asserts that the figure of the woman "takes her *jouissance* in an anti-Apollonian Dionysian orgy" (154): indeed, the *jouissance* of this act of transgressive, accelerating energy threatens the symbolic chain, shifting the site of the generation of desire to the meeting point of queer bodies. But rather than emphasise any "essence" of female—or indeed, male—specificity, the love scene between Hector and Adrian focuses on the illegibility of gendered categories in a science fictional future. The transgressive potential of these interconnected, transforming, and desiring bodies therefore more accurately illustrates Braidotti's conception of entities on the verge of "dynamic, shifting encounters". These are bodies which "become" through their proximity to one another.

The gendered and racialised body does not become "invisible", however, when characters merge. Attention is paid to the "brownness" of Adrian's skin and the Caribbean-Hispanic inflections of Hector's use of language, in particular his cry of "papi!" throughout the duration of the scene. Similarly, sexual organs do not "disappear" when these bodies overlap: on the contrary, genitalia is central to the scene's lovemaking. Instead, genital determiners of sex are released from gendered bodies, so that they cease to signify within normative systems of gender. When bodies overlap and fragment, nipples, breasts, chests, and members come to signify outside of the sex-gender continuum as markers of identity as transformable sources of pleasure: the invocation of hands on flesh. In this sense, the scene evokes Sedgwick's suggestion of an open definition of the term "queer", which can refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically" (8). The emergence of desire from the fragmented narrative's breaks, silences, and inconsistencies radicalises the notion of "queer" so that, in the words of Muñoz, queerness becomes "more than

an identitarian marker” and “articulate[s] a forward-dawning futurity” (87). Reaching beyond “permanent” sexual, racial, and gendered markers of subjectivity, queerly science fictional lovemaking becomes the point of departure into relational beings born from the peaceful occupation of a shared space.

This departure into interrelational modes of subjectivity on the one hand, and collective materiality on the other hand, is also suggestive of Butler’s invocation that “the self is always finding itself as the Other” (*Undoing Gender* 149). Her radical re-conception of a humanist understanding of the relationship between self and other is grounded in affect theory in the context of gender and race studies. The “you”, which is expressly gender indeterminate, “might as well take the place of ‘man’ in the quest for a human beyond the constituted horizon of humanism” (197). That “you” neither presumes gender nor eradicates it but moves the focus away from gendered and racialised markers of identity and towards an affective understanding of subjectivity based on a non-violent relationship with the “other”. Indeed, as Adrian touches him, Hector vacillates between “himself” and his “other”, Helen, establishing himself also as a figure of alterity at the same time that his body is lovingly penetrated by Adrian’s. He appears to become “himself” only by embracing a version of himself that is radically “othered”. Viewed through Butler’s Hegelian approach to the idea of “becoming-other”, Hector does not, through this act, “contain” Adrian within himself, or vice versa. Instead, the reciprocal process of lovemaking moves these selves towards the “you’s” which they seek, and in doing so, they are, as Butler puts it, “transformed by virtue of their dynamic relation with one another” (“Longing for Recognition” 117). Butler argues in *Senses of the Subject* that if ethical humanisms utilise the pronoun “you”, it might instigate “a new conception of the human where some manner of touch other than violence is the precondition of that making” (197). The transformative touch between Hector, Adrian, and the transfigured Hector/Helen demonstrates such a “making” of a non-violent future, one that is based in a quest to move beyond the “I”: that outmoded and impossibly self-sufficient subject of Enlightenment humanism.

This embodiment of an affective humanism appears again in women’s European SF in the form of DR, Vallorani’s anti-heroine “Replicant” who both straddles and exceeds the identity categories of “synthetic” and “woman”. DR intoxicates herself on the drug Sintar to induce an opiate stupor, through which she enters the memories, thoughts, and emotions of the humans she comes into contact with. In one scene, she experiences a memory that belongs to Angel, an “alien” born on the ex-colony planet of Entierres, as he journeys to Earth on the spaceship of his Terrestrial father, Samuel Bayern:

È sulla nave con Bayern, al ritorno da Entierres. Sente e vede tutto attraverso i sensi di un bambino che deve essere Angel. Lei è Angel. Poi è qualcosa d'altro senza smettere di essere Angel. È simile a lui continuando a essere lui. Vede Bayern da due angolazioni diverse, gli parla con due voci diverse, lo spia come se fossero due persone a spiarlo, con lo stesso profondo amore, ma ... diverso, lei non lo sa come, ma diverso.

E nel silenzio della nave, sente, annusa il dolore di Bayern, la nostalgia di casa ... Un groviglio di sensazioni doppie. Un calore forte al centro del torace, la sensazione di vivere.

Non andate via non andate ... non andate via da me (33).

[She is on Bayern's ship, returning from Entierres. She feels and sees everything through the senses of a child, who must be Angel. Then she is something else while also being Angel. It is similar to him, while also still being him. She sees Bayern from two different angles, speaks to him with two different voices, spies on him as if there were two people spying on him, with the same deep love, but ... different, she does not know how, but different.

And in the silence of the ship, she hears, smells Bayern's grief, his homesickness... A tangle of double sensations. A strong heat in the middle of her chest, the feeling of life.

Do not go away do not go... do not go away from me].<sup>2</sup>

As "Angel", DR is able to experience the memory from both his and Bayern's perspectives: while she "sees and feels everything through the senses of a child that had to be Angel", she is also struck by the profound and painful sensation of Bayern's homesickness for Earth. DR gets her high from seeking out a position of hyper-empathy towards Bayern and Angel,<sup>3</sup> risking her own safety to better understand their situation by thinking and feeling as them. Through this radical act of seeking out the emotions of another, DR experiences a "un calore forte al centro del torace", a feeling of comfort and vitality. DR thus becomes "human" through the effort of implicating herself in the emotions and experiences of others. Desire—which manifests itself both in the pleasure she takes in feeling "alive" and in her will to share the thoughts and feelings of others—propels DR forwards into new encounters. She is, quite desperately, seeking out the other in order to "become": to unfix, to evolve, and to transform the boundaries between human and synthetic.

Indeed, rather than become more human as she begins to feel "alive", the narrative suggests that she experiences animacy in a more hybrid sense. Her experience of drugged sentience complicates the distinction between animate human and its lifeless synthetic "other". A new form of subjectivity



is suggested at through DR's second-hand experience of memory: one that, in its multiplicity and intangibility, is unnameable. A "qualcosa d'altro" is formed, which, like the "you" that evades interpellation, remains just out of reach. It can be identified by nothing other than the fact that it is "diverso" in ways that "lei non sa come" [she does not know how]. Thus, the emergence of the "qualcosa d'altro" from the conjoining of DR, Angel, and Bayern through space and time creates the possibility of an entity that exceeds gender and species categorisation, while still being grounded in a meeting of particular subjectivities, localities, and temporalities. Indeed, the value that Butler attributes to the pronoun "you" is partly that it avoids the notion of being formed as a subject by being "assigned a gender through pronominal reference or repeated treatment and practice" (14). But the narrative also goes a step further: not only does the "qualcosa d'altro" escape the frame of gender categorisation, it also evades the shape of race and species: it is "qualcosa" [something], rather than "qualcuno" [someone], an intangible, supra-human entity that exceeds both alien, human, and synthetic form. This unidentifiable "you" exceeds and displaces the "I's" of Bayern, Angel, and DR: it is each of them and none of them. DR offers a vision of the political tool exploited by Butler and those who precede her in their conceptualisation of the "you" that should be "at the core of politics" (*Senses of the Subject* 197), notably Arendt, Levinas, and Fanon. The text demonstrates that the use-value of an elusive, open-ended "you", which is always in the process of becoming, is its role in the creation of radical forms of subjectivity that, as Foucault has suggested in the context of his experience of phenomenology, "tear the subject away from itself" (quoted in Butler *Senses of the Subject* 241). The "self" subsequently establishes a relationship with this "you" that involves re-orienting its gaze away from itself and towards an awareness of the co-subsisting elements which are involved in never-ending processes of "becoming".

Queer assemblages, in Braidotti's and Butler's terms, appear in contemporary SF not only as bodies but also as arrangements of space. Bodard's conception of "deep space", outlined in her 1987 story "A Salvaging of Ghosts" as a place where "reality itself changes from moment to moment" (135), offers the opportunity to connect with a "you" across different time zones, while the fragmentary intertextual references that run through Brissett's *Elysium* draw past with present, provoking what Braidotti has termed "a dynamic, shifting horizon of multiple other encounters, of territorial and border crossings of all kinds" (*Metamorphoses* 108).

*Elysium's* fragmentary narrative signals a decaying world that has fallen subject to unstoppable implosion. But rather than present itself in terms of entropy, as did the narratives of feminist New Wave SF in their depiction of the chaos of the "internal" spaces of consciousness, degeneration

into increasing disorder is infused with instances of vitality, connectivity, and transformation. In a style evocative of the way in which T.S. Elliot collects and orders disparate fragments of intertextual references in his modernist masterpiece *The Wasteland*, the narrative fashions hybrid spaces of encounter by merging the events in the text with passages of computer code, verses from Caribbean folk songs, and samples of “90”s and 00’s hip-hop, rap, and heavy metal. This accumulation of restless energy is best illustrated by the fragments of text onto which Brissett transposes the lyrics of poet and rapper Saul Williams. In one section, with modifications to word order, meter, and rhythm, Brissett cites his 2007 release “Break”, embedding into the narrative a paratactic set of images that identify the apocalypse as a place of encounters and border crossings:

Corpses piled in heaps. Sores and decay. Reeks.  
Placin’ tags on feet. A Nike Air Force Fleet. Custom  
Made: unique. Still in box, white sheet. Ripened  
Blue black sweet. White tank top, wife beat BREAK.

(85)

The final injunction to “BREAK” signals both the end of the verse, the beginning of a new set of fragmentary images, and an allusion to breakbeat, a style of dance music that originated in the USA in the 1970s. Breakbeat is often distinguished by its irregular drum patterns, which form a rhythmic base for hip-hop tracks, and are produced when the DJ alternates between a number of tracks, replaying the “breaks” between them. This fragmentary effect creates connections between samples of songs from different eras and genres. With similar effect, Williams’s apocalyptic lyrics knit together a string of images from around the globe: poverty and sweatshop labour in the Far East “Corpses piled in heaps ... Placin’ tags on feet”, that feeds consumer militarism and cultural homogeneity in the West, in the form of the paradox of mass production that masquerades as a one-of-a-kind product, “A Nike Air Force fleet: Custom made: unique”. The lyrics bind together product, consumer, and labourer, offering a space of reflection and encounter with the invisible instruments of capitalist development. These disparate, clashing images, the contrast of “Blue black sweet”—an allusion Williams has used elsewhere in his poetry to describe the African-American body<sup>4</sup>—to the “white tank top”, and a juxtaposition made again in the second verse (“Consider yourself: almost, never quite, dark-skinned/Lily white, black as sin, devils den, whiteness”), draw together racial dichotomies into a hybrid, nomadic, and multiplicitous body. While grounded in racialised and historicised systems of identification, this body makes visible the interrelated components of normative formations of identity: white must be set in relation to black, luxury must depend on poverty, a “unique”

look requires methods of mass production. Williams's poetry, which creates fragmentary subjectivities in dystopian spaces, asks that the body be seen as a series of border crossings and movements of flux between disparate "you's". A succession of encounters materialise in these verses: Brissett's novel meets Williams's songwriting in her narrative remix of his tracks; the images within the verses overlap and juxtapose; and the application of those images to the events of *Elysium* induces a layering of apocalyptic imagery. Global chaos in two different worlds runs laterally to one another, accentuating the atmosphere of chaos, devastation, and possibility.

In his collection of poetry, Williams writes that "break-beats have been the/missing link connecting the diasporic/community to its drum-woven past" (*The Dead Emcee Scrolls* 101). These "breaks" are equally points of rupture and encounter, where the looping drum beat of the breakbeat style forges connections between elements of global music. While the lyric suggests an interesting manoeuvre of historical re-encounter with a geographically removed past in a superimposition of the "past" onto the "present", Brissett's narrative removes itself from the idea that diasporic cultures belong in some way to a "drum-woven" African/Caribbean heritage. While retaining the sense of Williams's use of the imperative "BREAK" as a fissure that forms a new beat, another allusion, and a breakthrough encounter, it also distances itself from a notion of a centred past. This is visible in the latter half of the novel, when Adrienne begins to feel "nubs burrowing out of her back" (92) which signals that the dust has started to make changes to her body. Realising she will soon sprout wings, she sings a song her mother once sang her:

She remembered how on a night like this her mom once told her a story from "back home" as she tucked her into bed ...

Pitney watched the sun rise up  
 But no duppies came to call  
 So what caused her this night of fright?  
 Grannie's stewpeas 'twas all

By the end, they were giggling uncontrollably with her mother tickling her belly while telling her it was time to sleep. Now those days were gone. She had the story, but not her mom. And the story wasn't funny anymore.

(93)

Drawing together music from around the globe, both contemporary and traditional, Brissett's narrative demonstrates how apocalyptic space has become a queer assemblage of fragmented cultural references and histories. Bodies, local mythology, and memories are thrown together in the process of multiple encounters that occur in the midst of alien invasion, leaving

Adrienne with a feeling of deep unease. Within the humanistic space of the narrative, which encourages encounters with other bodies, spaces, and histories, the borders of race are confused and unsettled. “Back home”, for example, is framed within quotation marks, signalling Adrienne’s refusal to take the concept of “home” for granted. While her mother’s “home” is likely to be either Central Africa or the Caribbean, given that the character of the spirit “duppy” is common in Caribbean mythology and is understood to have originated in Bantu folklore,<sup>5</sup> the narrative’s “breaks” and allusions make it impossible for Adrienne to neatly situate her identity, as her mother does, in a fixed notion of a home space. Within the apocalyptic narrative Adrienne is reconstituted into an arrangement of space, an assemblage of, in Braidotti’s terms, dynamic, shifting encounters between, for example, traditional orally transmitted folk tales that have travelled between generations and geographies, and contemporary American rap music from the reader’s present day. Allowing the two musical narratives to intermingle, she establishes herself as a meeting point for a series of historical encounters. While Adrienne’s mother has established for herself a clear sense of genealogical grounding overseas, Adrienne resists the idea that she belongs to a fixed point of origin: for her generation of characters in *Elysium*, home is the shifting topography of the unspecified decaying metropolis of a planet that will soon no longer be theirs. But it is also, as Adrienne has become, a site which, faithful to Braidotti’s model of a posthuman body, “captures, produces and transforms interconnections” (“Affirming the Affirmative”). These linkages also occur by way of the narrative’s error codes, which transform the past and offer it up for a potential re-encounter with other bodies in other times and spaces with every “break” and “system interrupt”. Rendered in programming language onto the page, these breaks between sections of the narrative are signalled by, for example: “>>/>>/\*BREAK\*/101100011...” (29); “>>/>> system reset” (52); “>>/>> \*\*system interrupt\*\* ERROR: FRAGMENTATION” (15); and “>> bridge status/connecting...” (108). This then triggers a “reset”, “fragmentation”, or “bridge”/connection, resulting in an alternative set of encounters between characters and the spaces which they inhabit. The sequential narrative is therefore queered at the moment of these ruptures: the break is the condition by which new queer assemblages are made possible. Set to the tempo of calamity, the uncompromising disintegration of the social fabric is the condition for the emergence of new humanistic becomings which can be usefully compared to Braidotti’s theory of nomadic becomings and Butler’s theorisation of the way in which the “self” finds itself already socially and discursively constituted.

The nomadic spaces of Bodard’s *Citadel of Weeping Pearls* are perhaps even more radical evocations of Braidotti’s and Butler’s respective affective conceptions of ethics. The novella’s journey into “deep space” takes the

reader into the frayed edges of the universe, “beyond time, beyond space” (136). Here, temporalities merge and the universe “re-organises itself” (130). I conceptualise Bodard’s approach to the science of deep space through an analysis of Braidotti’s powerfully vital and yet fragile nomadic subject as a spatial phenomenon. In these terms, the nomadic subject is a space of thresholds, of concentrated energy or *potentia* that produces new assemblages. Like the “high-intensity” subject of Braidotti’s philosophical nomadism, deep space can be seen to be “animated by unparalleled levels of vulnerability”: this is a dangerous place for humans, whose embedded and embodied fleshy humanity can “disintegrate” in the nomadic spatiotemporalities of deep space. Suu Noch, the Citadel’s supervisor of military research, and Ngoc Ha, the Empress’s youngest daughter, discover this when they travel into the furthest reaches of deep space, accessed through the portal that the Empress’s head of scientific research, the “Grandmaster of Design Harmony”, has created in her laboratory:

Suu Nuoc took the head of a detachment of three men and stepped forward, into the maelstrom of light. Ngoc Ha watched him from behind one of the overturned tables—something crackled and popped when he stepped inside, like burning flesh on a grill; but he didn’t seem to notice it. He said something; but the words came through garbled—he moved at odd angles, faster than the eye could see at moments, slow enough to seem frozen at others, every limb seemingly on a different rhythm, like those nightmarish collages Ngoc Ha had seen as a child, a narrow, lined eye of an old Đại Việt within the pale, sallow face of a horse; the muzzle of a tiger with the smiling lips and cheeks of a woman—the familiar boundaries shattered until nothing made sense.

(115)

Entrance into deep space is signalled by an electric charge, a voltage that propels Suu Nuoc into a maelstrom of fragmented images. Its danger is its vitality: the “crackle” and “pop” of its conductive path, the rapid expansion and collapse of air, which cause a perceptible burning of his flesh. Stepping through the maelstrom, Suu Nuoc appears as a stream of intersecting images: a “nightmarish” mosaic of man, woman, and animal. A plethora of rhythmic beats pulls limb from limb, exposing each part of the body to different dimensional forces. Suu Noch no longer appears as a stable, unified subject, identifiable in terms of gender and species, but is instead transformed into a collision of angles and rhythms. His resulting appearance is queer: beyond man and woman, human and animal, he moves at “odd angles”, his language “garbled”. Inhabiting this queer space, Suu Noch is visibly the nomadic subject Braidotti describes in *Transpositions* (2006) as “flows of patterns of becoming in an unlimited space somewhere

between the no longer and the not yet” (*Transpositions* 235). As a “flow of patterns”, Suu Noch performs a utopian spatiotemporal play, straddling the “no longer”—a fixed, stable entity, a “past” represented by Ngoc Ha’s memories that return to nightmarish effect—and the “not yet”, the subject that is yet to emerge from the shattered boundaries of deep space. This fragile subject blinks in and out of perception, its vulnerability a product of the charges of energy that bring it into existence. The entrance of humans into deep space therefore interrogates what Braidotti, following Deleuze, has termed the “threshold of sustainability”, a concept that asks where the limits of the forces that structure the subject are, how intensely a subject can run, and how much those bodies are capable of (“The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible” 5). The “I” is framed as a passing manifestation of subjectivity, one that is forged through its simultaneous movements to other coinciding subjectivities. The “flows of patterns” that issue from Suu Noch’s “becomings” trace the contours of a new immanent ontology, one that is as infinitely regenerative as it is intrinsically vulnerable.

The way in which deep space creates hybrid life forms through the interconnection of spaces, temporalities, and subjectivities is foregrounded towards the end of the novella, when Ngoc Ha travels into deep space to retrieve her sister, the banished Princess Ngoc Minh, from the dead:

Ngoc Ha stood, caught in the light—her hand thrust through the door, becoming part of the whirlwind of images beyond ... She didn’t think; merely pulled; and her hand came back from beyond the harmonisation arch; and with it, another hand and an arm and a body. Two figures coalesced from within the maelstrom. The first, bedraggled and mousy, her topknot askew, her face streaked with tears, could only be the missing engineer ... But the other one ... the one whose hand Ngoc Ha was still holding, even now ... She had changed, and not changed ... the sister who had stood on the view-screen with her last message ... her head was well under the harmonisation arch, except that there was about her a presence, a sense of vastness that went well beyond her actual size. She was faintly translucent, and so were her clothes, shifting from one shape to the next, from yellow brocade to nuns’ saffron; the jewellery on her hands and wrists flickering in and out of existence.

(134)

Deep space and the laboratory are contrasted as spaces of activity and stagnancy, respectively: while bodies in the laboratory stand still, the figures that form in deep space come into configuration when they make contact with other entities. The part of Ngoc Ha’s body that is still standing in the laboratory, in another dimension, is described in terms of stillness and inactivity: she “stood”, “caught”. Her hand, which moves into deep space

through the portal, is by contrast in a state of motion: it “thrust” and “pulled” to bring with it “another hand and an arm and a body”. Through the “harmonisation arch”, subjectivities “coalesce”, and transformation occurs with and through the interconnecting forces. The bordered body subsequently disintegrates into an affective “presence” that is both past and present, a sum of all creatures and none: a nomadic life form described by Braidotti as “not only, not even, human” (“The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible” 6).

Through the harmonisation arch, the destroyed Citadel is reborn. In its recovered form, it straddles what is from Ngoc Ha’s and Suu Noch’s perspective the present moment, and the past in which the Citadel was still intact. Princess Ngoc Minh’s presence is made possible only by this conjoining of temporalities: she reappears, unrestricted, in a liminal position. The enormity of this space transforms the image of Ngoc Minh’s person: she takes on “a vastness that went well beyond her actual size” (*Citadel* 134). Because she is a product of this space that exceeds her, she also exceeds the limitations of the body to connect to other times, spaces, and entities. In this utopian re-embodiment, Ngoc Minh is able to live again to behold her sister as a mesh of interconnections, “harmonised” into a multiplicity of shifting shapes. Indeed, the banished Citadel, lost in space and time, and “dead” to the Empire that blasted it out of the sky, still contains “people” of some kind, but these people “didn’t wear faces or bodies anymore”. Instead, they are networks of energy that flicker in and out of multiple spatiotemporal coordinates. Deep space makes these visible: it is the spatial performance of Braidotti’s “joyful mode” of nomadic philosophy that confronts “the overwhelming intensity of bios-zoe” (“The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible” 9):

This implies approaching the world through affectivity and not cognition: as singularity, force, movement, through assemblages or webs of interconnections with all that lives. The subject is an autopoietic machine, fuelled by targeted perceptions and it functions as the echoing chamber of *zōē*. This non-anthropocentric view expresses both a profound love for Life as a cosmic force and the desire to depersonalise subjective life-and-death. This is just one life, not my life. The life in “me” does not answer to my name: “I” is just passing.

(“The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible” 9)

Like Suu Nuoc, who “crackles” with energy as he travels into deep space, Ngoc Minh owes the force of her vitality to the multi-dimensional assemblage from which she is formed. The fixity of the human, and of its bodily markers of race and gender, is undone in deep space: Ngoc Minh is “depersonalised” into “shape” and “colour”. Indeed, she appears to her



sister as pure affectivity: when her sister experiences her presence, it is as emotion and as memory, “she was all of Ngoc Ha’s memories—the hands closing hers around the baby chick; the tall, comforting presence who had held her after too many nights frustrated over her dissertations” (135). It is love and mutual affinity that brings Ngoc Minh to “life” before her sister’s eyes. At the fringes of the universe, in the fragile borderlands of time, space, and materiality, Ngoc Minh burns with the “cosmic force” of life. She appears not as a stable entity, but as a plethora of “passing” “Ts”: her transparent, flickering person vibrates in a transfer of energy between multiple interdimensional points. The effect is an abstract and “de-personalised” set of shapes: both translucent and coloured, Ngoc Minh is complexly woven into the fabric of spacetime. Like a shifting hologram, she disrupts the space, repeatedly taking on a different appearance within the colour gradient. A hybrid and affective subject-in-motion, Ngoc Minh’s transformational body demonstrates what Braidotti considers to be “the kind of subjects we have become” (“The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible” 133).

## 1 Conclusion

Brissett’s, Bodard’s, and Vallorani’s emotional renderings of assemblages that transform and connect across space and time call for a historicised understanding of the human as “more than” human: as a site of affective transformations. The hybrid life forms that take their place in Bodard’s *Xuya Universe*, notably *On a Red Station*, *Drifting* and *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls*, illuminate Braidotti’s formulation of a vulnerable, high-intensity nomadic subject and Butler’s notion of the queer. In Bodard’s *Elysium*, Braidotti’s dynamic, shifting entities that are always on the verge of encounter find correspondences with Butler’s own Deleuzian-Spinozist conceptualisation of subjects that are dependent on and therefore vulnerable to those who occupy their shared space. These apocalyptic selves, who find themselves in relation to their queer desire for others, elucidate Butler’s Hegelian approach to “becoming-other,” in which subjects are transformed by way of the dynamic and shifting interactions made possible by the series of breaks in the computer-generated narrative script. *Elysium*’s technologically mediated correspondence with the reader illustrates modes of being-in-relation that are motivated by a generous and unconditional love. Desire, in this science fictional re-rendering of Braidotti’s “non-anthropocentric view” of “love for Life as a cosmic force”, is a transformative, transcendent mediation between the “self” and the “other”, as is also the case for DR of *Il Cuore Finto* as she seeks to feel human emotion, and for Ngoc Minh of Bodard’s *Citadel* as she searches for her sister in the perilous landscape of deep space. It is the engine for an affective re-encounter of the world and

proves the only hope of possible survival in the final moments of Earth's apocalypse, as the pace of life increases, and the violence of racialised societies—both of the colonising Krestge and their human victims—are exposed at a heightened state of intensity. As the Earth crumbles into irreparable disarray, apocalyptic space permits a shifting from one viewpoint to another, so that characters such as Adrienne emerge in the narrative as a queer assemblage of diasporic cultures and histories that are mediated by technology. Butler's and Braidotti's respective notions of dynamic subjects that "become" through their encounter with others are, in this apocalyptic scramble of space and time, suggestively dependent on the disintegration of a prior world order. Dystopia is, in *Elysium*, the medium through which the "self" can be written at its "othermost", where configurations of inter- and intra-species race and gender lose their potency.

For Vallorani's protagonist, it is the injected narcotic Sintar which allows DR to re-negotiate the delineations of human and android and to "become" through the memories of the human other. By seeking to feel and to remember as humans do, DR embraces the unidentifiable "you" theorised by Butler as a transgression and reformulation of the insular and self-serving subject propounded by Enlightenment humanism. Her encroachment on Angel's memory triggers an additional, unnameable, and unknown viewpoint to form, one that draws together an assemblage of human, android, and alien perspectives both within and beyond the space of the memory.

Broken boundaries and trespassed limits are also the condition by which queer assemblages and new modes of knowing the other can emerge in Bodard's *Citadel*. In pockets of "deep space", space and time converge, triggering encounters between bodies that radically invoke Butler's and Braidotti's respective theorisations of the interdependence of vulnerable bodies and the instability of dynamic and nomadic subjects. Subsequently, the shifting non/human entities that occupy the perilous spatiotemporalities of Bodard's *Citadel*, at once intangible and made manifest, become visible as the product of a series of precarious encounters. These are beings that are brought to life at their extremity, so that they remain, in motion, on the hazardous peripheries of animal, machine, and human. In space, sometime in the far-future, the boundaries that delineate difference both between various life forms and within individual species are exposed as irrelevant and archaic modes of subject identification.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example, *Gender Trouble* (1990), in which she explores how "the imaginary condition of desire always exceeds the physical body through or on which it works", resulting in bodies that are ontologically unstable. In *Undoing*

- Gender* (2004), she expands on this notion to elaborate her argument that “gender itself is internally unstable” (54). In *Senses of the Subject* (2015), she applies her theorisation of queerly desirous, outwards-seeking subjects to her conceptualisation of vulnerability and subject inter-relationality, claiming that “the distinction between self and Other is a dynamic and constitutive one”, a conclusion she situates as the basis for collectivities grounded in a sense of mutual dependency (*Senses of the Subject* 80).
- 2 This and all subsequent translations of Vallorani’s *Il Cuore Finto di DR* are my own translations from the original.
  - 3 Angela Davis has recently explored the idea of “hyper-empathy” in relation to another celebrated work of dystopian SF, Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, in which the young protagonist, Lauren Olamina, is chosen by a community of different racial and generational backgrounds to help them find refuge in a world of violence and corporate supremacy (see Davis, “Planetary Utopias”).
  - 4 See S. Williams.
  - 5 See, for example, Warner-Lewis (308).

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## 5 Pregnancy, by Mistake

### Transgressing Race and Gender through Queered Extraterrestrial Fertility

This chapter extends the previous chapter's exploration into the life forms at the heart of new forms of humanism. In this reading of the humanistic potential of speculative times and spaces, a common demonstration of desire—sex—refuses to function within the parameters of normativity, and new, “unthinkable”,<sup>1</sup> modes of being with and through the “other” come into focus. In her 2018 lecture at the University of Bologna, Rosi Braidotti asked “how do we think the unthinkable when linearity is blocking the trajectory of our thought?” She stresses that the “unthinkable” must “resist the power of understanding”, perhaps because, as she explains in “Teratologies” (2000), “thinking the unthinkable”<sup>2</sup> moves the dominant subject away from its safe zone and towards “alternative figurations of subjects-in-becoming”, that is, “all that the phallogocentric system does not want it to become”. The unthinkable, in this sense, is also another time and space, one beyond the racialised and gendered standards of the Anthropocene.

