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Nostalgia for Infinity:
New Space Opera and Neoliberal Globalism

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Dedicated to my better half
For putting up with this space junk

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Nostalgia for Infinity: New Space Opera and Neoliberal Globalism

by

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This doctoral dissertation argues that contemporary postcolonial literature from and about the Caribbean, Scotland, and India responds to American and British popular genre fiction, specifically the subgenre known as New Space Opera, in allegorizing the neoliberal processes, conditions, and experiences of globalization in the world-system. My project discusses works by postcolonial authors who have yet to receive theoretical investigation from this perspective, including Iain M. Banks, Karen Lord, and Nalo Hopkinson, as well as important transatlantic SF authors whose work has yet to be discussed in terms of globalism including Samuel R. Delany, M. John Harrison, Gwyneth Jones, Bruce Sterling, and C.J. Cherryh. I argue that these often critically neglected space-opera novels reconfigure for our times the conventional trappings of traditional space opera — such as faster-than-light starships, galactic empires, doomsday weapons, and dramatic encounters with exotic aliens — to reflect and refract the global dimensions of our neoliberal and postcolonial world-system transfigured by contemporary technoculture. Consequently, I argue that New Space Opera novels address and intervene in sociopolitical and historical developments specific to the cultures in

which they are written. New Space Opera written from Scottish, Indian, and Caribbean perspectives interrogates the interweaving of nation-states and transnational culture, especially in connection with the rapidly accelerating technological, social, and economic changes facing our planet today.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | |
| Pulp Affect, Cosmopolitical Critique, and the Reinvention of Space Opera | |
| Chapter 1 | 1 |
| Neoliberal Masters of the Universe: Space Culture and the Predawn of Space Opera | |
| Chapter 2 | 69 |
| “A Smear and Bogus Milky Way of Wealth”: The Origins of New Space Opera in the Neoliberal Moment | |
| Chapter 3 | 102 |
| “Moments in the Fall”: Neoliberal Globalism and Utopian Socialist Desire in Ken MacLeod’s <i>Fall Revolution Quartet</i> and Iain M. Banks’s <i>Culture Series</i> | |
| Chapter 4 | 165 |
| Global Feminism and Neoliberal Crisis in Gwyneth Jones’s <i>Aleutian Trilogy</i> | |
| Chapter 5 | 218 |
| “Archipelagoes of Stars”: Caribbean Cosmopolitics in Postcolonial SF | 260 |
| Conclusion | 312 |
| Works Cited | 318 |

INTRODUCTION

Pulp Affect, Cosmopolitical Critique, and the Reinvention of Space Opera

“But I’ve managed to follow human history, pretty well, through the next thousand years. That’s what I’ve been writing. The history of the future!”

- Jack Williamson, *Legion of Space* (1934)

“What was the Beach, after all, but a repository of fading memories?”

- M. John Harrison, *Empty Space* (2012)

In M. John Harrison’s *Light* (2001), a rocket-jockey breaks a quarantine zone to scavenge artifacts from an inexplicable spatial anomaly called the Kefahuchi Tract. Billy Anker outruns Earth Military Contracts (EMCs) and discovers contraband from a planet filled with the remnants of a dead culture sixty-five million years old. Here Harrison plugs into and puts a dark twist on a ubiquitous trope of salvaging ancient, hyper-advanced alien technology whose antecedents, in genre SF, can be glimpsed as far back as the decaying Martian civilizations in the re-serialized pulp-magazine fiction of both H.G. Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs. The trope has since become an intertextual reference point for the movement known as New Space Opera to be found, for instance, in Iain M. Banks’s *Consider Phlebus* (1987), Paul McAuley’s *400 Billion Stars* (1988), Vernor Vinge’s *Fire Upon the Deep* (1993), Alastair Reynolds’s *Revelation Space* (2000), or Justina Robson’s *Natural History* (2004). And the trope has reached saturation

point, crossing over, via perhaps the amniotic fluid of the monolith-spawned Star Child in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, to popular film and video games as well; most recently, exploring the consequences of rediscovered xeno-technology features prominently, for example, in the bestselling *Mass Effect* (2007-2014) or massively multiplayer *Eve Online* (2003-2014) videogame series, the commissioned SyFy Channel show based on James S.A. Corey's *Expanse* series, the nostalgic summer hit of Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), and the widescreen-baroque blockbusters of Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014) and the Wachowski siblings' *Jupiter Ascending* (2015).

Only in Harrison's narrative, though, is it so foregrounded that the manhunt for this aging antihero, the maverick-loser starship pilot Billy Anker (i.e., W. Anker), dates back to the private military contractors and the promiscuous flows of global capital crucial to the thread of the novel set in the year 1999: "Before (EMCs) you had a loose cartel of security corporations, designed so the neo-liberal democracies could blame subcontractors for any police action that got out of hand...After K[efahuchi]-Tech, well, EMC became the democracies" (Harrison 258). This neoliberal prehistory haunts Harrison's prodigal return to a peculiar brand of science fiction he helped both to birth and to self-sabotage thirty years prior. In his canny foray into the resurgently popular terrain of New Space Opera, Harrison taps again into a curious, rich vein of popular literary allegory whereby the science-fictionality of our contemporary historical moment — the postcolonial, neoliberal, technocultural matrix that shapes our modern globalized history as much as the ancient alien artifact of its specific genre material — has to be

strangely uncovered from an imagined far future only to be reflected back to a disbelieving present-day audience.

Just as, in the background future history of the Kefahuchi Tract trilogy, Harrison alludes to the militarized realpolitik of neoliberal regimes, this dissertation views exemplary fictions of New Space Opera as allegories evolving in tandem with a specific new system of global capitalism. The epoch-defining birth of neoliberalism is most often traced back to the Bretton Woods conference of July 1944. This international agreement addressed a perceived need to prevent another Great Depression and to rebuild Europe in the postwar period. Due to the status of the United States as preeminent geopolitical power — the U.S. controlled seventy percent of the world's financial assets and a majority of its productive capacity (Kiely 50) — the agreement attempted to facilitate loans to Europe in the vein of those initiated by the Marshall Plan, through fixing the dollar as standard currency for exchange, and pegging the dollar itself to gold. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), and later the World Bank, facilitated the interest-bearing loans that assisted the resulting postwar boom. Export-led industrial growth and explosive technological advancement in the U.S. hinged on international trade and foreign direct investment. The geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War and economic inequality were bound up with the military Keynesianism — the rapid expansion in defense spending despite budget short-falls — and the influx of liquidity around the ostensibly pro-capitalist world in response to the rivaling global power of the Soviet Union.

The underdeveloped world of the global South also experienced growth, in part due to social planning and protective tariffs, such that President Truman, in the traditional anti-colonialist rhetoric of United States political discourse, could ideologically claim the “old imperialism” (Truman, qtd. in Silver and Slater 208) was over. Yet the uneven development and dependency of the global South was often actively sustained through an international division of labor that inhumanly exploited a cheap, disempowered source of industrial labor. The economic indicators of both the global South and North stumbled when the expansion of capitalist accumulation of the postwar period from 1945 to 1969 climaxed in a global economic crisis from which the world has yet to recover. Some of the symptoms of this crisis include slowed growth, inflation and a devalued dollar, a rising deficit, and increasing unemployment.

Neoliberalism, then, can be viewed as the backlash of “market fundamentalism” in response to the 1969-1973 crisis. As analyzed in the forthcoming individual chapters of this dissertation, historical-materialist theorists such as William Tabb, Manuel Castells, and David Harvey disparately analyze neoliberalism as the consolidation of historical patterns of class domination. The sweeping policy initiatives of Margaret Thatcher in the U.K., Ronald Reagan in the U.S., Helmut Kohl in Germany, and Deng Xiaoping in China, severely weakened working-class institutions and trade unions, democratic governmental structures, and economic stability through risky financial speculation. This increased volatility of global markets and vulnerability of workers exacerbated the neoliberal divide. Beyond the policy framework of deregulation and privatization, neoliberalism evinces a globally oriented ideology and cultural politics or

what Manfred Steger terms a “globalism.” James Mittleman outlines the core ideas of neoliberal globalism to be the propagation of the misnomer “free” market under the banner of promoting “individualism, consumerism, competitiveness, efficiency, and self-aggrandizement.” (Mittleman 17)

This dissertation *Nostalgia for Infinity* lifts its title from a generation starship in Alastair Reynolds’s Conjoiner series of exemplary New Space Opera. The pun on infinity refers to both the staggering, red-shifting depths of space and time in the scientifically observable cosmos and the endless, though crisis-prone, amassing of infinite capital accumulation and class hegemony in the profit-driven dynamics of neoliberal capitalism. Reynolds’s starship *Nostalgia for Infinity* has supermassive, techno-sublime scale used to freight hundreds of thousands of passengers. In Reynolds’s horrific, techno-noir take on space-opera staples, though, the starship is invaded and haunted by artificial intelligences, uploaded minds, and ancient alien viruses, manned only by a crew of highly modified cyborgs numbering in the single digits. The buoyant optimism and vast immensity of traditional space operas have been deflated and downsized into a postcolonial melancholia, living in the shadow of its former boisterous glory.¹

This typical souring of narrative atmospherics to a miasmatic post-imperial melancholy characteristically found in New Space Opera, as shown below, is important to note in part because of the contrastingly exuberant and optimistic affective experience of earlier space-opera pulps. As shown in the frame narratives of Jack Williamson’s *Legion of Space*, E.E. Doc Smith’s Lensman series, and Ray Cummings’s *Tarrano the Conqueror*, space opera often used elaborate narrative frames that situated the future-

oriented temporalities as a retrospective looking backward in future histories as their readers simultaneously rushed forward headlong into future speculations. The backward gaze of rocket-and-ray-gun retrofuturism, updated with the cyber-, nano-, and biotech-futurisms of New Space Opera, adds an involute layer of reflexivity to these fantastic, far-future speculations. Now writers and readers of New Space Opera still invest in the techno-scientific projections of future histories — the legacy of original space operas — but now also reflect self-consciously and critically on the pulp clichés of traditional space-opera superscience and folk futurism. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. contends the hopeful imagined predictions of future histories in science fiction fundamentally depend on present-situated anxieties and concerns such that the genre’s “gradual crystallization and respect for the faculty of forward-looking in the dialectic of experience [...] enabled sf to emerge in the first place” (Csicsery-Ronay 79). Current readers of contemporary genre-savvy science fiction, then, have the heightened vantage of reminiscing on the pitfalls and promises of earlier generations of future histories leaping forward often enthusiastically, but also often blindly and recklessly. Hence New Space Opera, in its knowing recuperation of heightened futuristic genre conventions and exaggerated pitches of campy speculative excitement — and as part of the future-oriented trajectory of neoliberal techno-culture more generally — both betrays and undercuts a hegemonic, melancholic techno-nostalgia as it mystifies and recuperates the catastrophe of contemporary history.

In *Empty Space* (2012), the third book in the Kefahuchi tract trilogy, M. John Harrison glosses Walter Benjamin’s famous angel of history to criticize the ruthless

techno-utopian drive of his future history: “The Angel of History may look backwards, but that pose will make no difference to the storm that blows into the future. No wonder it has such a surprised expression” (Harrison 155). According to Benjamin, recall that history hinges on a dialectic between progress and nostalgia, imprisonment in the golden status quo of yesteryear or escape from the brutal reality of systemic crisis, injustice, and inequality. With reference to the trope of excavating ancient remains mentioned at the beginning of this introduction — ubiquitous to the subgenre and foregrounded in Harrison’s Kefahuchi Tract trilogy and Reynolds’s Conjoiner series, among countless other examples — the relentlessly commodifying drive of popular culture recycles these alien, hyper-advanced technological ruins and fragments with the consistency of a hellish eternal return. Svetla Boym diagnoses “techno-nostalgia” as a paradoxical complacency that perpetuates ossified, or even reactionary cultural politics under the aegis of radical technological change (Boym 35). Hence techno-nostalgic neoliberal ideologies prize the ultimate profit-driven freedom of the individual and the infinite mobility of techno-capital at the expense of slashed governmental programs and services, state-run, so-called protectionist policies, and institutions curbing unregulated free-market expansion. Nonetheless, I intend to show that politically sophisticated New Space Opera as an evolving subgenre also reanimates its pulp ancestry with a critical-progressive response to neoliberal hegemony that stresses what Bruce Sterling calls the “mind-blasting vistas” and “vertigos of acceleration” (Sterling 238) emanating from disruptive techno-cultural innovation.

Political Allegory, Techno-Fetishism, and Pulp-Era Space Opera

In the 1930s and 1940s, the serialized newspaper comic strips of *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* and its chief competitor of *Flash Gordon* popularized the space opera subgenre of the pulp magazines, embedding space-opera images and icons into the deep fabric of contemporary geo-culture. These strips often evoke an implied nationalist fervor or what David E. Nye has described as the “American technological sublime” in a discussion of modern engineering marvels such as skyscrapers, the Hoover Dam, and the Apollo moon landing. These strips also fixated on re-envisioning the futuristic weapons of the interwar period — especially the rockets, dirigibles, submarines, airplanes, tanks, and machine guns (see Adas 366). Moreover, the American provenance of weapon-filled space operas seemed to validate imperial and hegemonic uses of such lethally efficient technological superiority that underpinned the budding ambitions of an increasingly rich, rapidly developing superpower. The Art Deco and Streamline Moderne design of the hyper-advanced technology in these newspaper spectacles characterized the look and feel of futurism in the period and instilled a hypnotic distinctively American brand of techno-enthusiasm for future progress in its eager consumers captivated by the torrential flow of narrative twists and turns in weekly installments.

The premise of *Buck Rogers* stressed the technological marvels of the future as Buck sleeps for five hundred years in a cryogenic gas of suspended animation only to wake up to a world where he must contest an imperialist nightmare — as opposed to the *cosmopolitical* views of New Space Opera discussed below — of Orientalized Mongol raiders equipped with anti-gravity airships and ray-beam disintegrators. Likewise, from

the first panels onward, the primary rival comic-strip of the *Flash Gordon* serial — composed of larger, more starkly colorful, and racier pictures with minimal dialogue — made the primal techno-worship and gadget fetishism of the space-opera comic strips more pronounced. In the very first comic strip of *Flash Gordon*, for instance, Hans Zarkov builds a weaponized starship to attempt to save humanity from a comet while a racially-inflected Orientalized vision of Middle-Eastern Arabs pray to Mecca and racially primitivized tribes of Africans prophecy doom. Lacking the requisite technological prowess, Zarkov kidnaps virile Flash Gordon, accompanied by voluptuous damsel-in-distress Dale Arden, to board the rocket and they are all swiftly launched into an interplanetary realm ruled by the stock “yellow-peril” villain of Ming the Merciless, and overflowing with the technological marvels of underwater cities, genetically altered shark men, space gyros, and magnetically charged ray beams. In this way, *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* embody streamlined, commercially palatable, and highly derivative examples of space opera and its tendency to allegorize, with heedless confidence, an underlying capitalist-imperialist endorsement of future technological progress.

Genre science fiction has consistently been replete with widely recognized, if defamiliarized, treatments of contemporary global politics to which the New Space Opera remains no exception. Space opera has consistently offered allegories in ludic dream-texts of condensation and displacement Frederik Pohl labels “political cryptograms” (Pohl 10). Yet it is precisely the pulp-era cryptograms vaunting ideologies and discourses of imperialism, colonization, and transcultural hegemony that makes New Space Opera so trenchant and incisive in its critical redaction of the previously culturally dominant

imperialism. The more nuanced investigation of globalized issues leads to an allegory that transcodes or ventriloquizes a global working-class solidarity marginalized in the pulp fiction. The allegory of New Space Opera stresses the struggles between linguistic “heteroglossia” (expression) and “canonization” (representation) that Michael Holquist, pace Mikhail Bakhtin’s Marxist writings, identifies with the fraught negotiation over hegemonic social meaning in a flexible hermeneutic process of interpretation. For Holquist, the insertion of hybrid heteroglossia into an authoritarian (“monological”) discourse permits readers to understand Jules Verne’s fiction as both representative of “the ideology of the Third Republic’s colonizing bourgeoisie” and the proliferation of alternate voices that lodge a “powerful critique of that ideology” (Holquist 176). Likewise, reception theorists such as Frank Kermode contend that institutions and industries sanction enigmatic, riddling allegory that flaunts a certain level of indeterminate obscurity and resistance to allegorical transparency. (Kermode 13) In the hands of a postmodern New Space Opera practitioner such as M. John Harrison, such indeterminate transcoding of allegorical representation into traditional space-opera narratives becomes the vector for playful metafictional games. In less experimental, hard sf authors such as Alastair Reynolds, the teeming randomness of allegorical heteroglossia is gestured at lightly and indirectly. Thus Reynolds quips that the allegorical seriousness of pulp-era space opera has transmuted in New Space Opera into a campy subgenre niche of commercial entertainment, such that space opera understood as mimetically representational future predictions seem like “a contradiction in terms, like tasteful heavy metal” (Reynolds 23).

Even the crudest political allegories, according to this analysis, do not necessarily make singular, one-to-one correspondences; rather the most reductive and escapist allegories may nonetheless trigger relays of multiple and shifting referents with the very same multivalent trope or icon. Pulp-era space opera frequently betrays this allegorical ambiguity, regardless of authorial intention or consumer demand. So A.E. van Vogt's *Mixed Men*, a fix-up space opera based on a stories serialized from 1943 to 1945 in *Astounding*, rings a constellation of changes on the Cambellian mutant. Here the singular voice of authoritarian social meaning combines with the subterranean undercurrents of (heteroglossic) counter-discourse that undermines the hegemonic discourse with a startling abruptness characteristic of van Vogt. Due to the novum of teleportation, human beings have mutated into the Dellians, an insurgent master race adapted at the molecular level to possess superhuman strength and agility as well as resistance to the widespread interrogation techniques of psychological manipulation. The equally technophobic and xenophobic masses deride this new breed of mutants as "robots" and begin to exterminate the persecuted minority in lynch mobs, forcing the Dellians to migrate to hidden enclaves in the Greater Magellanic Cloud. When the atomically armed battleship *Star Cluster* stumbles on the cloud, the captain sends a radio signal demanding the cloud accept integration into Earth civilization. The captain declares:

“Earth guarantees to the individual basic human rights under the law, guarantees the individual basic human freedoms and economic prosperity, and requires all governments to be elected by secret ballot.’

‘Earth does not permit a separate sovereign state *anywhere in the Universe.*’”

(Van Vogt 60)

The threat of military invasion is simply too drastic to permit the existence of competing political entities despite the fact that Earth claims to support democratic pluralism and self-determination. Such a tension seems to amply justify Damon Knight’s devastating critique, from *In Search of Wonder*, of van Vogt’s infantile power fantasies, just as it seems to suggest a timely protest of the rationalized atrocities of the Holocaust. As if to reinforce this oscillation between allegorical certainty and indeterminacy, van Vogt re-complicates the implied equation of the Dellians with persecuted Jewish diaspora, since the offspring of humans and Dellians, the hybrid Mixed Men, are in turn marginalized as sub-humans with no citizenship rights, by the Dellian-Human plebiscites of the Greater Megellanic Cloud. In the end, reluctantly but benevolently, the cloud joins Earth civilization; and van Vogt champions the techno-nostalgic individuality of the Mixed Men and Dellians who will be fruitful and multiply, while at the same time enfolding these dissident mutants into the rigidly hierarchical collectivity of Earth civilization. As such van Vogt anticipates the hegemonic allegory of neoliberal subjectivity as well as its undermining and decentering in the heteroglossic struggle against such overdetermined scripts.

Whether in the form of *Buck Rogers* comic strips or van Vogt short stories, the popularization of techno-cultural allegory in pulp-era space operas is intimately tied to

their widespread consumer appeal in the interwar period. More generally, the implicit commodity fetishism of ray-guns, dreadnaughts, and teleportation devices illustrate the incipient role of the subgenre as a political-economic allegory for technology-dominated class struggle in global capitalism. In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson theorizes that, in the twentieth century, science-fictional allegory often reveals its socialist-utopian desire for the material-physical body transfigured by radical technology, for lifespans extended into near-immortality or sweeping historical dimensions, and for a collective solidarity tantamount to the a depersonalizing eclipse of subjectivity (6). Jameson adapts here Ernst Bloch's notion of allegorical representation as not a literal-minded Lukácsian realism but a fragmented, open-ended process of the "not yet" or "forward dawning," or a kaleidoscopic bricolage of transformative, counter-hegemonic utopian impulses and experiences defused into the hegemonic, totalizing agendas of global capitalism in the here and now (Bloch 339). Unlike the totalizing allegory of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or Edmund Spenser's *Fairy-Queen*, science fiction does not impose a rigid allegorical structure that superimposes a pre-ordained, if complex, figural and secondary semiotic codes on an immediate or literal narrative. But, rather, as Stephen Slemon, in a discussion of postcolonial literature, contends, oppositional writers, such as the vanguard practitioners of New Space Opera discussed in these chapters, can appropriate and interrogate the hermeneutic mode of political allegory as itself deeply complicit in the hegemonic history of teleological progress that underpins the neoliberal project or what Walter Benjamin famously referred to as the evacuation of social meaning by "homogenous empty time" and the forces of global capitalism (Slemon 11).

Jameson's allegorical register, then, reverts and expresses the utopian impulses of the political allegory in contemporary science fiction; I would like to extend Jameson's expanded use of the term allegory even further to encompass the subgenre of New Space Opera and its efforts to triangulate a critical aesthetic dimension over against the recent unprecedented transformations in the political and economic modes of neoliberalism. This aesthetics and complex political allegory that highlight the destabilizing force of an unshakeable belief in market-driven limitless technological reproduction. This eternally renewed cycle of technological reproduction propagated by neoliberalism can be commandeered by New Space Opera to perform an aesthetic negation of pulp-era SF stylistics and somatics, which themselves serve as an index of the contemporary rapid acceleration of commodity fetishism and the myth of progressive development under neoliberal regimes of politico-economic subjectification. After a century in which the League of Nations proved as unrealizable as the Non-Aligned Movement, not to mention the conspicuous absence of workers of the world uniting under any banner of the internationally downtrodden, New Space Opera provides a downsized utopian desire that underscores the rationalized reifications and alibis of neoliberal ideology and neo-imperial aggression.

For Benjamin, homogenous empty time refers to a diverse constellation of progressive paradigms constructed by the linear, future-oriented temporality of the modern clock and the calendar. Although we need not travel with Benjamin all the way down this discursive road, Benjamin contends such a naïve, technocratic faith in progress evacuates the messianic presentism of a religio-medieval, pre-modern sense of eternal

recurrence and here-and-now eschatology. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), Benjamin develops a specifically aesthetic theory of allegory based on the baroque German *Trauerspiel* plays that he later adapts to analyze the technologically driven high capitalism of modernity itself in his longer work *The Arcades Project* (1929-1940). Benjamin ultimately concludes that the indeterminate opacity and objective materiality of modern baroque allegories — as opposed to the private and immaterial one-to-one correspondences of aesthetic symbolism — are productively coterminous with the commodity fetishism of hegemonic capitalist culture. Commodity fetishism, for Benjamin, alluding to Karl Marx's well-known theory from *Capital*, entails not only endowing an exchangeable commodity, such as a lace trimming or a comic-strip drawing of a rocket and ray gun, with a magical and ritualistic aura, but also its opposite, namely, reification, or the defining of a person strictly in monetary terms or in subordinate relation to the commoditized image, or constellation of images, in modern consumer culture. The mass-market products of pulp space opera epitomize such technologically oriented commodity fetishes.

From a Marxist lens, reification and commodity fetishism objectify —or baroque and metonymically allegorize — an autonomous human being into a fragmented, inanimate, and instrumentalized materiality. In this sense, modern allegory constitutes a dispersed, vernacular flow of cultural politics or structures of feeling that expose, and thereby both recycle and negate, the commodity fetishism of capitalist culture. The exposure of commodity fetishism, then, expressively short-circuits the circulation of homogenous, empty time and the hellish novelty-seeking in the progressive

paradigm of creation and destruction, establishment and disestablishment, stabilization and destabilization of all consumer forms, conventions, and values — not least of which our remit, the subgenre of space opera. Lodged in the indeterminacy of rapidly shifting sets of value, commodity fetishism undergirds crisis-prone cycles of capitalist economies. Benjamin contends that, in the grips of technological modernity, the transcendent evocation of a redemptive dreamworld of bourgeois comfort and meaning — the totalized beauty and truth of culture — constantly fragments into the catastrophic, obsolete ruins of homogenous empty time and the discarded fragments of oppressive inequality and class struggle — the limited inaccessibility the human subject has to such beauty and truth. The fragmenting of aesthetic allegory leaves in its wake of this mystical, naturalizing enchantment a profane testament to the expropriating, profit-maximizing wreckage of capitalist acquisition, the hoarding of private property, and the infinite accumulation of surplus value in the putatively free market.²

The primary assertion of this dissertation that a popular cosmopolitical phalanx of writers loosely termed New Space Opera has political allegory baked into its neoliberal DNA rests on an assumption that bridges a productive tension at the heart of Marxist-affiliated branches cultural studies and aesthetics, namely that culture can be both complexly non-instrumental (“purposively non-purposive”, to recall Immanuel Kant’s foundational formulation on the philosophy of art) and subtly ideological (Bérubé 7-9). Again, if we were to recruit Kant here, it is not entirely surprising that the philosopher conceived of the “cosmopolitan” public sphere as a fixed and yet ever-broadening perspective that nevertheless became axiomatic for his systematic ideas on both politics

and aesthetics given that in the *Third Critique* Kant famously defines the aesthetic responses toward the beautiful and sublime —which Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. compellingly smuggles into the “techno-sublime” of SF as one of the pillars of his *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* — as presupposing a standpoint both disinterested and personal, i.e., a built-in judgment and understanding that lays claim to “subjective universality” (See Szendy 69). In *Inhuman Condition* (2007), Peng Cheah credits Kant’s traditionally cosmopolitan aesthetics for the loosening of the hyphen between the nation and state prior to the emergence of the modern nation in a way that anticipates contemporary globalization characterized by transnational diaspora, the rise of global cities, and human-rights NGOs, in contestation with regime-change puppeteering, sweat-shop labor, capital flight, destabilizing stock-market speculation, and draconian immigration law. In contrast to Hegel’s state-centered relativism and in line with Marx’s sublation of the state apparatus by global capital, Cheah argues that Kant’s call for a world federation rearticulates the deontological, normative basis for a global public sphere such that indigenous groups can invoke a shared feeling of belonging beyond the local-regional polis. Yet despite appealing to the exhortatory and heuristic power of the intrinsic Kantian values of human freedom, dignity, and reason, especially in the context of disempowered subaltern subjects, Cheah’s cosmopolitics insists that the inhuman condition of the neoliberal consensus militates against this universalizing appeal to human-rights rhetoric.

Benjamin’s brand of Frankfurt aesthetics invoked in this chapter, then, grants more cultural-material specificity to artistic endeavor than Kant’s idealistic

Enlightenment-era cosmopolitanism but still posits the singular, irreducible possibility of an aesthetic-political allegory in which the disruptive, fetishized crisis or emergency evoked originally by the pulp space adventures in the torrid covers and lurid affect of bygone popular culture can recall the utopian totality and critical consciousness that is continually vulnerable to being relegated to the dustbin of history. This theory of political allegory equally stresses both the political and allegorical aspects of cultural productions: literary aesthetics in the contemporary marketplace betray both borderline-nihilistic, non-purposive, and escapist elements as well as instrumental, ideological, and political dimensions.

In other words, I contend that New Space Opera is non-instrumental and non-purposive and non-mimetic in its primarily aesthetic function and its registering of discordant affect, and at the same time I contend that New Space Opera is self-consciously political and ideological and provocatively instrumental in a sophisticated fashion that does not disregard the discriminating cognition of selection and judgment in understanding this particular flourishing cultural style as a representative species of cultural production. On an aesthetic register, this aesthetic-cultural effect of disruption and fragmentation occurs with respect to undercutting the ragged edges of clumsy pulp style and transgressing the authoritarian, technocratic message of reactionary SF; in an ideological dimension, this canny return to crudely sensational pulp stylistics and vivid, kinetic forms of expression mirrors, echoes, and transduces (while still finessing) the non-mimetic tropes, imagery, and insulating emotion (as opposed to disruptive affect) of our neoliberal moment. For our neoliberal moment is pulpy and science-fictional in and

of itself and its putatively “progressive” state sovereignty and the rampant accumulation of techno-capital through market deregulation and privatization renders whole populations across the globe continually expendable, that is, in Marxist terminology, fetishized and reified.

Even conceiving space opera as an aesthetic mode of complex global allegory fails to adequately capture the extent to which New Space Opera in particular articulates the extreme technological sublime of our contemporary neoliberal moment. In *Post Cinematic Affect*, Steven Shaviro draws on recent developments of affect theory to argue that blocs of *affect*, or an overwhelming and free-floating pre-conscious sensibility and uncontrolled bodily reaction, has been channeled and condensed into conscious and lucid emotional response by “the computing-and-information technology of contemporary neoliberal finance” (Shaviro 2). In addition to representational allegory, the literalized tropes and icons of science fiction appeal to audiences on an outré and non-mimetic level that refuses to be taken as directly representational such that New Space Opera negotiates an affective allegorical mapping of an un-representably complex world-system. Shaviro contends that the operations of neoliberal bio-power or the harnessing of the affective power of the human body into broader economic, political, and social processes can be meaningfully compared to the commodification of use value into exchange value in critical-materialist terms. What Susan Sontag derided as a naive celebration of the “unassimilable terrors that infect our consciousness” in 1950 science-fiction movies can be understood in terms of the sophisticated re-mediations of New Space Opera as

poignant, if outrageously bizarre, allegories of affective and neoliberal flows of bio-power.

Adapting Michel Foucault's seminal analysis of neoliberal globalism as constructing a rational, self-interested individual or liberal human subject, the "*Homo oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself" (Foucault 226) discussed at length in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Shaviro identifies contemporary science fiction as engaging with a disruptive political-economic affect. Shaviro concisely defines the affective turn in recent literary studies as an emphasis on autonomous affective experience as opposed to discursive *emotion* codified and commodified by neoliberal subjectivity. Shaviro develops Brian Massumi's theory to conclude that physiological response of affect entails something that is "primary, non-conscious, asubjective or presubjective, or asignifying, unqualified and intensive; while emotion is derivative, conscious, qualified, and meaningful, a "content" that can be attributed to an already-constituted subject" (Shaviro 3). As distinct from hegemonic and counterhegemonic positional coding of power and resistance on a static grid of identity politics, Massumi posits that a dynamic affective negotiation or "movement, sensation, and qualities of experience couched in matter of the most literal sense (and sensing) might be culturally-theoretically thinkable...without contradicting the very real insights of poststructuralist cultural theory concerning the coextensiveness of culture with the field of experience and of power with culture" (Massumi 4). Lauren Berlant connects affect theory to Marxist theories of the novel, showing that the novel has a long hermeneutic tradition of political-economic interpretation existing on cognitive and affective levels simultaneously. Berlant argues

that such culturally Marxist readings of affect offer productive means of designating “affective aspects of class antagonism, labor practices, and a communally generated class feeling that emerges from inhabiting a zone of lived structure” (Berlant 67).

Moreover, Berlant has fundamental affinity with Benjamin’s evocation of consumer phantasmagoria in her contention that contemporary neoliberal crisis has become mystified in an unsustainable cultural fantasy, or what she terms in an epithet particularly resonant with the auspicious attitudes of pulp-era science fiction: the “cruel optimism” of the ahistorical everyday. Berlant conceives of the connection between a tortuously fantastic attachment and the political-economic culture that inspires such an affective response as a mutually reinforcing feedback loop existing “in an aesthetic field of signification [as] a punctum that appears singularly ahistorical — affect — but which is, because of the detail it cuts across and unites, a relay through which the historical can be said to be sensed before it is redacted” (Berlant 70). Kathleen Stewart goes further to gesture toward the science-fictional nature of these everyday sensation-based fantasies embedded in the palpable textures and rhythms of lived culture; Stewart considers these pulpy fantasies “the genius of the so-called masses” or “ecstatic little forms of disappearance [that] have budded up” such as “UFOs [that] come in the night and lift you up in an out-of-this-world levitation trick” (Stewart 49). Indeed, this magical disappearing act of cosmic intervention forms the found-manuscript prelude to many early space operas such as Jack Williamson’s *Legion of Space* where John Delmar remembers the future, beginning with a hallucinatory and nightmarish vision where “a fantastic black machine was gliding down over those terrible mountains” (Williamson

10). In other words, the outrageous affect of pulp space opera afforded a hyperbolic and fantastic escape that only reinforced and did not completely elide the banal and mundane political-economic reality of everyday life in the Depression decade and beyond.

Affect and High-Cosmopolitan Allegory in Pulp-Era Space Opera

Despite our ingrained rejections of culture-industry diversions, such an exhilarating fantasy of escape that pulp science fiction afforded the mass market resists being dismissively reduced to cheap thrills or naively celebrated as *sensawunda* (sense of wonder). In fact, pulp space opera transmitted a variegated spectrum of tonalities, physical responses, and structures of feelings ranging from ennobling awe over the epic grandeur and complexity of the scientifically knowable and technological controllable universe to a normalizing, jingoistic civic duty and humbled complacency with the hegemonic imperialist-capitalist status quo, from a cosmic sense of alienation to a delusional state of anxiety, from jaunty glee to shrieking terror, from rambunctious excitement to blunt comedy, from irrational fury to unsettling, all-consuming desire.

Outer space itself was often the vacuous medium of such escape. The visceral experience of directly encountering the cosmos imagined in pulp science fiction, though clearly genre-mediated and phantasmagoric, appealed to phenomenological, existential, and profoundly affective registers. Directionality and dimensionality multiply and expand in the fictionalization of outer space due to the addition of upward and downward movement combined with the quotidian compass (leftward, rightward, frontward, and backward), and the displaced or absent center of gravity contributes to the fundamental

sense of disorientation. In *Triplanetary*, for instance, E. E. “Doc” Smith ratchets this affective experience up by the introduction of the faster-than-light device of the “Bergenholtm Inertialess Drive” that eliminates mass so as to avoid quantum paradoxes but can only be grasped by analogy to the free-fall multidimensionality of zero-gravity weightlessness. For the overwhelmed heroes “there came a sensation akin to a tremendously intensified vertigo but a vertigo far beyond the space-sickness of weightlessness as that horrible sensation is beyond mere dizziness... the Universe spun and whirled in mad gyrations as he reeled drunkenly to his feet, staggering and sprawling. He fell. He realized he was falling, yet he could not fall!” (Smith 196) As argued below, the sagas of imperial conquest tame the sheer affective power of cosmic exploration found in pulp space operas by the likes of Smith or Edmond Hamilton, Jack Williamson, Ray Cummings, A.E. Van Vogt, and Henry Kuttner. These pulp space opera practitioners set their stories in the disorientating near-infinite territory of astronomical space, literalizing the capitalist drive for profit-amassing accumulation in addition to, as shown below, the expansive Keynesian urge to curb such unrestrained accumulation, and the more radical revolutionary urge to dismantle the unsustainable system. Space opera channels and manages bodies in space.

The pulps put physiological sensation and movement back in the marketing term “sensational” and science fiction was not immune from the scandalous publishing climate that ensued; as a result, even today the titillating depiction of sex and death in cheap formats has become synonymous with the global phenomenon of pulp fiction. Puritanical crusaders campaigned against pulps in which bold and garish aesthetics at times

cultivated a raw pulp eroticism that moral guardians castigated as lurid and obscene. Indeed, it was partly this controversy swirling around the magazine stands that all but determined that the pulps would become big business in the United States beginning in the 1920s (see Boyer 155). In his early space operas, Henry Kuttner shocked conservative-minded readers and even government censors (See Ashley 122 and Resnik 118) who derided his “Avengers of Space” and “The Time Trap” that appeared in *Marvel Science Stories* and featured lantern-jawed, ray-gun-wielding male heroes frequently aroused by scene after scene of increasingly disrobed women menaced by amoeboid aliens and diabolically libidinal leopard priestesses. In response to such backlash, Kuttner tempered the explicitly pornographic elements of his fiction, but his hard-edged, noir-tinged fiction, clearly an influence on Alfred Bester and eventually New Space Opera itself, still elicited affect by the over-the-top stories of space adventure, as emblemized by “Thunder in the Void”, appearing in the October 1942 issue of *Astonishing Stories*.

In “Thunder in the Void”, after murdering his superior officer for molesting his girlfriend, Saul Duncan escapes from an arctic prison only to be blackmailed into heisting radium from a government starship *The Maid of Mercury*. Duncan’s girlfriend dies and the grief-stricken anti-hero vows revenge by hurtling into space without a government-issued protective helmet only to uncover that the psychic aliens, manufacturing the helmets that ostensibly defend Earth from malevolent mind vampires, are themselves the mind vampires. Much in tune with Jack Williamson’s space operas, Kuttner’s story accesses pre-existing physiological, de-individuated, and asubjective tonalities — in a word, affect — that are conducive to but fundamentally distinct from the complexly

realized psychological characterizations nurtured by mimetic literary fiction. For instance, the story hinges on affective incidents such as when Duncan gets trapped into the heist due to his pilot experience that includes “years of split-second conditioned reactions”, (Kuttner 19), or such as when Duncan gets knocked unconscious when blasting into space occurs due to “the stress of abnormal gravity” (Kuttner 19), or when the draining of energy by the mind vampires feels viscerally as if one’s mind is “drowned, as in a dark water, chill and horrible” (Kuttner 21). And when Saul careens toward Pluto, declared to be a sinister underworld, his vengeful fury is repeatedly signified by the titular (if scientifically inaccurate) loudness of the discrepant noise his starship generates: “The heavy, crashing roar of rockets mounted to a deafening crescendo” (Kuttner 23).

This exaggerated affective experience became the navigational lodestar of the subgenre and characterizes the outsized effects of one of the earliest, most successful, and highly influential space operas in pulp magazines, namely, E.E. “Doc” Smith’s Lensman series. In the expanded 1948 fix-up of the prologue that retroactively integrated *Triplanetary*, originally published as a stand-alone story in *Amazing Stories* in 1934, into the Lensman series, E.E. “Doc” Smith reveals the insidious machinations of the monstrous trans-dimensional alien race called the Eddorians and their nefarious covert agent, Gharlane, in the context of their history-spanning clashes with the superior Kinnison line of future Lensman eugenically engineered by the benevolent humanoid aliens called the Arisians. These six short episodes are set in Atlantis, Rome, and during the first two, and predicted third, World Wars of the twentieth century. In the retro-

futuristic Atlantis vignette, Smith exhibits his trademark fantastic apolitical escapism as a mystifying transcendence of struggles of labor and capital that plagued the 1930s. A capitalist-industrialist from Atlantis exclaims:

“Output per man-hour should have gone up at least twenty percent, in which case prices would automatically have come down. Instead, short-sighted guilds imposed drastic curbs on production, and now seem to be surprised that as production falls and hourly wages rise, prices also rise and real income drops. Only one course is possible, gentlemen; labor must be made to listen to reason. This feather-bedding, this protected loafing, this . . .”

“I protest!” Marxes, Minister of Work, leaped to his feet.

“The blame lies squarely with the capitalists. Their greed, their rapacity, their exploitation of . . .”

“One moment, please!” Aripionides rapped the table sharply. “It is highly significant of the deplorable condition of the two Ministers of State should speak as you two have just spoken. I take it that neither of you has anything new to contribute to this symposium?”

(Smith 31)

The Atlantis symposium must forestall these perennial debates to concentrate their efforts on the prevention of an obliterating nuclear war. Smith intimates to his pulp readers, adolescent boys of all ages and genders, that the impending techno-

swashbuckling adventure of ray guns and starships cannot be caught up in negotiating such mundane, controversial political-economic concerns. Yet Smith's reliance on popular space-opera conventions and protocols, even when recombining them with a seemingly fresh mintage, necessitates that such romantic-surreal expeditions into improbably exotic literary spaces cannot help but allegorize violent imperial projects in the early twentieth century, as well as, less catastrophically, the expansionary Keynesian deficit spending that domestically stimulated aggregate demand in the years of the Great Depression. In the subsequent 1941 vignette, Ralph Kinnison is a heroic chemical engineer as competent individualist-technocrat rooting out the inefficiency and waste of the petite bourgeois managerial-professional class. Unlike the preemptory political allegory found elsewhere in Smith, this vignette resembles the ambivalence toward capitalist sabotaging and corruption of heroic technological prowess also evident in the interwar leftwing Futurian movement of science-fiction culture analyzed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

To repeat, the underlying contention of this dissertation is that an affective-aesthetic register of paradigmatic pulp-era space adventure evident in Smith's fiction conveyed an exuberant embrace of simultaneously techno-progressive and technonostalgic imperatives in a rich ideological multiplicity. This polysemic richness is fundamentally irreducible to a singular hegemonic or counterhegemonic positioning and encoding but can only be understood as a dynamic process of ideological negotiation and compromise. Despite the fact that Smith would endeavor to confine the untamed affective potential of pulp space opera to reactionary and proto-neoliberal interests, his

space operas engaged readers at the level of flashes and surges of inassimilable but searing intensity over techno-sublime future wonders and space battles of staggering proportion. The future exploration of the cosmos could then become not a tumbling into an escapist void, with techno-nostalgic blinkers fully up, but the excavation of a techno-progressive warehouse of innovative speculations. Equally, space opera could virtually allegorize the militarized conquests reaping capitalist spoils expanding endlessly into a future techno-nostalgic infinity. Indeed, this proto-neoliberal reading was frequently endorsed by the right-libertarian Smith himself. In “Larger than Life”, for instance, Robert Heinlein celebrates Smith’s prescient neoliberal political-ethical vision that “assumes all humans are unequal” and that a “planned genetic breeding program thousands of years long can (and must) produce a new race superior to Homo sapiens... supermen who will become the guardians of civilization” (Heinlein 499).

This commitment to seeding into the Lensman series a secret history of intergalactic, racially inflected eugenics inspired Samuel Delany to refer to Smith as a reactionary purveyor of “fascist mysticism” (Delany 227). In *Subspace Explorers* (1960), the anticommunist Mccarthyist climate, especially prevalent in John W. Campbell’s *Astounding* magazine, permits Smith himself to offer polemical attacks on pro-union sentiment under the guise of “enlightened self-interest” (Smith 173). The story involves an intergalactic federation supervised by benevolent corporate executives who must curtail a general union strike on a dissident Earth. Smith lays a small degree of blame on slave-driving capitalists on Earth but pours the majority of scorn on the sinister power of workers unions. Smith excoriates these enemies to capitalist progress by reference to the

criminalized misfits and rejects of a quasi-fascist eugenics theory. This eugenics theory was earlier systemized as the monstrous degenerates of the Lensman villains: “Tellurian labor is a bunch of plain damned fools. Idiots. Cretins. However, that’s only to be expected because anybody with any brains or any guts left years ago. There’s scarcely any good breeding stock left, even” (Smith 174). Likewise, in *Galactic Patrol* (1937), the criminal underworld of space pirates and gangsters are finally revealed to be not a swarm of disaffected free-marketers and privateers, but the external machinations of a rival civilization to the galactic police, a conspiratorial organization called Boskone manipulated by the insidious Eddorians.

In the prequel *First Lensman* (1950), the Galactic Patrol replaces a corrupt drug-smuggling regime that politically dominates far-future North America, installing Roderick Kennison as president due to his pugnacious and unimpeachable virtue. Roderick stumps on a platform that demonizes a diverse spectrum of leftwing political agendas from socialist agitation and pro-union solidarity to mainstream reformist New Deal programs and the deficit-funded government spending characteristic of the Keynesian response to economic crisis. The Lensman Virgil Samms and the Galactic Patrol decry Senator Morgan and the incumbent Nationalists whose anti-capitalist speeches resemble the radical political agitation of the Depression era. Morgan shouts in a radio address: “But at bottom, even though (Roderick) is not intelligent enough to realize it, he is merely one more in a long parade of tools of ruthless and predatory wealth, the MONIED POWERS” (Emphasis in original, Smith 158). Roderick mocks this hypocritical strategy as absurd demagoguery and ironically mimics its populist appeal

while ignoring the substance of its anti-authoritarian critique: “People of Earth, arise! Arise! Rise in your might and throw off this stultifying and degrading, this paralyzing yoke of the Monied Powers — throw out this dictatorial, autocratic, wealth-directed, illegal, monstrous Council of so-called Lensmen!” (Smith 154). Far from a gratuitous gibe, Smith refers frequently to the “zwilnik” villains or Boskonian space pirates and gangsters, often associated with an ideological anti-drug phobia over Reefer Madness, as political radicals and subversives, valorizing the Galactic Patrol’s crackdown on their hydra-headed insurgent counterpublics.³ For instance, in *Children of the Lens* (1947) Boskonians bombard the planet of Lyras II with feminist Young Turks labelled “the New Deal” who are “rebellious as always against the hide-bound, mossbacked, and reactionary older generation, [and who] joined the subterranean New Deal in droves” (Smith 202).

The ruling elite of the Lensmen and the Galactic Patrol can enforce this coercive disciplining and management of such a subterranean, fractious underclass via their hyper-advanced technological competence. Over the span of the series, the Galactic Patrol have recourse to an escalating arms race of faster-than-light inertialess drives, hyperspace tubes, superdreadnaughts, force shields, tractor beams, laser blasters, and “negasphere” doomsday weapons. By the last installment Smith offered hyperbolic technological extravaganzas that made the plausibility-minded John W. Campbell increasingly cringe, such as the hurling of planets as vast projectile weapons, the harnessing of the power of the stars for immense solar blasts, and, climactically, an intergalactic tsunami of destruction emanating from collective psychic power of all the children of the Lens. The Lensmen specifically wield a glowing gem worn as a bracelet and manufactured by the

Arisians that begins as a device of universal translation before graduating to effecting psi-powers such as teleportation, mind-control, psychic links, and telekinesis. The ancient alien technology of the Lens operates according to a radical heroic individualism combined with a eugenic celebration of the Nietzschean Overman. Smith binds up his gadget fetishism with a neoliberal emphasis on bourgeois individuality as the singular mastery of the universe, as explained in *First Lensman* where the chosen-one Virgil Samms declares: “Then I – I alone — of all the entities in existence, can wear this particular Lens” (Smith 28). Later, Smith elaborates on the mind-over-matter, meritocratic self-actualization of the Lens: “strictly speaking, a Lens has no real power of its own; it merely concentrates, intensifies, and renders available whatever powers are already possessed by its wearer” (Smith 33) The techno-individualism crosses national borders and collectivities in an elite cosmopolitan pose since the Galactic Patrol mandates that humanity “will have to change their thinking from a National to a Galactic viewpoint” (Smith 155). Moreover, this lethal heroic individualism is heavily masculinized as the narrative makes clear that Jill Kinnison cannot wear the Lens since “lenses are as masculine as whiskers... pure killers, all of you; each in his own way, of course. No more to be stopped than a glacier, and twice as hard and ten times as cold. A woman simply can't have that kind of a mind” (Smith 39) In *Second-Stage Lensman*, only Clarissa MacDougall Kinnison becomes the tokenized contradiction of the masculine technological prowess of the *Lensman*.

The High Cosmopolitanism of Pulp Space Opera

Cosmopolitanism etymologically refers to “being a citizen of the world” and a vast and contentious philosophical, sociological, and ethnographic tradition of global theory, variously unpacking this complicated concept, shows no signs of slowing down its unabated proliferation. A crucial recurring motif in this literature is the assertion that the term cosmopolitan also inescapably echoes the Olympian gaze of the elite, cosmopolitan technocrat located in geopolitically and geo-culturally hegemonic Northern nation-states as opposed to the global periphery. According to this older paternalistic version of cosmopolitanism, the cultural-political hegemony of the global North dominates and flattens out global pluralism of the margins into an overly commoditized monoculture dictated by the prerogatives of transnational corporations and developed nation-states. In his introduction to *Cosmopolitics*, Bruce Robbins leads the charge in taking to task this old cosmopolitanism and stresses the skeptical inquiry integral to a new critical cosmopolitanism distinguished as cosmopolitics: “the neologism cosmopolitics is also intended to underline the need to introduce intellectual order and accountability into the newly dynamic space of gushingly unrestrained sentiments, pieties, and urgencies for which no adequately discriminating lexicon has had time to develop” (Robbins 9). Onto this critical term of cosmopolitics, I venture here a conventional pun on the astronomical scale of neoliberal globalism, evident, to take two arbitrary recent histories, in Vijay Prashad’s consideration of neoliberalism as the “new cosmology” in *The Poorer Nations* or Daniel Steadman Jones’s overview of neoliberal politics fittingly titled *Masters of the Universe*. What these titles suggest about

postcolonial and neoliberal culture and politics is what John Rieder notes is an underlying fantastic dynamic behind the emergence of science fiction as a distinctive genre, namely: “colonial commerce and imperial politics [that] often turned the marvelous voyage into a fantasy of appropriation alluding to real objects and real effects that pervaded and transformed life in the homelands” (Rieder 34).

Chief among the charges levied against old cosmopolitanism is that, under the guise of global peace and security and liberal democratic ideals, United States culture systematically foisted an oft-unacknowledged cultural-political imperialism over the rest of the world over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Such policies defended extra-territorial military and economic interventions in ever-widening ripples of globe-spanning hegemony, conveniently enumerated, for example, in William Blum’s *Rogue State*. According to this view, the old cosmopolitanism of the Woodrow Wilson’s multi-lateral Fourteen Points and failed vision of a League of Nations, for instance, reflect and propagate cultural responses that normalize the ascendancy of an Occidental metropole over against the Orientalized antipodes. Likewise, as often presupposed by the operating assumption of crafting genre fiction in the New Space Opera mold that is by and large more open and informed about global heteroglossia, the bulwark tradition of pulp-era space opera cannot easily dismiss or rebut the well-established, powerful critique of American neo-imperial cultural-political tendencies.

Edmond Hamilton’s over-the-top space operas, in particular, frequently embody the old cosmopolitan paradigm that buried incontrovertible evidence of U.S. imperial ambitions deep into a sometimes dimly perceived affective-cultural awareness, while at

the same time implicitly promoting a technologically driven American exceptionalism that selectively contradicts and upholds the Wilsonian ideal of national self-determination. Post-war, this exceptionalism was eventually codified into the policies and practices of neoliberal globalism. In “A Conquest of Two Worlds”, for instance, first published in February 1932 by Gernsback’s *Wonder Stories*, Hamilton weaves a bombastic and crude fever dream of future micro-history in which ham-radio tinkerers and amateur rocket enthusiasts send bellicose expeditions of an Interplanetary Council that conquers inimical Martian and Jovian tribes in rhapsodized campaigns of colonial subjugation and expropriation. Hamilton became known, of course, as the “World-Wrecker” in science-fiction fandom during the period for his melodramatic raising the hyperbolic stakes of space opera as exemplified in *Crashing Suns (Weird Tales 1928)*. This novel-length story presents its stalwart heroes with the forced choice of combating hostile alien hoards or, with patent outrageousness, experiencing the annihilation of the entire universe due to the superscience collision of two careening suns.

Likewise, Hamilton’s popular *Star Kings (1947 Amazing Stories)* reveals the world-wrecking aporia of U.S. discourse that pursues and denies imperial-global reach simultaneously. Twentieth-century everyman John Gordon body swaps with Zarth Arn from the year 202, 115 where interstellar governments are ostensibly liberal democracies (Hamilton 15) and yet call themselves star-kingdoms loosely federated by the benevolent Mid-Galactic Empire, with leaders who are nonetheless endowed with the powers of imperial royalty. When the usurper Shor Kahn plots a regime change, the stock villain must stomp around the Black Cloud star systems, stirring up democratic unrest, given

“the poverty of our worlds, the hardness of our lives”, although Khan, Orientalized as tyrannical, is secretly of the opinion that “the mob remains always stupid” (Hamilton 92-3).

Such hysterical jingoism and white privilege does not always erupt in pulp-era space operas so egregiously. In *Legion of Space* (1934), for instance, Jack Williamson renders a fast-paced, serviceable space opera in which a galactic democratic-liberal galactic police force, the eponymous Space Legion, must wage war against Lovecraftian monsters, and their fifth columnists, the aristocratic Purple Family of Ulnar, of whom the heroic protagonist John Starr (né Ulnar) is also a noble scion. When all seems lost, in an echo of the famous band-of-brothers speech from Shakespeare’s *Henry V* that Stephen Greenblatt views as strategically containing foreign subversion, John Star reflects on the dismal prospects of the all-but-defeated Space Legion by a telling analogy: “they were like three dawn-men, hunting in the shadow of some early jungle; three elemental beasts, cautious and dangerous” (Williamson 215). Similarly, the Falstaffian Giles Habibula, a gluttonous drunkard, lives up to the sumptuous hedonism implied by the Orientalism of the faux-Arabic surname. John Starr muses that “he still liked old Giles Habibula despite his grossness” (Williamson 35). The exotic techno-Orientalism is dislocated onto the Space Legionnaires themselves — itself inescapably echoing the French Foreign Legion deployed to occupy Algeria in the 1920s and 1930s. So despite the alien menace being specifically identified as a monstrous green jelly-fish on a tripod, or a “gross mass of glistening, slimy, translucent flesh palpating with slow life”, (Williamson 186)

Williamson suggests an anxious self-disgust over a fantastic reverse colonization that disunites the Space Legion from within its multicultural ranks.

Unfortunately, the reprehensible presumptions of classic space opera have not lost their cultural sway in many areas of commercial space opera⁴; politically savvy New Space Opera, though, explicitly dismantles this old cosmopolitan view from the technocratically authoritarian center by way of what James Clifford identifies as “discrepant cosmopolitanism” which, keenly aware of the violence of postcolonial and neoliberal politics, manages to renegotiate the “the excessive localism of particularist cultural relativism, as well as the overly global vision of capitalist or technocratic monoculture” (Clifford 36). Clifford might just as well be discussing Gwyneth Jones’s nomadic Aleutians, Iain M. Banks’s hyper-refined artificial intelligence, or M. John Harrison’s Motel Splendido and the Kefahuchi Tract itself when considering the Surrealist hotel-dwelling of twentieth-century Paris as embodying a travelling culture both “negatively viewed as transience, superficiality, tourism, exile, and rootlessness” and “positively conceived as exploration, research, escape, transforming encounter” (Clifford 31). Yet, despite its explicit dissociation with the old elite cosmopolitan stance, and the numerous postcolonial criticisms to the contrary, Clifford’s ethnographic cosmopolitics, just as New Space Operatic version thereof, also takes into account the reconfiguration of the experience of not only interloping traveler but also the “native” or Third-World subject. For Clifford, the native informant, qua the mobile de-territorialized and diasporic agent of history, renegotiates such atrocities as “transatlantic enslavement” (Clifford 34) and its ongoing legacy for current neoliberal cultural politics. This

reconstituted perspective of a mobile, underdeveloped locality has much in common with Caribbean space opera and the as-yet fully realized potential of New Space Opera to re-contextualize contemporary events and situations of recent history into a discrepant cosmopolitical inquiry redolent with what Paul Jay calls the long history of the transnational turn in literary culture as a whole (Jay 41). New Space Opera renegotiates and even dismantles what Bruce Robbins in *Feeling Global* identifies as the overwhelming tendency to make “international commitments seem culturally alien, a matter of cold and distant sacrifice rather than an extension of existing interests, affections, loyalties” (Robbins 22). The technological progress of network society has made all the more crucial the propagating of a cosmopolitical ethos as represented in aesthetic and literary works, which has innumerable concrete and urgent political consequences.

Viewing the cosmopolitics of New Space Opera in the long context of the transnational literary turn entails cementing a connection between national sovereignty and literary culture. As exemplified in M. John Harrison’s cosmopolitical space opera below, this technologically driven historical backdrop for literary production requires coming to terms with the transformative encounter of progressively intentioned national cultures with the randomness and difference of the extraterritorial. Perhaps Iain M. Banks encapsulates this moment most pithily in his illustration of the Outside Context Problem in *Excession* (1996):

The usual example given to illustrate an Outside Context Problem was imagining you were a tribe on a largish, fertile island; you’d tamed the land, invented the

wheel or writing or whatever, the neighbors were cooperative or enslaved but at any rate peaceful and you were busy raising temples to yourself with all the excess productive capacity you had, you were in a position of near-absolute power and control which your hallowed ancestors could hardly have dreamed of and the whole situation was just running along nicely like a canoe on wet grass... when suddenly this bristling lump of iron appears sailless and trailing steam in the bay and these guys carrying long funny-looking sticks come ashore and announce you've just been discovered, you're all subjects of the Emperor now, he's keen on presents called tax and these bright-eyed holy men would like a word with your priests.

(Banks 71-72)

For his immediate neoliberal milieu, Banks uses the broad brushstrokes of space opera to satirize the basis for what Benedict Anderson, in his enormously influential cosmopolitical scholarship, famously called the “imagined communities” of expansionist nation-states. Anderson couples the invented tradition of national sovereignty qua the “serial continuity” (Anderson 198) constitutive to the print capitalism of imagined communities — and, following Robbins, we might add the electronic or digital capitalism of global imagined communities (Robbins 21) – with the Enlightenment-era utopian speculators like Thomas More and Francis Bacon and satirical writers like Voltaire and Jonathan Swift who frequently deployed farcical or visionary encounters with inassimilable non-Western other for critical, subversive ends. According to Anderson, the discourses surrounding Western techno-social progress and development fail to

accommodate the radical alterity of non-Western cultural and social achievements. The shift is concretized in modernized nation-states through the increasing attention paid to the linear temporality of homogeneous empty time. Anderson claims “in the course of the sixteenth century, Europe’s ‘discovery’ of grandiose civilizations hitherto only dimly rumored — in China, Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent — or completely unknown— Aztec Mexico and Incan Peru — suggested an irremediable human pluralism” (Anderson 71). Anderson’s derivation of the imagined communities of nation-states from print capitalism couples neatly as well with Roger Luckhurst’s contention that one of the prior conditions of emergence for science fiction as a genre involves the expansion of popular literacy to majorities of the citizenry of the expanding English and American empires in the 1880s and 1890s (Luckhurst 16).

Anderson’s focus on the construction of the nation-state through the decentered but shared networks of language and literature corroborates, then, the focus of this dissertation on the neoliberal cultural politics of a specific literary and aesthetic phenomenon. Hence the cosmopolitical valences inherent in the literary productions of New Space Opera cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the complexity of national sovereignty and its link to neoliberal subjectivity. This complex historical reality is thoroughly analyzed by Eric Hobsbawm’s influential thesis that nation-states gradually emerge from a mutually contradictory mosaic of historical circumstances including but not limited to military and police enforcement, shared historical memory, ethnic identifications, state administration and infrastructure, democratic representation, middle-class-oriented liberal economics, and, last but not least for our purposes, a commitment to

techno-scientific progress (Hobsbawm 41). The last contributing factor of putatively superior science and technology proves especially relevant to the global literary imagination and its deeply complicit role in fashioning national communities rooted in expropriated blood or soil when confronted with the dauntingly advanced ancient cultures misperceived as primitive or undeveloped. In order to avoid alienating readers, the less gauche, if still outré, cosmopolitics of New Space Opera must take as given the proposition that the closet imperialist-nationalist narratives of original pulp space opera, such as those discussed above by Henry Kuttner, A.E. van Vogt, E.E. “Doc” Smith, Edmond Hamilton, and Jack Williamson, derive much of their space-opera verve and color from this misperception of the primal ethnographic scene.

On an ideological level, then, perhaps New Space Opera cannot naively return to the guileless optimism of the revolutionary master technocrat-hero or undaunted space pioneer given, as Henry Giroux contends, that neoliberalism has the aestheticized potential to “dehistoricize and depoliticize society in its aggressive attempts to destroy all of the public sphere...[such that] it becomes increasingly difficult for the average citizen to speak about political or social transformation, or even to challenge existing conditions, beyond a grudging nod toward rampant corruption, ruthless downsizing, the ongoing liquidation of job security, and the elimination of benefits for part-time and contract workers” (Giroux 53-55). This chapter will now return to its opening salvo on the retooled trope of scavenging ancient alien technology or the critical uncovering of what Giroux views as the “emerging authoritarianism” (Giroux 15) of our current neoliberal moment. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to integrating the above analysis into a

close reading of a prototypical exemplar of politicized, aestheticized New Space Opera, namely, M. John Harrison's Kefahuchi Tract trilogy. The essential contention is that Harrison's iconic revisiting of space opera performs the difficult cultural-aesthetic work of dismantling the pervasive influence of pulp-era stylistics while simultaneously interrogating neoliberal geopolitics.

