Strange children: childhood, utopianism, science fiction

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Strange Children: Childhood, Utopianism, Science Fiction

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore the role played by childhood within science fiction (SF). My focus is on the utopian politics of the genre and how SF creators' various appeals to the figure of the child can be usefully read through the utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch. Although childhood is not frequently identified as a central concern of the genre, I work to establish the ways in which Bloch's association of childhood with the act of curiously investigating a not yet existent future shines a light on the utopianism of SF. The child, who is new to the world and to whom the world is new, is shown to be well placed to aid in the exploration of the strange new worlds of SF texts.

Each chapter is structured around an aspect of Bloch's thought which pertains to the child's role within SF. My analysis moves from a discussion of utopian curiosity, to the non-linear temporalities which the child, who evokes both the past and future, makes thinkable, and on to an exploration of the utopian potential of childish hunger and the radical possibilities of utopian inheritance. In each chapter I pair Bloch's writing with that of some of his key interlocutors, meaning that my thesis draws on the fields of Marxist SF criticism, decolonial thought, queer temporality theory, trans utopianism, anti-work feminism and black feminist praxis. I also take a broad approach to SF, putting work by writers such as H. G. Wells and Pauline Hopkins into conversation with queer utopianism of the 1970s, and the amorphous field of vampire fiction. In this way I aim to demonstrate that childhood is not a niche interest for a small subset of SF authors, but rather can be understood as a utopian tool available to readers working across the genre.

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No one does anything alone. While these words are my own, this thesis is the product of my connections with everyone who has touched my life. To my friends, comrades, and kin, to the communities who have welcomed me and to those who have been willing to share thoughts, laughter, and wild imaginings, I am truly grateful.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Table of Figures

For Dan, my sweet friend

Introduction

Childhood, Utopianism and Science Fiction

> The story of an infant's first toddle across the
> kitchen floor will be an adventure if the writer can
> generate the infantile wonder at new muscles,
> new efforts, obstacles, and detours. I would like
> to read such a story.
>
> -   Samuel R. Delany[1]

Dreams of Another World

In Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) her protagonist, George Orr, has the ability
to change the world by dreaming. George falls asleep, dreams that the world is otherwise, and
when he wakes the world has changed. More than that, everyone else in the world now no
longer remembers the original reality. His dreams rewrite history, erasing both the past and the
present and replacing them with new realities. This is a text in which the task of imagining
new, more utopian, science fictional worlds is of paramount political significance. Le Guin's
novel dramatises the fact that, as Donna J. Haraway puts it, 'it matters what stories make
worlds, what worlds make stories.'[2] Through George's example, Le Guin prompts her readers
to answer the question posed by visionary activist Walidah Imarisha: 'Are we brave enough to

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[1] Samuel R. Delany, 'About 5,750 Words', in *Science Fiction Criticism: An Anthology of Essential Writings*, ed.
by Rob Latham (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 104–15 (p. 109).
[2] Donna J. Haraway, 'SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far', *Ada New Media*,
2013 <https://adanewmedia.org/2013/11/issue3-haraway/> [accessed 27 December 2020].

imagine beyond the boundaries of "the real" and then do the hard work of sculpting reality from our dreams?'[3]

George is not prepared for this difficult task. He experiences the process of having to navigate the various realities his dreams have brought into being as disorientating, frightening and demanding. However, he is not totally without recourse in his struggles. Of one particularly strenuous attempt to shape reality, Le Guin writes:

There were by now so many different memories, so many skeins of life experiment, jostling in his head, that he scarcely tried to remember anything. He took it as it came. He was living almost like a young child, among actualities only. He was surprised by nothing, and by everything.[4]

Here, rather than adopting the role of a scientist studying a new phenomenon, or an explorer on the final frontier, George - when faced with a strange world which does not adhere to his understanding of reality - attempts to live 'almost like a young child.'[5] In Le Guin's writing, it is children, who have no bank of reliable memories or stable knowledge of a fixed reality to guide them, who are best equipped for navigating the strange world which George has dreamed into being. In this way, I suggest, Le Guin opens up the possibility of including childhood as a significant category in the critical conversation surrounding science fiction (SF) - a genre in which the interactions of strangeness, novelty and curiosity are paramount.