In this chapter, I propose through an analysis of two works of contemporary SF, Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales* and Regueiro's short story “Planetoide de Oportunidades”,<sup>3</sup> that erroneous sex, that is, queer and interspecies sex characterised by mistaken identities, regret, pain, rupture, and unintended consequences, makes perceptible improbable, impossible, and “unthinkable” lines of anti-racist and non-phallogocentric posthumanist thought. I have chosen these works of Spanish SF because of their particular commentaries on issues of assisted reproduction, same-sex parenting, and gender asymmetry currently in contestation in Spain. The comic tone in which a violent male pregnancy is addressed in *Consecuencias Naturales*, published in 1994, echoes the rage of women's activist groups in Spain during the 1990s as they attempted to bring issues of women's reproductive health onto the political agenda. In 1991, the *Collectivos de Lesbianas Feministas* produced a joint manifesto of lesbian rights together with the *Asamblea de Mujeres de Euskadi*, titled “*Lesbiana que no te*

*Discriminen*". In 1992, the Revolutionary and Cultural Committee for Lesbians (CRECUL) began to meet with political parties to campaign for constitutional rights (López et al. 64). Between 1993 and 1995, the Second National Plan for Equal Opportunities developed and implemented specific gender equality measures (López et al. 35). The plan "highlighted the necessity to promote a more equal distribution of domestic responsibilities between women and men and a more balanced participation of women and men in the labour market" (López et al. 35). Resistance to aspects of women's rights was, however, strong during this period, with an estimated one million Spaniards taking to the streets in an anti-abortion demonstration in October 2009 ("Big Anti-Abortion Rally in Spain").<sup>4</sup> Their efforts, however, were mostly unsuccessful: in 2010, the Organic Law on Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy stipulated that Spanish women had a legal right to obtain an abortion within the first fourteen weeks of pregnancy ("Ley 2/2010"). In 2013, the year of *Historias del Crazy Bar*'s publication, in which "Planetoide de Oportunidades" is featured, Spain's governing party released plans to pass a tighter abortion law. On 1 February 2014, tens of thousands of pro-choice protestors marched to Spain's parliament in Madrid, claiming that the new law would "turn the clock back thirty years" (Govan). On the 23 September, the government abandoned its plans to toughen abortion laws, having failed to reach a consensus on the issue (Kassam). Meanwhile, Spain's Ministry for Health was attempting to scale back advancements in reproductive technologies: on 23 July 2014, Ana Mato Adrover, Spain's Minister for Health, implemented a basic common service portfolio that indirectly inhibited lesbians and/or women who wanted to reproduce without men from having a child (Mills). The portfolio would cover the cost of assisted reproduction for women under forty years of age only if they had a proven fertility problem, meaning that lesbians were "locked out of fertility treatments" (Mills). While the minister denied that her intention was to exclude single women and lesbians from the benefits of the scheme, which has been accused of systematically prohibiting them from assisted reproduction ("Sanidad Limita"). The underlying ambitions of Adrover's portfolio are still widely reflected in public opinion: a 2017 study commissioned by the Council of Europe reported that Spain is experiencing a rapid increase in its public resistance to LGBT reproductive rights. The report, "Salud y Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos de las Mujeres en Europa", which analyses the challenges and obstacles faced when accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare in the continent, identifies a surge in conservative positions only comparable to Hungary (Kohan).

A series of conversations between the protagonists of "Planetoide de Oportunidades", Linda and Nidia, confront the difficulties many women in Spain still face when seeking IVF treatment. The novel's opening scene

details the couple's inability to afford the necessary medical intervention for them to become pregnant. They decide to leave their steady but low-paid employment on Earth for dangerous, lucrative work terraforming an unspecified planetoid in outer space. In doing so, "Planetoide de Oportunidades" explicitly confronts the difficulties gay women in Spain face when seeking IVF treatment. Once on the planetoid, they discover that there is something "wrong" when they have sex, which turns out to be the (physically painful) intervention of native, microscopic bacteria. The bacteria's aim is to make these women able to conceive with one another. Having babies with another organism, the story suggests, is a win for these women, for whom bacteria-mediated pregnancy equates to being free of charge.<sup>5</sup> This form of reproduction also radically extracts itself from heteronormative conceptions of the natural family: while the bacterium is positioned as "nature", lesbian reproduction through bacterial intervention does not risk appearing "natural" in traditional reproductive terms. Instead, reproducing through "nature" alters the status of both "nature" and the "human". Rather than posing the question of whether technology-free lesbian reproduction counts as natural, Regueiro's text demonstrates how "queering" reproduction upends heterosexist conceptions of gender, sexuality, and the family by dislocating the dichotomy between human and its "other".

The pregnancies that occur in both Regueiro's story and Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales* offer a way out from the seemingly endless obstacles that face women as they claim their reproductive rights. In queered scenes of intercourse, masculinity fails to dominate, male human bodies are no longer the sole inseminators, and lesbian sex neglects to be sterile. Queerly science fictional sex stages a radical attack on the sedimented borderlines of human conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality that underlie exclusionary reproductive policies. The result is a vibrant entry into what Braidotti terms "alternative figurations of subjects-in-becoming": babies that, through their intimate imbrication and blurring of human and extraterrestrial entities, reformulate the "self" at its othermost ("Teratologies" 171).<sup>6</sup>

Both the generative potentialities of the queerly "erroneous" sex and its physically and emotionally challenging consequences, from pain and disillusionment to despair, can be understood through queer and humanistic theory on failure. I focus in particular on Halberstam's conception of "the queer art of failure", and the subversive humanism propounded by twentieth-century French humanist Gaston Bachelard. In Bachelard's analysis of the contribution of failed experiments to the progression of modern science, failure appears as a generative model of unveiling unmapped, and as yet unthinkable, scientific territories. I have also drawn on the work of queer and anti-racist eco-feminists Helen Merrick and Kilgore to explore



the way in which extraterrestrial sex that challenges the non-reproductivity of lesbian sex and of female ejaculation exposes the conditional relationship between gender, sexuality, and nature, while also bridging the human/other-than-human divide. Sex with other entities demonstrates a mode of becoming other-than-human that corresponds to Butler's conception of "becoming-other" (*Theory of Assembly*), Spivak's notion of "othering the self" (*Death of a Discipline* 91), and Braidotti's posthumanist "subjects-in-becoming" ("Teratologies" 171). In the shadowlands of heteronormativity, these unthinkable sexual interactions pose a critique of species separatism as an impossible, racist ideal. By exposing how the naturalisation of heterosexual reproductive futurity upholds ideas of racial purity, SF offers a poignant and challenging evocation of the way in which race is experienced through systems of gender stratification. Kilgore's question of whether it is possible to "queer" race in the future is responded to in the affirmative by queered acts of sex in space, which blur and render meaningless the markers of phenotype, physical characteristics, and location that structure racialised identities in the present.

### 1 An Error of Judgement

In *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Halberstam both elaborates on and subverts Edelman's negation of "reproductive futurism" (4). Halberstam instead outlines a vitalist approach to the negation of meaning-making that is closer to Braidotti's ethical vitalism than to Edelman's radically negative politics. He explains the disjointed convergences between his and Edelman's work thus: "My attempt to link queerness to an aesthetic project organised around the logic of failure converses with Edelman's effort to detach queerness from the optimistic and humanistic activity of making meaning" (106). Nico, the hubristic protagonist of Barceló's comic critical utopia, *Consecuencias Naturales*, is a handsome Spaniard who works on board a diplomatically crucial human spaceship in an unspecified far-away galaxy. Nico takes his job as a ship engineer as seriously as his personal mission to seduce every woman in sight. On the day that the humans' spaceship is set to encounter an alien species for the first time, Nico vows to seduce one of the alien "women". The mistaken assumptions and failed actions that define the scene of Nico's subsequent sexual encounter provide openings for the transgression and re-interpretation of both human and alien gender roles. Within the context of the queer art of failure, this section demonstrates how Nico is thwarted at every attempt to engage in what Halberstam terms "the humanistic activity of making meaning" (106). The painfully awkward interaction between Nico and the alien Akkhaia is described as an absurdity: error and awkwardness prevail in this senseless interaction. Sex, which for Nico is usually a reliably monotonous demonstration of his

virility and sex appeal, is stripped of its purpose and its logic: male pregnancy is the unthinkable inverted outcome of Nico and Akkhaia's sexual intercourse. Read within Halberstam's terms, Nico's experience of his pregnancy is profoundly destructive: he is confronted with "the negation of the subject rather than [his] formation, the disruption of lineage rather than its continuation, the undoing of self rather than its activation" (126). Depleted, "undone", and dehumanised, he reads his pregnancy as the unmitigated dissolution of the way in which he constitutes himself as a social subject, both in terms of his masculinity and his humanity.

The first instance of the negation and disruption of Nico's sense of "self" arises when Akkhaia tells him that in other worlds ["otros pueblos"]<sup>7</sup> people have sex with their clothes on: "Había dicho otros pueblos. Luego los Xhroll tenían contacto con otras especies no humanas y no sólo contacto sino, al parecer, también relaciones sexuales" (23) [She had said other worlds. Then the Xhroll had made contact with other non-human species and not only contact, but, it seemed, also sexual relations]. In a troubled bout of free indirect speech, Nico reasons that, contrary to what he had hoped and assumed, it is not both his and Akkhaia's first time sleeping with bodies from different planets. Indeed, he imagines that: "Igual la tía hacía una muesca en el cinturón cada vez que se tiraba a un alienígena" (24): with every act of extraterrestrial sexual conquest she adds a notch to her belt, as "would do a man". Akkhaia's sexual experience translates as what Halberstam has called a queer "disruption" of the "lineage" of male sexual conquerors from which Nico believes himself formed. By associating inexperience with submission, Nico conjectures that he is the virgin and Akkhaia is in "control". He is only able to interpret Akkhaia's previous sexual encounters as a macho desire to claim women's bodies as property and concludes that because her metaphorical belt is lined with previous interplanetary sexual encounters, she must be seeking to assert her dominance over other intergalactic races.<sup>8</sup> Quite to the contrary, Akkhaia's ambition is to save her species from extinction. Unlike Nico, she does not wish to amass meaningless sexual encounters with her sexual partners but produce offspring that will stabilise the declining birth rate on her planet, Xhroll. The narrative's dramatic irony, as the reader becomes aware of the discrepancy between Nico's assumptions and Akkhaia's reality, paints Nico's feelings of inferiority and shame with humour. With each error of judgement, by which Nico finds himself in the uncomfortable and unfamiliar position of inexperience, the scene develops as a comedy. Nico is not only unable to experience the feeling of "conquest" he normally enjoys during sex, but, through a chain of logic he does not fully understand, the supremacy that he previously attributed to humanity is de-centred. Indeed, it appears that humans are late to the party, and have been excluded from the first instances of interplanetary sex.

The comic image of Nico's self-imposed "virginity"—he subsequently admits "el que era prácticamente virgen era él" (24) [it was he who was practically a virgin]—while plainly untrue, positions Nico as the embodiment of the virgin territory over which he imagined himself sovereign. This "realisation" comes to him as a blow: prior to the encounter, he had vowed that "Si había una mujer, una única mujer, sería suya. Ya ni siquiera le importaba lo fea que pudiera ser. Lo importante era que él sería el primer humano en..." (15) [If there was a woman, a single woman, she would be his. He did not even care how ugly she might be. The important thing was that he would be the first human inside...]. The ellipsis prefigures the unknown into which Nico will enter as the "first human" to copulate with an extraterrestrial. This break in the sentence also highlights the importance that Nico places on being the victor, at the expense of further investigation into exactly what sort of entity he is entering. Believing himself to be exemplary of (male) humanity, the ready subject of European Enlightenment humanism, Nico is fixated on his potential to spearhead all instances of humanity's progress and achievement. In the name of humanity, Nico positions the alien "woman" as the vehicle through which he can achieve his Machiavellian ambition to sexually conquer an alien species. Putting himself in a position where he can judge her beauty, "Ya ni siquiera le importaba lo fea que pudiera ser", Nico buffers his supposed masculinity by transforming her into an object of potential pleasure or disgust. When he becomes aware of the fact that he cannot conceive of the sexual act in these unequivocally sexist terms, because Xhroll gender cannot be understood within the binary frame of human gender systems, Nico's sense of masculinity plummets. It becomes clear that he is invested in the ideology of sexism to elevate his own perceived humanity and masculinity: without a woman to objectify, control, and dominate, Nico's desire to be masculine is rendered meaningless. Indeed, when he finally comprehends that despite his perception of her physicality as marked by a feminised beauty, this does not make her a "woman", Nico is no longer able to conceptualise the sexual act. Confused and afraid, his understanding of his own gender identity is thrown into disarray. Instead of making history as the (hu)man who achieves an unprecedented sexual relation, he becomes, quite against his will, a landmark case in male conception.

## 2 Emasculating Race

When towards the end of the sex scene Akkhaia "ejaculates" onto him, Nico is mortified by the viscous substance secreted onto his body, which attaches itself to his skin with an unusual stickiness, and issues a bitter, vomit-like smell: "una especie de sustancia viscosa ... que tenía un olor agrio, casi como un vómito" (27) [a kind of viscous substance ... that had a sour

smell, almost like vomit]. The image occasions a re-thinking of heterosexual reproduction: in the ultimate queering of Nico's usual sexual encounters, alien "semen" is secreted onto Nico's hands and penis. The foulness of its odour, heightened by the pain he also experiences during the encounter "había dolor también" (142) [there was pain too], evokes the revulsion Nico later feels towards his pregnancy, which he views as the de-railing of "proper" masculinity and sovereign humanity. Nico's sense of shame is estranged from the narrative voice, which, in describing the "sustancia viscosa" in the foulest of terms—as vomit—appears to take delight in Nico's repulsion. Indeed, the text joyously renders Nico's "undoing" as a timely act of feminist catharsis, echoing instances of feminist violence in earlier women's SF. Nico's penetration recalls Jael's cold-blooded murder of a sexist soldier in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975); the eradication of men through disease in James Tiptree Jr.'s *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* (1976); and the feminist undertones of the "chestbursters" in Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien*, the infant species of the Xenomorph XX121 who hatch inside the stomachs of men aboard the *Nostramo* and penetrate through their chests to be "born". Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016), winner of the 2017 Bailey's Prize for Women's Fiction, also attests to the endurance of the theme of violent feminist retribution in contemporary SF.<sup>9</sup> As Róisín O'Gorman and Margaret Werry have noted, "Failure hurts. Failure haunts. It comes laced with shame, anger, despair, abjection, guilt, frustration—affects we usually wish away or hide" (4). Indeed, Nico's failure to dominate is particularly threatening to his sense of "self" simply because his identity is precariously constructed around the assumption that on board the spaceship *Victoria*, he rules the roost.

When the consequences of his encounter with Akkhaia turn out not to be consistent with this supposition, and he is impregnated against his will, Nico has a breakdown: he feels like howling in despair "sintió ganas de aullar de desesperación" (33), his fists are clenched in rage "los puños apretados de rabia" (27), a tide of frustration courses through his body "una marea de frustración recorriéndole el cuerpo" (27), and he succumbs to embarrassment "El pensamiento le dio vergüenza" (46) [the thought of it embarrassed him]. The sharp physical pain, "dolor" (142), which he suffers during sex, quickly converts into enduring and melodramatic physio-emotional agony, and he handles the affair with as little grace as (humanly) possible. His exaggerated response to his failure to be a "man" trembles with the ontological uncertainty precipitated by traditional humanism's inability to accept failure as a mark of humanity: that is, the failure of the European man to live up to that highly controlled and invariable subject position. Enlightenment humanism's problematic rejection of human failure has been explored within the context of Western science by twentieth-century French humanist Gaston Bachelard, who traces a history of productive

mistakes in modern science. In her analysis of Bachelard's work, *Gaston Bachelard: The Subversive Humanist* (1991), Mary McAllester Jones views this attempt to establish a genealogy of "successful" scientific errors as a radical subversion of traditional humanism's reliance on the false ideal of human infallibility (173). She takes as her example Bachelard's writing on the famed error-fraught experiment of Nobel Prize winner Albert Abraham, known as the Michelson-Morley experiment, which resulted in the modification of the fundamental principles of modern science: "Mais enfin quand l'échec de Michelson est devenu indéniable, la science a dû modifier ses principes fondamentaux. Ainsi prit naissance la science relativiste" (Bachelard 58) [But when Michelson's failure finally became undeniable, science was forced to reconsider its fundamental principles. And so, relativistic science was born"].<sup>10</sup> In response to traditional humanism's reluctance to accept error as productive, Bachelard offers examples of the evidenced potential of human failure to argue the link between progress, a central humanistic principle, and incompleteness, the necessary requirement for possible development. Indeed, as McAllester argues, Bachelard's work reveals that there is significant humanistic potential to be found in failure:

Failure is something we have all learned to fear and to judge, to criticise in others and avoid in ourselves. But why? It seems to be in some way an ontological threat, and the self-doubt and at worst self-destruction to which it leads will bear this out. Failure threatens our sense of our own completeness, of the coherence and control which we have learned to regard as the preeminent and defining characteristics of human beings. Traditional humanism cannot cope with human failure. Yet it is a fact of human experience, which Bachelard faces and uses, making central to his own subversive humanism. Failure to understand means incompleteness, but incompleteness from another point of view is openness, possibility, progress.

(McAllester Jones 173)

The relationship between failure and opportunity is made explicit in both Nico's experience of physical agony and the searing pain felt by Nidia in Regueiro's short story "Planetoide de Oportunidades", when she makes love to her partner Linda. During this failed act of sexual intimacy, Linda becomes aware that something is wrong, "algo iba mal" (90), when Nidia issues a "grito incontenible" (70) [uncontainable scream], a scream that more closely resembles that of a farm animal than a human cry, "nunca había gritado como acababa de hacer, prácticamente un alarido de socorro donde la voz se había distorsionado hasta el ganado animal" (70) [never in his life had he shouted as he had just done, practically a cry for help during which his voice had distorted into that of a cattle animal]. In a moment of intimate sexual agony, Nidia's tongue and legs turn into spears "Su

lengua y sus dedos casi convirtieron en lanza” (70) [his tongue and fingers became like spears], and, filled with fright “espanto” (71), she separates her body slowly from her partner’s. This is the point at which a new entity is conceived: the bacteria’s alteration of the biology of human reproduction results in Linda and Nidia producing a human-bacteria child. The pain experienced by Nidia can be read in terms of the violence incurred by disengaging from normative systems of gender and race during the formation of a new and multiplicitous entity. As in *Consecuencias Naturales*, the narrative suggests that the formation of hybrid creatures incurs violence: sometimes physical, but always ontological and discursive, the latter of which is expressed through the image of the tongue that transforms into a spear, “Su lengua ... convirtieron en lanza”. The violence of this scene can also be explored in terms of what Braidotti has theorised as “the pain of disengagement from *anthropos*”: indeed, the sexual unity of bacteria cells and lesbian bodies, and the joining of Nico’s male body with the Xhroll alien, constitutes a rupture from anthropocentric conceptions of human reproduction (“Posthuman Critical Theory” 16).

In both cases, humans find themselves outside their own conceptual boundaries. Nico experiences the failure of his pregnancy as the dissolution of the way in which he defines and relates to the world: it poses what McAllester Jones identifies as an “ontological threat”, obliterating his rootedness in a fixed and stable dominant gender and racial identity. Where initially he is described as the proud supplier of all the markers of privileged human masculinity, his teeth “perfectamente blancos” (13) [perfectly white], his body “liso, fuerte” (109) [smooth, strong], his subjectivity “único. Macho” (109) [singular. Male]. Nico not only loses his sense of maleness, but also what he feels is his “humanity”. He becomes an abstraction unto himself, estranged from his body into a comic object. He simply “cannot cope” with, as he sees it, the implosion of his human, masculine “self”: “coherence and control” evade him; he no longer experiences his body with clarity as “único”, separate, and self-standing. Instead, his world is plunged into darkness: “Muchas veces se despertaba tapándose la boca con las manos para no gritar, viscoso de sudor, oliendo a miedo, en completa oscuridad” (109) [Many times he woke up covering his mouth with his hands so as not to scream, viscous with sweat, smelling of fear, in complete darkness]. Into this darkness fall Nico’s sexist ideals and racist assumptions, making space for a different understanding of the relationship between the human and the other-than-human to emerge. This ontological and discursive shift is anticipated by “un pozo sin fondo” [the bottomless well] that Nico sees when, during sex, the alien opens her mouth:

Entonces abrió la boca de golpe y Nico tuvo la vertiginosa sensación de que, lo que momentos antes era un castillo que había que tomar, se había convertido en un pozo sin fondo que lo tragaría. Descontroladamente

se separó, jadeante, de su boca abierta y para cubrir su confusión la arrastró hacia la cama tratando de convertir su arrebató de miedo en un frenesí de deseo (26).

[Then she opened her mouth, and Nico had the vertiginous sensation that while moments before she had been a castle which he was about to capture, she had now become a bottomless well that he was drowning in. Panting, he separated himself uncontrollably from her open mouth and, with the intention of hiding his confusion and converting his fear into a frenzy of desire, dragged her towards the bed.]

Nico separates himself from Akkhaia's mouth with the same disgust and anxiety as Nidia pushes away Linda's spear-like body in Regueiro's "Planetoide". From being the embodiment of the very essence of the singular, agentic male subject of Enlightenment humanism, caught up in what Halberstam terms "the fantasy of liberty" (46), Nico becomes captive to a nightmarish experience of fear, suffocation, and vertigo.<sup>11</sup> The narrative is clear in expressing that this is a trap of his own making: the metaphor of the captured castle in this section of free indirect discourse evokes the way in which Nico conceptualises sex in the age-old terms of war. By framing his sexual relations as such, Nico makes himself a slave to the desire to fulfil what Halberstam terms "the fantasy of liberty" (46): the victorious and limitless freedom of the singular and agentic male humanist subject at the expense of the conquered "other". Paradoxically captive to this notion of freedom, his pursuit of the ego-fulfilling sex act is self-defeating, and ultimately costs him his freedom, his "masculinity", and his "humanity". The allure of supreme manhood, and of human untouchability, is exposed as false promises: constructing his selfhood within these masculinist fantasies of dominance makes Nico akin to the man who built his house on sand (Holy Bible, New International Version, Matthew 7:24–27). Profoundly afraid and confused, Nico is confronted with the "unthinkable": an encounter between species that upends fixed understandings of racial purity and the hierarchical gender divide. As Nico becomes conscious of the repositioning of his humanity and of his masculinity in this queerly "unthinkable" act, the gendered and racist systems of oppression upon which his confidence relied are pulled out from under his feet. He is left deeply ashamed, estranged from privilege, and faced with a new world for which he is singularly unprepared.

### 3 Queer Fertility

Nico's rushed, unconsidered rationale, which amounts to a failure to understand the possibility that his body might be able to host an alien child, demonstrates the enormously generative potential of erroneous action.



For Nico, a *consecuencia natural* of sex, pregnancy, bears no impactful consequences on the male body. This is evidenced by his improvisational response to Akkhaia's suggestion that he should take birth control because she has not: dismissing her warning as an absurdity, he swallows an Aspirin to reassure her that he is indeed "protected". Their significant misunderstanding demonstrates the way in which kinship structures shift between two sets of cultural and biological norms: instead of "taking precautions" or investigating why she is asking him to use contraception, he infantilises and mocks Akkhaia when he assumes she will be won over by his ruse. Unable to think male pregnancy without technological intervention—the still as yet "unthinkable" in Barceló's version of the science fictional future—Nico relies on the norms of Terran culture to structure his act of deception against Akkhaia: on Earth, as in space, human men cannot get pregnant without an artificial womb. Nico's pregnancy, free from technological intervention, is in Halberstam's terms a critique of the norms of common sense (88–9).<sup>12</sup> By subverting the conventions of sex, the novel explores queer and radically humanist modes of knowledge production that make space for alternative perspectives and practices.

The normative practice that particularly comes under fire in both Barceló's and Regueiro's stories is that of reproductive kinship, which is presented as a means of producing and reproducing heteropatriarchal ontologies. These works claim that humankind has for too long taken for granted the concept of the nuclear family as a "natural" given. I do not intend to focus here on what has been deemed "natural" or "unnatural" within various strands of normative theorising but will instead explore the potentialities of "erroneous" extraterrestrial pregnancies with regard to possible queer modes of kinship that have been grounded in specific histories, contexts, and geographies. As the fictitious scientist Dunyasha Bernadetteson counter-intuitively exclaims in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, "Humanity is unnatural!" (11). By casting humanity into radical alterity, Nico's pregnancy can be understood as neither inherently natural nor unnatural: as demonstrated by the differing attitudes of the humans and the Xhroll towards Nico's pregnancy, what is deemed "natural" and "unnatural" takes meaning from historically and spatially situated forms of knowledge production. Instead, Nico's capacity to bear a child offers a commentary on the social and cultural embeddedness of "nature". Contemporary queer eco-feminism, in particular Gaard's essay "Towards a Queer Ecofeminism" (1997), Merrick's "Queering Nature" (2008), Kilgore's "Queering the Coming Race?" (2008), and Haraway's extensive body of work, including *Primate Visions* (1989) and *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991), has offered particularly sensitive responses to cultural emphasis on the link between "natural" sexuality and reproductive sexuality. Gaard, for example, systematically deconstructs the hypocrisy with

which dominant ideology charges queers with “transgressing the natural order” while Western culture “has constructed nature as a force that must be dominated” (27). She concludes that “the ‘nature’ queers are urged to comply with is none other than the dominant paradigm of heterosexuality—an identity and practice that is itself a cultural construction” (27). Indeed, Nico’s pregnancy appears perfectly natural to the Xhroll: he is to them a fitting choice for an *abbas*,<sup>13</sup> a child bearer. For Nico, however, his new reproductive role is a perversity of masculinity and humanity that estranges him from the (human) heteronormative structures that make him easily self-identify as conclusively masculine, male, and human. In the context of queer eco-criticism, Merrick explores the way in which the “human” appears through the codification of nature:

The ways in which we define “human” are obviously complexly intertwined with our definitions and codifications of “nature” and how we separate the “human” from the non-human/other. Human/other boundaries are also, of course, prime sites for contestations and reinforcements of notions of sexuality.

(219)

Desperate for more offspring to regulate their birth rate crisis, the Xhroll’s flexible attitude towards what is and what is not natural, as far as reproduction is concerned, demonstrates that the ways in which “natural” is understood depend largely on social, political, and religious interests. What seems most “natural” to them is to do whatever they can to repopulate the planet. This racial imperative renders the human/Xhroll divide negligible in light of the greater need to ensure that a subsequent generation exists on Xhroll. Nature, sexuality, and the human/other divide appear in this context as contingent on the objectives of dominant ideologies. Perceived as fulfilling the natural role of *abbas*, Nico’s human rights are re-codified according to Xhroll law, such that the humans do not attempt to alter what their intergalactic neighbours view as Nico’s natural biological condition. Nico’s pregnancy is therefore simultaneously consistent with Xhroll law and a violent “break” from human ontologies that dictate what constitutes normative procreation. It is spatially and culturally defined, meaningless unless a site of ideological inscription.

The conditional relationship between gender, sexuality, and nature, which is very dramatically illustrated by the failure of Nico’s desire to sexually dominate, can be elaborated through a reading of Halberstam’s analysis of the 2006 collage-paintings of queer artist J. A. Nicholls, in particular *Here and Now*; *Higher Ground*; and *New Story* (*Queer Art of Failure* 140–44). He argues that Nicholls explores the gendered female

form's association with the natural world, while demonstrating its refusal or removal from the codification of gender into nature:

These new paintings attempt to represent femininity as a blurring of the female form with the natural landscape and as a violent cutting out of the figure altogether. The surreal and often hyper-artificial landscapes represent a queer femininity as a refusal of conventional womanhood and a misidentification with the logic of gender variance as the other of normativity.

(Queer Art of Failure 142)

The trope of women's association with the Earth, the subject of long-standing critique from feminist literature, notably Susan Griffin's *Women and Nature* (1978), is violently and systematically (under)cut by Nicholls's scissors. The subsequent hyper-artificiality of the settings occupied by Nicholls's figures, in comparison to the "natural landscape" in which they initially appear, queerly exposes the artifice of tropes of conventional womanhood. In Nicholls's paper collage, *Touch Me Now* (2005), a woman cut into fragments reclines in front of a grassy bank.<sup>14</sup> The woman's non-cohesive interaction with the splintered natural environment, in which clouds of a simple design are set in a sky painted in Fauvist colours, offers an image of queer "misidentification" with nature. The fragmentary, almost hostile re-piecing of the woman's body within the grassy bank in which she lays suggests the possibility of a new, dynamic relationship between the human and the natural world once the well-worn analogy of mother nature and her supposedly heterosexual, reproductive imperative has been reconsidered.