“Who Is Going to Save Us from the Machines, Vic?”: Neoliberal Political Allegory in M. John Harrison's Kefahuchi Tract Trilogy

In his canny twists on spaceport bars, interstellar motels, and space tourism, M. John Harrison rehearses the lively, discrepant cosmopolitics of the world-traveler. For Harrison, the off-the-wall juxtaposition, syncretism, and disjunctions perforate his postmodern narratives with aporia and indeterminacy in contrast to the thudding literalism of pulp space opera and the dogmatic tenets of contemporary neoliberal ideology. In a nod to Alfred Bester's *The Stars, My Destination* — discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation — Harrison highlights Bester's spin on his own pulp space-opera ancestry, considering this influential science-fictional novel “the most bijou of operas” and citing the experimentalism of the typographically pyrotechnic ending where the protagonist Gully Foyle teleports to escape an explosion. For Harrison, the novel “ends with the possibility of personal travel in time and vast space. Cut out the middleman. Bester seems to be advising: Everyman is his own interstellar drive.” In his arch but triumphant return to space opera that began with *Light* (2002) followed up by *Nova Swing* (2007) and completed with *Empty Space* (2012), M. John Harrison applies a New-Wave sensibility to this most understandably despised of pre-Golden-Age

subgenres. Harrison thereby performs a salvaging operation on space opera for the transgressive affective experience it provides. New Space Opera, for Harrison, elicits an affective “bursting out” or “going beyond” in a “ferocious leap of imagination” or “a raw sense of boundarylessness” while hastening to add the proviso that “the imagination is political, whether it intends to be or not” (Harrison 45). The trilogy takes place in two time streams of 1999 and 2400 that are loosely unified by the discovery and eventual exploration of the Kefahuchi Tract, an inexplicable black-hole-like spatial anomaly and lucrative graveyard of ancient alien technology. This scavenging and repurposing of ancient alien technology metaphorizes the critical renovation of pulp space opera for its political-allegorical potential.

The centerpiece of Harrison’s New Space Opera is the Kefahuchi Tract, an inexplicable materiality in empty space ripe for the harvesting of commodity fetishism. The tract turns out to be a testament to the inevitable crisis inherent in the myth of growth-oriented, progressive, developmental histories or Benjamin’s homogenous empty time, constituting the vestigial remains of a (mostly) extinct alien civilization that unlocks pliable, radically divergent cosmologies for profit-seeking salvagers harnessing the retro-advanced technology. Encounters with the recovered technology are bizarrely physiological and profoundly affective — often involving random sensations and disturbing scenes of body horror — but the technology works according to inconsistent laws of physics such that Harrison cheekily notes in reference to the unproven, counter-intuitive fields in contemporary theoretical astrophysics: “It was even possible to build drives on the basis of superstring-style theories, which, despite their promise four

hundred years, had never worked out at all” (Harrison 182). Although Harrison’s appeal to imaginary breakthroughs in quantum mechanics seems oddly plausible given these current trends in theoretical physics, the sheer multiplicity of interpretive potential for his fictive use of (super)science suggests an excess that explodes a singular faith in science and technology to understand and master the universe.

This technological drive to master the universe is not an incidental feature of the narrative given that Kefahuchi Tract trilogy hinges on the dialectic between technolstasia and techno-utopianism that characterizes the neoliberal era. In the 1999 plot thread of *Light*, Michael Kearney’s story epitomizes the critique of the relentless growth-oriented excess of the technological utopian drive. Kearney is a suicidal mathematician and, as it turns out, a mad-scientist serial killer, and thus the first scene descends from the bathetic to grotesque when Kearney leaves a cocktail party to kill his girlfriend Clara “as quickly as he had all the others” (Harrison 3). For the unearthly omen of the Shranders haunts Kearney, manifesting as an old crone in a maroon wool coat with the head of a horse’s skull, like the Celtic New Year’s Day omen of Mari Lwyd (Harrison 112). Kearney steals the Shranders’ dice from Monster Beach, and the frantic perpetual flight from the Shranders drives Kearney’s manic serial killing (Harrison 158). Kearney’s own private need to escape from the Shranders links him to neo-imperial transnational corporations given that Kearney’s research into the mathematical transformations for quantum computing and what becomes the Tate-Kearney faster-than-light drive involves the following of “the funding from university to university, doing what he called McScience for the corporates, keeping track of the new discipline of complexity and

emergent properties, all the time staying ahead of the game, the Shranders, the body count” (Harrison 250). Big science has replaced the pulp-era heroic exploits of the amateur tinkerer in the garage or basement; hence the market-fundamentalist myth of individualism, competition, and efficiency that bolsters neoliberal ideology can no longer be sustained.

Similarly, the commodity fetishism that supports neoliberal ideology is often aesthetically exposed and negated in the trilogy. In the 2400 timeframe of *Light*, Harrison introduces the “entradista” Ed Chianese, and perhaps his name recalls the vile yellow peril of the pulp-era space-opera serials of *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon*. Chianese enters the tract brimming with ancient alien technology in which mutable functionality suggests an aesthetic-literary critique of the boundless promise, randomness, and multiplicity of the McLuhanite global village, a dreamworld of reification. Just preceding Ed’s decision to helm the scavenged Kefahuchi Ship *The White Cat* — and to complete the twist on Schrödinger’s famous cat-illustrated theory of quantum indeterminacy — the inexplicable Kefahuchi Tract recurs once more in *Light* as a border-defying, spaceless flow in a description charged with Harrison’s signature imagistic panache: “a singularity without an event horizon. A place where all the broken rules of the universe spill out, like cheap conjuror’s stuff, magic that might work, or it might not, undependable stuff in a retro-shop window” (Harrison 412). Complicit with the retro-shop window of commodifying neoliberal experience he allegorizes and contests, Harrison genre-morphs from intervention in the New Space Opera subgenre to postmodern stylistics to high-intensity pulp-era affect, all with expert ease; this savvy aesthetic excess supercedes and

transcends the political-economic context of surging neoliberalism that serves as (quasi)realistic wallpaper for the near-contemporary, mundane timeframes of the trilogy.

The return of this near-future timeframe, approximately 2023, in the final installment of the trilogy *Empty Space* appears not yet to be headed down the terrifying neoliberal future history mapped out in *Light*, suggesting the post-2400 space opera might be a catastrophic alternate history narrowly avoided in some unremarked Jonbar point, or an elaborate psychotic delusion of either of the protagonists Michael Kearney or Anna Waterman, or simply an inexplicable textual incongruity. In the political-economic background of 2023, liberal democracies around the globe have innovated a progressive-critical response to the neoliberal crisis now seemingly made permanent, in contrast to the “early days of the century, when decline and reversal — quick or slow, economic or catastrophic — had seemed like temporary conditions, anomalous and a little exciting” (Harrison 46-7). Marnie Waterman, possibly the secret offspring of Michael Kearney and Anna Waterman, is starting a responsible career as a savings-and-loan banker in an era of austerity ushered in by global economic crisis. In an eerie echo of the early 1970s and the dawn of the neoliberal backlash, “stagflation wrote itself over everything like graffiti”, “peak oil had come and gone”, and “no one knew how to blow the next bubble” (Harrison 237). The governments of the world have come together therefore to curb the computing-and-information technology of neoliberal finance that has made capital “postmodernized as everything else”, so that “bankers seeking explanation read Baudrillard forty years too late” (Harrison 237). With utopian insight, states step in and the transnational corporations of free markets benignly “allowed the state to clip [their]

wings” (Harrison 237) with regulation and reform. Anti-neoliberal globalism holds sway as the hegemonic interests decline in the “the New Economics — cautious, simplified, and heavily shifted to the co-operative” (Harrison 237). The sobered and prudent Marnie must find out how to live without a radiantly optimistic future, although a comfortable upper middle-class way of life is well provided for in her childhood by her successful businessman father, Tim Waterman. The young Marnie’s chief consternation therefore were “the sharp divisions [that] appeared at the upper end of the middle class” where “suddenly your parents could afford the Wyndlesham cheese shop or they cannot” and “Marnie’s cohort found itself defined by this” (Harrison 237). In other words, the relentless commodity fetishism of neoliberal capitalism has become a less catastrophic human affair as the political-economic crisis is gradually redressed.

Less psychologically stable, Marnie’s mother, Anna Waterman, in her fifties or sixties, cannot escape her plaintive techno-nostalgia for a bourgeois dreamworld fraying at the edges. Reflecting on the entropic mass of commodities she hoards in her summerhouse — “two leather chairs, Marnie’s old Cambridge bicycle, a carpet brought back from India...quantities of ornaments, photograph frames, bits of china and silk, shellac record” — Anna becomes preoccupied by the nostalgic idea that “each generation, she thought, leaves itself scattered in a kind of alluvial fan across postcodes and sideboards, inside wardrobes, jukeboxes, second-hand shops and places like this” (Harrison 5). Anna, then, begins to experience a seeming dissociative break with reality as at night her summerhouse repeatedly erupts into flames before reappearing undamaged the next day. In the end, as part of an escalating series of erratic behavior, Anna enters the

inferno of the summerhouse, naked and delusional, and by all appearances dies of a stroke. The burning of Anna's summerhouse seems to suggest the process of destabilization and renewal inherent in the eternally recurring cycles of commodity fetishism and that the inhuman regime of reification is only complete in Anna's death.

After her death, lost in Anna's possessions remains one vital remnant of her exfoliating detritus of aging commodities, namely, the external hard-drive containing her deceased husband Michael Kearny's "contribution to science" (Harrison 21) that, if delivered to the surviving Brian Tate, possibly by Anna's increasingly obsessed therapist Helen Alpert, may or may not lead to the discovery of the Kefahuchi Tract and the secondary far-future space-opera setting of the trilogy. Hence the Kefahuchi Tract is verbally associated with Anna's entropic summerhouse, as one catalogue of the Tract's random assortments of commodities includes "giant crockery, huge shoes, ornaments and jewelry" (Harrison 61) This description of a non-instrumental, aestheticized "bursting in voluptuous vacuum" (to requote Aldiss's description of pulp space opera) accords with the second novel in the trilogy *Nova Swing* where Vic Seratonin plunges into the a downed fragment of the Kefahuchi Tract to encounter the "hypermarket of the meaningless in which the only mistake — as far as Vic could discern — was to have shopping goals" (Harrison 252).

The semi-autonomous aesthetic realm of allegorical multiplicity reaches for a global scope in contrast to high-cosmopolitan, nationally exceptionalist ideologies of pulp-era space opera. In *Light*, when Earth Military Contracts discovers the "oldest halo culture of all" known as the Kefahuchi culture, the neoliberal organization futilely

attempts to “contain” the area after experiments endeavoring to interface with the ruin hieroglyphs that function as machine code go awry. Virus-like substrates leak out from the ruins and escape its EMC cordon such that the Tampling-Praine Outbreak occurs in which “men, women, and children shipped in down the Carling Line from the branded prison hulks orbiting Cor Caroli, accidentally ingested the substrates” (Harrison 256). The bright star Cor Caroli that M. John Harrison also refers to similar effect in *The Centauri Device* was named after Charles I and this allusion to British history seems to suggest an atavistic critique of the developed, national imagined community as outlined by Benedict Anderson. The outbreak victims do not mesh with the progressive paradigm of national sovereignty, emulating instead the primitive tribal rituals of the Kefahuchi culture itself: “dancing. Sex and drug cults. Anthemic chanting” (Harrison 256). In contrast to the anonymous, alienating non-spaces of the corporate hub of Motel Splendido (Harrison 37), the Kefahuchi culture bespeaks cross-cultural encounter in direct contrast to a transnational homogenization that threatens to obliterate global hybridity. The victims of this outbreak are primitive yet advanced, underdeveloped and impoverished yet problematically eroticized and alluring.

Marc Augé theorizes that the affective experience of the assimilating monoculture and eerie “non-places” endemic to global modernity constitutes a new experience of the elsewhere and not-yet embedded within the here and now as a result of the growing interconnectedness of the globe dominated by transnational corporations. The Meadows Venture Capital building, where Kearney meets his financier in *Light*, is described as a “curious bolted-glass structure which glittered uneasily between the tailored alloy facades

of Walthamstow ‘excellence’ park”, and the office of Gordon Meadows similarly has a “grim view of trees” and seems to have been “furnished from an issue of Wallpaper”, sleekly decorated with “a desk made from a single slab of re-melted glass” (Harrison 169). The streamlined, mass-produced efficiency of hospitals, airports, hotels, and office buildings create a new insulating existential reality in response to “the overabundance of events, spatial overabundance” (Augé 40) that is, in effect, anonymous, solitary, abstract, and disorienting. Harrison dramatizes how the neo-imperializing anti-culture of non-places registers the mongrelization and cannibalization of critical cosmopolitical discourse.

Harrison’s trilogy is New Space Opera at its most progressive and renders an aesthetic or literary dimension to such cosmopolitics that the subgenre here resists the status quo of technocultural neoliberalism. Nevertheless, this discrepant hybridity of the cosmopolitical traveler nevertheless acknowledges its own complicity in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak diagnoses as the silencing of the subaltern, when discussing the ubiquity of electronic and digital technologies. Spivak refers to this epistemic violence as the “science-fictional” neo-imperial divide (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* 10) of planetary politics. The scope and limits of the transnational turn in informational capitalism have been provocatively addressed by Spivak, who negotiates the troubling complexity of older cosmopolitical discourses—as opposed to newer, dispersed cosmopolitical views—that attempt to speak for the silenced subaltern. Problematically, these cosmopolitan discourses emanate from the institutions and industries of the global North despite explicitly self-identifying as global and counterhegemonic. John Tomlinson

refers to this belief in the intractability of decentering globally Northern bias in the absence of radical material-physical transformation as the “incorporation thesis,” in which peripheral critique on the margins of empire inevitably becomes installed in the metropolitan center (146)

In the middle installment of the trilogy *Nova Swing*, Harrison probes at the limits of the incorporation thesis to cleave open a space for the subaltern to speak despite the complicit trappings of the techno-nostalgic subgenre of space opera. In this novel, Harrison introduces the police detective Lens Aschemann whose name perhaps incinerates the Gray Lensman, Kimball Kennison, or E.E. “Doc” Smith’s heroic leader of Galactic Patrol. Genetically tailored to resemble Albert Einstein, Lens ineffectually endeavors to prove God does not play dice with the cosmos, policing the Beach or the grotesquely lethal fallout from the piece of Kefahuchi Tract that has fallen on the planet Saudade (a Portuguese term translatable as “nostalgia”). The plot involves Aschemann’s thwarted attempts to contain the quarantine breaks that transgress the cosmopolitical travel zones of this terminal beach, especially the human trafficking of New Men, that is, physically unstable alien refugees originating from somewhere within the Kefahuchi Tract. Harrison’s New Men clearly metaphorize the postcolonial subaltern brutalized as non-citizens in such a way that the neoliberal consensus effectively neutralizes the vital human-rights rhetoric of a cosmopolitics worth the name.

Aschemann suspects Vic Seratonin of smuggling these would-be diasporic immigrants and refugees from the event site who spread bizarrely lethal contagion as “brand new people moving hesitantly away from Café Surf, unformed, emergent, puzzled

as yet unwounded, full of expectation” (Harrison 25). These postcolonial bodies subject to radical displacement and dislocation cannot be incorporated into the normalizing and border-policing scripts of the detective. Aschemann must curtail the disruptive influence of the “*scienza nuova*, new way of looking at things” (Harrison 167), not only a place name for newly conquered interstellar space in the trilogy, but the marker for the future-oriented, heroic phase in the cyclic history of neoliberal culture and a stand-in for the exuberant attitude of pulp-era space opera.

Cruelly disabused of the plucky optimism to be found in pulp-era space opera, Aschemann is constantly tormented by the recent death of his wife and the ghostly memory of this loss indirectly drives his quest for cosmic justice. Though, this complex emotion of toxic grief disperses into a free-floating affect in the novel since all that is known is that his wife has disappeared into the Saudade event site. All other textual certainties and psychological ramifications dissipate into mere speculation given that the novel refuses to settle the question even as to whether Aschemann might have killed his own wife in the guise of the Tattoo Killer. (Harrison 306) In this biting political allegory, the putatively deontological values of justice, freedom, and dignity so necessary for human-rights rhetoric cannot be easily retrieved from the successive waves of future neoliberal regimes.

This propensity for homicidal mania would make Aschemann a clear double of Michael Kearney from *Light*; yet the profound emptiness Aschemann feels when visiting his wife’s bungalow (Harrison 96) suggests more an unhinged sense of loss than outright remorse, thus making Aschemann a double for Anna Waterman of *Empty Space*. All that

remains deducible is the cultural flows of *affect* — specifically the affective experience of neoliberal techno-nostalgia — that this seminal trilogy incisively conveys. Juxtaposing the cutting-edge theoretical physics of quantum foam theory⁵ and the crime fiction subgenre of *surf noir*, Harrison suggests the futility of Aschemann’s quest to fight the endless waves of dangerous weirdness crashing against Saudade city.

The Long Bar at the Café Surf was full of fractured sunlight and bright air. Sand blew across the floor from an open door; the staff were sleepy and vague. Someone’s toddler crawled about the cane tables wearing only a T-shirt bearing the legend SURF NOIR. Meanings — all incongruous — splashed off this like drops of water, as the dead metaphors trapped inside the live one collided and reverberated endlessly and elastically, taking up new positions relative to one another. SURF NOIR, which was a whole new existence; which is a ‘world’ implied in two words, dispelled in an instant; which is foam on the appalling multi-textual sea we drift on. “Which is probably”, Aschemann noted, “the name of an aftershave.”

(Harrison 36)

Evidently, even the grandly posthuman far future invests libidinal energy in hip aftershave lotions. The deflation of epiphany in the delayed exposure of commodity fetishism fractally redounds to the larger project of the revamping of New Space Opera itself. The T-Shirt logo SURF NOIR is as mysterious and allegorically heteroglossic as the techno-noir emanations of the Kefahuchi Tract itself. Harrison implies here an

irascible deconstruction of the ancient alien technological artifacts of traditional space opera — and its thread-worn arsenal of lenses, FTL-drives, Big Dumb Objects, doomsday weapons, and so forth — into a reverberating, endlessly deferring signifying chain of aesthetic indeterminacy, negation, and randomness.

Despite its stylistic excess, the posthuman, futuristic engineering marvels of the Kefahuchi Tract penetrate, alienate, and dominate the vaunted sovereignty of the neoliberal techno-subject. As if to stress its interstitial position in the trilogy, *Nova Swing* does not reference a near-contemporary timeline as does *Light* and *Empty Space*. Much of the narrative in the novel, in fact, concerns a relatively straightforward cat-and-mouse game between Aschemann and Vic Seratonin who both equally show an unhealthy obsession with the Beach and both end up in a suicide mission deep inside its quarantined area. Yet the revelation that Aschemann wants not so much to imprison Vic for his Site Crimes as to have the travel agent guide him into the Event Site undermines the noir plot and “everything that made [Aschemann] such a reliable antagonist when Vic met him on the street” (Harrison 169). The novel stresses the irreducible singularity of the Kefahuchi Tract above and beyond the kinetic pulp plotting.

This event site cannot convey the technocratic optimism of pulp-era space opera given that it is fundamentally dangerous and lethal; the contagion of the site leads to agonizing and horrific deherence on a basic bodily level. When en route to a drop-off site in a starship, the smuggled-goods broker Paulie DeRaad witnesses the anarchic nature of his contraband first-hand and the reverting of his refugees into “a loose numinous fluid medium sometimes the consistency of rice pudding or lentil soup, sometimes having the

visual qualities of a pool full of chlorinated water agitated gently in powerful sunlight” that “stank of rendered fat” (Harrison 296). After a livid Paulie also begins to de-cohere, he rats out his partner and gives his involvement with Vic up as evidence of Site Crime to Aschemann, and then departs in his Kefahuchi-Tract starship. The starship lifts off over Aschemann’s head with a marvelous exhibition of technological wizardry given the observers “a moment to appreciate how capable it was of...divergent styles of behavior”: mapping every strand of DNA of the people on the street, “its mathematics...counting Plank-level fluctuations in the vacuum just outside the photosphere of a local star”, before “it revolved around on its vertical axis, torched up and quit the gravity well at just under Mach 42, on a faint but visible plume of ionised gas” (Harrison 235). Searchingly interrogating the technological commodity fetishism of pulp-era space opera as much as, allegorically, our own contemporary dynamics of neoliberal geo-culture, Lens Aschmann, soon to vanish into the Event Site of his own suicidal accord, can only sigh in response and dazedly wonder “who’ll save us from the machines, Vic?”

Despite his deep reservation, with sincere sympathy, Harrison revamps space-opera trash art to more overtly express the subterranean tensions and desires of everyday life, especially as this marginalized form conveys class conflict, postcolonial hegemony, and the revolutionary struggle against the dictates of neoliberal capitalism. In the chapter titled “Archive Style” in *Empty Space*, two minor characters, Ruby Dip and MP Renoko, have a brawl-inducing debate over the nature of kitsch that explicates the Tract’s entropic disarray and, more broadly, M. John Harrison’s campy reinvention of the space opera that betrays equal parts sympathy and postmodern irony.

Harrison caustically reconfigures pulp space-opera kitsch to allegorically symptomize the neoliberal crisis and its intersection with a rapidly developing technoculture. The mysterious agent, either of EMC or the Aleph, Renoko, claims “kitsch was the product of an event he named ‘the postmodern ironisation... [that to him] was like the Death of History or the coming Singularity” (Harrison 31). It is illuminating that this notion of kitsch conflates postmodern irony, Francis Fukayami’s controversial thesis on a post-ideological neoliberal ascendancy, and Vernor Vinge’s vision of the impending runaway acceleration of information technology. For, Ruby Dip, though, violently contends that Renoko sentimentalizes utilitarian kitsch or “the aesthetic of people with no taste” since veritable trash art celebrates a raw sexual energy as a “Saturday night art” (Harrison 31).

The conclusion of the trilogy balances delicately on this razor-edge of sympathy and irony, commodity fetishism and aesthetic negation, cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitics, techno-notalgia and techno-utopianism, non-mimetic SF and mundane realism. There are hints that Anna Waterman may be the primary vector of such indeterminacy for the trilogy. For in *Empty Space* Anna may be delusional evidenced by her irrational resentment directed toward her daughter, her tendency to wander London aimlessly, a sexual fling with a mentally challenged boy, and her repeatedly anticipating the arrival of her dead ex-husband, Michael Kearney. Moreover, the repeated engulfing of her summerhouse in flames appears to cause no damage, emits no smoke, and looks “stiff, idealized, as though painted for a Tarot card” (Harrison 23).

There are also hints, though, that the events of the novel are the intersection, at the quantum level, of a heightened fantastic reality. The same flames, for instance, appear to Aschemann's ex-partner, the nameless Assistant, "appearing curiously still, like cut-out flames, or flames in an old book" (Harrison 188). The Assistant, gene-tailored to be a terrifying weaponized killer, is having an identity crisis of her own and her reality, and even the kitschy technonostalgia of pretending to be a 1950s housewife in virtual-reality tanks, becomes increasingly overrun by hallucinations of a dangerous human artifact who calls herself Pearlant and whose sole mantra is the one utterance: "I come from the future." In the pyrotechnic penultimate chapter of the trilogy, it is revealed that Anna Waterman falls through her summerhouse floor into the Borgesian artifact referred to as the Aleph, morphing into this entity Pearlant.

The Aleph calls out for the Assistant and turns out to be a complete microcosm of the Kefahuchi Tract. As Anna falls into the Aleph, the confusion of past, present, and future literalizes Anna's experience of all time simultaneously, her life's events and that of the cosmos, in a kaleidoscopic palimpsest of fragment and juxtaposition that mirrors the ending of *Light*. Not simply solipsistically metafictional — one chapter title insists "The Medium is Not the Message" — this metaphysical falling breaks down the progressive narrative of homogenous empty time into a messianic presentism, if one thinks of such a concept as physical time as the physicist John Archibald Wheeler did in his analysis of the reversibility of events in quantum mechanics, namely "as what keeps everything from happening at once." In a first epigraph to *Empty Space*, Harrison refers to a different quote from Wheeler, but Wheeler's phrase for a here-and-now conception

of time is interestingly misattributed in the final epigraph to *Empty Space* to the writing of the pulp space-opera A.E. Van Vogt who most likely lifted the idea for “everything is everywhere at once” from Wheeler. Harrison’s New Space Opera collapses into raw violent energy of pulp space opera into a here-and-now liveliness that contrasts with progressive inertia of the space-operatic future history. In the climax, the inexplicable quantum paradox of the convergence of the Aleph, the Assistant, and Anna sets in motion a chaotic galactic war that tears the future history apart in “psychodramas of blood, risk, terror” (Harrison 229). Entropy, in other words, maximizes, as the Kefahuchi Tract expands to encompass the entire universe that the Aleph paradoxically already contains. The affective indeterminacy of space opera is unbound from its narrow channeling and recontainment, shattering the hyperbolic fantasy instituted by the dire cosmopolitics of neoliberal crisis.

Dissertation Chapter Summary

In *The Twilight of Equality?* (2003), Lisa Duggan lodges a suggestive critique of neoliberal cultural politics that straddles what she considers Nancy Fraser’s invidious distinction between “recognition” and “redistribution” (Duggan 88), retrieving discursive and aesthetic pleasure and recognition-affiliated identity creation in an adversarial and oppositional cultural positioning against the material, technocultural reproduction of economic inequality on a global scale. Rather than the distinctive neoliberal brand of capitalism emerging *ex nihilo* in the 1990s, Duggan frames this strategic conflation of private affect and public politics against the neoliberal hegemony of “fiscal austerity, privatization, market liberalization, and government stabilization” in a periodization

scheme through five stages of neoliberalism that this dissertation finds structurally useful as well: namely, (1) the 1950s backlash against the New Deal Coalition, (2) the counterstrike of the myriad countercultural development of the 1960s including feminism and Civil Rights movements, (3) the pro-business response to the economic downturn beginning in the 1970s, (4) the reactionary retrenchments of the Culture Warriors in the 1990s, and (5) the appropriation of multicultural alliances by “equality” neoliberal interests in the 2000s. The first two chapters of this dissertation move in a swift chronological fashion to discuss the unambiguous expression of the neoliberal cultural politics as exemplified in the first three stages of Duggan’s scheme, whereas the next three chapters chart the flourishing of anti-neoliberal ideologies in the final two accelerated turn-of-the-millennium stages that correspond non-coincidentally with the full blossoming of New Space Opera as a subgenre at the forefront of the British Boom. The first chapter discusses the “pre-dawn” of New Space Opera intentionally conceived as a protozoan ancestor of contemporary fiction in a strategic rhetorical reversal of what is often nostalgically considered the belle epoch or “Golden Age” of traditional American space opera. The argumentative thrust of this first chapter pairs this pre-dawn of New Space Opera with the onset of a transnationally corporate, technocratic vision of neoliberal capitalism in a postcolonial context. The second chapter then discusses the arrival of New Space Opera *avant la lettre* given the fact that the concept proper did not emerge in widespread usage within the broad community of SF producers and consumers until at least the late 1990s (see Kincaid, “The New Optimism”). This emergence pitched itself precisely, I argue, outside and against the consolidation of neoliberal hegemonic

interests of the globally Northern countries in a complex, decades-long struggle spanning across the 1960s to the 1980s.

The first chapter frames the predawn of New Space Opera in the context of Robert Heinlein's technocratic hard SF and in terms of the staggering midcentury apex of space culture as a pro-capitalist product of the militarized propaganda campaign designed in part to influence the political economies of the newly categorized, anticolonial Third World. This postwar period also marks the predawn of neoliberalism and the backlash against the Keynesian public spending of the New Deal, in adversarial response to which Isaac Asimov's Foundation series carves out an influential oppositional Futurian political allegory. The second chapter charts the origins of New Space Opera through alternatives to Heinlein's prototypically American brand of space opera, analyzing the work of Leigh Brackett, Alfred Bester, Samuel Delany, and M. John Harrison as respectively evolving in tandem with anticolonial primitivism, the rapid expansion of transnational corporations, the onset of informational capitalism, and the neoliberal austerity of the epochal post-1969 crisis in global capitalism.

The second chapter concludes with close readings of the direct New Space Opera antecedents of C.J. Cherryh and Bruce Sterling and the refashioning of space opera to explore the intersection of utopian cosmopolitics and neoliberal biopolitics. Cherryh allegorizes the anti-union policies of her immediate Reaganomic context through the space-opera trope of high-tech revolutionary spacers contesting neoliberal biopolitical regimes. Cherryh's tragic anti-hero, Arianne Emory, however, manages to reproduce the terror of neoliberalism in her hubristic and overreaching scheme to optimize

bioproductivity for the expansionist wing of Union governmentality. Sterling depicts the rivalry between the Shapers and Mechanists as expressive of the cyborgian and biopolitical networks of nation-states, transnational corporations, and the neoliberal financialization of the globe.

The first and second chapter of this dissertation therefore looks at the roots of the subgenre, tracing a genealogy of major influences and highlighting the political-cultural ideologies underpinning the fictional premises of some characteristically neoliberal and anti-neoliberal space opera. I offer readings and cultural histories of Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series, Leigh Brackett's "The Enchantress of Venus" (1949), Alfred Bester's *The Stars, My Destination* (1956), M. John Harrison's *The Centauri Device* (1974), and Samuel R. Delany's *Nova* (1968). I argue that these seminal precursors of what is conventionally considered the New Space Opera of the 1990s and 2000s cover a large discursive terrain that later makes the subgenre especially attractive to modification and critical, if respectful updating. This terrain includes compromised socialist-utopian desire (Asimov) discussed in the latter part of first chapter followed by the discussion in second chapter of the half-interrogated anti-colonial critique (Brackett), the depredations of neo-imperial transnational megacorporations (Bester), a controlled demolition of the all-pervasive technocratic rhetoric of the subgenre (Harrison), and a growing awareness of the constitutive postcolonial inequalities of the information-age, neoliberal world-system (Delany).

The second chapter concludes by investigating a foundational cornerstone of New Space Opera, Bruce Sterling's novel *Schismatrix* (1985), with its complex rendering of a

posthuman future as a prescient exploration of information-age and neoliberal cosmopolitics and its decentering of markets and states into “hundreds of habitats, explosion of cultures” (42). The depiction of Abélard Lindsay and his shifting set of allegiances between genetically engineered Shapers, the cyborgs of the Mechanist Cartel, the Preservationists of unmodified human culture, as well as the assorted Superbrights, Sundogs, Galacticists, Cataclysts, and so on, suggests a highly politicized allegory of international culture in which “crimes don’t exist outside your ideology” (84). I wish to underscore Sterling’s focus on hyper-capitalist flows of financial manipulation in connection with computer networks, examining the shapers and mechanists not as post-national but as transnational, deeply engaged with the collision of contemporary Cold War cosmopolitics with Third-World advocacy. I also analyze C.J. Cherryh “Union-Alliance” novels of the 1980s and early 1990s for their nuanced treatments of postcolonial struggles in the face of militarized enforcement of transnational corporations and Northern hegemonic nation-states represented by the Earth Company fleet. My analysis of *Cyteen* (1988) stresses the implicit allegory of decolonization and the neoliberal backlash apparent in the high-tension boardroom drama climaxing in the unsuccessful population control of cloned Specials.

The third chapter then analyzes the New Space Opera of Gwyneth Jones’s Aleutian trilogy for its profoundly affective estrangement device of an outworlder species of socialist-utopian traders stumbling on Earth and the misconstruals, errors, and confusions that ensue. Jones retools a critical global feminism as a nexus of gender-based border-crossing geopolitical movements to combat the depredations of neoliberal flows.

In her rejection of double colonization, Jones allegorizes a cosmopolitical response to the neo-imperial divide that refuses to appropriate the situated experience and struggles of subaltern women. Amid the consolidation of the Washington Consensus, Jones's seminal trilogy provides an intricately constructed aesthetic and literary negation of neoliberalism that exposes the patriarchal presumptions inherent in the fetishized technocratic ideology of traditional space opera.

The last three chapters of this dissertation are organized respectively, then, around class, race, and gender in the context of postcolonial critique precisely to counter the “post-ideological” exclusion of these categories in color-blind, equality feminist, and corporatized neoliberal discourse. In the third chapter, I analyze a signal work of New Space Opera: Gwyneth Jones's “Aleutian” trilogy, which includes the novels *White Queen* (1991), *North Wind* (1994), and *Phoenix Café* (1997). I contextualize this trilogy in the context of feminist, anti-globalization cultural politics. In an updating of anticolonial science fiction indebted to H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*, Jones turns the tables on neoimperial hubris, describing the impetus for the Aleutian trilogy as an inversion of the legacy of colonialism for our contemporary world-system. “I planned to give my alien conquerors the characteristics, all the supposed deficiencies, that Europeans came to see in their subject races in darkest Africa and the mystic East— ‘animal’ nature, irrationality, intuition; mechanical incompetence, indifference to time, helpless aversion to theory and measurement” (Jones 110). In its depiction of a near-future world shattered into such a state of neoliberal chaos that insidiously hostile invaders are viewed as potential saviors, Jones's series demonstrates a high-water mark

of what politicized New Space Opera can accomplish. The series, moreover, inverts the neo-imperial status quo into an unsustainable near-future crisis that Jones frames as a postcolonial-feminist return of the repressed.

The fourth chapter argues that two signal series of New Space Opera — Banks's Culture series and MacLeod's Fall Revolution Quartet — allegorize left-wing struggles against neoliberal consensus. Neoliberal policies and ideologies that are, in Manfred Steger's term, globalist in their scope and dimension seek to drastically cut back, deregulate, and privatize the social-welfare programs defended by Banks and the SNP under the auspices of promoting economic growth and development that will putatively benefit all. A key symbolic moment in the consolidation of neoliberal globalism in Europe was when Margaret Thatcher endeavored to crush a miners' strike in 1984, in Scotland and the rest of the U.K., by announcing the closures of a number of coal pits; through a police-enforced strikebreaking crackdown on trade unions, the British Conservative Party achieved a victory over the labor movement that cascaded into the privatization of the steel industry, shipbuilding, and automobile industries (Harvey 59). Banks and MacLeod's work dramatizes a break with this sort of neoliberal regime, whose intransigence is offset only by its volatility.

The Scottish postcolonial fiction of Banks and Macleod gesture toward a robust techno-progressive anarcho-socialism to fiercely combat and defy the behemoth of neoliberal globalism. Banks and MacLeod view recent Scottish history through a lens of trans-local, postcolonial affiliation and transnational networks mobilized by information technology. Banks and MacLeod construct New Space Operas that borrow the non-

mimetic affect from its pulp-era ancestry but deploy a sophisticated cosmopolitics that critique progressive narratives of capitalist development to highlight the crisis and emergencies of neoliberal regimes that had become institutionally normalized in the United Kingdom following Margaret Thatcher's term as prime minister. Despite the urgency of this crisis, Banks and MacLeod recharge the utopian affective potential of the subgenre, revamping the patina of nostalgia that tints the subgenre with an effervescence that defies the doleful and gloomy tonality of postcolonial melancholy.

The final chapter explores the transnationalization of space opera has both local and global affiliations in the promising work of Tobias Buckell, Karen Lord, and Nalo Hopkinson that can be loosely termed Caribbean New Space Opera. Soaring profits for transnational corporations in global capitalism depend on the cultural production of a specious diversity that modulates according to local-regional specificity, but at the same time the neoliberal consolidation of an international division of labor requires an opaque resistance to the monocultural homogenization of one world in the image of the first world. This final chapter reveals the way Buckell, Lord, and Hopkinson register the specifically Caribbean expression of the neoliberal, technocratic dynamics discussed in earlier chapters. The chapter views the imaginative inhabiting of a place-based micropolitics and postcolonial public sphere outside and against the corrosive privatization and deregulation campaigns of the neoliberal consensus. Such postcolonial cultural politics renegotiate the role of the Caribbean nations too frequently written off by Neoliberal powers as development sinks and irredeemable information gaps delinked from global systems of techno-capitalist production.

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The final chapter views New Space Opera in terms of the recent publishing trend labeled global science fiction, a term that refers to SF from writers who explicitly identify as diasporic, non-Western, or hybridized. Tobias Buckell is a Grenadian SF writer whose *Xenoworld* series (2007) the author identifies as “Caribbean space opera.” The novel depicts a resistance movement on behalf of Earth-based neo-Caribbean and neo-Aztec peoples against genocidal alien “satraps.” In contrast to Buckell’s straightforward intervention into New Space Opera from a global perspective, I closely read Nalo

Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000), which, though never marketed or reviewed as New Space Opera, handles the contemporary science-fictional iconography of interplanetary space travel and far-future technology in terms of modernized African-Caribbean traditions and folklore. Hopkinson's novel offers a telling point of comparison for delineating the uses and limits of New Space Opera as an evolving subgenre and movement. I argue that *Midnight Robber* explores postcolonial issues of exile and revolution, suggesting what Homi Bhabba calls "non-synchronous" hybridity of the technologically advanced and the organically pre-modern that promotes a subversive ambivalence toward the incommensurability of the global center and margins; Granny Nanny imaginatively reconfigures Jamaican history into a utopian trajectory toward a benevolent sentient artificial intelligence despite the fact that this far-future technology derives from the Marryshow Corporation's invasive neo-colonialism of "plunging into the womb of the soil to impregnate the planet with the seed of Granny Nanny" (2).

In sum, the dissertation shows how New Space Opera renders a complex understanding of geopolitical rivalries, information-age economic processes, and the resurgence of military-industrial nationalism from postcolonial, feminist, and socialist perspectives. The concluding chapter focuses on the inclusion of SF texts inspired by but falling outside Northern hegemonic interests, which gestures toward a new source of vibrant literary diversity. The project as a whole will pay close attention to representations of global dynamics within a specific tradition of twentieth-century Anglo-American genre literature. This emphasis on what Edward Said, in "Reflections on Exile," termed a historically contingent and culturally adversarial "worldliness" will

show how vanguard genre SF contends with and endeavors to reverse the suffering and oppression of persisting global imbalances.

¹ Here I adapt Paul Gilroy's evocative term "postcolonial melancholia" first introduced in "There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack" in *After Empire* (2005), and continued in *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2013). In contrast to a genuine multicultural conviviality, Gilroy redeploys Freud's distinction between traumatized melancholia and healthy mourning to argue that a general British amnesia and refusal to accept its loss of empire and international power — in line with Gilroy's notion of transatlantic circulation, the same analysis might be applied to contemporary United States culture. I am far from the first to connect contemporary science fiction and post-imperial melancholy. See, for instance, Luckhurst's *Science Fiction* (2005) and Mark Bould's *Science Fiction* (2012).

² Yet Benjamin also holds out a tentative hope for a critical scavenging and strategic trash-picking of the evanescent fossilized remnants of outmoded consumer culture. Benjamin isolates a utopian-socialist desire in the dialectical image of the commodity fetish, and the transformative potential to express progressive change lurking in the unconscious wish-image for the proletarian struggle, unrest, and revolutionary change endemic to consumer capitalism. In "Konvolut X" of *The Arcades Project*, for instance, Benjamin quotes extensively from Karl Marx to this end and reveals the basis for some of Benjamin's career-spanning borrowings of Marxist terminology. Benjamin is primarily concerned with how a superstructural "phantasmagoria" of culture is formed or how "commodity producing-society...represents itself and seeks to understand itself whenever it abstracts from the fact that it produces precisely commodities" (669). Benjamin thus explores this process of being seduced or mystified— the obliteration of real or authentic, that is, non-alienated value — by the translation of commodity-based culture into an ideological misrepresentation and false consciousness of its economic base. In "Konvolut X", Benjamin examines this reification by heavily citing passages from Marx that describe the way the property-owning capitalist-industrialist exploits surplus labor or socially necessary use value from the dispossessed manual or deskilled worker for the sake of the profit motive, or the "fictional" value surrounding the hoarding of interest-bearing capital (See Benjamin X1 3, P 651; X 2a, 2, P 655; X4a 3, P 658; X5 1, 658). In an act of utopian critical negation, modern allegory as much as the commodity fetishism of consumer culture itself illuminates this phantasmagoric misrepresentation, destroying as much as perpetuating the material conditions for all such fantastic cultural productions.

³ In *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), Nicholas Warner argues that public and counterpublic spheres or civil societies are of necessity non-empirical and yet-to-be realized given that publics are by definition social relations between strangers, addressed to an audience before such a public exists, and, circularly, publics are constituted by impersonal, notional attention from speakers and listeners. Counterpublics, in particular, are politically subordinated rhetorical gestures defining themselves against the horizon of a wider dominant public.

⁴ One early return to pulp-era space opera was a New-Wave intervention attempted by Brian Aldiss in the introductions to *Space Opera* (1974) and the two volumes of *Galactic Empires* (1976). In *The Trillion Year Spree* (1973), Aldiss takes to task Edgar Rice Burroughs — a pulp-era writer of a close sub-generic cousin to the space opera, "planetary romances", such as the Barsoom series set on Mars — for his "welter of racial fantasy" (Aldiss 165), primitivist xenophobia, and the barely concealed misogyny of depicting native women whose policed sexuality Burroughs seems to both "relish and deplore" (Aldiss 166). This ambivalence leads Aldiss to the critical reappraisal that the only decadent aesthetic value available in recovering this naive fiction is in its pulpy romantic displacement, the "heady escapist stuff", that allows its reprehensible ideological underpinnings to "burst in a voluptuous vacuum" (Aldiss xii). The branding of the New Space Opera into the undeniable flowering of a full-fledged subgenre— a subgenre, I argue, in a

strange hybridizing of the positions of both Aldiss and Del Rey, that resurrects these New Wave debates over the global cultural politics of the SF field —usually traces back in most critical estimations to M. John Harrison’s *Centauri Device* (1974) discussed below or Iain M. Banks’s early novels that were written in the late 1970s but not rewritten and published until the mid-80s. In terms of the sheer output of new science fiction self-marketing under this niche category, the high-water mark may be the anthologies *The New Space Opera* (2007) and *The New Space Opera 2* (2009) edited by Jonathan Strahan and Gardner Dozois. In the introduction to *New Space Opera 2*, Dozois and Strahan echo Hartwell and note that the subgenre derives from the New Wave focus on “introspective, experimental work with more immediate sociological and political relevance to the tempestuous social scene of the day” that made the old space opera become “widely regarded as outmoded and déclassé” (Dozois and Stahan 4). But by this point maintaining the novelty of this subgenre has morphed into the absurdity of what Gary K. Wolfe describes in December 2011 as “neo-New Space Opera, or possibly post-neo New Space Opera” (Wolfe 17). And in fact, the precise contours and proportions of New Space Opera has always been, naturally enough, quite difficult to delineate, leading Paul McAuley to call the phenomenon “less a movement than coincidence” (McAuley 43).

⁵ In interviews, M. John Harrison cites Janna Levin’s *How the Universe Got Its Spots* (2002) as an influence on the oddly plausible treatment of cutting-edge advances in astrophysics in the Kefahuchi Tract trilogy. Levin’s book eschews many of the clichés of popular astrophysics books, managing to concisely describe some of the fundamental concepts of quantum foam theory, finite universe topography, superstring and many-worlds hypotheses, and so on, while crafting an engaging personal memoir and profound meditations on suicidal mathematicians and global travel very much in the same spirit as Harrison’s trilogy.

Chapter 1

Neoliberal Masters of the Universe: Space Culture and the Predawn of New Space Opera

“Men are walking on the moon today

Planting their footsteps as if they were

Zucchini on a dead world

While over 3, 000,000 people starve to death

On a living one.”

- Richard Brautigan, “Jules Verne Zucchini” (1970)

“[John F. Kennedy’s] men had become convinced that the Cold War was going to be won or lost in the so-called Third World, and that cultural factors would influence the loyalties of wavering nations as much as economics did. In this respect, Apollo was performance, pure and simple. JFK wanted to something to capture the global imagination...and the fantasy was already there...all those space novels and sci-fi movies and articles in *Collier’s* and *Space Cadet* sat at the top of a pyramid of human dreaming that stretched back thousands of years.”

- Andrew Smith, *Moondust* (2005)

In his cultural history of the Apollo moon landings, *No Requiem for the Space Age* (2014), Matthew Tribbe notes with bemusement the grasping analogy that legions of pundits frequently made linking the Eagle lander of the Apollo 11 touching ground on the lunar Sea of Tranquility and Christopher Columbus's first footfall on San Salvador in 1492. Tribbe notes the tragic ineptitude of this glib analogy between "Columbus's blind voyage to a lush new terrestrial terrain and the astronauts' technologized, preprogrammed flight of already surveyed, dead world where they would almost immediately die outside their spacesuits" (Tribbe 29). For Tribbe, this inarticulacy is telling, though, since the reference to the overdetermined legacy of colonialism suggested the world-historical immensity of this staggering achievement that seemed to imply "to many Americans the ultimate proof that the United States had somehow mastered the universe, with its combination of can-do attitude and advanced science and technology" (Tribbe 4). Moreover, we might add that the perceived triumph of this largely symbolic global event of the moon landing was most successful at bridging a dated frontier mythos of American exceptionalism, tied inexorably to the expansionist ambitions of hyper-advanced global capitalism, with cutting-edge developments in rocketry, spaceflight, bureaucratic management, and computer-electronic technology.

The contention of this chapter is that the voluminous repository of space-opera fiction had already primed the pump of technocultural energies that the moon landing would later exploit in its media coverage and political maneuvering. The buoyant optimism of this space opera, as well as the space culture it shaped and transfigured, is the imagined infinity for which the New Space Opera that began to proliferate in the

1980s remains forever nostalgic. By the time Neil Armstrong parroted Werner Von Braun's rhetoric that the moon had been conquered "for all mankind", let alone Buckminster Fuller had stressed that the lunar missions offered a vision of the fragile interconnectedness of this Spaceship Earth, traditional American space opera had percolated into mainstream thinking and feeling a mode of economic-political rationality that promised as well to master the much more urgent geopolitical problems facing American hegemony in the wake of the end of empire, such as the persisting postcolonial dilemmas of Cold-War rivalry, global inequality, the expansion of transnational corporations, and neocolonial warfare.

Support for the massive government spending and technocratic Keynesianism of the U.S. manned space program quickly imploded as it inevitably failed to live up to the grandiose optimism of its overblown promise; moreover — unlike the more rarefied, literary, and more purely neoliberal space opera of the period that tapped into the widespread enthusiasm for Gerard O' Niell-esque space colony fantasies that championed "small-scale, do-it-yourself enterprises" (Weber 8) — funding for the NASA manned spaceflight programs fell apart under the general hostility to big government and extraneous tax burdens held by the populace at large. And unlike traditional space opera discussed in this chapter, sophisticated postmodern response to American space ambitions would be more suspicious of the moon landings as complicit in the "hourglass of failed colonialism" and the fall into "the rocket state of multinational capitalism (Atwill 21). The global dimensions of the space race, and its globalization of political economy in the postwar period of decolonization, must be understood as a prime

motivating factor in the development of the American space program and the role that space politics plays in the contemporary global cultural imaginary. Documents of the Kennedy administration reveal that the moon landing was conceived to bolster confidence in the prospects of American capitalism for the benefit of skeptical, non-aligned nations in the global South. Vice President Lyndon Johnson, for instance, advised Kennedy that “other nations will tend to align themselves with the country they believe will be the world leader — the winner in the long run”; and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara argued that the United States must commit to “make a positive decision to pursue space projects aimed at enhancing national prestige” (qtd. McCurdy 97).

Hence a major scientific discourse integrally bound up with what this chapter discusses as the recent global phenomena of American-derived neoliberal biopolitics is the rise of global space culture. Under-analyzed in the current literature on the subject is the extent to which the ideologically charged launch-pad of this space culture was constructed in the pulp-era space opera of the 1940s and 1950s. In his important tracing of the byzantine politics of the space race to the burgeoning of a global technocratic class, Walter MacDougall argues that the effect of the space race on the so-called “Third World” (a term invented in this period) was decidedly mixed: “some Third World leaders realized that space technology was irrelevant to their needs, and other indulged in exaggerated expectations of what the United States and space could do for them” (MacDougall 360). Nonetheless, prior to Kennedy’s 1962 “We Choose to Go to the Moon” speech, his second State of the Union address initially justified the eventual exorbitant expenditure of the moon landing — at its height, U.S. tax-payers footed

thousands of millions of dollars every year, or over two percent of their per-capita taxes on NASA alone — by way of a propaganda campaign designed to influence the decolonizing states. Kennedy made the moon appeal by claiming that the U.S. needed to “capture” the favors of the coming tide, “the great battlefield for the defense and expansion of freedom today is the whole southern half of the globe— Asian Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East— the land of the rising people” (qtd. McDougall 302).

By reference to the recent corporate sponsoring of space programs and the sub-orbital tourism ventures bankrolled by Elon Musk of SpaceX and Richard Branson of Virgin Galactic, Martin Parker echoes the titular theme of this dissertation by contending that the existing literature on the “Marxist sociology of space” as essentially arguing that “the desire to go into space is ‘cosmic narcissism’, a sort of projection of capitalist individualism onto the universe”, or, as Peter Dickens contends, “outer space represents resources for capitalism to continue ad infinitum, especially if unfettered by state intervention” (Dickens 73). Alternately, in a dialectical fashion, this dissertation also concurs with viewing New Space Opera as complex political allegory, coupling the collective imagination of manned space exploration with socialist-utopian energies. As such, I agree with Stephen Shukaitis who tracks the rhetorical deployment of outer space as “myth territory and space of composition...involved in forms of semiotic warfare and conflict” (Shukaitis 106) To this end, I would like to supplement a discussion of space-opera fiction onto Shukaitis’s contention and its drawing of a compelling genealogy from Wobbly labor-organizer Joe Hill’s playful suggestion that he would catalyze Martian

canal workers into a revolution following his execution, to Argentinean Trotskyist Juan Posadas and his absurd call for an intergalactic Fourth International, to the proliferation of Afro-futurist discourse from the Sun Ra Arkestra to Samuel R. Delany and Nalo Hopkinson.

Likewise, Roger Launius contends that an understanding of the technocultural system of NASA — “not just the spacecraft but the organizations, people, communications, manufacturing components, and even political structure” (Launius 294) — must needs negotiate the paradox of the planting of the American flag on the moon “for all mankind”, or the Christmas greeting cards sent of what came to be known as the “blue marble” images from Apollo 8 that influenced generations to see the fragile interconnections of all the people of the world as rooted in the grandiose statement of the moon landing, ultimately stemming in part from complex Cold War cultural politics and such historical realities as the launching of Sputnik, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the Vietnam War. The space opera of the period taps into the cultural politics of space race not simply as a function of the binary between Cold War ideologues or “One World” activists, but in the capacity of the triumphal, techno-capitalist management of labor evoked by the space race. And the New Space Opera that dominates subsequent chapters of this dissertation endeavors to rekindle the halcyon days of this earlier space fiction, epitomized perhaps by the warring poles of the lugubrious work of Jack Vance or the gung-ho juveniles of Robert Heinlein discussed below, in ways that that register, anticipate, and even contest the burgeoning military-industrial-space-complex of post-war global dynamics. The cutting edge of global New Space Opera both contests and

channels the techno-nostalgic return to the dyad of the neoliberal imperative, the continual tug-of-war between an unmooring sense of infinite expansion and the narrow re-containment of such disruptive, cosmopolitical impulses into the hegemonic, market-driven discourses of development, nation, and race. In the overarching thesis of this dissertation, I concur with Hoagland and Sarwal in *SF, Imperialism, and the Third World* that science fiction is too often marked by a “nostalgic attachment to the here and now that parades as an ersatz futurity” (13).

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, based on lectures given at Collège de France from 1978 through 1979, Michel Foucault provides a context for what he styles the American neoliberalism of what would eventually become the Chicago School as stemming from “a criticism of the New Deal and what we broadly call the Keynesian policy developed from 1933-34” (Foucault 216). Foucault, though, hastens to add that the global ideology of neoliberalism cannot be grasped as a specific policy platform of the leftwing or rightwing of any bipartisan national political system given that the discourse channels both a conservative antipathy to “anything sounding socialist” and a leftist “state phobia” (Foucault 218). Rather than a political history, Foucault is primarily interested in the cultural work— “a general style of thought, analysis, and imagination” (Foucault 219) that colonizes previously non-economic aspects of the technosubject — that neoliberalism performs in everyday life as a function of a utopian desire caught up in “the problem of freedom” (Foucault 218) in globally Northern, capitalism-driven democracies.

According to Foucault, neoliberalism counters the abstraction of labor as a passive investment strategy in classical liberalism through the positing of human beings as efficient machines of rational choice and decision theory, a new version of the *homo economicus* or the self-entrepreneur as form of biocapital. (Foucault 226) Eschewing an unambiguous enthusiasm for technocratic progress, neoliberalism, then, does indeed pursue technological innovation but tempers such faith with the motive of expanding profit margins (Foucault 232) in the context of an efficient laissez-faire law of supply and demand, risky, profit-oriented cost-benefit calculus, and competitive specializations, or the “framework of a multiplicity of diverse enterprises” (Foucault 241). This conclusion leads Foucault to argue that in neoliberal regimes even families engage in a mercenary and predatory quasi-Darwinian calculus to maximize the capital output of offspring via entrepreneurial potential. Neoliberal freedom, the ethos of the endlessly competitive fighting spirit in the free market, is the seductive chimerical delusion fabricated by the most recent cultural mythology of global capitalism.

One consequence of the origins of neoliberalism that Foucault does not enumerate, though — despite his acknowledged, if divergent debt to Karl Marx in his analysis of neoliberalism — is its erosion of the possibility of revolutionary class struggle given the compromise of mainstream political interests in foreclosing such utopian change. This is a significant addendum to Foucault’s discussions since as labor historian Sharon Smith writes in *Subterranean Fire* (2006) the neoliberal curtailment of class struggle was forged in the 1950s predawn of neoliberal politics, the infinite future for which New Space Opera remains nostalgic: “The era of the American Dream set the

stage for the employers' offensive...[and] the lasting impact of McCarthyism left the rank and file with few existing structures to challenge corrupt and moribund union leaders, much less to launch an aggressive defense of workers' rights" (Smith 223). But a signal consequence of neoliberal biocapital for postcolonial theory that Foucault does indeed briefly suggest is it forces us to "rethink the problem of the failure of Third World economies to get going, not in terms of the blockage of economic mechanisms, but in terms of insufficient investment in human capital" (Foucault 232). Hence postcolonial and cosmopolitical critics such as Peng Cheah revisit Foucault's analysis to show how the inhuman disciplinary and regulatory apparatus of "governmentality" or the "heterogenous assemblage of institutions, technologies, calculations, and tactics" (Cheah 201) shape the neoliberal biopolitics of the global South given that "welfare policies can shape the population by affecting birthrates, health, and distribution of the population" (Cheah 201).

Critics of one of the most nostalgically lionized science-fiction grandmasters of the twentieth-century, Robert Heinlein, have not failed to notice the author's consistent proliferation of characters and plots celebrating the superior, omni-competent individual, the superheroic "Man Who Knows How" (Knight 83), in connection with his libertarian devotion to an entrepreneurial vision of global capitalism, noting especially the eternal recurrence of the "Social Darwinistic theme of human progress through free enterprise" (Smith 151) in Heinlein's prototypical work. Although there is some ambiguity over his attempt at fashioning anti-sexist, anti-racist, and even queer politics prior to the civil-rights, women's liberation, and gay-rights movements, it is hard to contest that the writer

was extremely rightwing even for his conservative midcentury postwar climate, offering up an avid fanbase thinly veiled propaganda for the xenophobic glorification of proxy war in the global South that had found itself locked in the heated standoff of Cold-War rivalries. Heinlein's defenders aver that the writer advocated a modernized defiant individualism characteristic of deep tradition of American culture in which the government is best that governs least and marked by "intense Jeffersonian Americanism combined with 'social justice'" adamantly opposed to Marxists and leftists (Patterson 509). In *Starship Troopers*, for instance, Heinlein sets out fruitlessly to "demolish the Marxian theory of value" and childishly castigates *Das Kapital* as infantile (Heinlein 114-18).

H. Bruce Franklin is not so charitable in his assessment that Heinlein's work represents not only a moment "when America's powers seemed invulnerable and its future boundless as space... [but also the fear] that the combined force of the Soviet Union and the anti-imperialist revolutionary movements in Asia, African, and Latin America threatened the very existence for a society based on worldwide economic and military hegemony" (Franklin 66). The expansion of the lone solipsistic individual into the cosmos indirectly reflects the annexation of decolonizing countries into client states and the interplanetary aggression and loathing of alien civilizations depicted in Heinlein's fiction becomes a logical extension of international neo-imperialism and American exceptionalism. The hysterically anticommunist alien-invasion novel *The Puppet Masters*, for instance, famously concludes with this pathological war cry of preemptive strike to the body-snatching hive-mind spreading over the globe: "the free men are

coming to kill you! Death and destruction!” (416) In the same novel, Heinlein’s neoliberal avatar of a character, the secret-service agent Sam, argues that “the price of freedom is the willingness to do sudden battle, anywhere, any time, and with utter recklessness” (Heinlein 99). Yet critics have yet to discuss the ways that Heinlein’s primal gestation of traditional gung-ho American space opera responds to the first inklings of its neoliberal moment in the context of the anti-New Deal backlash of the 1950s. *New Space Opera*’s later problematizes this boosterism of radical freedom, as often expressed in Heinlein through the dynamic adventures of right-libertarian supermen. *New Space Opera* therefore owes as much to the nexus of concerns Foucault relates to the broader spectrum of neoliberalism than only the narrow (and incoherent) Republican platform of militaristic, free-market liberalism per se. With irreverent nods to Heinlein’s foundational work, *New Space Opera* re-envision the interworking of technocratic innovation, especially cutting-edge advances in biological and physical scientific knowledge and particularly in the context of the burgeoning space race, the climate of economic rational-choice theory and market fundamentalism, and the championing of a ferocious entrepreneurial spirit. These concerns were forged in the neo-imperial furnace of a hyper-capitalist 1950s American culture that fervidly imagined an idealized rich, white, male future to which both contemporary neoliberal culture and *New Space Opera* today are inextricably linked.

Despite his involvement as a vote canvasser and local organizer in Upton Sinclair’s End Poverty in California (EPIC) gubernatorial bid and the socialist inflections of that failed campaign, in the early short story “The Roads Must Roll”, the cover story

for the June 1940 issue of *Astounding*, the neoliberal Heinlein unveiled his militant union-baiting anti-socialism combined with a deep-seated phobia over a technocratic state. The story involves the violent crackdown on a strike of technocratic engineers that oversee vast mechanized conveyor belts providing interurban transportation in the wake of the automobile age. The union strike erupts as a result of the grandfathering in of corrupt union bosses who abuse their immense power because they were not trained at Annapolis as were the younger recruits of heroic engineers. The story betrays intense anxiety over dependence on a technocratic cadre of experts in charge of an exceedingly complex technocultural infrastructure as well as disgust over bureaucratic bloat in which as Heinlein aphorizes in *Time Enough for Love* “an elephant is a mouse built to government specifications” (Heinlein 244). The story ultimately pathologizes the technician union leader “Shorty” Van Kleek as sorely lacking in biocapital, a Darwinian weakling or “pathetic little shrimp”, unable to successfully compete in the ruthless technocratic marketplace, and equipped merely with the entrepreneurial gumption of a “third-rater” and therefore bent on sadistic destruction given his own sour grapes of moral failures and “rotten inefficiency” (Heinlein 53). Unlike Heinlein’s hero Larry Gaines, the Chief Engineer, Van Kleek cannot cope with the unyielding innovation-driven demands of his hyperadvanced technological environment.