[3] Walidah Imarisha, 'Introduction', in *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, ed. by Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015), pp. 3–6 (p. 5).
[4] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven* (London: Gollancz, 1971), p. 125.
[5] Le Guin, p. 125.

In his influential definition of the genre, Darko Suvin argues that the SF text is rendered science-fictional by the fact that the world it depicts is '*radically or at least significantly different from the empirical times, places, and characters* of "mimetic" or "naturalist" fiction.'[6] What George's appeal to childhood demonstrates is that the position of the 'young child,' who necessarily experiences the world as a strangely new place, speaks directly to that of the reader faced with the 'radically or at least significantly different' worlds depicted in SF texts.[7] For the child, reality itself is strange, meaning that children are well placed to grapple with the strangeness of SF worlds. Moreover, the child's ability to perceive strangeness in what would otherwise be considered normality suggests a connection between childhood and the claim made by Marxist SF critics that, as China Miéville has put it, '"real" life under capitalism *is a fantasy*.'[8] George's efforts to live 'like a young child' involve on the one hand a distrust of past experiences and the hegemonic reality they represent, and on the other a more direct engagement with the contingency of the 'actualities' before him.[9] Childhood is thus given a central role within the science-fictional project of revealing 'the historical specificity of contemporaneous human relations,' which as Rhys Williams has argued is, for Suvin, the necessary condition for science-fictional estrangement.[10]

In this thesis I build on this affinity between the figure of the child, to whom the world is new, and the reader, confronted with the strangely new worlds of SF, in order to argue for childhood's broader relevance to the genre. Specifically, I argue that 'the Child,' as theorised by Lee Edelman, acts as an emblem of 'the future,' and thus plays an important role in the

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[6] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), p. viii.

[7] Le Guin, p. 125; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii.

[8] China Miéville, 'Editorial Introduction', *Historical Materialism*, 10.4 (2002), 39–49 (p. 42) <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692060260474369> Emphasis in original.

[9] Le Guin, p. 125.

[10] Rhys Williams, 'Recognizing Cognition: On Suvin, Miéville, and the Utopian Impulse in the Contemporary Fantastic', *Science Fiction Studies*, 41.3 (2014), 617–33 (p. 623) <https://doi.org/10.5621/sciefictstud.41.3.0617>.

construction of science-fictional futures.[11] While Edelman sees this association as necessarily conservative, with the Child 'enacting a logic of repetition' designed to ensure the continuation of 'the social order' into the future, my focus is on the failure of childhood to perform this conservative function.[12] Drawing on the estranging capacity of SF to question that which is presented as unquestionable, I interrogate the Child's innocence, demonstrating the enormous amount of ideological work that goes into holding this image, supposedly defined by its natural simplicity, together. By insisting on the unnaturalness, impurity and complexity of childhood, even when it appears to have been most successfully enlisted in the service of a conservative hegemony, I mean to show that the inconsistencies and strained logic of capitalist ideological production are such that there is no figure which is beyond utopian reconfiguration. My focus on childhood is designed to contribute to the Marxist feminist refusal to frame social reproduction, gestational labour and the family as either apolitical, natural or otherwise *outside* of capitalism. It is to this end that I read the SF texts under discussion, not as utopias where the figure of the Child has shaken off its ties to the conservativism of 'reproductive futurism,' but rather as evidence of the constructed-ness of futures and thus, of the constructed-ness of the Child.[13] I argue that these texts, when read in conversation with the utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch, open up an understanding of childhood which is in excess of the Child; an understanding tied to the curious interrogation of reality, to non-linear, anti-colonial and queer temporalities, to the hunger for better worlds and to a mode of inheritance which is not confined either by or to the family. This is achieved, not by shying away from the Child, but by addressing it head on, pushing it to its limits and thus, as I go on to demonstrate, exploding it from within.

Utopianism and Science Fiction

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[11] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 25.
[12] Edelman, p. 25.
[13] Edelman, p. 2.