Viewed within the context of feminist art's exploration of processes of disidentification from the normative logic of the gender/nature relationship, in particular "the violent cutting out of the figure" in Nicholls's work (Halberstam 142), the pain experienced by Nidia during bacteria-mediated sexual intercourse with Linda signals the separation of the lesbian woman's body from normative notions of the relationship between gender and nature. This radical separation and subsequent coalition or re-piecing together of woman and nature suggests that the designation of the lesbian as non-reproductive is a misidentification. The pregnant Nidia is no longer "the other of normativity": the biological givens that structure the systems of heteronormativity on Earth—in this case, that lesbian sex cannot result in pregnancy—cease to apply on the planetoid. Here, in the spatial fringes of the known universe, gender is thrown into question through the "symbiosis" (102) of bacteria and human. Rather than gesture towards Edelman's conception of the queer "death drive", the violence

of the act demonstrates that queer bodies can harmonise with the natural world to disengage from the expectations of gender performance and species separatism. Indeed, by way of the displacement of the human/other boundary, the phenomenon of bacteria-mediated lesbian pregnancy contests normative understandings of sexuality. The resulting offspring are described by Alejandra as “la unica armonia posible en dos especies tan encontradas” (103). The bacteria’s painful, unwarranted, and non-consensual intervention into the reproductive capacity and sexuality of the lesbian women appears discordant with the idea of “harmony”. However, the text does little to problematise this proposition, with Linda sparing a minimal amount of time to mourn her partner Nidia: even during her tearful reaction to her partner’s death she agrees to contribute to the raising of Alejandra’s hybrid child. The narrative even suggests that this problematic mode of “harmony” between “human” and “nature” is the only means of countering the violence of human colonisation: upon their arrival to the planetoid, the human terraformers used atomic bombs to eradicate all life forms from the planetoid. The humans’ treatment of the bacteria, which evokes the way in which the humans destroyed their natural environment on Earth to the extent that it became uninhabitable, indicates that their assumption of authority over other species is the driving force of their inclination towards self-sabotage. Had they not defaced their blue planet, they would not be perilously skirting the prospect of apocalypse in the form of a planetary homelessness. In this story, human claims to inimitable agency presume the autonomous power of mankind, declare humanity sovereign, and demand that it be alone in the universe.

The narrative sentiment, as expressed through Alejandra’s interpretation of the bacteria’s ambitions, looks favourably on the radical attempt of the microscopic species to approach humankind, however invasively. The bacteria assert their value by offering lesbian women sperm-free fertility. It appears that the bacteria have little to gain by uniting with lesbian bodies, and are simply demonstrating species compatibility: they do not need to reproduce with humans to survive. Indeed, unlike the Xhroll of *Consecuencias Naturales*, the bacteria are near immortal: they are thousands of years old and, as single-cell organisms, they are highly resilient to temperature, pressure, radiation, and radioactive decay. By entering into the bodies of humans that, in the case of Nidia and Linda, might potentially welcome an invasive foreign body to conceive—the couple complain throughout the opening section of the story that they cannot afford IVF—the bacteria find a way for humans to recognise that they are cooperative, resourceful, and a permanent inhabitant of the planetoid.

The resulting human-bacteria offspring represent more than a possible alien-human alliance in the future: they embody a radically re-sexualised

and anti-racist collectivity formed between bacteria, Alejandra, and Linda. The pluralised subjectivity formed through this serendipitous union points towards a form of reproductive queer kinship that addresses an anti-racist politics: it is suggestive of Kilgore's question of "queering the coming race?" by framing the issue of human descendancy within the context of queer sexuality. When Linda meets Alejandra's child for the first time, the narrative combines issues of queer kinship with the question of human descendancy in the future:

Linda miraba fascinada al pequeño ser gimoteante que descansaba entre las toallas que forraban la caja, en nada y en todo parecido a los bebés vistos con anterioridad y a la imagen de la descendencia deseada que Nidia y ella se habían dedicado a imaginar en días de planes sobre el futuro (102).

[Linda watched the little wriggling being with fascination as it rested between the towels that lined the box. It was both nothing and everything like the babies she had seen before and the image of the imagined offspring that her and Nidia had spent days imagining while making plans about the future].

Watching the "ser gimoteante" with fascination, Linda acknowledges the tiny package of radical otherness with wonder and with joy. In doing so, she demonstrates a desire to overturn the shame, failure, and pain that she suffered during the breakdown of her relationship with Nidia by engaging in the positive process of raising her extraterrestrial "descendencia". Linda's affirmative action authenticates this subversive life form: she claims the tiny being ["ser"] that Alejandra has given birth to as the unexpected, posthuman descendent that she and Linda spent so many days hoping that they would one day create for themselves.

Lesbian women are, in this story, central to the process of deconstructing racialised notions of the human family. The story engages with an intersectional argument often posed in gender and critical race theory: racial difference is enacted and perpetuated through normative gender identities. Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) argues that "gender identities come to exemplify the immutable cultural differences that apparently arise from absolute ethnic difference", or in another formulation, "racism partially determines the content of black gender roles and interrelation of sexual and labour exploitation" (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 85, 179). These have been central arguments throughout Gilroy's career, culminating in his more recent assertion that "sex and gender are experienced—lived conflictually—at a heightened pitch that somehow connotes race" (*Against Race* 196). This logic can be attributed to some of the conclusions made by hooks in her 1981 work *Ain't I a Woman*, in which she theorised the

connection between the gendered body and the perpetuation of racial bloodlines in relation to slavery in the Americas during the nineteenth century. She noted that women were forced to “breed” a lineage of slaves that not only perpetuated racial segregation but also provided a steady stream of colonial income. In “Planetoide”, Alejandra experiences this in the reverse: she is the colonising terraformer that, paradoxically, has produced a creature that might offer a way out of ideologies that justify colonial violence and capitalist labour. This storyline elucidates Gilroy’s and hooks’s emphasis on the role of gender identity in buffering notions of ethnic difference by posing queer intercourse as the means of deconstructing racialised hierarchies. The story’s interrogation into issues of lesbian reproduction is the point of entry into possible resolutions to humanity’s unflinching insistence on species segregation. The “queering” of the relationship between gender and racial uniformity resists the doubly oppressive force of racially demarcated borders between ethnic groups and between humanity and its “other”. Neither the distinction between human and extraterrestrial, nor between racialised groups within the human species, is clearly legible in this queer entity.

To respond to Kilgore’s question of whether the coming race can be queered, I would suggest that the combination of Linda’s and Nidia’s lesbian sexuality and the gender trouble issued by the bacteria’s implication in their reproductivity can result in a queering of the borders of “human-kind”. Indeed, sexual interactions between queer humans and aliens prompt a hegemonic shift that not only upsets the autonomy and centrality of the Anthropocene, but also simultaneously troubles the idea that racial homogeneity can be guaranteed through heterosexual reproduction. Queer reproductivity troubles race in more ways than one, offering multiple paths towards a reconfiguration of the relationship between human and extraterrestrial raciology.

#### 4 Inclusive Descendancy

*Descendencia*, which can be translated as “offspring” or “descendants”, implies a racialised and heterosexually produced unit. While Linda’s interest in her “descendencia deseada” (102) might be read as the echo of a heteropatriarchal concern for lineage, one that might reduce the myriad of relational possibilities associated with queer sexuality to what Halberstam terms an “authenticating notion of longevity” (72), I would conversely argue that the term can be read in this context as a queering of the concepts of heritage and ancestry. This suggestion responds to Kilgore’s suggestion that the queering of the known world incurs a shift from a human history partitioned and cordoned off from environmental history to a more holistic view:

To ask if the universe may be queered is to inquire whether humankind's understanding of itself and its place in the world can undergo a radical change. Can we imagine futures in which our descendants differ profoundly with ourselves while existing in a shared history?

(Kilgore 234)

For human descendants to “differ profoundly” from their ancestors, these entities have to be immune from species categorisation, and instead be identified based on characteristics other than phenotype, physicality, and location. Kilgore's notion of a queered race might be instructive here: he uses the concept to decentralise humankind and open up for a genealogy that includes those who, as Braidotti puts it, “have never been considered human”. The idea of a “shared” yet non-linear, non-heterosexual, and non-rationally homogeneous descendant moves humanity beyond an exclusionary human-other dialectic, signalling an end to the Anthropocene in an apocalypse of the unified, singular human species. “Descent” comes to mean interconnections, meeting points, interdependencies, and the shifting of kinship structures. Thus, the queer alien child undermines the unity and separateness of heterosexual and anthropocentric genealogies. Its complex, hybrid, and contradictory nature is reflected in Linda's description of it as [“en nada y en todo”]: it resembles all and none of the babies she has seen before. “Failed” sex and unintended queer reproductivity demonstrate that “natural” is a fluid descriptor, culturally and historically situated in social and biological norms. In the extraterrestrial spaces of the planetoid, “natural” is shown for what it is: spatially determinate and politically and ethically mediated. If for Kilgore there is “a ‘straight’ relationship between baseline humanity and any other race or culture” (244), then in “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, the heterosexual correlation between the human race and its microbiological-other is upended through the queering of normative reproduction.

## 5 Conclusion

Norms, it appears, do not travel well between galaxies. Regueiro's and Barceló's stories upset the standardisation of sexuality as they draw on the utopian science fictional imaginary to explore how unexpected and mistake-laden sexual encounters with extraterrestrial species provoke a shift in the way in which humans navigate sex/gender systems. During these human/extraterrestrial encounters in interstellar space, the heterosexual bind unravels as spatially segregated species cease to exist at a remove from one another. In *Consecuencias Naturales*, Nico is confronted with the fact that Xhroll bodies are, despite his best efforts, un-mappable within human formations of racial hierarchy and binary gender identity. His coupling with



Akkhaia disables the hierarchical and violent power relations that Nico assumes sex with a Xhroll “woman” will reinforce. Straddling human and Xhroll views of what is “queer” and what is natural, the “baby” that grows inside its unwilling father is the utopian evocation of an entity that simultaneously undercuts the clarity of species differentiation and racist conceptions of ethnic divides. For the bacteria of “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, their contribution to the creation of a hybrid species undermines the humans’ colonising efforts to eradicate them from the planetoid. This confronts and resists humanity’s violent history as “custodians” of planet Earth, while also suggesting that, somewhat paradoxically, humanity’s only means of survival is extinction in the form of merging and metamorphosing with another species.<sup>15</sup> We might consider, then, that Kilgore’s question of “queering the coming race?” is perhaps not merely a possibility for the future, but the essential and sole means of preserving some form of the “human race” within the unthinkable materiality of a mixed-species entity.

## Notes

- 1 She defines the unthinkable as thinking “the anomalous, the monstrously different not as a sign of pejoration but as the unfolding of virtual possibilities that point to positive alternatives for us all” (“Teratologies” 172). Specifically, these possibilities and alternatives arise through thinking about the possibility of collective extinction and thinking about the unassimilated or unrepresented lives that are “othered” in relation to human existence. For an elaboration of her conception of the unthinkable as collective extinction, see *The Posthuman*, in which she explains that extinction, or collective death, is the “inhuman conceptual excess: the unrepresentable, the unthinkable, and the unproductive black hole that we all fear” (131). For further exploration of her conception of representations of non-human life as unthinkable, see Braidotti, *Transpositions* 109–10; see also “Teratologies: Monstrous Technoscapes.”
- 2 A comparison might be made here between Braidotti’s “unthinkable” and Spivak’s notion of planetarity. Spivak suggests that “in the context of planetary, random means nothing, which no thought can weigh, no thought can weigh the planetary” because it is “the attempt to write the self at its othermost, and blur the outlines between that graphic and globalisation ... to allow through pluralisation the imagining of a necessarily and yet unimaginable planetarity, ways that we do not know yet” (“Planetary Utopias” 1:44:30–1:44:42, 1:33:50–1:34:30). In this sense, a prominent correspondence between the planetary and Braidotti’s “unthinkable” might be the magnitude of the scope of both these terms, which is employed to precipitate the imagining of spaces beyond the global formations of race and gender that tie social subjects to ideological governance.
- 3 From *Historias del Crazy Bar*.
- 4 Police estimated 250,000 attendees, but the regional government said that there were over a million protestors present, while the protests organisers claimed there was a turnout of two million (“Big Anti-abortion Rally in Spain”).

- 5 While gay activism has not demonstrated unanimous support for queer reproductivity, with some members of the queer community believing that little is to be gained by replicating heteronormative modes of futurity (Edelman), a number of important works of critical theory do support lesbian pregnancy (Pepper; Brill and Toevs; Wyer et al.) and the increase in research and development for medical fertility treatments for queer parents (Mamo).
- 6 From Spivak's conception of tracing the lineaments of the planetary by othering the self. See *Death of a Discipline* 91.
- 7 This and all subsequent translations of Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales* are my own translations from the original.
- 8 The irony in this scene, during which Nico refuses to predict that the alien might have different motivations for their sexual intercourse than he does, is suggestive of James Tiptree Jr.'s "The Women Men Don't See", in which Don Fenton consistently demonstrates an inability to understand the women's behaviour except through his own frame of reference, which leaves him astounded when they express their desire to leave with the aliens instead of remaining on Earth.
- 9 Alderman, a protégée of Margaret Atwood, envisages a world in which, almost overnight, women around the globe sprout electricity-emitting glands in the palms of their hands and use their new weapon to emancipate themselves from the men who bully, belittle, and enslave them. In each instance, the male body fails itself: it fails to demonstrate physical superiority by losing a physical fight against a woman (*The Female Man*); it becomes incurably susceptible to a disease that women are unaffected by (*Houston, Houston, Do You Read?*); it bridges the reproductive gender binary when men are impregnated by the Xenomorph XX121 species, becoming carriers for alien offspring (*Alien*); and it finally emerges as the most vulnerable gender (*The Power*).
- 10 My own translation from the original.
- 11 Nausea and vertigo, the physical symptoms of Nico's existential crisis, are also, according to Halberstam, physical manifestations of "queer shame": she argues that "the physical experience of shame records in dramatic fashion (a blush, vertigo, overwhelming panic) a failure to be powerful, legitimate, proper" ("Shame and White Gay Masculinity" 225). Nico's involvement in a sexual act beyond the anthropocentric imaginary and estranged from humanity's binary system of gender differentiation excludes him from the privilege he feels he ought to have access to. Unable to adhere to the normative standards required of his gender, race, and class, he believes that he has lost the right to be "powerful, legitimate, proper". Halberstam suggests that "the subject who emerges as the subject of gay shame is often a white and male self whose shame in part emerges from the experience of being denied access to privilege" (223). She notes that seventeen of the forty-five participants at the "Gay Shame" Conference that she attended in Michigan in 2003 were "white" gay men "and only a handful of people of colour were listed for the entire event" (223). She concludes that the appeal of the concept to mostly "white", queer men makes it "a powerful tactic in the struggle to make privilege (whiteness, masculinity, wealth) visible" (220), and that this is the use-value of identifying the biases around the notion of "queer shame". Indeed, Nico's shame also derives from a

- feeling that his privilege has been curtailed. As an attractive “white” Hispanic, Nico has become accustomed to the trappings of privilege: easy access to reputable and presumably well-remunerated work as an engineer, the propensity to revel in a comfortable sense of masculinity, the ability to effortlessly navigate social norms. Within arm’s reach of privilege, and yet, seeing it denied to him, he suffers total humiliation. The narrative expresses this reaction as comically hypercondriachal, his wailing and mourning a demonstration of the weakness of the position of privileged masculinity, which so easily succumbs to shame.
- 12 Halberstam elaborates on Antonio Gramsci’s critique of hegemonic “common sense” [“buon senso”] in her theorisation of the queer art of failure, arguing that “what Gramsci terms ‘common sense’ depends heavily on the production of norms, and so the critique of dominant forms of common sense is also, in some sense, a critique of norms” (*Queer Art of Failure* 89). For Gramsci, common sense that is grounded in normative ways of perceiving the world: “commits the grossest errors ... for common sense it is ‘true’ that the world stands still while the sun and the whole firmament turn around it, etc.” (*Prison Notebooks Vol. 2* 909). For more about Gramsci’s writing on the notion of “common sense” see, for example, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971) and *Socialismo e Fascismo* (1921).
  - 13 Somewhat perversely, abba is the Aramaic for “daddy” or “papa”, the Greek transliteration of which (Αββα) is common in Biblical language as a word that signifies a closer relationship with God “the Father” (Byrne 56).
  - 14 Images viewed on the website of the Transition Gallery. See Nicholls.
  - 15 This has also been a hypothesis posited by Nick Bostrom, the Founding Director of the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University. Bostrom, who has become known for his work on existential risk, when reasoning how likely it is that humanity will become extinct at some point in the future, contends that “The longer the period in the future that we consider, the greater the chance that humanity will break out of this human condition, either downwards, by going extinct, or upwards, by maybe developing into some kind of posthuman” (00:10:10–10:22).

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## 6 Non-Reproductive Planetary Communities

### Race, Gender, Kinship, and Forgetting to Conform

Moving from reproductive kinship to non-reproductive forms, this chapter extends my analysis of how systems of race and gender can be upended by the different kinds of humanistic interrelations proposed by a reading of the works of Butler, Braidotti, Gilroy, Spivak, and Halberstam alongside my corpus of SF. I focus, in particular, on characters from works of critical dystopian SF that, in being estranged from their biological families, also fail to conform to human systems of race and gender. A failure to conform to race and gender-based kinship roles both unhinges the concept of race from that of the nation, to which it is often uncritically wed to, and makes possible alternative communities that extend beyond the scope of the nuclear or biological family. These are malleable and open alliances that demonstrate the kinds of solidarities that are at the heart of “planetary” humanisms, based in “will, inclination, mood, and affinity” (Gilroy, *Against Race* 133). Such collectivities demonstrate modes of community-building that respond to the precarity and uncertainty of life in dystopian worlds. Conflict-driven diaspora migrants, low-standing citizens in segregated cities, and synthetic life forms illegally roaming public space participate in modes of kinship that navigate the spatial discontinuities of war-torn and post-apocalyptic planets and counter the re-appearance and crystallisation of class and race-based borders.

The first section of this chapter, “*Potentia* in the Scrap Heap: Embracing the ‘Mess’ and Unbecoming Woman”, explores the way in which DR, the biorobotic protagonist of Vallorani’s *Il Cuore Finto di DR*, embodies a gruesome picture of human failure on multiple counts, evidencing the self-destructive tendencies of an Enlightenment-based pursuit of human progress.<sup>1</sup> As the broken product of human ambition, she is able to perform an anomalous femininity that subverts and reconfigures gendered kinship roles. The following section “Anomalous Femininity, Forgetting to be Mother” examines how DR’s accidental and erroneous body becomes the condition by which she can perform an anomalous femininity, both failing

to be feminine and failing to perform the role required of her as adoptive “mother” to a human girl. In doing so, DR engages in what Halberstam has termed “an adaptive affiliative process”, creating around her person a morphing, shifting kinship system that simultaneously de-essentialises the nuclear family and undermines the concept of race as the basis for community (81). These kinds of adaptive families, as Butler argues, and as is the topic of the next section, are not uncommon at a time in which the biological family is increasingly de-centralised by, for example, divorce and conflict-driven migration (*Antigone’s Claim* 22). I focus on the relationship between DR and the young Pilar as possibly elucidating Butler’s contention that the reciprocity of vulnerability means that we must learn to live together, across differences (*Theory of Assembly* 27), also additionally demonstrating the flexible, affinity-based kinships theorised by Gilroy as foundational to his planetary humanism. Novels such as *Sulla Sabbia di Sur*, in which a protagonist has lost all recollection of his biological mother, demonstrate how flexible and adaptive kinship networks can occupy and transform the position his mother might have had in his life, as is the subject of the following section (Forgetting the Mother: Alternative Kinship Arrangements). Expanding this investigation into how the failure of some characters in works of SF to create or maintain biological ties can create different kinds of proximities beyond the scope of the nuclear, heteroreproductive, and racial family, I go on to argue that instead of accepting to be held hostage to the expectations of state-authenticated racial families, characters seek forwards-dawning friendships in the temporality of the “to come” (“Deliberate Disavowal”). Finally, I will explore how these friendships rely on a displacement and disavowal of normative spaces (“Kinship as Displacement: Racialised Spaces; the Spatialisation of Precarity; Diaspora”). Fluid, mobile, and based in deliberate kinship choices, these friendships demonstrate the kinds of alliances fostered by “planetary” modes of community-building.

### 1 *Potentia* in the Scrap Heap: Embracing the “Mess” and Unbecoming Woman

DR’s body is multipliciously unintelligible. Only “parcialmente artificiale” (Vallorani, *Il Cuore Finto di DR* 16) [partly artificial], she is indestructible in her “machinic-ness” but also depressed, four-eared, blonde, fat, and rude. Neither fully human nor the android she was programmed to be, she fails to embody either the corporate-designated subjectivity that would make her a sexually suppliant android, or the human persona she must “pass” as in order to survive in the dangerous quarters of inner-city Milan. Rather than attempt to draw together a unified identity for DR by engaging in a quest for her “true self”, the narrative enacts a *bildungsroman* in the



reverse: throughout the course of the novel, DR “unbecomes” from the identity she was constructed to fulfil in the bot factory, demonstrating the nomadcity of the posthuman subject. She disassociates from this identity by framing herself in terms of error: she sees herself as “factory waste”, a “bin-job”, worthy of being assigned to the scrap heap: “Lei è un scarto di fabbrica, un’esercitazione riuscita male, una specie di prova vivente della fallibilità delle intenzioni umane” (149) [she is factory waste, an unsuccessful exercise, a kind of living proof of the fallibility of human intentions]. She is, therefore, a vulnerable body akin to those theorised by Butler, who claims that due to the unequal distribution of vulnerability, some bodies are regarded as more permeable than others (*Theory of Assembly* 226n11). Indeed, it is clear that many humans believe that DR’s body is justifiably permeable to liberal human intervention: Willy, for example, modifies DR’s body against her will, before labelling her as “un rottame” (10) [scrap] and dumping her in the rainy streets of inner-city Milan. As such, DR illuminates the way in which Butler asserts that vulnerability is a political status: as an out-of-use Replicant with the lowest ranking in the social hierarchy, she denied the right to the infrastructural support that could ensure her a safe existence (*Il Cuore Finto* 121).

In response, perhaps, to the fact that humans have so often reminded her of her position of vulnerability by laying claim to her body, DR disassociates herself from her broken materiality: she views herself in terms of “un’esercitazione riuscita male”, a detached experiment. DR’s comic invocation of “[le] intenzioni umane” human fallibility, expressed in free indirect speech, further distances her from her body, a body that she also disidentifies with on the count of both its intended usage as a sex-bot and because, in her view, it epitomises the hubris of humanity’s failed attempt to create androids that can be controlled as part of a subservient labour force.

Unlike the self-annihilating energy of Nicholls’s cut-outs, DR’s self-proclaimed ugliness therefore does not entirely amount to self-loathing: instead, she turns her animosity towards humankind, so that her body exposes the “fallibilità delle intenzioni umane” (149). She therefore not only establishes herself as a product and a projection of human failure, but also as a point of departure towards other forms of “being”. As a hybrid set of interrelations engaged in an agentic relationship to other entities, both human and otherwise, DR demonstrates a way of thinking through and beyond human failure by welcoming its ontological ugliness as the bearer of unexpected connections between diverse entities.

Instead of distancing herself from the deficiencies of humankind, DR becomes permeable to various aspects of human frailty and vulnerability, thus indicating an affinity towards these “human attributes”. Her perhaps least machinic characteristic is a tendency to engage in self-destructive behaviour: DR’s intellectual brilliance stands in harmonic contrast to the

fact that her habitual practices often appear to run contrary to her own best interests, notably her daily intake of the drug Sintar, and her abrupt behaviour towards both her clients and her mixed species next of kin. Her self-destructive impulses align with one of Braidotti's conceptions of the posthuman predicament, where "Moods are manic-depressive, it is advanced capitalism as schizophrenia. Burnout, dropout, depression, [increased] suicide rates in the younger population" ("Critical Humanities"). DR is a material proof of the possibilities spawned by technological advancement, and its destructive, depressive, and unintended consequences. She lives intensively and perilously, navigating post-apocalyptic Milan's scale of contradictions: while the city is fraught with insurmountable danger, it also offers enormous promise as the embryonic stage of a new civilisation. In this sense, DR embodies the focal entity of Braidotti's conception of the "posthuman predicament": she is "the transversal collective assemblage immersed in the contradictions of the fourth industrial revolution and sixth extinction, and affirmatively empowered to act within it" ("Critical Humanities"). As such, she offers an indication of humanity's location, historicity, and condition as a species that is no longer autonomous but "affirmatively" imbricated within the aggregation of an animal, mechanical, and technological cluster.

Not unlike Braidotti's Deleuzian diagnosis of the "manic-depressive" mood of the posthuman condition, it has also been argued that the Enlightenment was characterised by a self-destructive pursuit of intellectual *éclaircie*. Horkheimer famously suggested that the Enlightenment was "destructive" because of its emphasis on "the self-destructive tendency of Reason" (366). Like the autonomous enlightenment "self" who Žižek claims embodies a Cartesian dialectic, DR attempts to separate mind from her body.<sup>2</sup> DR demonstrates these instances of proximity between the self-destructive tendencies of both Enlightenment rationalism and advanced capitalism. She distances and disassociates herself from her materiality, proclaiming her body "ugly" and strange: a plaything of the human species. This results in a stretching of the Cartesian dialectic to dangerous limits: DR privileges her mind over her body to the excessive extent that, in order to intercept the human memories that are essential to her career as a detective, she injects into her arm as much of the hallucinogen Sintar as she can get her hands on. By focusing on her psychological development at the expense of a prudent maintenance of her body, DR approaches Emmanuel Kant's conception of the failure of Enlightenment faith in a pure and perfect human nature driven by a tendency towards rational behaviour. Humanity's historically self-destructive pursuit of self-betterment is reflected in the person of DR: she is "living" proof of the inescapability of human failure and fallibility.<sup>3</sup> For the intellectual historian Eduardo Subirats, the social, technological, and ecological destruction caused by human efforts

to “emancipate” ourselves during the Enlightenment through scientific “progress” detached that project from the scientific logos, a connection that it was bound to maintain under Western Enlightenment humanism (20). Indeed, the grotesque architecture of DR’s body bears witness to the fact that, if the novel is consistent with the story of corporate-built androids popularised by Philip K. Dick, humanity’s attempts to support capitalist ambitions through android labour come at the expense of the rationalism of the scientific model favoured by the Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> This is also demonstrated by the fact of Willy’s botched attempt to turn DR from “un modello extra-lusso” [an extra-luxury model] into “uno sintetico da difesa” [a defence robot] (6), a nonsensical exercise in pseudo-science that results in a creature that is both entirely unsuited to either a career in sex or defence. Rather than attempt to conceal Willy’s misdirected attempts to live out the fantasy of human progress as an amateur scientist, DR accepts and recognises the marks of “destruction” on her body that bear witness to counter-productive human ambitions to create an all-purpose posthuman materiality. She has no intention of pretending to be the cohesive, socially useful entity that humanity intended to create. She neither attempts to conform to the profile of the irresistible android destined to be an aggressively gendered sex-bot nor tries to model herself around the looks and behaviour of a human woman. Instead, she revels in her rebellion and looks to new possibilities.

## **2 Anomalous Femininity, Forgetting to be Mother**

As Oriana Palusci devises in the context of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, “In un certo senso, la ribellione della ‘creatura’ è anche l’atto di nascita della fantascienza della donna” (18) [In a sense, the rebellion of the ‘creature’ is also the act of giving birth to women’s SF]. Viewed as a creature whose deviance from their creator’s wishes engages with women’s bid for freedom within the genre of SF, DR’s bold sense of independence demonstrates the relevance of a new generation of non-human anti-heroines within contemporary women’s SF. By neglecting to identify as either human or android, DR channels an anomalous femininity which deconstructs the image of the human mother. Smudging the delineations of gender and species, DR opens herself to new forms of kinship structures that are better suited to her adventures as a hybrid body at large in a dystopian, post-apocalyptic, and posthuman world. A key consequence of DR’s positive recognition of the fact that her body fails to read as either sex-bot or human woman is the way in which her erroneous corporeality allows her to avoid the demarcations of gender identity. Her femaleness is described in terms of “anomaly” and “error”: “Questa identità femminile un po’ anomala” (16) [This slightly anomalous female identity]. Like the deconstructed woman that appears

from the violently rendered shapes of Nicholls's collages, DR "undoes" the female body into an assemblage of jarring parts. She denounces her feminine identity as mistaken, "anomalous", drawing on the negative power of disidentification, that has been theorised in other contexts by Butler and Muñoz, in order to shrug free from a normative gender identity. By rejecting the particular image of a sexualised "woman" that has been projected onto her misshapen body,<sup>5</sup> she resists and destabilises ideological interpellation, demonstrating Butler's assertion that an (incorrectly) hailed subject can engage in a subversive mode of disidentification during the process of interpellation (*Bodies That Matter* 219). She does this by claiming ugliness—that which frees her from feminised beauty—distancing herself from descriptions of reproductive femininity and motherhood. The former manoeuvre is made visible in moments of free indirect speech: "E la bellezza, nel caso di DR, evidentemente non serviva" (33). She does not necessarily associate beauty with human women, and believes that she need not be beautiful in order to disguise herself as one. Instead, she views beauty as characteristic of other kinds of bodies, notably the perfect, posthuman body of the sexbot, the role she was originally intended to fulfil. Now, as a self-employed detective, she views beauty as unnecessary: her profession does not make her appearance "useful" within the capitalist system of commodification. The narrative therefore suggests that her femininity is also "anomalous" because she has little desire for her bodily image to correspond to beauty norms.

Another way that DR distances herself from the figure of the woman is by rejecting the role of the mother. This proves to be a more challenging task, because Pilar, a young girl who lives on the streets, has somewhat against DR's will adopted DR as her honorary guardian. Pilar finds the android a queerly protective and sympathetic companion: Pilar enjoys chasing cockroaches around DR's apartment, which she then cooks and eats, and she demonstrates an affinity to DR's ugliness and lack of "family" ties of her own. Their relationship explores some of the tropes of a mother–daughter bond: DR's abrupt use of language recalls the image of the waspish mother, as she demands that Pilar "Fa' silenzio e togli ti quella ridicola falce dall'orecchio" (26) [Be quiet and take that ridiculous sickle off your ear]. Through a set of imperatives associated with the discourse of mothering, DR chastises Pilar for her latest DIY earring—a piece of metal bent into a sickle—and tells her to "keep quiet".