In *Rationalizing Genius*, John Huntington Huntington reads “The Roads Must Roll” for the pulp-era trope in which cultivating the myth of the solitary, rational, technocratic genius at the same time evinces a telling defensiveness and in the process conveys political impulses ranging from the reactionary to the radical. With reference to

Tom Godwin's "Cold Equations" (1954), Huntington views Heinlein's hard SF work and the author's widely influential fidelity to not cheating or slipping up on verifiable scientific plausibility as a fictive, rhetorical illusion and naturalization that not only promulgates empirical validity but also rechannels the authoritative "language of science to justify prejudice and culturally determined expectations" (Huntington 72) such as the technocratic neoliberalism or gender bias of space culture. This analysis is not to disregard, of course, that Heinlein indeed endeavored to include a level of technoscientific verisimilitude and plausibility in the otherwise outrageous inanities of science fiction, especially the hyperbolic dimensions of outré space opera in the 1950s TV serials of *Tom Corbett*, *Space Cadet* or earlier in the pulps by the likes of Edmond Hamilton or E.E. "Doc" Smith. Only it is to claim that such an aggressive faith in scientific verisimilitude is not purely nonpolitical: it is also compliant to the putatively benevolent reign of a technocratic elite.

For the sheer breadth of developing disciplines that would dominate twentieth-century technocultural discourses and that Heinlein dutifully covers in his early fiction is comprehensive, from media-saturated rocketry and space flight in "The Man Who Sold the Moon" (1950), to counter-intuitive theoretical physics in "By His Bootstraps" (1941), from the ethical implications of experimental bioscience in *Beyond This Horizon* (1942) to the wonders of cyborgian body-modification and mechanical engineering in "Waldo" (1942). In "On Writing Speculative Fiction" (1947), Heinlein set the ground rules for what would eventually become hard SF by arguing that "in the speculative science fiction story, accepted science and established fact are extrapolated to produce a new situation, a

new framework for human action.” Hence Franklin notes that Heinlein's “hallmark, a no-nonsense, matter-of-fact sense of familiarity, stripped of the ‘gosh!—wow!’ air of much prewar space-travel science fiction” (Franklin 68). Nevertheless, Huntington is quite compelling in his contention that in unsurprisingly self-interested essays defending the craft of hard SF, as evidenced, for instance, by “Science Fiction: Its Nature, Faults, and Virtues” (1957), Heinlein perpetuates a unconvincing denial and evasion of the implicit neoliberal power imbalances inherent in vaunting the technocratic authority of rational science and engineering at the expense of the the potential ambiguity and dynamic heteroglossia of more complex political allegory.

In his last juvenile space opera set solely within the confines of the solar system, *The Rolling Stones* (1952), Heinlein specifically targets the demerits of the subgenre by embedding in the point-counterpoint of a fiction-within-a-fiction called *The Scourge of the Spaceways* that the obstreperous grandmother of a rag-tag spacefaring family, Hazel Stone, takes over the duties of serializing on commission. Hazel secretly keeps writing when her son, the patriarch Roger Stone, wishes to abandon the enterprise, suggesting Heinlein’s ambivalent relationship to a subgenre about which the worst absurd excesses Mr. Stone criticizes as “hokum, dreamed up to sell merchandise” (Heinlein 21). Hazel impishly introduces an arch-nemesis for the stalwart hero, John Sterling, called the Galactic Overload, and Mr. Stone balks at the commercial hackwork: “But ‘Galactic Overload’— now, really! It’s not only preposterous; it’s been used over and over again” (Heinlein 28) When Hazel plays a prank on her son by secretly writing a note from the Galactic Overload on a narrowly retrieved space parcel, Heinlein winks to his audience’s

craving for realistic future extrapolation in Mr. Stone's response: "I do not believe in ghosts, inside straights, or 'Galactic Overlords'" (Heinlein 135).

Yet despite its dismissal of the most hackneyed vulgarities of the subgenre, *The Rolling Stones* repurposes the conventions of the space-opera subgenre to construct a crowd-pleasing adventure of proto-neoliberal proportions. The mantra of "free enterprise" is not only the title of a chapter but the governing logic of the plot and its underlying ideological stance. The protagonists, the twin boys Castor and Pollux Stone, are gripped by an all-consuming passion to making a killing through the entrepreneurial gumption of a start-up import-export shipping business of first bicycles from the Moon to Mars and then alien pets from the Inner to the Outer Planets of the solar system. When their father Mr. Stone suggests that "money isn't everything", Castor quips, "no, there are stocks, bonds, and patent rights, not to mention real estate and chattels" (Heinlein 114). The twins are not only risk-taking geniuses of free enterprise but also paragons of technoscientific competence glorified during the space race; the twins know "enough non-Euclidian geometry, tensor calculus, statistical mechanics, and quantum theory to get along with an atomic power plant" (Heinlein 60) demanded by their starship mode of conveyance. The novel indeed paints the twins as maverick adolescents with a hubristic bent but only mildly and correctively so: "along with their great natural talent for mechanics and their general brilliance went along a cock-sure, half-baked conceit that they knew a great deal more than they did" (Heinlein 45). Their father upbraids his sons "you need to get it through your head that you are not supermen." Castor replies "how do you know we are not supermen?" And Pollux follows with "conjecture, pure conjecture"

(Heinlein 37) Heinlein's ideal reader only disagrees with the twins by half. In an orgasmic release of neoliberal rationalization, the novel ends by waxing lyrical over the right-libertarian anarcho-capitalist spread of human biocapital spaceward: "the *Stone* trembled and threw herself outward bound, toward Saturn. In her train followed hundred and thousands and hundreds of thousands of thousands of restless rolling stones...to Saturn...to Uranus, to Pluto...rolling on out to the stars...outward bound to the ends of the universe" (Heinlein 253).

Heinlein's fiction, though immensely popular, wasn't the only available brand of traditional American space opera that decidedly influenced the future course of the subgenre. At polar loggerheads to Heinlein's right-libertarian ethos was, for instance, Jack Vance whose lavish mythopoeic world-building, arcane shibboleths, alien semiotics, and byzantine stylistic flair seemed to invite an openness to dense, complex otherworlds that defied the "1950s chauvinism...mandated by Campbell's editorial policies" (Rawlins 27). Vance's fiction also dynamically embodied the Zuckerman Hypothesis (based on the British scientific advisor Zolly Zuckerman) who claimed an entrenched technocratic elite was primarily instrumental in fashioning the saber-rattling geopolitics and nuclear proliferation of the midcentury. In "The Deterrant Illusion", the Zuckerman hypothesis was conceived by its coiner as a technocultural fantasy in which science blended with myth and "[technicians] have become the alchemists of our time, casting spells which embrace us all" (qtd. Reiss 10). Mounting a critique of empirically minded technocracy, in *The Dying Earth* (1950), for instance, Vance renders a macabre post-apocalyptic landscape populated by necromancers, thaumaturges, paladins, and androids who are the

result of the super-science of “mathematics” that rushes into the void of what appears to be a nuclear holocaust. In *The Dying Earth* saga, the enthusiastic technocratic imperative of the space race meets its decadent and entropic doppelganger.

In a later work called *Space Opera* (1965), whose title was pre-selected by the publisher Pyramid Books to Vance’s chagrin, Vance subverts the tropes of space opera for comic relief at the expense of the cultural and economic imperialism often implied in the jingoistic space opera to be found in Heinlein’s space-colonization narratives. In the novel, a traveling troupe of haughty musicians attempt to subject grand works of Western opera by Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Wagner, and Debussy on host after host of unimpressed alien civilizations across the galaxy, and absurd culture clash ensues. After a picaresque series of misadventures, it is revealed that Adolph Gondar has kidnapped the Ninth Company of Rlaru in an attempt to profit off creating an exotic musical fad back on Earth, and the citizens of Rlaru, who are more interested in the crew’s impromptu jug band than all the exalted works of Western culture. The Rhlaru are infinitely more sophisticated and refined in their technological manipulation of musical artistry, theatrical illusion, and magical artifice than human culture could ever dream of attaining. When describing the effect of this alien sophistication on the pretentious cultural impresario Dame Isabel and her crew of the *Phoebus*, Vance offers a self-conscious analogue of such a deflation of neoliberal American exceptionalism in his astonishingly sumptuous prose style.

Dame Isabel flung about and found the sky to be dancing with colored shapes.

They mingled and separated, merged inward and outward and settled to the

meadow which became a place of luminous magic, and the whole *Phoebus* came front in awe to watch the magnificences displayed to them. Cities like gardens appeared one after another, as if in compendium: each different, each a development of the last, each with its own delights and prideful vistas, each receding and growing remote. A miscellany of new images appeared in the foreground: regattas of boats with enormous patterned sails, each of which might have been sentient and alive: a jeweled moth.

(Vance 162)

The marvelous poetics of this passage feature assonance (“settled” and “meadow”), alliteration (with a heavy emphasis on “m” phonemes and its semantic connotation with “magic”), parallelism of verbs, prepositions, and gerunds (“merged inward and outward and settled”, “receding and growing remote”), intriguing and extensive syntax variety (long sentences, compound verbs, stylish colons), hyper-precise details (“enormous patterned sails”), arcane and unexpected diction (“magnificences”, “prideful”), and a figurative power in which meadows become garden-cities that morph into regattas that transform in turn into the drab alien insect aestheticized into a living art object and encrusted with beguiling jewels. Vance’s richly ornamented prose is the diametrical opposite of Heinlein’s crisp, pared-down sentences; the sheer gorgeousness of Vance’s aesthetic style suggests a fierce rejoinder to neoliberal rationalization and utilitarian efficiency for its own sake.

Social Science Fiction: Isaac Asimov's Foundation Series and Futurian Space Opera

Vance's anti-technocratic fiction, though, was not the only model for space opera available in the pre-dawn of the neoliberal era. As explicitly testified by many of the major New Space Opera practitioners, one crucial space-opera series that predates the flourishing of the neoliberal space-opera of the 1950s but bridges Heinlein's hard-sf with a disregard for pro-capitalist and nationalist pieties was Isaac Asimov's Foundation series. Huntington stresses that Asimov's privileging of "psychohistory", discernable by the genius technocrat Hari Seldon who has codified predictive computation and has raised it to the level of a science, demonstrates a trilogy that doth protest too much: "by the denial of history, it dismisses conventional politics, but in doing so it becomes a political statement" (Huntington 142).

Indeed, the gulf in political-cultural awareness between Asimov and Gwyneth Jones or M. John Harrison is unbridgeably vast. I contend, however, that not all hard-sf space opera should be haphazardly lumped together into an apolitical sameness; a more nuanced, aesthetically inclined critical judgment of Asimov's seminal trilogy seems called for if we are to trace its influence on the successive development of a politically engaged, less dubious New Space Opera. Huntington importantly complicates the leap of mystical faith from aesthetics and culture to actual political transformation too often taken for granted; but, as foregrounded in progressive New Space Opera, and as made culturally relevant with the ubiquity of the space race, the non-purposive and non-

instrumental character of putatively escapist space fiction should not be so easily dismissed as politically reactionary given that a devotion to aesthetics and affect can equally serve as a disruptive negation of neoliberal status quo.

Although a strong proponent of space programs as a rule, Isaac Asimov was a consistent critic of the nationalist tenor and motivating geopolitics of the space race that — for the sake of understanding of the critical renovations of the subgenre to come — should be distinguished from Heinlein’s gung-ho borderline-propaganda (see, for instance, Asimov’s 1957 satire of Cold War politics in “Gentle Vultures”); nevertheless, I fully acknowledge that Asimov’s first Foundation series, published in *Astounding* magazine in World War II and reprinted in book editions continuously thereafter, proved amenable to a postwar climate of nuclear anxiety, suburbanization, and MCarthyism (see Booker 32-38). Despite claims of the prophetic vision of early pulp SF, during the height of the Apollo program Asimov was most struck by what his typical moon-landing story “Trends” published in the July 1939 issue of *Astounding* failed to anticipate: “It wasn’t anything like the flight that just took place. The ship was built by a one-man inventor in a backyard out of beaten-up tin cans. There was no governmental participation. No officers were involved. No huge NASA. No Russia. Just my hero and his tin cans” (*Conversations with Asimov*, 6). Even in the midst of the triumph of the victorious moonshot, Asimov’s rationalized neoliberal nostalgia here is plaintive: gone are the days of the amateur tinkerer whose sheer engineer genius can do battle against the profit-amassing interests of big business and nation-states.

Yet the nostalgia that less ambiguous neoliberal ideologies purvey — a space-age longing for a return to an antediluvian, womb-like cosmos of untrammelled global capitalism — cannot be neatly conflated with Asimov’s anti-capitalist championing of the technocratic genius. The neoliberal nostalgia promoted by Heinlein may clearly entail a critique of the contemporary moment of blinkered bureaucratic bloat and inefficiency, but Heinlein’s attachment to an uncritical nostalgia for the benevolent reign of a secular priesthood of outwardly bound technocrats, however superficially projected into the future as inevitable and naturalized, ends up obscuring as much as, if not more than, it reveals. Asimov’s Foundation series, on the other hand, invokes the fictive future as a utopian, celestial (counter)public sphere that can defy the global regimes of exploitation, alienation, and inequality that rapacious neoliberal industry and ideology wreaks on impecunious labor.

For Asimov never hid his life-long loyalty to the radically anti-capitalist movement of SF writers commonly labelled “the Futurians”, though he was only an active member of the Manhattan-based “Futurian Science Literary Society” starting in September 1938 for about a year.⁶ In the first part of his autobiography *Memory Yet Green* (1979), Asimov declares the group was “some of the most intelligent (if sometimes erratic) people I have ever known” (Asimov 211), highlighting that the Futurians wanted “to use science fiction as a way of fighting fascism, and it was almost impossible to this in those days without making use of Marxian rhetoric, so that these activist were accused of being Communists by the opposition” (Asimov 211). Even though Asimov reaffirms that, among these impoverished science-fiction readers and

fans, “solidarity was solidarity, and it was my intention to stay with the Futurians,” Asimov later describes his shamefaced attendance of the first World Science Fiction Conference, despite the fact that the Futurians were bounced from the conference by “the burly Sam Moskowitz...and a number of his cohorts” (Asimov 244). At the time, the ambitious Asimov avoided antagonizing the dictatorial fiat of John W. Campbell who held the Futurians in contempt given, as Asimov recalls, Campbell was “(my diary says) ‘a hidebound conservative’” (Asimov 212).

The left-SF response of the Futurian movement was inextricably linked to the Technocracy Movement and a backlash against its increasingly reactionary betrayal of utopian promise. Roger Luckhurst cogently posits that “Campbell and the Futurians regarded SF within very different political paradigms offered by, respectively, the Technocracy Movement and the Popular Front” (Luckhurst 68). This alignment of the Futurians with the Popular Front seems appropriate as one common origin story of the group underscores John Michel and Frederik Pohl’s association with the Young Communist League. Likewise, the momentary alignment of the Technocracy Movement with John Campbell’s *Astounding* pulp-magazine resonates with the archival evidence of the left-SF readerly response to E.E. “Doc” Smith’s Lensman series, serialized in *Astounding*, and the move away from space opera as a subgenre that increasingly catered to hidebound conservatives. Soon-to-be Futurian spokesman John B. Michel reveals the Left-SF optimism of the early days of both the Technocracy movement and space opera in his concluding statement to “the Rob-Smith Controversy” in the January 1933 issue of *Amazing Stories*. Michel defends E.E. “Doc” Smith’s use of vulgar slang in his space

opera against a scandalized reader, not on “nationalist grounds” but in the interest of accurately representing “not only the masses, but also the higher ups, the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy” (957) all of whom resort to hardy, now-dated expressions like “dough,” “hootch,” and “talkie” to express themselves. In the modernized diction, Michel notices here that space opera at its pulp inception had a dissident, insurgent edge.

By December 1939, the mood had turned sour and Left-SF readers had lost its faith in technocratic space opera; in the *Science-Fiction Fan*, for instance, C.S. Youd, the alias used by the British writer John Christopher, dismisses E.E. “Doc” Smith’s space operas as “a lot of balderdash,” and parodies critics who were only satisfied when their science fiction can claim the dubious honor of stating “here are none of your dirty Reds, your Wobblies.” By contrast, Youd argues “it is this refusal to consider the class struggle that stamps magazine SF with the other bunk.” In the July 1940 issue of Futurian organ and fanzine *The Science-Fiction Fan (U.S.A.)*, Robert A. W. Lowndes published “The Michelist Movement in American Fandom,” which recaps the history of the Futurian controversy from the October 1937 Philadelphia Convention to the World Science Fiction Convention in 1939. For his part, Lowndes is content to chart the origins of Michelist movement from the International Science Association’s impatience with the myopically technoscientific “Gernsback delusion” in *Amazing Stories* and its continued distaste for John W. Campbell’s lack of “sociological” content in *Astounding*. Lowndes defended the Michelists against their critics for their staunch refusal to celebrate escapism, searchingly asking “And where was the golden age? Outside science fiction magazines was despair, poverty, and in Europe a new dark age” (8). In other words,

Asimov's allegorical Foundation series injected vapid and escapist space opera with the political and cultural context that increasingly disenchanting Left-SF readers found wanting.

Lowndes's disillusionment echoes the widespread framing of the Technocracy movement as a gradual compromise, a swing on the political-cultural spectrum from an anti-capitalist stance toward a pro-corporate one. For in its heyday, the Technocracy Movement obtained some mainstream credibility. The December 26, 1932 issue of *Time*, for instance, contained a profile of Howard Scott and the New York-based Technocracy, Incorporated. The *Time* profile is equal parts anxiety over Scott's statistics concerning the number of people being automated into unemployment, awestruck wonder over Scott's vision of socially planned abundance, and sneering dismissal of his lack of expertise, his fraudulent personal narrative, and his crackpot projects like his idea to replace money with energy tokens called "Ergs." In a partial defense of the much-maligned SF literature of the period, Andrew Ross connects the Technocracy Movement to Paul's pulp illustrations, the 1939 New York World's Fair, and Streamline Moderne aesthetics: "the dreamy rhetoric of technological futurism has been taken over lock, stock, and barrel by corporate advertisers and managers in the business of selling tomorrow's streamlined worlds" (Ross 128). Ross compellingly sees the Technocracy Movement as subsumed under the imperatives of the business and corporate world and as a failure of a technologically utopian vision and socialist desire. For the movement can be traced back in part to *The Engineers and the Price System* in which Thorstein Veblen calls for a "practical soviet of technicians," the social planning and systematic

coordination of “industrial experts, skilled technologists, who may be called ‘production engineers’, for want of a better term” (Veblen 52). Veblen’s vision of mobilizing an elite cadre of highly trained and specialized engineers into a Platonic ideal of philosopher-kings revolved around the belief that if resources could be allocated efficiently at the industrial level, then duplication and wasted efforts could be eliminated, full employment obtained, consumer needs met, and strikes and deadlocks between unions and management made a thing of the benighted past (Akin 11, 24).

Why then did Asimov revive space opera stamped with this distinctive Futurian-affiliated political imprimatur with decided echoes of a prelapsian technocratic optimism? I contend that the aesthetic and cultural substitution and sublimation of seemingly escapist space opera appealed to Asimov because of its latent potential for the critical political allegory of social science fiction. This is not to revert to reductive claims that Asimov seeded an essentially Marxist message into his space opera. In line with Booth and Huntington’s interpretation that Asimov deliberately made his fiction non-political and therefore conducive to his technocratic-capitalist climate, in “Asimov’s Guide to Asimov,” Asimov himself backpedals about his own earlier Futurian political affiliations to a certain degree, claiming “I have never read anything by Marx...consequently, I don’t really know anything about Marx and I therefore fail to see how anything I write can represent a Marxian view of history, either clear or distorted” (Asimov 203). Asimov directly responds here to Charles Elkins’s unflattering essay, extending comments made by Donald Wollheim in *The Universe Makers*, that the Foundation series represents a “vulgar” historical materialist vision of inexorable historical change. While perhaps

bristling Asimov by holding him up to a benchmark of critical explicitness and rigor the pulp writer never had any intention to meet, Elkins is certainly correct to claim, “if Asimov was at all aware of the pervading political and intellectual milieu of the New Deal decade, he would have been exposed to the clamorous controversies between the Left and Right as well between the Left of the time” (Elkins 103). My contention remains, then, that regardless of Asimov’s strict Marxist credentials, the Foundation series remains relevant to New Space Opera today since it serves as a complex science-fictional allegory for cultural-political dissent, unlike what Asimov categorizes as “adventure” and “gadget” science fiction. This Hugo-winning foundational series of classic space opera holds up as a sterling example what the author—in a strange, syncretic mixture of the Campbellian and the Futurian stances on the value of politically engaged space opera — calls “social science fiction...the only branch of science fiction that is sociologically significant” (Asimov 14).

In an essay comparing the New-Wave space operas of M. John Harrison’s *Centauri Device* to Samuel R. Delany’s *Nova*, Rjurik Davidson uses Asimov’s original Foundation trilogy as foil, especially because of its ideological underpinnings, amounting to the conclusion that “liberal capitalism, rationally complemented by the rule of a technological elite, is intrinsically and unquestioningly better than feudalism” (Davidson 272). Yet one should not elide Asimov’s Futurian faith in a technologically progressive future so simply with a technocratic, proto-neoliberal capitalism. To do so would ignore the great lengths Asimov goes to debunk evil robots as much as evil empires, or what he dismissed as “The Frankenstein Myth” that governed popular superstitions about science

and technology. The hyperbolic trope of an “evil empire” (later infamously invoked by Ronald Reagan himself) here is exposed repeatedly by Asimov to be a specific incarnation of unchecked technological promise as recruited to protect the vested interests of money, markets, and private property. It is easy to forgive the logical leap that construes Asimov as both an unabashed capitalist-technocratic apologist and true believer in the free flow of techno-capital. Indeed, the persistent analogy in the Foundation series of the collapse of the Galactic Empire to Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or the corollary analogy of the monastery-led Medieval period to the First Foundation-led interregnum, would seem to imply a dubious Enlightenment teleology — what Benajman refers to as homogenous empty time — with modernity as the pinnacle of restored Western civilization. Like Heinlein, Asimov therefore does indeed champion the radical sovereignty of the progressive and efficient liberal human subject projected into the far future and distant cosmos, though, steadfastly loyal to the New Deal and Cultural Front politics that will face a rising backlash in the postwar climate, Asimov precribes definite limits on the neoliberal rationality of privatization, deregulation, and neo-imperial ventures around the globe, curtailing the laissez-faire ethos of specialized competition and hierarchical individualism that this rationality entails.

Close attention to the Foundation series, then, contradicts an overly reductive reading of Asimov’s fiction, which is doubtless the most significant Futurian legacy on the cultural politics of New Space Opera. To begin with, contra Davidson, Huntington, and Booker, the telos of the progressive future history of the Foundation series is emphatically not the Galactic Empire. In the “Prologue” to *Second Foundation* (1953),

for instance, Asimov describes the Galactic Empire with a neutral, decidedly not jingoistic hand: “[The Empire] included all the planets of the Galaxy in a centralized rule, sometimes tyrannical, sometimes benevolent, always orderly” (Asimov vii). Asimov does not celebrate (neo)liberal capitalism as anything but a weigh-station to future progress; the (quasi)socialist-utopian vision of the Foundation series is consistently portrayed not as liberal capitalism, but a far-future post-scarcity technocracy never to be realized.

A more detailed reading of the serialized stories in the first trilogy can clearly show the incipient Futurian critique of what Lisa Duggan periodizes as the first phase of the neoliberal era. Published by *Astounding* in 1944 but collected in *Foundation* (1951), “The Traders” involves the first steps of Hari Seldon’s plan to rebuild galactic civilization from its devastated ashes. The First Foundation scientists establish trade relations with a powerful planetary kingdom, Askone, through offering their services of advanced scientific knowledge in the form of a post-scarcity transmuter that miraculously converts metals into gold. The transmuter uses atomic technology, further cementing the link between the U.S. and the First Foundation. In order to rescue Eskel Gorov, a fellow trader and undercover Foundation agent for the slowly encroaching First Foundation, Limmar Ponyets offers a single transmuter to an ambitious local politician Pherl (Asimov 136). Ponyets knows that the politician might use the transmuter in the short term for the gold, but when the machine breaks down, so will the technophobic taboos that prevent the First Foundations from expanding its spheres of influence. Although the reader is supposed to side with Ponyets as an agent of the First Foundation, Asimov is keen to point out the exploitative underbelly at the core of this one-way capitalist exchange based

on “intelligent self-interest” (Asimov 136). Ponyets extorts enormous quantities of tin from Askone’s mining estates not only by offering his entire cargo of atomics, but also by threatening Pherl with the recorded footage of the transmuter, against Askone’s strictures and punishable by death. When an unconvinced Eskel upbraids Ponyet’s unscrupulous sales techniques, Ponyet responds with post-catastrophe proverb, “never let your sense of morals prevent you from doing what is right!” (Asimov 120). Far from a liberal-capitalist utopian ideal, this catchphrase is hard-boiled and cynical, and no ringing endorsement of the temporary stopgap on civilizational decline that is the first Foundation.

The Foundation series repeatedly embraces a Futurian-affiliated rhetoric of the marshaling of class power by a progressive, if woefully compromised, technocratic elite; like mushrooming varieties of space culture increasingly dominant in this period, this rhetoric both rationalizes in bad faith and aesthetically defies in a semiotic war of position the pervasive imbalances of the neoliberal era and the onset of decolonization. In June 1942, Asimov published in *Astounding* the second “Foundation” story, “The Bridle and Saddle,” collected in the Foundation fix-up as “The Mayors.” In the story, following the collapse of the Galactic Empire, the Mayor of Terminus City, Salvor Hardin, defends the vestiges of technological advancement preserved by the Encyclopedist Actionists, a kind of practical soviet of technicians, against the neighboring empires of the Four Kingdoms, especially the imperial aggression of King Leopold I of Anacreon. To do so, Salvor invokes the popular religion of “scientism” promoted by the Encyclopedists in rhetoric heavily indebted to the pro-union, class-based, and Cultural-Front rhetoric of the

Futurians. Salvo explains his “interdict,” a counterstroke against an attack on Terminus City by the Anacreon emperor, as a labor protest: “I might explain that every priest on Anacreon is going on strike, unless I countermand the order” (Asimov 107). The popular solidarity and uprising of the Actionists neutralizes the imperial ambitions of Leopold I, galvanizing the workers into a shut-down of the communications systems, public transportation, hospitals, water, and energy infrastructure (Asimov 109). In the fantastic extrapolations of his far-future space-opera, the concealed ace in Asimov’s sleeve that eventually makes good on an initial stage in Hari Seldon’s grand plan is rather more grounded in the science-fictional cultural formations and debates swirling around the Cultural Front in the 1930s: namely, a general strike.

Contending that Asimov masters the cliffhanger trick in the pulp-serialization toolkit by structuring his fiction like an interlocking chain of sequential problems followed by their deferred ingenious solutions, James Gunn argues that the puzzlebox introduced in “The Merchant Princes” (published as “The Wedge” in *Astounding*, October 1944) that Asimov leaves unsolved until the end of the first Foundation trilogy is that of “economic deprivation” (Gunn 49). Having outsmarted the military might of imperial warlords and religious potentates, the Foundation threatens to rip apart as a result of the vast disparities the capitalist traders impose on the galaxy. “The Merchant Princes” involves the trader Hober Mallow who instigates a mass revolt by an unruly mob of the disenfranchised poor that neutralize the imminent threat posed by the barbaric rulers on the planet Korel. Even as this immediate danger dissipates, Hober mulls over an unpromising future for the Foundation traders locked into a vastly unequal,

interdependent system with the Korellians. At the end of the first Foundation novel, Hober can only resign himself to the creation of a pernicious but stable “plutocracy” (Asimov 200), nurturing a wan hope for another the enlightened eradication of capitalism as just another superstitious vestige of the pre-utopian past. Hober perversely longs for “crises in the time to come when money power has become as dead a force as religion is now” (Asimov 200). The fantastic speculation of space opera is being used as vehicle for politics diametrically opposed to Heinlein’s trumpeting of free enterprise.

In the next story, “The Mule,” first serialized as the cover story in the November 1945 issue of *Astounding* and later assembled in the fix-up *Foundation and Empire*, Asimov, encouraged by his publisher Campbell, perhaps shows some disenchantment with the heady rhetoric of the Futurians, but nonetheless dons the mantle of his technocratic principles conspicuously. Asimov adapts the Futurian cultural politics to take into account a rhetorical complicity with the thriving war machine of both Nazi Germany and the Allied Powers. In the beginning of the short story, the heroine, Bayta Darrell, recaps the far-future space-opera premise of a Hari Seldon’s plan to preserve and compress progressive social energies through the building of a Foundation in the interregnum following the collapse of the galactic Empire. This counterfactual future history of preserving a restorative technoculture through the apocalyptic anarchy of global war clearly resonates with Asimov’s contemporary world. Yet Bayta explains the disintegration of the newly established Foundation into the competing sovereignties of warlords and traders does not derive from an instrumentalizing domination of technology run amok. Rather, the social principles of the Foundation, and its imaginary futurological

science of “psychohistory,” serves the technocratic and Taylorist ideal of retaking the means of production, controlling modern industrial technology as a means to a progressive end, and as a result optimizing efficiency and waste management: “Inertia! Our ruling class knows one law; no change. Despotism! They know one rule; force. Maldistribution! They know one desire; to hold what is theirs” (Asimov 90). Bayta and her husband Toran are partisans of an underground resistance to the despotic Foundation and as such represent the oppositional interests of the “external proletariat” (Asimov 105). William Timmins, who filled in for Hubert Rogers during World War II, compensates for Asimov’s minimalist attention to scenic description with a cover that appears to be loosely inspired by the story. The cover features a secret hangar in which a couple in spacesuits run from a V-2 rocket to the opening in a cave wall that occupies most of the center of the cover and at the bottom of which the shadow of a lone figure looms forebodingly.

This figure might be the Mule, a Campbellian mutant telepath named for his sterility and doggedness. The Mule is such a statistical improbability that he foils Hari Seldon’s predictive science of psychohistory. The Mule easily manipulates the crumbling Foundation to become a ruthless dictator, and the Russian-born Jewish-American Asimov clearly intended contemporary resonances with Adolf Hitler to be unmistakable. Timmins’s cover underscores escape from a shadowy cave of illusion, past the menacing gatekeeper of the Mule, and into a dazzlingly bright future. Illustrators of Asimov’s fiction often have recourse to picturing puny humans dwarfed by some sublime or terrifying vista such as Hubert Rogers’s cover to “Nightfall” in the September 1941 issue

of *Astounding* or Michael Whelan's "Trantorian Dream," which graced the cover of *Foundation's Edge* (1983). In "The Mule," though, Asimov has modified his splendidly complex sense of wonder, and his radical technocratic cultural politics, to countenance the actuality of a war dominated by technological horrors like the atom bomb and gas chambers; Seldon's plan simply fails to anticipate the singular genetic anomaly of the freakish Mule or his charismatic powers of leadership, which are telepathic and, like Curt Siodmak's bestseller *Donovan's Brain* (1942), seem to rely on an implicit analogy with the invisible phenomena of radio waves. Likewise, although the location of the Second Foundation is kept a carefully guarded secret, the First Foundation topples under the Mule's trickster powers of mass deception and mind-control. In other words, while not blind to the fascist overtones of technocracy's engineer mythos and its covert *Übermensch* rhetoric of radical individualism, Asimov also urges a progressive breakthrough, an evolutionary leap that would generate a mutant adaptation to the harsh realities of the cosmos that has fundamental parallels with Futurian rhetoric. The stubborn refusal of this guileless optimism to acknowledge the unavoidable resistance of neoliberal capitalism to be technocratically constrained soon becomes a primary bone of contention that New Space Opera finds the most problematic in Asimov's influential work, not to mention those of his largely forgotten Futurian compatriots.

⁶ For my original archival research into the intriguing cultural connections and discrepancies between the technocracy and Futurian movements, see my "The Michelist Revolution: Technocracy, the Cultural Front, and the Futurian Movement."

Chapter 2

“A Smeared and Bogus Milky Way of Wealth”: The Origins of New Space Opera in the Neoliberal Moment

“Star Wars is just a way for the Feds to toss out money, to Bell Labs, and TRW, and General Dynamics, and all that fat-cat, big-cigar crowd.’

‘The Russians are afraid of the Space Shield. They know it will make their stupid missiles useless.’

‘Look I was in the U.S. Army,’ Jim said. ‘I *repaired* that kind of stuff, okay? Helicopters, with goddamn eighty-dollar bolts that any dumb ass could buy for ten cents. It was all a *waste!* Just a damn waste, throwin’ stuff away, for nothing.’

‘America is rich and free!’ Irene protested.”

-Bruce Sterling, “Jim and Irene” in *Globalhead* (1992)

In March 1983, the Reagan administration cast its ill-fated lot with the Strategic Defense Initiative. This laser-guided anti-ballistic missile program popularly lampooned as “Star Wars” cost thirty-billion dollars, in the original estimation, and, as the money annually poured into the highly speculative project, the hyperbolic science-fictionality of

the 1980s quickly devolved into an unending series of media-fanned Buck Rogers punch-lines. Ironically, SF authors themselves took what SDI represented as more than just expensive bluster meant to intimidate Reagan's "evil empire" or the moldering remains of the Soviet Union, noting a conjunction between military Keynesianism, Reaganomics, and the dawn of a neoliberal era. With reference to the SDI-supporting Citizens Advisory Panel on National Space Policy launched by the conservative science-fiction writers Jerry Pournelle, Larry Niven, and David Drake, Thomas Disch, for instance, charts how the subgenre of space-opera lost its socially progressive luster in this period, given the transitivity of the practitioners with the rise of right-wing power in global politics: "Space Opera = NASA = blank check for high-tech research" (Disch 215).

In the 1980s, the nostalgic attempt to recapture the bygone glory of the manned space program manifested itself most powerfully as the SDI program. Edward Reiss quotes from congressman Floyd Spence that "back in the Buck Rogers days they had a beam they shot out there and shot down all kinds of spaceships" to argue that such justifications for the Star Wars program depended on a repository of space opera to bolster the myth of American economic, political, and technological superiority because "the assumption that science fiction prefigures actual scientific advance implies that the development of superweapons is now preordained" (Reiss 159). The technocultural fantasies of space opera, a mainstay of the American popular imagination since the 1930s, indeed set the stage for SDI and yet, despite the hawkish exploitation of these cultural energies, the space-opera fiction discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation also established the touchstone thematic terrain of the incipient subgenre as both

celebratory and skeptical of the mainstream trumpeting of unbridled free enterprise at the expense of trade unions, regulation, and public-sector programs and services.

This chapter draws on theories of neoliberal biopolitics to argue how an even more trenchant strain of cultural-political criticism marked the development of New Space Opera in its infant stages. The chapter begins with the prehistory of half-interrogated anti-colonial critique in Leigh Brackett's noir-tinged space operas, then it traces this jaundiced undercurrent of space opera to the 1950s depredations of neo-imperial transnational corporations in Alfred Bester's *The Stars, My Destination* (1956) until arriving at a growing awareness of the constitutive postcolonial inequalities of the information-age, neoliberal world-system in Samuel Delany's *Nova* (1968) and, finally, a controlled demolition of the all-pervasive technocratic rhetoric of the subgenre in Harrison's *Centauri Device* (1974). The chapter concludes with the first inklings of New Space Opera in the 1980s typified by the cyberpunk response of Bruce Sterling's *Schismatrix* (1985), which interrogated the intersection of information technologies and the financialization of the globe. Lastly, this chapter analyzes C.J. Cherryh's *Cyteen* (1988) that updates Brackett's questioning of the post-colonial and anti-imperial presumptions of traditional space opera in response to the dawn of neoliberalism.

Taking Stark Seriously: Primitivism and Anti-Colonialism in Leigh Brackett

In the "Enchantress of Venus" (1949), the native albino-pale inhabitants of the infernal, mist-shrouded swamps of Venus, cannot refrain from remarking on the uncanny visibility of outworlder Eric John Stark's darkened skin. Stark explains that his appearance derives from being orphaned as a child on the closest planet to the sun, the

smoldering Mercury, which tanned him “almost as dark as his black hair” (Brackett “Queen of Martian Catacombs”, 1). Ferrying Stark across the Venusian Red Sea to the city Shuruun, ship captain, Zareth Malthor attempts to couple him with his daughter and, following Stark’s refusal of such a pairing, endeavors to kill him. What sets Stark apart, Malthor marvels, is his symbolic *chromatism*, amounting to a problematic, stereotypical construction of his black body as savage and barbaric, and a leering attention to his hypersomatic physique: “I have never seen such skin...Nor such great muscles.” (Brackett “Enchantress of Venus”, 145) Malthor fetishizes Stark’s blackness as exotically irresistible, an index not so much of racial cultural politics per se as atavistic prowess and a fierce primitivism.

Given the ban on black protagonists enforced by editors like John Campbell at *Astounding*, the blackness of Eric John Stark must have been faintly scandalous, if seemingly undiscussed at the time. And, on the myriad covers of Leigh Brackett’s anti-hero, Stark was never illustrated with any skin pigmentation but white until the beginning of the twenty-first century when some editions began appealing to aficionados by dying the hue of Stark’s skin on the original *Planet Stories* pulp covers. It is tempting to read Brackett’s primitivism as a dissident twist on the John Carter series, in line with what Marianna Togorvnick saw as conspicuously absent from Burroughs’s dated *Tarzan* franchise that no longer retains its status as a sprawling media empire. The waning novelty and vanishing popularity hovering around the Tarzan archive, not to mention Burroughs’s entire oeuvre, calls out for a critical project to recapture “this sense of wonder... [and] imagine the primitive as a source of empowerment — as a locus *for*

making things anew to preserve what is worth preserving and change what deserves to be changed” (Togorvnick 45). John L. Carr, for instance, ventures into biographical criticism to suggest that Brackett was in part rebelling against her adamantly pro-segregation mother in her re-appropriation of Burroughs: “the racism that everywhere colors Burroughs is lacking in Brackett’s work” (Carr 15).

In the “Enchantress of Venus”, Brackett celebrates Stark’s primitivism as source of adaptive survival instincts as much a naked aggression. His primal fury is channeled into a slave rebellion against grotesquely white overloads, the Lhari. Since Stark is “a creature both less and more than man” (“Black Amazon of Mars”, 12), and “civilization had brushed over Stark with a light hand” (Brackett “Enchantress of Venus”, 144), the beast within Stark can in an instant slough off the thin veneer of a hypocritical civilization, transforming into his faux-African alter ego of N’Chaka to hunt, growl, claw, pounce, and rage in self-defense or on the side of the colonial underdogs. When the chips are down and his atavistic subjectivity unlocked, Stark continually emerges victorious from bout after bout of acrobatic, lethal combat. In the noir adventures of this wild man transplanted onto the surreal pseudo-inner space of Venusian jungles, Brackett distorts and cements racial “epidermilization” and underscores its immediacy as a cultural formation and material condition. As such, Brackett uses race in a fashion that perhaps does not so much mystify or elide race as highlight its visibility.

The problem with this progressive reading, though, is that it grossly discounts the extent to which Brackett also sublimates racial categories into a Jungian archetypal essence that rationalizes and validates brutal regimes of imperial control. So although

Brackett seems to reach out to a global anti-colonial and anti-racist solidarity in the Eric John Stark series in particular, her vocation as a pulp writer of U.S. science fiction makes her tellingly pause over cementing that connection. Writing to the emerging global superpower, hers is not a Fanonian recuperation of race in the service of a stance advocating strategically nationalist decolonization. The raw power of Leigh Brackett's Stark as a fictional character has much in common with what Fanon notices skeptically in the "Tarzan stories" to be the aggressive "cathartic unconscious" (Fanon 121) in the white culture of the colonizers, and decidedly different from a progressive "dis-alienation" (Fanon 142) of the colonized. Nonetheless, this violent, near-existential representation of racial difference in the service of an anticolonialist agenda could easily be espoused by Stark as much as Fanon: "I am black, not because of a curse, but because my skin has been able to capture all the cosmic effluvia. I am truly a drop of sun under the earth" (Fanon 31).

By all accounts, Brackett's personal politics were highly idiosyncratic, as her biography makes clear. She claimed to have both Scottish and Mohawk and Sioux ancestry, and was directly impacted by the Great Depression in that, though highly intelligent, she did not go to college for the lack of money. (Carr 4) As illustrated by her anti-racist parable "All the Colors of the Rainbow" (1957), Brackett agreed in principle with the turbulent protests of the Civil Rights movement. And, as preserved in the historical record by her signature on the paid advertisement of science-fiction authors in defense of the Vietnam War in the July 1968 issue of *Galaxy*, she would also live to firmly support anticommunist containment strategies — as early as 1944, she would

deride the devouring hive-mind plant monsters of “The Vanishing Venusians” as “a new form of communism” (Brackett 68). Her friend and direct literary progeny Michael Moorcock regretted that she shared some political sympathies with the radically reactionary John Wayne for whom she wrote the screenplay for several Howard Hawks westerns. Still, Brackett did not view the fervent anti-colonial rhetoric of the Eric John Stark series as entirely divorced from contemporary geopolitics or the Depression-era crises and panic on the domestic front. Specifically, Brackett identifies her fiction as a covert political allegory for an international diaspora brutalized, displaced, and exterminated by the German military machine.

In Brackett’s “Lost Citadel of Ships” (1943), for instance, the rugged Roy Campbell attempts to assist Stella Moore and the revolution of the Kraylens on Venus against the resource-exploiting Terran Coalition Government’s autocrat Tendrick in an effort to find a permanent home for these nomadic people “cold, and hungry, and resentful” (Brackett 7). In a letter to the editor “Give ‘Em Hell, Leigh” in the Winter 1943 issue of *Planet Stories*, Leigh responds to a previous letter from reader Jay Chidsey published in the September issue of the magazine. Chidsey upbraids Brackett, contending “we never feel sympathy for the Kraylens, whose pitifully few numbers and decadent state invite LIQUIDATION” (emphasis in original) and “the decadent, anti-social, unassimilable castaways should have been fumigated” (121). In a lengthy impassioned response that receives full editorial endorsement, Brackett identifies the Kraylens with Serbian gypsies currently being persecuted by Nazi Germany and cautions: “it’s well to remember one thing when you’re planning the liquidation of minorities. Human society is

fluid thing. And it's frightfully embarrassing to wake up one morning and find that of a sudden YOU have become a minority" (121).

With unconcealed patriotic fervor and on the side of the war effort — but still acknowledging the evanescence of even hegemonic white U.S. culture — Brackett reveals an awareness of the tens of thousands people tortured and executed for being classified as racially inferior and ethnically other “Roma gypsies” by the Nazi government in the expanding German occupied territories sweeping across Europe. Brackett evokes her otherworldly, science-fictionalized gypsies as a strategic trope to suggest an analogous marginalized minority whose uprising may pose potential resistance to a subjugating authority. For, since at least the Medieval period, Western culture gradually constructed gypsies as rootless diaspora, doomed to eternal wandering, crushing poverty, and an anachronistically backwards culture. Brackett employs this exoticizing, arcane ethnic marker to designate a persecuted minority capable of challenging a colonial sovereignty.

A persistent dichotomy between a triumphal expansionism and an equally celebratory insurgency recurs in Brackett's treatment of space colonization as a trope. In the June 1941 *FMZ Digest* fanzine, Brackett anticipates space exploration with bated, ecstatic breath, “there will be a fire lit, as there was in 1492...ships will go out, manned by young men with visions of empire in their hearts.” Yet in “And As for the Admixture of Cultures on Imaginary Worlds”, Brackett explicates the care she gives to populate the many distinct cultures of her Venus and Mars with both swords and starships, or with varying levels of technological weaponry. Brackett references the anachronistic

alternatives that exist side by side with the apex of economic and technological progress: “we perfectly accept the fact that spacecraft take off from Cape Kennedy practically over the heads of the Jivaro Indians who live just a step away in the distance and some ten thousand years away in time” (Brackett 236) And in her space operas, Brackett consistently imposes this implied teleology of linear progress and its corresponding modernization paradigms on diverse instances of human culture only to consistently maneuver readerly sympathies to be on the side of the latter end of the spectrum, the primitive, undeveloped, and technologically retrograde. In “The Black Amazon of Mars” (1951), for instance, Brackett writes that for Stark “it came with full force that this was North country, half a world away from the Mars of spaceships and commerce and visitors from other planets. The future had never touched these wild mountains or barren planes. The past held pride enough” (Brackett 2).

Resistance to the technological gap catalyzes the blood and thunder of the anticolonial narrative thrust. In the “The Enchantress of Venus”, Brackett contrasts the technologically transfigured body with the threatened and vulnerable body of Stark. The decadent, inbred Lhari enslave the local population with an electric collar and ray guns. In contrast, during the insurrection at the palace, Stark discards this “shock weapon”, preferring combat by swords. (Brackett 198). In a technologically utopian dream-turned-nightmare, the experimentation with cellular manipulation in the City of the Lost Ones goes wrong, transforming their altered bodies into amorphous monstrosities “until the bodies we labored over were like things of wet mud that flow and change even as you look at them” (Brackett 189). In addition to this anxiety over deconstructing the

autonomy of transfigured material bodies, anticolonialism can be seen on a psychodynamically infused level as well. Brackett employs a lyrical, brooding, and hyperkinetic symbolic structure through the repetition of swamp, fire, and blood imagery and their suggestive association with hallucinatory states of consciousness. In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt argues that the use of swamp imagery in European travel writing disrupts the non-reciprocal, panoptic view from above exclusive to the colonizing “monarch-of-all-I-survey” perspective, substituting instead a fusion of the seer and seen “not looking down at them or even walking around them, but by sloshing zestfully through them in a boat or up to her neck in water and slime” (Pratt 213). In swamps of Sharuun, this kind fusion of colonial binaries is often, rather, nightmarishly invasive to Stark — at the very start of the story Stark confronts the menace of planet given that “the mists that clouded it were stained with a bloody glow” (142). The immersion into this alien world haunts him with traumatic childhood memories of failing to assimilate into the insectoid aboriginal tribes on Mercury. Venus torments him with “memory shattered into a kaleidoscope of broken pictures fragments, rushing, spinning” (Brackett 168). Yet the experience can also be thrillingly liberating in the way Pratt describes; Stark exults that “here in this strange sea one’s motion was as much flying as swimming” (Brackett 178). It is no great coincidence as well that this lust for life discovered in the swamps occurs exactly when the taboo of miscegenation arises; Stark swoops for the titular white enchantress Varra like a “black hawk chasing a silver dove through the forests of a dream” (Brackett 178).

The Space Opera to End All Space Operas: Transnational Corporations in *The Stars, My Destination*

By the 1950s, a dominant venue for the rebounding postwar SF market, and one which included work from many members of the by-then officially disbanded Futurian group, was H.G. Gold's *Galaxy*. This digest showcased masterly satire by the likes of Robert Sheckley, Fredrick Pohl and C.M Kornbluth, Cordwainer Smith, and early Philip K. Dick, recoiling from the worst offenses of mass-produced pulp-era space opera. The first October 1950 issue of *Galaxy* featured an advertisement on the back cover targeting derivative space opera in which passages from a space opera and a Western were juxtaposed side-by-side and the science-fiction text identified as "merely a Western transplanted onto some alien or impossible planet" followed by the assurance "YOU'LL NEVER FIND IT IN GALAXY!" Serialized in four parts beginning with the October 1956 issue, "Tiger! Tiger!" and released the following year by Signet Books as *The Stars, My Destination*, Alfred Bester turned his pulp-influenced flare and gusto on crafting a self-conscious pastiche of space opera that was both affectionate and acerbic toward the conventional iconography and topos of the subgenre. The devastating impact of this pastiche on the subgenre has never been lost on critics, although its equally mordant satire of neoliberal ideologies underpinning global power dynamics in the midcentury world-system has yet to be fully discussed. John Clute praises the novel as "about the best sf ever produced" and astutely contextualizes *The Stars, My Destination* as a late Modernist text given that "much of the twentieth century shares with [Bester] his technically ironic, technically 'superior'" (Clute 52) attitude toward his material. Robert

Scholes and Eric Rabkin argue that Bester smuggles a canny self-awareness into space opera, dryly noting that “this is not the clumsy earnestness of Doc Smith writing a genuinely ‘popular’ fiction” (Scholes and Rabkin 67). And Robert Silverberg registers the ground-clearing resonance of the pastiche from within the genre: “[Bester] deftly lets the air out of not only science fiction but of our entire culture” (Silverberg 95). Samuel Delany comes closest to my thesis, though, in suggesting this sense of insular parody, however cutting, needs to be understood as extending into the expanded discursive terrain of satire: “[*The Stars, My Destination*] chronicles a social education but from a society which, from our point of view, has gone mad” (Delany 47).

My allegorical reading contends that the retrofitted pleasure Bester wishes to recover from bygone conventions of space opera can be viewed as a broadly Futurian-influenced desire to wrest a regulatory ethos from the depredations of the emergent networks of transnational corporations. In a foundational work of corporate governance, *Modern Corporation and Private Property* (1932), Adolf Berle, a crucial member of the Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Brain Trust, reflects on the recent checkered history of finance capitalism and anticipates the explosive growth of transnational corporations to conclude that new corporate regulation was needed based on the distinction between diffuse corporate ownership and individual private property. Berle argues that “the rise of the modern corporation has brought a concentration of economic power which can compete on equal terms with the modern state” (Berle 357). Advocating a moderately leftist position, Berle nevertheless conceived of the emergence of transnational power in neo-imperial terms in which the “princes of industry” established an “economic empire—an

empire bounded by no geographical limits, but held together by centralized control” (Berle 2) In a memo to Roosevelt, Berle summarized his position by insisting that Keynesian economics strategies could curb the laissez-faire flows of global capital and affirm “social values more noble than monetary profit” (Hiltzic 28). Whether such New Deal policies could be applied to neoliberal dynamics remained an open question in the postwar period. In a comparison between the cosmopolitan culture of 1950s and 1990s transnational corporations, Timothy Brennan notices a dispiriting lack of change such that the increasing flexibility of transnational culture belies its static national character under the banner of deregulation and the post-Fordist restructurings, the endless consolidations of “mergers, leveraged buyouts, capitalization, and strategic alliances” (Brennan 134)

In “Science Fiction and the Renaissance Man” (1957), Bester opines that the 1930s represented a slump in the overall literary quality between the peaks of the early Gernsbackian 1930s and the Campbellian 1940s. For Bester, the hackwork of the 1930s pulp-era science fiction shamelessly pandered to adolescent wish-fulfillment and banal escapism. Interestingly, Bester partially rescues the chief space opera practitioner E.E. “Doc” Smith from such critical contempt: “Back in the thirties we used to wonder why we enjoyed Doc Smith’s space operas so much. We usually felt guilty about it. Now I realize that Doc Smith had a charm for us then.” Set in the twenty-fifth century, *Stars, My Destination* extrapolates a familiar future dominated by the lethal players of both megacorporate entities such as the Presteign Clan and a neo-imperial, state-run rivalry between the Inner Planets and the Outer Satellites. The hegemonic capitalist families

acquire their concentrated wealth through technological innovation as illustrated by the Government House ball on New Year's Eve where the various corporate clans dress up in period costumes when their trademark was patented; so the telegraph-industrialist the Morse clan wear Victorian hoop skirts, the gunpowder-mavens Skodas wear Regency crinolines, and the rocket-mogul Peenemundes, flapper dresses (Bester 104). Rather than a triumphant and optimistic intergalactic battle between good and evil, this space-opera combat reveals layers of postwar complexity and bleakness, especially as "the war gained momentum and grew from a distant affair of romantic raids in space into a holocaust in the making" (Bester 92). The discovery of humanity's innate capacity for teleportal "jaunting" shrinks space and shortens time in a fashion that allegorizes the globalization processes mobilized by unregulated disruptions of techno-capital. At one point in the rapid-fire narrative, the nouveau riche Gully Foyle has to fend off assaults by "jack-jauinters" who seem like the uncanny return of the Depression-era repressed: "the jaunting age had crystallized the hoboes, tramps, and vagabonds into a new class" (Bester 96). Describing the impetus behind the transportation and communication industries of the Outer Satellites and their waging war to save vested interests, Bester begins the novel with a devastatingly ironic nod to the pulp-era space opera often loosely labeled "Golden Age": "this was the Golden Age...this was future of fortune and theft, pillage and rapine, culture and vice...but nobody admitted it" (Bester 7). Far from the technocratic exuberance of E.E. "Doc" Smith, Bester suggests that a dark reality of income inequality and ruthless economic competition underlies pulp-era optimism and gusto: "there were crashes and panics and strikes and famines as pre-jaunte industries failed" (Bester 12).

The distinction between nation-state and transnational corporation in Bester blurs into an indistinguishable fusion. The Presteign Clan protects its bottom line and maroons Gully Foyle after the Outer Colonies attack and destroy his ship “The Nomad” carrying precious cargo. Gully Foyle vows revenge on the Presteign-ship “The Volga” that bypasses him, mumbling to himself, in his future pidgin-English slang, obsessive, violent thoughts with all the compulsive repetitiousness of a subliminal corporate jingle: “I find you, ‘Vorga’. I pay you back, me. I rot you. I kill you, ‘Vorga’. I kill you filthy” (Bester 20). The demented rage of Gully Foyle’s personal revenge quest mirrors the ruthless agenda and interests of transnational corporations and the state actors such as the U.S.-based Central Intelligence who initiate a manhunt for Foyle in a bid to recover the world supply of PyrE, a doomsday weapon compared to the nuclear bomb (Bester 44), which was transported on and lost with “The Nomad.” The national character of the hegemonic transnational corporations becomes glaringly apparent as the Central Intelligence vies to recover PyrE to defend the regnant Liberal Party from incursions by Presteign Clan. (Bester 45) In their urgency to recover PyrE, both the Presteign Clan and Central Intelligence threaten Gully with the same extreme brutality; Dagenheim claims Central Intelligence “butchers its answers out of people” (Bester 52), whereas the Presteign Clan merely endeavors to lobotomize Gully. (Bester 53)

Like Alexander Dumas’s *The Count of Monte Cristo* on which many aspects of the novel were explicitly based, *The Stars, My Destination* cloaks class antagonism in an adventurous revenge-quest bildung. Bester introduces Gully as a working-class antihero, interposing the typographic experiment of his Merchant Marine record that lists zero

education, skills, merits, or recommendation to his name, and condescendingly describes him as “stereotype Common Man” who has his “potential stunted by lack of ambition” (Bester 15).

The climax of the novel oscillates around the indeterminacy over whether or not the potential for regulation and equality can be retrieved from transnational corporate excess. The novel fragments into a primitive graphic novel of typographic experimentation after a flaming Gully Foyle morphs into the Burning Man and jaunts through time and space to escape a burning cathedral, redistributing PyrE around the world in the process. Gully frames this goading of either total annihilation or revolution as a leveling of the political-economic playing fields. Gully envisions a settling of the score for a newly engendered underclass solidarity, “I’ve handed life and death back to the people who do the living and the dying.” (Bester 194). His final sermon elevates his future hipster-slang into a fiery jeremiad that demands a reckoning for global imbalances cemented by the “driven men” of capitalist transnational elite. Livid with righteous fury, Gully excoriates the self-perpetuating feedback loop of injustice and asymmetries enabled by transnational hegemony, “You pigs, you. You goof like pigs, is all. You got the most in you and you use the least. You hear me, you? Got a million in you and you spend pennies. Got genius in you and think crazies. Got a heart in you and you feel empties. All a you. Every you” (Bester 195).

“The Questionable Past”: The Techno-Surreal Demolition of Space Opera in M. John Harrison’s *The Centauri Device*

The 1960s saw the emergence of two distinctive American and British strands of “New Wave” movements in SF literature. New Wave SF scholars Rob Latham, Roger Luckhurst, and Colin Greenland have shown that in manifestos, editorials, interviews, and anthologies, various loosely affiliated rafts of SF writers aligned themselves with the youth-oriented counterculture and registered the postwar economic boom, the tumultuous developments of the myriad protest movements, and the subsequent political retrenchment, oil crisis, and recession. The radically progressive, anti-technocratic political-cultural ideologies that inspired these multiple branches of New Wave SF writing contrasted starkly with pulp-era technologically utopian science fiction that preceded it. Such anti-technocratic stance in global culture gestated gradually over the course of the early twentieth century, before SF writers finally adapted and modified its theory and practice beginning in the 1960s. I look at two writers, the British M. John Harrison and the American Samuel Delany, both characteristic in some degree of the separate British and U.S. brands of New Wave SF, to analyze the ways space opera was delicately handled, as if with waldoes, during the period.

Technocracy always had its critics. As early as 1934, the prominent technocultural theorist Lewis Mumford identified such phenomena as industrial resource extraction, military hardware and strategies, and financial speculation as leading to “psycho-social transformations” resulting from the authoritarian logic of the “neotechnic megamachine”, that is, the insistent cultural pressures of technological antihumanism and

depersonalization. (Mumford 76) Noting the increasing dependence on electrical appliances and conveniences, Siegfried Gideon claimed with horror that in the modern world “mechanization penetrates the intimate spheres of life” (Gideon 41). Likewise, Jaques Ellul averred that the “soft” bureaucratic and administrative structures of the “world-system” industry becomes self-perpetuating and ubiquitous, “consuming everything it touches” (Ellul 4). This anxiety over the feedback loop of technological transformation intensifies through the twentieth century such that by 1969 Victor Ferkiss contends that the subduing of nature by the machineries of war has created an “existential revolution” (Ferkiss 243) and a disorienting indeterminacy in which the power of technology over everyday life became increasingly incalculable. Influenced by Ellul, and in contrast to techno-enthusiast countercultural critics like Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, and Stewart Brand, Theodore Roszak connected technocracy to the establishment against which was poised the rebellion of the “counterculture”, a term he coined. Roszak diagnoses the maladies of 1960s American culture by coupling “technocracy” with the Vietnam War, backlash against the Civil Rights movements, urban squalor and poverty, and unemployment caused by post-industrial automation. In response, Roszak prescribes student protest and civil disobedience, “dropping out” or the fostering of underground oppositional subcultures, holistic depth psychology, neopagan mysticism, and psychedelic drug use. To develop his argument, Roszak relies on Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse who were highly influential in the critique of the death-driven modern industrial culture (Brown 284) and “rationalizing control” (Marcuse 141) of contemporaneous technoculture.

In addition to the anti-technocratic strains of twentieth-century technocultural discourse, the SF fiction and art of the New Wave were directly and self-consciously influenced by the Surrealist aesthetics of Salvador Dali, Yves Tanguy, Paul Eluard, Joan Miro, Max Ernst, and many others. These Surrealist and anti-technocratic concerns were not in fact readily distinguishable. In the *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), Breton claimed surrealism manifested the “marvelous in the everyday” in part out of a spirit of social protest and revolt against the technosocial order. Breton avers, “surrealism, such as I conceive it, asserts our complete non-conformism... (it) does not allow those who devote themselves to it to forsake it whenever they like. There is every reason to maintain that it acts on the mind very much as drugs do; like drugs, it creates a certain state of need and can push men to frightful revolts.” Rebellious against the deadening machinery of modern life, Surrealist fiction and art constructed fantastic tableaux and collages, dream-like assemblages of hallucinatory and disjointed images, what Lautreamont famously aphorized as “a chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella.” Objects and places landscapes were bizarrely recontextualized in a defamiliarizing process the Belgian Surrealist Marcel Marien labeled *detournement* (“the turning around”) or the decomposing and repurposing of a cultural artifact in a way radically subverting and resistant to its original intended use or meaning.

In the editorial “The Coming of the Unconscious” in the August 1966 issue of *New Worlds*, J.G. Ballard urges that “the techniques of surrealism have a particular moment when the fictional elements in the world around us are multiplying to the point that it is almost impossible to distinguish between the ‘real’ and the ‘false’ — the terms

no longer have any meaning.” In his blog post from December 2007, Harrison holds steady with essentially the same notions in his assault on world-building developed out of Tolkien’s idea of “secondary creation.” Harrison charges that overelaborate world-building has become redundant in a neoliberal era constantly bombarded by hyper-real simulacra. Harrison claims, “the originally vertiginous and politically exciting notion of relativism that underlies the idea of “worlds” is now only one of the day-to-day huckstering mechanisms of neoliberalism.” Harrison deploys the insistent fragmentation of coherent grand narratives with surreal, jarring images in bizarre juxtaposition precisely to demolish the ideological complacencies of the technocratic order specifically linked to the neoliberal global politics. This fierce aversion to a ploddingly literal escapism and power-fantasy wish-fulfillment in connection with a return to the aesthetics of pulp-era space-opera tradition can be evidenced in Harrison’s complicated readerly relationship with Samuel R. Delany’s retro-space operas. In May of 1968, Harrison heaped nothing but high praise on Delany’s *Einstein Intersection* (1967), especially its metaphysical allegorical convergence implied in the imaginary future science of the title and its uncanny restyling of classic myths: “the meeting of two vastly different but complementary realities (modes of existence, universes, what-you-will” (Harrison 32).