In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), Suvin's central thesis – that SF texts serve to denaturalise the sociopolitical conditions of 'the author's empirical environment,' thus demonstrating their contingency and opening up the possibility of radical change – is founded upon the Marxist, utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch.[14] In an article co-translated by Suvin, Bloch writes: 'the real function of estrangement is – and must be – the provision of a shocking and distancing mirror above the only too familiar reality.'[15] Bloch thus provides the basis for Suvin's definition of SF as the literature of 'estrangement and cognition.'[16] However, as I go on to argue, he also provides an important opportunity for including the epistemological position of the child – a position from which reality seems far from familiar – in theoretical discussions of estrangement. While Bloch does not suggest that the child who 'is "strange" with adults it does not know,' is experiencing estrangement in the political sense theorised by Bertolt Brecht, that same childish receptivity to strangeness does provide a *model* for his understanding of estrangement as it applies to literature which causes 'the scales [to] fall from one's eyes,' revealing the strangeness of capitalist reality.[17] Where Suvin treats childhood with scepticism, prioritising 'mature SF' and denigrating the genre's association with childhood – a subject to which I return in Chapter One – Bloch's writing is full of references to childhood as a curious, hopeful and otherwise utopian state of being.[18] It is for this reason that I have chosen to structure my research around a principally Blochian, as opposed to Suvinian, theoretical framework. I mean to show that Suvin's definition of SF in fact often runs counter to Bloch's thought, and that applying a Blochian framework directly allows for a fuller appreciation of the genre's utopian potential.

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[14] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 9.
[15] Ernst Bloch, '"Entfremdung, Verfremdung": Alienation, Estrangement', trans. by Anne Halley and Darko Suvin, *The Drama Review: TDR*, 15.1 (1970), 120–25 (p. 124) <https://doi.org/10.2307/1144598>.
[16] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 3.
[17] Bloch, 'Entfremdung, Verfremdung', pp. 120 and 121.
[18] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 10.

In Bloch's writing the revolutionary project of Marxism is inextricably linked to the development of what he calls an 'anticipatory consciousness.'[19] Set in opposition to a conservative understanding of the present as exclusively a product of the past, Bloch emphasises the importance of the 'Not-Yet-Become.'[20] He sees the world as fundamentally 'unfinished' – part of an open process of becoming which does not adhere to a linear, teleological narrative of progressive development.[21] For Bloch it is this unfinishedness which opens up the possibility of radical transformation. His understanding of utopianism is not, therefore, reserved to the literary genre which stems from Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). As Bloch writes, in his magnum opus *The Principle of Hope* (1954-59): 'To limit the utopian to the Thomas More variety, or simply to orientate it in that direction, would be like trying to reduce electricity to the amber from which it gets its Greek name.'[22] Bloch's utopianism is located, rather, in 'the Here and Now,' in the form of a hunger for better worlds driven by what he refers to as 'the voice which calls for things to be different, to be better, to be more beautiful' – a voice which, he argues, is most easily heard by those 'young person[s] [...] who are not infected by and in league with the putrefaction of yesterday.'[23]

Bloch's stated antipathy for 'the Thomas More variety' of utopianism should not, however, be taken to mean that his philosophy is irrelevant to the student of utopian literature – a mode of writing which Suvin has identified as '*the sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction*.'[24] Indeed, one of the most influential elements of Suvin's intervention into SF studies

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[19] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), I, p. 45.
[20] Bloch, I, p. 11.
[21] Bloch, I, p. 131.
[22] Bloch, I, p. 15.
[23] Bloch, I, pp. 188 and 117.
[24] Bloch, I, p. 15; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 61. Emphasis in original.

has been his application of Bloch's work to the genre. Suvin argues that the emphasis which Bloch places on utopianism as a process oriented towards the future – 'the psychological birthplace of the New' – speaks directly to SF understood as a genre centrally concerned with the production of radical novelty.[25] In exploring the 'strange newness' of the worlds of SF, he suggests that the genre's creators are engaging in precisely the kind of utopian dreaming which Bloch advocates for.[26] Far from seeing the act of dreaming – in which Bloch includes everything from daydreams to the creation of fictional worlds – as apolitical or solely a matter of escapism, he argues that the cultivation of a utopian politics requires one to understand the process of dreaming 'deeper and deeper and in this way keeping [one's dreams] trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right.'[27] Moving far beyond the assessment of the degree of perfection achieved in a given fictional society, Bloch's understanding of utopianism locates the revolutionary potential of a text in its capacity to cultivate utopian dreaming – in other words, in the extent to which a given text illuminates the fact that utopian dreaming is itself a 'teachable' act.[28]