And yet, DR explicitly resists the custodial and nurturing characteristics attributed to motherhood. As the narrative voice ironically comments, DR is hardly the paragon of the mother: "Pilar ha nove anni ma sembra un bambino denutrito di quindici. Apparentemente, non ha famiglia, a parte DR, che è stata acquisita come parente suo malgrado, e che non è proprio un modello di mamma" (20) [Pilar is nine years old but she

seems like a malnourished child of fifteen. Apparently, she does not have family, apart from DR, who has been acquired as a relative in spite of herself, and who is not really the model of a mother]. Pilar's appointment of DR as guardian appears to be an unorthodox choice: DR is at a remove from the image of the maternal figure in more ways than one, and perhaps most significantly because she was not created with the capacity to reproduce.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, because DR is a recently re-born Replicant, despite her stature and mental maturity she is likely to be as "old" (or as young) as the human child Pilar is. What DR lacks in age, she might not even possess in experience: Replicants have no memories of their own, and, as is also explored in depth in Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner*, the memories that have been artificially implanted in their minds are either synthetic or stolen. DR, therefore, cannot subsume the role of giver of valuable generational advice, a position that is foreclosed by her want of a "past" from which to draw experience. This mode of guardianship therefore supplants linear notions of "inherited knowledge" with an emphasis on lateral acts of inter-community caregiving.

Indeed, DR's renunciation of both humanity and a feminised identity forestalls the possibility of inherited customs and practices descending from her to Pilar.<sup>7</sup> DR's failure as a human woman and as a mother offers the possibility of collective and simultaneous knowledge creation that renders obsolete the possessive structures of gendered and "racialised" genealogies, if Pilar's and DR's difference of species is understood as an invocation of race. As DR and Pilar navigate inner-city Milan together, on equal footing, they create what Halberstam terms "a theoretical space that is 'not woman' or that can be occupied only by unbecoming woman" (125). In the space where woman is "undone" by DR, different kinds of flexible, collective, and interrelational affinities are born.

While Vallorani's use of the terms "mamma" and "famiglia" might suggest that, on the contrary, DR's relationship with Pilar is a problematic re-inscription of inter-species kinship within the lexical field of the biological "family", it also deconstructs that conception of "family" within non-reproductive and subversive scenes of anti-domesticity. As an introverted, synthetic drug addict living in a house filled with cockroaches, DR fails to offer the destitute child either sufficient moral guidance or the trappings of comfort that a minor might require. Instead, the figure of the mother shifts throughout the narrative onto the figures of other characters, so that motherly attributes are projected onto a plant brought back to Earth from Entierres by the father of the story's villain, an explorer named Samuel Bayern. The plant, known as "l'Altéa de Venus" embraces Samuel with the "spontaneous tenderness of a wife": "l'Altéa de Venus lo abbraccia con la tenerezza spontanea di una moglie" (28). The extraterrestrial fauna's ability to perform the role of the wife, when set against DR's failure to

imitate motherhood, not only demonstrates a mode of inter-species kinship that queers the signification of “wife” as a human woman but proves that a plant that was not even created in the image of a woman can outperform this woman look-alike in its performance of human kinship roles. The term “wife”, when applied to l’Altéa de Venus, is also stripped of its meaning of “married woman”. Through the science fictional characterisations of DR and the extraterrestrial plant, the categories of both “wife” and “mother” are displaced through evocations of kinship that confound the exclusivity of the racially homogeneous human “family”.

The Replicant and l’Altéa de Venus are, however, suggestively personified through their ironic evocation of human kinship roles such as “mother” and “wife”. This somewhat elucidates Butler’s contention that being human requires subjects to subsume normative familial roles: she argues that the concepts of “human” and “family” are inextricably linked within the discourse of normativity, so that “to become human, for some, requires participation in the family in its normative sense” (*Antigone’s Claim* 22). Excluded from full access to the privileged status of “human”, DR finds herself exempt from engaging in heteronormatively reproductive relations: her machinic not-quite “womanness” complicates her participation in family life. The term “family”, then, when used to describe the relationship between a creature without vital organs and a dirty, cockroach-eating street child, ceases to signify a reproductive kinship structure within either human or animal groups. As I will subsequently argue, drawing on Butler’s and Gilroy’s theorisations of kinship structures in the context of new forms of humanism, these modes of “doing family” demonstrate the non-reproductive and deconstructive kinship of a “planetary” humanism.

### 3 The Adaptive Family: Flexible Kinship for a Changing World

The dystopian post-apocalyptic setting in which DR’s and Pilar’s “queer” family materialises is, perhaps, not so estranged from the increasingly precarious global climate that Butler believes has provoked a certain flexibility in the way “kinship” is performed. She argues that we live at:

a time in which children, because of divorce and remarriage, because of migration, exile, and refugee status, because of global displacements of various kinds, move from one family to another, move from a family to no family, move from no family to a family, or in which they live, psychologically, at the crossroads of the family, or in multiply layered family situation ... —this is a time in which kinship has become fragile, porous, and expansive.

(*Antigone’s Claim* 22)

Butler, who explores the changing face of kinship in the context of global precarity, argues that the increasing de-centralisation of the biological family has resulted in the bending of kinship structures to accommodate a variety of mobile and multidirectional relations of support. This is certainly the case in Vallorani's inner-city Milan, in which ecological devastation and economic crisis have taken their toll on the domestic containment of the traditional family. These orphans, the parents of whom are either dead, chose to abandon their children, or are too sick to care for them—possibly a common occurrence given post-apocalyptic Milan's widespread disease, street violence, and drug addiction—compete for food with the cockroaches and the adult survivors. The resulting, vulnerable youth population must seek connections beyond familial ties that enable them to compete in the hunt for whatever scarce food can be found among the ruins. The novel demonstrates the way in which the critical dystopia can harbour a utopian potential for the re-arrangement of kinship, by adopting a realistic mode to suggest that these are the kinds of collectivities that we must foster in order to avoid a future that is worse than our present reality. This is in keeping with the way in which Butler's re-signification of vulnerability and Braidotti's affirmative ethics, like Gilroy's and Spivak's theorisations of planetarity and Halberstam's attempt to find alternatives to heteronormative models of growth and development, demonstrate the different kinds of collectivities that must be theorised and performed in order to avoid continued inequality at best and the catastrophic collapse of the planet at worst. I do not view the communities forged between Replicants, orphaned children, and quasi-indestructible cockroaches in the precarious setting of *Il Cuore Finto*, therefore, as problematic invocations of a better mode of relationality in a place of suffering and uncertainty, but instead as figurations that allow the reader to perceive the gap between our current world and a possible worse one, and to grapple with the work that needs to be done to prevent the former slipping into the latter.

One element of this re-modelling of kinship and community that is particularly prominent in *Il Cuore Finto* is DR's and Pilar's transgressive performance of female positions within the nuclear family. While some children form defensive communities among themselves, others like Pilar appoint different creatures as their next of kin: she chooses DR, and in doing so, engages in a complex reformulation of the "mother–daughter" bond that the narrative ironically projects onto the dysfunctional pair. Pilar and DR, however, have very little in common: the small, hyperactive, cockroach-eating human and the socially incompetent android who has no need for food have, aside from their mutual abandonment by their "parents", almost no basis for sharing their lives with one another. While usually in a state of permanent disagreement, and with very different concerns and requirements that issue, in part, from their differing personalities and,



materially speaking, the dissimilarity of their bodily forms, the fondness they each display for their co-habitation is deeply moving. In her critique of identity politics, and in the context of, in particular, the divisions that erupted in America following Donald Trump's election in 2017, Butler has contended that we must expand our conception of "what it means, politically, to live together, across differences, sometimes in modes of unchosen proximity, especially when living together, however difficult it may be, remains an ethical and political imperative" (*Theory of Assembly* 27). The relationship between DR and the young Pilar possibly elucidates this contention that our mutual vulnerability to one another and our subsequent ethical obligation towards other human beings can be fulfilled by expanding our conception of what it means to form unexpected proximities with people we may seemingly have little in common with. As they learn to live together, and respect their differences, DR and Pilar also establish a better sense of their mutual needs. With this knowledge, they reconfigure the family structure to better respond to their peculiar arrangement, which also involves recognising the clients upon which they depend for "sustenance:"

Accarezza la scatola, DR, e sorride perché la piccola vipera che si tiene in casa pensa sempre di farle da mamma e questo produce davvero una strana famiglia: una sintetica molto brutta e con difetti di fabbrica, un'orfana denutrita, un esercito di scarafaggi e transitori clienti che di tanto in tanto provvedono al sostentamento di tutti costoro (52).

[DR caresses the box and smiles because the little viper who stays at home always thinks she's being the mother, and this has resulted in a rather strange family: a very ugly synthetic with factory defects, an undernourished orphan, an army of cockroaches, and the transient customers who from time to time provide for their sustenance].

The functioning of this adaptive "family" is, more than anything, a political refusal of the situation of abandonment in which they have been individually and collectively jettisoned. While their proximity in inner-city Milan is unchosen, their subsequent collaboration as a corrupted version of a normative "family" structure is not. The operation of this "strange family" requires a manipulation of the lexical field of "family", which I read as an elucidation of some of the possible responses to Butler's contention that we must find alternative ways of establishing social intimacy. The word "*mamma*", for example, is used with irony several times in the narrative to describe DR, who has most likely very little in common with Pilar's biological family. It also finds a new application in the passage quoted above, in which DR describes Pilar as motherly because the girl repeatedly hides DR's store of the drug Sintar. DR, affectionately referring

to Pilar as “the little viper”, registers that Pilar “always thinks she’s being the mother” by hiding her stash. The combination of their shared space and their disconnected pasts thus requires a different notion of motherhood, one that is detached from the requirements of its biological connotations. Indeed, throughout the course of the novel, Pilar’s behaviour often subsumes characteristics of the anxious and protective mother: she insists that DR requires her presence around the weather-worn shack for company, she regularly attempts to confiscate drugs from DR and, in the final scene, she saves DR’s life when she is pursued by a number of hired assassins.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, she “queers” the position of an adopted child, not only by choosing her “family” and by establishing the conditions of her adoption, but also by defining her role in their relationship as that of chief provider of a paradoxically mature source of moral cognition. As for the android, a queer Replicant with no biological family to speak of, she sidesteps the model of the nuclear family altogether by performing a negligent anti-motherhood to a precocious human girl. This off-beat but decisive intimacy counters her double abandonment by the corporation that built her and the amateur scientist who made subsequent modifications on her body, while also resisting the solitariness ascribed to her species by a society that believes that her inability to reproduce amounts to the foreclosure of her access to “family life”. “Queering” the model of the nuclear family and its emphasis on generational divides, Pilar and DR open up a differently relational world that illuminates Foucault’s contention that “Nous devons nous battre contre cet appauvrissement du tissu relationnel. Nous devons obtenir que soient reconnues des relations de coexistence provisoire, d’adoption” (309) [We must fight against this impoverishment of the relational fabric. We must obtain recognition of relations of provisional coexistence, of adoption]. Indeed, within their mode of coexistence, it is arguably Pilar who adopts the antisocial android, rather than the other way around. This demonstrates a response in the affirmative to Foucault’s rhetorical question of “Pourquoi n’adopterais-je pas un ami plus jeune que moi de dix ans? Et même de dix ans plus vieux?” (309) [Why should I not adopt a friend who is ten years younger than me? Or even ten years older?]. Through their strange relationship, Pilar and DR demonstrate affirmative responses to human and posthuman emotional needs that enrich rather than deplete the relational social fabric. Pilar’s “mothering” produces a strange adoptive family (“questo produce davvero una strana famiglia”), and, by including and welcoming destitute and outcast post-apocalyptic critters, radicalises the concept of the normative family. If we can consider Pilar and DR as embodying different races, by reading their difference of species as an invocation of racial difference, then the proximity of their relationship regardless of the heterogeneity of their material differences might also constitute a disruption of the racialised family.

The fact that DR has been excluded from the possibility of reproducing has not, then, made her ineligible to participate in the process of kinship. Instead, the queer inter-species intimacy between DR and Pilar offers all the necessary benefits of kinship: it creates a partnership that will aid their mutual survival, it offers a quiet sense of companionship that counters the solitariness of inner-city life, and it allows them to engage in a comfortable rapport. Together, they demonstrate that these attributes need not spring from traditional models of kinship but can be the product of a heterogeneity of queer inter-species and non-gender-dependent modes of affiliation. The relationship between DR and Pilar is not necessarily an example of an exciting “new” way of remodelling kinship in the future, for their relationship is suggestive of the often mundane and essential caregiving or support roles currently being performed by queer communities in ways that also counter the notion that queers are “exiles from kinship” (Weston).<sup>9</sup> Instead I would like to offer DR and Pilar as an example of elective kinship, both regarding their choosing of one another as next of kin, and in relation to the way in which they adopt a number of different roles within their relationship, rather than assuming a fixed position of either carer or dependent, mature adult or inexperienced child. *Il Cuore Finto* contends that this plasticity is a crucial characteristic of kinship groups that successfully navigate economic and social precarity and instability in the post-apocalypse. Their mutual caregiving, which is also crucial to the evil Elsa Bayern’s fall in the novel’s *denouement*, is their only and essential means of economically accessible support, demonstrating Butler’s contention in *Theory of Assembly* that all lives are sustained through structures of support, both at an institutional level and by way of other modes of caregiving (84). The novel’s characters demonstrably rely on one another for support: this is the basis of their resistance to the state’s devaluation of their lives, with the inner-city population seemingly at the bottom of the government’s priority list in this post-apocalyptic era. Orphans like Pilar are deprived of foster care, and drug addiction services, which might be the possible recourse for regular users like DR, seem to be non-existent in the abandoned wasteland of the inner-city. Pilar takes the role of both a child and foster carer when she adopts herself into the home of a machinic single parent, in which she subsumes the role of both the parent who attempts to guide and reason with their offspring, and the reprimanded child, when, as has been described previously, she adorns what DR believes is a visually offensive choice of earring. The description of Pilar’s behaviour as an attempt to “farle da mamma” and the descriptions of care and protectiveness that the narrative ascribes to the concept of “mamma”, attempts to reconcile normative paradigms of motherhood with a non-normative repossession of the concept. Their relationship can therefore be viewed as what Harlan Weaver has termed, in the context of the “inhuman” intimacies between

pit bulls and humans in animal shelters, “queerly kindred in a way that does and does not fit into the ... normative model” (352). It is a shifting, morphing view of the “mother–daughter” bond that weaves in and out of normativity.<sup>10</sup>

The “strana famiglia” that arises from this queer union between an android and a dirty, cockroach-eating child typifies this notion of the adaptive family: by the end of the novel, their family has grown into a responsive support unit comprised of *Il Cinese*, another undercover Replicant; a Vietnamese storekeeper; Nicole, an extraterrestrial; a clairvoyant called Mariposa, “la saggia”); Suor Crocefissa, a homeless madwoman; and an army of Milan’s ubiquitous cockroaches. This non-reproductive and non-anthropocentric “family” therefore finds other ways to laterally extend outwards of DR’s and Pilar’s more intimate relationship, so as to create a band of allies that can successfully defend the existence of those dwelling precariously in the city. The resulting community offers its members—inner-city Milan’s homeless, drug-addicted, orphaned, and synthetic citizens—a flexible support network through which to navigate the perilous post-apocalypse space.<sup>11</sup> Literally as well as metaphorically “synthetic” and “dis-organic”, DR’s kinship group simultaneously de-essentialises the family and removes species as the biologising frame of social intimacy. In doing so, it elaborates on Harlan Weaver’s notion of an inter-species “intimacy without relatedness” (352), a provisional rootedness based on mutual need and affection. In this sense, the other key family in the novel, which comprises the murderous Elsa Bayern and her explorer father, Samuel, can be described as a “relatedness without intimacy”: Elsa shows no empathy or resemblance to her father and ultimately murders him out of rage, greed, and jealousy. Vallorani’s reformulation of the relationship between love, friendship, and biology in queer inter-species kinship practices privileges neither blood ties nor new affinities, suggesting only that duty and obligation should be supplanted by, as Gilroy suggests in his theorisation of modes of kinship that extend beyond the “cheap, pre-given sameness” of the racial family, “will, inclination, mood, and affinity” as the alternative foundations for building and sustaining affiliations in the mode of the planetary (*Against Race* 133).

#### 4 Forgetting the Mother: Alternative Kinship Arrangements

The relationship between race, gender, kinship, and new humanistic modes of community-building can be expanded through a reading of Vallorani’s critical dystopia, *Sulla Sabbia di Sur*. In this novel, a group of young people, which can be interpreted as both multi-species and multi-racial<sup>12</sup>, respond assertively to conditions of social unrest, fabricating a makeshift family to gather resources and defend themselves. Sur is a space

of economic instability and widespread social violence, governed by a cruel organisation that uses the city's youngsters for medical experiments. Through the versatile and accommodating nature of their collectively agentic responses to acutely precarious conditions, which invoke Butler's theory of assembly and Braidotti's nomadic becomings, they also elucidate possible manifestations of Gilroy's humanistic notion of affirmative and alternative kinship groups, the flexible and temporary families theorised by Halberstam, and the forwards-reaching friendships that issue from Spivak's theorisation of planetarity. My reading of *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* alongside these theories demonstrates the kinds of kinship-in-motion that are made possible by the absence of Kurtz's mother.

Vallorani's novel begins with Kurtz,<sup>13</sup> one of the key figures in the group, who is known throughout the city of Sur by a series of politically incorrect aliases, from "il nero" to "mezzafaccia". To the state medical department "Il Centro" who brought Kurtz to Sur for a series of medical experiments after they found him near-dead in the desert beyond the city walls, Kurtz is also "una cavia" [a guinea pig]<sup>14</sup> (232). Following these medical interventions, Kurtz has no memory of his life before Sur. A series of broken narratives in the first person, spoken through a voice in the "rete"—Sur's high-tech internet that is "surfing" in virtual reality, so that its users must attach themselves onto it using skin grafts—explain fragments of Kurtz's past in the voice of his biological mother, who calls out to him to free her and the "topi" [mice] from their enslavement by the *zannegialle* monsters below the surface of Sur (216). Unaware of this, Kurtz lives alone in the control tower of the abandoned airport, until he meets Jan, Spino, Mariel, Asia, and Vita, a group of human and non-human youths who club together to retrieve Kurtz's past and reconcile him with his mother. But rather than set up this reconciliation as the victory of the heteronormative family, Kurtz frees his mother and then leaves her so that he can lead his band of friends away from the cruel and hard life of Sur in search of the sea. The novel explicitly lacks an investment in the centrality of the mother-son bond, refusing to privilege biological kinship over more temporary or contingent forms of community. Kurtz's memory loss has taken with it all recollection of his mother. In the space she once filled, non-reproductive kinship formations emerge, ones that offer inclusive alternatives to the exclusivity of the nuclear family.

In the fourth chapter of *The Queer Art of Failure*, "Shadow Feminisms" (126–46), Halberstam builds on his analysis of "forgetfulness as an interruption to generational modes of transmission that ensure the continuity of ideas, family lines, and normativity itself" to argue that "losing one's mother is not simply 'careless,' as Oscar Wilde might say; it actually enables a relation to other models of time, space, place, and connection" (123–4). Reading Kurtz's total memory loss regarding his early life with his

biological mother in what I consider to be the terms of Halberstam's project of "unknowing, failing, and forgetting" (124), the intimacy of Kurtz's relationship with Asia, Jan, Mariel, Spino, and Vita is only possible *because* he has no recollection of his time with her. He is not bound to her: he is free to explore other ways of structuring significant, affective relationships. In this sense, memory loss creates the spaces within which alternatives to biological kinship can appear.

While I apply Halberstam's work on forgetfulness to the context of agentic SF communities, it does not necessarily follow that this exercise in "forgetting" heteronormative forms of kinship in *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* entails an erasure of history, particularly within the context of the wilful forgetting of slavery,<sup>15</sup> which is alluded to in the novel's emotional portrayal of Kurtz's friends' recovery of his mother's testimonies of subterranean confinement at the hands of the *zannegialle* "yellow-toothed" monsters. On the contrary, Kurtz's chosen group of queer next of kin set themselves to collectively excavating Kurtz's history, a quest that takes them into the dangerous digital depths of Sur Medical Centre's online database. They exercise a range of skills to excavate the lost information: while tech-savvy Spino demonstrates his proficiency at data mining to extract Kurtz's files from the digitally protected spaces of the medical centre, other members of the group gather oral narratives that circulate in Sur to fill in the blanks of Kurtz's past. The group's combined attempt to retrieve the full scope of Kurtz's story points towards the way in which flexible, anti-racist, and non-gender specific forms of affiliation also promote disjunctive modes of historicising the past. This retrieval is brought about by Kurtz's solitary attempts to recall life before Sur, which he subsequently shares with other members of the group, once he learns to trust them: "Cerco di pensare alla persona che ero, e il ricordo mi sfugge. Non ha importanza, comunque. Nessuno deve riconoscermi. E io chi sono lo so già" (41) [I try to think of the person I was, and the memory escapes me. It does not matter, anyway. Nobody has to recognise me. I already know who I am]. The narrative demonstrates a tension between the present moment and the forgotten past "io chi sono lo so già" [I already know who I am]. In absence of the past, Kurtz is propelled towards new encounters with these set of multi-species and multi-racial youths, all of whom are focused on survival in the present:

Di sicuro Jan non aveva voglia di raccontare i fatti suoi, e Kurtz che di ricordi dolorosi ne aveva già abbastanza, non si era fato ripetere l'avvertimento. Così tutti e due si erano adatti a vivere nel presente, sfiorandosi appena ma rendendosi indispensabili uno all'altro (90).

[Jan definitely did not want to tell him his business, and Kurtz had had enough of painful memories, so he had not repeated the warning. In this

way both of them had adapted themselves to live in the present, scarcely touching, but becoming indispensable to one another].

Barely touching [“sfiorandosi appena”], Kurtz and Jan are cautious as they establish their friendship. As strangers, their approach towards one another takes a respectful distance. Cut off from the ties of biological family, their focus is on mutual survival: forging a mutually beneficial emergency response to the precarity of life in Sur. This is what renders them “indispensabili” to one another. Their relationship is particularly valuable because its obligations are short term: they can walk away at any moment, free from the duty-bound commitments that often come affixed to biological bonds. For Halberstam, “new kinships” are often devalued because “an authenticating notion of longevity renders all other relations meaningless and superficial, and family ties, by virtue of early bonds, seem more important than friendships” (72). Indeed, Kurtz’s non-reproductive kinship relations in Sur offer an alternative way of creating kin-like intimacies beyond the racialised and reproductive family.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the most ephemeral of the novel’s relationships is that of Kurtz and his mother: meeting only briefly at the end of the novel, he hugs her and sets her free from the *zannegialle*, while she tells him to leave her and Sur behind and cross the desert with his friends in search of a better life. The biological imperative to stay with his mother, loyal to a bloodline he never knew existed until his friends help unearth his past, is supplanted by the queer temporal mode of Sur, in which the only thing that lasts forever is friendship: “Amici è per sempre, amici non si sbaglia amici si nasce dentro una stessa foglia dentro una mano aperta sulla vita dentro una storia che non è mai finita”<sup>17</sup> [Friendship is forever, friends are not mistaken friends are born inside a single leaf inside an open hand on life inside a story that is never over]. Here, friends are “birthed” together through nature: “in a single leaf inside an open hand”. There is a matryoshka doll structure to this kind of friendship: friends are born into a leaf; the leaf lies in an open hand; and the friends in the leaf are set within a never-ending story. The multi-layered formation of the complex, fluid friendships evoked by the unpunctuated phrase suggests that the group is open to an infinite expansion of its community. More members are continually drawn into its “story”, and the group is reborn again, together. Indeed, Vallorani’s formulation of friendship in Sur as a story that is never completed [“una storia che non è mai finita”] echoes the kinds of collective “becoming” that Spivak refers to when she speaks of a “politics of friendship to come” (13), one that can also be thought in the tense of the future anterior<sup>18</sup>—that which will have been achieved. Spivak grounds her notion of a forwards-reaching friendship in the Derridian conception of messianic teleiopoiesis, the temporality of the “to come” that situates friendship in the mode of the



“perhaps”: “You-my-friends-be-my-friends-and-although-you-are-not-yet-my-friends-you-are-already,-since-that-is-what-I-am-calling-you” (Derrida 235). This sense of a “not yet” friendship has also been elaborated by Gilroy in his theorisation of a “heterocultural, postanthropological, and cosmopolitan yet-to-come”, a form of incipient togetherness that he believes should substitute “the stern discipline of primordial kinship and rooted belonging” which promotes “the popular image of natural nations spontaneously endowed with self-consciousness, tidily composed of uniform families” (*Against Race* 344, 123):<sup>19</sup>

My own desire to see the end of raciology means that I, too, have invoked the unknowable future against the unforgiving present. In doing this, I urge a fundamental change of mood upon what used to be called ‘anti-racism.’ It has been asked in an explicitly utopian spirit to terminate its ambivalent relationship to the idea of “race” in the interest of a heterocultural, postanthropological, and cosmopolitan yet-to-come.

(*Against Race* 334)

For Gilroy, the “end of raciology” comes into effect through the alliances made possible in the vibrant cosmopolitanism of the present moment. Following Bloch and his conception of the “not yet”, Gilroy sets his “utopian spirit” in the mode of the “to-come”, by which logic the affinities that supplant “the stern discipline of primordial kinship and rooted belonging” must always be in the process of de-rooting or “becoming” (*Against Race* 123). Thus, the process of friendship displaces the “fixed” and uninterrogated past implied by blood relations. Asia’s and Kurtz’s project of community extends beyond biological determinisms, providing a utopian element to Sur’s dystopian setting, so that the possibility of exclusive racialised cultures is foreclosed by the renunciation of blood ties. Flexible communities consequently emerge, ones that are better equipped to navigate the instability and precarity of life in Sur.

## 5 Deliberate Disavowal

The protagonists of both *Il Cuore Finto di DR* and *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* demonstrate a tendency towards “antidevelopment” and a curious inability to remember their past that is in line with Halberstam’s contention that “a queer form of antidevelopment requires healthy doses of forgetting and disavowal” (73). Indeed, DR’s synthetic body forecloses the possibility of either making memories or developing physically, while also contributing to her disidentification from human behaviour, her ascribed gender, and its “natural” conclusion: motherhood; on the dystopian island of Sur, a place that has swallowed up Kurtz’s past, “un passato che non conosce”, and

which continues to mask his future, “un future carico di insidie”, Kurtz suffers from severe memory loss that suspends him from his blood bonds.

While these examples of queer forms of antidevelopment, forgetting, and disavowal are often unintentional—DR cannot help that she is a Replicant, while Kurtz’s amnesia is a product of non-consensual medical intervention—“forgetting and disavowal” has a more deliberate significance in the context of Lady Linh’s migration from her family planet in Bodard’s *On a Red Station, Drifting*, and Asia’s escape from her swamp tribe in *Sulla Sabbia di Sur*. Magistrate Linh is an asylum seeker who becomes part of the conflict-driven diaspora when she lands on Prosper station having “disavowed” her war-torn country and her next of kin who chose to remain. I read this as problematically suggestive of Halberstam’s notion of “forgetting and disavowal” in the context of the subversion of the heteronormative family (73). Linh’s distant relative, the intelligent and reserved Lady Oanh, whom Linh implores for shelter on the space station, is unsympathetic to Linh’s plight and convicts her of betraying her family. Oanh argues that it is of utmost importance to remain in the space where one’s family dwells, whether or not that place is safe. Linh responds by dismissing Oanh’s undue emphasis on blood ties: “Those ties are what we make of them”, Linh said.

Are not friends and sworn brothers as important as blood-brothers? A true friend will know your heart, and hear the roar of running waters and the distant wind over the mountains in the song of your zither, without any need for you to speak aloud.

(56)

Leaving her family behind prompts Linh to consider new kinds of social contracts, by which she can secure her own safety on an unfamiliar space station that has, so far, escaped the immediate violence of military invasion. Described as a pre-discursive, natural attachment, “A true friend will know your heart”—the kind often associated with parent-child attachment, where a parent is viewed as knowing their child’s thoughts before they utter them—Linh’s conception of friendship unravels the association of close kinship with the “natural family”. She emphasises that what friendship lacks in “blood”, it makes up for in faithfulness and compassionate action: “a true friend” will respond to the needs of another’s heart. By foregrounding the performative nature of kinship, the passage corresponds to Butler’s assertion that “modes of patterned and performative doing bring kinship categories into operation and become the means by which they undergo transformation and displacement” (*Undoing Gender* 123). For Butler, kinship categories are the product of iterated performances that both sediment those categories and, if imagined differently, create new

kinship relations. Linh's persuasive speech rhetorically underlines the series of repeated activities through which a tender and protective kinship relation comes to fruition: in this case, the practised action of listening to the heart of a friend. Indeed, described in terms of activity, the act of listening out to "hear the roar of running waters", which a troubled friend might metaphorically experience, positions kinship as an iterative practice of care and support. The "hypostatised structure of relations" to borrow Butler's description of normative kinship, that in Oanh's mind constitutes the truest mode of kinship—the biological family—here give way to an image of kinship as "modes of patterned and performative doing" (*Undoing Gender* 123). Butler emphasises that only through the exposure and recognition of the performative nature of kinship can a "transformation and displacement" of normative kinship structures take place (*Undoing Gender* 123).