In the January 1969 issue of *New Worlds*, Harrison lauds Delany’s *Nova* (1969) for its “jeweled prose” and “colorful moments” but notes that the allegory has calcified into “no real compensation...or adequate theme”, achieving a book that “is highly readable but finally unsatisfying”, and a disappointing rehash of hard space-opera “bedded in the genre’s most stifling traditions” (Harrison 50). In his other path-breaking

criticism for *New Worlds*, Harrison catalogues the case against the formulaic and derivative rehashing of pulp-era science hackwork. It is not, Harrison argues, that E.E. “Doc” Smith or L. Ron Hubbard were any lesser talents than even H.G. Wells, if judged only on their furious productivity and enormous popularity of their output alone: “it has to do with comfort: the repetition of form and content, careful rationalization of any change in the status quo; a body of warm, familiar assumptions” (Harrison 85). Likewise, Harrison finds the anti-psychological, post-human dimension to their technocratic art severely disturbing, short-circuiting a surrealist process of recognition and identification: “as long as [science fiction] appeals to writers and readers who can feel more compassion for a machine — Asimov’s robots, the sentient bomb of Van Vogt — than a human being, then it is *still* pulp fiction” (Harrison 100). Finding Donald Wollheim sub-literate and borderline-delusional, Harrison is especially irked and embarrassed by the slightly soured, latter-day Futurian rhetoric: “Wollheim accepts and absorbs it all into a metaphysic of sad hope: the joke, the satire, the money-spinner that financed last year’s vacation— ‘such speculations, such visions...’” (Harrison 104).

At the same time, Harrison assails the “snobbish” hierarchies and “struggle against its own pulp-magazine image” that rejects out of hand pulp-era work as all uniformly “simple minded, poorly written alternatives to Westerns and soap operas (hence the term space opera” (Harrison 129). Harrison parodies the self-loathing: “*Dr. Who* is just about giant worms (and things that jump out and suck your head off in the dark). If you think *Dune* is just about giant worms too, you are being cynical and obstructive, go to the bottom of the class” (Harrison 129). In his ascribing to pulp

science fiction a lurid, surreal disruption of technocratic rationality, Harrison thus presages his own eventual return to his space-opera roots in the Kefahuchi Tract trilogy.^{vii}

Like other major New-Wave works of the period such as Brian Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head* or Michael Moorcock's *A Cure for Cancer*, Harrison's *The Centauri Device* diffracts the contemporary Israel-Palestine conflict as an index of the extremes of this postcolonial global conflict. The novel revolves around the misadventures not of a singular Nietzschean superman of golden-age space opera but of John Truck, an apathetic born loser caught between the political players of Israel World Government (IWG) and United Arab Socialist Republic (UASR). Following wars and the collapse of what is referred to as the postcolonial "client state system" The IWG and UASR are no longer "parasites on the political muscle tissue" (Harrison 28), but major galactic superpowers and leading political players after the bewildering paradigm shift of the Rat Bomb Wars. These galaxy-spanning powers want Truck for his ancient Centauran DNA that could unlock a sentient doomsday device that directly echoes A.E. Van Vogt's "Dormant". Like the reference to neoliberal mercenaries in *Light* suggest, in *Centauri Device* Harrison extends neoliberal conflicts of his contemporary milieu into a near-future crisis that forms the deep background of his far-future space opera such that "the uneasy and paternalistic compromise between autonomy and empire, fragmented and fell apart" (Harrison 29). The subsequent postcolonial phase re-inscribes colonial attrition as the first wave of space settlers wipe out the first humanoid aliens they encounter in an atrocity called the Centauri Genocide. The last remaining pure-blooded member of the alien species, Annie Truck, John Truck's mother, commences her darkly picaresque

“long uncomprehending migration” (Harrison 17) as a refugee survivor of the Centauri “who bolted off like rats and scattered themselves like rats over the newly colonized planets” (Harrison 21). Addicted to “adrenochrome” — an imaginary drug Hunter S. Thompson invented for his nightmarish ode to U.S.-led global capitalism in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* — Spaceport Annie allegorizes the abject bare life of a dispossessed postcolonial migrant inhumanly denied the privileges of citizenship in the first world: “she asked for a cure, but the authorities already had her scheduled for resettlement as a displaced person” (Harrison 22).

In Harrison’s caustic recycling, a grotesque techno-surrealist aesthetic evokes a thorough disdain for the expansionist neoliberal lebensraum of traditional space opera. The prose waxes its most psychedelic and ornately surreal when describing the prisons of the IWG whose worst atrocities disturb even the imperturbable ex-warden and IWG General Alice Gaw. In an echo of the New Wave science-fictional political critique of Thomas Disch’s *Camp Concentration* (1968), Harrison writes that the Environmental Prison was “that nodal myth of the hinterlands, its seeping ducts peopled with ghouls, its vaults packed with lost souls in Gothic decaying orbits around the solar enormity of their own innocence, administered by Fungus Men with cattle prods for arms and ECT machines for heads” (Harrison 19). A far cry from Delany’s quasi-utopian cyborgs, the fusion of the human body and an emergent techno-cultural order invokes not awe-struck wonder but inexplicable horror. In Carter’s Snort, Horst Sylvia, a “biological sculptress”, manufactures her newly bioengineered chimeric animal shape-shifter and lauds Herman Goering as a “true Romantic”, appealing to Nixon and Brezhnev as the “great landowners

of the twentieth century” (Harrison 38). Horst Sylvia plucks at the techno-nostalgic heart-strings and claims her wonders are “harking back to the optimism—the Romance — of the Cold War, the promise of technology!” (Harrison 39). Without missing a beat, she also limns the savage cruelty of her techno-scientific hubris and her facile nostalgia for neoliberal power-brokering, noting “[the anamorphs] don’t last long, of course” (Harrison 39).

The Information Age, Heterotopia, and Countercultural Cyborgs in Samuel R.

Delany’s *Nova*

Manuel Castells argues that the information technology revolution arose in the 1960s and 1970s, claiming to be the illegitimate offspring of a heterodox combination of social vectors including, to name a few, the 1960s campus-based political movements, the US Defense Department research and development especially ARPANET, the entrepreneurial innovations of Silicon Valley, and a post-1970s recession and subsequent restructuring of the global market (Castells 5, 19). According to Castells, the “Information Age” developed in response to the post-1969 recession and the reorganizing of capitalist modes of development as first-world societies began producing information processing or knowledge-generating services instead of material goods through industrial manufacturing. The restructuring has led to a trend in which capital has become characterized by the increase of “fleximers” or information-based managers in charge of flexible and geographically mobile tasks and projects in response to dynamic markets (278). At the same time, unemployment has steadily climbed as the core labor force has become increasingly expendable and vulnerable to reduced wages, worsened living and

working conditions, automation, off-shoring, sub-contracting, or firing (Castells 272).

This fundamental paradigm shift produced both the increasing hegemony of transnational corporations and new models of multimedia communication, identity politics, and multicultural interactions. Such “narrow-casting” or “long-tail” approach is also increasingly accessible to low-income users and producers, whose technical wherewithal has hitherto often been shrouded in myths casting their computer use as criminal or deviant.

Yet Castells’s core thesis is that transnational corporations and the jet-setting class of techno-elite, investors, experts, networkers, and business-manager nomads, are privy to “placeless places” and “spaces of flow”, which bears comparison to Marc Augé’s “non-places” discussed below, in a globally integrated system of instantaneous electronic, informational transactions and communications. The top strata of cosmopolitan capitalists work in fluid and mobile “self-programmable” networks and projects, whereas the traditional labor force remains dependent on unstable market realities and woefully vulnerable to being potentially switched off from global flows.

Immanuel Wallerstein offers the explanatory mechanism of world-system theory as a corrective to the prevailing vision of nations defined by developmental stages that emerges from Bretton Woods in which Third World countries progress toward the telos of First World development. By contrast, Wallerstein follows the comparative disadvantage thesis first advanced by Paul Prebisch; contra David Ricardo, Wallerstein pace Prebisch contends surplus value from global trade exacerbates the uneven, actively underdeveloped conditions of Third World countries. Wallerstein credits neoliberalism

and the Washington Consensus promulgated by the annual World Economic Forums at Davos with the rollback of labor production costs that has shown marginal success boosting profits through structural adjustment policies and opening up borders, but which profits were decidedly off-set by financial speculation in the global stock market that has left the world-economy volatile. (Wallerstein 86) In his critique of the world-system, Wallerstein combines an eclectic but effective base of research and theoretical positions including the work of the National Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), Fernand Braudel, the Annales school of historiography, Karl Polanyi, post-Stalin Soviet scholars, and the dependency theory or core-periphery analysis.

World-system analysis shows that the globalization consists of a single vast terrain, a large bureaucratic structure comprising multiple distinct cultures but unified by an underlying or “axial” international division of labor that binds core to peripheral zones in an unequal system of exchange ideologically termed “free trade.” Wallerstein traces world-system analyses back to the fifteenth century and pre-capitalist feudal monarchies whose Eurocentric bias failed to accommodate the radical alterity of language, religion, customs, and technoscientific development in their ethnographic encounter with “high civilizations” (Wallerstein 17) of China, India, Persia, and the Arab world. Samir Amin has argued that the consolidation of the world-system following Bretton Woods has eclipsed the sovereignty of the nation-state while leading to an ever-tightening integration of global capital that chiefly faces resistance through the third-world advocacy to be found in the post-Bretton-Woods Bandung Conference in 1955 or its continuation into the Non-Aligned Movement (Amin 145).

World-system analysis interrogates a naïve cosmopolitan ethos that would too precipitously endorse the seemingly altruistic spirit of border-defying humanism, transnational empathy, and cross-cultural circulations. This uncritical humanism, according to world-system theory, though, often proves too compatible with neoliberal globalism. Nevertheless, the rapid acceleration of globalization, globalism, and globality in the modernizing world necessitates a reevaluation of politico-ethical cosmopolitan norms and values especially as a bulwark against domestic coercion, corruption, and tyranny as well as recognition of the global obligations and answerability to a fellow feeling for the far away. My contention is that New Space Opera adamantly puts the clash back into culture clash, in its popular, paraliterary treatment of what Rebecca Walkowitz defines as the style of critical cosmopolitanism: “an aversion to heroic tones of appropriation and progress, and a suspicion of epistemological privilege, views from above or from the center that assume a consistent distinction between who is seeing and what is seen” (Walkowitz 2). Walkowitz adopts this term in concert with a bevy of recent global theorists including Bruce Robbins, Peng Cheah, Giles Gunn, and Paul Jay.

In “Midcentury: An Essay in Contextualization”, Samuel R. Delany places U.S. New Wave culture within a familiar “postrevolutionary” narrative: “between the spring of 1968...and the summer of 1969...change reached a certain momentum that pretty much everyone in the nation became aware of it” (Delany 185). In what he terms a “historical visceral” sense, Delany periodizes the fifties as a seventeen year timeframe prior to the “knotting-up, tyings-off, and openings-out of ’68 and ’69” (Delany 188) but in which the “rhetoric of the sixties — the linguistic, pictorial, and even behavioral —

was smelted.” (Delany 189) In this personalized genealogy, Delany maps the “profusion of ethnic, gender, and cultural studies” onto emancipatory but highly localized, micropolitical pedagogical scenes in which the onset of French theory in the American academic setting reduced the browbeating of students at the hands of professors defending the literary canon. It is tempting to follow in Delany’s contextualizing footsteps and note that a crucial, but so-far-overlooked nexus of his postrevolutionary concerns can be found as well in Delany’s literary output of this time, such as his last straightforward genre-SF novel *Nova*, which he in part revised in San Francisco during the 1967 Summer of Love and amounts to a complex meditation on cybernetic selfhood that proved highly influential on Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto”.

Substituting Harrison’s withering scorn for a nostalgic enthusiasm, Samuel R. Delany wrote *Nova* to revisit the space opera and plug into its proletarian Futurian roots. Extending Asimov’s focus on the sociological dimensions of technological determinism into new directions, *Nova* interrogates the constructed category of the human and its dependence on both hard and “soft technology”, the radiating meanings of the world-system mobilized by an emerging First-World cybernetic culture. Delany’s late-60s vision of the year 3172 is presciently saturated with countercultural computers. The troubadour protagonist Mouse, more than a little evocative of Jimi Hendrix, or Delany’s own musicianship, for example, plays a psychedelically holographic instrument, the sensory-syrinx, which exists in some liminal space between the analogue and the digital: “it might have been a harp; it might have been a computer”, guitar- and sitar-like but with

“induction surfaces” like a Theremin and made from both “carved rosewood” and “stainless steel” (Delany 8).

Haraway cites Delany, among others, as “storytellers explaining what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds.” In turn, Delany wrote “Reading at Work”, an early review of Donna Haraway’s essay, applying a Marxist-inflected poststructuralist framework to Haraway’s third-wave feminist refiguring of identity as dispersed, bodiless networks of cyborgian interconnections. Delany, an openly gay, African-American tenured radical, clearly has sympathy here for Haraway’s loose construction of machine/human identity as a site of reclaimed pleasure and indeterminate blurrings of stable boundaries which refuse to settle into any recognizable “humanity” or organic, pure, or whole sense of self. Delany contends, though, that Haraway betrays a “delirious” fantasy endemic to a Western first-world situation in which “as a society becomes more and more infrastructurally stable does it permit greater superstructural freedom — of expression, of action, of belief” (Delany 90). It is useful to frame Delany’s skepticism in terms of his own avowed contextualization in the New Left abandonment of the heady late-60s rhetoric of “universalist democratization” in which the Old Left campaign for revolutionary overthrow of an oppressive system was revamped as the more modest multicultural search for representation across divisions of race, gender, and sexual orientation in education, government, and business. Delany’s self-conscious recourse to the dichotomy between Northern hegemonic freedom of expression and global inequality highlights the limits of his own multiculturalist, post-structural platform, and thus can serve to contextualize the late 1960s cybernetic revival within a

larger cultural moment whose nostalgically perceived radical nature is embraced but also called into question.

Delany populates his space opera with “cyborg studs”, so awarded that honorific as an index of their status as hypermasculinized and covertly queered cowboys, as well as attesting to their status as manipulated cattle. These cyborg studs control “energy vanes” that allow for interstellar space travel by plugging into on-board computers via human/machine interfaces on their wrists, back of the necks, and the base of their spines. This six-prong socket (not unlike an electrical outlet) seems both freakish and invasive as well as organicized and empowering to a cyborg stud like Katin Crawford who, while jacking into a row of cords on the spaceship “motherboard” Olga, observes both that “this should make a good marionette show” and “the base of the spine always struck me as an unnatural place from which to drag your umbilical cord”, (35) identifying plugging-in as a profane “Great Return” to the motherly womb. The cyborg bioports bypass the nervous system and therefore circumvent the physical pain and drudgery associated with manual labor, accessing a realm of what Patrice Flichy has theorized as the technoimaginary. Delany’s mouthpiece, Katin, though, explains that such a posthuman transcendence of the alienating physical body specifically in neuroscientific, embodied terms by way of a “nerve cluster” between “cerebrum and medulla” that converts “cerebral abstractions” into “sensory impressions” (Delany 23). Like the maternalization of the shipboard computer, such a technological breakthrough permits the protagonist Lorq Von Ray’s own mother to have a remote telepresence via an “android programmed with her general response pattern”, regardless of her being a “victim of a degenerative mental and physical

disease that often left her totally incommunicative” and relegated to “masked, isolate chambers” (Delany 53). Delany loses no opportunity to contrast this semi-utopian medico-technological advancement, though, with the danger of erasing the primacy of the body via prosthetic enhancement. Lorq Von Ray’s nemesis, Prince Red, for instance, is traumatized by being born without a right arm, the superpowered artificial-limb replacement not compensating for but only reinforcing his sense of inadequacy. Oversensitivity to perceived deformity, specifically marked by his mechanical appendage, transforms an existing deep-seated family vendetta and political rivalry into a pathological sadism and lust for revenge against the supposedly “piratical” Von Ray family.

Katin muses that the subordination of human agency in the service of technologically determined ends has led to “the thirty-second-century overspecialization” and made him “dream about a return to the great renaissance figures of the twentieth century: Bertrand Russell, Susanne Langer, Pejt Davlin” (Delany 25). Delany invented the last name in that list, but the allusion to Russell and Langer reveals an investment in contemporaneously popular developments of (1) “Russell’s Paradox” and response to set theory, a formative influence on Alan Turing, and, as John Lucas has argued, instrumental in the cybernetic application of formal logic to an understanding of the human mind as structured by algorithmic or rule-governed mechanical behavior. Lucas frames Alan Turing specifically in the context of Kurt Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, alluded to in the title of Delany’s preceding novel *The Einstein Intersection*, which rigorously sets the unprovable, “specialized” paradigms of existing scientific

endeavor as the limit of computability. (Delany 2) The cognitive philosopher Susanne Langer's view of the mind as ordered by context-specific symbolic language is also similarly indebted to Russell's collaborator Alfred North Whitehead's formal logic and proto-cybernetic theory.

Carl Freedman has argued that Delany posits an ironically totalizing "negotiation and management of difference through the praxis of desire" (Freedman 163), which "estrangle the ideologies of race, nation, and ethnicity" (Freedman 157). By contrast, I contend that in *Nova*, Delany qualifies an emphasis on such nomadic or deterritorialized desire, and the disruptions of the technocratic world-system, based on a pervasive anxiety over being inescapably enslaved to the information-age world-system. The novel, however, as the titular "nova" indicates, still contains a utopian impulse and the guerilla but singular breakdown, slippage, or overthrow of technocultural infrastructures marks the potential for radical change and the invention of alternative futures. The title, after all, derives from the novel's retro-Futurian, technologically utopian premise of overturning the intergalactic dispersed communications system composed of the warring socioeconomic factions of the elite Pleiades Federation dominated by the Von Ray family computer and cyborg industry, as well as the lingering aristocratic legacy of the Draco Sector controlled by the Red Shift, Limited transportation monopoly, and the exploited Illyrion mines of the Outer Colonies. The existing interstellar regimes of power can be fundamentally altered by Lorq Von Ray's proposed harnessing of the energy source Illyrion from the center of a sun gone supernova, and the post-scarcity political dynamics likely to ensue. Far from being exceptional, though, Lorq's mission refracts a larger

sociopolitical drive that strongly resonates with the 1960s counterculture, especially with respect to the rise of computerization, which represents the basis of the Von Ray family business. As the university student Lusana, disregarding how “his scholarship is showing” at a Von Ray family cocktail party, exclaims, “economic, political, and technological change” threatens to disrupt “an incredible tangle of decadence, scheming, corruption” (Delany 41). Delany frames the existing state of oppression which Von Ray seeks to overcome with a nuanced ambivalence that ties together the countering tendencies of the computational cyborg, its avoidance of mind-body dualism, and its corresponding privileging of disembodied abstract cognition.

The twin African crewmembers, Lynceos and Idas, wonderingly recall how they lost touch with their brother Tobias after his adaptation to air masks, wet suits, and bioports allowed his indentured slavery to the Outer-Colony underwater mines on Illyrion to be naturalized and less arduous: “his hand had taken up the rhythm of the tides, the weight of ore became a comfort on his palms” (Delany 30). The rebellious Lynceos and Idas, by contrast, flee the Outer Colonies after mocking all authority figures in the Illyrion city, Argos — named after the all-seeing monster from the Iliad— in the solar system Tubman (as in, Harriet) B-12 through constructing an effigy of the mayor of Argos “fixed with a clockwork flying mechanism, and set(ting) him soaring about the city square, uttering satirical verses on the leading personages of the city” (Delany 30). The twins and their recourse to a pranksterish cybernetic flying machine are positioned in terms of knowing gestures to 1960s counterculture given their overuse of the psychedelic drug Bliss. Katin half-facetiously holds forth on how the fragmented, postmodern “social

sciences— isn't that a delightful name? — had run amok” in partial reaction to “the experiences opened up by psychedelics...making everybody doubt everything anyway” (Delany 27). Katin implies an alternative in the futuristic “synthetic and integrative sciences that are too familiar for both of us for me to insult you by naming” (Delany 28), which suggests Delany's cybernetically inflected New Leftist Marxist humanism. But this making “the whole mess...be put back into some sort of coherent order” appears to be heavily ironized too as nobody except the bookish Katin seems cognizant of the revolutionary “integrative science” (in contrast to the predominance of a holistic, scientific understanding of the Tarot Cards) and even the dissident cyborgs Lynceos and Idas nurture a childish, indoctrinated belief that the Von Ray family are “great and good” despite their ownership of the Illyrion mines and implication in the exploitation of the Outer Colonies. Delany further connects the dangers and pleasures of drugs and its threat of overdose to the computerized bioport in “blind Dan” who hurls himself into one of Illyrion's volcanic cracks after witnessing a nova while being plugged into Olga overloads his senses with the agony of constant overstimulation. (Delany 35)

Delany invokes what Fred Turner delineates as the 1960s countercultural fusion of back-to-earth environmentalism and cybernetic research in his idyllic description of New Brazillia: “through the trees, the lights of the village went off and on like a computer checkboard” (Delany 43). In stark contrast to the persecution of Mouse's uncyborgian gypsy family, “traveling around without plug facilities”, and thereby refusing to submit to work regimes of “the miner, or street cleaner, or bartender, or file clerk” (Delany 113), Lorq Von Ray's family, and the utopian potential they represent, are

solely defined by their role in the manufacturing of cyborg technology. Accordingly, Lorq's captain quarters is composed of wall-to-wall computers and decorations projected onto screens such that the gypsy Mouse observes that "among the mechanical clutter, nothing personalized the cabin — not even the graffiti" (118). Moreover, Lorq describes the synergy of his ideal crew in terms of the intimacy of a feedback loop that "functioned closely as the layers in a bimetal strip" (118). The Von Ray family derives their market share from the innovations surrounding cyborg sockets theorized by Ashton Clark, an homage to the space-opera practitioner Clark Ashton Smith, which putatively eliminates the dehumanizing reification effects of industrial labor on the worker by allowing entire factories to be "machined directly by man" (Delany 195). This cybernetic innovation restores dignity, satisfaction, and creativity to the tedious, soul-killing work of alienated labor but only in the context of a championing of disembodied mental abstraction and superstructural decoding. Katin admits the chief drawback of this cyborgization of work is a postmodern "lack of cultural solidity" in which "society has fragmented around itself" leaving only "a gaudy, meretricious" (Delany 196) antifoundationalism in its wake. In other words, Delany's cyborgs are disturbingly uncanny, however benign, and they rely on the discourses surrounding cybernetics, artificial intelligence research, cognitive psychology, and the philosophy of mind. Like Turing, Delany reframes the space opera as a promiscuous, utopian tool for radical change. Yet this critique nevertheless acknowledges the difficulty of dismantling the entrenched, systematic socioeconomic imbalances of a dehumanizing cyborgian world-system.

The Monstrous Birth of New Space Opera in the 1980s

In the fanzine *Cheap Truth* # 13, Bruce Sterling performed a critical hatchet job on *Window of Opportunity* (1984), a non-fiction book of futurology co-written by soon-to-be Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and military space-opera scribe David Drake. What Sterling assailed was not so much the technological unviability of the SDI program—the whipping-post of much mainstream-media coverage— but what Manfred Steger elsewhere labeled Gingrich’s penchant for “masterpiece(s) of market-globalist distortion” (Steger 83) that deftly mystify global inequality with techno-utopian promises of a future upwardly mobile rising tide. In the fanzine, Sterling identifies Drake as a “Pournelle disciple” and then mounts a coruscating critique on the ideological premises of the SDI program: “Peace, Prosperity, and Freedom are [Pournelle’s] watchwords. Peace: as an orbiting Pax Americana over a world requiring American tutelage. Prosperity: for high-tech asteroid-barons, who will watch the disastrous crumbling of communist society from the safety of orbit. Freedom — from any necessity of change or accommodation to other cultures.”

In this ideologically charged context, New Space Opera first began to bring a new acerbic energy and political-cultural resonance to the handed-down material of the science-fiction genre. This chapter views two progenitor space operas as offshoots of the neoliberal turn that had become mainstream politics by the 1980s. Both Bruce Sterling’s *Schismatrix* (1985) and C.J. Cherryh’s *Cyteen* (1988) allegorize the current neoliberal historical moment of global capitalism in a fashion that became foundational for the

subgenre movement moving forward. As such, both works are characteristic of a diverse constellation of science fiction conventionally known as New Space Opera whose inception can be traced back to the political-cultural milieu of the neoliberal 1980s. In *Cheap Truth 15*, Sterling admits to “boil(ing) down the three-percent beer of space opera into a jolting postmodern whisky”, and aligns *Schismatrix* with “the radical hard” return to Space Opera in the Spring and Summer 1984 editorials of *Interzone* and the gritty space operas by the likes of Barrington Bayley and Colin Greenland, retaining the “wild power of E.E. Smith, without Smith’s pathetic illiteracy or gross provincialism” (Sterling, *Cheap Truth 3*) Likewise, as Jo Walton has observed, Cherryh’s *Cyteen* complicates the fictional premises of Asimov’s “Foundation” series with a morally ambiguous, convoluted self-awareness that fundamentally reshapes the subgenre’s political allegiances. C.J. Cherryh’s space opera centers on the intense uncanny-affective tropes of clones, space colonization, and future war to refract the 1980s rise of transnational corporations, trade deregulation, debt crises, and Third-World revolutions, whereas Bruce Sterling’s cyberpunk space opera retrofits body modification, alien encounters, remote-control mind uploads, and doomsday weapons to espouse cynical outrage over the corrupt and simulacral dynamics of information technology, military spending, and financial capital. In both works, what Brian Aldiss famously labeled “the Wide Screen Baroque” (Aldiss 264) of space opera paradoxically evokes the final frontier of both progressive-utopian desire and a fantastic techno-nostalgia for the infinite mobility of global capital.

The sustained interrogation of the myth of free-market economics compels the periodization of this fiction under what Michel Foucault influentially described as “neoliberal governmentality” (Foucault 87) that self-regulates techno-subjects in globally Northern liberal democracies. In *New Space Opera* as much as in the historical record, such a market-fundamentalist control society can only vainly promise the social optimization of rational, self-interested individuals in a perfectly efficient economic laboratory. In fact, the Nixon administration’s decision to end the dollar-gold convertibility in 1971 led not to the desired strengthening of U.S. geopolitical hegemony that neoliberal advocates of floating exchange rates like Milton Friedman tirelessly advocated. Through the expected growth in international trade, the end of the Bretton Woods agreement provoked anxiety over a possible dollar free-fall as reeling Americans witnessed the tidal shift from the nation’s longstanding status as one of the world’s largest creditors to one of the world’s largest debtors. The subsequent institution of neoliberal Reaganomics stateside—trickle-down tax cuts for the wealthy, deficit spending on Cold-War military agendas, the monetarist ratcheting up of interest rates, the privatization and deregulation of everything from water and electricity to public-housing and waste-management—contributed to plummeting wages and swelling unemployment on the domestic front. Moreover, the worldwide recession of the early 1980s accelerated a debt crisis in developing nations that transformed the International Monetary Fund and World Bank into galvanized agencies that could police debtor economies through Procrustean monetarist policies in an effort to demand balance-of-payment on defaulted loans and achieve equilibrium between imports and exports, all under the banner of

laissez-faire profit-seeking and small government. (Kiely 72) Susan George decries that these straightjacketing policies of the IMF and the World Bank amounted to a resurgent neo-imperial directive: “thanks to the debt crisis and the mechanism of conditionality, [the IMF] has moved from balance of payment support to being quasi-universal dictator of so-called ‘sound’ economic policies, meaning, of course, neoliberal ones” (Bello 32).

In C.J. Cherryh’s Hugo-winning *Cyteen*, one of the chief driving factors of the postwar diplomatic insurrection staged in the novel occurs as a result of the out-of-touch Earth Company’s imposition of tariffs and most-favored-status monopolies on the settler world of Cyteen. In the forward to the sequel published over twenty years later, *Regenesis* (2009), Cherryh underscores the fundamental diplomatic-economic situation that undergirds the clash between the myriad self-interested players of the Union, Alliance, Earth, and the Company Fleet in the universe of *Cyteen*: “Union enjoyed the manufacture, mining, and prosperity of its own widely scattered stations... which provided sorely needed markets but not as profitable markets, counting Union tariffs, as they would be if Alliance owned the cargos and stations” (Cherryh 2-3). The Union prevents the Alliance of merchant ships, in other words, from pursuing the nominally free trade that would consolidate the Alliance’s own profit margin at the expense of the Union. The taut, byzantine narrative of *Cyteen* centers on one of the science directors and a chief Union leader, a so-called genetically modified Special, Ariane Emory, who endeavors to nudge the Union to a pro-expansionist, population-exploding settling of unoccupied worlds and corresponding severing of its ties to the manipulations of Earth, the Alliance, and the Company Fleet.

Opposed to Ariane's scheme is the Union leader, Jordan Warrick, also a Special, who advocates a centrist line resistant to such colonial expansion. Jordan oversees the creation and development of a clone of himself, Justin, who Ariane then sexually and physically abuses in a terrifying behaviorist process called "psychogenesis" conditioned through the novum of "tapestudy." Ariane perpetrates this ruthless crime partly in far-sighted bid to wrest control of Union away from the centralizing, terraforming authority of the Centrist party. The novel follows Ariane's assassination seemingly by Jordan and the coming of age of Ariane's own clone, also named Ariane Emory, who has been conditioned both environmentally and genetically to replicate the mind and body of the original Ariane. On a private level, Ariane irreparably damages and traumatizes who she endeavors to save and love; likewise, on a public level, her own relatively good-intentioned, even utopian fidelity to resist the concentration of capital in the hands of the existing state, corporate, and military elite resorts to forwarding a laissez-faire policy of expansionist neoliberal free trade that ironically, at least in the foreseeable short term, imposes a straightjacketing regime of what Henry Giroux refers to as the anti-democratic, quasi-fascist system of "terror" consequent to neoliberal ideology. Cherryh's novel remodels the American Revolution in space such that a counterfactual sense of doomed, insurgent tilting at the windmills of neoliberal fate cloaks the domination and asymmetrical status quo of a privileged corporate elite. Giroux describes the tragic irony of neoliberal authoritarianism concisely: "construing the public good as a private good and the needs of the corporate and private sector as only smart investments, neoliberal ideology produces, legitimates, and exacerbates the existence of persistent poverty, racial

apartheid in the inner cities, and growing inequalities between the rich and poor” (Giroux 54).

Likewise, in the initial exposition of *Cyteen*, Cherryh highlights that the novel takes place precisely when the paradigm shifts in her elaborate galaxies-spanning future history to macro-level experimentations with neoliberal economics and the destabilized system of diplomatic trade that ensues. The spacers — constituted by a relatively poor underclass of war refugees and diaspora opposed to governmental interference — become disaffected from Earth Company’s “convolute and wildly varying politics” once “[Earth,] subject to internal pressures from a faltering trade system, and in a desperate and ill-advised action imposed a punitive tariff which led to smuggling and an active black market” (Cherryh 3). In this meticulous world-building, Cherryh extrapolates on the contemporary status quo of neoliberal economic theory; and the heavy-handed, top-down, and brutalizing political-economic intervention of imposed tariffs seems to rely on a neoliberal, market-oriented view that the already-slumping trade of Earth should impose a profit-driven neo-imperial exploitation of the colonies and bottleneck the influx of goods (especially the technological manufacturing of rejuvenation drugs, genetically enhanced embryos, android workers, and foodstuffs) to and from the resource-rich colonies. Nevertheless, with Cherryh’s characteristic dark and complex twist on classic space-opera optimism, the macro-level botched design and re-engineering of the interstellar political economy fails spectacularly and this failure clearly echoes the micro-level miscarriage of design and re-engineering applied to the minds and bodies of the oppressed colonial underclass of spacers.

In the post-1970s slump and backlash of neoliberalism in our own world-system that Cherryh's intricate fiction parallels, labor movements, working-class institutions, and trade unions suffered a series of setbacks and concessions. (Cox 252) The shift in the political-economic balance of power worsened through high turnover and deskilling in the global South and deindustrialization, reduced wages, and lowered living conditions for increasingly vulnerable and divided industrial workers in the North. A key symbolic victory that characterized the decade in the United States was the PATCO strike, which President Reagan peremptorily broke through the mass-scale firing and replacement of 11,359 air traffic controllers. This media-fanned event effectively declared open season on many subsequent eruptions of union resistance to the hegemonic administration of transnational biopower in U.S. labor politics during the 1980s evidenced, for instance, in the Local P-9 of the Food and Commercial Workers' Union in Austin, in Watsonville against local frozen-food canners, or in the strikers against GM in Van Nuys. (Davis & Sprinkler 5-6) These localized, micropolitical protests resist the sovereign exercise of neoliberal biopower, the excessive disciplining and rationalization of the laboring human body reconfigured as a receptacle of an increasingly cheaper, more disposable labor commodity and at the mercy of rapid turn-over and accelerated demands in exchange for dropping wages.

The genetically engineered mass-production of clones, androids, and artificially grown children in *Cyteen* literalizes this uncanny biopower and attaches the control of social and cultural life to the scientific discourses and rational technologies that systemize the practice as cutting-edge bioscience. The mentally deficient Rho-class clones who

populate the lowest bioengineered caste on the planet illustrate the harvesting of the manual labor commodity for profit. According to the semi-experimental, or at least commercially unpalatable technique, of randomly splicing “tapestudy” into the narrative of *Cyteen*, the biological research facility at Reseune engineers and reprograms the “rho” and “theta” clones, unlike the genius-level Alpha-class “azi”, on a “commercial basis” for their “general labor”; moreover, Reseune denies this bottom caste of clones “rejuv” or longevity and anti-aging treatment given that the heavy “physical strain” placed on their bodies during their lives results in irremediable “skeletal damage” (Cherryh 30-31). Laura Chernaik argues that C.J. Cherryh’s Chanur Saga represents the means by which “transnationalism as a material practice produces species difference, race, gender, sexuality and class” (Chernaik 271) Developing this framework, this chapter targets C.J. Cherryh’s Union-Alliance novels as an outgrowth of their contemporary milieu impinged by the transnational dynamics of capital and labor. Contra Chernaik, however, while not minimizing the intersection of these myriad identity categories, this chapter views the mercantile federation of Union in terms of what the name literally suggests, namely, as allegorizing the struggle for labor-oriented solidarity and cohesiveness “worked over” (Cherryh 330) by draconian biopolitical regimes.

In a tapestudy fragment, Ariane Emory explains the rationale of the Expansionist party of the Union and its unlikely affiliation with the radical-fringe Abolitionists described as a “lunatic group [that] got up a proposal to outlaw azi and outlaw human experimentation” (Cherryh 22). Ari claims the exploitation of clones is “overall repugnant to [her] personally and to everything Reseune stands for” (Cherryh 187) — the

Research facility uses clones for “economic necessity” of “profit-making operations” (Cherryh 188) not in the interests of “eugenics” and genetic perfectibility but for the sake of the survival of an endangered “diaspora” (Cherryh 187). The heavy irony in this high-sounding mission statement, of course, is that Ari does not exclusively act in a fashion consistent with such worthy aims. In fact, the first half of the novel recounts the frightening ways that a sociopathic Ari exploits her power and terrorizes the clone in her custody, blackmailing and sexually abusing Justin Warwick in part because her troubled psychosexual history with the original of the replicate clone, Jordon Warrick, Justin’s “father” . N. Katherine Hayles argues that Ari represents a transgressive feminist supplanting of biological mothering or the naturalized and singular act of giving birth by the technocultural discourse of “generativity” and its technological forms of reproduction. For the first third of the book, Ari is not an essentialist Earth Mother but “arrogant, shrewd, formidably intelligent, indifferent to masculine pride, at the height of her power and enjoying every minute of it” (Hayles 167). As such, she might be considered coeval with Donna Haraway’s uncanny cyborg or the weaponized revenge fantasy of Joanna Russ’s Jael in *The Female Man*.

An unavoidable connotation of Ari’s traumatizing sexual abuse of Justin too is that not only are the feminine or the maternal unstable, complex categories, but also that neoliberal regimes of labor depend on a Foucaultian biopower that spreads its impacts the entirety of her future history. Prototypical of New Space Opera, it is precisely Cherryh’s contemporary resonance and dense complexity of both deep, unsympathetic characterization and intricate world-building that leads careful readers like John Clute to

admire the “control of the baroque high-wire multi-layered space opera” (Clute 91). The “governmentality” of constructing the citizen as repository of exploitable labor power entails the deployment of rational, techno-scientific discourses and research studies involving, for instance, birth and death rates, living standards, and life expectancy. (Foucault 218-219). In the neoliberal context, at its most extreme, the biopolitical information retrieval of the refugee or displaced body and the disciplining of this body according to the inhuman conditions of mutable sovereignty and citizenship attach the expendable human body to both brutalizing processes of technological reproduction and self-perpetuating mechanisms of biological reproductive labor. Just as in the colonial period, homemakers and mothers helped maintain empire through reproducing the settler population (Strobel 15), while at the same time brutally repressing maternal bodies especially in the slave and penal colonies (Whitlock), so in the postcolonial era, the reproductive labor of women is valorized and instrumentalized simultaneously.

Ari’s prime motive in spearheading genetic research at the Reseune Facility and supporting the expansionist party of the Union is species survival. The creation of Azis should be valued not for the “labor, but to open a colonial area, bringing it up to productivity, and produce offspring...to guarantee genetic variety” (Cherryh 188). The tapestudy Ari makes for her parental-replicate clone Ari II explains that she wishes to overcome her severely damaged psychological profile – putting it mildly, she admits “I have a certain sadistic bent I try to control” (Cherryh 471)— with her commitment to blurring “psychogenesis” and “sociogenesis” in the service of ensuring “human scattering” or “human diaspora” (Cherryh 472). In the short-term, this commitment

positions her adamantly against the Abolitionists despite her strong sympathies to the opposite given that the Union's Constitution enshrines sovereign self-determination as the paramount value, to an anarchic extreme except when "the local government does not have consent of the governed" or a hegemonic power attempts "to impose its will on a neighbor" (Cherryh 315). In its real-world context, this championing of human democratic individualism can easily collapse into rationalizations for neoliberal U.S. geopolitics. In 1980s foreign policy, the Reagan Doctrine updated this dubious democratic rhetoric such that John Quincy Adams's non-interventionist dictum that America "did not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy" was contravened by a cynically strategic Wilsonian idealism in Afghanistan, Iran, Nicaragua, Angola, and Ethiopia. (Kissinger 774).

In a 1989 Interview with *Interzone* magazine, Cherryh defends her artistic choice to populate her space operas with disturbed and complicit heroines by way of "political allegory." Cherryh contends that "[such unsympathetic protagonists are] sort of my commentary on modern politics...often in history, you can think you're on the side of angels but when you look at the amount of freedom it is affording individuals, you may be surprised" (Nicholls 38). The success of decolonizing and anti-colonial movements across Asia, Africa, and South America hinged as well on narratives of national liberation (Springhall 9) and mobilized power by constructing a Third-World class-based solidarity (Ahmad). In her interposed excerpt from a Union Civics tapestudy, Cherryh stresses that "new form of government" of her Union colonies depended on "independence from colonial policies of Earth Company" (Cherryh 315). Ari's grand design is to prevent the

mass replication of clones and the intergalactic expansion of the radically individualistic and neoliberal profit motive of Earth Company. Similarly, beginning with the debt crisis of 1982, the rigid policing of uneven development by the IMF and World Bank reconsolidated this shift from colonial into postcolonial and neo-colonial regimes and the pressing global need for struggles to contest and resist such transnational corporate hegemony.

In a October 1989 interview with *Locus*, Cherryh notes that one of her chief preoccupations in *Cyteen* was the impact of the burgeoning industry of biotechnology on the “living substance” of the individual and “what ethics were involved” (Cherryh 7). Patrick Monk notes that that biological difference and its manipulation with biotechnology characterizes Cherryh’s work as a whole and its consistent exploration of radical political-cultural alterity: “it is clear that biology is the key factor in Cherryh’s concept of interspecies dichotomies of otherness” (Monk 8). In a 1989 *Interzone* interview, Cherryh bridges her concern with the latest twin developments of “genetics” and “computers” by way of an appeal to global interconnectedness and the first photographic view of Earth from space afforded by space flight. Cherryh contends that this widely disseminated, extraterrestrial photograph reveals a planetarity that transcends the petty concerns of nation-states: “what you see is one beautiful, fragile, interlocked system.” (Nicholls 25) This newfound planetarity promotes, as Cherryh describes on her blog “A Wave Without a Shore”, a cosmopolitical counter-public sphere advocating a spirit of empathy and fellow feeling for the far away, especially as this impinges on the global economic gap between poor and rich countries such that, as Cherryh contends, “a

waitress in Kansas City is really worried over the plight of children in central Africa...and let me say, has a lot more accurate information about that situation than her great-grandmother would have had.

Displacing the transnational onto the intergalactic not for purely escapist or compensatory purposes but to enhance the affective power of the political allegory, *Cyteen* engages with neoliberal biopolitics as the means by which the drastic imbalances of the capitalist-driven international political economy shape social and cultural life. The sovereign authority of Earth Company dictates the non-citizen status of the marginalized and exploited clones in much the same way that Foucault argues the modern world administers human life and physical bodies through biotechnological and informational technoscience and self-enforced mechanisms of social control. Giorgio Agamben modifies Foucault to contend that current biopolitics operates in a global (in)human condition that exist in a “zone of irreducible indistinction” between included political citizens (*bios*) and the excluded refugee, migrant, or trafficked “bare life” (*zoe*). Adapting the Foucaultian classificatory scheme between the technoscientific, discursive knowledge regimes that govern populations and the disciplinary power or the social control that self-regulates states, schools, hospitals, and factories, we might follow theorists like Peng Cheah and Aihwa Ong and view neoliberalism as inextricably involved with the biopolitics that informs the management and harnessing of the living resources of the dehumanized non-citizen, especially at the crossroads of the free flow of global capital and the hegemonic interests of nation-states and transnational corporations. In a fictionalization of these ever-growing concerns, Jo Walton suggests that *Cyteen* draws on

its science-fictional roots of earlier Futurian-inspired space opera and thereby evades the dubious Cold War self-censorship with regards to representing socially planned economies as a viable alternative to a free-market ideology. Walton contends that “[*Cyteen*] is about mindbuilding and society-building, and it works in a way very like Asimov’s psychohistory, by manipulating people and trends.”

Neoliberal biopolitics reinforces and exacerbates the disposability and commodification of the non-citizen such that these mass-replicated clones are treated as colonial “expendables” (Cherryh 202) by the sovereign powers. The Union Secretary of Defense Lu describes the clones as such when admitting to his involvement in the clandestine project to land 40,000 Union azi-class clones on the hospitable Gehenna and thereby “remove it from profitability” (Cherryh 201). This invasion and reversion (or revolution) of the clones to the status of “primitives” forms the basis of the first Union-Alliance novel *Forty Thousand in Gehenna* (1983) and its subsequent cover-up to keep this information from being leaked to the Abolitionists and Centrists within the Union factors into the intricate realpolitik of *Cyteen*. Ultimately, the scandalous revelation of the Gehenna project galvanizes the electoral leverage of the Centrist party and calls into question the value of democratic representation for Union political scientists who view their draconian Earth-centered political institutions and bureaucracy as self-animating their own reach of disciplinary power at the mercy of the transnational vagaries of mobile techno-capital. These social theorists conclude that “the system encourages electorates to vote their own narrow interests above that of the nation at large” (Cherryh 317). Cherryh highlights the undecidable fungibility between a corrupt entrenched elite violating the

principles of democratic representation and established institutions supporting the hegemonic status quo of neoliberal biopower. The arbitrary administration of sovereign biopolitical authority couples the Reseune citizen, the legitimate humanity of *bios* or *homo sacer* in Union space, and the socially and genetically engineered clone or *zoe*. The tapestudy civics lesson advises with oversimplified lucidity, “corruption means elected official trading votes for their own advantage; democracy means a bloc of voters doing the same thing. The electorate know the difference” (Cherryh 317).

In an echo of 1950s CIA-funded MKULTRA experiments conducted by Dr. Ewen Cameron that influenced much then-classified military research into psychological warfare, Ari Emory exploits psycho-surgery, mind-wiping, and a barrage of psych-tests to regulate and reprogram Justin Warrick, and eventually following her anticipated murder, her clone Ari II. Like the invasive socio-economic planning of neoliberal policies, these mind-controlling, torturous tactics of “psychogenesis” are complexly coterminous with a grandiose scheme of social planning or “sociogenesis” via the negotiation, compromise, and media-dominated leadership of hegemonic biopolitical interests and agendas. The science-fictional novum of tapestudy adapts plausible far-future extrapolations on 1980s advances in informational and biotechnological technoscience for the purpose of such hegemonic training. Robert Cox argues that neo-Gramscian hegemony crucially informs US-led neoliberal capitalism through a transnational bloc swayed by an internationalized managerial class of cosmopolitan elite. For Cox, the postwar efflorescence of revolutionary anticolonial and decolonizing movements were all too soon replaced by a new neo-colonial world order in which Third-

World states “depend on its control over official unions to ensure the supply of trainable, docile, and cheap labor” (Cox 385). With terrifying precision, in Cherryh’s science fiction, Union scientists embed hegemonic ideological training into subliminal commands— or deep, complex microstructures in constant flux— to rebuild the minds of clones from the bottom up, transforming “psych-sets” and “gene-sets” out of ostensible blank slates: “when a mind drank in tapestudy, it incorporates it. Tape images faded and resident memory wove itself into the implant-structure and grew and grew in its own way.” (Cherryh 72).

Cherryh refashions the discursive terrain of anti-colonial interstellar revolution that energized earlier, less canny pulp-era space opera like Leigh Brackett’s Eric John Stark series. In the Union-Alliance novels, though, Cherryh makes it clear that dynamics of high-tech neoliberal capitalism ease the transition from direct, military-colonial rule to indirect, economic-postcolonial control. At first, the Earth Company imposes rigid social planning that resonates with the privatization and deregulation policies of structural adjustment programs mandated by the IMF and World Bank. Earth Company rationalizes its neo-missionary agendas in terms familiar to an audience steeped in the Reagan-era neoliberal rhetoric exacerbated by the early 1980s debt crisis: Earth Company institutes “a payback program, a tax of goods, which would make up recent losses. They argued to the stations of the Community of Man, the Moral Debt, the burden of gratitude” (Cherryh 11). Free merchanters resent this heavy-handed imposition and drive the Company Wars through which the Union achieves political independence from the Earth Company. Forming the background of *Cyteen*, the events depicted in the Hugo-winning *Downbelow*

Station (1981) narrate the Company Wars that occur just prior to the events of *Cyteen* whereby the discovery of a resource-rich Pell's World catalyzes revolution via a "disturbance in the directions of trade and supply" (Cherryh 10). Harvesting the luxuries of high-tech biostuffs fuel a market-oriented anarchic impulse that promises to liberate the free merchanters from dependency on Earth.

As *Cyteen* dramatizes, the Company War is not an emancipatory turning point so much as simply another moment in long historical continuum that signals an all-too-predictable shift in the economic and diplomatic balance of power. Tapestry dictates "the value of Earth's goods fell, and consequently it cost Earth more and more to obtain the one-time bounty of the colonies" (Cherryh 11). Hence the Machiavellian intrigue and the intense rhetorical games of boardrooms and senate chambers predetermine long in advance the outcome of the Company War more than any fire-fights or skirmishes of interstellar combat that dominate the hyperbolic action of pulp-era space opera like the work of E.E. "Doc" Smith and Edmond Hamilton. The Union turns out to exploit a rapidly exploding population of computer-based, biotechnologically enhanced clones in an ironic reversal that gives Earth Company the moral high ground against the consequent reprehensible dehumanization of these clones as well as the dubious expansionist impulse of Union fanatics. The revolutionary, anti-colonial stance of the Union becomes the comprador party line, complicit with the neo-colonizers: "generations whose way of life was stars, infinities, unlimited growth and the time which looked to forever" (Cherryh 14). At its most devastating, the Union victory in the Company War victimizes discarded bare life as so much racked-up collateral damage. Hovering in the

background of Union triumph are the quarantined refugees fleeing Russel and Mariner's Station to Pell Station who wait "sick with terror, as despair hung all about this last, forlorn gathering of refugees which refused to leave the desks on dockside: families and ports of families, who hunted relatives, who waited on word" (Cherryh 31).

As a testament to its tautness and virtuosity, *Cyteen* won the 1989 Hugo award chosen by fans of the World Science Fiction Society, beating out the much-vaunted cyberpunk competition of William Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive* and Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net*. Despite their radically divergent stylistics and cultural-political positioning, these novels that are often classified as "cyberpunk" in fact share many of the concerns of *Cyteen* but Sterling's mundane science-fictional thriller especially helps to ground and contextualize the major New Space Operas of the 1980s with a mimetic straightforwardness in a significant counterpoint to the grandiose, veiled political allegory that characterizes the burgeoning subgenre of New Space Opera, including Sterling's seminal *Schismatrix* that I would like to turn attention to now. In his manifesto introduction to *Mirrorshades*, Sterling put the nail in the coffin of "cyberpunk" literature as "the definitive product" of the "Eighties milieu", especially in its prototypical science-fictional registering of the technological shift from bulky rocketry and engineering to a micro-processed cybernetic technoculture "utterly intimate, under our skin, inside our minds" ; I suggest we take Sterling at his word and track the political allegory this foundational New Space Opera performs of another definitive product of the Eighties milieu: namely, the computerized neoliberal turn of global capitalism. This analysis also redounds to the short-lived cyberpunk movement in general given that, as Sterling claims

in the introduction to the 1996 Ace Books edition *Schismatrix Plus*, “these stories, and this novel, are the most ‘cyberpunk’ works I will ever write...in those halcyon days...[when] cyberpunk wasn’t hype or genre history: it had no name at all” (Sterling viii).

In *Islands of the Net*, Sterling places the naive American Laura Webster, CEO of the globalized corporation Rizome, in a politically unstable Grenada whose long-suffering inhabitants deeply resent the neoliberal interventions of her putatively benevolent transnational corporation. Defending the near-future New Millennium Movement policies that seek to protect and shelter the underdeveloped nation from predatory global flows, one aggrieved Grenadian complains to Laura: “Without Movement discipline...our money would flow back like water downhill... from the Third World periphery, down to the centers of the Net. Your ‘free market’ cheats us; it’s a Babylon slave market, in truth!” (Sterling 108). To ease her complacent conscience Laura quickly disarms this anti-neoliberal critique of the imprisoning net of informational globalization as tantamount to a warmongering and quasi-fascist blood libel: “Revolutions. New Orders. For Laura these had the cobwebby taste of twentieth-century thinking. Visionary mass movements were all over the 1900s, and whenever they broke through, blood followed in buckets” (Sterling 109). The New Millennium Movement’s conflation of Third-World resistance and global justice movements pitched against neoliberal hegemony with the comprador Free Army of Counter-Terrorism and collectivist Soviet-era ideology blunts the edges of Sterling’s otherwise incisive analysis. In a perceptive essay on the frequent failures of cyberpunk literature to dislodge a First-

World capitalist ideology it clearly loathed, Mark Bould cites *Islands of the Net* and *Holy Fire* (1996) as a “tacit acknowledgement of the need to address such lacunae, even if they are not entirely successful in doing so” (Bould 120). Sterling’s book of short-stories from this period, *Globalhead*, for instance, especially succumbs to cyberpunk posturing; the stories temper their otherwise blistering critiques by not only interrogating but also recycling neoliberal ideological stances bolstering anti-Soviet hysteria, Islamophobia, techno-determinism, and predatory capitalism.

Likewise, in *Holy Fire*, a dissident form mirrors progressive novelistic agenda but in the end again often reveals a telling tension in its complicity with the neoliberal status quo it endeavors to dismantle. Sterling builds a feverish, strange, late twenty-first-century world with slick cyberpunk stylishness, while at the same time deliberately showing the patchwork seams, aiming for a fragmentary disjointedness that flaunts its subcultural status as botched and schlocky sci-fi. Stylistically, the cyberpunk novel displays a radically compressed, image-crammed prose as much as heady streams of ideas in dense monologues and associative-speculative info-dumps that experimentally bloat, attenuate, distend, and flail about. Likewise, the novel’s thematic terrain targets the technology-driven neoliberal excesses of global capitalism as much as *Islands of the Net* or *Schismatrix*. Set sometime in the 2020s, the near-future world in the novel has undergone a series of devastatingly huge financial crises, revolutions, plagues, and mass die-offs. Miraculously, though, humanity emerges from these flames galvanized into prosperous societies governed by enlightened gerontocrats, a generation of centenarians kept alive, healthy, and sharp by innovations in advanced First-World health-care technology.

Poignantly extrapolating on what one journalist called the “privatization mania” (Klein 363) of Reaganomic, neoliberal policies that the 1980s initiated, health care and the denial of services to the disempowered bare life becomes an administrative instrument with which to exercise biopolitical control over an unruly populace. The protagonist Mia Ziemann strives to lead risk-free, essentially impeccable, lives out of an instinct of self-preservation. But in her 90s, Mia, a high-profile medical administrator—stable, successful, and flawlessly health-conscious—feels a gnawing lack. An unexpected windfall from a moribund, regret-wracked ex-lover and an experimental life-extension treatment, Neo-Telomeric Dissipative Cellular Detoxification, gives Mia that second chance to find personal happiness. Mia morphs into the runaway Maya, a rejuvenated twenty-year-old, borderline schizophrenic, consumed by a prime directive to self-actualize by way of an obsession with digital photography and an ill-advised traipse across Europe. Along the way, Mia is hunted by the biopolitical surveillance regimes of an informational geoculture embroiled in fractious class warfare.

Ultimately, it is *Schismatrix* that not only made Sterling the godfather of New Space Opera but fully explores the neoliberal complexity of our imminent posthuman future in its prescient exploration of information-age cosmopolitics and its decentering of balkanized markets and states into “hundreds of habitats, explosion of cultures” (Sterling 42). In its byzantine tapestry of our near-future post-human progeny the novel adopts myriad methods for radically transforming the human body through a Foucaultian biopower that subjugates and controls techno-subjects in a fashion that challenges sacrosanct humanist and neoliberal ideas about the autonomous, discrete identity of the

self-possessed individual. As Sterling condenses this complicated idea in the novel: “Mankind’s a dead issue now, cousin. There are no more souls. Only states of mind” (Sterling 59). In making the case that *Schismatrix* is both an essential novel in the New Space Opera canon and crucial expression of our neoliberal era, this chapter concludes by adding some specificity to Scott Bukatman’s insight in *Terminal Identity* that “there is, in Sterling’s writing, a profound acceptance of the human as a complex network of biological, political, technological, economic, and even aesthetic forces” (Bukatman 277).

The rollicking picaresque of Abélard Lindsay and his shifting set of allegiances between genetically engineered Shapers, the cyborgs of the Mechanist Cartel, the Preservationists of unmodified human culture— as well as the assorted Superbrights, Sundogs, Galacticists, Cataclysts, and so on— suggests a labyrinthine politicized allegory of an international culture in which “crimes don’t exist outside your ideology” (Sterling 84). In this neoliberal anarchy of a space-opera future, cosmopolitics afford individuals carte blanche to kill their putative enemies indiscriminately. Sterling’s focus on hyper-capitalist flows of financial manipulation in connection with the advanced computer networks of developed nations in the global North, examining the Shapers and Mechanists not as post-national but as transnational, deeply engaged with the collision of contemporary market-supremacist biopower and resistant or counterhegemonic cosmopolitics.

Beginning the novel as an artificially enhanced Mechanist before switching loyalties to the genetically altered Shapers, Abélard Lindsay secretly owes fidelity to a

techno-elite post-human Shaper clan, the Preservationists, who seamlessly reshape the DNA of the human species with its futuristic biotech while maintaining ethical-political ties to historical human culture. Betraying the “radical old aristos” of the Mechanists in a failed suicide pact on behalf of the “rebellious plebes”, Lindsay soon escapes to the Concatenation, circumlunar nation-state satellites splintering off Earth’s moon. Members of these lunar-colony stations brand themselves “Sundogs”, a renegade population of exiles and traitors officially outlawed by the elite Shapers and dominated by the collusion of affluent Geisha Banks and a transnational corporation termed, in this Japan-dominated future, Zaibatsu. In survivalist mode, Lindsay shifts allegiance back to the enemies of the Shapers, the equally ruthless but technologically retrograde Mechanist Cartels. These cyborgs, with affinities to the rocketry and engineering of a previous era, graft hardware appendages and extensions onto their reconfigured bodies, and privatize their labor and biopower into commoditized guilds with a lethally efficient cynicism that views bygone Preservationist humane virtues, such as cosmopolitical empathy and respect, as defunct and flawed relics. Manipulating the dematerializing vagaries of speculative techno-capital, Lindsay, with the help of the Mechanist Fyodor Ryumin, amasses a fictitious stock out of a shell corporation until his Kabuki Bubble achieves a “grotesque solidity” and bursts, his “glittering deceptions fly apart to leave him naked and exposed” (Sterling 46) And the Sundog is back on the run, cosmically cast adrift once again in a “a smeared and bogus Milky Way of wealth” (Sterling 58).

This space-opera escapade allegorizes the dynamic intersection of transnational corporations (Zaibatus), hegemonic nation-states (the Fortuna Miners Democracy), and,

though Lindsay's financial ruses in tentative league with the head of the Geisha Bankers, the mind-uploaded Shaper Kitsune, what William Tabb canvasses as the destabilizing of global economies in late twentieth-century economic meltdowns such as the 1980s debt crisis. Tabb contends that computer-enhanced financial deregulation, off-shore banking, and the fraudulent manipulation of overvalued stocks directly resulted from the unpegging of currency exchange rates to the US dollar first instituted by Bretton Woods. Tabb contends that widely instituted policies of financial liberalization served to bolster the apocalyptically risky and corrupt operations of speculative techno-capital that nonetheless rely on the normative ideological financial theories of the Washington Consensus to rationalize neoliberal globalization. Tabb avers that "with the demise [of Bretton Woods in 1973] the financial sector tail came to wag the real economy dog" (Tabb 223) such that eventually in the 1980s Reagan Treasury officials and the Securities Exchange Commission conspicuously refused to regulate the tax-avoidance, graft, and accounting irregularities in banking and stock-market practices despite the economic meltdown of stagflation.

Even though *Schismatrix* ostensibly takes place in the far future where Cold-War rivalries are a thing of the ancient past, the Mechanist and Shaper conflict clearly reflects the ideological antagonism of the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union, as well as the non-aligned Third World countries of the global South regularly maneuvered as dominoes by the competing superpowers. Hence Lindsay defects to the Soviet-identified Mechanist Guild of the Fortuna Miners Democracy on the spacecraft *The Red Consensus* that demonizes the Zaibatsu lunar colony he flees from as lacking the

communist-inspired institutions of their utopian nation-state republic; Lindsay endears himself to the red-tape bureaucrats of this Soviet legacy by disowning the imperatives of transnational corporations: “They’re fascists. I prefer to serve democratic government” (Sterling 49). At the same time, the ideologically well-trained Lindsay confides to his fellow Shaper and newfound lover Nora Mavrides that the neo-Soviet scavengers are utterly despicable to him, “scum, pirates, mauraders. Failures. Victims, Nora” (Sterling 74). Moreover, both post-human superpowers, the Shapers and the Mechanists, are the neoliberal vestiges of unchecked nuclear proliferation based on the game theory of mutual assured destruction. As in our own time, this technological menace of nuclear weapons still persists in the future of *Schismatrix*, “a relic of a lunatic era when men first pried open the Pandora crypt of physics. An age when cosmic explosives had spread across the surface of Earth like bleeding scabs across the brain of a parietic” (Sterling 65).