Over the course of his lifetime Bloch produced an extensive and notoriously obscure body of work. As Vincent Geoghegan has noted, Bloch's writing is 'studded with opaque metaphor, untranslatable puns, obscure neologisms and overblown rhetoric.'[29] In this thesis I do not, therefore, attempt to read Bloch's work as a coherent whole, productive of a single, unified theory. Instead, building on the rich and growing body of existent Bloch scholarship, I focus very specifically on the moments in Bloch's work in which he draws on the figure of the

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[25] Bloch, I, p. 116.
[26] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4.
[27] Bloch, I, p. 3.
[28] Bloch, I, p. 3.
[29] Vincent Geoghegan, *Ernst Bloch* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), p. 2.

child to illustrate his theory of utopianism.[30] Although age is not much discussed as a vector of utopianism in criticism of Bloch's writing – including, somewhat surprisingly, in the Bloch scholarship produced by noted theorist of children's literature Jack Zipes – in this thesis I demonstrate that Bloch's allusions to childhood, youth and young people are frequent and significant.[31] Writing of the 'forward dream' of a utopian future, Bloch states:

> If youth occurs in revolutionary times, that is, during a time of change, and if it is not duped into screwing its head back, as so often happens today in the West, then it really does know what the forward dream is all about. The dream then passes from vague, mainly private premonition to a more or less socially sharpened, socially mandated premonition.[32]

In Bloch's formulation, youth is thus given a central role within the transition from 'private' to 'socially mandated premonition' – a transition which is central to the political significance of SF.[33] Far from suggesting that young people are hindered by a lack of either political or scientific knowledge, Bloch privileges the 'revolutionary wishful dream[s]' of the immature over the 'bourgeois wishful image of more mature years' which, he argues, 'no longer possesses' an 'expectation of the unknown.'[34] For Bloch, the utopian future is that which 'all

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[30] Some prominent examples of this scholarship include Geoghegan; Wayne Hudson, *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing, 1982); Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan, *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (London: Verso Books, 1997); For more recent applications of Bloch's thought within literary criticism see Caroline Edwards, *Utopia and the Contemporary British Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Sean Austin Grattan, *Hope Isn't Stupid: Utopian Affects in Contemporary American Literature* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2017).

[31] See Jack Zipes, 'Introduction: Toward a Realization of Anticipatory Illumination', in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, trans. by Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), pp. xi–xl; Jack Zipes, 'Traces of Hope: The Non-Synchronicity of Ernst Bloch', in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, ed. by Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan (London: Verso Books, 1997), pp. 1–14.

[32] Bloch, I, p. 117.

[33] Bloch, I, p. 117. Bloch writes generally of 'youth' and specifically of 'childhood' in his philosophical work. In this thesis I read both terms as standing in opposition to maturity, understood as a position of epistemological security and as the telos of various linear narratives of development.

[34] Bloch, I, p. 35.

of us have glimpsed in childhood,' and as such childhood has a significant role to play within

his understanding, not only of the utopian function of dreaming, but also of the non-linear

temporalities which structure what he terms the philosophy of 'the future in the past.'[35] By

tracing the development of these aspects of Bloch's utopian philosophy, the uses to which he

puts childhood in supporting them, and their relevance to the politics of SF, I demonstrate the

utility of including childhood in the critical conversation surrounding SF. I examine

childhood's function in Bloch's theorisation of: the 'relentlessly curious' questioning which

drives utopian speculation, the promise of the 'Not-Yet-Become,' the utopian potential of

hunger understood as an 'expectant emotion' importantly tied to hope, and the significance of

what he calls the 'dialectically useful "inheritance"' of potentially revolutionary moments in

previous generations.[36] Without such a thorough theorisation of childhood, I argue that any

understanding of utopian consciousness will be necessarily limited.