The necessity of "forgetting" biological family and the possibilities for alternative kinship that this might offer is again made acutely visible in the case of another young woman leading a precarious life in *Sulla Sabbia di Sur*. Asia, a young amphibian woman, has been born into a matriarchal, swamp-dwelling "race". She has pale skin, like Jan, but unlike the rest of her "mixed-race" friendship group of "misti" she has hollow bones, webbed feet "piedi palmati", and an elf-like body (22). Her tribe is jealous and possessive: their prerogative is to defend the matriarchal bloodline at all costs, and Asia is violently, though not successfully, persuaded to stay with them rather than join Jan and the *Misti* in their escape from Sur. This inability on the part of the community to offer its members the freedom to choose whether or not to remain in the group forecloses the possibility of relations of support and trust.

Nearing the end of her "childhood", Asia must reckon with her tribe's initiation process into womanhood that has been undergone by the stock of women before her. However: "Di colpo, la prospettiva di un futuro già deciso, uguale a quello che avevano conosciuto tante ragazze prima di lei, le fece salire un'ondata di nausea dallo stomaco" (186) [Suddenly, the prospect of an already decided future, the same as that of many girls before her, made a wave of nausea rise in her stomach]. Asia experiences physical nausea as she witnesses her freedom disappearing into the genealogy of women that she must assimilate into. The concept of the "blood tie" is given a more "explicit" application when Asia's mother signals to the fact that her upcoming first menstruation will be the "tie" that binds her to this community of women: "Scorre nel sangue e quando è tempo si fa sentire" (186) [It flows in the blood and when it is time it makes itself felt]. Menstrual blood is the sign of her unbreakable bond with the swamp women, and yet, the performed ritual of the initiation process and the anger of the women's decree that, "È tempo di crescere e di entrare a far parte della comunità. Tu fai parte do questo mondo" (199) [It is time to

grow up and become part of the community. You are a part of this world], suggests the fragility and spuriousness of that blood bond. Indeed, her tribe subscribes to what Gilroy has termed “a doggedly positive and always over-integrated sense of culture and/or biology as the essential reified substances of racial, nation, and ethnic difference” (*Against Race* 221). Menstruation, the prevalent bodily response to hormonal changes among young women, has been made into the exclusive signifier of their small tribe, therefore basing collective identity in a biological imperative that is both non-specific to them and a seemingly inescapable reality for Asia. As Gilroy has noted, racist and exclusionary politics is often grounded in the notion that culture and biology are interchangeable: in the context of the Nazi’s Aryan ideal, Gilroy sees the “coding of biology as culture and culture as biology” as the core of their devastating commitment to the racialisation of the Jewish people. By viewing race as a historical artefact, Gilroy deconstructs it from a sedimented given into contingent component parts. Indeed, Asia’s interrogation of her place in the community demonstrates the assumptions upon which their conception of their race is founded: namely, that their tribe is entirely made up of amphibian “women:” “madre, sorelle, figle” (186) [mothers, sisters, daughters]. In the words of Abigail J. Stewart, the “gendered features of the world are taken for granted and therefore invisible” (11): in this sense, the tribe’s sense of supposed individuality rests on an unnoticed, uncontested, and therefore “invisible” logic that makes gendered biology the foundation for racial “identity”. Such an unfounded assumption obscures the multiple intersections between race and gender that contribute to the construction of this homogeneous and inaccurate suggestion of an exclusive amphibian womanhood.

Fearing being lost in the uniformity of “tante” “regazze” “uguale”, Asia refuses entry into the community “Non le voglio. Non voglio essere parte della comunità” (199) [I don’t want to. I don’t want to be part of the community], which also requires her to negate entry into adulthood. Asia’s disavowal of her community necessitates a difficult and painful dismissal of her mother’s wishes. For Halberstam, queer culture puts emphasis on “a refusal of adulthood” (73) in order to claim meaningful connectivities based in affiliations other than the blood bond. Indeed, Asia’s act of radical non-acceptance of her mother’s contention that “È tempo di crescere” demonstrates a determination to queer the linear progression from childhood into adulthood. The framing of the swamp women’s kinship structure within the discourse of normativity also corresponds to Halberstam’s point that heterosexuality isn’t just for heterosexuals: queer kinship formations such as this amphibian, lesbian, asexually-reproducing one can still run the risk of stagnancy and homogeneity. Halberstam elaborates on the theme of the child’s maturity into compulsory heterosexuality, as has also been theorised in Edelman’s *No*

*Future* (2004) and Stockton's *Growing Sideways* (2009), explaining that "the child is always already queer and must therefore quickly be converted to a proto-heterosexual by being pushed through a series of maturational models of growth that project the child as the future and the future as heterosexual" (73). As I have already argued, the "maturational models of growth" presented by the swamp tribe in the form of an initiation process are justified by the instance of the arrival of the child's period, one that roots the entry into swamp womanhood in a biological imperative. Asia's denial of that "fact" of womanhood rejects the amphibian matriarchs' assumption of the tie between racial authenticity and essentialised gender difference. Even when coupled with her webbed feet and lithe water-born body, her "upcoming" period (which is, for Asia, still the not yet) does not equate to community. By making the decision not to remain in the swamp, and not to undergo the initiation, Asia positions community as choice. In doing so, she re-asserts her agency and individuality as a being that is also "more than" an assimilated unit in a tribe. The substitution of her amphibian family for a diversified group of friends, the seemingly incompatible *misti*, can be read as a performance of what Halberstam describes as "healthy doses of forgetting and disavowal which proceeds by way of a series of substitutions" (73): this is the antidote to the imperative to pursue a heterosexual development within the nuclear family. To abandon the swamp tribe, therefore, Asia must "forget" not only her mother but also the trappings of a racialised womanhood: notably, her upcoming period as a signifier of her "racial identity". This achieved, she can retract from her submissive position and contribute to her group of *Misti* not only as a woman and an amphibian but also as a survivor, collaborator, and leader.

## 6 Kinship as Displacement: Racialised Spaces, the Spatialisation of Precarity, and Diaspora

Asia's decision to leave her tribe and join the *Misti* also involves a kind of spatial "disavowal" that counters the idea of the swamp as a particularised racial space to which Asia belongs, a notion that is consistently reinforced by the swamp's matriarchy as they tell her, "Tu fai parte di questo mondo. Sei una di noi" (199) [You are a part of this world. You are one of us]. Unable to open up to the *Misti* while still attached to her belief that she must always return to the swamp, the text refers to her as "Asia della Palude" (35) [Asia of the Swamp], demonstrating how she has reduced her sense of who she is into little more than a location. She repeatedly ventriloquises the swamp's values during her initial interactions with the *Misti* in bouts of disingenuous speech, during which she helplessly regurgitates a series of accepted truths that she has been dealt since birth, primarily that the swamp is her home for life "la palude era casa, sempre" (186) [the swamp

was home, always]. This is a notion that has been reinforced by the swamp women's emphasis on a rigid genealogy of amphibian "madre, sorelle, figlie" (186) who share the same space, so that the daughter must be where her mother is. The separatist women's utopia, an established trope of women's SF which, as Monticelli has argued in the context of Gearhart's *The Wanderground*, can be "a strategy to provide women with new words and worlds" (*Politics of the Body* 150) is problematised in the narrative's critique of Asia's false sense of dependency on her immediate family and on the environment of the swamp, "Il bayou è la mia casa, e mia madre mi starà aspettando" (61) [the bayou is my home, and my mother will be waiting for me]. The certainty of "home" as the "place" of the swamp and the location of her mother leads her to reason that, if race is tied so definitively to place, she is physically unsuited to life elsewhere: "non posso vivere in un posto dove l'acqua non c'è" (61) [I cannot live in a place without water]. This statement turns out to be utterly false once she renounces the tribe to join Kurtz and the *Misti* in the desert, a place where "l'acqua non c'è" [there is no water]. Growing up in a culture that anchors specific geographies to racially homogeneous peoples leads her to wonder whether "I Misti erano troppo diversi per stare insieme" (187) [the Mixed Ones were too different to be together]. The supposed disparity between a location "un posto" [a place] and the difference of the people who reside there "[persone] troppo diverse" makes visible her tribe's mapping of homogeneity onto the racial cartography. The swamp thus demonstrates the way in which ideological governance can be embedded in physical space, a phenomenon that reflects Lefebvre's notion of "lived space", Said's work on regulated and disciplined spaces (*Culture and Imperialism*), and Soja's conception of "thirdspace" (*Thirdspace*), as has already been discussed in the second chapter of this book. The way in which the swamp is imbued with "invisible" values that extend beyond its watery topography, and which mediate the way in which its inhabitants interact with this place that they consider to be their only home, corresponds in particular to Lefebvre's notion of "lived space": spaces layered with images and symbols through which a person subjectively interacts with any given place (*Production de l'Espace*). The way in which Asia navigates the space of the swamp is demonstrably informed by lived experience, so that as she walks through it, it is at once a place that is real and a place that lives in her memories: "Asia camminava e i passi la guidavano verso i posti che conosceva" (186) [As Asia walked, her steps guided her towards the places that she knew]. Through the person of Asia, the narrative exposes how the swamp is materially lived in relation to elements that extend beyond what is immediately visible, elements responsible for the fierce attachment that the amphibian women demonstrate towards the confines of their aqueous homeland. By exploiting the swamp as a counterspace for the contestation

of ideological governance, Asia also demonstrates how the swamp can be seen in terms of Soja's notion of "thirdspace", a space of both resistance and oppression. The swamp is presented as both saturated with the politics and ideology of the matriarchal amphibian tribe and imbued with the possibility for non-conformity and dissent to the swamp's attempt to exert its mode of spatial control.

Asia's escape from the regulated space of the swamp, and her fellow *Misti* Muriel's and Spino's successful efforts to get themselves expelled from the *Accademia*, a punishing institution that trains its students into a life of gang warfare (140), points to the possible rejection of fixed connections between certain spaces and racial authenticity. Asia's decision to move away from the swamp—the place of her bondage—and to choose the travelling *Misti* over the rooted community of the amphibian women, is suggestive of Bhabha's constructivist argument that "What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (2). Bhabha demonstrates the active temporality of the "process" of the "articulation of cultural differences" that can counter the notion of "origin" as a stable basis to subjectivity. Indeed, by way of Asia's refusal to ground her sense of who she is within the limited scope of the tribe's collective identity, the novel interrogates the concept of identity as a point of origin. This notion, that race *is* identity, appears as an abstraction that yields only a superficial form of belonging. Her disentanglement of kinship from birthplace, and of their combined synonymy with the idea of racial or national belonging, offers insight into the way in which race is spatialised through the practice of territorialisation. This is dramatically evidenced when Asia considers the possibility that amphibian life is only possible within the frontiers of the swamp: movement away from the swamp might mean that she cannot survive, "non posso vivere". The contradiction of this later in the novel deconstructs the fixity of the relationship between race and place, revealing that the amphibian, matriarchal race is, as Achille Mbembe argues, "a spectral form of division and human difference" (55). Detached from its hold on "place", race is revealed to be an elusive claim to a synthetic, pre-conceived "identity" by which communities are grounded in a supposed sameness.

Contrary to the stagnancy of swamp life, her activities as part of the *Misti* are characterised by continual displacement: they move between the swamp, the kasbah, the subterranean network of tunnels, the virtual reality "rete" [network] and the medical centre, before finally heading out to "cross" the desert (216). The periphery of Sur might represent, to borrow Westphal's description of "the essence of space", "les limites du perceptible et du maîtrisable" (*Le Monde Plausible* 247) [the limits of the perceptible and



the controllable]. Indeed, beyond Sur lies the inconceivable: spaces which cannot be “mastered”, dominated, and controlled. This ultimate venture into the “beyond”—outside the walls of Sur—is suggestive of communities forged through often precarious diasporic movements. The *Misti*’s journey outwards also suggests a form of community-building that does not dwell in the purified interiority of racialised being, or the inner-workings of female biology—as is the case for Asia’s tribe of menstruating amphibians—but is sought in the embrace of an untidy and adventurous interrelationality in the mode of the “planetary”. This can be read as a defial of normative modes of linear development by growing “out” rather than “up”.

For Gilroy, diaspora is a means of thinking the planetary: it exposes the linkages between nations and populations that undermine the fixity of the relationship between race and place. He often expresses this contention by way of the comparative homonym of “roots and routes”. One of the earliest occurrences of Gilroy’s use of the phrase is in his 1997 essay “It’s a Family Affair”, in which Gilroy asks:

If we are to think of ourselves as people whose black cultures and identities have grown from communicative webs that link several nation-states, how do we understand the notions of space and spatiality, intimacy and distance, raised by the writing of diaspora history?

(193)

Gilroy’s understanding of the spatial intimacies created through diaspora history evokes a passage of Bodard’s novella *On a Red Station, Drifting*, quoted above, in which Magistrate Linh, also a diasporic subject, attempts to persuade Lady Oanh that it is possible to create a bond between them akin to kinship. Her goal is to resist a future of isolation and friendlessness on Prosper, of the kind often experienced by subjects of, as Bodard puts it, “the very peculiar migration engendered by wars” (@aliettedb). Her relationship with Oanh, however, would not be based on blood but on the mutual need to create an adaptive “family” with which to govern war-torn Prosper. Linh uses the metaphor of the zither, a traditional sixteen-string Vietnamese instrument, to bind her and Linh within the shared space of the *Đại Việt* imaginary. This rhetorical tactic refashions the relationship between place and kinship in a way that creates connections between their two far-off places of origin. Obscuring the spatial estrangement of Linh’s planet and Oanh’s space station, Linh instead highlights the fact that they are both from a part of the galaxy that is operated and ruled by *Đại Việt*. She does this by evoking a “shared” Vietnamese landscape, one that in all probability no longer exists: the windy, mountainous planes of Vietnam are likely to be only a memory of a bygone planet in this far-future universe. These are spaces of the past, memories recovered and immortalised by *Đại*

Việt poetry, prose, and visual art. Nevertheless, they attest to Linh's belief in the importance of a shared affinity as the basis for kinship. Unable to ground their friendship in the notion of a racial space, as Asia's swap community attempted to do, Linh's evocation of the Đại Việt imaginary engages with the geocritical practice of space-creation to create a set of images that attracts and comforts them both. Her lyrical description of a mythical Vietnamese geography relies on the interaction and interrelation between the real space of a bygone Vietnam and the imagined space of its fantasy renaissance. In this way, Linh conjures a contingent space of nomadic intimacy that echoes the movement-based politics of planetary solidarity that Gilroy advocates in his approximation of "roots and routes". This homophone describes the way in which the dynamic movement of peoples and societies across the globe counters the idea that race is the product of static geographies. In *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and *Against Race* (2000), Gilroy elaborates on this idea to argue that the diasporic crossroads can be productively read as the site of antiracist community-building. He argues that the displacement and transferral of communities as part of diaspora movements often renders cultural investments in "the pastoral black family" meaningless (*The Black Atlantic* 194). "To take diaspora intercultural seriously", as he puts it, is to make race visible as a spectral, ideological force grounded in false notions of the empirical (biology) and the spatial (the place of the nation) (194). The transnational movements of diaspora complicate the purified representations of community that he believes are "a short-cut to solidarity" (203). Indeed, by moving away from home and taking up shelter in other lands, the protagonists of *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* and *On a Red Station, Drifting* definitively take "the long route" to the formation of alliances. Not content with presumed affinities between entities of the same species and gender that share a particular space, they venture towards a slow, incremental mode of building active and nomadic affiliations. As I explore in the following chapter, the deliberate and mobile kinship groups that ensue demonstrate the complex and uneven processes of a "planetary" mode of community-building.

## 7 Conclusion

Women's SF in Europe has proffered several ways of negotiating with the tropes of normative kinship to incur a more inclusive and affective practice of queer intimacy. In *Sulla Sabbia di Sur*, *On a Red Station, Drifting*, and *Il Cuore Finto di DR*, reluctant guardianships and slow-to-bloom friendships form the makeshift "families" of the science fictional future. By way of their gender non-conformity, their blurring of the human and the non-human, and their queering of the connection between kinship and geography, these characters implicate themselves in a different kind of

relationship with their communities that both engages with and surpasses conceptions of the traditional family. These kinship units are porous, malleable, and transient: their form responds to the requirements of the group, adapts to changing external threats, and offers its members both freedom and stability. Within these open, chosen, and inclusive “families” members elect how they relate to one another. This freedom to choose constitutes a political gesture that substitutes the fixed generational hierarchies of the heteronormative family with its “other”—a queer and adaptive grouping of interracial neighbours.

## Notes

- 1 See Horkheimer and Adorno for an analysis of the self-destructive tendencies of the Enlightenment in the context of the failure of Enlightenment rationalism.
- 2 Slavoj Žižek has argued that posthuman entities, like the human subject of the Enlightenment, embody a Cartesian separation of mind and body: the posthuman’s exploration of the permeability of the boundaries between the machinic and the autonomous human “Self” holds interesting similarities to what Voltaire terms the Enlightenment’s “grande société des esprits” [great society of minds] (68). Žižek claims that:

Where Hayles gets it wrong is in her crude opposition between the liberal self-identical autonomous *human* of the Enlightenment and the *posthuman* body separates my autonomous Self from its machinical protheses is constantly permeated, and in which the Self in itself explodes into the famous “society of minds.”

(See Žižek)

- 3 See Horkheimer and Adorno for an analysis of the self-destructive tendencies of the Enlightenment in the context of the failure of Enlightenment rationalism.
- 4 For an analysis of the way in which androids are exploited for labour in the world of Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1969) and the subsequent adaptations into film as the *Bladerunner* series (1982–2017), see Gregory E. Pence.
- 5 Additionally, at no point in the novel does DR demonstrate sexual desire. There is a “male” Replicant in the story, *Il Cinese*, but Vallorani does not position him or any of the story’s characters as prospective love interests for DR.
- 6 It is a theme that has been explored to frightening effect by director Denis Villeneuve in *Blade Runner 2049*, based on the novel by Philip K. Dick that also inspired Vallorani’s work (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 1969). Niander Wallace, the story’s hubristic villain, is engaged in a failed attempt to be the single parent of all mankind by attempting to manufacture a breed of Replicants that can independently reproduce. This would make the female womb dispensable from the process of reproduction, a process which he feels has excluded men from the intimacy associated with the nine-month gestation period.

- 7 Indeed, as Halberstam puts it in the context of “mother–daughter” dynamics within women’s studies departments in the USA, “The whole model of ‘passing down’ knowledge from mother to daughter is quite clearly invested in white, gendered, and heteronormativity; indeed, the system inevitably stalls in the face of these racialised and heterosexualised scenes of difference” (124).
- 8 Pilar’s dedication to the well-being of a physically and often mentally unstable elder is reflected by statistics that demonstrate the situation for children in many countries, including the UK, where a 2010 survey conducted by the BBC and the University of Nottingham reported that an estimated eight percent of all children in the UK may be acting as carers for parents or other relatives, and in America, the National Alliance for Caregiving and the United Hospital Fund reported in 2005 that 1.4 million children aged eight to eighteen provide care for an adult relative (Howard; “Young Caregivers in the U.S”). The latter survey suggested that seventy-two percent of these are caring for a parent or grandparent, and sixty-four percent are live-in carers. In view of this, assumptions about how caregiving is usually structured within the nuclear family might lose some of their potency.
- 9 Indeed, with the goal of demonstrating that LGBT people are “integral parts of the families they grew up in” and “often provide care to their *families of choice*”, a 2005 survey by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute found that forty-six percent of LGBT New Yorkers over fifty years old had taken on an unpaid caregiving role in families of origin or families of choice in the previous five years (Cantor, Marjorie, et al.). These respondents therefore proved an ongoing commitment not only to their biological families but also to the wider community, and in so doing, demonstrated their implication in both normative and non-normative conceptions of family life.
- 10 In the context of behavioural ecology, Halberstam has also theorised this kind of nomadic intimacy, describing the changing roles taken on within clownfish kinship groups as “an adaptive affiliative process” (81). The flexibility demonstrated by animal communality, both in Halberstam’s and Weaver’s examples, de-code the human values that insist on the biological family as the only model of kinship in order to build flexible affinities that respond to the changing requirements of the group (81).
- 11 It is a demonstration of kinship not unlike Isaac Julien’s film *Young Soul Rebels*, in which disenfranchised London youths in the 1970s survive as best they can amid the era’s rising racial and sexual tensions. Gilroy has called the film’s heterogeneous group of city dwellers: “a kind of surrogate, joyfully dis-organic and synthetic kin group” (“It’s a Family Affair” 205).
- 12 As I will clarify in this section, Asia, for example, is an amphibian girl, while Kurtz is described as “mixed-race”. These differences precipitate a blurring of race and species.
- 13 The figure of Kurtz, the ivory trader with an international reputation in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), has been analysed in depth by Vallorani in her literary criticism, and forms a recurring motif in Vallorani’s work. See, for example, *Gli Occhi e la Voce. J. Conrad, Heart of Darkness: dal Romanzo allo Schermo* (2005), and *Nessun Kurtz. “Cuore di Tenebra” e le Parole dell’Occidente* (2017).

- 14 This and all subsequent translations of Vallorani's *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* are my own translations from the original.
- 15 See Garaway for more on the deliberate "forgetting" of slavery.
- 16 Homi Bhabha, drawing on W. E. B. Du Bois, noted two decades earlier that a community that is contingent and indeterminate "disturbs the grand globalising narrative of capital, displaces the emphasis on production in 'class' collectivity, and disrupts the homogeneity of the imagined community of the nation" (330). Bhabha's conception of the "capital-community opposition" (329) both creates divisions, interstices, and fragmentations within the notion of a sovereign self and within the regulated ideal of civil society grounded in heteronormative familial bonds.
- 17 Extract from the novel's back cover.
- 18 This is an elaboration of Derrida's conception of "l'amitié [que] s'y implique d'avance: l'amitié pour soi, pour l'ami et pour l'ennemi." Based on his notion of Messianic teleiopoiesis "la téléiopoïèse" which I explore further in the following chapter, this kind of friendship demands that the self, "l'autos" be put to one side as the "I" ["je"] draws towards the other:

Nous dirons brièvement téléiopoétique mais non sans suggérer dès maintenant que l'amitié s'y implique d'avance, l'amitié pour soi, pour l'ami et pour l'ennemi. Nous nous autorisons d'autant plus facilement à laisser le soi de l'autos dans l'ombre qu'il paraît ici comme l'effet divisé plutôt que comme l'origine simple de la téléiopoïèse.

(Politique de l'Amitié 51)

[We shall say *teleiopoetics* for short, but not without immediately suggesting that friendship is implied in advance therein: friendship for oneself, for the friend, and for the enemy. We all the more easily authorise ourselves to leave the self of the *autos* in the wings, since it appears here as the split effect rather than as the simple origin of teiopoiesis.]

(Politics of Friendship 32)

- The logic of teleiopoiesis assumes that friendship will be realised on the basis of a utopian, forward-dawning futurity, to borrow Muñoz's appropriation of Ernst Bloch (Muñoz 87, 99). This kind of anticipatory friendship illuminates what is not-yet, but must be, if it is to form the basis of a planetary humanism.
- 19 The way in which Gilroy connects race to kinship is demonstrated in his critique of "uniform families". When he employs the term, he implies not only heteropatriarchal families that "neatly" fit in with national patriarchal values and structures but also racially homogeneous families that are consistent with existing racial divisions. Gilroy explores the relationship between diaspora and kinship to demonstrate how the reality of the continuing movement of racial formations today defies the conception of race as "rooted belonging" (*Against Race* 123).

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## 7 At the Borders of the Planetary

“Queer”, inter-species, and recently established SF communities can demonstrate ways of opposing kinship structures grounded in racialised and gendered identity formation. These modes of what I view as a queered kinship tentatively delineate the borders of what I have called “planetary” humanism: modes of being through which the Anthropos and its rigid hierarchies of race and gender are de-centralised and invalidated. However, in this incipient state, humanistic contradictions proliferate: both problematic and wildly promising, the radical “othering” of humanity in European women’s SF raises a range of concerns and conditions that dictate the way in which potentially reparative and inclusive humanisms can ethically come into fruition. By way of a close reading of Brissett’s *Elysium* and Regueiro’s short story “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, this chapter aims to open a critical dialogue between these works and Spivak’s and Gilroy’s conceptions of “planetarity” and to negotiate with the implications of its promises of permeability, inclusivity, and interconnectivity. Where globalisation’s promise of open borders is extended only towards the privileged few, these theorists’ conceptions of “planetarity”, or in Gilroy’s case, “planetary humanism”, experiment with formulations of borderlessness that override the discriminating “globalisers” of race and gender. The negotiation of borders is a theme that runs through the new forms of humanism that I identify, in particular, in the work of Braidotti, Butler, Spivak, and Gilroy. While Halberstam does not explicitly use the concept of the border in his work, his queer theory can be seen to engage in a constant transgression of borders. As explored in Chapter 5, his analysis of Nicholls’s collages as a “blurring of the female form” that induces a refusal of normative gender roles can be seen as an invocation of the rupture of the borders of the gendered body and its position within the natural environment (*Queer Art of Failure* 142). Braidotti and Gilroy also theorise the positive implications of border-crossings: Braidotti suggests that desire is the engine for “territorial and border crossings of all kinds” in the context of nomadic subjectivity

(*Metamorphoses* 108), while Gilroy explores the kinds of humanistic modes of kinship that can overstep “the borders of essentially homogeneous nation states” (*The Black Atlantic* 5). Spivak and Butler have also demonstrated nuanced conceptualisations of borders and border crossings that are sensitive to geopolitical issues and the question of subalternity in their evocations of new forms of humanism based on a critique of issues of race and gender. Butler’s theory of vulnerability and precarity concerns itself with “the invasion of bodily boundaries” in order to argue that gendered bodies are differentially permeable. She argues that bodily permeability can be managed and mobilised to make a positive claim for social recognition and reciprocity (*Theory of Assembly* 226n11). Spivak, in the context of the “seemingly permeable female body” and its implication in the birthing of legitimate citizens, contends that the planetary’s prerogative is to attend to borders and that this involves the performative contradiction of respecting the borders of the gendered and racialised body while simultaneously emphasising the pleasures and radically humanistic implications of bodily “borderlessness” (“A Borderless World?” 47). Not dissimilar to Gilroy’s formulation of new forms of humanism in relation to notions of alterity, Spivak argues that new forms of radical planetary alterity overstep spatial and categorical borderlines—as well as the supposed “borderlessness” of capitalist globalisation—enabling a positive utopian re-imagining of global solidarities.

I explore the (open) question of borderlessness through an investigation of the way in which the permeability of the bordered bodily is rendered in SF. When the human body is violently penetrated, and its intimate permeability is evidenced, the problematic and non-consensual aspects of border-crossing come to the fore. At the borders of the planetary, communities forged in precarious, dystopian worlds are forced to explore the limits of what it means to be alive together.

In her 2016 essay “A Borderless World?” Spivak offers “planetaryity” as an antidote to the exacting, far-reaching eye of globalisation, introducing it as “the space of the incalculable” (47), a space which has not been so exhaustively counted, measured, and assessed. The planetary is, for Spivak, not simply a question of “border crossings and free frontiers” but “attending to borders” in order to ensure “respect for the bordered body” (47). Navigating the double implication of the “amphibolic” border (47) requires a re-formulation of borderlessness into a question, as Spivak demonstrates through the rhetorical formulation of the essay title itself. Suggesting that attending to borders is slow, incremental work that requires openness and a willingness to be transformed, Spivak points to the old French root “attendre” [to attend; to be attentive to; to listen] of the verb “atteindre” [to wait for] from which the English “to attend to” derives. For Spivak, the deliberate, patient, and interminable effort of attending

to borders stands in contrast to the speed of information flows and the movement of capital in a globalised world. The borderlessness of capital, she argues, is a performative contradiction: the free flow of capital depends on the fixity of national borders. Many diaspora communities, on the other hand, who travel to seek asylum from war or economic instability, are excluded from the promise of open borders, an injustice that demonstrates the uneven effects of globalisation.

For Gilroy, the problem of globalisation is also that it privileges the spread of one dominant culture over another, an issue he is particularly concerned with in relation to the way in which race is globalised and commercialised, in particular, the disproportionate visibility of North American “black culture” (*Darker Than Blue* 52). In the context of globally disseminated made-in-the-USA TV shows that feature specials on, for example, African-American hip-hop artists’ cars, he claims that: “Even in these anodyne forms, the planetary reach of the African American vernacular has meant that globalising black culture has been repeatedly oriented towards North American standards, desires, and passions” (52). Globalisation in the form of Americanisation has allowed for the spread of North American notions of black masculinity. His view reflects Spivak’s often-repeated assertion that “Gender is the tacit globaliser of the world before the globe could be thought by cartographers” (“Can There Be a Feminist World?”). Her and Gilroy’s conceptions of the “planetary” overcome the paradox of globalisation in order to escape the globalising systems of race and gender. As Spivak has conjectured: “I propose the planet to overwrite the globe” (*Imperatives* 72). For Spivak, the “imperative to re-imagine the planet” is profoundly ethical: citing Foucault, she notes that “The need is to turn toward ethical practices—care of others as care of the self—that were ‘defective for capitalism’” (72). Thus, Spivak’s conception of the planetary presents itself at a distance from the capitalist emphasis on competition and instead advocates “systems where responsibility inheres as birth right ... (This is responsibility in an ‘extra-moral sense,’ if you like, counter-intuitive to Enlightenment moralisms)” (“From Haverstock” 11). At a remove from the moral philosophy of the Enlightenment, this notion of planetary “responsibility” draws its energy from “care of others as care of the self”, thus supplanting the prerogative of the universalised, autonomous, and inwards-looking male European subject with a perspective oriented towards the collective (“From Haverstock” 7).