Lindsay’s Shaper “neural programming” (Sterling 65) will not let his arm pull the trigger to activate Armageddon Machine and open fire on a mining asteroid base full of out-cast Shapers. Instead, through a series of “minor concession and agreement” (Sterling 76), Lindsay and Nora initiate a frail *détente* of arms control between the Mechanist guild and the small band of Shapers that threatens to collapse when a Shaper murders a Mechanist (Sterling 80), but then spreads to the galaxy at large when Lindsay encounters the Alien Investors and strikes it rich yet again serving as their liaison. The alien investors usher in an uneasy peace between the Shapers and the Mechanists but at the same time buy up all the human enterprises and resources and sell impractical goods and services for exorbitant prices that superficially have the potential to “transform a

flagging industry into a rocketing growth stock” (Sterling 109). This is the closest the galaxy gets to a utopian global village: “people began to speak, for the first time, of the Schismatrix — of a posthuman solar system, diverse yet unified, where tolerance would rule and every faction would have a share” (Sterling 109).

Sterling makes clear the implicit allegory at work in this section of the novel; the unequal trade between the alien Investors and the Shismatrix of the post-humans mirrors the invasive operations of transnational corporations and punitive structural adjustment programs (as well as frequent military interventions and shadow-state puppeteering) imposed on underdeveloped Third-World nations. The narrative explains the state of global imbalance in stark terms strikingly reminiscent of the dependency theory of global relations: “human wealth poured into the alien coffers” (Sterling 109). A shaper named Wells complains that this momentary stabilization period where the Investors played on the humans for profit is short-lived as the aliens soon begin abetting warmongers and encouraging bidding wars among increasingly embattled clades. As guilty of fraud as the neo-imperialist alien investors, Lindsay self-consciously becomes a public-relations flack for them out of a spirit of self-preservation. Despite his reservations, Lindsay knows well enough that the *détente* will not last and that “the Investors were profiteers” (Sterling 123) consumed not by altruistic aims but merely with “cast-iron gall and a magpie’s lust for shiny loot” (124).

Although the post-human future foresees the imminent obliteration of nation-states (Sterling 170), vestigial nations such as the Nephrene Black Medicals in the circumlunar *Zaibatus* persist as vectors of transnational corporation allegorized as post-

human clades that channel “torrent of riches” into “a vertigo of acceleration” and “mind-blasting vistas” (Sterling 195). This escape hatch of blaming the soon-to-be-superseded tyrannies of national sovereignty allows Sterling to retain a modicum of the exuberant optimism that characterized traditional space opera such that the novel can end with an aged dying and newly disembodied Lindsay hitching a ride with the Alien Investors to destination unknown. A God-like Presence exclaims to Lindsay: “I’ll wait out the heat-death of the Universe to see what happens next!” (Sterling 236). Yet this techno-utopian disruption cannot escape the event horizon of the precedent set by the sinister Investors and the post-national fantasy cannot be conceived as anything but oblivion.

The two formative New Space Operas have become highly influential source texts for scores of New Space Opera writers even to this day. The eventual full blossoming of the subgenre was therefore imprinted with a neoliberal signature given that C.J. Cherryh hesitates over endorsing the messianic post-colonial and anti-imperial presumptions of traditional space opera in light of corrosive neoliberal interests, networks, and players. And Bruce Sterling challenges the rampant inflation of stock manipulation in collusion with informational and financial technologies increasingly subject to risky speculative or fraudulent overexposure. Despite the sense of inevitability with which space opera can endow policy initiatives, the transformations of the 1980s forged an adversarial cosmopolitical attitude among vanguard science-fiction writers that resisted what Foucault during the same period theorized as the rationalization of neoliberal biopolitics as a historically contingent and by no means neutral or irrevocable discursive formation.

^{vii} In a blog post circa 2012, Harrison limns his longstanding, self-deprecatory opinion that the novel that he once described as “the crappiest thing I ever wrote...that tootles along under the rubric ‘Masterwork’.” Nonetheless, Harrison explains that with *The Centauri Device* he “tried to out space opera as a kind of counterfeit pulp” in which “pulp’s lust for life was replaced” and domesticated by a neo-colonialist “lebensraum and a cadetship in the Space Police (these days it’s primarily low-bourgeois freedom motifs and nice friendly sexual release).”

Chapter 3

“Moments in the Fall”: Neoliberal Globalism and Utopian Socialist Desire in Ken MacLeod’s Fall Revolution Quartet and Iain M. Banks’s Culture Series

Banks and MacLeod are also pivotal figures in what is called the New Space Opera, a movement characterized by its sophisticated reharnessing of conventional pulp-era trappings: faster-than-light starships, future wars, byzantine diplomacy, doomsday weapons, and dramatic encounters with alien planets and species. Prior to the emergence of the New Space Opera, this subgenre had long been in disrepute within the field not only for its aesthetic failings but also for its ideological tendencies: its quasi-fascistic fascination with supermen and super weapons, its abiding racism and sexism, and its juvenile wish-fulfillment fantasy. In the postwar period, writers such as Alfred Bester and Samuel R. Delany would occasionally produce space operas that conveyed a decadent energy and retro pleasure, but it was not until the late 1980s and especially the 1990s that coordinated attempts were made—in the work not only of Banks and MacLeod but also of Paul J. McAuley, M. John Harrison, Alastair Reynolds, and Gwyneth Jones, among others—to systematically rehabilitate the ideological presumptions of space opera.

In the Fall Revolution series, Ken MacLeod imagines that a newfound global federation couched in the spirit of volunteerism could rise from the ashes of the embattled enclaves and distracted mini-states that plague a near-future global crisis of capitalism. In the first book of the series, *The Star Fraction* (1995), a combatant rallies for the slow building of an anarcho-socialist utopia⁸, a freely willed unity in diversity that eclipses the dystopian collapse: “see, what we always meant by socialism wasn’t something forced on

people, it was people organizing themselves as they pleased into co-ops, collectives, communes, unions” (314). And so the Fall Revolution depicted in *The Star Fraction* inspires worldwide protests, strikes, and riots that express a socialist globalism promoted in a famous 1960s-era environmentalist slogan prominently cited by MacLeod: “there’s some kind of upsurge coming down the line ... we may find a lot of separate campaigns *thinking globally and acting locally* in the next few days” (248; emphases in original). Far from escapist or vacuous, in these novels MacLeod’s political science fiction emanates from a historical context that has both local and global dimensions.

In the Culture series Iain M. Banks is likewise politically engaged and refrains from charting that extrapolative line from the contemporary world-system to his own dazzling anarcho-socialist future; yet, like MacLeod, Banks certainly does not foreclose such science-fictional, utopian desire either. In the titular novella of *The State of the Art* (1991), the Culture, a far-future anarcho-socialist utopia, discovers Earth, circa 1978, and two incognito Culture agents, Dziet Sma and Linter, study the planet to see if its inhabitants should be welcomed into the galactic utopian fold. Ultimately determined to be too primitive for official first contact, Earth fails to be inducted on several counts and the novella catalogs a blistering critique of “the plotting militaries, the commercial frauds, the smooth corporate and governmental lies” (130) by a deeply disgusted narrator, Dziet Sma, even though her partner, Linter, becomes irrationally infatuated by Earth’s suffering-induced joie de vivre and contagious groupthink. Disillusioned by East Berlin, Dziet Sma concludes that Earth’s problems are largely politically and economically derived given that the only alternative to unregulated capitalism is deeply impoverished

and oppressive as well: “was this farce, this gloomy sideshow trying to mimic the West – and not even doing that very well – the best job the locals could make of socialism?” (Banks 109). To the enlightened, rationalist Dzierżko’s chagrin and horror, Linter converts to Catholicism before finally succumbing to Earth’s manifold dystopian dangers in a fatal mugging in New York City. Mourning the loss of her intimate friend, Dzierżko despairs over the entrenched forces that pre-empt any progressive change to a seemingly congenitally unequal and unjust world-system: “What they could do if they just got their planetary act together but what was the point” (130).

This commitment to anarcho-socialist utopia is, of course, no mere coincidental eccentricity nurtured by two likeminded friends who happen to be major science-fiction writers. We might easily add MacLeod’s oeuvre to David Pattie’s contextualizing of Banks’s work in the Scottish literary revival and the sea change in Scottish literary culture that occurred as a result of the devastating failure of the Referendum bill in 1979. The failure of this home-rule legislation meant for many Scottish citizens a state of governance tantamount to abject recolonization in that the Tory party now held sway over a predominately working-class country. Prominent cultural figure Tom Nairn echoes this Scottish socialist-nationalist sentiment when he claims that Margaret Thatcher’s legendary sound-bite phrase “There Is No Alternative” (TINA) “became the formative slogan of an emergent world order, that of first-stage globalization. Marx’s ‘sorcerer’ of modernity, capitalist free-market mania, lives like a carrion-crow off the resultant symbiosis” (Nairn 27). Likewise, Scottish journalist and political activist Neal Ascherson voices the deep-seated belief that a cultural-literary sense of Scottish nationality

transcends short-term, state-centered political maneuvering: “class loyalty is far stronger than feelings about self-government” (Ascherson 109). The long-sought devolution of powers to the Scottish parliament in 1997-99 pushed as concession by Tony Blair’s New Labour party and the impending Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014 has reinvigorated a sense of Scottish nationality that advocates rebellion against a class-based feeling of subordinated status as an unrepresented and exploited constituency of the United Kingdom. Banks and MacLeod fit especially well into Andrew M. Butler’s verdict in “Thirteen Ways of Looking at the British Boom”: “While some British sf writers may have been carried along by the publicity of Cool Britannia, and, with some exceptions, the default position of contemporary British sf writers is on the left, it is difficult to think of a British sf writer sympathetic to the Blairite cause” (Butler 375).

In interviews, Banks described this renovation of the subgenre in starkly political terms, dedicating his Culture series of novels to take “the moral high ground in space opera, and [...] reclaim it for the Left!” (Rundle, *SciFiNow* Interview). Although the politics of American space operas are often only faintly suggested in the texts themselves, Banks thereby distinguished his brand of New Space Opera from the still popular, traditional, and primarily American strain of the subgenre best typified perhaps by the four books of Dan Simmons’s *Hyperion Cantos* (1989-1997) that update what Banks recognized as the implicit conservative undercurrent of space opera – the political bent of the subgenre passed down from the likes of Robert Heinlein through Poul Anderson and Jerry Pournelle to Dan Simmons, David Brin, and Vernor Vinge — for a world-weary, cyberpunk-influenced 90s audience. The Hugo-winning *Hyperion* recounts the

Chaucerian pilgrimage to a mysterious planet by far-future citizens of the Hegemony, an interstellar, capitalist-driven democracy whose parallels with and derivation from contemporary United States history are conspicuous. To the hyper-developed, militant Hegemony, the sinister artificial intelligence of “the Technocore” is as subversive and dissident as “the Separatists” dismissed by a protagonist as “yahoos” and “groundlings” who grievously interfere with each particular “world’s trade potential” (Simmons 444). More recently, in a notorious blog post, “The Message from the Time Traveller”, whose premise was later rewritten into the thriller *Flashback* (2011), Dan Simmons encounters a time traveller from the dystopian future dominated by an Islamic Caliphate, “Eurabia”, who urges the author to wake up and enlist all American citizens to abandon their allegiance to the Democratic Party and join in the Republican fight in “a war for nothing less than hegemony over the entire known world” (Simmons, “Message From a Time Traveller”).

Similarly, in Vernor Vinge’s Hugo-winning *A Fire Upon the Deep*, terror erupts over informational black holes de-linked from global flows. The novel depicts such a menace in a fashion Ken MacLeod in an editorial for the August 2003 *Locus Magazine* special issue on New Space Opera has called “anarcho-libertarian” (MacLeod 41), positioned against both collectivist-socialist state-dominated political economies and the monopolizing domination of market-sanctioned transnational corporations. In *Fire Upon the Deep*, Vinge patents the out-of-control artificial intelligence of the novel, the Blight, as the definitive post-Singularity political threat to individual liberty: a product of such a vertiginously self-amplifying acceleration of technological change — extrapolated from

Moore's Law and the shrinking in size of microelectronics by half every ten years — that contemporary models for understanding and shaping technocultural innovation fail to cohere. Less skeptical of market-driven progress than Vinge, David Brin's Uplift Series of six novels was another powerful, though collegial conservative competitor to Banks and MacLeod's leftwing projects during the 90s. While the commercially successful Uplift Series wisely refrains from dogmatic proselytizing, the novels are not as conflicted as Banks or MacLeod about xenophobically appealing to alien menaces, or unabashedly celebrating interventionism and neoliberal development campaigns in a manner that leftwing New Space Opera often deliberately disrupts. Brin extrapolates on the eugenic uplifting of the client species of monkey and dolphins by a patron humanity in a fashion that enshrines such a master/slave relationship as a benevolent hierarchy, and counters revolt against such manipulation as irresponsible and imprudent.

In addition to echoing classic pulp aesthetics—outsized scale and frenetic action, cosmic magnitudes and adrenaline-fueled rush—New Space Opera conveys its fierce political stances through impressive exhibitions of literary-aesthetic virtuosity. New Space Opera intricately constructs psychologically complex, unsympathetic protagonists, sophisticated economic and political analyses, information overload appropriate to a world saturated by digital and electronic technologies, more or less believable technoscience, the display of virtuosic literary techniques, and an obsession with interstellar culture clash (See Wolfe and Letson 40). Both Banks and MacLeod in particular project onto their big, sprawling galactic canvases a radical leftwing politics extrapolated from living in a postcolonial, globalized Scotland. Banks, for example, has

been outspoken in his support for Scottish Independence, seeing Thatcherism as the moment when “a lot of Scots beg[a]n to realize that we were, after all, meaningfully different en masse from the English; more communitarian, less convinced of the primacy of competition over co-operation” (“Scotland and England”). Banks has heralded the longstanding political successes of the Scottish National Party, with their myriad platforms defending a broadly conceived safety net of social funding, services, and programs (labor rights, standardized living conditions and wages, unemployment compensation, educational loans and grants, federal aid for old-age benefits, and healthcare). For his part, MacLeod claims a hedged affiliation with the socialist globalism of contemporary Scottish Trotskyists who, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, have propulsively fueled mainstream liberal positions such as those adopted by the SNP. Moreover, MacLeod’s Trotskyist solidarity with independence movements from the global South negotiates Scotland’s status as both a postcolonial and a settler nation within the modern world-system, since it helped to maintain the British Empire before identifying with global subaltern struggles against a hegemonic colonizer nation (Ashcroft et al. 31).

David Pattie contextualizes Banks’s work in the Scottish literary revival and the sea change in Scottish literary culture that occurred as a result of the devastating failure of the Referendum bill in 1979. The failure of this home-rule legislation meant for many Scottish citizens a state of governance tantamount to abject re-colonization in that a Tory party now held sway over what many felt, rightly or wrongly, was a predominately socialist country. Prominent cultural figure Tom Nairn echoes this Scottish socialist-

nationalist sentiment when he claims that Margaret Thatcher's legendary sound-bite phrase "There Is No Alternative" (TINA) "became the formative slogan of an emergent world order, that of first-stage globalization. Marx's 'sorcerer' of modernity, capitalist free-market mania, lives like a carrion-crow off the resultant symbiosis" (Nairn 27). The long-sought devolution of powers to the Scottish parliament in 1997-99 pushed as concession by Tony Blair's New Labour party, and the impending Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014, has reinvigorated a sense of Scottish nationalism that advocates rebellion against the subordinated status as an unrepresented and exploited constituency of the United Kingdom.

Banks and MacLeod have remained consistent in their open criticism of various aspects of New Labour politics, especially in the crucial intersection of the British dominion over Scottish home rule. Although MacLeod's Scottish loyalties are tempered by his Trotskyist and radical anarcho-libertarian principles, he sympathizes but ultimately refuses to subscribe to Scottish independence as a practical politics. On his blog, *The Early Days of a Better Nation*, MacLeod expresses anxiety over a Scottish-run government: "Most of the parties at Holyrood are in favour of a nanny-state smoking ban, restrictions on sectarian parades (restrictions whose inevitable consequence, civil liberties aside, would be to exacerbate sectarianism), and making it a crime to carry a penknife" (MacLeod, "Independence"). After Banks's untimely death, on his blog MacLeod also documents Banks's longstanding support of Scottish independence as complex but firmly set against New Labour dominion: "after the party mutated into New Labour, he switched his practical vote to the Scottish National Party and his protest vote

to the Scottish Socialists and (I think) the Greens. Even before then, in the early to mid-1990s, he'd come around to the view that Scotland would never be safe from the ravages of Tory governments it hadn't voted for unless it separated from England" (MacLeod, *The Early Days of a Better Nation*, "Use of Calculators"). Ostensibly a piece of creative non-fiction about a whiskey-tasting tour around Scottish distilleries, Iain Banks's *Raw Deal* likewise documents the author's outrage over the invasion of Iraq that led Banks and his wife to burn their U.K. passports in protest against hubristic globe-spanning ventures. Peppering the book with tangential lambasting of George W. Bush as a "grotesquely under-qualified-for-practically anything daddy's boy" (Banks 94), "Dubya the Usurper and the grotesque squad of Cold War throwbacks" (Banks 314) and "a cross-eyed cretin backed by a gang of drooling, mean-spirited, proto-fascist shitheads" (Banks 57), Banks in *Raw Spirit* endeavors to voice vituperative dissent over Anglo-American media collusion with the War on Terror that "help make this year's invasion look less like the exercise in naked imperialism that it in fact is" (Banks 314).

This chapter argues that two signal series of New Space Opera — Banks's Culture series and MacLeod's Fall Revolution Quartet — allegorize left-wing struggles against neoliberal consensus. Neoliberal policies and ideologies that are, in Manfred Steger's term, globalist in their scope and dimension seek to drastically cut back, deregulate, and privatize the social-welfare programs defended by Banks and the SNP under the auspices of promoting economic growth and development that will putatively benefit all.⁹ A key symbolic moment in the consolidation of neoliberal globalism in Europe was when Margaret Thatcher instigated a miners' strike in 1984, in Scotland and

the rest of the U.K., by announcing the closures of a number of coal pits; through a police-enforced strikebreaking crackdown on trade unions, the British Conservative Party achieved a victory over the labor movement that cascaded into the privatization of the steel industry, shipbuilding, and automobile industries (Harvey 59). Banks and MacLeod's work dramatizes a break with this sort of neoliberal regime, whose intransigence is offset only by its volatility.

Both writers invest in a global vision of a socialist utopia, described succinctly in "A Few Notes on the Culture," an essay MacLeod posted to the newsgroup rec.arts.sf in August 1994 on behalf of Banks and later reprinted in editions of *The State of the Art* (1991). The document briefly summarizes the hyper-advanced far-future utopian civilization that hovers in the background of Banks's Culture series, which currently numbers ten lengthy, popular novels. Benevolent artificial Intelligences (AIs) called Minds manage Banks's Culture: with these denaturalized machines, Banks anticipates Bruce Robbins's call for a revolutionary international cultural politics that refuses to ignore the inequalities of the world-system, capitalizing on advances in electronic and digital systems as a means to gradually overcome the imperial divide (Robbins 21). Robbins's worldly culturalism, like Banks's fictive Culture, promotes an aesthetic and literary front of advocacy and activism on a global (galactic) scale in response to the depredations and distress of the neoliberal consensus (Robbins 134). Cosmopolitical culture, in effect, reiterates contemporary advocacy for a globalism of human rights and redistributive justice, which Banks reimagines as a far-future anarcho-socialist utopia.

Banks traces the origins of Culture to a crisis of capital in which the market logic of capitalist economies, with their drive to continually expand and maximize surplus value, reached the limits of its profitability. This neoliberal collapse, as discussed below, derives in part from the rampant and relentless campaign of globe-spanning corporations to sweep over and destabilize the internal economies of independent, sovereign nations. Well aware of this process in part due to the economic and social hardships of recent Scottish history, Banks and MacLeod show that the upheavals of the capitalist world-system collide with the limits of its sustainable efficiency. Such structures of global capitalism enable and produce the corresponding exacerbation of human misery on a global scale. In “A Few Notes,” Banks writes that “the market, for all its (profoundly inelegant) complexities, remains a crude and essentially blind system, and is—without the sort of drastic amendments liable to cripple the economic efficacy which is its greatest claimed asset—intrinsically incapable of distinguishing between simple non-use of matter resulting from processal superfluity and the acute, prolonged and wide-spread suffering of conscious beings.” Banks and MacLeod thus use their version of New Space Opera as a retrofitted vehicle to represent the opportunities and pitfalls of globalization. In the process, they reveal that this genre movement is fundamentally hardwired to imagine radically estranged futures and alternative worlds beyond capitalism.¹⁰

In “A Few Notes on the Culture,” Banks imagines that faster-than-light explorations of deep space have led to the proliferation of competing enclaves and mini-states free from authoritarian oversight: “on a planet, enclaves can be surrounded, besieged, attacked; the superior forces of a state or corporation—hereafter referred to as

hegemonies—will tend to prevail. In space, a break-away movement will be far more difficult to control, especially if significant parts of it are based on ships or mobile habitats.” This appeal to border crossing and the transnational obliteration of sovereign boundaries breeding a kind of utopian social anarchy counteracts the intrusions of both the market and the state, radically empowering individuals and communities. Such anarchy, for Banks, cements the development of utopian, post-capitalist economies: “essentially, the contention is that our currently dominant power systems cannot long survive in space; beyond a certain technological level a degree of anarchy is arguably inevitable and anyway preferable.” The focus for both Banks and MacLeod is on depicting embattled rivalries that allegorically restage the unsustainable crisis of the modern capitalist world-system. The upheavals of this world-system lead them to imagine the overthrow and overhaul of a fundamentally unjust and unequal regime. The emancipatory utopia that replaces neoliberalism arrives at a delicate balance where anarchic liberation coexists with but does not cancel out the technologically sophisticated renovations of a welfare-oriented socialist utopia.

A side-by-side analysis of Banks and MacLeod offer illuminating points of divergence and contrast within the larger framework of their overlapping resemblances and continuity. Despite parts of the Culture series technically taking place a long time ago in galaxies far, far away — a epilogue note establishes the events of *Consider Phlebas* to happen in our late medieval period — Banks explores an estranged, far-future setting. MacLeod, on the other hand, extrapolates a Heinleinian future history in a near future of impending neoliberal collapse to the point that *The Sky Road* never even

effectively leaves Earth. Correspondingly, MacLeod documents a series of chaotic upheavals and revolts staged from within a rapidly fragmenting global space, whereas Banks probes threats and challenges to utopian perfection launched from outside the bailiwick of the Culture. Banks mines the tantalizing complexities of ideological opposition to progressive social change; MacLeod plays with the compromises and dialectics of anarcho-socialist desire that collapse hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses into a dynamic solidarity. Beyond their comparable sophisticated literary strategies and devices — the ironically distanced narratives, the questionable protagonists, the multiple time streams, the mundane description brimming with both uneventful and suspense-driven detail, the ingeniously witty texture of their prose — both writers are ultimately likeminded, fiercely engaged with contemporary global capitalism in an era dominated by technological rupture.

The Free Fall of Neoliberal Consensus

Recently, there has been an upsurge of scholarship at the intersection of postcolonial theory and science fiction, but critics have yet to fully explore the way contemporary science fiction registers the role of specific neoliberal and global dynamics.¹¹ For example, Banks and MacLeod's work responds directly to the explosive expansion of Transnational Corporations (TNCs) in the latter half of the twentieth century. This growth of TNCs constitutes one of the chief economic engines of globalization. TNC sales currently outstrip the Gross Domestic Products of most countries, and their numbers surged from 7,000 in 1970 to 78,000 in 2006 (Gilpin 20). Such numbers point to the hegemony of what Steger calls "market fundamentalism"

(160), a regime John Williamson has analyzed as the “Washington Consensus” underpinned by the policies of the U.S. Treasury, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and the World Bank (see Steger 77).

Their widely adopted policy goals, initiated as far back as the Bretton Woods Conference of July 1944, involve eliminating foreign debt owed to TNCs. Specifically, these neoliberal economic policies involve such draconian measures as enforced domestic budget cuts, tax increases, deregulation of interest rates, reduced exchange rates, privatization of state programs, and openness to foreign direct investment. The overarching neoliberal regime was originally designed to service the loans of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that proved punitive and crippling for many underdeveloped countries. The SAPs led Joseph Stiglitz, the chief economist and senior vice president for the World Bank from 1997 to 2000, to label the Washington Consensus tantamount to a neo-imperialist status quo of “new missionary institutions” (14), undergirded by the capitalist logic of “market supremacy” (12), and contributing to the global situation in which those victimized by the system justly complain that “the Western countries have pushed poor countries to eliminate trade barriers, but kept up their own barriers, preventing developing countries from exporting their agricultural products and depriving them of desperately needed export income” (6).

David Harvey faults Stiglitz for viewing neoliberalism as merely an “erroneous theory gone wild” (152) while at the same time documenting the means by which neoliberal policy has determined U.S. and British foreign relations in economic crises in Iraq, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, and Southeast Asia. Harvey also tracks the neoliberalism

guiding Deng Xiaoping in China whose market reforms, as Aihwa Ong also shows, wore away the livelihood of impoverished rural farmers and the communal ownership of the State Owned Enterprise Township and Village Enterprises. Neoliberalization, according to Harvey, then, is a global phenomenon that involves not simply a fiscal and monetary theory, but the consolidation of the historical patterns of class domination through flexible and decentered labor markets, products, and processes. This restoration of worldwide class domination ensures support for undemocratic government, the weakening of trade unions and working-class institutions, and the promotion of corporate oligopolies and risky speculative capital in volatile financial markets. (Harvey 138)

In effect, the Washington Consensus, if not the decentralized structures of the TNCs themselves, promotes a top-down, one-to-many model of cultural interaction over the entire globe, preventing trade unions from organizing for rights or governments from protecting civil liberties. Moreover, Harvey argues that the neoliberal turn in contemporary global political economy has produced a neoliberalization of the global marketplace, especially with regard to the rise of the Internet. Information-technology industries undergird neoliberalization through their “capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyze, and use massive databases to guide decisions” (Harvey 3). The crucial function of the recent developments of the information-technology industries in making possible this neoliberalization is key to understanding the science-fictional treatment of the breakdown of the neoliberal consensus in Banks and MacLeod.

Manuel Castells adds some specificity to the information-technology revolution that Harvey sees as constitutive of the neoliberal turn. According to Castells, the

“Information Age” developed in response to the post-1969 recession and the reorganizing of capitalist modes of development as first-world societies began producing information processing or knowledge-generating services instead of material goods through industrial manufacturing. This restructuring has led to a trend in which capital has become characterized by the increase of “fleximers” or information-based managers in charge of flexible and geographically mobile tasks and projects in response to dynamic markets (278). At the same time, unemployment has steadily climbed as the core labor force has become increasingly expendable and vulnerable to reduced wages, worsened living and working conditions, automation, off-shoring, sub-contracting, or firing (272).¹²

The global recession that resulted from the OPEC oil embargos of the 1970s ushered in the profound economic backlash of renewed neoliberal market globalism. Sankaran Krishna documents how the petrodollars generated by the embargo, filtered through Eurodollars financed off-shore, were spent on foreign loans to underdeveloped Third-World nations in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, just as New Space Opera began to flourish, the Washington Consensus and its cost-cutting, welfare-shredding demand for return on these risky investments exacerbated global inequality, worsened economies in sub-Saharan Africa, augmented the debt crisis afflicting Latin America, and provoked the East Asian crisis (Krishna 45). It is no mere coincidence that in the 1990s per-capita Gross Domestic Products in debtor nations in Latin American and Africa decreased while U.S., British, and German foreign policy enshrined the virtues of private enterprise abroad. As Sankaran Krishna contends, “if earlier centuries of free trade were imposed on third world countries via gunboat diplomacy, today it is done through

ostensibly neutral international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank” (49). As a result of neoliberal policies, over a hundred million asylum seekers, war refugees, and undocumented and temporary workers have fled crime, turmoil, famine, and corruption in search of life opportunities (Brah 178).

Aihwa Ong charts the neoliberal turn in contemporary biopolitics and the ways in which sovereignty or the “soft” technology that governs citizens in contemporary states is decidedly double-edged, covering neoliberal reforms within state-controlled economies and state-driven policies within market-oriented economies. Ong refers to these forms of biopolitics, respectively, as “neoliberalism as exception” and “exceptions to neoliberalism” (4). Both liberal-democratic exceptions to neoliberalism and socialist-authoritarian neoliberalism as exception could either optimize efficiency and provide a “safety net” of welfare benefits or they could exclude non-citizens from the protections of state sovereignty, depending on the particular case at hand. Countering Harvey’s emphasis on increasing immiseration, Ong contends that these marginalized migrants and refugees have been enormously aided by the interventions of entrepreneurs in developing nations, including upwardly mobile Malaysian women careerists, special market zones in China, as well as, crucially, “a diversity of multilateral systems—multinational companies, religious organizations, UN agencies, and other Non-Governmental Organizations” (Ong 24).

Moreover, Ong devotes much attention to the mutations of neoliberalism as exception even within the sovereignty of a so-called authoritarian-socialist state. Beginning in the 1980s, for example, Ong details how China revamped notions of

citizenship and sovereignty to accommodate the opening up of coastal cities (Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen, Shantao, Hainin) to foreign direct investment and export-oriented market forces (104). The market-oriented reforms of this developmental state led to economic growth and security of social relation, especially for upwardly mobile Chinese citizens. (Despite first-world perceptions of the ills of authoritarian social planning, this form of strategic capitalist intervention in the special zones of the economy was ironically pioneered by a de-Stalinized Soviet Union.) Yet at the same time, in China's Special Market Zones, neoliberalism as exception has exposed zone workers, most of whom are rural women, to reduced wages, harsh working conditions, and restrictions on educational opportunities and residential rights (Ong 106).

In "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", Fredric Jameson controversially defines Third-World literature by its apparent function as national allegory and adamant refusal to participate in the "radical split between the private and public" (Jameson 69) characteristic of the West. Aijaz Ahmad's fiery "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" famously took this definition to task for its ethnocentric blindness to the manifold multiplicity of non-Western literatures, but, as Imre Szeman contends, this understandable critique should be historicized as a quasi-deconstructive response to broader trends in Marxist postcolonial studies, and itself neglects the extent to which Jameson's original formulation of difference between First and Third World political economies is "broad and conceptual and should not be seen as rendering homogenous what are two extraordinarily heterogenous categories" (Szeman 807) In other words, anticipating the salient attributes

Jameson would repeatedly assign to science-fiction, cosmopolitical national allegory should be viewed as a supple, fragmentary assemblage that manifests or forecloses a broadly utopian desire, a deliberately non-appropriative, spectral haunting that permeates a rich profusion of divergent texts. This idea of an incipient phantom counter-public is what Pheng Cheah uses to describe inchoate and compromised decolonizing narratives of national liberation such as what MacLeod and Banks perform for Scotland, found in the subtle and shifting allegories of “historico-empirical forces” of Filipino novelist Pamoedya Ananta Toer and Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Th’iong’o, given “the tightening of control over the economic and political spheres by an indigenous bourgeois elite, often in collaboration with transnational capital” (Cheah 245).

Cheah and Robbins use the term cosmopolitics to describe the means by which global literature dismantles the public and private split in an eclipse of subjectivity. Cosmopolitics delineates an emergent, fragmentary collective desire, or “proletarian public sphere”— to use a term developed by the Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in contradistinction to Jurgen Habermas’s monolithic and bourgeois public sphere— as a civil society and cultural domain of specifically international political solidarity, agency, and activism. For Robbins and Cheah, this global public sphere impinges on and deviates from the mobility, security, and privilege of hegemonic global actors who support the existing neo-imperial world-system and its ingrained inequalities and oppressions.

In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson theorizes that, in the twentieth century, science-fictional allegory often reveals its socialist-utopian desire for the material body transfigured by radical technology, for lifespans extended into near-

immortality or sweeping historical dimensions, and for a collective solidarity tantamount to the a depersonalizing eclipse of subjectivity (6) . Jameson adapts here Ernst Bloch's notion of allegorical representation as not Lukácsian realism but a fragmented, open-ended socialist desire or ongoing process of realizing the "not yet" or "forward dawning," or a kaleidoscopic bricolage of transformative, counter-hegemonic utopian impulses and experiences defused into the totalizing agendas of global capitalism in the here and now (Bloch 339). Unlike totalizing allegory, science fiction does not impose a rigid allegorical structure that superimposes a pre-ordained figural and secondary semiotic code on an immediate or literal narrative. But, rather, as Stephen Slemon, in a discussion of postcolonial literature, contends, oppositional writers can appropriate and interrogate the hermeneutic mode of allegory as itself deeply complicit in the hegemonic history of teleological progress that underpins the colonialist project, or what Walter Benjamin famously referred to as the evacuation of "homogenous empty time" by the forces of historical progress (Slemon 11).

The New Space Opera of Banks and MacLeod represents a strategic return to political science fiction when direct colonial rule completes its transition into such indirect forms of neoliberal and postcolonial control. For Banks and MacLeod, as for Ong, neoliberal regimes reveal a complex combination of utopian-socialist and dystopian-neoliberal propensities. Both writers insist that an eccentric collaboration and rapprochement between capitalist and socialist agendas and interests is necessary before the viability of a revolutionary socialism can be outlined.

Iain M. Banks's Critiques of Neoliberal Globalism

In contrast to market-driven neoliberalism and state-authorized neoliberalism, Banks's Culture series charts a byzantine future history where the benign civilization known as Culture meets stiff resistance while expanding its galaxies-spanning spheres of socialist influence. In dramatizing an imperious uplifting of underdeveloped states, Banks taps into a rich leftist vein of globalist ideologies in British science fiction. As a Scottish socialist, Banks assumes an optimistic faith in the rationalist forces of technology that govern his hyper-automated societies. The Culture series literalizes this faith through the densely imagined, utopian intergalactic federation known as Culture. The novels set in the Culture universe consistently interrogate what Gene Roddenberry in the *Star Trek* franchise boldly termed the "prime directive"—that is, the normative injunction against sophisticated cultures intervening in the "barbaric" or "despicable" customs of less advanced civilizations. Yet due to futuristic engineering coups, Culture is not neo-imperialist but a socialist utopia, post-scarcity and post-capitalist, dedicated to spreading this vision to newly encountered civilizations. Despite this missionary impulse and its sinister echoes of the legacy of colonialism, Culture's automated society is harmoniously run by Asimovian, compassionate machines or artificially intelligent Minds and therefore has "no need to colonize, exploit, or enslave" (Banks, *Consider Phlebas* 499).

Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and James Heilman fruitfully contend that Banks Enlightenment philosophies of Hobbesian liberty, Lockean equality, and Hegelian reason to probe the problem of encountering the Other in Western liberal democracies. (Heilman and Jackson 239) I respectfully disagree, however, and contend that such a pat equation

of Culture with Western liberal democracies flattens out the complexity and defangs the biting critique of the series. The utopian backdrop of the Culture, on the contrary, functions as an incipient hope and a satirical critique of the democratic pretensions of neoliberal globalism, and straight from the stocks the inaugural Culture novel *Consider Phlebas* decidedly stacks the deck of readerly sympathies in an anti-utopian direction, if only for the sake of a fast-paced, action-oriented story. The third-person narrative is mostly restricted to the point of view of the morally ambiguous protagonist Bora Horza Gobuchul, concentrating on his conquering bent and that of his species, the Idirans. The Idirans provoke Culture into a “religious war” (498) motivated by the “secular evangelism” (499) of Culture, which, though only marginally threatened, cannot “surrender its soul” (500) or sacrifice its single-minded missionary impulse to assist and uplift less advanced civilizations. Only a careless reader would equate the utopian society of Culture with the profit-seeking laissez-faire policies of global capitalism or the current agendas and interests of globe-spanning TNCs and hegemonic nation-states.

If anything, the primary satirical target of the first Culture novel turns out to be Horza himself, a die-hard adversary of Culture whose justifications for the expansionist policies of his own species closely correspond with apologies for the unrestrained mobility of global capital sanctioned by the neoliberal consensus. Indeed, the shape-shifting nature of Horza’s Idiran xenophysiology embodies what John Rieder analyzes as a guiding principle of body-snatching SF narratives in a postcolonial era marked by the protean diffusion of TNCs. Horza self-identifies as an Idiran zealot, a religiously driven soldier of a ruthless shape-shifting warrior species that is effectively immortal as well as

highly weaponized. The Idirans declare a futile jihad against the atheistic, technologically utopian Culture, the technocratic, utilitarian logic of whose civilizing mission Horza despises, adamantly believing that the denizens of this utopian civilization are covertly enslaved to a mechanistic idea fixé, “their clinical drive to clean up the galaxy, make it run on nice, efficient lines, without waste, injustice, or suffering” (34). This misguided critique of Culture’s putative neo-imperialism refracts the wrongheaded neoliberal (mis)characterization of socialist and leftist agendas. Whereas for most of their evolutionary history the Idirans are “near-immortal, singular and unchanged ... on one planet” (367), the “biomatons” of the invasive Culture seem “too quick and nervous and frantic for our own good or anybody else’s” (368), so “divorced from the human scale” (32) that the futuristic computers of the Culture are able to stage military engagements in fractions of a second and at a distance of several trillion kilometers. The Idirans and their petty empire stand little chance against such a technologically sophisticated force, and thus, Banks implies, our present-day neoliberal regimes similarly have no future, if (a big if) a robust anarcho-socialism can take root. In terms of his repressed desires, Horza himself unconsciously seems to admit this defeat in advance; the unsympathetic protagonists’ pathetic self-loathing cements his fate to be colonized by Culture through a series of telling compromises and self-betrayals.

The enlightened, rational self-interest of the Culture incubates political-ethical “perversions” (200), which reflect the adversarial downsides and discontent of neoliberal globalism. The cosmopolitan elite of the neoliberal consensus sustain rafts of unrestrained, border-crossing investors, technocrats, and managers whose reckless

gambling and speculation end up causing what Joseph Stiglitz calls “financial contagion” (Stiglitz 6). With remarkable consistency, Banks maintains this critique of the neoliberal elite over the entire series; the overarching main plot of penultimate Culture novel, *Surface Detail* (2011), for instance, explores the possibility of retributive justice as recompense for such reckless exercises of power politics by pathologically diabolical technocrats. And what preoccupies Banks in this novel, as always, is the ethical dilemma, or perhaps only surface tension, of how his idealized hyper-advanced civilization can stand for “empathy, altruism, strategic decency” (Banks, *Surface Detail*, 326) when the cosmopolitan elite shore up neoliberal forces of “ethical myopia” (Banks 446) that militate against this progressive impulse. Enter Lededje Y’breq, an exoticized spoil of speculation-driven techno-financial wars, and illicit sex slave to Joiler Veppers, the neoliberal plutocrat in charge of the Veprine Corporation. Following Veppers’s branding her in the womb with a full-body tattoo, Lededje, like Bester’s Gully Foyle, grows to have a complicated relationship with her tattoo, an outward sign of her indenture, and made up of a beautiful scrolling scrimshaw full of colorful letter Vs (for Veppers) and daggers that are paradoxically “deep” surface detail: the tattoo is imprinted on her body in embryo to fractally cover her skin, muscle, bone, all the way down to the cellular level. The tattoo is a badge that signifies both shame and pride, emblematic of subaltern domination at the intersection of class-driven neoliberalism and race, given that the text stresses Lededje’s “dark, glossy black skin” (Banks 76) For Lededje internalizes the reification literally inscribed on her body, “engraved like a high-denomination banknote made out specifically to (Veppers)” (Banks 153).

The mobility and privilege that the techno-capitalist, cosmopolitan elite of the neoliberal center wield continually teeters on the edge of apocalyptic risk. Banks's Culture novels insistently foreground the imminent demise of the privileged elites of technocratic globalism. Hence in *The Player of Games* (1988) Culture recruits the genius gamer Gurgeh to topple the bellicose empire of Azad given the unstable system of governance of this fledgling power that operates according to a code whereby whosoever wins a maddeningly complex strategy game (also called Azad) becomes the new emperor of the entire civilization. As Gurgeh learns more about the Azad Empire so as to master the culturally specific nuances and quirks of this all-important game, the game player disbelievably encounters the antithesis of Culture's post-scarcity utopia and a fitting description of our contemporary neoliberal world-system: "It seemed to him to be an unbearably tangle of contradictions; at the same time pathologically violent and lugubriously sentimental, startlingly barbaric and surprisingly sophisticated, fabulously rich and grindingly poor" (Banks, *The Player of Games*, 131). Instead of outright invasion, this neoliberal regime threatens to collapse under the weight of its own crisis-prone pressures and stresses. Culture offers a united front of solidarity pitted against an Empire on the brink of imploding under the excesses that neoliberal regimes shelter and enable. The spectacular downfall of the Empire of the Azad — for Gurgeh's victory is a near-foregone conclusion to the Culture's semi-omniscient Minds — serves as a cautionary reminder that the neoliberal world-system forever hinges on the verge of its own undoing.

In the Culture series, Banks codes neoliberal and socialist ideologies into his otherwise outrageously escapist space opera to suggest the potential of a socialist-utopian transformation of the current status quo of neoliberal cultural politics. Through such an encoding, likewise, Banks satirizes the misguided utopian aspirations of neoliberal technocrats and also highlights the untoward tactics and hovering totalitarian dangers of all authoritarian-socialist projects. In *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, John Clute commends Banks's *Use of Weapons* for its "tough-minded" approach to "the question of Culture guilt for its manipulation of species not yet free of scarcity-bound behavior" (88). Drawing on the template established by what Tom Moylan calls "critical utopias" characteristic of the progressive wings of modern science fiction, Banks's Culture series consistently employs a paradoxical double optics whereby the series levies a sustained critique of the Culture at the same time as Banks brackets as absurdly perverse whether or not the utopian dimensions of the Culture would be an undesirable civilizational trajectory. On the one hand, the conceit of the Culture can easily be seen to flatter the self-image of the neoliberal status quo, or even the capitalism-that-cares of the New Labour Party, depicting a hegemonic power bloc that cloaks its unstable economic-political interests in a smug sense of superiority to the poor, undeveloped savages on the outskirts of the known universe. On the other hand, Culture resists such an anti-utopian critique by consistently manipulating events in an endless supply of clever, clandestine diplomatic and political maneuvering.

In this latter optic, Banks stresses a split between an anarchic, private self-interest and a utopian public good; this alienating public good systematically dismantles

neoliberal subjectivity in a fashion much more pronounced than can be found in MacLeod's complex dialectic of Trotskyite and Libertarian ideologies. In Banks, the utopian public and social domains circumscribe and control dissident private impulses and the personal agency of individuals with a suffocatingly uniform hand. Hence the narratives sideline utopia proper and foreground instead the recalcitrant and unregenerate non-conformists and malcontents, the flawed dissenters and misfits who chafe under the thumb of the Culture, lashing out and yearning to escape with an intensity seemingly gratuitous in the utilitarian perfection of this ideal utopia. The plotting of the novels therefore can be seen to reinforce the ceaseless efforts of the Culture to expose to the all-too-human protagonists the error of their ways. A prime example of this preaching to the never-to-be-converted occurs in *Matter* (2008) where one of the protagonists Djan Seriy Anaplian gently defies her extensive Culture training and physical enhancements to "go native", in part out of tedium and uneasiness with the Culture's continual striving for perfection. Anaplian is given as dowry to Culture by her father, King Hausk, on the cod-medieval home planet of Sursaman; she then goes on to develop the enlarged cosmic perspective that comes with Culture and its buffet of extreme "amendments" or cyborg body-modification, yet she never fully assimilates and never becomes entirely comfortable with the Culture way of life. Groomed to be an elite Culture spy, Anaplian seemingly wastes all her potential to quit the utopia, relinquish all her amendments, and revert back to nearly human-basic.

Going against Culture's urgings to return home, Anaplian spends most of *Matter* travelling back to save the desperately threatened Sursaman. Sursaman is non-

coincidentally a “shellworld”, composed of sixteen concentric spherical levels or worlds within worlds. The shellworld is a strikingly described image in the novel and vividly illustrates the dizzyingly complex hierarchy of Banks’s Culture series. In her reversion, Anaplian embodies a private self multiply split and concentrically encompassed by successive levels of galactic power structures. Mid-point through the novel, the Machiavellian former Culture agent, Xide Hyrlis, puts the “prime” back in primitive and expatiates on the ineffectuality of Culture and, in so doing, dashes the hopes of the heir-apparent Ferbin that the covert regicide that usurped his rightful place on the throne had been documented by off-world Culture surveillance systems. Despite all the well-meaning altruism of the Culture, Hyrlis contends that the powers the Culture wield are not diabolically insidious but, rather, severely limited. In terms of the “war, famine, disease, genocide” that afflict the non-utopian conditions of existence, Hyrlis concludes: “just as reality can blithely exhibit the most absurd coincidences that no credible fiction could convince of us, so only reality – produced, ultimately, by matter in the raw – can be so unthinkingly cruel” (Banks, *Matter*, 340). Anaplian saves her planet but loses her life by detonating an anti-matter bomb embedded in her skull; in a parallel fashion, Banks suggests, anybody seduced by matter in the raw and its contemporary analogue of our world-system wracked by rampant neoliberalism, even out of understandable exhaustion with a monolithic utopian desire, is likewise noble but doomed.

Continuing the interrogation of neoliberal globalism, especially in the militarized context of the warring poles of foreign interventionism and isolationism, the third book in the series conducts the most penetrating inquiry into the hypocrisy and ideological

distortions of the Culture's utopian aims. The novel revolves around the character Cheradenine Zakalwe, a deeply embedded double-agent mercenary for Culture's black-ops organization, Special Circumstances. Cheradenine Zakalwe is no less morally ambiguous than Horza from *Consider Phlebas*, but considerably less oppositional to the Culture, which he disparages not as invasive infidels but only as "soft." The flawed critique of a genuine socialist utopia by an unsympathetic protagonist recurs in this novel such that while undercover Cheradenine Zakalwe can vent (to a genocidal autocrat) his own anxiety by playing up the secret unscrupulous neoliberal ideology of his putatively advanced society: "and these people lived in peace, but they were bored, because paradise can get that way after a time, and so they started to carry out missions of good works; charitable visits upon the less well-off you might say" (Banks, *Use of Weapons*, 64). It might be inferred that this mockery of the prime directive as a neo-imperial rationalization for naked domination misdirects its fury toward what in the real-world allegory would be the United Nations, socialist programs, NGOs, and a strategic neoliberalism as exception. The nuanced irony here is that Banks again diffracts the militarized foreign interventionism and the regime-changing or government-puppeteering policies of neoliberal apologists into what from the socialist utopia of Culture the enlightened Minds sees for what it is: namely, a loathsome and hypocritical rationalization for one-sided power-brokering.

The cunningly structured *Use of Weapons* – an arrangement for which Banks credits or "blames" MacLeod in the Acknowledgement — is composed of alternating chapters in counting-down numerical order of flashbacks reversing in time to fill in

Cheradenine's mysterious past with forward-moving, numerically ascending chapters that follow Cheradenine's Culture-sponsored mission to bring the ex-general Tsoldrin Beychae out of retirement. This sophisticated deployment of juxtaposed time streams characteristic of New Space Opera dramatically withholds a surprise revelation until the narrative climax. It turns out that Zakalwe is an assumed name and the main character of the novel is in fact Elethiomil (Banks 738), an ex-tyrant of an outlying planet who once betrayed the powerful Zakalwe family and killed the real Cheradenine Zakalwe's sister. Elethiomil ruthlessly sends the woman's bones to Cheradenine, who then commits suicide out of remorse. Elethiomil is subsequently so wracked with guilt himself that he is compelled to make reparations for this war crime by adopting the name of his slain adversary and becoming a Culture mercenary. This contrite self-distrust makes his subsequent devotion to Culture also unreliable and distorted by a firm skepticism of socialist values, a bias characteristic of neoliberal ideology. Hence when the war-weary ex-general Tsoldrin Beychae wonders if Culture extends its promotion of "machine sentience" and "cross-species tolerance" (471) into an absolutist edict from on high, Cheradenine can only respond "I have no idea whether [the Culture] are the good guys or not" (474). The reader knows better.

For evidence that Banks is indeed satirizing, and not subscribing to, this deeply complicit rationalization for neoliberal hegemony, and refusal to see the problem from the point of view of the oppressed and disempowered, one need look no further than *Excession* (1996) in which the fractious dialogue among Culture Mind takes center stage. Even though the regrettably necessary actions the Culture feels compelled to make may

seem almost to validate the shadow tactics of covert U.S. operations in, for instance, Cambodia or Iran-Contra or both invasions of Iraq, the doubt-ridden back and forth of Culture Minds counteracts both naïve neoliberal self-vindications as well as the equally complacent co-optation of voiceless subaltern perspectives in uncritical cosmopolitan discourse. The mordant disdain Banks reserves for a putative selfless altruistic ethos can be seen in the Affront that genetically modify an underclass of subaltern women and castrati to be continually tortured. A hawkish, self-interested fraction of the Culture attempts to precipitate a war with the Affront as the dark obverse of the self-vindications of the Affront, which defends its twisted genetic experiment as selfless and altruistic ministrations. Such a deliberate misconstrual and appropriation of the brutalized subaltern, or those physically harmed by the deeply ingrained imbalances of the neoliberal world-system, mystifies ritual atrocities under the generous banner of mutual empathy and humanistic responsibility.

Not that this ironic treatment of the Culture's neo-missionary impulses exactly disarms the utopian, anarcho-socialist critique. The political-ethical gap between the Culture and its aggrieved opponents suggests that neoliberal resistance to calls for socialist-utopian revolutionary change is all too inescapable in the contemporary world. Yet neoliberal globalism produces also a critical openness to the viable alternatives of justice-oriented, anti-globalization, and human-rights globalism. In *Look to Windward* (2000), an avenging terrorist Major Quilan and a guilt-stricken Mind *Lasting Damage* discover their mutual resistance to utopia becomes absorbed into the retrenched system too readily, and redemption from the damage inflicted by the Idiran war remains

impossibly out of reach, leaving the only available option joint suicide. This unforeseen side effect from curbing neoliberal aggression is too pitiable to be properly tragic.

So despite the deep questioning of whether or not utopian socialism can be successfully retrieved from neoliberal globalism, the deeply disturbed conscience of the Culture necessitates nothing but swift justice for Culture's fiercest opponents. Hence in the deliberately antiquated *Inversion* (1998), where reference to the Culture is never made explicit, and the neo-feudal setting and courtly machinations eerily echo the tyrannical repression and realpolitik of contemporary neoliberal regimes, the novel appears to be not so much an exception or departure from the Culture series as a crystallization of its crucial tendency to make the futuristic, utopian alternative a tacit understanding and dimly perceived background. The novel interlaces two narratives in alternate chapters: the first thread titled "The Doctor" recounting the Special Circumstances spy, the undercover Vosill posing as a doctor from Drezen, who ministers King Quence of Haspidus and influences him to make progressive-socialist reforms such as legalizing the ownership of farms by serfs before disgruntled band of reactionary dukes attempt to frame and then unsuccessfully assassinate Vossill; the second thread titled "The Bodyguard" recounts the successful assassination of General UrLeyn, the Prime Protector of the Protectorate of Tassasen, by the avenging concubine Perrund despite the attempt to prevent such a politically inconvenient killing by the bodyguard, DeWar, a covert Culture agent. The power-consolidating atrocities and the attempt to counter such brutality fail to escape the ground zero of injustice, unfreedom, and

inequality despite the subtle reform and clandestine influences from the Culture and its relentless good works conducted in the novel's wings.

Similarly, the last Culture novel, *Hydrogen Sonata* (2012), published a year before Banks's recent sudden death by cancer, puts a fitting capstone on the series, involving as it does the Culture's mostly foiled attempt to prevent a whole species, the Gzilt, from "Subliming", or extinguishing their material existence and uploading their minds and bodies into an incomprehensible virtual heaven. The Culture resists the Gzilt's Subliming due to what our enlightened utopia see as the false pretenses of the Book of Truth, but which the Gzilt view as sacred scripture vouchsafing their exceptionalism. In the end, the Book of Truth is revealed, in a book-length investigation, to be a fabricated sociological experiment concocted by a disinterested academic. For Banks, despite its seductive power, retirement from the dire, continual struggle against the fallout of neoliberal authority mystifies the deluded allure of laissez-faire, techno-utopian market fundamentalism and its contemporary equivalent of a blanket evangelical celebration of neoliberal globalization, with an appeal to a sublimated crypto-sexual ecstasy: "a big kablooey of transcendent smashingness... [that made] this life and everything in it seem irrelevant and feeble" (Banks, *Hydrogen Sonata*, 26).

Ken MacLeod's Critiques of Neoliberal Globalism

With noticeably less space-opera theatrics than Banks, MacLeod's Fall Revolutions quartet of novels also cannot escape this political-ethical event horizon of contemporary global crisis. MacLeod charts the gradual attainment and preservation of a technologically progressive, socialist utopia in response to the breakdown of the

neoliberal regimes of the West into a multiplicity of militarized competing sovereignties. In the debut novel of the series, *Star Fraction*, MacLeod plunges his reader into a state of global chaos in which a reinvigorated Space Movement propagandizes for the brokering of power between the newly formed US/UN megastate and a bewildering multiplicity of embattled micropolitical groups referred to as the Left Alliance. The Left Alliance includes revolutionary communists (the “Army of the New Republic”), women-identified feminists (“femininists”), queer pacifists (“The Pink Polity”), artificial-intelligence extropians (“cranks”), animal liberationists (“creeps”), environmentalists (“greens”), Islamic militants (“Black Zionists”), and even separatist Christian fundamentalists (“Christiananarchists”). This apocalyptic scenario of internecine strife in fact consists of an act of political misdirection, a brutal campaign driven by the US/UN megastate and the corporate expansion of neoliberal regimes into a strategy of “divide-and-rule replicating downwards in a fractal balkanization of the world” (82).

The protagonist of *Star Fraction* is the professional mercenary (or “security advisor”) and Trotskyist Moh Cohn who views the splintering of the Left Alliance in terms of the breakdown of the global aspirations of the Fourth International and the Old Left into a post-revolutionary gridlock. Cohn muses on these “factions of the old party, fragments of old man Trotsky’s endlessly twisting and recombining junk DNA ... lost cause and effect of a forgotten history that had taken too many turnings ever to find its way back. Nothing left for him now but to fight a rearguard action, to hold back the multiplying divisions of the night” (43). Cohn’s own reversal, flipping his progressive politics into reactionary mercenary opportunism, mirrors the widespread upending of the

left-right political poles within the Left Alliance as a whole. Cohn laments that the Left Alliance has transformed from oppositional mini-states into “smelly, cosy subtotalitarianisms” (128). Aligned with Harvey’s and Castells’s analysis of the current era of global information-age capitalism, and also with Banks’s focus on the artificially intelligent Minds and the disembodied Dra’Azon, MacLeod situates the feuding mini-states in the context of the rise of the Internet, called in the novels “the Cable” that “linked [the mini-states] to the world” such that “the autonomy of all the Free States, the *communities under the king*, depended on free access to it” (27; emphasis in original).

Infected by a smart drug developed by the biotechnology scientist Janis Tain, Moh Cohn becomes a cyborg, rewired via a freak biotech virus to anticipate the impending invention of an artificial intelligence, the Watchmaker. Cohn then has a vision to convert the Left-Alliance Barbarians into a new anarcho-socialist space movement, the global Star Fraction “beyond that the infinite universe of socialism—the bright world, a world without borders, without bosses and cops” (151). In order to establish this socialist utopia, Moh Cohn collaborates with the neoliberal agendas of the Space Movement anarcholibertarians, as well as the military maneuvers of the revolutionary communists (the ANR). Cohn employs Jordan Brown to help track down the Black Plan, a sophisticated computer program that directs the ANR based on the latest data and whose processing time is distributed through servers all over the world via covert freeware-gopher uploads called the Dissembler. Ironically, it is this rapprochement with an AI roaming unchained through the Internet—an unknowably advanced, infinitely malleable power that can transgress the dictates of both state and market and their respective

accumulations of techno-capital—that makes Moh Cohn, according to the Watchmaker, “the initiator” of the socialist utopia to come. The bid for posthuman sentience on behalf of this godlike entity is intimately tied to a world revolution since the orbital lasers controlled by the US/UN Stasis have the potential to annihilate not only the Left Alliance but also the databases wherein the Watchmaker resides. Aware that the Sino-Soviet alliance is currently combating neoliberal Japanese forces—who are themselves negotiating with the US/UN megastate—Cohn seizes upon a golden opportunity to begin a socialist insurrection against the repressive apparatuses of state and market that are idiosyncratically global and postcolonial in scope: “when the insurrection’s launched here we can create two, three, many Vietnams” (223) When forced to acknowledge the entrenchment of the US/UN Space Defense and that their neoliberal hegemony may be immune to overthrow, Cohn backpedals to “many Cambodias.”

The ANR insurrection is indeed immediately suppressed by the US/UN, and Moh Cohn is killed by a virus plague to which his direct interface with the Watchmaker makes him vulnerable. Yet the revolt inspires worldwide protests, strikes, and riots that express a socialist globalism promoted in a famous ‘60s-era environmentalist slogan prominently cited by MacLeod: “there’s some kind of upsurge coming down the line . . . we may find a lot of separate campaigns *thinking globally* and *acting locally* in the next few days” (248; emphases in original). Even though the hegemonic megastate crushes the offensive initiated by the Watchmaker, an unstoppable grassroots groundswell nonetheless occurs. Socialist activists who advocate installing a new governmental infrastructure push this Fall Revolution over the brink. These ANR functionaries still fundamentally remain

neoliberal in many ways, even to the extent of being paid-for-hire mercenaries. The anarcholibertarian Jordan Brown notes with wonderment the crucial role his soon-to-be wife and socialist-feminist ANR mercenary Catherine Duval plays in provoking an uprising in the Christian anarchist Beulah City. To Jordan's awe, Cat replies: "Goddess, what a world! Even the revolution is privatized" (255). This statement encapsulates The Fall Revolution series as a whole given that the quartet of novels consistently depicts socialist agitators galvanizing a bottom-up gradual overthrow of the neoliberal consensus by deploying a strategic market-oriented neoliberalism as exception within the framework of a high-tech mini-state-orchestrated revolution.

This exploration of neoliberalism as exception, or the provisional deployment of neoliberal political-cultural tactics in pursuit of revolutionary global change, is not to imply that MacLeod does not also evince a problematic preoccupation with exceptions to neoliberalism. Even though his deep engagement with socialist politics is consistent and wide-ranging, MacLeod's libertarian tendencies make it difficult to categorize his work as monolithically leftwing or anti-neoliberal, and his large readership clearly does not always receive his work in such a way. Hence the Fall Revolution series won the Prometheus award given annually by the Libertarian Futurist Society. In *Stone Canal* (1996), MacLeod explores his libertarian streak with a combination of troubled skepticism and giddy enthusiasm, gradually filling in the intricate backstory of the radical libertarian or revolutionary "individualist anarchist" (MacLeod, *Stone Canal*, 34) Jonathan Wilde who helps to found in the early twenty-third century a free-market anarchist society on New Mars, a colony planet on the other side of a wormhole that is primarily populated by

genetically manufactured clones, entrepreneurial armies of robots, and vast artificial intelligences. New Mars geographically consists of five arms, four of which involve non-human quarters revealing a vicious neoliberal struggle to survive imposed by a laissez-faire technological zealotry. To the third-person narrator, the four arms resemble an amoral and rudderless nightmare, a “creationists’s caricature of natural selection” whereby sophisticated nano-machinery “lurks and pounces, gobbles and cannibalizes for purposes of its own” (MacLeod 76). The fifth arm is the human quarter and operates according to an abstruse “polycentric” (MacLeod 82) legal and banking system organized by a self-aware computer system called “The Invisible Hand” and involving cartel-enforced business transactions, property rights, and predatory loans on everything labor to organs. In this stateless, market-driven anarchy of New Mars, *Stone Canal* explores the means by which a ruthless technology-driven neoliberalism as exception crushes exceptions to neoliberalism in an accelerated series of capitalist exploitations and dehumanizations.