What I perceive as Spivak’s and Gilroy’s utopian invocations of planetarity, therefore, emerge in opposition to the harmful consequences of capitalist and globalised systems. Similarly, planetarity signals a utopia beyond the dystopia in several works from my corpus of SF. In the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic *Elysium* and “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, for example, planetary responsibility is expressed through their admonition

of human permeability: as the apocalypse rages, human flesh is, at a heightened degree, vulnerable to penetration, invasion, and transformation. Acutely vulnerable to others, in a way that demonstrates Butler's theorisation of precarity and bodily permeability, these texts demonstrate the way in which unexpected solidarities can be formed through an awareness of mutual vulnerability. Bodily permeability can also be transformative when it is mobilised for collective action: alien penetration of human flesh oversteps and transforms the borderlines of race and gender, making the human body radically "other". However, these illustrations of the permeability of the bordered body are also problematised in a formulation that is suggestive of Butler's contention that bodies experience "a differential allocation of permeability", some of the novel's racialised and gendered bodies appear to be acutely permeable and others less so (*Theory of Assembly* 226n11). Therefore, while planetary humanisms visibly arise from the shifting of the borders of race and gender, the violent nature of the reconfiguration of these borders, as the extraterrestrial body penetrates the human one, demonstrates the non-consensual aspects of border-crossing. This analysis subsequently nuances the notion of planetary borderlessness by positioning it as a question of managing the borders of the body rather than the pursuit of total permeability.

In *Elysium*, the alien invaders—called the Krestge—undertake a form of colonial warfare that exploits bodily permeability, transforming human flesh into scaly monsters:

One of the crazies had gotten to her mom one night when she went out looking for supplies. She came back with bite marks on her arm. They thought she would be okay since it was the mist that was dangerous. But within days blue veins were winding through her light brown skin.  
(96)

In the moments before the physical symptoms appear, and the bitten humans undergo a vampiric transformation, they must face the terrifying possibility of becoming "alien".<sup>1</sup> The depth of the alien's entry into Adrienne's mother's body is signalled by the blue veins sprouting in her arms, ones that transform her from a "light brown"-skinned woman into an alien-human hybrid, surpassing the delineations of race as her body transgresses the markers of humanity. This image of the penetrated, transforming woman explores the dehumanising aspect of race and gender: the forced entry of the female body by the racialised other, "being entered against one's will, the invasion of bodily boundaries", results in her transformation into humanity's blue-veined "other". In her theorisation of the way in which race and gender make bodies appear as differentially permeable, Butler contends that:

The tactical deployment of the distinction between the vulnerable and the invulnerable depends as well on the differential allocation of permeability. The language of permeability became rather important in the US after 9/11, referring to the permeability of national borders, drawing upon the anxieties of being entered against one's will, the invasion of bodily boundaries. Both sexual interdictions and gender norms are at work in such language, to be sure—the fear of rape, the prerogative to rape, to name but a few ways in which gendered differences are established through the political problems raised by the permeability of the body, a condition that can only be managed, but not escaped (since all bodies have orifices, or can be pierced by instruments). And yet, the impossible project goes on by which one gender is regarded as permeable, and the other not.

(Theory of Assembly 226n11)

Butler signals to the vulnerability of the permeable body, while also noting that its permeability is gendered, with only some gendered bodies viewed as penetrable. For Butler, the “language of permeability” that was in common use after the September 11 attacks was deeply impressed with the language of race and gender, by which the woman's body, that “prerogative of rape”, becomes the violated national border, entered non-consensually. In *Elysium*, from the moment of her transformation, Adrienne's mother becomes visible as a racialised “other” from the perspective of the Krestge. The subject of their hatred and their sense of superiority over humankind, she is re-embodied as an interdimensional monster, a physical manifestation of the violence wrought by the Krestge's colonial endeavours on one of the Earth's native species. Narrativised as emblematic of the creeping terror of alien invasion, Adrienne's mother's transformation is evocative of Butler's contention that, within the lexical field of permeability, the woman's body, entered against its will, “becomes” the penetrated border of a nation under attack. As a critique of the traditional dualisms between women and nature/nation, which has been theorised by, for example, Adriana Teodorescu, Luca Valera, Maureen Devine, Laurence Coupe, and others, the transformation of Adrienne's mother's body also comes to signify the Krestge's pollution of the Earth's atmosphere, which facilitates the aliens' colonisation of the planet by making it inhospitable to humans. The human and its natural environment are destroyed in synchrony, so that the physical markers of race—in the case of Adrienne's mother, the “light brown skin” that is ultimately transformed into scales—are rendered unintelligible simultaneous to the process of destruction through which the Earth's surface ceases to become recognisable as a place of human habitation. The non-consensual border crossings of the ecological and militarised apocalypse that results from inter-species conflict thus casts both the human

body and the natural world into radical alterity. Subsequently, racial and gender demarcations by which humans were hierarchised when they existed autonomously to the Krestge are historicised and invalidated based on their dependence on the Earth's spaces, which now no longer exist.

As Adrianne's father explains during his last days on *Elysium's* broken surface, what can be viewed as a post-anthropocentric turn triggered by the alien invasion has interfered with the way in which race is socially structured. He states: "A black man never stood a chance in this city. They fixed it so that we always got a raw deal. Then all of the happened and none of that mattered anymore" (98). The permeability of the human body both radically undermines the kinds of humanistic ontologies that position humans as different and separate from other things, and simultaneously historicises and culturally situates gender and race as markers and differentiators of individual identity. As the borders of the human become increasingly elusive, the planetary comes into focus. This is perhaps most effectively illustrated when Adrian, mourning the loss of his brother Antoine, graffiti's the bulldozed city in remembrance of him:

He drew face after face after face. Over and over and over again he drew. Strange faces. Faces of friends. Faces of the fellas from around the way. Faces of the kids at school. Different faces. He stopped and looked over all of the pages he had done. The faces merged into one. They were his brother.

(88)

These borderless faces, both identifiable as plural and unfamiliar "strange faces" and as the single face of his brother, suggest that a community of mutually vulnerable "fellas" and "friends" has been drawn together. The borders of the body disintegrate into a composition of interconnectivity and solidarity born from shared precarity. The image, and its harrowing backstory of intergalactic war and the aliens' colonial ambitions, knits together Butler's conception of the uneven distribution of precarity, Spivak's notion of the "planetary" as alterity, and Gilroy's composition of a counter-anthropological and non-racial planetary humanism. Faces grow "strange", and are subsequently, in more than one sense of the term, "drawn" into proximity. For Spivak, the planet must, through a displacement of the centrality of the Anthropos, become a "species of alterity", a space which, despite its familiarity, can be viewed in terms of otherness (*Death of a Discipline* 102). This process of "othering", through which the world is seen again, differently, paradoxically offers glimpses of "collectivities that must be opened up with the question 'How many are we?'" (*Death of a Discipline* 102). The multiplicity of bodies drawn onto the page by Adrian's iterative artistic gestures, through which "face

after face after face” appear “over and over and over again”, repeatedly ask the question of how many brothers have been lost in the war against the Krestge, how many Adrian must mourn for. Registering his brother’s disappearance in terms of what Spivak might call a “hybrid ethos”, Adrian experiences the multiplication of the brother he loves into a hybrid, nomadic subject, drawing into its fold the untold stories and invisible faces of the disappeared multitudes (“From Haverstock” 18). The planetary thus advances the question of simultaneity, formulated by Spivak as: “we do exist together; how?” (“A Borderless World?” 56). A tentative response to the question of “how?” emerges in Adrian’s drawing: countless faces fuse into one image of love and loss, so that “a dystopian existing together” in “violent global simultaneity” (“A Borderless World?” 56) offers the basis upon which to formulate a future mode of being together.

Gilroy also identifies in the “features of this pragmatic, planetary humanism” a revolution in the “constraints of bodily existence (being in the world)”, so that:

The recurrence of pain, disease, humiliation and loss of dignity, grief, and care for those one loves can all contribute to an abstract sense of a human similarity powerful enough to make solidarities based on cultural particularity appear suddenly trivial.

(Against Race 17)

Echoing Butler’s conception of the use-value of shared precarity as the basis for collective assembly, Gilroy suggests that planetary humanism can offer an “abstract sense” of “human similarity” through the acute experience of modes of vulnerability that overcome cultural specificity. While collectives formed on the basis of “human similarity” might seem to reinstate the anthropocentric formulation of human particularity visible in traditional humanisms, Gilroy makes clear that a focus on human vulnerability serves to, on the contrary, undermine “the triumphal tones of the anthropological discourses that were enthusiastically supportive of race-thinking in earlier, imperial times” (Gilroy, *Against Race* 17). He identifies as a mode of counter-anthropocentrism the process of making the Anthropos visible as a collection of (ontologically) permeable bodies. Indeed, as he puts it, the “grim determination” of traditional humanism “to make that predicament of fundamentally fragile, corporeal existence” into one of autonomy and self-sufficiency is rendered futile in the reality of human precariousness (*Against Race* 17). Humans are, as Butler has also emphasised, dependent on one another for recognition and for survival, and so, in their mutual vulnerability, collectivities of resistance can emerge to denounce shared grievances. For Adrian’s father, this involves using his body to protect his son: “Bullets flew. The heat, The smoke. The smell ... Adrian ducked. The



night was pitch black with repeating burst of light. He moved to cover his son with his body” (138). The novel’s blurring of characterisation and narrative further contributes to this image of bodies that offer their permeability in protection of one another. Where one character’s “consciousness” is incompletely rendered by the computer script embedded into the Earth’s atmosphere, another character “steps in” to fill in the blanks, merging their story into the space where the other narrative went dry. This combined effort of human–computer storytelling offers a more complete picture of what happened in the events surrounding the Krestge’s invasion. A planetary *exposé* of this precarious historical moment creates a vision of contaminated and uneven communities forged through collaboration, becoming-other, and technology-mediated interactions between the reader (who takes the place of future beings that encounter the computer script etched into the Earth’s atmosphere) and the humans that live through the apocalypse. Individually controlled by no one, yet accessible to all, the effect of borderlessness on this patchwork narrative redefines “the commons” on a planetary scale. This is a narrative that shifts with every re-reading of it: borderlessness creates new bodily boundaries, as characters form again, differently, as is allegorised by Adrian’s graffiti, in which many faces merge to form the distinct, identifiable outline of his brother. Both, therefore, the permeability of the borders of the characters’ bodies and the re-definition of those boundaries into subjects who are known and loved offer an exploration of Spivak’s dual understanding of borderlessness.

Borderlessness, in Spivak’s terms, negotiates a dual process by raising the question of “attending to borders”. This involves making the border of the body recognisable while also bearing in mind that its permeability can potentially “be a pleasure”. As seen in the previous section, Brissett’s narrative does not underestimate the potential pleasure of borderlessness, as demonstrated by *Elysium*’s love scenes, in which genitalia and sexualities merge into an intricate overlapping of desire. Spivak explains:

In terms of respect for the bordered body, the short-term work is law, and its implementing. The long-term work is the work of a borderlessness that attends to borders. To be borderless is also a pleasure for the female and the male—to be borderless, to be permeable, can be a pleasure. So it is attending to borders rather than simply respecting them that is our first, gendered, lesson.

(“A Borderless World?” 47)

Attending to borders is thus a two-part process: making sure to allow for the possibility of pleasurable permeability on the one hand, and ensuring that the boundaries of the body are protected by right of law on the other. For Spivak, attending to borders in the “long term” is “a responsible pragma”

that can be learnt from “underclass immigrants” (“From Haverstock” 15). Learning from “below”, as Spivak puts it, is the task of imagining “something different, much harder, not a quick fix. Something that you will never hear in discussions of multicultural policy” (“From Haverstock” 15). *Elysium* demonstrates all these aspects of borderlessness: the pleasure of nomadic sexual encounters; unexpected communities forged through overlapping narratives; characters interpellated by planetary alterity; and the violent, non-consensual entry of another’s body, in a manner evocative of Spivak’s conception of the way in which “the space of the incalculable” that is entered into “at the border of gendering” often “surfaces as rape, displacement, asylum” (“A Borderless World?” 47).

When posed as a question, the dual implication of borderlessness can be elaborated through a reading of the problematic but hopeful lesbian pregnancy detailed in Regueiro’s short story “Planetoide de Oportunidades”. Following the intervention of microscopic bacteria, Nidia becomes pregnant with her girlfriend’s child, undergoes a botched abortion, and dies at the hands of the planetoid’s corrupt medical team, who are under orders to rid the planetoid, and all infected humans, of the bacteria. Her girlfriend Linda discovers this conspiracy from Alessandra, another worker on the planetoid whose girlfriend was also “infected” by the bacteria, and subsequently was able to unknowingly impregnate Alessandra during sex. The story ends, somewhat incongruously, with Linda agreeing to help Alessandra look after the bacteria-human child she has given birth to, seemingly having forgotten the trauma of her girlfriend’s recent death. The story’s jarring ending, and Linda’s rather disingenuous note of hope, demonstrates the dual aspect of “attending to the borders of the body”: on the one hand, the violent and non-consensual invasion of bacteria into the lesbian woman’s body is a breach of the bordered body, while on the other hand, the story strongly emphasises the utopian potentiality of a “borderless” relationship between human and bacteria. As Spivak explains in the context of how to account for women’s suffering across the globe: “even violence can be desired when we are in the arena of the incalculable. Attending to borders is a complex thing, as incalculable as life and death, subject to teaching that touches the spirit, rather than mere legal action, or tabulation for convenience” (“Can There Be a Feminist World?”). Borrowing the term “incalculable” from Derrida, Spivak notes that attending to borders, like gender itself, is an immense, complex task. In the context of “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, the unannounced penetration of the lesbian women’s bordered bodies, is—however desired the result—a violent infraction of their right to choose. However, as with the transgressive encounters of Braidotti’s nomadic subjects, this violent human-bacteria border crossing produces unimaginably fruitful consequences, resulting in a foetus created without the addition of genetic material from a male human. In doing so,

the story constitutes a reprisal of themes of twentieth-century women's SF, notably, according to Eleonora Federici, the impact technology might have on Darwinian notions of reproduction and natural selection "Il discorso sulla riproduzione, la revisione della tradizione darwiniana, il dibattito su scienza e tecnologia collegata a una riflessione sull'etica e sul significato di questi sviluppi nella vita delle donne sono centrali" [The discourse on reproduction, the revision of the Darwinian tradition, the debate on science and technology linked to a reflection on the ethics and the significance of these developments in the lives of women are central] (14).<sup>2</sup> "Planetoide de Oportunidades" signals an overthrow of a Darwinian model of the evolution of human reproduction, so that bacteria-human offspring can be made possible through an infraction on the bordered human body and its evolutionary processes. In doing so, humanity and the mode by which it reproduces itself is cast into radical alterity, invoking Spivak's notion of the "planet" as the world made unfamiliar. The strangeness of the bacteria-lesbian pregnancy opens up for a new perspective on the idea of "living together" with another species, a perspective which also overcomes the notions of racial separateness and heteronormative procreation that inflect the "global" and the "globalised". Spivak has explained that: "The 'planet' is ... as perhaps always, a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right. Its alterity, determining experience, is mysterious and discontinuous—an experience of the impossible" (*Death of a Discipline* 102). In "Planetoide", Alessandra and Linda quickly realise their implication in an act of "collective responsibility": for these women, becoming aware of the reproductive potential of bacteria-human sex is also an ecological awakening. In a deliberate act of genocide, the humans attempted to eradicate all bacteria life from the planetoid. Through their impregnation of lesbian couples, the bacteria attempt to demonstrate that there was an ecology on the planetoid that existed prior to human invasion. Butler has claimed that, "the discursive move to establish "the people" in one way or another is a bid to have a certain border recognised" (*Theory of Assembly* 5). In this sense, the bacteria's attempt to have the borders of their microscopic bodies recognised also problematically necessitates a breach of the bodies of another species. Indeed, the bacteria's infraction of the borders of the human body is presented as their only available means of asserting their recognisability. While the bacteria cannot vocally communicate with the humans, Alessandra feels that they have made their motives clear: they have made a plea to lesbian couples to support microscopic life forms native to the planetoid. In so doing, they struggle towards a mode of planetary solidarity that oversteps the borders of the human race and the reproductive limits of lesbian sexuality.

A spatialised vision of this negotiation of the concept of borderlessness within the terms of a planetary humanism is dramatically rendered in the

“deep spaces” of Bodard’s *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls*. This is a phenomenon that occurs in the fringes of known space, where the laws of physics repeatedly distort so that “reality itself changes from moment to moment” (“A Salvaging of Ghosts” 135). Instances in which characters enter deep space are evocative of an interconnected aspect of planetary humanism that I wish to explore: the way in which the question of borderlessness is raised in science fictional visions of the anthropocentric apocalypse.

When the Đại Việt Empire is attacked by the neighbouring Nam Federation, the Empress begins to regret destroying the Citadel of Weeping Pearls, a place to which she had banished Ngoc Minh, her eldest daughter, along with her largest supply of weaponry. The Citadel’s supervisor of military research, Suu Nuoc, believes that the fringes of known space can help her in this endeavour: Nuoc has run a series of experiments which suggest that deep space acts in a way similar to the time machine, drawing past, present, and future together. Nuoc intends to exploit this convergence of temporalities to return to the Citadel and reclaim the weapons that the Đại Việt Empire so desperately needs to defend itself. When Ngoc Ha, the younger sister of Ngoc Minh, and The Turtle’s Golden Claw, the Mindship daughter of Ngoc Minh, travel into deep space to retrieve Suu Nuoc, they discover that this is a place in which the borders of the body and of humanity can be dissolved and reformed:

Humanity, too, ceased to have any meaning—Ngoc Ha had read Grand Master Bach Cuc’s notes—she’d sent *The Turtle’s Golden Claw* there on her own, because humans who went this far *dissolved*, turning into the dust of stars, the ashes of planets. “You’re not human,” Ngoc Ha said. Not anymore.

“I’m not human either,” *The Turtle’s Golden Claw* said, gently.

Ngoc Minh merely smiled. “You place too much importance on that word”.

(137)

In the shadows of deep space, at the fringes of the known universe, differential timelines are “dragged together”: humanity’s era, or timeline, is measured in relation to other times and spaces—other timelines—historicising humanity’s supposed uniqueness. Within this convergence of temporalities, the era of the Anthropocene is an insignificant product of a particular configuration of time and space.

No longer intelligible within linear, normative spatiotemporality, the systems of race and gender through which humanity gains meaning in this novel are emptied out. Instead, the shimmering, interdimensional shadows of those who live there no longer take the form of “bodies”, and are only refracted images of a humanity that “was”. This visual demonstrates

Spivak's notion of the imminent "death" of anthropocentrism, first signalled to in her 1985 essay "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value", in which she points to a metaphysical apocalypse in which the old gives in to the new. The apocalypse would subsequently be used by Spivak as a metaphor for both the effects of global capitalism and traditional Comparative Literature's destructive enforcement of globalisation, as explained in *Death of a Discipline* (2003), in which she calls on the planetary to defeat the standardised model of world literature. This vision of potential disciplinary apocalypse in the humanities is based on a much earlier critique of Derrida's 1983 work *D'un Ton Apocalyptique Adopté Naguère en Philosophie* in which she suggests that the "apocalyptic tone" of Derrida's essay:

announces the pluralised apocalypse of the present moment, in our particular case the set or ensemble of ideology-critical, aesthetic-troping, economically aware performative or operational value judgements. My careful language here should make clear that the practical moment is not a "fulfilment". In the pluralised apocalypse, the body does not rise. ("Scattered Speculations" 92)

Finding "in this obscure text a practical politics of the open end", Spivak identifies the use-value of the unrestricted politic in its rhetorical engagement with ideology (*The Spivak Reader* 297). The bodiless shapes that inhabit what can be read as, in Spivak's terms, the "pluralised apocalypse" of Bodard's *Citadel* resist reincarnation and resurrection—they do not "rise". I view this as suggestive of Spivak's elaboration of Derrida, as has been previously discussed in Chapter 2, with its evocation of restoration that refuses to return to a single world order or bring about an inevitable future, thus avoiding the guarantee of certain revival achieved by Christ's resurrection (*Politiques de l'Amitié* 74). This mode of looking to the future does not allow for the prolongation of any particular ontology, thus diverting from the "messianic structure" of what John D. Caputo terms "concrete messianisms" (*Jacques Derrida* 135). Indeed, Bodard's novel does not conclude with a singular and certain messianic "return" of the Citadel. Instead, in a Derridian space of "l'entre-deux", which both separates and draws together life and death, the "dissolved" and spectral humans of the Citadel appear in radical alterity (*Politiques de l'Amitié* 399). Within, the radical destruction of the human form is quasi-transcendental, offering perpetual incompleteness, not revival. In keeping with Derrida's notion of spectrality, the Citadel is both absent and present, amounting to a blurring of those terms. For Spivak, gender's empirical is "sex", that which "makes explicit the mysteriousness of being-human ... keeping spectrality under control" (*Other Asias* 4). If gender expressed as "sex" keeps spectrality at

bay, then the Citadel's spectrality can, when read through Derrida's deconstructive ethics, reveal the contingency of concrete identity markers that signify race and gender. These spectral forms also demonstrate that "too much importance" is placed on the category of human, because the spectral displaces the historical-temporal origin of that formation. Instead, its indeterminate grounding across "differential timelines" both demonstrates the contingency of man-made identity categories and points towards a state-of-affairs that remains perpetually unfulfilled: a queer failure,<sup>3</sup> perhaps, as previously discussed, to adjust to normative linear historicity. Derrida's reconstructive project requires that completion is avoided at all costs, while Spivak warns against "fulfilment" in the practical moment. In aiming beyond the regulative ideal, as Dana Hollander puts it in her comparison of Derrida and Rosenzweig's accounts of messianism, it "risks utter disappointment and failure" (*Exemplarity and Chosenness* 190), echoing the kind of radical change that Halberstam identifies in works of art that craft a queer aesthetic with which to represent "queer failure" (*Queer Art of Failure* 100). Formed of the "dust of stars, the ashes of planets" (137), the shapes that populate the Citadel point towards an infinite becoming, just as the bulk of chemical elements expelled from dying stars undergo an infinite transfer of energy: they are never resurrected into fleshy bodies. The Citadel enacts the *teleiopoietic* convergence of temporalities demonstrated by Derrida's testamentary sentences, which draw together the performative and the constative, establishing the double etymology of *teleiopoiesis*: the possibility of both completeness and endless potentiality. These sentences, which also echo Spivak's "pluralised apocalypse", cross space, reverse time, transforming, producing, and creating. In Spivak's pluralised apocalypse, "the body does not rise": the Messianic promise will not be fulfilled ("Scattered Speculations" 92). In the novel, instead of a "resurrection", bodies disintegrate into complex collectivities, shadows that emerge in the differential timelines where the Citadel has been summoned by the Grand Master Bach Cuc.<sup>4</sup> In its temporarily restored form, the Citadel's convergence of spatiotemporal lines can be read as in tune with Spivak's dual process of combined short-term action and long-term patience. Deep space reconciles two temporalities within a continuous future-present moment: a poetics of distance at one remove ["une poétique de la distance à distance qu'il s'agit ici"] (Derrida, *Politiques de l'Amitié* 50). The teleiopoietic quality of the suspended state of the Citadel's deep space detaches the limiting and exclusionary categories of race, gender, and humanity from their signifying function in the present. Reading the spaces of the Citadel alongside Spivak's ontological post-structuralist apocalypse therefore enables a radical theoretical re-interpretation of the spatiotemporal setting within which an anti-racist and gender-inclusive planetarity comes into effect.

The momentum of “the short term juridical-political” is surfaced in *Citadel* through motifs of time running out: “‘The Turtle’s Golden Claw was hovering near the boundary, bobbing like a craft in a storm. ‘There’s a differential’, she said. ‘Different timelines all dragged together. If you gave me time—’” (115). The proximity of past, present, and future amounts to a compression of time and space, within which time is of the essence because humans cannot survive long here: “humans who went this far *dissolved*” (137). This evokes both Spivak’s point that there is a pressing need for “short-term” socio-juridical gender-related work and Said’s conception of “lateness” (*On Late Style*), borrowed from Adorno, and taken up by Gilroy in his analysis of Said’s “late works” (“Not Yet Humanism” 106). Gilroy elaborates on Said’s use of the term to explore the long overdue humanistic gestures that must urgently be undertaken in the wake of irreparable ecological damage. The Turtle’s Golden Claw’s request for more time evokes the immanency of “the spectre of human extinction” that Gilroy points towards as he calls for a planetary humanism (“Not Yet Humanism” 21). Through the image of an Earth haunted by the possible eradication of humanity, Gilroy argues that humanity is already situated in a moment of belatedness that contradicts the “disavowed mortality” of Enlightenment doctrine (“Not Yet Humanism” 106). He argues that this reprisal of the concept of lateness might then “constitute a morbid relocation or restaging of our always vulnerable humanity in the waiting room of death”, a liminal space that is rich with the challenge to make change so as to secure better future (“Not Yet Humanism” 106). “The waiting room of death”, or, in the words of SF writer China Miéville, the space of a “not yet apocalypse” (*Kraken* 165), is also spectral in the Derridian sense: it is both imminent and always in the mode of “to come”, as is also demonstrated in the apocalyptic moments of Brissett’s *Elysium* and the transcendental deep space of Bodard’s *Citadel*. Gilroy expresses its dual temporality as that which takes place:

After the end of natural evolution, after we have the Anthropocene in focus, in the era of genomics, in the face of irreversible climate change which will enforce its own regime of social and economic differences beyond the institutional and imaginative grasp of the national state, when the waters start to rise...

(“Not Yet Humanism” [Edward Said Memorial Conference]

00:29:40-00:30:02)

The temporality Gilroy describes is the moment of the overdue, the belated, and the untimely. It is an expression of the failure of humanity to appropriately and sustainably steward the planet. In this context of tardiness and of failure, Gilroy’s reformulation of Enlightenment humanism emerges. While



it is too late to repair damaging human behaviour, the forward-dawning apocalypse also serves to bring the present closer to possible “planetarity”. Bhabha reads the “time-lagged” narrative of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) while tracing the concept of “belatedness” through the work of Fanon, in particular Fanon’s understanding of the “‘belatedness’ of the black man” within what Bhabha views as the “temporality of modernity” (*Location of Culture* 364, 340). In doing so, he echoes Fanon’s lamentation that “You come too late, much too late, there will always be a world—a white world between you and us” (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 122). In this spirit of belated appearance and action, Gilroy asks that humankind invigorates its work to prevent the obliteration of its planet. These are, as Said has suggested in *On Late Style*, humanity’s “late works”, the belated actions that will be most remembered by the coming generations.

A view of what will happen if humanity forgoes its final opportunity to engage in the overdue actions that Gilroy’s planetary humanism urges must be undertaken is compellingly demonstrated by Brissett’s apocalypse narrative, *Elysium*, a novel in which the reader must enter the narrative in the aftermath of apocalypse, when it is already too late. The opening sections of the novel contain a series of prophecies, from the classical apocalyptic trope “Bad omens were everywhere” to Adrienne’s ravings from the confines of a psychiatric ward:

“War is coming.”  
“What do you say, honey?”  
“War is coming.”  
“War is coming?”

(55)

Adrienne’s insistent iterations of her prophecy contribute to the pace and momentum developed in the first half of the novel before the humans are forced to evacuate the Earth. This section of the story is characterised by an almost biblical, eschatological rush towards the future: as David W. Jardine puts it in the context of the dash to complete the mapping of the human DNA, “toward the last days when all will be fulfilled, when we will somehow be done with this burden of suffering and continuance, and can finally rest, assured” (“Eight Pedagogical Preambles” 44). Indeed, there is a sense that on the other side of this incorrigible dystopia is Elysium. But, as the book reveals, Elysium—heaven on Earth—is never recovered: Earth remains in hands of the Krestge. Thus, the tendency towards the messianic—towards the Elysium to come—is foreclosed by the temporal structure of the novel, in which the computer code is accessed in a future where the Earth has been destroyed by the aliens. Where then, we might ask, is the promised Elysium in all of this? The novel suggests that

the Elysium that the reader is pressed to rediscover is in fact our own Earth in “real time”, one that we must rush to recover from war and ecological disaster before it is too late.

For the world depicted in Brissett’s narrative, there can be no redemption, no “fulfilment”, and no resurrection. Dyschronia has embedded itself into the spaces of their Earth, so that the desecration of human spaces occurs in synchrony with the speeding up and folding in of a time and space that has gone “bad”. The error codes written onto the page, which signify an incorrect recall or complete loss of information in the memory drive, evidence this rotting of apocalyptic space. The spatiotemporality of the moments leading up to near-human extinction becomes increasingly dense and compact. Space folds in on itself so that scenes in the novel, which are layered on top of each other, indistinguishable as independent occurrences, become increasingly iterative, told and retold, each time with modifications. The result is a cacophony of voices and possible conclusions:

Spinning. Turning. Slipping. Sliding. This was the truth. This was a lie. This was the truth. A lie. This was real. But... it couldn’t be. She remembered him. Some other time. Another place. Sick and dying. Then healthy and leaving her.

>>

>> .

10110001101100011011000110110001101

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(40)

The syncopated, four-syllable sentences demonstrate a closing in of space and a speeding up of dystopian time, offering a sense of apocalyptic urgency. The pressure of impending apocalypse is emphasised throughout scenes of climactic violence, in which those who have been turned into scale-covered monsters by the alien dust seek to ravage the last few of their species that have remained recognisably human:

The sounds of hooves pounded the pavement, shaking the floor and making the windows tremble. Some of the shadows stopped and began banging on the pane. There was no time. It broke open like the crash of a wave against the rocks.

(79)

Inside the shop, Hector, Antoine, and Adrian are hidden, awaiting their fate. As the transformed humans drum a military marching beat into the ground, a rhythm is formed that sets the pace of the battle. Time moves in synchrony to war, moving faster and faster until there is “no time”, and

the remaining humans are forced to meet their death. The motif is repeated by another “version” of Antoine, a soldier in love with a “version” of Adrienne, who in this instance is a young girl trapped in a violent, ancient cult: “We don’t have much time before I have to be back. The war is not going well” (41). The pressure to act fast is heightened by an apocalyptic soundtrack of 1990’s and 2000’s hip-hop, rap, and heavy metal. Among other tracks Brissett cites—with modifications to word order, meter, and rhythm—the lyrics to Saul Williams’s “Break”, offering the narrative a paratactic set of images that underlines the pace of the apocalypse:

Corpses piled in heaps. Sores and decay. Reeks.  
Placin’ tags on feet. A Nike Air Force Fleet. Custom  
Made: unique. Still in box, white sheet. Ripened  
Blue black sweet. White tank top, wife beat BREAK.

(85)

Williams’s lyrics, which were critically acclaimed for their unconventional time signature, reference poverty and sweatshop labour “Corpses piled in heaps ... Placin tags on feet”, as well as consumer militarism, homogeneity, and the paradox of mass production that masquerades as a one-of-a-kind product: “A Nike Air Force fleet: Custom made: unique”. These fragmented images are compiled to the tempo of calamity, suggesting the uncompromising disintegration of the social fabric. This echoes the “fragmentation, *bricolage*, pastiche” that Bhabha identifies in Fanon’s depiction of “the disjunctive space of modernity”, a place of contradiction “wrought from the interruptive, interrogative, tragic experience of blackness, of discrimination, of despair” (*Location of Culture* 238). Brissett’s dystopian setting gives the prolific racism Bhabha describes a sound and a shape, a synesthetic “audible-bleakness”. The space of the novel echoes and illuminates Bhabha’s description of the way in which race is lived: the fear etched into the computer code that forms *Elysium*’s narrative is, in its broken and incomplete form, imbued by the tragedy of the Krestge’s annihilation of humankind. In this way, the Krestge’s imperialist political agenda, recorded in time and space through the digital remains of the computer script, corresponds, inversely, to Bhabha’s suggestion that the “ontology of man” is a historical phenomenon, one that neither makes space for non-male European entities, nor has ever been able to fully grasp what it means to be human (*Location of Culture* 341). For the Krestge’s wrath to be satisfied, the humans must be destroyed utterly. As this section of the novel comes to a close and the humans are forced to face up to impending apocalypse, the critical distance between the narrative and humanity’s similar claims to domination is lessened and the reader is positioned to recognise the tragic consequences of humanity’s similar claims to domination over other

peoples, species, and landscapes. If the present time on Earth is, according to Gilroy, the moment of belatedness from which humanity must engage in crucial reparative actions, then this point of *Elysium's* narrative signals the moment in which that possibility has passed.

This sense of inevitable apocalypse and the impossibility of belated action come to a climax when a spaceship called The Trajan begins to board the portion of humans who will be saved and taken to an extra-terrestrial base: the fate of humanity on Earth has been decided. When the spaceship is ready to take passengers, many of the humans who have not reserved a seat because they were initially unwilling to leave Earth now regret their decision, and clamour violently for a place on the spaceship: "A riot of colour raged, turning and running and pushing" (160). But their efforts are too little and too late as Eliel, the administrator of The Trajan, informs them: "We warned you! We urged you to prepare, but still you did nothing! Now there is no room!" (161). Eliel, whose name means "God is my God" in Hebrew, rebukes their stupidity, echoing the apocalyptic biblical prophecy of Ezekiel to those who did not prepare for the coming of the Lord: "Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come ... Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and spend my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations" (English Standard Version, Ezek. 7.3-5). Eliel's admonition also echoes George Townsend's classic vision of Judgement Day, in his introduction to Genesis Chapters 6 and 7 in his 1849 *Scriptural Communion with God*:<sup>5</sup> "and the sinners who had mocked the preaching of God's judgement wept in despair, or groaned for their folly, and too late repented; as men now too late repent, when they cannot live, and fear to die" (100). *Elysium* demonstrates what is "not yet" but which "will have happened" if the Anthropocene does not halt its movements towards ecological and military apocalypse. This is the temporality that the reader inhabits, as they enter the narrative before the collapse of Earth but after the fictional fall of Elysium. The narrative space of the "what might have been" thus casts the Earth into a position of alterity: in this hypothetical space and time, apocalypse has already broken on the horizon, appearing more imminent, and more frightening, than the real-life global devastation that is often nonchalantly consumed through, for example, European media. The future-dawning temporality within which Gilroy's own conception of a not yet apocalypse is set, a temporality within which, unlike in *Elysium*, humanity does still have time to engage in belated action, radically reformulates the Enlightenment humanist equation, both by negating the human as its normative subject and by suggesting the possibility of a future democracy for all living entities.

## 1 Conclusion

At the borders of the planetary, where *Elysium*'s humanity is decentralised in an apocalypse of anthropocentrism, where past and present conjoin in the deep spaces of *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls*, and where native bacteria make their claim to the right to exist by broaching the bodies of lesbian women in "Planetoide de Oportunidades", humanity becomes other to itself, emerging only at the very limits of what it means to be human. From within these spaces of alterity, humanity paradoxically takes shape as what Gilroy might term a "species that differs from itself" (Gilroy, "Not yet Humanism" 106). These borderlands of radical otherness can be read as the outer reaches of the humanist imagination, where systems of race and gender can be finally reconfigured.

As demonstrated by these works of SF, the borders of the planetary are necessarily spaces of discomfort and estrangement. In each of these narratives, the vertiginous experiences of, in *Elysium*, global apocalypse, in *Citadel*, bodily transformation in the warped materiality of the resurrected city, and in "Planetoide", a bacteria-induced pregnancy evoke the disorientating positions of alterity which Spivak believes are the points from which we can enter into an ethical relation with the world and with those around us. The new forms of humanism proposed by Gilroy also depend on an estrangement or "differing" of perspective so that humanity emerges as unrecognisable, in order that a revised humanism does not simply "reverse the unacceptable polarity of European domination" (100). While what I view as his "reparative" reading of Enlightenment humanism, to borrow the term from Eve Sedgwick, draws on the incendiary force that Gilroy identifies in eighteenth-century humanism, unlike the pioneering works of *Les Lumières*, he enters into a study of new forms of humanism to confront and oppose the deeds humanity has wrought against itself and the planet, acts that he argues were justified in part by traditional humanist scholarship. He claims that these crimes against each other and against the creatures that we share the Earth with have been justified in part by hierarchical relationships both between humankind and nature and within differentially racialised and gendered groups, hierarchies upon which Enlightenment humanism was predicated (*Against Race* 100). Taking as his example the post-Second World War work of Aimé Césaire, Gilroy suggests that the impetus to enter "the forbidden zones of humanism" is triggered in light of these devastating acts of human will, and the possibility of worse ones to come. These possible worse events are the ones signalled to by my chosen works of SF, which point to military violence, for example, in *Elysium* and *Citadel*, the devastation of planets and their native species; for example, in *Elysium*, wherein the perpetrators of this

violence are the Krestge aliens; and in “Planetoide”, where it is the humans who seek to destroy all other life forms.

In these examples of women’s SF, human lives persist at great risk, emerging as both vulnerable to and dependent on other entities. At the borders of the planetary, this vulnerability is made acutely visible. The reality of human precarity is particularly prominent in Gilroy’s and Spivak’s theorisation of planetarity. Gilroy, for example, has emphasised that his venture into new forms of humanism is a historicised response to the precariousness of human existence, a precarity which he believes is also acutely present in Said’s work on the concept of “lateness”, which is “a morbid renovation or restating of our always vulnerable humanity in the waiting room of death, that is in relation to the horizon of our omnipresent but disavowed mortality” (106). Gilroy’s planetary humanism is, therefore, not centred around the invincible, invulnerable individual, but around mortal, unevenly grouped, vulnerable, and complexly interrelational entities. I consider this theoretical stance an invocation of the apocalypse of anthropocentrism, by which the human no longer perceives itself as the centre of the universe, as is also the case in these works of SF, and in particular *Elysium*, in which the humans fall prey to the aliens’ intergalactic colonial ambitions. *Elysium* forewarns the global catastrophes that make other kinds of apocalypse increasingly plausible: from, on the one hand, ongoing claims to territory that make life unliveable for people in many parts of the world to political solicitations for nuclear war by bellicose world leaders, on the other hand. In doing so, it issues the kind of “ambitious counter-anthropology” that Gilroy identifies in the late works of Edward Said (100). Indeed, when read as evocations of the borders of new forms of humanism, *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls*, *Elysium*, and “Planetoide de Oportunidades” demonstrate the necessary confrontation of humanity’s ego with the precariousness of its planetary position.

## Notes

- 1 A conceit that has appeared in decades of speculative fiction cinema, the horrific permeation of the bordered body has thrilled and terrorised SF fans in equal measure, particularly perhaps in its visual rendition in SF cinema, in films ranging from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), *Alien* (1979), *Independence Day* (1996), *Mansquito* (2005), *War of the Worlds* (2005), and *Slither* (2006).
- 2 While tracing a genealogy of women’s SF in *Quando la Fantascienza è Donna* (2015), Federici identifies a shift between the “scenari apocaliptici e totalmente disumanizzanti per le donne” [apocalyptic and totally dishumanising scenarios for women] of early twentieth-century dystopias and women’s SF of the late twentieth century when

il discorso si sposta più su una visione utopica della scienza utile per poter comunicare con l'altro, con il diverso. All'anticolonialismo e al pacifismo le autrici affiancano un discorso sulla comunicazione come comprensione della diversità e il tempo stesso presegono un discorso sulla maternità e sulla riproduzione. (14)

[the discourse moves more towards a utopic vision of forms of science that could be useful to be able to communicate with the other, with the different. In contrast to anti-colonialism and pacifism, the authors put forward a discourse on communication as an understanding of diversity while at the same time presiding over a discourse on motherhood and reproduction].

Conjoining a denunciation of colonialism with a utopian vision of communication between women and other species and a re-thinking of maternity and reproduction, "Planetoide de Oportunidades" can be viewed as straddling the moods of both early and late twentieth-century women's SF, addressing issues of colonialism simultaneous to proffering a utopian solution to issues relating to homosexual reproduction.

- 3 For an analysis of "queer failure" in relation to space, see Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure*, in which she describes Judie Bamber and Edelman's notion of "the horizon as limit" as "inscribing queer failure into time and space" (106).
- 4 Derrida's "perhaps" ["le peut-être"] is an invitation into the ethical responsibility of a future that has not yet been determined. While his messianic sentences draw the recipient forwards on the presumption that this future will come into effect, they also demand an indefinite period of waiting (*Politiques de l'Amitié* 55–152). Theologian Travis Kroeker has called this "messianic patience": "There is an excess in this radical, apocalyptic patience that has the courage to act from the modest stance of 'infinality' just because in the cross of the resurrected Messiah is revealed the power of the sovereign God" (*Essays in Exile* 170). In Spivak's words, this is a crucial part of "the double bind of the short term juridical-political, and the long term waiting" (Spivak "Interview"). "Long term waiting" is, at present, particularly frustrating and unfashionable in the context of liberal feminism's emphasis on quick legal victories over incremental change. Indeed, the #metoo movement resulted in a tidal wave of mass accusations of sexual impropriety, formed over a matter of weeks, in what has been termed a "sex panic" (Gessen).
- 5 Genesis Chapters 6 and 7 recount the events surrounding the Great Flood, in which God destroys those who refused to abandon their acts of sin and repent.

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## 8 Conclusion

### New Forms of Humanism

In this final chapter I aim to consolidate how my corpus of SF written by women writers can be productively read together with critical theory in order to elucidate and to advance not only the relevance but the necessity of turning to new forms of radical humanism or “planetarity”. The planetary spaces of SF can offer new perspectives on the role that these forms of humanism can play in confronting issues of race and gender. In demonstrating the creativity of narrative contributions to the development of new forms of humanism, SF is suggestive of Braidotti’s assertion that: “A great deal of courage and creativity is needed to develop forms of representation that do justice to the complexities of the kind of subjects we have already become” (“Affirmation” 9). Works of SF written by women, therefore, not only demonstrate courageous, embodied, and imaginative engagements with the new forms of anti-racist and anti-sexist humanism proposed by the critical theory of Butler, Braidotti, Spivak, Gilroy, and Halberstam but actually formulate their own radical “planetarities”.<sup>1</sup> This suggestion is in keeping with the genealogy of SF that I have traced in the first chapter, in which I demonstrated that the contributions of Zoline and her contemporaries to the New Wave movement radicalised the genre with their creative and political energies and in doing so, as many critics have argued, proffered modes of political theory in themselves.<sup>2</sup> In this vein, I view the works of SF that I analyse in this book as indicative of new forms of humanism grounded in anti-racist and feminist critique. These fictional narratives, as I have argued, when read alongside the works of Butler, Braidotti, Spivak, Gilroy, and Halberstam, expound, elaborate, and problematise the emergence of new forms of humanism and their implications for systems of race and gender in a variety of ways.

Firstly, as demonstrated by my analysis of Bodard’s “Immersion” and Regueiro’s “El Enemigo en Casa” in the third chapter of this book, SF explicates the way in which these theorists historicise the relevance of new forms of humanism. Bodard’s and Regueiro’s tales, which offer a reparative

reading of history as the point of departure into an exploration of possible resolutions in the future, are illustrative of Butler's conception of the vulnerable body as the social embodiment of historical conditions, Gilroy's reparative reading of traditional humanism, Spivak's grounding of "planetary" in, among other contextualisations, an account of complex colonial history, and Braidotti's spatialisation of the nomadic subject as a historical position. "Immersion" and "El Enemigo en Casa" engage in a similar situating of new forms of humanism within the context of a particular historical necessity, demonstrating the way in which solidified modern-day conceptions of race and gender can be historicised into a pattern of territorial control and political intimidation that are buried in Europe's past. By collapsing the past, present, and future within the pages of a political thought experiment, these stories contextualise the need for a humanist reformulation of systems of race and gender through specific reference to, for example, Hitler's following in Spain and the actions of members of Franco's political party, and France's ongoing involvement in Vietnam. By grounding their exploration of radically different modes of being in a fictionalisation of the past, by which that past inhabits an alternative future, racist, sexist, and violently anti-LGBT government policy take on a contemporary mood, emphasising the historicisation of issues of race and gender as the necessary precondition of the emergence of new forms of humanism.

Secondly, as is evidenced in the fourth chapter of this book, science fictional entities which straddle and surpass the borders between the human and its "other" radically enact Braidotti's, Gilroy's, and Spivak's call for forms of post- or planetary humanisms that forge a critical move beyond the centrality of the human. The "planetary", a non-anthropocentric term which both incorporates and exceeds humankind, can be identified in Bodard's *Xuya Universe* series, Brissett's *Elysium*, and Vallorani's *Il Cuore Finto di DR*, as an alloy of Braidotti's brand of posthumanism and Butler's conception of "becoming-other". The collectivities formed by these hybrid creatures are, while still in many ways problematic, composed of radically anti-sexist and anti-racist configurations that surpass the restrictions to the political imagination that potentially limit the critique of Butler, Braidotti, Gilroy, Spivak, and Halberstam. This is perhaps because SF's unique visual language enables the emergence of radical forms of community that are otherwise "unthinkable", to borrow Braidotti's term ("Critical Humanities"). The blockages, inconsistencies, and impossibilities that emerge in theoretical responses to Braidotti's question of "How to do the unthinkable when linearity is blocking the trajectory of our thought" can thus be overcome in science fictional landscapes ("Critical Humanities"). Equally, Gilroy's own gesture towards the unknowable, which he terms a "new idiom"—a new way of speaking about hybridity

beyond the language of patriarchal, Enlightenment-descended identity politics—is creatively responded to by anti-racist and gender-critical modes of SF that tell the story of unexpected kinship groups between diasporic populations. The hybrid, nomadic, and inter-species collectivities proposed by Bodard’s *Xuya Universe* and Vallorani’s works of fiction, in particular, offer a new way of discussing Gilroy’s notion of the “vigorous cosmopolitanism” of the modern era, which he believes is “endowed in modernity by transgressive and creative contacts with different people” that extend beyond the vocabulary of “loss, dilution and weakness” (*Against Race* 263, 38, 217). The collectivities visible in these texts do this by eluding the narrow set of biological determinisms currently associated with race, offering extreme variations of Gilroy’s already revisionist demand for the anti-anthropocentric embrace of complex and transgressive solidarities that extend beyond the “colour line”.

It is also by way of the unique spatiotemporality of speculative modes of fiction, which radicalise the anti-racist and gender inclusive collectivities evoked by the humanistic inquiry of Butler, Braidotti, Gilroy, Spivak, and Halberstam that the yet “unthinkable” can be thought. In the fifth chapter of this book, I explore how SF can, through its utopian evocation of a “forward-dawning futurity”, to use Muñoz’s appropriation of Ernst Bloch’s term (*Cruising Utopia* 99), bring the “unthinkable” to the fore. Works from my corpus of primary sources gesture towards “unthinkable” forms of radical alterity that evoke what Braidotti has termed the “common quest for alternative figurations of subjects-in-becoming” (“Teratologies” 171). Read with Gilroy, these SF narratives point to what Gilroy terms a “heterocultural, postanthropological, and cosmopolitan yet-to-come” (*Against Race* 334). As an evocation and elaboration of Butler’s work, some of these SF texts suggest that an “unthinkable” assemblage can be created when an “I” seeks towards an unreachable “you”. The planetary spaces of SF also express the “unthinkability” of Spivak’s conception of the planetary, which “no thought can weigh” (“Planetary Utopias” 01:44:39–01:44:42). Vallorani’s *Sulla Sabbia di Sur*, for example, not only gestures at these divergent theoretical ventures towards a planetary collectivity in the utopian mode of Gilroy’s formulation of “yet-to-come”, but also transforms and invigorates them. Vallorani’s depiction of a friendship group described in terms of “una storia che non è mai finita”, supplants fixed and pre-determined biological ties and demonstrates the importance of flexible affinities, particularly in moments of global unrest. The solidarities that are subsequently formed are radically agentic, requiring the protagonists to successfully navigate between the digital server—the “rete”—the underground tunnel networks, and the dangerous dystopian cityscape of Sur. Where hegemonic local cultures present the hypostatized concept of blood ties to the young protagonists as an unchangeable reality to which There

Is No Alternative, characters fight for the reconfiguration of kinship as “modes of patterned and performative doing” (“Kinship” 34). Bodard’s *On a Red Station Drifting*, meanwhile, also demonstrates a radicalised conception of the transformation and displacement of normative kinship structures, notably through its descriptions of hybrid Mindships. These human-machinic entities, which operate by way of a dynamic interaction between animals, humans, and ancestor-spirits, are a “colossal hybridisation” of life forms that distress the dialectics of devalued difference that have traditionally positioned the European man as the *homo universalis*, representative of the Anthropos and the standard bearer for the universal. Instead, the Mindship performs elements of an inclusive humanism that rests on the idea of cultures of belonging: it is tailored to the needs of those whom Braidotti describes as the kinds of “others” that are

structured with distressing regularity along the axes of devalorised difference. They are the racialised others: natives, post-colonials, and non-Europeans; naturalised or earth others: animals, insects, plants, and the planet; and the technological others: machines and their interactive networks.

(“Metamorphic Others” 1)

This formulation of a new planetary “family” recovers elements of Vietnamese spiritual and cultural tradition suppressed during France’s colonisation of Vietnam by the emphasis put on Christian culture. The Mindship is thus a material demonstration of an inclusive humanism resting on cultures of belonging, one that reformulates a collective subjectivity in the mode of the pronoun “you”. For Braidotti, anti-racist and gender-inclusive collectivities between and beyond humanity must be urgently and generously thought, for: “we are all caught between the fourth industrial revolution and the sixth extinction and “we here” is a planetary category” (“Dictionary of Now” 00:12:10–00:12:17). Forging connections across time and space, SF captures Braidotti’s invocation of the temporalities humanity is stranded between and draws the reader into an engagement with what must be done in order to survive the future.

SF’s unique mode of navigating time and space is also the condition by which my chosen works of SF can radicalise theoretical gestures towards an expansive planetary humanism, one that is grounded in a feminist and anti-racist politics of location, by evoking at a heightened intensity the spatiotemporalities of both Spivak’s and Gilroy’s conceptions of the apocalypse of the Anthropocene. Bodard’s *Xuya Universe* series, *Elysium* by Brissett, and “Planetoide de Oportunidades” by Regueiro, are individually and collectively illustrative of both Spivak’s notion of attending to borders—the slow task of planetarity—and Gilroy’s conception of the

moment of “lateness” during which new forms of humanism arise. The compression of time and space invoked by the moment of “lateness” is forcefully illustrated when, in Bodard’s *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls*, an errant scientist gains access to deep space. In deep space, objects are warped and move in slow motion. Time is of the essence, because humans who travel this far into space can “dissolve” into thin air (137). This is not merely an enactment of Spivak’s “pluralised apocalypse” or Gilroy’s apocalyptic moment that is staged in “the waiting room of death”, but it brings about a new perspective altogether, so that a reading of these theorisations by Gilroy and Spivak alongside works of SF can induce a re-spatialisation of their suggestions of an open-ended, abstract, and unknowable apocalyptic moment (Spivak, “Scattered Speculations” 92; Gilroy, “Not Yet Humanism” 106). In this way, Bodard’s resurrected Citadel can be read as a radical re-interpretation of the kinds of spaces that are made possible through the lens of new forms of humanism: spaces which collapse human understandings of linear time; spaces within which bodies are neither singularly human nor autonomous subjects; and spaces within which human-made hierarchical systems of racialised and gendered differentiation and demarcation are invalidated. Imbued with a new but impermanent materiality, the Citadel can exist again simultaneous to the times and spaces from which it is accessed by visitors from the future. The urgency of Ngoc Ha’s and Grand Master Bach Cuc’s desire for the city to re-appear expresses both the language of imminence with which new forms of humanism are articulated, and the spatiality of these nomadic, “not yet” humanisms that, in Butler’s terms, venture towards an ever-elusive “you”. The effect of radical alterity that deep space has, in *Citadel*, on the way in which bodies are fused together as a material embodiment of multiple times and spaces, therefore not only radically evokes the combination of short-term and long-term action that Spivak believes is necessary for her momentous project of creating the conditions within which the subaltern might be able to speak, but also reconciles these complementary temporalities of action in an evocation of the planet as a species of alterity.

This position of alterity, which situates the reader at a critical distance from reality, is also why the genre of SF can, as evidenced by the apocalyptic moment in which Brissett’s *Elysium* takes place, enable a radical re-composition of the Enlightenment notion of human individuality by making the once familiar figure of the Anthropos uncanny in the throes of alien invasion. Where Spivak asks that we position the planet itself as a “species of alterity” (*Death of a Discipline* 102), a place that despite its familiarity, we must view in terms of otherness, Brissett’s novel portrays to frightening effect humanity as neither an eternal nor a dominant species, but merely the product of a moment in time, one that runs the risk of being forgotten entirely. Presenting a magnified and radically dystopian invocation of

potentially irresolvable war and ecological destruction, *Elysium*'s narrative is congruent with Spivak's suggestion that we must enter into a new and more respectful relationship with the Earth by defamiliarising it through the lens of the "planetary". By way of the futuristic storyline permitted by the SF genre, a broken narrative is strung between human memory and the digital graft in the Earth's atmosphere, so that the story can take on a "mysterious", "discontinuous", and "impossible" alterity. Spivak suggests that alterity must be attempted by humankind in order to preserve the Earth (*Death of a Discipline* 102). The hybrid and heterogeneous materiality of the narrative voices offers, as Spivak puts it in the context of planetary alterity, an "experience of the impossible": that which demands that we inscribe "collective responsibility as right" (*Death of a Discipline* 102). "Collective responsibility", that most abstract and seemingly unattainable of concepts, is radically rendered in works of SF through the descriptions of the solidarities which emerge during the apocalypse. The fragmented digital narrativisation makes individual humans indistinguishable: the blend of voices that emerge on the borders of the human and the machinic speak from the future to implore the reader that there is a pressing need to preserve the Earth from military and ecological destruction now, before it is too late.

Viewing these works of SF as radicalisations of new and planetary humanisms also suggests that critical theory should engage with the discontinuities of posthumanism, planetary humanisms, and other new forms of humanism. I would argue that this beneficially heightens the perceived vulnerability of the very notion of humanism in a way that is also in keeping with the reformulation of vulnerability engaged in by these new forms of humanism. In order to remain nomadic, uneven, and contested, resisting closure, sedimentation, and ideological captivity, new forms of humanism must remain vulnerable to different readings and interpretations. A reading of SF alongside what sometimes appears to be incompatible theoretical tentatives towards different modes of being with and through other entities, therefore, demonstrates that new forms of humanism must coexist, mutually vulnerable, in a relation of reciprocity and interdependency.

## Notes

- 1 While this conclusory chapter explores the way in which planetary humanisms are radicalised in SF's planetary settings, it would be imprecise to suggest that simply because SF is a genre of literature that is often set in futuristic interplanetary locations it necessarily has an intrinsic connection to the concept of the "planetary" that is proposed by, for example, Spivak and Gilroy. Some works of feminist New Wave SF that emerged in the 1960s, for example, which are neither set in outer space nor take place in the future, also demonstrate elements



of Spivak's and Gilroy's gender-critical approach to planetary humanisms. These stories, for example, American New Wave writer Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe" (1967), explore the "inner space" of a character's consciousness rather than the "external" worlds of a galactic "beyond". In doing so, they cast the domestic sphere into radical alterity, facilitating a gender-sensitive critique of human kinship formations. It could be argued, therefore, that Spivak's and Gilroy's conceptions of planetarity are evoked in the sense of estrangement felt by the suburban housewife as she imagines planets and extraterrestrials invading the space of her own living room. Subsequently, it is not my claim that SF in general points towards new forms of "planetary" humanisms merely because SF narratives are often set on other planets and solar systems: indeed, the protagonist of "Heat Death" is permanently nested within the domestic sphere. Instead, I contend that productive planetary perspectives, like the one that Zoline puts forward, are specifically visible in works of SF that discuss and reformulate issues of race and gender in relation to space.

- 2 See, for example, Tony Burns' *Political Theory, Science Fiction, and Utopian Literature: Ursula K. Le Guin and the Dispossessed* (2010); Lucy Sargasson's *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (2002); and Donald M. Hassler et al.'s *Political Science Fiction* (1997).

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## 9 Summaries of Primary Science Fiction Texts

Italy:

Nicoletta Vallorani's *Il Cuore Finto di DR* (2003) and *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* (2011).

Spain:

Lola Robles and María Concepción Regueiro's *Historias del Crazy Bar y Otros Relatos de lo Imposible* (2013).

Elia Barceló's *Consecuencias Naturales* (1994).

UK:

Jennifer Marie Brissett's *Elysium: Or, the World After* (2014) and her short story "Kamanti's Child" (2016).

France:

Aliette de Bodard's *Xuya Universe* series, including the novellas *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls* (2017), and *On a Red Station, Drifting* (2012). My analysis will also draw on some of her award-winning short stories, including "Immersion" (2012).

### 1 Italy

*Nicoletta Vallorani*

Vallorani, who is a Professor of Contemporary English Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Milan, has authored a number of works of speculative fiction and critical essays in the fields of SF and utopian studies. Vallorani's interests in documentary filmmaking and urban geographies have given birth to a recent non-fiction publication in the field of psychogeography, *Millennium London: Of Other Spaces and the Metropolis* (2012). The book explores an array of visions of London

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as the physical and topographical settings of films and novels. While Vallorani's work often uses Italian cities as dystopian and critical utopian settings, she confronts a number of global issues, such as youth violence, drug addiction, and the division of space according to hierarchical class structures. Her work is, in particular, embroiled in the humanist problems posed by future technologies and rigid kinship structures, such as the loss of individual freedom and agency. Vallorani's novels also experiment with new collective formations that reconcile freedom, individuality, and solidarity.

### **Sulla Sabbia di Sur (2011)**

In an inhospitable, windswept city in the middle of a desert, detached from its beyond by miles of sand dunes in every direction, four young women and men hustle for their freedom. In Sur, only the strongest survive, and survival is no mean feat in a place where death, drug addiction, and disease reign. While the people of Sur are divided into militant gangs, Kurtz, Muriel, Spino, and Asia prefer to take their chances and live alone. All citizens of Sur are "*sanguemisto*" [mixed blood]: Asia is an amphibian woman, born in a matriarchal swamp-dwelling society, a cult which forbids its members to leave on pain of death. Kurtz, who has no knowledge of his past before he arrived in Sur as a young boy, is known within the city as "*mezzafaccia*": one half of his face is a golden, terracotta-brown, while the other is milky pale and eyeless. He guards his freedom closely, living alone in the control tower of an abandoned airport, accessible only by scaling high concrete walls and navigating the cracks through the old runways formed by earthquakes past. He descends only to scavenge for food and to fight when necessary. Muriel and Spino are close friends who plot to flee the city's hierarchical and aggressive Academy, where they are forced to learn Sur's mode of combat: telepathic duelling. These duels are Sur's predominant spectator sport: in the style of Roman gladiator games, citizens gather in the desert just beyond the city walls to watch the strong crush the minds of the weak. The academy's most capable students can ultimately enter the "posse", within which they stand a higher chance of survival in Sur. When Jan appears out of the desert and refuses to duel-combat with Kurtz—becoming the first person in Sur's history to refuse a duel—Kurtz must relinquish his solitude to make space for a new friendship. Through a series of chance encounters, Jan, Asia, Muriel, and Spino come together to defend each other's freedom, and to restore the memory of Kurtz' past. In the process, they encounter Vita, a voice in the "rete", the virtual reality internet portal of the future, who is trapped in the underbelly of the city, and awaits the group to free her.