Wilde’s friend and rival David Reid, a disillusioned and compromised socialist, establishes himself as the one-man ruling elite over the unregulated capitalism of New Mars, given his controlling ownership of mind-state gene-codes and bonded robot laborers. In Glasgow, Scotland in the 1970s, as a visionary computer-science major and avowed Trotskyist, Reid explains the difference between socialism and Labour Party politics: “the problems we have don’t come from workers going on strike, but from the bosses and bankers doin’ business as usual” (MacLeod 39). Reid tells Wilde that “‘the computers taking over’ (which was how people talked back the about the Singularity)...

[is] like a bourgeois version of dialectics” (MacLeod 37). Ultimately, despite his protests that he remains a revolutionary to the end, Reid helps to develop just such evolving modes of production in the service of a cynical capitalist ethos and ends up fulfilling the prophecy he fatalistically relates to Wilde, “people don’t stop being socialists and become something else. They just become *nothing*, or join the Labour Party — same difference” (MacLeod 37). Noting that IBM often spends more prodigiously on useless infrastructure than the Soviet Union, Reid’s socialism is fatally compromised by his partisan technological convictions, and his socialist ideologies destabilized by the seductions of techno-capital. Just as the neoliberal advocate Wilde shares covert sympathies with his parents and their “staunch Marxist materialism”, so Reid reveals a contrarian false consciousness toward his shifting set of core values, a “prickly independence of mind, a dogged tendency to worry at difficulties in the doctrines his sect espoused” (MacLeod 37).

Out of jealous spite for Reid making advances on his wife, Wilde gives Reid’s mailing address to “every free-market, libertarian, anti-environmentalist or just sheer downright reactionary organization [he] ever had contact” (MacLeod 93). This blitz pushes Reid’s fragile sanity over the edge, and Wilde invests in the chattel slavery of bonded-labor to assist in the furthering the agendas of the Army of the New Republic and its affiliation with the Deep Technology of artificial-intelligence research and the space exploration of the Space Movement, just as Myra Godwin and Wilde precipitate millions of death in the Third World War through privatizing nuclear armament and deterrent. This Libertarian swing rightward of these three world-historical players in *The Stone*

Canal derives in part from a violent reaction to present-day neoliberal extremism. Wilde muses that stateless anarchy of New Mars grows out of the way “Reid’s rules, in turn, were rooted in libertarian texts with which I’d once tried to warp his mind” (MacLeod 285). Once the progressive technological leap of the Singularity is made, Reid journeys with his artificially intelligent colonists to New Mars. When an “abolitionist” regenerates Wilde’s mind-state to sue Reid for expanded robot rights, including the release of Wilde’s cloned wife, Dee Model, used by Reid as a sexbot, the “re-venting” or the re-embodiment of the stored mind-states of the dead poses a challenge to regnant neoliberalism but, in keeping with the dynamic flux of socialist desire depicted in the entire series, the desired revolutionary effects of this challenge are never finally realized: “If it was ever to be done it would be in a far future, which receded like communism once did in the minds of the Communists” (MacLeod 295). The Fall Revolution does not offer any easy solutions to the problems that plague our neoliberal era whose impending collapse nonetheless fundamentally destabilizes the millennial, techno-capitalist victory culture of the New World Order: “‘Fall’ is right! Everything’s falling apart — It’s like a global version of the Soviet breakup” (MacLeod 234).

The show trial on New Mars to return the escaped Dee Model to Reid’s ownership, and for robot abolition in general, ultimately rules against emancipation and in Reid’s favor based on a technicality, even though Jonathan Wilde uses the court as a legerdemain to covertly stage a virtual heist on Reid’s encrypted codes for the artificially-intelligent fast-folk and their ability to resurrect the mind-states of the dead. This resolution revolves around a crucial ambiguity. Reid’s opposition to the Fast Folk and

robot abolition reflect his anarcho-capitalist contempt for the political-cultural machinery of revolutionary working-class solidarity and neoliberal reform, just as his opposition also reflects his lapsed socialist desire to curb the singularity of exponentially dehumanizing techno-capital. The opportunist Wilde's resurrecting of the Fast Folk and the dead might similarly make him the *instumentum vocalis* ("talking tool") of his libertarian complicity, just as his revolutionary change to expose Reid's involvement with the bonded-labor Mutual Protection company might initiate a chain of events that militate against the blind fear of Wilde's narrow-minded self-interest.

In his complex rendering of the multiplicity of utopian impulses within technological modernity, MacLeod admits the pervasive power and utility of neoliberal globalism. As a corrective against the stripping of the exploited and disempowered in this capitalist world-system to the status of dehumanized non-citizens, MacLeod pits justice or human-rights globalism against neoliberal globalism. In Roger Luckhurst's view, "the culminating joke" of the third book in the series, *The Cassini Division*, is that the SF trope of an encounter with the "utterly alien turns out to be an encounter with posthuman anarcho-libertarians and federal socialists" (229). The narrative thrust of the novel hinges on this paradox of fostering the viability of neoliberal resistance to state control while at the same time nurturing socialist desire. The story revolves around a rapprochement between the Solar Union and New Mars, advocated by the clone of a neoliberal ideologue and forced-labor company owner, David Reid, who wishes to trade with the Solar Union despite anxiety that the socialist federation might thereby make itself vulnerable to a virus plague initiated by hyper-advanced posthumans or "Fast Folk." The Fast Folk or

Jovian Outworlders terraform Jupiter into smart matter and create a post-Singularity wormhole. The dire need of the Fast Folk to expand their settlements make the Solar Union approach the posthumans as hostile enemies: terrifying godlike splinter cells of humanity who are extropian to the point of digital mind upload. The Fast Folk clearly represent the digital and electronic circuit of neoliberal globalism that ensures, as Ong and Harvey argue, the decentered expansion of technological capital at the expense of the brutalized or redundant workers and unemployed, especially non-citizen refugees and migrants reduced to sweat-shop conditions. Ellen quips at the multiplicity of self-governing regimes threatening to exploit the biopower of the workers, “society on New Mars was what Wilde called a free market anarchy. To us, it sounded more like a multiple mutual tyranny” (43).

A complex, overarching novum of the *Fall Revolutions* series is the collective striving for the anti-globalization solidarity embodied in the technologically progressive socialist utopia called the Solar Union. And the driving narrative thrust of the quartet arises from the thwarting of anarcholibertarian technocrats and the misguided and deluded utopias of unfettered neoliberal globalism.¹³ Space travel and the capacity for interstellar colonization in *The Cassini Division* allegorize globalization as a sociological process of increasing worldwide interconnection. Moreover, the urgent diplomacy and hyper-violent warfare arising from this space expansion symbolize competing vectors of neoliberal and socialist globalisms. An agent for the frontline force tasked with protecting a socialist utopia, the narrator-protagonist Ellen May Ngwethu, explicates the grim ideological underpinnings of her interplanetary federation:

Life is a process of breaking down and using other matter, and if need be, other life. Therefore, life is aggression, and successful life is successful aggression. Life is the scum of matter, and people are the scum of life. There is nothing but matter, forces, space and time, which together makes power. Nothing matters, except what matters to you. Might makes right, and power makes freedom. You are free to do whatever is in your power, and if you want to survive and thrive you had better do whatever is in your interests. If your interests conflict with those of others, let the others pit their power against yours, and everyone for themselves. If your interests coincide with others, let them work together with you and against the rest. We are what we eat and we eat everything.

(90)

Out of context, this diatribe may easily be mistaken as an outburst of undisguised neoliberal ideology advocating the raw power of rational self-interest as a geopolitical juggernaut sweeping over the sovereignty of nation-states and domestic markets. Such anarcholibertarian ideology constitutes a cornerstone of the neoliberal consensus that responds to and shapes the complex economic and technological process of globalization. The entropic conversion of international relations into an all-devouring Darwinian law of the jungle refracts the border-crossing mobility of techno-capital in global markets. Yet this rationalization forms the ideological basis that characterizes not only the socialist heroine of the

novel, *Ellen*, but also the guiding belief system of the socialist utopia itself, the Solar Union.

Ellen May Ngwethu's grim comments square the circle of social relations between the welfare state and the free market. Ellen describes the way her utopia was forged in the molten struggle between local or regional agents and interests that promote group or communal solidarity with global reach, on the one hand, and the market expansions of the managers and technocrats of globalization that rationalize their profit-driven market calculations as pro-growth, on the other. Negotiating this dialectic, MacLeod's socialist utopia channels and manages the neoliberal obliteration of state sovereignty and governmental power and the self-interested authority of individual entrepreneurs and market agents. His science-fictional discourse admits the technologically driven allure of global solidarity while at the same time opposing the carceral logic of exploitative market forces and sweat-shop labor regimes in the form of David Reid's bonded laborers, and the militarized interventions of hegemonic nation-states or TNCs, represented by the threat of computerized virus plagues from the Jovian Outworlders. In "Impermanent Revolutions: The Anarchic Utopias of Ken MacLeod", Farah Mendlesohn analyzes the genocide of Jovian Outworlders or Fast Folk and the troubling representation of a technocratic non-human Other. Mendlesohn contends that MacLeod resorts to a spurious binary between the anarcho-libertarian Fast Folk and the anarcho-socialist Solar Union to effectively excuse, even glamorize, genocide. While conceding that MacLeod is deeply invested in depicting the Solar Union as an inherently flawed, critical utopia, I contend that MacLeod's radical cultural politics necessitates

viewing neoliberalism as a credible threat to revolutionary socialist-utopian desire. Hence MacLeod's series should not be so easily conflated with hawkish, conspicuously rightwing space opera that glorifies genocide, such as the hugely popular American brand of space opera discussed in John Kessel's "Creating the Innocent Killer" and its perceptive reading of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1985) and Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959).

Known to comrades of the Solar Union in *The Cassini Division* as the catechism of "true knowledge," the faith in technological modernity that Ellen espouses here with evangelical fervor is an English translation of a Korean expression, coined by bonded laborers, for "modern enlightenment" (MacLeod 89). Ellen invokes a missionary zeal to describe her theorizing of a rational socialist globalism as a bulwark against the depredations of neoliberal capitalism in the world-system. She thereby reasserts her unswerving faith in the viability of a continuous progressive revolution: "On this rock we had built our church. We had founded our idealism on the most nihilistic implications of science, our socialism on crass self-interest, our peace on our capacity for mutual destruction, our liberty on determinism" (90). Such an affirmation of socialist or communalist desire positions the novel in the 1990s debates over the ongoing transition from colonial direct rule to postcolonial economic control in the so-called Third World or global South.¹⁴ Hence the last name of MacLeod's protagonist, Ngwethu, betrays its non-European origins in pan-African decolonizing liberationist movements; the word taken from a Solar Union mantra ultimately derives from the South-African Xhosa word for "freedom" (MacLeod 211).

In support of a cosmopolitical ethos of empathy and respect in the face of postcolonial and neocolonial inequality, Ellen May Ngwethu confronts the Jovian Outworlders from an early age who lambast her “commie altruism” (95) and await the Singularity or the feedback loop of artificial intelligence in which “we’re going to turn all the dumb mass into smart-matter” (95). This transcendent faith in a technological, utopian “[r]apture of the nerds” (115) elides the problems of the Third World whose needs are “edited out” (96) of the databases of self-aware machines. Posthumans abandon Marxist humanism in their critique of the Turing Test, discriminating between computers and human brains, as a trivial if not impossible goal, attacking the core underlying assumption of human-rights and justice globalism that undergirds the Solar Union: “Marx was wrong—we aren’t alienated from our humanity, alienation is humanity” (96). Ellen acknowledges the utilitarian advantages of posthuman adaptations while nonetheless insisting that “I don’t like to see people suffer, so it would be very unselfish of me to ignore ten billion people blundering into the dark” (95).

The Sky Road (1999) eulogizes the foreclosure of socialist-utopian desire by a globalizing regime of unregulated, profit-driven capitalism in a gesture that explicitly traces itself back to the Marxist clarion call to unite all the alienated, working-class “men without a country” in *The Communist Manifesto*, and the four divergent movements of the Internationale that had essentially dissipated by the end of the twentieth century: “Long ago there had been another country, a country of hope, and it encompassed the world. Until one day, August 1914, its citizens went to war with each other, and the world ended” (MacLeod 94). In certain moods, Myra Godwin dismisses this vision of

history, which she borrowed from the disillusioned socialist David Reid, as a “callow undergraduate nihilism”, and in other moments “profound and true” (MacLeod 94). This ambivalence resonates with her oscillating mixture of cynical neoliberal realpolitik and revolutionary Trotskyist zeal that animates her complex leveraging of privatized nuclear deterrence as leader of the International Scientific and Technical Worker's Soviet of Kazakhstan, her controversial decision to trigger the “ablation cascade” and annihilate the battlesats that harbor a menacing artificial intelligence in near-Earth orbit, and the ushering in of a Luddite eco-utopia in Glasgow in the twenty-sixth-century second times stream of the novel. The latter elements make *Sky Road* an alternate future history to *The Stone Canal* and *Cassini Division*, and also pre-empt the elements of space-opera, nanotechnological Singularity that characterize those earlier books in the quartet. Although ostensibly more interested in gradual bureaucratic change than Reid or Wilde, especially in terms her affiliation with the bonded labor of Reid’s Mutual Protection company, Myra’s compromises non-coincidentally parallel Stalin-era Soviet Russia: “the Fall Revolution had given [Mutual Protection] an appalling unstoppable logic of runaway expansion, in much the same way as the use of prison labour in the First Five-Year Plan had done for the original Gulag” (MacLeod 30).

Like Banks’s Special Circumstance unit of Culture, the Cassini Division is forced to combat the reckless neoliberal policies of the techno-libertarian Fast Folk who fail to be satisfied by the utopian social harmony and abundance of the Solar Union. The thwarting of these pernicious posthuman technocrats is the final blow that cements the permanence of the socialist revolution against vestigial regimes of neoliberal globalism.

In the end, the Cassini Division beats the Fast Folk at their own game, yet some scruples are lost in the process, with the leftwing cadre continually threatening to merge with its rightwing political opposite: “In our classless society, [the Cassini Division] was the closest thing to an elite; in our anarchy, the nearest we came to a state; in our commonwealth, it held the greatest share of riches” (6). In *Star Fraction*, a Space-Movement partisan notes that these compromises and retrenchments that agonize outfits such as the Cassini Division are testaments to the upheavals of a neoliberal globalism in its death throes: “what we thought was the revolution . . . was only a moment in the fall” (314). In the wake of the crisis, the “Fall Revolution” series has the boldness to desire a strategic collapse between the extreme poles of neoliberal and socialist globalisms not at all similar to the cynical conflation of socialist agendas and neoliberal interests satirized in Banks’s novels, but more in line with Aihwa Ong’s discussion of neoliberalism as exception. MacLeod imagines that a newfound global purpose and volunteerism.

In sum, this chapter has argued that Banks and MacLeod deploy strategies and styles of utopian estrangement to reconfigure nationality and cosmopolitics in our neoliberal moment: MacLeod does so by representing a strategic complicity with neoliberal interests, Banks by representing the tragic and absurd commodification of his misguided radical individualists. In a recent interview I conducted with Ken MacLeod—despite warning of the dangerous promotion of national identity over class division in the “turbulent years ahead”—he cleaved steadfastly to his utopian ballast of anarcho-socialist desire that has an intrinsic connection to his immediate historical context of recent Scottish history and politics: “I’m not sure at all that neoliberalism is a credible threat to

revolutionary desire. If neoliberalism could reliably fulfil people's needs, I wouldn't have any great objection to it. Instead, it creates needs it can't satisfy and it often fails to meet more basic needs in ways that are very obvious even if unevenly distributed in time as well as in space" (MacLeod, "Turbulent Years Ahead"). Disagreeing with Ascherson that Scottish national independence at the civic and governmental level provides the best blueprint for a revolutionary tomorrow—given that he "like[s] England perfectly well as it is, asleep" —MacLeod nonetheless voices sympathy for a cultural sense of Scottish belonging and collective struggle that he considers "flourishing" at the present.

MacLeod thus vividly embodies what Ascherson claims is the inherently cultural and class-identified quality of much faith in the technocultural future on the part of the Scottish citizens in ways that betray both cosmopolitical dimensions of the local and the global[AQ6]. Ascherson contends that "much popular nationalism in Scotland is inaccessible to politics — even after the revival of a Scottish Parliament ... The Scottish people do not see their future in this binary way ... they simply wish Scotland to run its own affairs, as other nations do" (Ascherson 110). Similarly, despite his commitment to civic autonomy, MacLeod may be viewed as siding with the foundational postcolonial theorist Franz Fanon, who influentially concludes that "national consciousness is the highest form of culture" (179), yet MacLeod modifies this call for a vibrant national culture of postcolonial self-determination with a distrust of the neocolonial ambitions of a state-sponsored nationalism, or what Caroline McCracken-Flescher views as constitutive of Scottish SF as a whole—namely, the hybridity of Scottish culture represented in an "oddly imperial and yet strangely subaltern literature" (2). As this article has argued, the

Fall Revolution series registers an unavoidable but strategic complicity with neoliberal ideology and its undermining of nation-centered programs and services of progressive possibility while at the same time deploying genre-savvy strategies of utopian estrangement to wage a non-literal total war against such state-centered, hegemonic incursions on a genuinely anarchosocialist desire.

Similarly, in accordance with Banks's adamant support for Scottish sovereignty, this chapter has argued that the radical dissenters from the Culture's technologically progressive solidarity should be viewed not simply as emblematic of individualistic capitalist-democratic states from the hegemonic global North but as allegorical indexes of anarcho-socialist, communal desire, and postcolonial resistance contaminated and rechanneled into neoliberal interests and recruited by an ideological struggle that has deep roots in Scotland and abroad: namely, the struggle for what the fourteenth-century Scottish poet John Barbour in *The Brus* famously referred to (in early Scots) as "fredome." The Culture—exemplified by Iain Banks's open letter to the British newspaper *The Guardian* that urged a "cultural and educational boycott" of Israel for a deadly raid on a Gaza flotilla—recasts Banks's utopian vision of a progressive, cultural, and decidedly non-military front of artists, athletes, academics, and concerned citizens pitched against the operations of the "outlaw state" (Banks, "Why I'm Supporting a Cultural Boycott"). Banks's public criticism of the great regime-toppling games of the transatlantic War on Terror in *Raw Spirit* (2003) also illustrates his cosmopolitics—his belief that the neoliberal media colluded to "help make this year's invasion [of Iraq and Afghanistan] look less like the exercise in naked imperialism that it in fact is" (Banks

314)—and his fierce independent streak that led him to voice his vituperative dissent by burning his UK passport in protest against globe-spanning ventures. In the Culture series, Banks consistently positions the Culture as a critically utopian, anarcho-socialist allegory for a cosmopolitical cultural politics of counterfactual speculation.

Perhaps the most memorable image of this cosmopolitical utopian speculation is the evocative ending of MacLeod's *Sky Road*, in which Myra Godwin becomes transfigured by the global hagiography of an alternative future history into the heroic Deliverer, due in part to her role in initiating a nuclear ablation cascade that destroys all the space-based communication satellites, ushering in a technophobic but green quasi-utopia of farmers and artisans across Scotland and elsewhere. As we follow the history graduate student Clovis colha Gree and the computer engineer or "tinkerer" Merrial in their quest to uncover the forbidden knowledge outlawed by a revisionist history, the reader grows gradually more aware of the anti-electronics, anti-nuclear terror over "black logic" in a claustrophobic culture that arguably crosses over into superstitious Ludditism. Such hysterical anxiety, of course, may be solidly justified given that, as Myra in an earlier timeline laments, the black logic of technocultural progress has, after all, led to a history of the death of international socialist desire and utopian hope, a history "of the damned, of poor devils struggling in the hell these men had pitched them into; and nobody could be judged for how they behaved in hell" (MacLeod 94).

However, the invocation of the anarchist black flag in the last lyrical lines of the Fall Revolution series not only foreshadows the coercive black logic and the future state-centered crackdown of technophobic backlash, but these final

sentences also nurture a wan hope for a stateless anarcho-socialist utopia beyond our neoliberal moment, a hope that characterizes Banks's as much as MacLeod's exuberant vision of our collective future as a potential blank slate: Whatever the truth about the Deliverer, she will remain in my mind as she was shown on that statue, and all the other statues and murals, songs and stories: riding, at the head of her own swift cavalry, with a growing migration behind her and a decadent, vulnerable, defenseless and rich continent ahead; and, floating bravely above her head and above her army, the black flag on which nothing is written.

(MacLeod 291)

⁸ Both Banks and MacLeod owe an overwhelming debt to the philosophical–political discourses of anarchism and their critique of overweening governmental authority, a debt that undergirds *The Fall Revolution and Culture* series. Banks accepts “anarcho-socialism” as a descriptor, for instance, in “A Few Notes on Culture,” where Culture morphs into “socialism within, anarchy without,” and MacLeod explicitly acknowledges his engagement with anarchism by naming the protagonist of *The Sky Road* Myra Godwin, whose namesake, of course, is the nineteenth-century anarchist William Godwin. The constellation of concerns Banks and MacLeod denote with “anarcho-socialism” amounts to a utopian stateless society of direct democratic action mediated at the local and global levels by a mutualist, non-hierarchical federation of decentralized working-class syndicates and communes on the model influentially argued for in works of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin (the first two of whom are name-checked by MacLeod in *The Stone Canal*). The term “anarcho-socialist” attempts to repair the fractious “split in the First International when the followers of Marx and those of Bakunin [who] ... began, at first rather hesitantly, to call themselves anarchists” (Woodcock 10). More recently, the mantle of anarcho-socialism has been adopted by anti-globalization activists to protest what Immanuel Wallerstein articulates as the “world-system,” as exemplified by those demonstrations organized against the World Bank and IMF at the Battle of Seattle in 1999 and the myriad decentralized attempts to reinvigorate what Michael Denning views as the resurgence of the cultural significance of the global New Left in the “campaigns of the antisweatshop movement, the struggle for international standards of labor, women’s rights, and the environment” (Denning 49).

⁹ Manfred Stegner defines such competing neoliberal and broadly socialist interests as globalisms or the political and rhetorical ideologies and discourses that shape and respond to the globalization phenomenon, itself defined as the technological and economic conditions of accelerated worldwide interdependency (43).

¹⁰ In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), Darko Suvin claims space operas can all “be translated back into the Social Darwinism of the Westerns and similar adventure-tales by substituting colts for ray-guns

and Indians for slimy monsters of Betelgeuse” (82). Upending the Suvinian binary between cognitively estranging utopia and escapist space opera is one of the signal accomplishments of New Space Opera.

¹¹ John Rieder’s *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* analyzes the dynamic whereby the control of colonized peoples was historically validated and naturalized by SF narratives, as well as the way science fiction dismantled that racial supremacism as an ideological fantasy. In “Science Fiction and Empire,” Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. draws on the theories of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to argue that technoculture and global capitalism have reached a symbiosis under the SF banner of a New World Order instituting global peace and security. This renovated context helps frame and anticipate the concurrent waves of science fiction written from the postcolonial periphery.

¹² Castells’s specific conclusions about the network society of the Information Age are very much in line with the broader world-system analysis of Immanuel Wallerstein. World-system analysis shows that globalization consists of a single vast terrain, a large bureaucratic structure comprising multiple distinct cultures but unified by an underlying or “axial” international division of labor that binds core to peripheral zones in an unequal system of exchange ideologically termed “free trade.” Wallerstein credits neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus promulgated by the annual World Economic Forums at Davos with the rollback of labor production costs that has shown marginal and uneven success boosting profits through structural adjustment policies and opening up borders, but those profits were decidedly off-set by financial speculation in the global stock market that has left the world economy volatile (86).

¹³ MacLeod employs the literature of utopian estrangement to underscore the often neglected immediacy of these global concerns, or the importance of what Ernst Bloch, in *The Principle of Hope*, theorizes as discarding the false utopias propagated by hegemonic culture as unrealizable blueprints for a revolutionary tomorrow. In the “Fall Revolution” series, MacLeod indeed voices a variation on Bloch’s principle of hope, a radically open-ended “forward-dawning” or “striving” for the “not-yet-conscious” achieved via the “novum.” The philosophical novum constitutes a utopian transformation in the logic of history, and science-fictional novae, as first discussed by Darko Suvin, are the material-physical inventions or discoveries whose hypothetical introduction into history radiates out consequences that overhaul the abject inequalities of the future or alternate world depicted. Moreover, MacLeod also embodies what Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. identifies as the ludic quality of all science-fictional novae, in which the utopian devices of a text become “complex, ambiguous, multiple” (62).

¹⁴ Usage of the two terms “global South” or “Third World” vacillates depending on whether one views the legacy of the cold-war struggle between the Soviet Union and the U.S. as enacting a single bloc over against the underdeveloped world (global South) or as a triangulation of three worlds (Third World).

CHAPTER 4

Global Feminism and Neoliberal Crisis in Gwyneth Jones's "Aleutian Trilogy"

"A sensible female executive tries not to think about where it all comes from, the Poor South; the giant live-in sweatshops in her own backyard."

- Gwyneth Jones, *White Queen*

"That the very changes launching some women up the ladder doom others to servitude and sweatshops makes it crucial to study both groups together, scholars agree."

- John Marx, *Geopolitics and the Anglophone Novel, 1890-2011*

"Women stand where many of these savage lines intersect."

- Stuart Hall, "The Neoliberal Revolution"

In *The God of Small Things* (1997), the Indian novelist and anti-globalization activist Arundhati Roy has her two ill-fated twins Estha and Rahel sear into their childhood memories the so-called "History House" on the outskirts of Roy's home town, Ayemenem, in the southeastern Kerala region of the Indian subcontinent. Estha and Rahel fantasize in vivid, gothic detail the delapidated house and its English occupant who committed suicide ten years before: "The Black Sahib. The Englishman who had 'gone

native.’ Who spoke Malayalam and wore mundus. Ayemenem’s own Kurtz. Ayamenem his Heart of Darkness” (51). This reworking of Conrad’s famous novel is typical of fiction Vilashini Cooppan identifies with postcolonial anxieties over the resurgence of anti-colonial resistance and its historical connection to the degeneration of Victorian nationalism into fin-de-siecle “imperial decline” (Cooppan 61) and “the specter of savage civilization” (Cooppan 63). Cooppan’s thesis has much in common with the cultural malaise Paul Gilroy suggests permeates contemporary paternalistic anxieties about Third-World underdevelopment as a form of “post-imperial melancholy”, the pathological dimension of which involves an anti-multicultural “guilt-ridden loathing and depression that have come to characterize Britain’s xenophobic responses to the strangers who have intruded upon it recently” (Gilroy 90). Post-imperial melancholy echoes the insecurity and fragmentation of previous systems of colonial power following decolonization and the advent of new dispersed systems of global neoliberal hegemony (or de-linked states thereof) that develop in the proliferation of postcolonies.

Roy’s novel, however, consigns such melancholy to the margins of her text, concentrating instead on what Elleke Boehmer in *Stories of Women* (2005) analyzes as Roy’s postcolonial-feminist task to artistically represent “lower-caste nation or people, defined relationally” and intricately negotiate not only traditional male-dominated postcolonial Indian nationalism, but also the public global sphere of “the capitalized Nation, monolithic, chauvinist, neoliberal, revivalist, in cahoots with multinational companies and the World Bank” (Boehmer 202). In the process of rendering the sweeping historical backdrop of the novel, Roy gives an impressionistic thumbnail

portrait of the complex history of Kerala from the pre-colonial matrilineal Nair peoples to the medieval influx of Syrian Christians, from the British occupation to the rule of the Communist party under E. M. S. Namboodiripad and its violent clashes with the Naxalites, to its current status as a neoliberal tourist hotspot. The novel rails against the abiding patriarchal-neoimperial structures that dominate contemporary life in Kerala, especially the violence against women, low-wage labor, unpaid domestic work, and high unemployment rates of women, exacerbated by the lack of gender parity in political and property rights. (*Kerala Development Report* 46) In *Invested Interests: Capital, Culture, and the World Bank*, Bret Benjamin argues that Roy's reference to "the banks of the river that smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans" should not be read as extraneous description, but "that her explicit naming of the institution serves as a marker for contemporaneity, foreign exploitation, and the ravages of globalization...and the longstanding abuses of individuals at the hand of Big Things" (Benjamin 171). Roy's subsequent decade of politically engaged non-fiction in the wake of the international success of *The God of Small Things* seems to bear out Benjamin's interpretation. In *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, (2014) for instance, Roy invokes the spectral dynamics of the current world-system and the hauntological globalism that Cooppan argues still dominates postcolonial discourse in her claim that a new Indian middle-class, "the 300 million of us who belong to the new, post-IMF 'reforms'", must now contend the traumatic memories of the recent spate of neoliberal victims of the Gujarat dam project or the depredations of genetically altered seed-crop, "the ghosts of 2,50,000 debt-ridden farmers who have killed themselves, and of the 800 million who have been impoverished

and dispossessed to make way for us.” Confronted with the neoliberal crisis, Roy can only summon the revenant of this postcolonial melancholy, a stalled and eternally recurring mourning in which an alienated, uncanny hauntology deconstructs a metaphysics of colonial presence or visibility.¹

Benjamin’s extended analysis of the cultural politics of the World Bank² and its parallels to Roy’s conjuring of the specters haunting Indian neoliberal formations — in conjunction with Boehmer’s discussion of a diasporic, self-sustaining community of subaltern women voices in a global literary marketplace — together suggest the gradual emergence of an international marketplace for postcolonial-cosmopolitical literature expressing not nationalist decline but a dispersed structure of feeling that Avtar Brah labels a transnational “homing desire” (Boehmer 190) in reaction to neoliberal globalism, perhaps most evocatively expressed by the otherwise silenced subject positions of contemporary women writers from the global South. In the ongoing project of creating such a marginalized and oppositional postcolonial feminist canon, a major preoccupation of the merger of postcolonial and feminist criticism, however, is the hovering threat of erasing and homogenizing the homing desires of these globally Southern women under the more expansive umbrella of global feminism.

As this dissertation as a whole argues, *New Space Opera* has been constitutively hard-wired to address the hyperbolic science-fictionality of our neoliberal present, if primarily from a globally Northern perspective. In *North Wind* (1994), the second novel in “The Aleutian Trilogy” frequently hailed as pivotal to the loosely defined canon of

New Space Opera, Gwyneth Jones sets part of her novel in a speculative future Kerala where a utopian feminist community thrives, despite the eruption of gender wars and the collapse of global capitalism elsewhere. In contrast to Roy's Kerala and its deft evocation of post-imperial melancholy via the History House, Jones brings her fugitive female protagonist to B.K. Pillai's splendid, anti-technocratic, separatist-feminist home, "a pleasantly old-fashioned establishment in the green heart of Woman Town" (Jones 105). Given the name of Pillai's daughter, Katalamma, Jones overtly alludes here to the depiction of the Keralan fishing deity in Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's novel *Chemmeen* (1956), a major indigenous, postcolonial Indian novel and one of the first Malayalam novels to be widely translated and adapted into a film. Although the Keralan community is divided on this issue — Jones is scrupulous about depicting the ethnic, religious, and generational divides that make up her fictional future Kerala — B.K. Pillai's views on the invasion of a bizarre spacefaring alien species that forms the narrative crux of the series is that it amounts to an irrelevant quasi-neoliberal incursion of "ignorant, well-meaning foreigners" (Jones 107). The more pressing concern is the local masculine hegemony that threatens to reinstate patriarchal hierarchy in a rigidly feminized domestic sphere characterized by arranged marriages, dowries, and domestic violence that constantly demand "a ritual of submission, a formal abdication of authority" (Jones 105). Not convinced as her mother that the foreigners are well-meaning third parties to these ongoing atrocities, B.K. Pillai's daughter, Katalamma, an anti-alien member of the Keralan community, exclaims that the aliens are double colonizers, re-inscribing such

patriarchal domination despite altruistic ambitions: “they thought they were our partners, but they demanded submission” (Jones 106).

Despite attempts by critics such as Arjun Appadurai to theorize globalization as a less localized, post-national chaos theory, since the famous 1980s interventions of postcolonial feminists as diverse as Trinh T Minh-ha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, the question of whether First-World feminism can be ethically and politically mapped onto intransigent Third-World locations, or the fragmented homing desires of diasporic perspectives, has been insistently raised. In 1985, Kirsten Holst-Petersen and Anna Rutherford first coined the term “double colonization” to describe the overlapping hegemony of an equally coercive patriarchal and imperial culture. Sara Suleri argues that this problematic of double colonization demands a postmodern relativism since in the neo-colonial context putatively neutral native informants ultimately provide “lived experience [that] serves as fodder for the continuation of another’s epistemology, even when it is recorded as ‘contestatory’” (Suleri 766). While admittedly feminists of the global North do indeed often threaten to re-inscribe the neo-imperial divide in their very globally oppositional positions to the local-national patriarchal oppression of subaltern women, this chapter follows Chandra Mohanty’s critically materialist subaltern feminism and the contention that the material-economic effects of neo-liberal governing bodies such as the World Bank have been “devastating” on “girls and women around the world, especially in the Third World/South, that bear the brunt of globalization” (Mohanty 506).

A pervasive worry recurs, then, over double colonization or whether the struggles of Southern women necessary for the cultivation of such an alternative postcolonial-feminist canon simply serve as grist for neo-imperial divide, monolithically re-consolidating the progressive feminist in the global North over against subjugated Other, “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized” (Mohanty 200). Postcolonial-feminists complain that the self-professed progressive ideology of putatively neutral global feminism covertly quarantines the female native informant into “Someone’s private zoo” (Minh-ha 82), overriding and effacing the gendered subaltern into a “pristine nothingness” (Spivak 306). The sentimental exoticization of the subaltern in fact exposes the degree to which global feminism is complicit in upholding neo-imperial projects. By no means triumphant over double colonization, the extant corpus of New Space Opera therefore often re-draws the neo-imperial divide in its very attempt to capture the cognitive-affective intensity of the global way we live now. Hence in the hands of a First-World postcolonial feminist writer such as Gwyneth Jones, as I shall argue below, New Space Opera clearly evinces how painfully aware the writer from the hegemonic, developed North is that a global feminist stance is direly compromised by the silencing of the subaltern.

In this debate over the neoliberal arrival of galactic tourists, Gwyneth Jones stresses that her twist on the popular space-opera convention of alien encounter crystallizes pre-existing psychic investments, which serve not to heal but to highlight prevailing dichotomies of gender inequality, as well as probe the complex cosmopolitical connection such indigenous feminism has to overarching world-system inequality. By

making her alien-invasion accelerate, as opposed to transcend, existing global imbalances, Jones displays a keen awareness of the neo-imperial divide that creates the homing desires of displaced diasporas deeply shaped by neoliberal politics rooted in the local-situational adverse conditions of poverty, famine, strife, and wars. In the encounter with biological alterity, one character, for example, metafictionally explicates Jones's estrangement strategy of this science-fictional series in which a global feminist project displaces the utopian goal of gender equality onto uncanny aliens, whereas traditionalist men displace a vindication of vile essentialism and sexist difference: "the women saw the aliens, with no one forcing sex on them, having children and not getting pay docked for the privilege, and so on. The men saw the same aliens doing what comes naturally with no thought of the consequences, and nobody having unrealistic expectations or nagging them to behave" (Jones 95). With this allegorical thought experiment, Jones constructs a cosmopolitical bridge between global feminist solidarity and local anti-neoliberal contingencies.

Jones also short-circuits techno-cultural nostalgia, that is, the plaintive longing for a bygone confidence in a disruptive innovation that simultaneously reaffirms the neoliberal status quo. The Kerala women's collective resists both the technocratic-neoliberal hegemony of the Global North and its ambiguous allegorical proxy in the alien-invasion narrative. As a result, Jones wrenches the rampant escapist tendencies and commodity fetishism of the commercial space-opera subgenre in a genuinely new direction, namely, toward a complex, serious meditation on the fraught intersection of

what Ursula K. Le Guin famously diagnosed as the overlapping male and colonial biases of the most retrograde conventions of male-dominated space opera.

The Foundations of “The Aleutian Trilogy”: From Proto-Feminist House Operas to Antifeminist Backlash

In “American SF and the Other” (1975), Le Guin expresses her disenchantment with the commercial science-fiction genre as whole — with which, due to her highly ambitious and acclaimed *Hainish Cycle* (1966-1976) of novels, she was increasingly identified — but she seems to be mostly singling out the subgenre of commercial space-opera conventions for scorn. In this essay, Le Guin upbraids the “power-worshipping” and “male elitism” of the hoary clichés of scientist’s daughters, spinster-maids, and “loyal little wives or mistresses of accomplished heroes” and dismisses the space-opera trope of galactic empires as symptomatic of “white man’s burden all over again” (Le Guin 93). Le Guin goes on to astutely note the neoliberal undercurrent of traditional right-libertarian, anarcho-capitalist space opera as well: “Competitive free-enterprise capitalism is the economic destiny of the entire Galaxy” (Le Guin 95) Finally, she concludes that “American SF has assumed a permanent hierarchy of superiors and inferiors, with rich, ambitious, aggressive males at the top, then a great gap, and then at the bottom the poor, the uneducated, the faceless masses, and all the women” (Le Guin 96). Le Guin’s critique and public disowning of the neoliberal tendencies of American space opera as both phallogocratic and neo-imperial seems amply justified when one considers E.E. “Doc” Smith’s disparagement of the possibility of a heroic Lens-woman

(save for the tokenized loyal wife and eugenic womb-factory of Clarissa Macdougall Kinnison) or one recalls the routine misogyny characteristically found in, for example, Robert Heinlein's immensely popular space-opera work, such as "The Black Pits of Luna" (1949), first published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, where a space pioneer blusters, "I suppose women just don't have any force of character" (Heinlein 289).

In a list of her "Top Ten Books" by women writers in SF, Jones duly cites Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and its game-changing innovation in science fiction, as epochal for its evocation of an "impossible friendship" and depiction of Estreven as "the person whose sexual nature Genly Ai cannot accept." (Jones, *Imagination/Space*). Likewise, in *The Dispossessed*, despite criticism from the likes of Samuel Delany and Fredric Jameson to the contrary, Le Guin connects a feminist critique of class-based male domination, especially in the sciences, to an incipient postcolonial rejection of neoliberal incursion, as implied by the ironic inversion of First-World hyper-development rhetoric in the alienated Shevek's conclusion that "all the operations of capitalism were as meaningless to him as the rites of a primitive religion, as barbaric, as elaborate, and as unnecessary" (Le Guin 109). This line of argument levied against male-dominated commercial space opera, though, ironically echoes Joanna Russ's famous dissatisfaction with Le Guin's oeuvre in "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" (1971), that itself highlights Le Guin's use of the male pronoun by the hermaphroditic Gethenians in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the Ekumen envoi Genly Ai's macho posturing, and the impression that Le Guin's *Hainish Cycle* comes "surprisingly close to

[a] space opera, he-man ethos, either anti-feminism or resentment at being feminine, depending on how you look at it” (Russ 94).³

For her part, Russ may too patly endeavor to transcend the postcolonial and anti-capitalist dimensions of Le Guin’s global feminism, neglecting the profound extent to which Le Guin’s space opera has been hitched to anti-colonial insurgency. In *The Two of Them* (1978), for example, Jones vies for a global feminist solidarity only by silencing local subaltern resistance. Jones’s novel is a signal SF work that Jones herself justly praises for its post-Vietnam gesturing toward the tragedy that “radical politics simply could not see the feminizing (or rather the de-masculinizing) of global culture as a worthwhile project” (Jones 22), but the novel also seems uncomfortably dated to contemporary readers sensitive to the postcolonial issues raised by Spivak, Mohanty, and Minh-ha. The novel weaves a fiery First-World feminist Irene Waskiewisz, covert agent for the galactic empire of the TransTemporal Center, who rescues the Sultan’s daughter Zubeydeh — who may have the potential to become a future Shakespeare’s Sister, even though Irene dismisses her juvenile poetry as overly “patriotic” – from the violently patriarchal-Islamic, non-Western parallel universe of Ka’abah. Russ’s novel ends with a macabre Orientalist flourish that suppresses proud attempts by Muslim women to reclaim the veil as an anti-imperial symbol: namely Irene’s nightmarish vision of the Zubeydeh’s unsaved mother, Dunyazad, trapped in Ka’abah and brooding over an abyss filled with a mountainous pile of human bones, as only a faint whisper of potential redemption “stirs the edge of Zubeydeh’s veil” despite the tragedy that “Dunyazad, Shahrazad’s sister, that mad, dead, haunted woman...could not save herself” (Russ 225).

Even though both feminist SF authors achieved a daring level of originality, Le Guin and Russ's negative assessments of masculine space opera, of course, do not suddenly erupt fully formed with their New-Wave, feminist-utopian interventions; scholars continue to study a long, active tradition of proto-feminist science fiction that paved the way for Le Guin's crucial reinvention of the subgenre in the *Hainish Cycle* or Joanna Russ's space-opera furniture in *The Female Man*. From Pamela Sargent's seminal *Women of Wonder* (1974) to more recent studies such as Lisa Yaszek's *Galactic Suburbia*, valiant attempts have been made by scholars, theorists, and anthologists to construct an alternative feminist canon of science fiction that show the full flowering of feminist science fiction with Le Guin, Pamela Zoline, Marge Piercy, and Joanna Russ in the 1960s and 1970s stemmed from the fertile seedbed laid by a vigorous tradition of prolific SF women writers in the 1950s. In their analysis of 1950s-era proto-feminist space opera, Diane Newell and Victoria Lamont contribute to this ongoing project that might be considered the science-fictional variant on Elaine Showalter's "gynocriticism"—as opposed to "gynesis" that often focuses on the representation of women in male writers — or the creation of an alternative SF feminist canon after decades of institutionalized neglect. In line with this agenda, Newell and Lamont coin the term "house opera" to describe the vein of space adventure penned by American women writers, in a recovery of the vital contribution of overlooked women SF writers such as C.L. Moore, Katherine MacLean, Margaret St. Clair, and Marian Zimmer Bradley. For Newell and Lamont, the full spectrum of house opera was epitomized by the 1940s and 1950s work of, on the one hand, Judith Merrill's family-centered, female-oriented

domestic space operas and, on the other hand, Leigh Brackett, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, who refused to write like a “woman”; both of whom, though, innovatively used genre-SF tropes of starships, exoplanetary landscapes, and alien beings to challenge masculine proto-neoliberal hegemony, especially with regards to the subordinated role of women in the fields of science and technology, while at the same time often perpetuating not only the vicious gender stereotyping of what Betty Friedan famously labelled “the feminine mystique”, but also what Amy Kaplan influentially argues underlies the neo-colonial, expansionary manifest destiny of privatized, domestic frontier narratives in the U.S. literary tradition. Following Robert Young’s postcolonial theory and in a way that anticipates the gender troubling of Braemar Wilson in Gwyneth Jones’s *White Queen* as discussed below, Newell and Lamont contend the intersection of race and gender in 1950s house operas engulfed and disassembled the white First-World male psyche with a colonial desire destabilized in the path-breaking act of rewriting the white First-World housewife as an active agent of future history.

For a particularly class-oriented, neoliberal example not discussed by Yaszek or Newell and Lamont but an acknowledged influence on Gwyneth Jones, consider Kate Wilhelm and her combination of conventional domestic tropes with daring feats of female technological competency that puts her very much in this domestic space-opera context. The early female space-opera writer Wilhelm — later recognized for her ecotopian masterwork *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1976), which features a feminist clone narrative that anticipates C.J. Cherryh’s *Cyteen* — smuggled into her house operas intense affective anxieties over the social and cultural construction of gendered science

and technology, and the corresponding heterosexist fetishization and demeaning of white women trapped in disempowered patriarchal roles. In Wilhelm's "Fear is A Cold Black Thing" (1963), for instance, a distraught hausfrau on an Ark-like transport starship interrupts the fear-subsisting space parasite scenario to give voice to the precarity of her position characterized by a future universe of high-tech working-class exploited labor and overdependence on a husband who has been driven insane by the parasite. Kara interrupts the captain despite the protests that "the captain isn't interest in ladies, either as such, or as a problem":

Dad is a mining engineer on Trannus. I was born there and Mother died there. He never seemed interested in leaving. But there was nothing but mud and work and filth. Dredging day and night with the sound of the sucking mud in my ears. It was all I knew until I was grown. I had to get off— now while I'm still young and attractive — or I'll die there old and ugly and alone.

Following the major second-wave feminist victories in the ongoing fight for professional, legal, and political equality for all women, such limited focus on the helpless situation of the housewife, daughter, and unmarried single woman may seem outdated, even hegemonic.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1960, less than 40 percent of women were in the labor force compared to 60 percent in 1989, despite the wage gap that women only average 65 percent of men's income; and the proportion of managerial jobs between 1972 and 1992 more than doubled, even though only a small cadre of women

have broken through the glass ceiling into the upper corporate echelons. Sharon Smith has convincingly connected the post-feminist backlash to this influx of women into the workforce resulting from the 1970s women's liberation movement. Drawing attention to the embattled antifeminist lexicon that parallels Jones's near-future extrapolation of a "war" against upwardly mobile, career-oriented women (in the mold of Jones's Braemar Wilson) waged by gender-role "traditionalists", Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1991) exhaustively documents the neoliberal cultural politics of post-1980s media attacks that borrowed from and refurbished right-wing pro-family rhetoric to such a large extent that a major blueprint for Reagan's trickle-down, supply-side economics, *Wealth and Poverty* (1981), was written by the men's-liberation pundit, George Gilder; moreover, feminist recanters such as Betty Friedan, who notoriously blamed the welfare-oriented goals of women's liberation implicit in such programs as child care and maternity leave, state-sponsored battered women's shelters, and the Equal Rights Amendment, also began to import "the style and substance from the Reagan program" (Faludi 323). Citing Faludi's classic study — updated by more recent sallies such as Mary Eberstadt's *Home Alone America* (2004) that equally blames working women for teen pregnancy and child-obesity, or the 2003 *New York Times* cover story "The Opt-Out Revolution" that naturalizes women as caregivers — Smith carefully analyzes Karl Marx and Frederick Engels's proto-feminist work to argue in *Women and Socialism* (2005) that global capitalist enterprise militates against the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, endeavoring to reverse the winning of "crucial reforms — most notably, abortion rights — and raised demands for equal pay and government-subsidized child care" (Smith 17).

Consumer taste for commercial space opera perhaps most clearly registered these shifting historical dynamics in Lois McMaster Bujold's long-running *Vorkosigan Saga* that began in 1986 and currently numbers twenty three novels. Bujold herself admits she subtly codes the male protagonist of this series, Miles Vorkosigan — five-feet tall, hunch-backed, and scarred due to a birth deformity — as abjectly feminine (and even bisexual) in the context of a culture steeped in feminist backlash; Bujold continues therefore the space-opera tradition of co-opting male power with a difference perhaps most dramatically realized before Bujold by Leigh Brackett in the 1940s with the sturm und drang of her Eric John Stark Series or *Alpha Centaur or Die!* But that extends into hard 1990s and 2000s space opera by the likes of Linda Nagata, Mary Rosenblum, and Nancy Kress; and in interviews, Bujold contends that Miles is a “female in disguise” and “socially disadvantaged” by his physique, “just as women in patriarchal society are made to feel deformed” (Lake 8). Sylvia Kelso notes as well Bujold's depiction of Miles's mother in *Shards of Honor* (1986) as a prototype of the career-oriented, neoliberal woman: “the discourse of gender equality derived from liberal feminism, used in SF by both men and women writers, produces the rough, tough, unquestioningly heterosexual female hero, who proves herself by outfighting, out-drinking and out-bedding men.” (Kelso 14) Much like C.J. Cherryh's Union-Alliance universe, *The Vorkosigan Saga* also lightly touches on neo-colonial encounter from a complex, often counter-hegemonic perspective; the Hugo-winning *Barrayar* (1991), for instance, recounts the birth of Miles during a colonial insurrection on an outpost planet subjugated by the bewildering realpolitik of galactic powers.

The entering of First World women into the paid workforce, sometimes making possible the opportunity for women to become independent breadwinners and in rare exceptions high-powered executives, however, engendered a new host of problems not only for the new tenuous elite of women careerists in traditionally male-dominated professions, but especially in terms of global disparities. In *Global Women* (2003), Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russel Hochschild draw attention to the contradiction at the heart of global feminism, that is, between the priorities of affluent First-World women and the exigencies of poor women from the global South. For global feminism to be viable, in other words, it must be first acknowledged that women in the neoliberal world-system exist in a diametrical push-pull dynamic between a cosmopolitan elite and a cosmopolitical subaltern: “in images familiar to the West from television commercials for credit cards, cell phones, and airlines, female executives jet from around the world, phoning home from luxury hotels, and reunited with eager children in airport” in contrast to “the increasing migration of millions of poor countries to rich ones, where they serve as nannies, maids, and sometimes sex workers” (Ehrenreich and Russel 2). Connecting this fracturing of the coherent, unitary category of global women to its impact on contemporary globalized literature, in a discussion of William Gibson’s science-fictional *Pattern Recognition*, John Marx concludes that the feminization of labor and poverty are double-edged and must be analyzed in tandem to give scholars the global scope of our neoliberal moment. (Marx 176)

An activist for Amnesty International and cosmopolitan global traveler, Gwyneth Jones grounds the inherited domestic space-colonization trope developed by women

space-opera writers and transforms these genre materials to be more in keeping with a recognizable near-future global context. In the process of this dismantling of the escapist trappings in New Space Opera, Jones sheds light on the schisms and divisions that ruptures the singular category of global women and the neo-imperial divide that prevents any oversimplified solidarity along the united sexual division of labor. And yet despite her sensitivity to cultural and political differences between the global North and South, Jones does not refrain from putting pressure on what she routinely calls (perhaps by way of Lacan) a “gender holocaust” committed against women in the Third World. The aforementioned Keralan community is subtly censured for its Luddite technophobia and its complicity with the feminist backlash of a resurgent patriarchy. In this post-apocalyptic near-future, Jones explains that “the traveler women” engaged in their own private house operas: “tending their fires, cooking food, mending clothes minding children, and hiding assiduously under the black veils from the enemies who shared their lives” (Jones 67). Likewise, in her literary criticism, Jones remains similarly outspoken in her dismay over the oppression of women from the global South in strident tones that her nuanced fiction generally eschews. On her blog *Bold as Love*, for instance, Jones bashes the Egyptian-émigré and Islamic-convert G. Willow Wilson’s stunning science-fictional debut novel *Alif the Unseen* (2012) as unsatisfying precisely because it may be read as indirectly reinforcing patriarchal Islamic cultural norms: “the Djinn is pretty cool, and the princess is a bold, shallow, unveiled no-good who gives up her virginity FAR too easily, and is thoroughly trounced by the full-veiled, FGM [female genital mutilation] certified (at least, the Djinn reckons she’s been ‘cut’, and I think he’d know), ‘Wahhabi’-fan Girl

Next Door” (“Green November”, emphasis in original). This flippant evaluation is in danger re-inscribing one of the signal errors of the global feminist turn since the 1970s woman’s liberation movement as evidenced by Joanna Russ’s *The Two of Them* discussed earlier: namely, homogenizing the situated contingencies of Muslim women resistance as a humanitarian alibi for Northern hegemonic nations such that, as Lila Abu-Lughod argues in the recent *Do Muslim Women Need Saving* (2013), a new cultural common sense arises in which “most people still harbor a stubborn conviction that women’s rights should be defined by the values of choice and freedom, and that these are deeply compromised by Muslim communities.” In ““The Aleutian Trilogy””, I argue that Gwyneth Jones achieves a more sophisticated cultural and political awareness than her blog comments would suggest. In fact, Jones’s *New Space Opera* mounts a critique of what Meyda Yeğenoğlu theorizes as the sexually exoticization and fetishization of complexly historically embedded circumstances on behalf of the putatively benevolent Western discourses of “feminine Orientalism.” (Yeğenoğlu 11) Jones follows Le Guin in foregrounding postcolonial issues in science fiction and scrupulously avoids participating in naïve, deluded, or misguided attempts to liberate Third-World women in the name of technocratic progress.

This chapter contends that Jones explores a signal contradiction of global feminism at the intersection of the neoliberal and patriarchal divide. This intervention must be understood in its immediate historical and cultural context. In “Neoliberal Revolution”, Stuart Hall summarizes the masculine bias in the smooth transition in British cultural politics from Tory Thatcherism, and its ideological dismantling of “the

Nanny State” or labor-oriented regulation and welfare, to the New Labour “tough talk” of Tony Blair and forward to David Cameron’s “muscular liberalism” vis-à-vis the naturalized, humanitarian discourse of neoliberal globalism wherein “the main purpose of global governance was to protect markets and investments and maintain the conditions for the successful pursuit of global capitalist enterprise” (Hall 28). For in 1997, the British House of Commons elected a record-breaking 101 female members of parliament. Considered rank-and-file “Tony’s Cronies”, a study conducted by Paul Crowley at Hull University charged that these women were less willing or able to vote against the party line than their male counterparts. Early in 1997, for example, only one newly elected female MP voted against the reduction of funding to the Lone Parent bill; according to Sarah Childs, this concerted legislative act clearly felt like a betrayal to progressive women-issues voters who received the chilling message loud and clear that “women’s faith in [the women MPs] appeared to have been misplaced” (Childs 246).

It should be noted that some of these MPs eventually cut ties with New Labour party, notably, for instance, Sandra Osborne and Clare Short who indignantly resigned or stepped down following their moral opposition to the Iraq War. But, all the same, a stream of similar, severely contradictory, and highly problematic, national political events characterized the Tony Blair and the New Labour Party’s heady rhetorical embrace of the “Third Way” as theorized by Anthony Giddens as a post-ideological accommodation with global capitalism in the absence of viable alternative. Such a glad-handing, smiling Bambi gushing a moderate platform with compassion and caring mystified the continuation of the neoliberalization process set in motion by the previous

conservative Tory governments. Hence, at his most impervious to doubt, Blair could wed his Africa Commission that pushed for debt-relief for poor countries to the bellus-cassus rationale for the Iraq War and the invasion of Afghanistan. To Tony Blair and the New Labour party, both wildly discrepant projects endeavored “to bring the same values of democracy and freedom to people around the world...the starving, the wretched, the dispossessed, the ignorant, those living wanton squalor, from the deserts of North Africa to the slums of Gaza, to the ranges of Afghanistan: they are our cause” (Blair, qtd. in Riddell 138). Commenting on this meteoric rise of the female New Labour MPs that achieved such pronounced visibility in the mainstream press—even if ritually demeaned with the sexist label “Blair’s Babes”—the science-fiction novelist Gwyneth Jones arrives at this withering meditation:

Blair’s Babes, I’m thinking. Blair’s Babes (referring to the massive increase in female MPs, in Tony Blair’s 1997 government, achieved by Labour Party initiatives not unlike the proposals above) Did they really love Tony? Nah. They loved being in power though, and Tony soon made it clear that they served the One Man, or they were career-dead. Doesn’t matter what you do. The thing about women is that they really *are* no different from other human beings, as corruptible and malleable as any brother...But I loved this sort of thing...

(Jones, *Imagination/Space*)

To launch her New Space Opera series, Gwyneth Jones takes as starting point the death of a global system instituted by the neoliberal capitalism of Tony's Cronies. Foremost among the political agendas she tracks into this apocalyptic near-future is the collapse of global neoliberalization: "the slide from unlimited prosperity to decline [that] turned into an avalanche" (Jones 133), urged on by "the rise of European mega-slave-state, gross industrial malpractice and economic warfare" (Jones 36). In the essay "SF Feminism in a Time of War", Jones explains that for nearly the entirety of time she was writing "The Aleutian Trilogy", she was working on the Amnesty International UK Women's Action Committee. This experience led her to nuance her activist feminist stance of her earlier science fiction to take into greater account the underlying economic and material factors that consolidate the neo-imperial divide not only between men and women but between women and women. This attention to the systemic nature of contemporary neoliberalism contributed to the "black humor" with which she "investigated the causes of the battle of the sexes" (*Imagination/Space*, Jones 60) in her complex and multivalent science fiction. Indeed, Brian Attebery contends that "The Aleutian Trilogy" uses the well-worn science-fictional trope of alien invasion to explore not only the social construction of gender-based exclusion and Other-ing, but the "conditions of subjugated people of all sorts" (Attebery 62). If this investigation has also led Jones to suggest that an emancipatory feminism relies on a neo-imperial complicity that reinforces patriarchal violence such that "the underdogs are treacherous, self-interested, and vindictive as hell, whenever they get the chance", the conclusion comes as a result of the belief that global feminist solidarity is nevertheless possible and necessary

despite the entrenched, seemingly insuperable interests that militate against the breakdown of prevailing laissez-faire market forces. In another novel *Life* (2004), which similarly portrays the fraught intersection of global feminism and neoliberal globalism, Gwyneth Jones expresses this neo-imperial split starkly. When Ramone, a radical but naive first-world feminist gets arrested for her involvement in the bombing of the Malaysian offices of Parentis, a global biotech company, another radical feminist explains Ramone's tragic misunderstanding: "You think it's backward to wear the hejab... You're wrong... it's the only way they can hang onto their jobs, to their lives" (Jones 235).

Reading "The Aleutian Trilogy" as Neoliberal Allegory

In "The Aleutian Trilogy", Gwyneth Jones then allegorizes the alien-invasion narrative with a polyvalent multiplicity; depending on the context, the Aleutians variously signify neoliberal incursion, diasporic resistance, socialist desire, and utopian gender parity. In particular, Jones appears to be keenly aware of this inescapable pitfall of implicit gender bias in the construction of hermaphroditic aliens; perhaps in a nod to Le Guin's famous faux pas, she often refers to aliens the humans identify as female such as Bella in *North Wind* with the male pronouns. Correspondingly, Jones puts a politicized New-Space-Opera twist on what Russ and Le Guin symptomize as the blatant sexism of traditional space-opera, updating for the 1990s high tide of antifeminist backlash strategies imported in part from the revisionary 1980s space-opera women writers such as C.J. Cherryh and Lois McMaster Bujold. In fact, L. Timmel Duchamp identifies Jones's

remarkable attention to “fluid construction of gender and culture” in the continually shifting human perception of her ambiguous Aleutian aliens. Jones not only toggles between but, in the vein of Le Guin’s Gethenians, also upends the gender binary in the utterly alien cognitive estrangement of her genderless alternative culture. The Aleutians view the battle of the sexes, the abstruse controversy of violent human gender dichotomies that they can make no sense of with their reductive biological categories. Hence the Aleutians view human gender distinctions as an absurd joke between two embattled oppositional categories, the male division of which is seemingly dominant but biologically dependent: “a feud between parasites and childbearers [that] was another peculiarity, to add to the local obsession with religion, their promiscuous mingling of formal and informal language, their horrid food” (Jones 119-20).

In “Aliens in the Fourth Dimension”, Gwyneth Jones explains the genesis of ““The Aleutian Trilogy”” as a fictionalization of double colonization based on the analogy that “on the global scale...there are obvious parallels between my culture’s colonial adventure and the battle of sexes.” The representation of the “Aleutian” aliens therefore struggles between the hegemonic consent of the neo-colonizers and the counter-hegemonic resistance of the neo-colonized. Moreover, Jones explains that the Aleutians have all the cultural baggage of neo-imperial stereotypes ritually assigned to “subject races in the darkest Africa and mystic East”: “animal nature, irrationality, intuition; mechanical incompetence, indifference to time, helpless aversion to theory and measurement.” While at the same time, Jones contends that it is “no coincidence...that the same list of deficiencies...were and still are routinely awarded to women.” Despite

this cosmopolitical solidarity between double-colonized women in the global South and North as similarly “defeated natives” much in line with feminist-postcolonial positions, Jones nonetheless freely acknowledges that “differences are real” and her attempt to represent radical alterity inevitably fails such that the many aspects of the Aleutians become interchangeable with the author’s subject-position, “one uniquely different middle-aged, middle-class, leftish Englishwoman.”

The first installment of the “Aleutian Trilogy”, *The White Queen* (1993), includes a literally militant feminist movement that violently seeks redress for the double-colonized subaltern. A British delegate for the World Conference on Women’s Affairs (WOCWOM) in Thailand, Ellen Kershaw, advocates the party line: “women are the poor of the world” (Jones 65). When there is a massacre of female construction workers near Islamabad, the WOCWOM issues a political-economic reprimand. (Jones 107) Secretly, though, Ellen laments the ineffectuality and the “wooly-hat-anarchist ethos of WOCWOM” (Jones 63) that instigates the Eve Riots in response to the feminization of poverty and the devastating global labor conditions of subaltern women. Despite a global revolution in 2004 out of which turmoil a collapsed Soviet Union, a retrenched China, and an unstable United Socialist States of America eventually emerge, Ellen remains disturbed over the fact that “surprisingly little has changed as far as the powerless were concerned” (Jones 65). The Eve Riots quickly spread to reach a global scale — from Karachi, Lagos, Jakarta, New Delhi to London, Paris and Strasburg— yet the neo-imperial divide persists intact. Jones maintains that this global state of affairs implies contradictory ideological positioning for feminists from the hegemonic North: “a sensible

female executive tries not to think about where it all comes from, the Poor South; the giant live-in sweatshops in her own backyard” (Jones 74). Yet, much like the post-human response to the alien Investors qua saviors in Bruce Sterling’s *Schismatrix*, for Ellen, the arrival of these seemingly superior alien visitors promises a potential second chance for the silenced subaltern and the redemptive hope that these invaders might rescue humanity from neoliberal collapse, engendering in the wake of such global crisis “a tolerant, compassionate culture like [their] own, where everyone was free to live exactly as they pleased” (Jones 70). Rudely awakened by a menacing threat after a tissue sample is stolen from the Aleutians, Ellen dashes her “foolish dream” once she sees “the same old political monster...interest dressed up as emotion, wounded principle a cloak for villainy, the same old story” (Jones 139).

Like Ken MacLeod’s contemporaneous “Fall Revolution” series, *White Queen* catapults readers headlong into a near future that witnesses the death of capitalism. It is the year 2038 where neoliberal Northern nation-states break down “as the whole world spiraled back towards the mindset of old Africa” (Jones 53). This latter quote implies a superstitious neo-imperial chauvinism over the menace of hyper-advanced, developed nations from the global North putatively reverting to the status of a primitivized, undeveloped Africa. Jones identifies this techno-nostalgia for global superiority with post-imperial melancholy, an “acute, almost precancerous depression.” In fact, of course, Jones’s novel eschews the homogenous empty time of such progressive narratives of national development; the onslaught of millennial crises, revolutions, and environmental disasters does not eliminate the neo-imperial divide, but only exacerbates it, even though

“you could not persuade the public that one catastrophe did not cancel out another”
(Jones 60).

In “Aliens and the Fourth Dimension”, Jones suggests that this alien invasion underscores a hauntological trauma for global capitalism in crisis precisely because the seemingly telepathic but silent Aleutians embody a violent eruption of the real, a reinvention of the “unconscious in the version proposed by Lacan, the unspoken plenum of experience that is implicit in all human discourse.” In *Phoenix Café*, in a section titled “The Name of the Father”, Misha Connelly’s father surmises that “the Aleutian silent language is equivalent to the seamless discourse that for Lacan constitutes the human unconscious” (Jones 227). Despite Jones’s conscious intentions, though, perhaps, this notion of the retooled space-opera trope of alien encounter un-tapping pent-up desire via the exorcism of trauma necessitates a primary liberal human subject that Jones’s radically asignifying and estranged aliens systematically dismantles; Steven Shaviro, for example, plumbs anti-psychoanalytic discourse to classify the hypothetical un-commodified material existence of pre-subjective, unpackaged emotion or *affect*. Shaviro contends that the accelerated, hyper-exaggerated trope of “the convulsive death of capitalism” (Shaviro 136) — in line with what Jones invokes as the opening gambit to her New Space Opera — entails an “intensity affect” (Shaviro 138) that reifies the root affective experience of what it is like to live in the world today. The New Space Opera genre convention of neoliberalism-induced balkanization provides cognitive maps for the unthinkable complex digital flows of neoliberal finance capitalism. Hence the Aleutians indeed ascribe not so much to Lacanian subjectivity as to a de-individuated *WorldSelf* in which

every endlessly productive fractal monad is a “microcosm of all complexity, all being” (Jones 88). Likewise, the obligatory space-opera FTL device applies the principles of an imaginary theoretical physics in which human-minds serve as engines of the “matrix of *allthought*... where we replicate the whole of the all... the macrocosm, which is also ‘contained’, in a certain sense” (Jones 278). Indeed, in an extended analysis of Aleutian exobiology, their cultural practices of Common Tongue, and the reincarnation process of gene-swapping performed by the bug-like pod-bodies or biotic cells called Wanderers, Sheryl Vint argues that mind-body and nature-culture binaries are upended such that “Jones provides a new model of the body, a model premised on the deconstruction of the boundaries between the human and the alien” (Vint 27).

White Queen critically interrogates the legitimation of neoliberal and postcolonial dynamics by refracting a spectralized post-imperial melancholy in part through the troubled relationship of Braemar Wilson and Johnny Guglioli. Braemar is a global investigative media personality and covert anti-Aleutian agitator who seduces Johnny, a colleague and engineering journalist (or “eejay”), quarantined in Africa after being infected by a contagion in space with an ancient petrovirus “QV” that damages the futuristic computing nanotech “blue clay.” Johnny has become an object of desire for the hermaphroditic alien Clavel (or Agnes), one of the three captains of the first expedition, and Braemar uses Johnny to expose the Aleutians hiding out in West Africa. Braemar falsely promises Johnny a means to return home to his family in the United States and to contend the quarantine on the conspiratorial grounds that the charges of infection are scientifically inaccurate; and her desertion of Johnny in Africa to pursue the developing

Aleutian news cycle strikes Johnny as a brutal post-feminist or “female-impersonator” (Jones 253) comeuppance for his continual abject sexual objectification, and even borderline rape, of her. A primary mascot of the feminist backlash, career-oriented, upwardly mobile Braemar aims for commandeering economic equality via what Frances Bartkowski in *Feminist Utopias* describes in relation to Joanna Russ’s *Female Man* as “the weapons, tactics, strategies, of masculine power” (Bartkowski 57). Later, Johnny discovers that Braemar has concealed the fact that she contracted AIDs from her abusive husband, and Johnny’s willingness to infect Braemar with his own sexually transmitted petrovirus — a devious intention Johnny reasonably equates with rape — find its whirligig of revenge. Leader of the spectral White-Queen terrorist cell of the title, Braemar, clad in the commodity fetish of beautifully fashionable glowworm dresses, wreaks preemptive carnage on both Johnny and the Aleutians like the eponymous Lewis Carroll queen who screams before she gets hurt to save time.⁴ A driven feminist if only in her gender-role reversing career ambitions, not to mention her fierce hostility to all members of the patriarchy, Braemar climbs to the top of a media empire and initiates in advance an anti-colonial resistance movement against the Aleutian invaders, thus cementing her role, in one of many possible interpretations of her character, as resurgent subaltern alterity. Perhaps, though, readers should keep in mind the racial whiteness of this queenly power-feminist.

When Johnny joins Braemar on a hallucinatory astral trip to the Moon-orbiting Aleutian mothership through the looking-glass (or virtual-reality FTL starship) invented by the Pynchon-esque mad-scientist Peenemunde Buonarotti, Braemar confirms her

worst suspicions that the Aleutians are not superior quasi-divine beings such as those rhapsodized in Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama* or even vampiric monsters such as those demonized in H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*, but merely unlucky opportunists who consider themselves a privatized "Corporation" and who randomly end up on Earth "for some kind of massive harvesting of the solar wind; of the energy-skirts of each star as they pass through its domain" (Jones 247). In the Hall of Remembrance on the mothership, Johnny and Braemar discover, to their vindicated horror, Earth's souvenirs the Aleutians gradually smuggle onboard, realizing their function as a neo-imperial raiding party: "the rape had begun. The adventurers had started to ship back their loot" (Jones 282). In a dynamic shift in their symbolic register, though, before the Aleutians track down and modify the FTL drive hijacked from Peenemunde, the aliens, soon to be called "looties", are more interstellar refugees than sinister invaders, protecting their secret alternative-technocultural parity with human advancement out of an instinct of self-preservation.

Meanwhile an extremist junta quietly vies to take over the Aleutian landing party — whose collective hive mind has socialist dimensions — and waits on five-million reinforcements. The neoliberal political allegory twists its resonance yet again as the newly hostile aliens colonize the planet and "change utterly, the miserable savages they'd stumbled upon" (Jones 291). Logic-chopping a paperback of Marx in his hand like "a proper little Jesuit", the Aleutian leader Clavel the Pure One, despite his affiliations with radical socialist desire, endeavors to mystify the international division of labor and the profit-driven, unequal process of colonization as a synergistic dialectical exchange: "I am

an adventurer, trade is my obligation. But I had to come to earth to find a world where trade is a vision of the whole” (Jones 312). At the close of the first novel, by parliamentary vote, the WOCWOM buries the White Queen agenda and the FTL drive; Johnny is killed as a sacrificial forfeit for allegedly attempting to sabotage the mothership’s nuclear reactor; and Braemar, the White Queen, is allowed to escape by WOCWOM to carry on the anti-Aleutian movement.

In the sequel *North Wind* (1996), for decades after Johnny and Braemar’s sabotage incident has provoked an ever more virulent Men’s Agenda backlash against the Eve Riots and the WOCWOM serving as the alien emissaries. These conservative male-dominated Allied nations are “traditionalists, and they included plenty of women who agreed that the traditional division of labor, responsibility and material wealth between genders was natural and right” (Jones 24). The masculinist backlash pursues an escalating global Gender War and the only enclaves of peace are quarantined zones of the Aleutian trading networks. To fight climate change, the Aleutians announce a Himalaya Project to annihilate the European mountain ranges through microbes and thereby stir resentment in the still-underground anti-colonization movement. In a terrorist bombing, the anti-Aleutian Sydney Carton escapes a Greek enclave with the Bella to find the whereabouts of the rumored FTL drive, cloaking Bella in a chador in the process and thereby aligning with the militant Reformer feminists in the novel, not to mention the subaltern Islamic women of our own time (Jones 50). Here again, then the Aleutians shift their allegorical valence from geo-engineering neo-imperial oppressors to a refugee embedded in a diaspora of radical subaltern resistance. Jones makes this connection explicit when Bella

escapes Sydney by absconding with a band of female Chador-veiled Ochiba, or anti-Aleutian travelling raiders, who, despite their associations with traditionalist Muslims and Hindus, create women-centered communes in the Kerala region of India as discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Bent on survival, these refugee groups of subaltern women target and kill men who commit violence against women, but oddly also identify with the traditionally masculinist and anti-Aleutian Allied nations against the feminist Aleutian-sympathizers Reformer nations in a way that parallels the neo-imperial divide between developed and underdeveloped countries. The globally spanning ambitions of First-World feminists (the Aleutians-sympathizers) erases the cosmopolitan complicity such well-meaning women have with regards to the locally situated activism of Third-World women (the anti-Aleutian Allied nations), even though this requires the beleaguered Third-World women to identify with their patriarchal oppressors (the anti-reformist Men's Agenda). Sidney observes how, after his Greek massacre of the Aleutians and the subsequent protest that destabilized the human-alien truce, the battle of the sexes just fragmented even more, marveling at how "muddled it all become after the shooting started" (Jones 67)

Emblematic of this confusion, Sidney is a half-caste or "looty-lover" who has surgically altered his face to be baboon-like, noseless, and hare-lipped in the mold of the Aleutians, despite his fervent Anti-Aleutian sympathies. Sidney desires to get close to and spy on his sworn enemies in the enclaves. For her part, Bella turns out to be a biological hybrid herself who superficially resembles a half-caste — hence the Ochiba women mistake her for a brainwashed convert and urge she has reconstructive surgery to

disavow her ill-founded Aleutian sympathies — and she is kidnapped by Sidney in hopes of finding the FTL drive before the Aleutians. Sydney and Bella become the obligatory star-crossed lovers of this book and together occupy the ambiguous borderland in the militant political rivalries between men and women, the global North and South, neo-colonizing aliens and colonized humans. Yet in Kerala, the semi-separatist Ochiba women offer a sanctuary for Bella from not only the hegemonic Northern nations but also the local male backlash against the alien colonizers, and their own violently traditionalist men, despite the women being associated with their patriarchal enemies in terms of their overarching geopolitics.

On the other hand, regardless of their neo-imperial specialization as transgalactic corporate traders, their project to raze the Himalayan mountains, their hoarding of Earth souvenirs, and their clandestine scheme to retrieve the FTL device, the Aleutians embody an incipient socialist desire in their explicit rejection of the neoliberal capitalism of the human natives. The Aleutian Yudisthara considers economic growth to be verboten given that a gestalt collectivity cannot grow “except by devouring its neighbors: shrinking markets, destroying diversity, killing trade” (Jones 144) Their socialist harmony and abundance seems to be delusional piety to the anti-Aleutians, especially Sidney who desperately searches for the FTL device out of a conviction that it belongs exclusively to the people of Earth. When it turns out that FTL device makes humans incurably psychotic (in a nod perhaps to Cordwainer Smith’s “Scanners Live in Vain”) and only the resilient Aleutian hive-minds can withstand the process – hence Peenemunde hides it from humans behind a nuclear meltdown hoax — Sidney has to concede the device to the

Aleutians, the “shipwrecked refugees” gone astray from their raiding mission of “making landfall and a quick profit” (Jones 276). At the end of the second novel, then, the Aleutians seem to eerily invoke the millions of migrants, guest-workers, exiles, and dislocated persons that constitute the fraught ethnoscaples of our globalized world today. In other words, at this transitional point in the series, the Aleutians allegorically stand in for the hapless victims of neoliberal capitalism in apocalyptic crisis and their imperative for trade seems to depend less on a hegemonic need to exploit raw materials or expand markets than a counter-hegemonic one for a diaspora to simply survive, that is, to seize on improving their limited capital, mobility, and life opportunities.

The events of the final novel of the trilogy, *Phoenix Café*, (1998), take place 300 years after *North Wind* and revolve around Catherine, a reincarnation and alien-human hybrid version of Clavel. The alien-invasion neo-imperial allegory reasserts itself given that Catherine joins a neo-missionary fraction for the Aleutian faith, the Church of Worldself, that assists human suicide to putatively help these poor, misguided natives remember their own hidden potential for serial immortality and their long-forgotten past lives that determine Aleutian biology. Not convinced the humans in fact possess this dormant ability to reincarnate, Catherine performs this fanatical service out of guilt-racked bad faith and need to deplete the overpopulating numbers given the disastrous intervening three centuries of Aleutian colonial exploitation and environmental devastation under an ill-disguised capitalist directive of neoliberal free trade. Catherine mercy kills humans because she realizes that the Aleutians are on the verge of cutting and running (via the finally completed Aleutian-specific FTL device), and “so much living

space had been lost during the Aleutian era: devastated by war, poisoned by overuse, ruined by bad, alien solutions to Earth's problems" (Jones 25). This global state of affairs explicitly stratifies the class divide; Aleutians are referred to as "the rich" and the humans, "the poor."

In a 1997 interview for *Spike Magazine*, Jones explains that she wrote *Phoenix Café* as a complex political allegory to be especially cognizant of the overlapping continuities between colonial and postcolonial regimes. Jones states that "the history of colonialism shows you don't walk away and leave a ruin. The people left in Africa and India can't disentangle their culture from ours and that's what I've tried to write about in *Phoenix Café* – what do you do when the aliens go home" (Mitchell 2). Hence Sattva, the Aleutian City Manager of Youro, outwardly frames the departure of the Aleutians with the rhetoric of a triumphant decolonization or surrender "we mean to secure peace with honor", while covertly decreeing like a brutal colonial administrator wishing to divest its entrenched power as cleanly as possible: "the day after we leave...they can do what they like to each other. Until then I want my patch quiet" (Jones 42). . In an influential but controversial formulation, Achille Mbembe observes such a complicity in the everyday life of the contemporary African postcolony. In *On the Postcolony* (2001), Mbembe avers that the everyday life of decolonized communities are often evacuated of the direct hegemonic domination of either the nation-state or the influence of transnational economic forces and flows, despite the fact of the postcolony is intimately subject to such a *commandment* or the frequent arbitrary violence and brutality of postcolonial state repression and destabilizing global markets.⁵

A local Traditionalist elite, Mrs. Benazir Khan, explains that the poor huddled underclass of the Reformers violently resist the male backlash of the neoliberal privileged, educated elite. Despite her intimacy with the Aleutians, Khan argues that the social-sexual divide of gender difference between Reformers and Traditionalists does not represent any biological distinction, composed as it is of men, women, and the transgendered, but masks the deeper discord between neo-colonial and anti-colonial interests. Oddly, the poor masses of Reformers are androgynous and alien-identified, and the dominant upper-class is human-oriented and gendered. By these muddled affiliations, Jones suggests that the fraught political reality of the impending postcolonial social relations will remain informed by the colonial legacy. In fact, paradoxically, the deeply unequal colonial system that the Reformers support may have more progressive and redistributive aspects than a reactionary postcolonial state from which the Traditionalists distinguish themselves, especially in terms of gender parity. In postcolonial theory, the Ghanaian socialist Kwame Nkrumah influentially labeled the resurgence of this kind of postcolonial hegemonic power a *comprador* class (from the Portuguese for “purchaser”), or an entrenched and complicit local intelligentsia that serves as a subservient middleman in the colonial administration, and in the independent postcolonial state reiterates the capitalism-driven disparities and exploitation of a departing colonial or neo-imperial power.

On a missionary quest for a poor woman in trouble, Catherine stumbles on the Renaissance in the Phoenix café, a renegade group that works to revive the pre-invasion technology that the Aleutians with their organic data cloud— communicated through the

ingestion of wanderer cells — loath as part of the primitive dead-world. For Misha Connelly, the Renaissance is a utopian cooperative that adamantly opposes the Aleutians in part because of their polluting an already environmentally devastated planet with toxic “antifeedent” and in part because of their trading policies in their enclaves where “[the poor] could not live except by battenning on the rich, and the rich defended themselves savagely” (Jones) The Renaissance fetishize technical arts and crafts, and even wear elite fashionable couture so as to emphasize to the artificial and unreal in resistance of the organic and the alien. Yet to Reformers, the Renaissance also seemingly wants to reinitiate the Gender Wars and the twenty-first-century genocide where “millions upon millions of innocent women, girl children and girl fetusus had been killed, starved to death, aborted, because they were women” (Jones 116). In light such Reformer anxiety, the Renaissance resurrects a male-dominated traditionalism with an emphasis on technological innovation, rediscovery, and artifice, and in a spirit of rebellion against the Aleutian trading imperative. This retrograde postcolonial outlook achieves a grotesque comprador conviviality between the global powers or local elites and the oppressed subaltern agents.

In contrast to the triumphant narrative of national affirmation and decolonization, this neo-colonial and comprador violence is, though, continually reanimated on a local, everyday level in carnivalesque fetishes, polyphonic magical symbols, and complex phantasmagoric rituals, songs, and legends. In *Phoenix Café*, Misha Connelly embodies everyday life in the moribund global postcolony that fetishizes the inoperative remains of the recent technological past as numinous, spiritual symbols, oblivious to how he also at

the same time obliterates the corrosive history of these artifacts with his plaintive, unreal techno-nostalgia. Misha pleads with Catherine, “don’t you love the way the car [run-down machines] morph into religious images, so sacred, so reverent: while the *traffic* absolutely disappears?” (Jones 133)

The disturbing and insistent recurrence of sexual violence in ““The Aleutian Trilogy”” reflects Jones’s uncompromising commitment to portraying the problematic antagonism of neo-imperial sexual difference in its brutal everyday reality. In *Phoenix Café*, the imminent restoration of Gender Wars literalizes the nightmare of the continued phallographic oppression of subaltern women; at this late stage, though, the cultural construction of gender difference has revealed itself to be tantamount to “the mindless engine of territorial expansion; which has become [the human] engine of destruction” (Jones 207). Bookending the trilogy are horrific acts of sexual violence involving the same reincarnated neo-colonizer, Clavel, in polarized phases of self and other, as demonstrated by the human-born Catherine, plagued by the memories of the reincarnated alien Clavel, and as a result inviting her own graphically described, repeated rapes from a pathological Misha, in response to a twisted need to atone for Clavel’s initial rape of Johnny in *White Queen*. In the trilogy, these scenes of sexual violence, then, recur in doubled allegorical phases that correspond to the two aspects of double colonization: firstly, as index of invasive colonial encounter; secondly, as an index of the perpetuation of gender-based violence.

To view how Gwyneth Jones's politically sophisticated science fiction serves as a megatextual touchstone for New Space Opera in general, one only need only consider the broader feminist canon of New Space Opera that Jones's novel anticipates, revises, and updates. These other works of New Space Opera have extended Jones's vanguard charge. On the one hand, there is the signal example of Justina Robson's *Natural History* (2004); Robson's novel deploys the tropes of alien encounter, FTL drives, and posthuman cyborgs in a fashion that similarly resonates with our neoliberal era. The fact that the Unevolved humans dictate "the form and function" of the posthuman Forged, subordinating these posthumans to the status of an exploited underclass, galvanizes a Forged Independence Movement against the hyperbolic neo-imperialism of rule imposed from the cosmically distant. Another key masterwork in this regard is Linda Nagata's *Vast* (1998) that reconfigures the anti-colonial space opera of Leigh Brackett and Judith Merril's feats of female technocultural competency to subtly unsettle contemporary views of gender and sexuality in the intense space-opera context of galactic wars, interstellar journeys, and nanotech viruses. On the other hand, there is the more explicitly feminist New Space Opera of Sheri Tepper's *Six-Moon Dance* (1999) in which the fascinating gender reversal of oppressed male consorts reduced to veiled, reproductive vehicles fully flowers into the melodramatic space-opera grandeur involving male-backlash alien invaders, the intricate diplomacy of an intergalactic Council of Worlds and its menacing cyborg-envoy, and the colonized native underclass suitably named the Invisibles. Unlike Banks and MacLeod whose committed socialism may at times seem to trivialize the full complexity of gender issues, Jones epitomizes feminist New Space Opera attempts to

rethink women-centered solidarity in the neoliberal context defined by crisis-induced alienation, malevolence, and enmity between men and women. In contrast to this palpable political animosity traceable in part to the widening gap between the rich and poor of the world, Jones reaches for a nuanced global cosmopolitics that struggles against such rampant inequality most severely affecting global women.

¹ Much aligned with Valashini Cooppan, Roy may be invoking Jacques Derrida too here who in *The Specters of Marx* (1994), of course, influentially traces from the specter of the always-already revolution-to-come — a deconstructed revenant simultaneously both memory and future, dead and alive, present and absent, cause and effect, fantasy and reality, base and superstructure — glossed from the gothic rhetoric in *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital* to our present-day neoliberal debt crisis in which “the world-wide market holds a mass of humanity under its yoke and in a new form of slavery” (Derrida 117). Cooppan follows Derrida in coupling this discourse of debt-induced post-imperial melancholy not with a psychobiological imperative à la Freud but with an imaginary and fantastic spectrality in which the phantasmagoric denial of mortality is imagined through assimilating the entropic decline of empire within the existential colonial subject-position (Cooppan 16). In Jones’s “Aleutian Trilogy”, then, it entirely understandable that the Aleutian aliens often seem like ghost-like revenants since human postcolonial culture is always-already “surrounded by ghosts, ruled utterly by commands and portents of the spirit-world” (Jones 244) Accordingly, Jones puts a postcolonial and neoliberal variation on what John Rieder notes is an underlying dynamic of the emergence of science fiction as a distinctive genre, namely: “colonial commerce and imperial politics [that] often turned the marvelous voyage into a fantasy of appropriation alluding to real objects and real effects that pervaded and transformed life in the homelands” (Rieder 34).

² In *Invested Interests*, Benjamin engages in a thorough analysis of the rhetorical discourses and cultural productions of the World Bank — including the charter, economic analysis and reports, marketing pamphlets, biographies, political cartoons, historical criticism, speeches — that provide a crucial glimpse into the heavily naturalized institutional mechanisms of global capitalism embodied in the World Bank, which, Benjamin argues, helped to construct the gradual transition from colonial to postcolonial world-systems, that is, from the military-administrative age of imperial adventure to the corporate-diplomatic hegemony of the neoliberal venture capital. (Benjamin 11) Benjamin shows how, in response to the urgent need for postwar reconstruction, a new world-historical lexicon of development, sustainability, and global trading and finance developed. This cultural politics was very much in debt to pre-existing colonial discourse while also lending itself to the trickle-down, rising-tide rhetoric of the deregulated market eventually championed by the neoconservative platforms of Thatcherism and Reaganism and its contemporary offshoots of either political wing. Benjamin historically tracks the evolution of the culture of the World Bank from a fiscally conservative agency — a hegemonic fledgling institution expressing the swaggering demands of a new superpower, nervous yet overconfident about the sovereignty of the unregulated free market, and ultimately profit-oriented given that it was pitched successfully to U.S. congress after Bretton Woods as a prime boon to U.S. global capital investments following the devastations of the first half of the twentieth century (Benjamin 27) — to a paradoxical discovery of the social and transformation into a foreign-aid and development agency that channeled the revolutionary cultural energies of decolonization and the Bandung Conference hosted in Indonesia in 1955, while at the

same time setting up the draconian loan conditionality and default requirements for massive engineering projects and export-oriented, post-Fordist factories that would serve to destabilize and exploit developing countries. (Benjamin 117) One crucial apex of this trajectory, Brett argues, arises with the humanitarian, elite-cosmopolitan bad faith of Robert McNamara and his role as World Bank president in the late 1960s, (Benjamin 87) through which official position the World Bank built the benevolent neo-missionary rhetorical and cultural precedents for twentieth-century unilateral military interventions from Vietnam to Baghdad, cemented into the Washington Consensus and the current crisis of hegemonic neoliberal globalism that engenders the anti-globalization protests and lobbying of NGOs, the World Social Forum, and the 1999 Battle of Seattle. (Benjamin 138)

³ Though Justine Larbalestier does not mention this particular article and appears to be decidedly more sensitive to Le Guin than Russ (who herself later revised her opinion), in *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, Larbalestier explores the treatment of gender difference through SF works about alternative androgynous societies where such classificatory schema are self-consciously put under erasure, such as Katherine Burdekin's *Proud Man* (1934) and Theodore Sturgeon's *Venus Plus X* (1960). Although attentive to the way these hermaphroditic aliens fundamentally confound naturalized gender distinctions, Larbalestier contends alternative androgynous societies in science fiction often too easily re-inscribe patriarchal presumptions as one-sexed worlds threaten to become all-male worlds (Larbalestier 73). Jones's New Space Opera series, though, seems to respond to even this profound criticism by having the ambiguously non-gendered biology of her aliens itself ideologically misperceived as alternately androgynous, female, and male all at once by the limitations of gendered human subjectivity.

⁴ In *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism* (2012), Ewa Ziarek analyzes the Modernist dialectics of feminist-socialist dynamics that may shed light on Jones's ambivalent depiction of the hyper-advanced, gendered technology such as Braemar's glowworm dresses in "The Aleutian Trilogy" that have both empowering and exploitative functions. Ziarek's nuanced analysis, in fact, fundamentally parallels the discussion of neoliberal biopolitics in Chapter Three of this dissertation and commodity fetishism of pulp space-opera in the Introduction. Ziarek argues that modern technological commodity fetishism invokes the biopolitical state of exception to exclude or marginalize the bare life (*zoe*) of women's bodies into a fetishized, instrumentalized, autonomous object. This violent inscription of sovereignty on the damaged female body stripped of activism or agency transforms the utopian potential for productive use value into sexualized, naturalized exchange value. The anti-essentialist aesthetic autonomy of social or political formalism suggests that the bare life of women's body is dangerously naturalized by ethnic, gender, or class construction. Yet the appeal to techno-cultural commodity fetishism suggests that the primacy of the female body precedes its social-political exploitation. "The patriarchal exclusion of women Women's literature has to maintain its autonomy in order to contest the forgetting of women's suffering in history, and, at the same time, it has to negate that autonomy in order to remain its proximity to suffering." (Ziarek 81)

⁵ For Mbembe, the postcolony refers to a carnivalesque plurality of obscene and grotesque restaging of the arbitrary and cruel coercion of postcolonial state power following decolonization. This is a controversial, anti-Gramscian thesis that de-emphasizes the role of counter-hegemonic, subversive negotiation in the manufacturing of consent to postcolonial state authority. Yet I still find Mbembe extraordinarily useful in understanding the postcolony of *Phoenix Café* given that such convivial participation in the law of the *commandment* derives from a neoliberal "implosion" that leaves the de-linked and impoverished cultural landscape of the postcolony bereft of "international competition (de-localization, the quest to maximize advantages of low labor costs, growth of industries in free-trade zones, worldwide corporate strategies, globalization of markets, volatility of capital flows), with the deregulation in the 1980s of foreign exchange markets, [that] have compelled these economies to

reposition themselves within the world context” (Mbembe 52). This neoliberal renunciation makes Jones’s last installment in the trilogy not one of decolonizing liberation but chaotic intensification of postcolonial inequality.

“Archipelagoes of Stars”: Caribbean Cosmopolitics in Postcolonial SF

“But things must fall, and so it always was,
on one hand Venus, on the other Mars;
fall, and are one, just as this earth is one
island in archipelagoes of stars.”

- Derek Walcott, “The Schooner *Flight*”

How long shall they kill our prophets,
while we stand aside and look?

- Bob Marley, “Redemption Song”

“I wrestle the warptenned flying ship from the ensourcelled dungmaster, the master plan
blaster in his silver-fendered Stratocaster with wings of phoenix flame.”

- Nalo Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*

In Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, there is a telling moment of mock-heroic comic relief. In Chapter 45 of Book 6, Walcott sings his sardonic deflation of Homer’s *Iliad* and its underscoring of the dissonance between the Antillean and Mediterranean seas of history and literature. Possessed by the neoliberal entrepreneurial spirit, Hector, whose corpse in its Homeric incarnation we remember was infamously dragged around the Trojan walls by Achilles’s chariot, now has a rebranded chariot, a “sixteen-seater

passenger van”, with which he drags around his own tourist retinue of walking dead as part of a tropical resort shuttle service. Hector’s incongruous chariot is christened “The Comet” because “coiled tongues of flame / leapt from its sliding doors. / Each row was a divan of furred leopard-skin” and “because of its fiery name/ under an arching rocket painted on its side, / the Space Age had come to the island.” Walcott implies that Hector’s chariot here embodies a destabilizing hybridity that combines the troublingly exoticized, underdeveloped insularity of a Caribbean island (St. Lucia) with the potentially devastating incursions of a profit-driven, homogenizing global tourism industry, “an Icarian future they could not control.” The passengers have to buckle their seatbelts to be “prepared for the Comet’s horizontal launching/ of its purring engine, part rocket, part leopard, / while Hector, arms folded, leant against the bonnet like a gum-chewing astronaut” (117). Indeed, in his collected poetry and plays as a whole, Walcott fairly consistently notes an ambivalent reaction to the arrival of the space age to the Caribbean islands; in “The Schooner *Flight*”, for instance, Walcott basks in the “archipelagoes of stars”, the cosmos as a blank template for loose, hybrid affiliations of both pan-Caribbean identity and this island Earth bound up in both Venusian love and Martian war, global-local interconnection and disjuncture; and, in *Midsummer*, the poet visits the Babylon of Chicago to experience a foreboding premonition of the precarious position of the Third World evident in the abyss yawning below the terrifyingly apocalyptic diplomacy of the space race: “above, the punctured sky is needled by rockets that keep both Empires/ high. It will be both ice and fire.” (XLII).

In his hybrid space-age chariot, half-rocket, half-leopard, Walcott illustrates the conflicted, unstable geopolitics of the Non-Aligned Movement, (NAM) the globalized rest of the world caught in the middle of the Cold War between the nominally communist Soviet Union (Second World) and the nominally capitalist United States (First World). From its inception in the Bandung Conference of 1955, the NAM countries of the global South, eventually incorporated into the G77, were racked by political dissension, before the decolonizing front of Third World solidarity collapsed as the 1970s recession and the 1980s debt crisis ushered in the IMF-driven consolidation of the neoliberal consensus and the subsequent issuing of unfavorable, even predatory loans, attached with the welfare-gutting strings of structural adjustment programs, under the ostensible pretense of development. (Prashad 86) These programs of neoliberal globalization mandated across Latin America and the Caribbean, among other Third-World regions, by the IMF, and ironically spurring state-driven reforms, targeted “wasteful” and “profligate” spending, such as provisions of food staples to the urban poor or basic systems of public infrastructure (water, roads, emergency relief, and so on) so as to devalue currencies, enhance selective exports, imports, and foreign direct investment in the interests of transnational corporations, and liberalize trade and tariff restrictions, curtail labor unions, reduce workers’ wages, and, more generally, drastically shrink state budgets. (Krishna 48)

In *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society*, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval revive Foucault’s analysis of neoliberal biopolitics (See Chapter 2) to contend that far from simply governmental sanctioning of putatively free-market economies,

neoliberalism must be grasped as a more pervasive and ubiquitous mode of culture, a systemic “rationality” in the Weberian sense, produced by the self-generating and self-regulating apparatuses of state-endorsed market efficiency, individualism, and competition. Foucault’s *homo economicus* or the “entrepreneurial man”, the soul of modernity, perpetually struggles and competes for a dynamic desire of profit-maximizing upward mobility and capital accumulation, in an existential condition made possible in part by biological and medical sciences and the diffuse normalizing and active, self-perpetuating reproduction of population dynamics — as opposed to the sovereign mandating of power over citizen behavior in pre-democratic societies — evident in statistical census data and the collection of demographic information in birth and mortality rates, disease flows, anatomical classification, or more contemporaneously, in the mining of genetic data by transnational corporations.²⁰ Counterhegemonic response to regnant neoliberalism also floated the prospect, hovering buoyantly on the utopian horizon of the radiant future, of boundaryless equality and class-oriented revolution unmoored from capitalism-driven greed and misery. Equally, the burgeoning neoliberal era — instituted by the historically specific pro-market ideologies that became widespread policy beginning in earnest in the early 1970 but tracing back to 1930s German Ordoliberals and the 1950s Chicago School “neoliberal” economic and political theorists such as Fredrich Hayek, Ludwig Von Mises, and Milton Friedman — this era produced a new seductive mode of existence in which market incentives intimately shaped people’s everyday life, and the insatiable entrepreneurial desires of beleaguered

citizens in technologically developed liberal democracies suggested the imminent benevolent reign of a technocratic elite.

Registering the specifically Caribbean impact of these neoliberal, technocratic dynamics, this final chapter will show how New Space Opera has begun to merge with global literature, amassing the numbers of SF-identified writers and readers who engage with post-colonial, anti-colonial, and neo-colonial histories and explicitly identify as diasporic, non-Western, Third or Fourth-World, globally Southern, or, more often than not, hybridized. This chapter looks particularly at Caribbean New Space Opera as a literary phenomenon and its relation to Caribbean Literature and its marshaling of a sophisticated political-cultural response to neoliberal globalism. I analyze Tobias Buckell's New Space Operas in his *Xenowealth Series*— complete with canny twists on the received tropes of stalwart heroes, ancient aliens, faster-than-light space travel, doomsday weapons, galactic empires— and his literary-cultural stance articulated on his blog, public appearances, and interviews that should guide the reception of his too often overlooked science-fiction novels, which depict a resistance movement on behalf of Earth-based neo-Caribbean peoples against genocidal alien “satraps.” I also contextualize Karen Lord's recent *The Best of All Possible Worlds* (2013) as the latest entry into the Caribbean space-opera canon in its engrossing far-future narrative of a natural catastrophe that leads to an intergalactic scattering of a species wishing to interbreed with hybrid alien species, that is, to biologically cross-pollinate, in order to escape species-wide extinction. Lord's expertise as a social scientist, and her characterization of her scientists-at-work protagonists prizing rationality as a brake on an otherwise preternatural

hypersensitivity, injects a layer of scientific realism as well as potent traces of recent Caribbean history into an episodic space-opera plot that unspools woolly picaresque narratives involving time travel, evil empires, and psychic aliens.

In counterpoint to Buckell's straightforward intervention, or the ingenious genre twists of Karen Lord's novel, I will also closely analyze Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000), as an intervention into global and Caribbean literature which, though never marketed or reviewed as New Space Opera, has been acknowledged as a touchstone for Lord and Buckell. Hopkinson's novel indeed has space-operatic flourishes as she handles the contemporary SF iconography of interplanetary space travel and far-future technology in terms of creolized Caribbean literature. Hopkinson's novel also seriously explores postcolonial issues of exile, revolution, and hybridity, suggesting what Homi Bhabha in *Location of Culture* calls the "non-synchronous" (Bhabha 218) combination of the technologically advanced and the organically pre-modern, the rocket and the leopard, promoting a subversive ambivalence toward the incommensurability of the global center and margins. This incommensurability is what Edouard Glissant, in his magisterial *Caribbean Discourse*, frames as characteristic of the literature of "the Other America" as a whole. Glissant broadly includes into his eclectic canon the (often non-realist) work of Caribbean authors such as the St. Lucian Derek Walcott, the Cuban Alejo Carpentier, or Guadeloupean Maryse Condé with the Mississippian oeuvre of William Faulkner as much as the Columbian Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and characterizes Caribbean discourse precisely in terms of its recurrent treatment of a global regime of neoliberalism-induced underdevelopment, what Glissant terms "pseudo-production"

(Glissant 40). For Glissant, the Caribbean political economy of pseudo-production is historically linked to the plantation system and culminates in a regional, neo-imperial dispossession and postcolonial dependency as a result of the lack of indigenous production, markets, and capital.

Caribbean literature — referred to in Glissant’s terminology as the “poetics and counter-poetics” of the Other America — resists being consigned to neoliberal underdevelopment through a destabilizing, hybrid diversity that champions an oscillating flux of difference contesting neoliberal hegemony in a fashion termed “a poetics of relation.” Glissant argues that Caribbean discourse is marked by “creolization” and an exaggerated, affective attention to the bracingly corporeal, to the startlingly imagistic, to the excessively sonorous, such that “languages dazzle and shimmer instead of simply ‘reflecting’” and these “global civilizations of the non-written” oppose “writing linked to the transcendental notion of the individual, which today is threatened by and giving way to a cross-cultural process” (126). Crucially, Glissant critiques, though, the Creole folk tale and its representation of “the tool [as] the other’s property; technology remains alien. Man does not (cannot) undertake the transformation of the landscape” (132).

And herein Glissant gestures to a rapprochement with global technoculture, a key site for integrating the isolated outside of pseudo-production within an insulated interiority of technological development. Glissant looks to a utopian-styled future in which a dynamic global Caribbean culture can strategically commandeer the asymmetrically imposed technoculture from the global North for its own hybrid ends: “However, it is not impossible that therein lies the possibility for a fruitful syncretism —

if it does not turn out to be an anonymous vulgarization” (112). To ward off the proliferation of such debased “anonymity” or homogenization, characterized, for instance, by “passive consumerism” (Glissant 45), Glissant argues for an “opaque” poetics of relation, a self-conscious hybridity that syncretizes a “fold” or rhizome of global openness, interdependence, and connection. This opaque poetics of relation, on the one hand, resists an equalizing homogenization, sameness, or assimilation, while, on the other hand, does not succumb to essentialized, often primitivist exoticism, radical otherness, or solipsistic difference, perhaps most clearly epitomized by Aimé Césaire’s nativist notions of the “Negritude” movement, figured as a decolonizing “heterocosm” and a purist “verrition.” Hence Glissant affirms a fluid and dynamic cultural “creolization” (see below) that can nevertheless coalesce into strategic assertions of regional and national identity: Glissant calls and responds, “What is the Caribbean in fact? A multiple series of relationships” (Glissant 139). Partially akin to James Clifford’s controversial dictum “we are all Caribbean now” (Clifford 173) at the onset of the transnational turn in literary studies, and yet marked by a clearer, more strategically counter-global impulse, Caribbean discourse, as J. Michael Dash glosses Glissant in *The Other America*, offers a vision of “opacity [that] emerges as a central thread, or more precisely a fluctuating force, within a network (*trame*) of horizontal encounters (*étendue*).... Martinique’s experience of modernity as ever-intensifying contact with the encroachment of a universalizing culture is seen as an extreme instance of a larger global condition” (Dash 155). And like Walcott, Glissant specifically views the science-fictional culture of aerospace and rocket iconography as typifying both a corrosive

homogenizing influence and prime hybridized opportunity, as the Western culture “manage(s) to ‘slip by’ almost without having to *declare itself*, from the Platonic ideal to the lunar rocket” (Glissant 99). In his analysis, though, Glissant makes a clear, if ambiguous distinction between “indigenous technology versus assimilated technology” (51).

The multiplicity of Global SF already available, if mostly critically overlooked, demonstrates the rich profusion of perspectives that are beginning to address the social imperatives of culture in the world-system, but, given the longstanding domination of the SF megatext by hegemonic nations from the global North, the threat of a commodified homogenization and misrepresentation of putative Otherness looms large.²¹ The debate over the authenticity of Global SF strikes at the heart of theoretical debates of globalizing culture as a whole. In *National Culture and the New Global System*, Frederick Buell argues against the cultural-political “homogenization thesis” that the recent exponential rise of global interconnectedness has led to the vertiginous production of an American-style monoculture, “a gigantic K Mart with no exit” (Buell 1), given that such narratives of boundary-violation depend on a fantasy of contaminated purity. (Buell 3) Oppositely, in *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*, Timothy Brennan celebrates the Latino Lower East Side of New York City precisely because of the “enormous energy expended in protecting home against an avalanche of assimilationist appeals and threats” (Brennan 176), suggesting that theorists who favor Buell’s position and his championing of universal hybridity at the local level also inadvertently replicate themselves what Jonathan Friedman calls a “confused essentialism” (Friedman 82) in which the smuggled

assumption of cultural-political purity and insiderism remains unexamined only to be debunked. Both sides of this seemingly unresolvable, nonetheless contentious antinomy over an ersatz global assimilation as hierarchized over its implicit supplement of authentic local integrity and diversity; in other words, both sides claim their opponents fetishize and commodify an uncritical, pristinely pure culture either deconstructed by or desperately threatened with obliteration by the runaway forces of globalization. I contend, though, that this unresolvable antinomy (perhaps what we should follow Glissant and call an “opacity”) can be illuminated by framing the sliding scale of our one-size-fits-all hegemonic globality and an insurgent hybrid locality in terms of a critical cosmopolitics avowed by writers at the fertile junction between New Space Opera and Global SF.²²

Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins coin the term “cosmopolitics” for describing the means by which global literature dismantles the public and private split in an eclipse of subjectivity. Cosmopolitics delineates an emergent, fragmentary collective desire, or “proletarian public sphere” — to use a term developed by the Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in contradistinction to Jurgen Habermas’s monolithic and bourgeois public sphere — as a civil society and cultural domain of specifically international political solidarity, agency, and activism. For Robbins and Cheah, this global counter-public sphere impinges on and deviates from the mobility, security, and privilege of hegemonic global actors who support the existing neo-imperial world-system and its ingrained inequalities and oppressions. In much the same way that foundational postcolonial advocates such as the Caribbean theorist Aimé Césaire who identified the fierce struggle for revolutionary

Third-World nation-states with the upheavals of the global underclass of postcolonial workers, Bruce Robbins argues for a discriminating, adversarial, and compassionate inquiry into the “agents, options, modes, and costs of effective response” (Robbins 23) on a global scale. In its imbrication in the globalism of neoliberal politics, and its ambiguous allegorical affinity for science-fictional ways of thinking, feeling, and knowing that are sensitive and relevant to discourses of strategically supported advocacy of global human rights, empathy, and redistributive justice on neo-imperial frontier, it has been the contention of this dissertation that New Space Opera invests in a sophisticated cosmopolitics, which consistently interrogates the “hegemonic free flow of capital” (Robbins 12).²³

Beyond Global SF, and the cosmopolitical subgenre of New Space Opera, the other salient literary genre that warrants mentioning here is magical realism. Most literary histories trace the global phenomenon of magic realism to *lo real maravilloso* (“marvelous realism”) as articulated by the Cuban Alejo Carpentier in his Introduction to *El Reino de este Mundo/The Kingdom of this World* (1949).²⁴ Despite the eventual association of magical realism with world writers as diverse as Salman Rushdie, Günter Grass, and Toni Morrison, after a visit specifically to Haiti, Carpentier claimed magic realism was different from surrealism or Western (especially Spanish) fantastic traditions in part because of its resonance with Caribbean history, geography, and the postcolonial politics later most famously elaborated by, among others, Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Édouard Glissant. (Carpentier 84) In *The Other America*, J. Michael Dash cites the Haitian René Depestre and Jacques Stephen Alexis, as well as the French Surrealist

Andre Breton and the Columbian Gabriel Garcia Marquez in their engagement with the loose canon of Caribbean, magical realist texts. In *The Kingdom of this World*, Alejo Carpentier, for instance, constructs a dynamic, mythico-religious vision of nature in which it is “less the tradition of occultism that is important here than the need to envisage the Other America in terms of a new matrix of values, a new mythology of Caribbean identity that would end all exile and wandering” (Dash 88). Chief among a syncretic catalogue of global literature committed to postcolonial dynamics, Michael Denning refers to the Marquez-initiated threads of Latin American magical realism and Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso* for its high-profile challenging of the minimalist-realistic protocols associated with both engaged postcolonial literature elsewhere and also with the Soviet-era, quasi-Lucasian social realism of the Second World. Michael Denning traces the sustained attention to cultural politics evident in Latin American magical realism, in both its neo-colonial hegemonic aspects and its utopian hope for progressive change, to the 1950s advent of the age of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the culture of the Third World, that now is becoming eclipsed by our neoliberal era of oppositional anarcho-socialist, anti-globalization movements most culturally visible in the Battle for Seattle in 1999. I claim that the postcolonial, Caribbean-identified literature of Hopkinson, Buckell, and Lord often betray a utopian, anti-globalization impulse in a polyphonic, resistant, and subversive way; that is, they are hybrid, localized yet diasporic, and adamantly oppositional products of a repressive world-system through their merging of magical realism and postcolonial SF.²⁵

“Them Bablyon-Oppress People Ran Away”: The Caribbean New Space Opera of Tobias Buckell

Tobias Buckell is a popular Grenada-born SF writer whose **Xenowealth Series**—*Crystal Rain* (2006), *Ragamuffin* (2007), *Sly Mongoose* (2008), and *Apocalypse Ocean* (2013)—the author himself identifies this seminal series with “Caribbean space opera”, deeply engaged in repurposing the Western-derived but globally oriented space opera renaissance that has become a recurring focus of critical literature for over two decades. In a *Strange Horizons* review, Paul Kincaid welcomes the Nebula-nominated *Ragamuffin* to the fold of New Space Opera on the grounds that it fulfills all the ambitious artistic criteria of the subgenre movement and, moreover, “it is the harbinger of a rather more subtle and interesting shift in the cultural dynamic of space opera.” In a 2011 interview, Buckell triangulates his ongoing contribution to the subgenre as self-consciously inserting itself into the growing body of global and postcolonial science fiction, especially alongside fellow Caribbean science-fiction writers Nalo Hopkinson and Karen Lord, citing his discovery of this “zeitgeist” as “a scales-from-the-eyes moment” (Buckell, *The Skiffy and Fanty Show*). Buckell recounts that his “experience growing up in small nation with a deep history of being dominated by other colonial nations” naturally led him to the arresting childhood epiphany that, despite his formative gravitation toward the subgenre, “this fiction Others me, and the people I consider my family, and friends, and countrymen.”

As a result, Buckell came to fully embrace and identify with Global SF that reverses the shopworn conventions of traditional Anglophone space opera, and its thinly

veiled political allegories of (neo)colonial encounters where “the Bad Guys were my friends, we were the Other, non-entities.” At a reading Buckell gave on April 4th, 2014 for an undergraduate science-fiction course taught by Nalo Hopkinson, when I asked Buckell whether he felt there was a productive tension in his repurposing of New Space Opera that can otherwise be a constricting and ethnocentric genre designation, Buckell suggested that even the small sub-field of Caribbean science fiction was already extraordinarily diverse. Buckell suggested that his use of “space-opera symbols” was an attempt to show diversity can be represented in “high-octane adventure”, that is, commercial fiction. Buckell then related a story where his publisher said he could increase his advance if only he would write an “immigration magical-realist story” about his own early biography, but he felt writers like Nalo Hopkinson were already doing that style of SF too superbly. So while choosing to forego the paradoxically lucrative market of serious, respectable fiction, from the debut novel *Crystal Rain* onward, Buckell nonetheless sets the stage for his far-future history with a diverse cast of characters that would continually boast a diasporic set of ethnicities and nationalities defying the default white, American, or European monoculture of traditional space opera. Over against the “Babylon oppression” of Earth, Buckell populates the small peninsula colony of Nanagada with a veritable cornucopia of ethnoscapas: “there was Afrikan. And there was Indian. Carib. Chinee...all color of skin leave [Earth]” (Buckell 38).

Crystal Rain introduces the Caribbean protagonists of the Xenowearth series. Set in the lost, steampunk settler colony of New Anagada (or Nanagada), the novel revolves around an invasion, though the hundred-year-long stratagem of an underground tunnel

burrowed beneath an impassably high mountain range, of merciless hoards of Azteca—who, true to legendary form, rip human hearts out in open markets, though, Buckell, loath to demonize the complex Mesoamerica ancient culture of the Aztecs, makes the Azteca spy Oaxycatl one of the novel’s heroes, and hastens to add that the Azteca are also not in fact Earth-derived diaspora (as opposed to the Terran colonists) and have a rival Quetzalcoatl faction opposed to such senseless brutality. New Anagada has been rendered technologically retrograde by the resistance movement’s secret Electromagnetic Pulse Weapon and the guerilla bombing of the invading aliens, the Azteca-supporting Teotls, gone awry. As can be divined from the reference to the Aztecs, the debut novel also sets in motion a series of half-buried, repurposed allusions — Buckell calls them “symbols” — that refer to recent Caribbean and Central American culture and history.

The Ragamuffins, for instance, or the Capitol city of New Anagada’s militia, invokes the enforcement posses and drug gangs in Trench Town ghettos of contemporary Kingston, Jamaica, yet like the electronica dance-hall music culture of “ragga” (a term Buckell also modifies for his militia), reclaims “ragamuffin” as a badge of honor from the tainted colonial-era disparagement of Jamaican youth. As Abbie Bakan documents, the organized crime and violence of the poverty-stricken Jamaican Ragamuffin gangs derive in no small part from IMF and World Bank policies and the neoliberal structural adjustment programs cemented by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher’s support of the Jamaican Labour Party and the prime-minister Edward Seaga whose term outflowed a total of £443 million to foreign creditors, including £176 million to the IMF. Such balance-of-payment financing of the predatory all-strings-attached loans contributed

directly to the lay-offs, gutted wages, wrecked standard of living, and a soaring inflationary spiral that still afflicts contemporary Jamaica. It is precisely this neoliberalism-induced mass poverty and violence that marks indigenous Jamaican experience today that Bob Marley famously decried in the Garveyite “Redemption Song” and its possible pun on profits/prophets: “how long shall they kill our prophets/ while we stand aside and look?” Noting the massive impact of the song on popular global culture — Stuart Hall cites Seaga’s failed attempt to co-opt Bob Marley, leading to the singer getting shot at the Smile Jamaica Concert in 1976 as a signal instance of “culture legitimating politics” (54) — *Rolling Stone* claimed Marley’s Rastafarian line was itself a “prophetic utterance” that “would soon carry a worldwide moral weight to trump national anthems” (68).

Such coded allusions to pan-Caribbean culture and history multiply. In much the same way as what U.S. Central Intelligence Agency did more subtly with the guns-for-ganja trade in Jamaica, the Mongoose Gang in Grenada were a U.S.-supported death-squad and secret police formed by Eric Gairy whose power coalesced after the 1983 revolution and U.S. invasion, which Buckell personally lived through as a child. In *Crystal Rain*, the Mongoose Men are a highly trained army that defends New Anagada from the Azteca, though the denizens of Capitol City fear the Mongoose Men’s potential to transform into a regime-toppling junta. Moreover, like Hopkinson’s Marryshow Corporation’s pilgrim starship named the Black Starline II, Buckell cannot resist calling the neo-Caribbean colony by the similarly Garveyite designation the Black Starliner Corporation, and thereby obliquely reference the Back-To-Africa movement and its

influence on its Rastafarian, Nation of Islam, and Black Power descendants. The Black Starline Corporation first makes the Caribbean colonists indentured servants: “they had toil for Babylon. In return, Babylon oppress many people. And eventually them Babylon-oppress people ran away” (Buckell 37). The aliens who assist in the effort to recover a missing hyper-advanced starship that can reopen the wormhole to the rest of the universe and end the fight against the Azteca are called Loa after the Vodou deities. And the series-long Ragamuffin protagonist Pepper, a dreadlocked cyborg in a trenchcoat and top hat, strikes fear in his enemies in part by his uncanny resemblance to Baron Samedi, the crowning loa of death.

Expanding the scale and complexity of the frenetic action from the planetary to the galactic, Tobias Buckell earned what Thomas Wagner at *SFReviews* voiced as the views of a large contingent of Buckell readers in the claim that “*Ragamuffin* shores up Toby Buckell’s stature as a leading purveyor of the new space opera.” Allegorizing the recent history of the postcolonial Caribbean, *Ragamuffin* also complicates the standard space-opera fare of the revolutionary anti-colonial narrative, from its bracing opening sentences on: “It had been three hundred and fifty-seven years, three months, and four days since the emancipation of humanity. And for most, it did them little good” (Buckell 3). And as if the suggestion of a deadening continuity between colonial and postcolonial/neocolonial regimes was not abundantly clear from that statement alone, Buckell has the oppressive galactic empire, populated by aliens reminiscent of Lovecraftian giant trilobites, identify themselves as the “Benevolent Satrapy” — a term dating back to a dispersed network of Greco-Roman imperial governors but often

currently used to refer to the local entrenched elites of developing postcolonial nations beholden to hegemonic transnational interests of the global North.

The benevolence of the Satrapy is the condescending neo-missionary attitude that, as Gayatri Spivak argues in relation to globalizing discourse, camouflages and validates neo-imperial presumption and privilege with the beguiling mantle of an uncritical, border-spanning humanism and empathy. The Satrapy colonizes Earth and then benevolently grants the League of Humans provisional independence so long as the neo-colonizers retain control over a galactic series of wormholes and fueling stations. Attempts to commandeer prohibited technology constitutes a violation of the Emancipation agreement punishable by summary execution. The deliberate suppression of technological advancements is a fertile trope in the New Space Opera canon and drives the narratives of Vernor Vinge's *A Fire Upon the Deep* (1992) and its prequel *Deepness in the Sky* (1999) as well as Alastair Reynolds's *Inhibitor* (2000-2007) series, in which existential terror erupts over informational black holes de-linked from galactic flows. It is no coincidence that New Space Opera fixates on this informational terror just as globalization first begins to threaten the sanctity of underdeveloped nations with the dominant imperatives of the "technocratic-managerial-financial" (Castells 415) experts in the global North. For, as Buckell's use of the trope in the context of global science fiction implies, the techno-cosmopolitan elite of the Benevolent Satrapy dominate the galaxy, crushing the emancipatory promises of the diaspora, postcolonial nations. The virtual spaces of flows, or the novum gadget of lamina in the novel, expands and accumulates the techno-capital of a neo-imperial core through decentered networks enabled by the

information age. The neo-imperial divide underwrites the global management and strategic enforcement of the status quo by obedience to the dictates of the hegemonic center (Castells 460). And this disarming sense of post-ideological complicity — the infamous New World Order — reciprocally reinforces the virtual frontier or the divide between the reigning technological superpowers and the vast majority of exploited and oppressed workers and unemployed from the neo-imperial periphery. Buckell's persistent fixation on the technological backwards is evident by its eternal return in the series, reappearing, for instance, in fourth book *Apocalypse Ocean* in the squalid island slum of Placa del Fuego, on the planet Octavia, whose previously advanced state of technology, not to mention emigration flow, has been brutally shut-down and de-linked from the wormhole network by the Benevolent Satrapy and their League of Humans collaborators.

As the opening line of *Sly Mongoose* fatly states, decolonizing emancipation in actuality is a far cry from its lofty pretensions and in fact amounts to self-sustaining cycles of poverty, violence, and inequality, all carefully monitored and exploited by the Benevolent Satrapy. The protagonist Nashara begins in the brutal reality that explodes the mystification that informed and engaged cosmopolitical analysis also dismantles, namely, the impoverished reservation of Pitt's Cross rigidly policed by the guards, scanners, and checkpoints of the Satrapy and, with cruel neoliberal irony, defined by "its starving, population-exploding sovereignty and freedom" (Buckell 6). When Nashara escapes the Reservation by assassinating a local kingpin in exchange for forged electronic credentials, she does so with the intention of expediting back to the Ragamuffin

resistance a virus stored in her womb and capable of wiping out the augmented reality virtual informational network, or “lamina”, of the Satrapy. Similarly, the third book in the prospective five-book series, *Sly Mongoose*, follows the Ragamuffin Pepper’s repeatedly thwarted efforts to rescue the floating city of Yatapek from the invasion of the complicit League of Humans by means of the new bio-warfare of smart zombies.

Yatapek is so poor and exploited by their Aeolian overlords that the rural citizens cannot afford to replace their farming groundsuits protecting them from merciless solar heat, but must force their teenagers to be *xocoyotzin*— “honored youth” in the Aztec language of Nahuatl – and starve themselves to fit into the groundsuits and work long, dangerous hours in the fields. (Buckell 133) In contrast to the 1934 film *White Zombie* and the subsequent George Romero updates that cemented the American co-optation of *zombie* into the demonized *zombie* horror staple (Ramsey 171), Buckell thus reclaims for a postcolonial context the myth of the undead and its original association used by Caribbean farmers to signify the mind-numbing effects of slave labor.

Despite its deceptive resemblance to and bottom-line marketability as thrilling, escapist adventure fiction about evil empires torn asunder in high-tech border disputes and internecine squabbles, the contemporary world-historical resonance of Buckell’s fictive modus operandi situates his work also against the juvenile wish-fulfillment and bellicose gadget-fetishism of pulp-era space opera and its commercial contemporary offshoots. The starship dogfights and raygun shoot-outs of classic space opera, and its seeming warmongering, unabashed jingoism, and treacly nostalgia for vanishing codes of citizenship and chivalry, has routinely provoked the critical disdain of even boosterish

SF-aficionados such as the unlikely fan Leslie Fielder to conclude space opera as a subgenre amounts to naïve, backwards-looking fantasy and “ends by creating space-time horse operas, intergalactic feudal romances, or pseudo-epics, in which petty earthside heroism is projected upon the empty stretches between the stars” (Fielder 128). In contrast— with knowing nods to the signal examples of politicized new space opera by the likes of Sterling, Cherryh, Banks, and Jones, discussed in the preceding chapters of this dissertation — the myriad allegorical references in Buckell’s *New Space Operas* concretize and refract fierce ideological antagonisms that have flared up in the recent postcolonial histories of Caribbean and Central American nations. For, as historians such as Max Boot and William Appleman Williams analyze, in recent years the underdeveloped countries of these regions have been tragically racked by invasion, civil war, counterrevolutionary death squads, genocidal juntas, and rampaging contras, often indirectly orchestrated, funded, and equipped by hawkish U.S. military intelligence at the behest of neoliberal transnational interests.

Like Nanagada in *Crystal Rain*, Placa del Fuego in *Apocalypse Ocean* exists in an EMP-induced deadzone for technocultural infrastructure but operates as well as critical junction point for the wormhole network over which the Legion of Humans and the satrapic Xenowealth do battle. Moreover, the pontoon-floating island of Placa del Fuego has instituted the Bacigalupi Doctrine in which companies capitalize on the the calorie economy for a soon-to-be fuel-starved galaxy by manufacturing genetically engineered workers whose bodies are reshaped by the local hegemonic interests. Through this return to the hard-scrabble survival and revolution narratives set in space-opera development

sinks and information gaps, Buckell stresses the salience of the biopolitics of global South in which the inhuman and brutalizing regimes of global economic disparity can be rigorously calculated even on the basis of calories quantities, or lack thereof, which can then be managed and disciplined for the sake of unequal and dependent investment and development. Buckell puts his own unique stamp on space opera tropes as potent vehicles for these political allegories partly out of savvy instinct for semi-oppositional, post-revolutionary tactics in the literary marketplace. In “The Shock of the New Normal”, Nisi Shawl contends that Buckell’s performances of such literary resistance are subtle but effective commercial ploys: “Given this background, Buckell’s consistent efforts at creating marketable novels with crossover potential can be seen as revolutionary acts, attempts to stand the genre’s financial hierarchy on its head.” Buckell taps into the kinetic energy of pulp-era space opera but with an unmistakably more progressive agenda of refashioning the tools of neoliberal hegemony.