Themes

Vallorani explores the way in which multiracial bodies survive in a dystopian landscape through solidarity in difference and shared precarity. *Sulla Sabbia di Sur* also presents a thorough investigation of Vallorani's humanistic concerns with various configurations of freedom and agency. While some group formations offer little more than bondage and dependency—from the matriarchal swamp people to the regimented Academy—Vallorani also explores the potentialities of assemblages of friends, wherein collective solidarity is grounded in individual freedom and difference. Kurtz, Muriel, Spino, Asia, Jan, and Vita distance themselves from Sur's bloodthirsty, thieving population through their dedication to non-violence: their form of combat and self-defence is creative thinking and a strong inside knowledge of their local environment.

**Il Cuore Finto di DR (2003)**

*Il Cuore Finto di DR* is a murder-mystery with a twist, combining elements of SF and the crime novel with a *noir* aesthetic. It takes place in a dystopian, post-apocalyptic, and multi-racial Milan, a place where the rich have made money from the exploitation of extraterrestrial colonies and moved out to the suburbs, where they live in armoured homes surrounded by synthetic gardens. Before the novel opens, Willy, a wannabe Frankenstein, steals a sex doll and tinkers with her bodily structure, increasing certain hormones, altering her brain wiring, and adding an additional pair of ears, so that DR returns to her consciousness as a wildly intelligent but unequivocally ugly synthetic woman. Her official name according to the government's database of synthetic Replicants is Penelope de Rossi, which she detests. Fat, ugly, and drug-addicted, DR nevertheless manages to transform her pitiful situation when she opens a one-woman detective agency.

DR is commissioned by the novel's villain, the cruel Elsa Bayern, to track down her missing husband, Angel. Angel, who is in fact her half-brother, is also an extraterrestrial born on the ex-colony-planet of Entierres. Elsa's father, an intergalactic explorer, conceived Angel when he encountered extraterrestrial settlers on the planet. DR senses that Elsa is not telling her the truth, and ultimately discovers that Elsa has murdered Angel and is paying DR to track down Angel's twin sister Nicole so that she can kill her too. Elsa is motivated by vengeance: embittered that her father loved her extraterrestrial half-siblings more than he loved her, and hurt that Angel did not love her back, she sets out to murder the remaining members of her family.

When a series of Milanese drug dealers disappear or are murdered, the mystery takes DR across the city's ghettos to places she already knows well, places where the drug Sintar is used and traded. It appears that Elsa is importing a naturally grown version of Sintar from Entierres, and unrolling a plan to control the city's underbelly through her growing narcotics empire. DR, a functioning dependent of the synthetic version of the drug, cannot be seriously harmed by it given that she is not made of human flesh. Instead, the drug gives her what she most desires: vivid, emotional dreams that tap into the real-life memories of humans. When Elsa discovers that DR is hot on her tail, and comes after her with a combination of professional synthetic and comically amateur human assassins (the worst of the two resembling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern), DR must club together with a rebellious and emaciated teenage orphan named Pilar, who looks upon DR as an adopted mother-figure, a homeless madwoman called *Suor Crocefissa* [Sister Crucifix] a Vietnamese shopkeeper, a Chinese man, and *Mariposa* [Butterfly] the clairvoyant.

### *Themes*

Set in a highly segregated post-apocalyptic Milan, the novel is openly concerned with inequality of class, race, and gender. Human supremacy seems to be buffered by the creation of synthetic Replicants that can be sexualised and racialised in ways that promote the supremacy of masculinity and "white" humanity. This social formation is presented to be the product of a long and murky history of the colonisation of extraterrestrial planets, exploited for their slave labour and mineral resources. Against the backdrop of human violence stands DR, a vivacious and brilliant anti-heroine who often appears among the most empathetic and humane of the novel's characters. Indeed, some of the novel's most "personable" characters are synthetics in hiding: *Il Cinese*, for example, reminds DR that "l'uomo è dentro, non sulla pelle" (204) [man is not skin deep]. The novel thus raises the questions posed by Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* and *Mathilde*, respectively: what endows the monster with a certain humanness, and what makes a human monstrous? DR's "imperfect", stereotypically ugly physical form, the experiment of both the sex-doll market and Willy, her re-maker, offer possibilities for new kinds of heroism. Finding "life" after "death", DR surmounts her brief career as a sex doll to be a feminist hero, comically upending expected gender performativity as a non-woman of wit and wisdom. By subverting the expectations of her sex and her "species", identity-markers deeply entangled within one another, *Il Cuore Finto di DR* proposes a future comprised of hybrid subjectivities that subvert the human-imposed hierarchies that seemingly dominate the city.

## 2 Spain

### *Lola Robles and María Concepción “Conchi” Regueiro*

Robles is a leading writer of contemporary Spanish SF and the acclaimed author of four SF novels and a number of short stories. She defines her work as “feminista, pacifista y queer” (“Lecturas de Género”). A member of the pacifist group *Internacional de Mujeres de Negro contra la Guerra*, her writing is often fervently anti-violent. Robles’s work also demonstrates ecofeminist concerns through an interrogation of interspecies hierarchies. Other recurring themes include the role of language in the construction of systems of race and gender, and issues of disability (Robles herself has a visual disability). Robles identifies as queer and has spoken at length on the importance of queer visibility in works of fiction (“Las Otras”; “Qué Relación”).

Regueiro is a writer and social worker who has been published in both Spanish and Gallego, in which she is also fluent. Regueiro’s work is demonstrably feminist, and major characters are often queer. Several of her novels such as *Reclutas de Guerras Invisibles* (2006) and *La Moderna Atenea* (2008) combine a traditional style of Anglo-Saxon with uchronic reprisals of nineteenth-century Spanish history.

### *Historias del Crazy Bar y Otros Relatos de lo Imposible (2013)*

This collaborative work showcases a collection of short stories that explore lesbian sexuality in near-future settings. *Crazy Bar* is based on the premise that if Scheherazade had lived in the twenty-first century, she might have spent some of her one-thousand-and-one nights telling her stories from a table in the *Crazy Bar*, an atmospheric local joint with a dubious reputation, and the site of encounter for weird and wonderful people from around the universe. The stories spun by Robles and Regueiro form a remarkable update of the Arabian nights, centred around queer love and friendship in near- and far-future Spain and Spanish colonies.

The opening story, “El Enemigo en Casa” [The Enemy in the House], grounds the collection in a historical rendition of the lives of five women in Francoist Spain. “Motivos para Viajar” [Reasons to Travel] is the story of a woman’s quest for the woman she loves across intergalactic time and space. “Las Houstonianas” [The Houstonians] is the tale of a romance between three women during a cold war on a mineral-planet divided between South America, North America, and European ownership.

“Planetoide de Oportunidades” [Planetoid of Opportunities], the collection’s fourth story, follows the series of events following a lesbian couple’s decision to leave behind their life on Earth and take on



the dangerous and lucrative work of “Terraforming” a planetoid. This involves preparing the surface of the planet for human habitation using nuclear bombs, which introduces ecofeminist and humanist concerns into the narrative. This radioactive wasteland offers both dangerous and well-paid work for human labourers, who are exposed to high levels of radiation. Linda and Nidia, two such workers, hope to save enough money for a new and expensive treatment that will enable Linda to become pregnant with Nidia’s baby without the introduction of sperm. Following an unusual sensation during sexual intercourse with Nidia, Linda realises that she is pregnant. A colleague on board the spaceship subsequently alerts her to a mysterious bacteria, indigenous to the planet, that has chosen lesbian parents through which to diversify its species. The story becomes an investigation into the implications of the “natural” reproductive opportunities that extraterrestrial ecology offers lesbian couples.

“Sala de Almas” [Hall of Souls] and “Brilla Tu Pelo a la Luz del Fuego” [Shine Your Hair in the Light of the Fire] explore technology’s potential to secure human immortality, and the effect that this might have on love beyond death. “Historias del Crazy Bar I: el Tiempo es un Caballo de Luz” [Stories from the Crazy Bar I: Time is a Horse of Light] is the tale of an astronaut’s enduring passion for his young love, even after an improbably long journey home from outer space. “En la Tempestad de la Historia” [In the Storm of the Story] is a dystopic tale of a future society in which the oppression of homosexuality has intensified, and a bisexual woman who has separated from her aggressive, macho ex-husband is only able to meet up with her daughter illegally. The final tale, “Historias del Crazy Bar II: Retrato en Dos Tiempos” [Stories from the Crazy Bar II: Portrait in Two Temporalities], mixes SF with the gothic as it unravels the mystery of an old painting and a series of sinister noises coming from the attic room of an old house in Spain.

### *Themes*

At its core, this collection explores queer love in both joyous utopian and hostile dystopian settings in the near and far future. The stories’ settings range from spaces in which women can desire each other openly to ones in which women are politically or legally inhibited from expressing same-sex love. In both utopian and dystopian scenarios, female solidarity is posed as the means to overcome cruel, fascist, and militaristic regimes that seek to secure dominance through the imposition of heteropatriarchal culture. These regimes are often portrayed as having colonial ambitions: “Motivos para Viajar”, “Planetoide de Oportunidades”, “Las Houstonianas”, and “Historias del Crazy Bar I: El Tiempo es un Caballo de Luz” imagine Spain’s involvement in a future space age-dominated by European spacecraft. Robles and Regueiro are careful to highlight the capitalist

momentum behind future colonisation, which results in a heightened form of anthropocentrism grounded in racial and inter-species hierarchy. Ecological disaster is the bi-product of the aggressive, male-dominated, and capitalist-funded forms of colonialism that are particularly central to these stories. Ecofeminist concerns also point to the interdiction of interracial and same-sex love—as well as environmental disaster, the exploitation of natural resources, and the destruction of intergalactic ecosystems—as the inevitable legacy of colonial politics.

### *Elia Barceló*

Born in Alicante, Barceló is a major writer of Spanish SF and a Professor of Spanish literature at the University of Innsbruck. She is part of a trio of the world's most prominent Hispanic women writers alongside Angélica Gorodischer and Daína Chaviano, who, because of their popularity with Latin American SF fans, have been dubbed “la trinidad femenina de la ciencia-ficción en Hispanoamérica” (“Elia Barceló”) [the female trinity of SF in Latin America].<sup>1</sup> She has written almost two dozen novels in the past three decades and won a number of awards, including the prestigious Ignotus prize. Her works have been translated into several European languages, including French, Italian, Catalan, Dutch, and Esperanto. Many of her novels are explicitly feminist in their exploration of how representations of the feminine surface in human-nonhuman encounters. Her anthology of short stories, *Sagrada* (1989), in particular, was groundbreaking in Spanish SF for its confrontation of essentialist conceptions of woman's reproductive capacity and its illustration of alternative possibilities for feminine subject formations.

### *Consecuencias Naturales (1994)*

This novel humorously explores the “natural” consequences of one macho Spanish astronaut's ambition to be the first man to have sex with an extraterrestrial “Xhroll” woman. When Nico comes out of the bedroom pregnant, his ladykiller instinct turns out to have had potentially disastrous consequences for intergalactic diplomacy. The Xhroll “woman”, Ankhjaia'langtxhrl, is not in fact a woman as such, but an ari-arkhj, one of three Xhroll “genders” who can be distinguished by their artificial breast implants, making their body shape not dissimilar from human women. Because the ari-arkhj asked Nico if he was taking contraception before intercourse, to which he responded in the affirmative, neither Nico's human superiors nor the Xhroll spokespeople are prepared to accept his pregnancy as non-consensual. It appears that Nico, unable to conceptualise the potentiality of male pregnancy, tricked Ankhjaia'langtxhrl into thinking that he had taken contraception by swallowing an Aspirin pill.

The consequences are both “natural” and permanent: unable to safely abort the foetus, which has attached itself to Nico’s internal organs, Nico is forced to endure the duration of the pregnancy on the Xhroll planet, where he is sent with Charlie, his Officer and superior, so that both he and the foetus can be better cared for until “birth”. Nico later seeks revenge by attempting to rape an Ari-arkhj nurse he finds in his room. Charlie, who was raped as a young soldier starting out in her career, views Nico’s plight without sympathy. She befriends Ankhjaia’langtxhrl and sets about getting to grips with Xhroll languages and cultures. She learns that the Xhroll planet is “post-apocalyptic”: the Xhroll had previously totally destroyed the natural environment on the planet’s outer crust, and have spent many centuries carefully restoring it to its former health. To protect it from further danger, the Xhroll have moved underground, and, as vivacious gardeners, spend every possible free moment tending to the landscape above. Their destructive past exposes the Machiavellian spirit still at large in their society: it becomes apparent that the Xhroll, who suffer from a dangerously low birth rate and are nearing extinction, had deliberately sent Ankhjaia’langtxhrl to seduce Nico, knowing that he would rise to the bait. They subsequently sent an Ari-arkhj posing as a nurse into Nico’s room, knowing he would force himself onto her, in an unsuccessful attempt at using a human male to impregnate an Ari-arkhj. The Xhroll, who initially appear to be a superior or advanced species of ecologically conscious and gender-fluid beings, have a rigidly hierarchical and gendered social system: the non-reproductive Xhrea are the governors of the planet, while the Ari-arkhj, the “inseminators”, hold full rights over the childbearing Abbas—which the pregnant Nico has become—who have no freedom of agency while they are pregnant. Having succeeded in making Nico an expecting Abba, and in a desperate scheme to acquire more Abbas, the Xhroll leader orders the Ari-arkhj to take over the human spaceship and rape all male humans. Charlie and Ankhjaia’langtxhrl come to the rescue, finding an alternative solution to the Xhroll’s reproductive problem by suggesting that the Ari-arkhj inseminate the Xhrea, an unthinkable option to the Xhroll, for whom the Xhrea must, as governors of Xhroll, remain non-reproductive in order to remain decision-makers. Charlie and Ankhjaia’langtxhrl’s proposed alternative kinship structure both offers new kinds of sexual and gendered relationships on Xhroll and saves human–Xhroll relations from a catastrophic end.

### *Themes*

The novel is, primarily, a feminist manifesto against gender violence and dogmatic pro-life politics. Nico’s pregnancy offers catharsis to many generations of women who are told that if they get pregnant following

intercourse and are forced to keep the child, that they must accept the “consequences of their actions”. It is a bitter pill that Nico must swallow, as he is positioned as the sacrificial victim in a revenge novel that takes self-conscious pleasure from his agony. Refused an abortion, made the property of his Ari-arkhj, and told by the Xhroll that the life of the alien foetus growing inside him is more important than his own, Nico’s experience resembles that of many women globally.

Similar to Regueiro and Robles’s *Crazy Bar*, Barceló’s novel grounds its characters in Spanish culture and history, while interweaving issues of gender and sexuality with ecological concerns. The Xhroll, who only became ecologically minded following the obliteration of their natural environment, are facing a similar extinction to that of the flora and fauna on their planet if they cannot imagine a re-organisation of reproductive roles. Their short-sightedness represents contemporary human attitudes towards gender and kinship structures, in particular, the limited view inherited from religious orthodoxies of what kind of sexuality is “natural”, and what is not. Indeed, the Xhroll view Nico’s pregnancy as perfectly “natural”, while they perceive Nico’s traumatic response to the news that there is a child growing inside him as shameful and “unnatural”.

The Spanish language also contributes to the experience of “natural” sexuality and gender roles, both expressing and determining what society views as “natural”. The humans appear to exist in a “post-gender equality” society, in which “equality” has been hard won through legal legislation that has afforded women both equality of opportunity and visibility in language. The humans, who seemingly use Spanish as the official human language aboard the spaceship, use both masculine and feminine articles when referring to gendered nouns, so that “the humans” is both “las humanas y los humanos”. Gender and language gain an even stronger association when Ari-arkhj explains to Charlie why the Xhrea have long assumed that they cannot be part of the reproductive process. Ari-arkhj explains that the Xhroll perception of gender roles is intrinsically linked to Xhroll language, in which gender “es sólo una clasificación lingüística ... O que la impone y no os permite pensar de otra manera” (96–97) [it’s just a linguistic classification... That demands that it is used and does not allow you to think in any other way].

While the humans seem to put a greater emphasis on issues of “gender equality”, neither species is more “advanced” in their commitment to progressive politics: though the Xhroll are criticised by the humans for only using the masculine “los humanos” when they speak about humankind, the Xhroll are shocked to hear that humans “rape” each other: worse, when Charlie explains the concept of rape to Ankhjaia’langtxhrl, she lies about it, claiming that it is a thing of the past, a bygone by-product of eras of human warfare. Initially, the Xhroll cannot even conceptualise

taking another Xhroll by force in the act of sex, and yet, so oriented is their society towards reproduction and sustainability, that they deny their Abbas freedom of choice over the reproductive capacity of their bodies, which belong unequivocally to the state.

The novel demonstrates contradictory ideas about gender and racial difference, complicating notions of gender equality and mainstreaming: while the Xhroll all have different skin colours, which might suggest a commitment to “racial” diversification, the shape of their bodies within gender groups is practically identical, affording no variation at all. While the humans appear to take “gender equality” measures seriously, Nico is unequivocally sexist, and a series of racist jokes made by the technicians aboard the human spaceship—at the expense of the English, the Japanese, the Scots, and Latinos—reveals the endurance of human divisions of race, even though his attempts at humour make an implicit claim to, if not equality, “equal treatment”, by varying which nation is at the butt of the joke.

The confrontation between the two species exposes the way in which issues of race and gender evolve and transform relative to one another, and the story ultimately demonstrates the mobility of the points of intersection between race and gender.

### 3 UK

#### *Jennifer Marie Brissett*

Brissett is a British-Jamaican writer currently living and working in America. Her work incorporates Afro-Caribbean mythology, magic, and technology, resulting in an exploration of possible alternatives to an “inevitable” future dominated by a Western and Capitalist aesthetic. Her short fiction has been published both digitally and in print anthologies, including *People of Colo(u)r Destroy Science Fiction!* (2016) and *Welcome to Dystopia: 45 Visions of What Lies Ahead* (2017). Her 2016 short story “Kamanti’s Child”, inspired by Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, takes place in a far-future Africa that has rejected high technology and “returned” to living with and on the land. The story self-reflexively takes as its theme “Western” science’s systems of legitimisation and dismissal, which dictate the parameters of the genre of SF and control images of what the future looks like. Brissett’s concern for issues of race and gender often leads into an exploration of what connotes the “human” in relation to other beings: “alien”-human interactions are common in her work and provoke a revisioning of social hierarchical formations in the science fictional future. Her work also forms a critique of the impact of war on ecological devastation, notably *Elysium* (2014), her first novel and the finalist for the James Tiptree Jr. Award and the Locus Award for Best First Novel, and winner of the Philip K. Dick Award, with a Special Citation.

Elysium (2014)

A multi-racial near-future society is fighting a losing battle against an alien species called the Krestge. The Krestge, who have interdimensional shadow-like bodies, have invaded Earth with the intention of eradicating humanity and re-building it as a planet-colony. Society briefly appears to be running as normal, the war—which takes place beyond the city borders—is invisible to those who dwell within. But then the Krestge release a poisonous dust into the atmosphere, which rots the cityscape and kills humans *en masse*, either by transforming them into scaly human-animal mutants or by weakening their internal organs. While it soon becomes clear that the Krestge are approaching victory, it is this setting of seemingly indomitable death and decay from within which the story explores the vitality of the remaining humans in their battle to survive. Many of these humans are more resistant to the dust because of higher levels of melatonin in their skin: they are Puerto Rican or African American. Led by Antoine, the self-appointed team of engineers who have taken responsibility for humanity's future design a subterranean city, built deep into the Earth's crust, to shelter the remaining humans from the war that rages on its surface.

To warn other species or, perhaps, future humans, of the Krestge, the engineers have uploaded a data drive onto the Earth's atmosphere with the consciousness of selected humans: Hector, Helen, Antoine, Antoinette, Adrian, and Adrienne. The narrative is written in the form of this computer script, etched into an atmosphere partially destroyed by war and ecological disaster. The reader encounters the script in the future of that future. At this point, the script is partially corrupted, so that parts of the text are incomplete or merged with the consciousness of another of the characters. This newly composite script cuts and pastes people and their stories together, creating its own connections between the half-remembered bodies of the protagonists. These are Antoine who is also Antoinette, who is in a relationship with Adrienne who morphs into Adrien, and Hector who is also Helen. Antoine's boyfriend, Adrien, has fallen terminally ill from the dust, and is suffering a long and painful death on life support. He is in an open relationship with Antoine, who, unable to move his body, bitterly encourages Antoine to sleep with Hector, a Puerto Rican friend from the gym. In another "version" of Antoine's narrative, he is a soldier fighting in the war who has returned for a few days to the city, where he meets with his lover, Adrienne, a young girl trapped in a violent, ancient cult of virgins that disbands down once the aliens invade the Earth. In another "merging" of the narrative, Hector is a trans woman named Helen, confined to a psychiatric ward after the authorities take her emotional instability after the death of her mother as an excuse to institutionalise her. Helen befriends and cares for Antoine, who has also at this point been confined against his

will to the psychiatric hospital. When the aliens take the city, Helen aids Antoine's brother Adrian to find Antoine and take him to safety. Hector encounters another version of Adrienne in the hospital, who, in the guise of a prophet, proclaims the coming of an all-destructive war. In another manifestation of Adrienne, she and her father have sprouted wings, and must use them to hide from the bloodthirsty reptiles and also to scavenge for food in the deserted city.

Antoine, Antoinette, Helen, and Hector grapple together in love and friendship to survive extreme precarity. Their shared exposure to injury, violence, and likely death is accentuated through the cut, pasted, and rebooted computer script, which melds their memories together, possibly also "creating" new versions of compounded characters. By the end of the novel, the high-tech, subterranean shelter that the humans have built is beginning to have its air supply infected by poisonous gases, and so a spaceship, the Trajan, many years in the making, takes a limited group of humans to another planet suitable to support human life.

### *Themes*

*Elysium*, which in Classical Greek mythology, is the paradise on Earth reserved for the afterlife of heroes, might at first seem an ironic title for a dystopian apocalypse novel. But the Elysium emerges not from the dystopian near-future presented by Brissett, but in what we already have: paradise is the Earth pre-global war, and pre-ecological apocalypse. The novel thus urges the reader to experience the Earth beneath their feet as a fragile Elysium, a place that humanity will only get one chance to enjoy. At its basis, the novel thus poses an interrogation into the devastating effects of colonialism, anthropocentrism, ecological disaster, and nuclear war. But the narrative also offers an inquiry into the possibilities for change in moments of global precarity. Interspecies and racial hierarchies are inverted when humankind falls prey to an alien species with superior weaponry and technological resources, and darker-skinned humans run an increased probability of survival. Characters that experienced racism in the workplace at the novel's opening or were excluded from certain careers now find themselves in the bittersweet position of guardians of the human race, who must decide if and how survival is possible. Apocalypse upends these well-worn hierarchies: poisoned from the inside out, the Earth experiences Yeats's apocalyptic nightmare, in which the "centre cannot hold; /mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" ("The Second Coming"). The anarchical narrative also queers the fixity of gender and sexuality markers that would normally allow the reader to distinguish between characters: as the computer script is cut, pasted, and rebooted, heterosexual relationships are transformed into homosexual ones and vice versa within the space of a dozen pages. These constantly mutating formations



of race and gender offer new forms of interconnected subjectivities. The novel thus debases the importance of fixed identity markers in favour of the demonstrations of love and protection that the characters offer one another.

#### 4 France

##### *Aliette de Bodard*

Many of the novels and short stories by Bodard, who has become one of the biggest names in European SF while using her work to address issues of race and gender and to reclaim alternative modes of science, are preoccupied with the idea of a “global France”, a former Empire with a continued influence over its current and past *departements*. Bodard’s writing is therefore of a particular interest to book, which acknowledges that race and nation extend beyond the borders of a country. She offers a wider scope to “French SF” by exploring the relationship between France, Europe, and South-East Asia. France appears beyond the “Hexagon”, through a constant tension between European and South-East Asian visions of the future, their cultural aesthetics and their racialised and gendered standards of beauty and status. This tension is perhaps felt even more acutely by the fact that, though her mother tongue is French, Bodard writes in English. She has explained that this choice was based on a number of issues, one of which is to secure a wider readership: her latest SF novellas and fantasy novels have been published by major SF publishing houses Angry Robot/HarperCollins and Gollancz/Roc. In her blog post “Writing in a French language”, Bodard emphasises that “SF and fantasy remain very much anglo-centred”, so much so that she is prepared to overcome “Grammar mistakes, usage mistakes, Gallicisms” (“Writing in a Foreign Language”). Though there are several *salons* and meet ups for writers and fans of comics, manga, and gaming in France, the official language for both the Eurocon and the largest SF conferences is English. Herself a consumer of anglophone SF, and an attendee of these major conferences (Bodard was on several panels at the 2017 Helsinki WorldCon), she subsequently feels that she has “very little idea of what the vocabulary of speculative fiction would be in French” (“Campbell Nominee Interview”).

But Bodard also feels that writing in English is “liberating”: in English she can break free from “correct phrasing” in French in order to “twist the words until they bleed, and that’s a great thing for crafting fiction” (“Campbell Nominee Interview”). This is key to Bodard’s *Xuya Universe* series, which, set in a future space age characterised by a South-East Asian and Chinese aesthetic, is grounded in French colonial history and offers an alternative historical chronology to the events that led to France’s dominant position both in Europe and across the globe.

*Xuya Universe: The Citadel of Weeping Pearls* (2017); “*Immersion*” (2012); *On a Red Station, Drifting* (2012)

Bodard’s *Xuya Universe* stories are grounded in a detailed alternative history, stretching across centuries of human time and light years of space. The works I have chosen are part of the *Xuya Universe* space age and take place in the twenty-second century. Her Hugo Award-winning short story “Immersion” (2012) is the first of the stories in the chronology, a critique of France’s cultural and economic hold over post-independence Vietnam. The story takes place on Longevity Station in the twenty-second century, following its victory over its Western colonisers, the Galactics, who represent the French. Galactic culture remains highly influential thanks to an array of Galactic technology and media consumed by the people of Longevity.

The novella, *On a Red Station, Drifting* (2012), also takes place during the twenty-second century, but it is set on Prosper Station, the “mothership” of the spacefaring Đại Việt Empire. Rebels have started a war with the Empire, attacking its planets and sending a surge of refugees to Prosper. The station is held together and protected by the Honoured Ancestress, a semi-immortal “Mind”, part AI, part flesh, and descended from human parents: it is, in effect, a spaceship grown inside a human womb. But the Honoured Ancestress is suffering from age, disease, and the emotional strain of holding a family together that is fraught by acts of dishonour and mistrust. Quyen, the most senior member of the Honoured Ancestress’s human family on Prosper Station, is forced to show hospitality to a relative who has abandoned her own close family and her planet to take refuge on Prosper: the brilliant but arrogant Magistrate Linh.

Bodard’s novella *The Citadel of Weeping Pearls* takes place 30 years after the events of *On a Red Station, Drifting*. The Đại Việt Empire now faces imminent attack from the neighbouring Nam Federation. The Federation has infiltrated Rai Viet Mindship technology, causing them to act out of sync with the Empire. The Empress’s most powerful supply of weaponry has also become unavailable to her: it was stored in the Citadel, a fleet which the Empress exiled her daughter to some years previously, before ordering that the Citadel be destroyed. Meanwhile, the Empress’s head of scientific research, the Grand Master of Harmony Bach Cuc, has been working on a new technology that will allow her to venture into deep space and retrieve the Citadel and its weapons.

### Themes

In the *Xuya Universe* series’ alternative historical chronology, China discovers the Americas before Columbus, which enabled Asian world

powers to govern half of the Earth as well as planets in many other galaxies. Asian powers are divided into Vietnamese and Chinese Empires: stories about the Chinese largely take place in Xuya, China's name for the Americas, while stories that centre around the Vietnamese Đại Việt Empire mainly take place in outer space in the twenty-second century. These latter stories show a deep concern for the effects of colonisation on the systems of race which emerged in South-East Asian French colonies, notably Vietnam.

Bodard also uses the *Xuya Universe* as a means of defiance against the damage wrought upon South-East Asia by the French between 1887 and 1954. The Vietnamese Empire, still known as the “Đại Việt”, takes its name from a period which ended in real time in 1804. Whereas Vietnam declared independence from China in the tenth century and from France in 1954 in the real world, Đại Việt is only occupied up until 1820 by the French, thanks to the rise of a new Việt imperial dynasty, the Rông. The Rông gained independence from their European coloniser over a century before the French relinquished their claim to Indochinese territory at the 1954 Geneva Conference. This alternative chronology of Vietnamese command allows for the now extinct Đại Việt Empire to be a major force in a uchronic variation on the future.

## Note

- 1 Translation my own.

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