In his imaginative inhabiting of a fiercely anticolonial counterpublic sphere, Buckell does not, though, simply make a cynical consumer appeal to exploit a reified market niche of New Space Opera infused with the marketing category of “global diversity” or “multiculturalism”; rather, Buckell appeals to what Raphael Dallelo refers to as a primary opportunity seized by postcolonial Caribbean writers “in the age of privatization” (Dallelo 238) and in the wake of the waning of anticolonial movements: namely, the reclaiming of “popular culture [which] becomes the site for intellectuals to channel the utopian aspirations once invested in literature” (Dallelo 200). Charting the capacity of the Caribbean counterpublic sphere to both challenge and intervene in the

state from abolitionist movements beginning in late eighteenth century to the anticolonial literature of the early-to-mid twentieth century, Dallelo marks the 1983 invasion of Grenada as “the beginning of the period we now occupy” (Dallelo 225). This contemporary postcolonial period severely tests limits of the globalized marketplace of ideas radicalized by Hardt and Negri’s pitting of “the Multitude” against “the Empire.” Globalization evacuated of the indigenous cosmopolitics of post-colonialism fails to grasp the counterhegemonic scope and function of oppositional cultural politics in Caribbean postcolonial literature. Globalization of a deracinated global underclass does not register the codification of specific regionalized global public space of the Caribbean as a potent means of challenging through politically engaged and historically informed popular literature and media the widespread exploitation and domination of the global South according to the international division of labor. Buckell’s space operas kinetically reconfigure the cosmopolitical political allegory that flourishes in New Space Opera discussed above to inhabit this postcolonial counterpublic sphere.

The Best of All Possible Worlds? Karen Lord and Bioscientific Hybridity

In 1991, a sub-initiative of the Human Genome Project proposed to sample and archive the world’s human genetic diversity until the United Nations, the Third World Network, and the World Congress of the Indigenous mobilized a campaign to halt the project — going so far as to label it the “Vampire Project” — on the grounds that it promoted racialist ideologies, failed to improve the well-being of tribes in any immediate way, and could be easily exploited for “patenting” and privatized research. In *The Race to the Finish*, science-and-technology theorist Jenny Reardon invokes a Foucaultian

paradigm to view this ill-fated Human Genome Diversity Project as indicative of a broader problematic in the booming field of genetic-variation research in which despite the often admirably ethical intentions of geneticists to use their research to fight racism and ensure the safeguarding of human rights, the projects nevertheless quickly become stigmatized due to a naive reproduction of racialist presumptions. The Third World advocacy groups reasonably claim what Glissant would call an “opacity”, a strategic resistance to serve as a transparent vehicle for genetic information retrieval by first-world scientists primarily from the global North; yet this very resistance perhaps contributed to a lack of openness to the integrated circuit of global knowledge production through which diversity can also be protected (via reparations or land grants, for instance) and the persisting imbalances of the world-system addressed.

A critical estrangement of such a problematic arises in Karen Lord’s *The Best of All Possible Worlds* in which, due to near-genocide of alien “Sadiri” women by means of a deliberately vague doomsday weapon, these Sadiri women are viewed as scarce genetic commodities needed for sexual reproduction, an eminently marketable mode of neoliberal rationalization, where biologically compatible women are valued as mere womb factories and “xenofetishes” (Lord 278) subject to genetic profiling in a perverse series of eugenics experiments. Yet, oddly enough, the novel clearly does not wish to condemn this impulse to not only record but actively produce cross-species interbreeding, in a questing spirit of bioscientific hybridization; the novel, for instance, reenacts the breeding program through the courtship narrative of the two chief protagonists, the “Terran” alien, Grace Delarua, a biotechnician, civil service liaison, and cultural attaché,

and the chief science officer and traumatized Sidiri, the Byronic Dllenahkh. The romance between the Kirk-like Delarua and the Spock-like Dllenankh, in fact, makes the novel very susceptible to be read as covertly legitimizing the fan-driven, homoerotic movement of slash fiction. This conventional courtship plot even climaxes with a token, tongue-in-cheek allusion to the female gothic tradition when Grace invokes Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* to inform us: "Reader, I married him" (296). Grace Delarua also alludes to Ray Bradbury's "Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed" (1949) to convince Dllenahkh of the exploitative patriarchal sovereignty of his neoliberal encounter in which he values Terrans as "the chicken stock of every human genetic soup in the galaxy...just mention hybrid vigor and suddenly Terrans became very popular" (16) As in Bradbury's evocative story where the human colonists morph into shape-shifting Martian natives, so the Sidiri's imperious attempt to colonize Terran women in order to ward off the extinction of their species initially fails due to the resistant matriarchal culture of the Terrans. Delarua explains that within a few generations the Sidiri will become Terran, not vice versa, given the fact that Terran women will not play the dutiful wife and pass on the cultural heritage of the Sidiri, regardless of genetic inheritance: "I'm telling you, if you think you can colonize Cygnus Beta and turn it into Sadira, centuries later all you'll have is a slight tendency to shiny hair and pedantic speech in the common Cygnian stock" (21).

The outpost planet of Cygnus Beta, then, is a heady transcultural amalgam that nonetheless paradoxically incorporates radical racialized-genetic difference while at the same time diluting such spurious essentialism into the chicken broth of global (galactic)

assimilation. In an Afterward, Lord writes that she conceived of *Cygnus Beta* rendered in the novel— described initially as a “galactic hinterland of pioneers and refugees” (8) — as a space-operatic model of “the Caribbean [which] to me is the new cradle of humanity” (306). As the novel unfolds a picaresque series of adventures involving cultural outreach expeditions to homestead settlements across the Tlaxce Province in which the Sadiri science team endeavors “to encourage potential wives to remove to our settlement here in Tlaxce” (29), the novel resists the uncomfortable and troubling biological essentialism of the premise, and its debt to nineteenth-century racist discourse that Foucault believed to be genealogically connected to neoliberalism, and slowly the Sadiri come to enjoy being culturally reverse-colonized themselves by the metaphorically dark and golden-eyed foreigners. The team begins to discover that “Cygnians did not possess a greater percentage of taSadiri genes compared with those last two settlements, appearance notwithstanding (genetics can be a funny potluck, let me tell you), but what they did have was surprising amount of cultural integrity” (48).

The cultural-outreach expedition therefore replicates the problematic explored in Iain M. Banks’s *Culture* novels in which a technologically progressive, hyper-advanced culture (the Sadiri) encounters what it perceives from primitive or barbaric cultures— people not considered to be part of “civilization” (53) — and fails its non-interventionist directive. And much like Banks, the reprehensible conditions of barbarism and inhumanity seems to allegorize not so much the derogated underdeveloped culture, but the neoliberal consensus of the global North. The settlement of Kir’tahsg enforces a system of sweatshop wage-slavery on its beleaguered workers that manages to skirt

intergalactic anti-slavery laws. One worker explains the horrifically exploitative extraction of labor power: “Slavery doesn’t exist on Cygnus Beta...All you have to do is claim the credits appropriately. The cost of our food, our shelter, our clothing—somehow it all balances out perfectly...there is an excess of credits, but it doesn’t come to us. It’s paid in installments to our former owners” (169). As is the case with current world-system, the capitalist class also are predominately racially and genetically homogenous. Against the non-interference stance of galactic bylaws, Grace Delarua steals blood samples from the Kir’tahsg elite to “prove that they have an ugly class system based on phenotype” (173). Delarua also discovers that, in the mold of the sexual-domination practices of slave-masters in the Caribbean plantation system proven to be epidemic through recent genetic research, “analysis proves that the Master of Kirtahsg is the genitor of over ten percent of the domestics of the household” (174). This systemic brutality does not prompt a galactic council to intervene in inhuman condition of Cygnus Beta, even after Grace signs a confession and loses her position as a cross-cultural liaison. Yet Delarua defends her confession and resignation, and its symbolic protest of this practice by way of her maverick, hybrid resistance to global regimes of normalization: “I’m mostly Terran, which means sometimes I don’t do what’s sensible and methodical or even appropriate. Sometimes I listen to my intuition” (192).

Much like Bradbury’s psychic aliens, the Sidiri possess telepathic abilities. And much like the Vulcans in *Star Trek* — as first explained in the original-series episode “Amok Time” penned by Theodore Sturgeon — Lord deploys this trope as a literalized metaphor for both self-control and outward domination of the racially Othered. Due to

their hypersensitivity, the Sidiri must actively curb their excessive reaction to external stimuli and internal urges through cultivating their coolly rational, scientifically advanced minds (94). From the Campbell-mandated mutants of A.E. Van Vogt's *Slan* (1946) to the New-Wave recuperations of Philip K. Dick's *Ubik* (1969) and Robert Silverberg's *Dying Inside* (1972) and onto the preternatural gestation of information by aliens in Gwyneth Jones's Aleutian trilogy (See Chapter 4), psi-powers in literary science fiction, by means of the exaggeratedly affective shock of a new twist on a non-mimetic genre trope, often enact a disciplinary apparatus of surveillance and mind-control. It is therefore unsurprising that the neoliberal board of inquiry approves the mission creep to "add psi-profile to [their] genetic and anthropological data" (80).

However, the novel also charts the eventual discovery that the narrator Grace Delarua also possesses psychic abilities, which underlines an opacity: the hybrid, indigenous (even counter-hegemonic) response to the homogenizing monoculture of globalization, especially with regards to the local micro-politics of women of color and their refusal to be assimilated by global bio-scientific information retrieval campaigns. The team discovers from monitoring Grace that she is "capable of quite strong empathetic projections" (84) in the areas of pleasure and lethargy. Closed-off from this potential for radical empowerment, Grace has built up her own compensatory barriers to hybrid integration with diversity that has disabling psychological ramification given that "when you start thinking of yourself as damaged goods, you put up defenses to make sure no one has the chance to reject you" (88). Eventually, with the help of unintentional drug side effects, this psi-power becomes so pronounced that she becomes a subconscious

telepath and amnesiac who dreams the experiences of others while asleep (205). In her own dreams, Grace half-realizes, though, that her empathetic psi-powers make her more, not less intimately hybridized with Sidirans, as opposed to enforcing her psychic perspective through the compensatory, defensive shielding of a blind imposition of desire or a naked projection of her gaze. She dreams of cosmopolitically transgressing rigidly delineated boundaries and merging with the cross-species other by riding an elephant on a dry safari, murmuring “dark you are, and golden-eyed” (102) to the mute African beast.

The resolution of the novel reiterates the problematic with an emphasis on the Dardot and Laval view as integral to neoliberal discourse, namely, the enshrining of contractual obligations. Unbeknownst to Grace, Dllenankh has filed a life-partner application with the Ministry of Family Planning and Maintenance, which entails testing of Grace for compatibility that is “highly intensive, consisting of genetic profiling, psychiatric assessments, and financial auditing” (282). Likewise, Grace discovers “Sadiri men have a need to form meaningful telepathic bonds” (288) that are more deeply invasive than she previously imagined to the effect that Dllenakh has been able to completely read her mind for most of the novel. However, despite the productively troubling aspects of the novel and its implicit neoliberal allegory, Lord chooses to end the narrative with the happy companionate marriage required of classical comedies. There is nonetheless much irony taken as Dllenankh declares his fidelity with an amusingly stilted scientific vocabulary: “I have identified you as the most appropriate mate, probably through an unconscious assessment of pheromones, mental capacity, and, of course, social compatibility.” Grace translates this biological essentialism into a raw affective

response: “So, you’re saying you like how I smell, you like how I think, and you like to hang out with me” (294). And the novel ends with the talking dirty about their procreative desire for hybridity that the novel both questions and affirms, as Dllenakh informs Grace that she too wishes to instrumentalize him: “you believe that I possess certain characteristics that you would like to be passed on, via genetic transfer and mentoring, to your children” (295).

Far from a simple heteronormative re-inscription — though, it is certainly that notwithstanding novel including compelling queer characters — this marriage ritual, rather, should be viewed in the context of the novel’s nuanced rendering of complex Caribbean identity and the drive of diasporic and hybrid culture to survive the onslaughts of globalization, tourism, low-wage labor or the brutal lack thereof, and corrosive neoliberal influence. Unlike much commercial space opera, Lord resists waxing technonostalgic about ersatz futures that undergird the status quo of the neoliberal crisis, and in so doing both dramatically and playfully registers the pernicious, malevolent power of techno-capital beholden to transnational corporate interests under the auspices of what, in the end — as much as every other high or low, subcultural or mainstream consumer product of the cultural industry — must be recognized as commercial, if artful entertainment. The novel also portrays a kind of galactic police in the vein of E.E. “Doc” Smith Lensman series in the Caretakers, identified early on as “savior guardian myths primitive societies dream up to deal with the uncertainty of the universe” (15). The caretakers reframe the questionable trope of the procreative urge as a figurative affirmation of Caribbean identity under the threat of extinction: “Others say they are

people from the future and light fragrant incense to them...remember your ancestors, dream of your descendants, and work hard while you're living" (227). Due to the Sidiri experiments with time travel, there is speculation that the Caretakers are in fact from a utopian future from a parallel time line in which the demographic disaster of the women-directed genocide never took place. (223) When Grace comes face to face with a Caretakers as part of an emergency rescue of two teammates stranded underground in a volcano-induced rockslide, the mysterious Caretakers explain their utopian desire to rescue the endangered species of humanity by way of an ironic origin myth dedicated to the preservation of hybridity: "see how [the Terrans] combine four aspects of humanness...It was also decided to periodically save them from themselves by placing endangered Terran where they could flourish and begin to mix with other humans" (266). Less ebulliently optimistic than Leibniz's philosophy, Lord's novel aligns itself with Voltaire's *Candide* in which the titular refrain of "the best of all possible worlds" ironically puts in painful, but playful relief the unacceptable insufficiencies of our own world-system.

"I Stole the Torturer's Tongue": Diaspora, Revolution, and Hybridity in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*

While Buckell and Lord's space operas are exceptional at rendering the dynamic clash of opposing ideologies underlying very real-world conflicts and hostilities, the broad commercially palatable nature of the fiction at the same time must sacrifice some of its potential to conduct a probing meditation of the phantom counter-public at the core of contemporary cosmopolitics. This counter-public expresses and actualizes utopian

sociocultural alternatives to corrosive neo-imperial conditions. Buckell's grandiose, adrenaline-fueled fiction, or Lord's delectably romantic courtship narrative, therefore, do not pretend to represent a viable counter-narrative to the all-consuming globalizing forces directing such Third-World poverty and discord. Otherwise likeminded, Nalo Hopkinson's science fiction brings into thematic focus the postcolonial utopian desire that more intimate New Space Opera — less confined by the plot-driven strictures and reading protocols of special ambassadorial envoys to so-called "primitive" cultures, or pyrotechnic battle scenes, and feverish descriptions of armed fighting — can stunningly achieve. Never marketed as New Space Opera per se perhaps because of an ethnocentric bias in the term, Hopkinson's acclaimed novel *Midnight Robber* plugs into many of the recognizable conventions and tropes of subgenre — e.g., future history, wormholes and parallel universes, artificial intelligences, alien encounters, interstellar travel, a complex twist on evil corporate empires — and especially offers a telling point of comparison for delineating the uses and limits of New Space Opera as a still-evolving subgenre and literary movement. Hopkinson's novel dramatizes a collective desire for the utopian reconciliation of neoliberal interest that Buckell and Lord's novels sideline.

In Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, the settler planet of Toussaint gathers together a diverse pan-Caribbean diaspora transplanted onto this new alien world by Black Star Line II rocket-ships of the Marryshow Corporation, including "Taino, Carib, and Arawak; African; Asian; Indian; even the Euro, though some wasn't too happy to acknowledge that-there bloodline" (Hopkinson 18). Many of the inhabitants of Toussaint descend from the ethnically and geographically diverse diasporic underclass who once

“worked their figurers to the bone as indentured labour in the Caribbean” (Hopkinson 49) Not fully discussed in the aforementioned gradually building critical literature on *Midnight Robber* is the relevance of this regionalized, transcultural identity to the naming of the colonized planet after Toussaint L’Ouverture, a freed slave and chief political leader in the 1791 uprising that eventually transformed the French colony of Saint-Domingue into a fledgling independent state that reclaimed its Arawak name of Haiti.

A crucial, submerged intertextual reference point that can help decode the multivalent implications of this artistic choice of naming the planet Toussaint is C.L.R. James’s *Black Jacobins* (1936), a foundational historical and literary study that celebrates Toussaint in terms of what Nicole King has averred is James’s important contribution to postcolonial studies and cosmopolitical diaspora as a whole: namely, “creolization” (King 18). This theoretical term signifies the historically and geopolitically contingent form of Caribbean hybridity based on an analogy to the Kreyol language or the syncretic cross-pollination of a wide variety of African languages and diverse French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese dialects, spoken by a complex spectrum of people from all segments of pan-Caribbean cultures. Problematically, this term “creolization” also soon regained currency in the works of James Clifford, Kamau Brathwaite, Edouard Glissant, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Arjun Appadurai to refer to the Carnavalesque heterogeneity of global capitalism at large. In interviews, Hopkinson has identified Derek Walcott, whom the author knew and even as a child rehearsed with as part of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, as a crucial influence in her depiction of global hybridity (Strahan and Wolfe 293).

In the 1963 appendix to *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James articulates two sides of creolization or what I would like to discuss as this specifically Caribbean instantiation of the general phenomenon of neo-colonial hybridity, understood as the contradictory and layered double-consciousness of subjects negotiating the legacy of European colonialism in the Caribbean archipelagoes. The hybridity is literalized and technologized by Hopkinson in *Midnight Robber* in the female Carnival performer who “had temporarily cell-sculpted her skin to be Afro on one side, Euro on the other” (Hopkinson 55). James calls for postwar creative writers to express a pan-Caribbean Third-World nationalism that, due to the original genocide of the Arawaks and other Amerindian civilization, has the distinctive feature of lacking some of the bifurcated social and cultural structure of many other colonies, thus exacerbating the indeterminacy between colonizer and colonized (James 416-17). The ex-slave Toussaint, for instance, oversaw the radical abolition of slavery in the late eighteenth-century Haitian colony but preserved and maintained the exploitative economic system of the plantation division of labor following the revolution for years after, later to be continued in globally sanctioned wage-slave sweatshop labor. For James, Toussaint is a Marxist revolutionary icon, in the mold of Lenin or Trotsky, who capitalized on the grassroots revolts of the maroon Mackandal, Boukman, and Papaloi and whose resistance was cemented in rural Vodou culture. At the same time, after the revolution James contends that Toussaint “like so many men of better education than the rank and file, he lacked their boldness at the moment of action” (James 90) and therefore recapitulates the problematic of the modern pan-Caribbean writer who “every succeeding year...saw the laboring population, slave or free,

incorporating more and more of the language, customs, and outlooks of its masters” (James 405). Creolization, then, is not a necessarily positive or emancipatory attribute, though, the rich, messy *mélange* of Caribbean culture itself, for James, has an implicit, if sometimes-unacknowledged anti-colonial energy. This chapter contends that without abstracting the palpably local affiliations of its pan-Caribbean context, Hopkinson adapts the contradictory impulses of creolization to a burgeoning global science-fictional context that refashions technoculture linked to Northern hegemonic nation-states and transnational corporations.

In one of the three main narrative threads of *Salt Roads*, Hopkinson fictionalizes the unsung female voices of the Haitian revolution out of sync with the official nationalist story celebrated in Toussaint’s masculine exploits. In lieu of the heroic, if conflicted anti-colonial narrative written in the masculine voice of C.L.R. James, Hopkinson concentrates on the character of Mer, a Ginen obeah “witch-doctor” or indigenous medicine woman working as a transplanted slave in the Saint Domingue colony. Mer’s holistic, homeopathic ministrations and hard-earned wisdom reduce the collateral damage instigated by the rebellious Mackandal, a historical figure transformed in the novel from his usual defiantly heroic depiction into a reckless *oungan* and vindictive shape-shifting trickster Anansi figure who burns down a plantation, poisons the food and water of the French slave master Seigneur Simenon and his white family, and instigates the butchery of a national revolt. In other words, *Salt Roads* follows but interestingly modifies Antonio Benitez-Rojo who argues in *The Repeating Island* that the historical record must countenance the underlying hybrid ideological myths that induced the Haitian revolution,

specifically “voodoo” and its “vast network of relations, which includes the atrocities of social life...contributing to its dense Pan-African and Afro-European syncretism” (Benitez-Rojo 163).

When Mackandal cuts out Mer’s tongue to prevent her from warning Seigneur Simenon, Hopkinson literalizes the silencing of subaltern women and their less violent, invisible forms of resistance in the Haitian revolution. Hopkinson therefore aligns herself with Karen Lord and other contemporary Caribbean women of color including Mary Chauvet, Maryse Conde, or with regards to more recent queer culture, Dionne Brand. Similarly, in *Midnight Robber*, while it is certainly apparent that Hopkinson references Toussaint and the Haitian revolution to update the utility of recalcitrant pan-Caribbean nationalism in the face of corrosive and invasive neoliberal geopolitics, it must also be observed that Hopkinson remains especially cognizant of the spectral, unstable nature of such a progressive, anti-globalization cosmopolitics rooted in the anti-colonial, underdeveloped nation-state. As one of the leading practitioners of postcolonial SF working today, Hopkinson adapts many of the tropes and icons of space opera to critically interrogate a crucial premise of the traditional fare, namely the triumphant rebellion against a draconian galactic empire. This anti-colonial streak is typified, for instance, in Leigh Brackett’s Eric John Stark series or Hari Seldon’s underground Second Foundation in Asimov (see Chapter 1), or, more contemporaneously, the Ragamuffin resistance to the Benevolent Satrapy in Buckell. The harmonious critical utopia of Hopkinson’s creolized Toussaint, aided by the far-future technocultural appropriations of space travel, nanotech, and artificial intelligence, stands to both express and foreclose

inchoate proletarian and subaltern cosmopolitics or a viable international counter-public. The novel shows a recurring concern with the way counterhegemonic alternative or resistant cultural formations forever threaten to dissipate into phantoms and revenants, made continually vulnerable to a predatory neoliberal capitalism.

Midnight Robber begins with an epigraph from David Finley's "Stolen" that boasts a steady refrain, which may as well apply to Hopkinson's creolizing and recomposing of the conventions of space opera in keeping with the dictates of the Anglo-American publishing market: "I stole the torturer's tongue." Speaking, like all the characters, in a lilting, creolized English called in the novel "Anglopatwa", the narrator frames the novel with the contrast between the terraformed Toussaint and the prison-planet New Half-Way Tree that hinges on the distinction between a neo-colonized zone and the global imaginary of a counterhegemonic, uncolonized world. Beyond a "dimension veil", New Half-Way Tree shadows Toussaint before the traumatizing rape of colonial encounter whereby "the Marryshow Corporation sink them Earth Engine Number 127 down into [Toussaint] like God entering he woman; plunging into the womb of soil to impregnate the planet with the seed of Granny Nanny" (Hopkinson 2). The narrator stresses the ephemeral, phantom-like nature of New Half-Way Tree and the speculative-fantastic estrangement of its own storytelling practices by which the mirror planet exists in an otherworldly twilight zone as a "dark version of the real thing" (Hopkinson 2). Granny Nanny playfully taunts the reader to doubt the authenticity of not only the Anansi trickster figure's truth-telling, or her sophisticated information-age ability to "spin the webs" and weave the story, but also the unspoiled, preexisting reality

of the prison planet itself, not to mention its inchoate subaltern residents. These “restless people” (Hopkinson 2) make New Half-Way Tree their home, and the SF trope of the transdimensional mirror planet nebulously occupying the same quantum space and time, resonates with an incipient creolized cosmopolitics whose subtle, post-revolutionary resistance and subversions of neo-colonial paradigms are as unstable and shifting as the political realities of the ex-colonies themselves.

The growing body of criticism on the novel has tended to focus on the binary of between the two mirror planets as performing an ambiguous dialectic between the pluralist inclusions of utopia and the obligatory exclusions of dystopia. Adapting the overlapping concerns of Jameson’s theorization of science-fictional utopias and his conceptualizing of Third-World literature, Eric Smith contends that the evocative power of *Midnight Robber* derives in part from an attempt to construct a pan-Caribbean utopia through the pairing of SF with Third-World Afro-Caribbean folklore and fairy tales. This intermixture gestures to a cognitive mapping that incorporates the de-historicizing absence and excess of contemporary neoliberal culture while at the same time the globalized workings of its economic base, such as what seems to be Hopkinson’s indirect extrapolation of the heavily exploitative, sweatshop labor camps such as the Jamaican Free Zone located in Kingston, which regulate and rationalize cheap biopower according to the dictates of the IMF and World Bank. For Smith, the transdimensional passage of Nannysong between Toussaint and its dark-mirror planet New Half-Way Tree cleaves open a virtual, utopian horizon of Blochian “not-yet” and “becoming” in the narrative. The narrator of novel turns out to be Tan-Tan’s house “eshu”, an ear-bug virtual-network

interface named after the West-African trickster deity, physically located in New Half-Way Tree, but cybernetically connected back to Granny Nanny web in Toussaint, and the listener turns out to be Tan-Tan's son, Tubman (as in Harriet), who can interface directly with Granny Nanny since his "whole body is one living connection" (Hopkinson 328). This socialist utopian hope functions in the political allegory as an opaque expression of unnamable desire for the viability of egalitarian and justice-oriented transformation immanent in the global imaginary. Smith believes that this dynamic utopian desire reflects and shapes the flexible and decentralized processes of our contemporary neoliberal international political economy that targets the indeterminate zone identified in Hardt and Negri's binary between a potential globally resistant Multitude and a hegemonic neoliberal Empire. Smith contends that "Nannysong thereby function formally as the persistent ligature between two otherwise discrete dimensions, between the bourgeois utopia of Toussaint and the realm of its jettisoned but recalcitrant history" (Smith 158). I contend, however, that Smith's reliance on Hardt and Negri's theory overgeneralize both Hopkinson's novel and the postcolonial dynamics of the world-system to the point of an unhelpful abstraction.

In contrast to Smith's Eurocentric vision of postmodern utopian fiction and recent postcolonial SF, Grace Dillon cogently offers insight into the means by which Hopkinson in *Midnight Robber* consistently opposes Western techno-scientific discourse to indigenous, aboriginal, and postcolonial competencies, including, for instance, herbal medicine, oral knowledge-transmission, hunting and agricultural eco-sustainability, learning behavior from and exchanging gifts with animal species (Dillon 23-41).

Similarly, Ingrid Thaler incisively reads *Midnight Robber* as negotiating the complexity of European culture as an especially resonant avatar of Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic merged with Internet-based technoculture. For Thaler, Hopkinson syncretically and ambiguously creolizes, samples, and intermixes hegemonic and counter-hegemonic impulses from black and white cultures, Caribbean literature, elements of transcultural diasporic history and identity, and miscellaneous aspects of Afrofuturist, utopian, and cyberpunk science fiction. Thaler concludes that *Midnight Robber* is a "contemporary Black Atlantic utopia that refers to the ambiguous past of Caribbean slave resistance for an ambiguous technological future in which post/colonial paradigms return" (Thaler 128).

What has been undervalued, though, in these otherwise penetrating analyses is the specific character of the Cockpit County communal settlement located in Toussaint's post-scarcity utopia. These stalwart colonists build a utopian community by exploiting the benevolent public-sector social planning and the collective governmentality of the ubiquitous Granny Nanny artificial-intelligence system that orchestrates the available resources and regulates social relations of the colony to meet needs and maximize the abundance and harmony of its perfectly efficient social machine. The namesake of the Banksian artificial intelligence alludes to a specific Caribbean nation-state: Nanny of the Maroons became a national hero in Jamaica by helping to establish Nanny Town in a ravine refuge, which the Jamaicans called a cockpit, from the plantation system. In *Politics of the Female Body*, Ketu H. Katrak shows that the freedom-fighter Nanny, or Ni, often appeared in Jamaican oral traditions as a superhuman mythico-religious figure

— who could catch bullets and hurl them back or keep cauldrons boiling without fire — as much as a historically documented cultural hero who fomented the active rebellion that protected the marronage or militant runaway ex-slaves escaped from plantations. Katrack compellingly argues for viewing Nanny as a signal vehicle for expressing postcolonial female resistance: “the evocative power of such stories of defiance and struggle for self-determination and pride as black people cannot be gainsaid” (Katrack 67). Hopkinson updates this postcolonial touchstone of oppositional Third-World identity by converting Granny Nanny into a semi-benevolent artificial intelligence.

From Robert Heinlein’s *The Moon is Harsh Mistress* and Frank Herbert’s *Destination Void* to William Gibson’s “Sprawl” trilogy, the science fictional megatext couples the unlocking of unforeseen computational capacities entailed by the trope of artificial intelligence with the progressive and democratizing bureaucratic and administrative imperatives of hyper-advanced nation-states, or, oppositely, the neoliberal supersession of such governmental institutions and economies. In effect, Hopkinson plugs into this megatextual trope to construct an imperfect but altogether desirable utopia that represents what neoliberal critics deride as “welfare entitlements”, namely, an alternative, sustainable mixed economy that nourishes public-sector programs and services in a bid to strengthen the underdeveloped postcolonial regimes and its working poor, especially through labor bargaining and advocacy for education, living wages, health-care, taxes, pensions, and protective tariffs. Such progressive constraints and checks on neoliberal capitalist expansion challenge and bids by techno-capital that tirelessly campaign for deregulation and privatization, expropriative foreign investment,

reduced interest rates, and trade liberalization, thus contributing to rampant inequality, worsening crises, and rising unemployment.

The wired denizens of Cockpit County, or the Marryshevites, greet each other with the egalitarian French handle of “compere”, eschewing hierarchal designations like “boss” (Hopkinson 123), to build an electronically enhanced solidarity in a fashion analogous to the way Marxists identify likeminded allies as “comrades” or people from Spanish-inflected Southwestern U.S. address themselves as “compadres.” Likewise, the pedicab operators, or anachronistic rickshaw runners in Toussaint, escape the leisure-oriented excess of the post-scarcity utopia, insisting instead on manual labor under the belief that “honest work is for people” (Hopkinson 8). The pedicab runners form illicit biopolitical cooperatives that hold secret meetings, make contracts on wood-derived paper, relay private messages under the radar of the Nansi’s Web, itself with direct ties to “the Nation Worlds [that] were one enormous data-gathering system that exchanged information constantly” (Hopkinson 10). The pedicab runners descend from the original programmers of Granny Nanny who at this stage do not undermine or even game the system so much as learn to be more fluent and knowledgeable in the code and protocols of “Nannysong”, the medium characterized by the complex rhythms and tonalities of Calypsonian music and through which Granny Nanny arrived at multidimensional sentience. This proficiency allows the programmer pedicab runners to avert the panoptic gaze, “lock out all but she overruling protocols for a little space”, (Hopkinson 52) and mobilize self-sustaining co-ops to agitate for working-class solidarity, as occurs in the

beginning of the novel when a pedicab petitioner petitions the mayor Antonio for tax breaks. (Hopkinson 7)

To celebrate Jour Overt that traces back to the abolition of slavery in Trinidad, Cockpit County holds a Carnival wherein Caribbean inflections erupt center-stage. In a discussion of contemporary Trinidadian writers Lawrence Scott and Willie Chen, J. Michael Dash contends that “the use of street ritual, especially that of the carnival, in Caribbean writing suggests an immensely creative interest in a master trope of Caribbean literature...a tempting trope for Caribbean writers because it so obviously facilitates an exploration of the free flow of time and space as well as the permutations, randomness, and eclecticism that are central to the cultural diversity of the Americas” (Dash 127-8). In Hopkinson’s novel, the seven-year old Tan-Tan Habib continually dresses up like and becomes infatuated with the Midnight Robber, a minor character from the pantheon of the Trinidadian Carnival. The Midnight Robber is a hybrid combination of African *griot* and Southwestern U.S. cowboy renown for boastful, semi-improvisational “robber talk” or lyrical performative speeches in exchange for ransom extracted from Carnival attendees. In a comparison that points up the tight consistency in the Trinidadian Carnival script of robber talk throughout the twentieth century, Ruth Wuest conceives of the Midnight Robber’s role, and recent relative unpopularity in Trinidadian Carnivals, in terms of the waning urgency of colonial inheritances: “‘Robber Talk’ comments on the Trinidadians’ desire for self-determination and free creative expression under colonial rule” (Wuest 52). Hopkinson’s revival of the Midnight Robber suggests, then, the continuing relevance of the figure that satirizes and burlesques colonial authority in the

postcolonial and neoliberal context. Moreover, in line with what was first famously theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Hopkinson constructs the rich, referential language of the text as a form of novelistic Robber Talk. Hopkinson self-consciously enters into the widespread literary practice of representing the Carnival in literature that, of course, has a long vibrant tradition of transposing the street-based revelry, feasts, and parades of this notorious holiday festivity into the “Carnavalesque” or the heteroglossic and polyphonic multiplicity of novelistic perspectives that flouts and overturns a single monological discourse or an authoritative authorial voice.

At the Jour Overt Carnival, the disruptive, anti-capitalist protest implicit in the festivity is strikingly evident from the Robber King’s performance. Tan-Tan watches rapt in amazement while, dressed like a gaucho desperado in the traditional Midnight Robber costume of “bandoliers, holsters, chaps, alligator skin boots with enormous spurs” (Hopkinson 56), King Hood regales the audience with his Robber-Talk repertoire in a funkadelic riff on *The Autobiography of Olaudah Equiano*: “the Robber Kings’ stream-of-consciousness speech always told of escaping the horrors of slavery and making their way into brigandry as a way of surviving the new and terrible white devils’ land they found themselves” (Hopkinson 57). As Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds analyzes, this eighteenth-century freed slave narrative of Equiano, which proved so vital in agitating for abolition of the slave trade in England at the turn of the nineteenth century, also radically sublated the international political economy in its necessarily awkward bridging of the horrors of Equiano’s experience as a naval captain’s slave to his experience of mercantile success on the high seas that seemingly disregards “the dehumanizing drive of

capitalism's slave market" (Hinds 635). In Hopkinson's novel, the Robber King declares "I wrestle the warptenned flying ship from the ensourcelled dungmaster, the master plan blaster in his silver-fendered Stratocaster with wings of phoenix flame" (Hopkinson 57). The exaggerated conflation of Equiano's perfectly legal career as merchant trader with the fantastic adventures of a black pirate wrestling a precarious living of maritime "brigandry" out of his one-time white overlords ("ensourcelled dungmaster") parallels Toussaint's wrestling of a collective post-scarcity utopia from the neoliberal interests of the Marrayshow Corporation, not to mention the wrenching of a hybrid Caribbean SF from the stranglehold of homogenizing Northern technoculture.

Highlighting the creolization of Toussaint citizenry, the Robber King demands ransom from his accosted witnesses whom he disparages as "compunctively, embroiled despoilers" (Hopkinson 56) for their hybridized complicity in the neo-imperial divide. This narrative focus on the continuation of colonization into postcolonial dynamics recurs when Granny Nanny exiles Tan-Tan's father, the mayor Antonio, for poisoning his wife's lover Quashee in a Carnival duel. The subsequent journey from Toussaint to New Half-Way Tree (named after a Yoruba myth and violent neighborhood in Kingston, Jamaica) is described in a startling metaphor that applies the science-fictional trope of travel through string-theory alternate dimensions or "veils" to the historical legacy of the Middle Passage, reiterating the substance of the earlier speech of the King Robber and Granny Nanny's narrative frame. Antonio kidnaps Tan-Tan and smuggles her into the small pod with him while being corralled into an high-tech transportation hub called the Shift Towers: "they were trapped in a confining space, being taken away from home like long

time ago Africans” (Hopkinson 74). Tan-Tan’s exile to New Half-Way Tree echoes and repeats, then, the horrific and genocidal forced displacement of West African diasporas in slave ships to the Caribbean across the Black Atlantic from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries. As felt immediately by Tan-Tan in her traumatic disconnection from the ‘Nansi Web through her inactive eshu, this metaphor reaches back to the unimaginably disruptive loss and terror of slavery to evoke the experience of being expelled from the benevolent caretaking of Granny Nanny and the high-tech, post-scarcity utopia of Toussaint. In this brave new world of New Half-Way Tree, Tan-Tan and Antonio encounter a hierarchical division of labor between a variety of native, bird-like alien species collectively called Douen and the “tallpeople” or exiled colonists from Toussaint, which shatters the egalitarian norms and values of Toussaint where “*shipmates all have the same status. Nobody higher than a next somebody*” (Hopkinson 121, italics in original).

Hopkinson stresses the devastating loss of such an Edenic socio-cultural paradise through the interjection of a bolded Granny Nanny’s frame-story section narrated to Tan-Tan’s son, Tubman. In terms of the political allegory of the novel as a whole, this particular fable suggests a fallen state of necessary compromise and strategic collaboration with the forces of neoliberal capitalism that viable mixed economies of the global South often require. The fable recaps the events of the novel so far with boldly expressive, fairy-tale strokes. Tan-Tan and Antonio descend from the lush wilderness of the moon where the Jamaican tribal deity Kabo Tano rains down sufficient bounty—“star apple, and guavas yellow and round like the moon it own self, and mamee apples,

big and sweet and sun-orange inside” (Hopkinson 79) — to a post-lapsarian Earth, barren and blasted. In this wasteland, Tan-Tan must hunt and scavenge like a rat to survive and Kabo Tano tests Tan-Tan by asking her to cut down the Half-Way Tree back to the moon. After Kabo Tano teaches Tan-Tan how to cook meat and she complies with chopping down the tree, Kabo Tano forever exiles Tan-Tan from the moon for initially lying to the god that she was too weak to perform the requested task. Yet despite her exile, the fable ends with the happily-ever-after of Tan-Tan rebuilding a partial and limited utopia on Earth modeled on the lunar heaven to which she can never return. This “new, clean Earth” (Hopkinson 90), though, requires Tan-Tan to don the mantle of Robber Queen and, like the biblical thief in the night, steal the lives of the animals she consumes to subsist. Hopkinson suggests this gradual reconstruction of a lost socialist utopia in the novel proper through Tubman’s own biotech link— metamorphosed from the nanomites of the eshu earbugs that fused with Tan-Tan’s body — back to the benevolent ‘Nansi Web that ultimately forms a healing bridge in Sweet Pone connecting the prison colony to the utopian Toussaint.

Beyond the dimension veil, a post-lapsarian, dehumanizing penance of subsistence labor defines the hard existence of New Half-Way Tree: “We not people no more. We exiles. Is work hard or dead” (Hopkinson 135). The subaltern counterpublics of New Half-Way Tree’s underclasses, both in the tallpeople settlement of Junjuh Town and among the tribal Douen at the Daddy Tree, coalesce into a contingent, spectral nation oppositional to the rational self-interest and capital-driven excess of the cosmopolitan elite whose neo-imperial expansions are figured as traumatic sexual violation. When the

deranged Antonio rapes his fourteen-year-old daughter as a substitute for being separated from his wife, Tan-Tan exploits the coping mechanism of imagining herself the Robber Queen who redresses the inequality, poverty, and immiseration of the neo-colony through highway brigandry. Tan-Tan screws up her courage by making believe she has become a harbinger of redistributive justice, “travel[ing] to this place to rob the rich in their idleness and help the poor in their humility” (Hopkinson 140). Imagining herself as the Robber Queen ultimately gives the young girl the resolve to stab and slay her rapist father — and the brutally exploitative forces he represents in the political allegory — out of an instinct of self-defense and revenge. (Hopkinson 168)

In Chigger Bite Village, Tan-Tan abandons role-playing and transforms into a super-heroic machete-wielding vigilante, the Robber Queen, not simply in her wild imagination, but through guerilla ambushes righting the wrongs for the overwhelming majority of the population identifiable by “the exhausted shuffle of someone who did manual labour from dayclean to daylean” (Hopkinson 250). Through gossip and rumor circulated around New Half-Way Tree, Tan-Tan morphs into the legend of a an avenging crusader “come to succor the massive—them, the masses the Nation Worlds had dumped out here behind God’s back” (Hopkinson 256). After the Junjuh Town mob burn down the Douen’s Daddy Tree to smoke out Tan-Tan, Tan-Tan and her Douen partner Abitefa separate from the tribe and scrape by a subsistence, all the while Tan-Tan answers her calling of performing good works as the Robber Queen dictated by the Douen creed of cosmopolitical empathy and altruism that combats the structural inequality of global capital: namely, “if you take one (life), you must give back two” (Hopkinson 290).

Hopkinson cements the connection between this ethos and the utopian Toussaint when Tan-Tan notices that Hinte comforting speech of the Douen resembles nannysong, and when in her final robber speech that silences Antonio's vengeful second wife Janisette, when Tan-Tan grandly identifies herself as a representative of an incipient subaltern counter-public, as a resurrected "N-AN-ny, Maroon Granny, meaning Nana, mother, caretaker to a nation" (Hopkinson 320).

Whether through farmer-centered resistance to a supposedly benevolent satrapy, or the courtship of scientists hard at work attempting to ensure the flourishing of a dwindling genetic line, or through a midnight robber and her valiant attempt to recreate a lost utopia, Nalo Hopkinson, Karen Lord, and Tobias Buckell variously depict an opaque resistance to the runaway neoliberal rationalization of experience and its impact on Caribbean culture and politics in the modern world-system. Their transformative contributions to global SF, not to mention the subgenre niche of New Space Opera, suggests an imminent, vibrant flowering of hybrid diversity that readers should welcome and celebrate for the cosmopolitical culture it represents, mediates, and reproduces.

²⁰ Cementing the connection between technocracy and neoliberalism, Dardot and Laval discuss the "manufacturing of the neoliberal subject" between the twin poles of "science, on the one hand, and capitalism on the other." By the term "science" here, Dardot and Laval are specifically referring to the neoliberal schools of economics and sociology that were disseminated to wider populations most adamantly by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher whose statecraft and policymaking coups stem not simply from an ethos of rugged individualism but from neoliberal ideology historically; Thatcher, for instance, seems to oddly parallel Max Weber's theory of the rationalization of subjectivity when she claimed the neo-missionary role of supply-side economics in "changing the heart and soul." However, Dardot and Laval trace some of theories of the original German Ordoliberals (who were themselves decidedly more left-libertarian) back to a critique of the Darwinian nineteenth-century Victorian natural science of Herbert Spencer. Otherwise Dardot and Laval make an important contribution to neoliberal theory in their well-researched studies that provocatively wed together classical laissez-faire liberalism, the birth of neoliberalism in theory with the Ordoliberals, the Chicago School, Foucault, Weber, and contemporary self-help culture.

²¹ A sampling of recent, seminal book-length criticism on the conjunction of science fiction and global dynamics, all of which have been cited selectively throughout this dissertation, must include the following: John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), Patricia Kerslake's *Science Fiction and Empire* (2010), Jessica Langer's *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2011), and Eric D. Smith's *Globalization, Utopia and Postcolonial Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope* (2012). This critical interest is very much aligned with a burgeoning literary demand for stories with a global slant as well. A postcolonial-global revamping of clichéd Eurocentric SF conventions has slowly trickled into the Anglo-American market in increasing numbers in the last few decades, including notably *Cosmos Latinos: An Anthology of Science Fiction from Latin America and Spain* (2003), *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2006), the *Apex Books of World SF* (2012), and *AfroSF: Science Fiction by African Writers* (2012).

²² On a successful campaign on the crowd-funding site Peer-Backers, Fabio Fernandes and Djibril al-Ayad pitched an SF anthology to be released in late 2013, called *We See a Different Future*. Fernandes and al-Ayad's bid, advertised on World SF Blog and a Locus Online Roundtable, also solicited for submissions for the short-story collection that would target a growing publishing trend often labeled for convenience "Global SF." The editors stated their militant desire for stories that rejected ethnocentric and neocolonial trends, vigorously alive in the genre since the pulp-era and before, that featured "White Man learning the error of his ways; nor parables about alien contact in which the Humans are white Anglos, and the Aliens are an analogue for other races. We want stories told from the viewpoint of colonized peoples, with characters who do not necessarily speak English, from authors who have experience of the world outside the First World." As this anthology suggests, the demand for a postcolonial revamping of shopworn Eurocentric SF conventions has recently accelerated since the critical success of Paolo Bacigalupi's *Wind-Up Girl* (2009) that won the trifecta of the Nebula, Hugo, and Philip K. Dick awards and takes place in a post-petroleum Thailand as a lynchpin in a new global economy built on calories and genetically modified crops, directly extrapolating on the late 1990s East Asian Crisis and the agricultural biotech of Monsanto. Bacigalupi's novel did not arise full-form out of a vacuum, though. SF short-stories with a global tinge have slowly trickled into the Anglo-American market in increasing numbers in the last few decades. Applauding the anthology but dubious of the dearth of non-Western voices except as ventriloquized by Western novelists such as Bacigalupi or Ian McDonald, in the Locus Online Roundtable, Joyce Chng laments the "minefield" of "cultural appropriation" and "exoticism" that sabotages good-faith efforts to develop a viable canon of Global SF.

²³ After a century in which the League of Nations proved as wispy as the Non-Aligned Movement, not to mention the conspicuous absence of workers of the world uniting under any grandiose banner of the internationally downtrodden, the resurgence of interest in cosmopolitan ideas may seem a convenient alibi for neo-imperial aggression. Yet a critical cosmopolitanism—dubbed cosmopolitics by its acolytes—has recently gained an undeniable postcolonial cachet. In *Inhuman Condition* (2007), Peng Cheah, for instance, credits Immanuel Kant's cosmopolitanism for the loosening of the hyphen between the nation and state prior to the emergence of the modern nation in a way that anticipates contemporary globalization characterized by transnational diaspora, the rise of global cities, and human-rights NGOs, in contestation with regime-change puppeteering, sweat-shop labor, capital flight, destabilizing stock-market speculation, and draconian immigration law. In contrast to Hegel's state-centered relativism and in line with Marx's sublation of the state apparatus by global capital, Cheah argues that Kant's call for a world federation rearticulates the deontological, normative basis for a global (counter)public sphere such that indigenous groups can invoke a shared feeling of belonging beyond the local-regional polis. Yet despite appealing to the exhortatory and heuristic power of the intrinsic Kantian values of human freedom, dignity, and reason, especially in the context of disempowered subaltern subjects, Cheah insists that the inhuman condition of the neoliberal consensus militates against this universalizing appeal to

human-rights rhetoric. Likewise, fellow cosmopolitical theorist Bruce Robbins in *Feeling Global* (1999) contends that global ethical-political obligations and civil-society appeals to empathy rooted in values of human rights or redistributive justice must compromise with the messy realities of laissez-faire profit-seeking and national modes of response in order to truly redress the worsening problems of the global poor and oppressed.

²⁴ Both parallel to and distinct from SF per se, the oxymoron of magical realism loosely refers to a rhetorical tone, narrative mode, or generic style of mimetic, matter-of-fact description of events and occurrences that would ordinarily be considered fantastic or supernatural from a rational-empirical worldview. Associated in its earliest incarnations with the post-Expressionist German art critic Franz Roh and the French Surrealist Andre Breton, in the introduction to *The Kingdom of this World* and its magical realist representation of the Haitian slave rebellion, Carpentier refers to the hybrid cross-pollination and symbiosis of *los real maravilloso americano* (conceived as baroque mixture of “criollo” and “mestizaje” culture), which reflects the localized, indigenous postcolonial imagination of the Caribbean region. Far from an anachronistic throwback, in his 1982 Nobel lecture, Gabriel Garcia Marquez explained that his use of magical realism—and the depiction of the United Fruit Company as the Banana Company in *One Hundred Years of Solitude/Cien años de soledad* [1967], for instance — was designed to reflect the neoliberal-postcolonial “unearthly tidings of Latin America.” In a discussion of Ben Okri’s Nigerian magical realism, Brenda Cooper contends that magical realism resists the homogenization and racialized exoticism of the postcolonial realities through its opposition to the “fundamentalism and purity” of mimetic realism (Cooper 22). For a comprehensive history of the complex debate over Homi Bhabha’s controversial claim that magical realism is “the literary language of the postcolonial world” and the conflicted connection of magical realism to SF literature, see Hart and Ouyang, 1-22.

²⁵ Challenging the priorities of the critical anthology *Science Fiction, Imperialism, and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film* (2010) edited by Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal and Jessica Langer’s *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2011), Smith valiantly endeavors to correct the neglected dearth of rigorous, critically materialist theory analyzing the relatively recent phenomenon of postcolonial or global SF, but in the process Smith may have unduly restricted the field of Marxist-affiliated postcolonial criticism to the eccentric positions advocated by Fredric Jameson and Neil Lazarus-- two important but not all-encompassing materialist theorists-- consigning “involutional queries about influence and derivation, hegemonies and counter-hegemonies” to an “insidious developmentalism masquerading as the progressivist countenancing of cultural plurality” (Smith 14). For some unanalyzed reason, the free-floating revolutionary and oppositional utopian desire and science-fictional cognitive mapping that Smith adamantly privileges does not smack of this scourge of “developmentalism”, however. Hence, regardless of how trenchant and powerful the sustained interrogation of the institutional premises of postcolonial studies may be, a blanket refusal to engage with cultural-literary hybridity and specificity may replicate what Aijaz Ahmad, cited but not rehearsed by Smith, influentially argued was a pernicious essentializing of distinct postcolonial sites, identities, and experiences as a monolithic insurgent or exploited multitude, an Other evacuated of historically embedded context and stripped of localized agendas. At its most problematic the danger of reductive analysis is glaring such as in a glancing discussion of Alejo Carpentier’s “real-maravilloso”, an antecedent to the diverse postcolonial cultural productions often labelled “magical realism”, Smith borrows from Jameson’s “On Magical Realism in Film” to argue such works allegorize the negotiation of pre-capitalist and capitalist cultural formations. (Smith 9) From this sweeping gesture, Smith then concludes magic realism has “calcified into the properly ideological institution” that “the imaginative capacities of postcolonial science fiction” (Smith 11) can finally put to rest. Are we to conclude, then, to take the most salient example, that Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who published *Love in the Time of Cholera/El amor en los tiempos del cólera* in 1985, not to mention his myriad contemporary literary progeny, are now outmoded because they fail to register the

impact of neoliberal capitalism, the new global dispensation that putatively began to emerge in the early 1970s? I argue, rather, that the debt postcolonial science fiction owes to magical realism is deeper and more integral to the fiction's genre protocols than Smith's dubious dismissal would suggest. Smith, of course, is not alone in making sweeping gestures to build up the novelty of postcolonial SF on the back of an outmoded magical realism; theorizing on contemporary fantastic (as opposed to science-fictional) literature, Brian Attebery's *Stories About Stories* (2014) echoes this now conventional move when he claims "it is significant that [Nalo Hopkinson] titles her collection 'fabulist fiction' rather than 'magical realism,' a term that can imply a religious or superstitious worldview unable to distinguish between the real and unreal" (171). I argue that the appeal to a cross-cultural poetics of relation combined with a regional-local Third-World opacity or strategic otherness in the large canon of magical realist Caribbean literature should be read as much savvier and less naïve than this argument implies.

CONCLUSION

The initial impetus for this dissertation came from my suspicion that the trope of excavating ancient alien artifacts that recurs frequently in New Space Opera — and which the finest works of the subgenre movement repurpose to unsettling and open-ended effect — metaphorizes the critical renovation the movement performs on pulp-era space opera. In the endless recycling of the literary marketplace, pulp space opera has now largely become a vestige of the curious past; the subgenre therefore awaited a rehabilitation given that the critical reputation of the subgenre, such as it ever was, has seen better days after reaching a ripe old age of approximately seventy at the turn of the millennium. The neoliberal context of unbounded world markets proved instrumental to understanding the political, cultural, and aesthetic character of this ongoing critical renovation. For New Space Opera is a paradigmatic example of a literary response to neoliberal culture and ideology, emanating from a pulp-magazine and later cheap paperback subgenre undeniably lodged in the cultural production, distribution, and consumption chains of a relatively affluent Anglo-American niche of a dedicated, if subcultural group of readers, writers, fans, and critics. This globalizing long-tail market, though, is increasingly expanding to accommodate a sophisticated array of cosmopolitical perspectives and positions outside and against the consumerist, service-oriented, informational economies of the global North.

The dissertation also grew out of the globalization of technocultural and SF studies and the scholarship interrogating the sophisticated political-economic understanding of global interrelations, closely linking postcolonial theory and SF. In their

general theoretical tendencies of major works coupling SF and postcolonial theory, I discovered Rieder, Ronay, and Smith embed SF within the interlocking global technocultural contexts of capitalism and postcolonialism, whereas Langer, Kerslake, Hoagland, and Sarwal thematize and historicize discursive and cultural tropes as rendered in prototypical works of postcolonial SF. This dissertation intervenes in the existing scholarship by contending that a complex, critically overlooked subgenre has developed sophisticated aesthetic and allegorical responses to the conjunction of neoliberal ideologies in the postcolonial world-system and recent transformative waves of global technoculture. The dissertation extends the Marxist-associated critical-materialist analysis of postcolonial SF (Rieder, Smith, Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.) and adds a vital subgenre context to the stylistic, formal, and discursive preoccupations of genre debates over postcolonial SF (Kerslake, Langer, Hoagland, and Sarwal). But a critical gap remained to be filled specifically linking neoliberal global dynamics to SF as a literary-cultural phenomenon, let alone the burgeoning subgenre of New Space Opera as one of the primary flagship archives of the genre that has developed in recent years.

The broader and more generally salient concern that this dissertation analyzes, then, is the cultural politics of neoliberal globalism in recent years. While not as incoherent or eccentric as Randian and Objectivist right-libertarianism in full bloom, neoliberal policy fully realizes the inchoate aims of Chicago School economists first introduced into the world-system beginning with the Bretton Woods Conference of July 1944 in contrast to the subsequent Third World advocacy of the Bandung Conference. Such putatively market-driven ideology often exacerbates inequality, poverty, and

unemployment by privatization of a range of services and programs offered by the public sphere including, for instance, health-care, education, emergency-relief, working-class institutions and labor unions, downwardly redistributive tax systems, deregulation of stock markets, and reduction or expansion of tariffs. In the service of championing this problematic free-market ideology, neoliberal globalism depends on a growth-oriented retro-longing for infinite future progress and endless capital expansion.

The dissertation therefore draws on a rich Marxist tradition on the sociology of aesthetics, especially the Frankfurt theories of temporality articulated in Benjamin and Bloch, to analyze the commodity fetishism that standardizes the individual crises and ruptures of global capitalism and technological modernity into inoculating sameness and alienation. Such fetishism and reification disarms the revolutionary utopian impulses and needs of social totality into the putatively progressive series of clock and calendar that continually postpones the treating of social ills to the indefinite future. Sophisticated science-fictional political allegory conveys a rich multiplicity of socialist-utopian and reactionary-hegemonic impulses that respond to the technocultural and technoscientific needs of the way we live now. The serious aesthetic negation of fetishized space opera is not a tangibly prescriptive public service announcement or practical solution but a partly non-instrumental, non-purposive, even nihilistic critique of rationalized, technocratic authority. Yet the political allegory gestures beyond mere ineffectual escapism and apolitical aestheticism, lubricating the given social machinery of progressive cultural politics to change popular consciousness within the circumscribed arena of commercial entertainments. New Space Opera counters the grand expectation, optimism, and

confidence of pulp-era space opera writers such as E.E. “Doc” Smith, Edmond Hamilton, Jack Williamson, and A.E. van Vogt with the New Space Opera disillusionment, cynicism, and uncertainty suggestive of a postcolonial melancholy. A major consequence of neoliberalism for the current world-system, after all, is the Washington Consensus in which institutions such as the World Bank protect the interests of the hegemonic nations of the global North by enforcing foreign-dominated privatization and deregulation through the servicing of predatory Structural Adjustment Programs on poor, underdeveloped countries in the global South.

To historicize this commodity fetishism more specifically within neoliberalism, the dissertation brings to bear Foucault’s seminal analysis of the technocultural power relations of neoliberal regimes on an understanding of New Space Opera. Foucault argues that the rationality of biocapital authorizes subjectification and citizenship through and within hegemonic discourses of neoliberal freedom, competition, and efficiency as well as counterhegemonic resistance in what I discuss as a utopian critical-aesthetic negation of this neoliberal hegemony. In addition to cognitive political allegory, space opera responds to the training of the sensorium in hyperbolic technocultural fantasy; extending the affective turn in literary studies, this dissertation contends, then, that space opera purveys pre-cognitive, somatically disruptive, and physiologically arresting structures of feeling evocative of the global class struggle and cosmopolitical labor unrest of everyday life. The privatization of the public sphere ensured by these neoliberal globalisms manages and exacerbates the extracting of biopower from the postcolonial periphery continually sacrificed, in Giorgio Agamben’s terms, as *bare life* by the *homo sacer* of the

metropolitan center. A key term that guides the dissertation is therefore Peng Cheah and Bruce Robbins's neologism of cosmopolitics that puts a critical, postcolonial spin on the chauvinist, high-cosmopolitan view from above that typifies not only pulp space opera but much contemporary mainstream discourse on geopolitics as well.

As evidenced by the deliberate omission of the adjective new in Rich Horton's most recent *Space Opera* (2014) anthology, the core of the subgenre has perhaps moved on and lost interest in labeling itself as especially innovative as opposed to locking ranks with the traditionally commercial; yet all the same, the subgenre not only bears traces of, but in many respects has remained unswerving in its commitment to, the sense of distinctive newness as articulated by its New Space Opera progenitors. Anne Leckie's hugely popular debut space opera *Ancillary Justice* swept the trifecta of Philip K. Dick, Nebula, and Hugo awards with its impressive return to the estranging territory of utopian gender-and-sexuality disruption via breathing new life into conventional space-opera tropes such as evil empires, sentient ships, hive-mind body sharing, clones, mercenary body-hijacked cyborgs, and a surprisingly potent usage of male and female gender pronouns based not on biological essentialism but on military rank. Leckie's debut novel harks back to Jones, Le Guin, and Cherryh, as well as rings changes on the apolitical prehistory of the subgenre in a dark, complex indictment of the insidious partnership of empire and techno-capital that suggests shades of Banks and MacLeod.

Likewise, in the *Expanse* series of space opera, the writing-partner team under the pen name of James S.A. Corey delicately negotiates the signal influence of both the gung-ho military sf of Heinlein and the gritty techno-noir of Bester to construct an

eminently commercially palatable brand of space opera still perennially engaged with its neoliberal milieu, especially in the loaded opposition of the thriving anarcho-capitalist outer planets to the gradual encroachments and big-government meddling of a decadent Mars and Earth. In the first novel of the series, *Leviathan Wakes*, Corey recalls M. John Harrison's crucial reference to the militarization of neoliberal democracies that began this dissertation: "Protogen. Pinkwater. Al Abbiq. Small corporate security forces that big transorbital companies used as private armies and mercenary forces to rent out as needed" (Corey 206). Likewise, in *Caliban's War*, for instance, one Martian character begins to doubt the typical neoliberal ideology that casts Earth's population as "lazy, coddled citizens on the government dole" (160). The noirish alienation and displacement of the spacefaring miners, traders, and settlers of this trilogy — the so-called Caliban of natives railing against the Leviathan of civilization — challenge such disdain for public-sector cutailments and regulation of hegemonic nation states and transnational corporations and their corresponding individualistic romanticizing of the laissez-faire profit-seeking that entrench the neoliberal privilege and entitlement of the techno-elite.

Perhaps, though, the most powerful critique of neoliberal consensus is yet to come and should be eagerly awaited in future work along the lines, perhaps, of the space opera that Buckell, Lord, and Hopkinson presage. This global and postcolonial offshoot of New Space Opera offers not simply an escapist negation of our times but a rich cultural representation contesting our neoliberal moment and enveloped by a utopian impulse so much more pervasive than the cosmic emptiness between stars.

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