Childhood

In this thesis my emphasis is on the benefits of centring childhood in conversations about the

utopian potential of SF. I argue that with some notable exceptions a critical over-attentiveness

to the 'academic legitimacy' of SF, as discussed by Roger Luckhurst, has led to a neglect of

that supposedly unserious subject, childhood, within discussions of the genre thus far.[37]

However, this is not to say that I am unconcerned by the possibility of overemphasizing the

utopian value of childhood. To trust in the innate virtue, or indeed utopianism, of a child's

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[35] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), III, p. 1376; Bloch, I, p. 9.

[36] Bloch, I, pp. 21 and 11; Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), p. 2.

[37] Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 167; The only dedicated study of childhood in SF of which I am aware is Gary Westfahl and George Edgar Slusser, *Nursery Realms: Children in the Worlds of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999) I expand on the reasons behind, and consequences of, this relative critical silence in Chapter One.

perspective is to risk, not only flattening the category of childhood into an artificially hegemonic whole but supporting a totalising model of moral purity. Purity discourses are intimately connected with racist and homophobic political projects. Indeed, Eula Biss has noted that purity 'is the seemingly innocent concept behind a number of the most sinister social actions of the past century,' in which she includes the eugenics movement along with miscegenation and sodomy laws.[38] This concern is all the more pressing when one is discussing the *utopian* potential of childhood. An over-emphasis on the desirability of purity feeds directly into 'the settler colonial doctrines of *terra nullius* [no man's land], *vacuum domicilium* [unoccupied home], and *inane ac vacuum* [idle and waste]' – doctrines which, as Karl Hardy has argued, are inextricably connected to the history of utopianism.[39] In this context, to emphasise the importance of childhood, when children are frequently represented by what James Kincaid has described as 'enticing images of purity and almost formless innocence,' seems misguided at best. In his discussion of the radical potential of impurity, Williams has noted that 'the construction of a discourse of purity tends to lend [...] the appearance of being necessary as opposed to contingent, 'natural' rather than constructed.'[40] The pure child seems thus to have no role within conceptions of SF which centre the genre's capacity for revealing, rather than mystifying, the contingency of social structures.

However, it is my contention that to dismiss childhood as inevitably or indeed naturally associated with purity is to ascribe to the very discourses of purity which Williams seeks to refute. By turning the 'shocking and distancing' lens of estrangement onto childhood itself I

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[38] Eula Biss, *On Immunity: An Inoculation* (Melbourne: Text Publishing Company, 2015), p. 75.

[39] Karl Hardy, 'Unsettling Hope: Settler-Colonialism and Utopianism', *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal*, 2.1 (2012), 123–36 (p. 125.) I return to utopianism's imbrication with colonial ideology repeatedly throughout this thesis but particularly in Chapters One, Two and Three.

[40] Alun Rhys Williams, 'Architects of Impurity: A Study of the Political Imagination in Contemporary Fantastic Fiction' (University of Warwick, 2014), pp. 34–35 <http://webcat.warwick.ac.uk/record=b2754274~S1> [accessed 29 December 2020].

mean to demonstrate that, as Kincaid puts it, 'innocence is not [...] detected but granted, not nurtured but enforced.'[41] In Kincaid's reading the idea that children are inherently pure is denaturalised and shown to be predicated on adult desire rather than any intrinsic characteristics held by children. Rather than holding childhood up as inherently symbolic of innocence, or purity, therefore, I seek to demonstrate the rhetorical work which goes into positioning the child in a prelapsarian past. Alexis Shotwell has noted that childhood is frequently invoked by those wanting to 'access or recover a time and state before or without pollution […] when the world at large is truly beautiful.'[42] However, I argue that childhood can also be used to resist this nostalgic pull. Indeed, I suggest that it is only when one examines childhood's various impurities that the failure of purity as a category is made evident. When Shotwell states: 'We are compromised and we have made compromises, and this will continue to be the way we craft the worlds to come, whatever they might turn out to be,' she does not exclude children from this 'we'.[43] Indeed, she purposefully includes them, citing Biss' discussion of umbilical cord blood and breast milk as potential pollutants, in which she concludes that 'we are no cleaner, even at birth, than our environment at large. We are all already polluted.'[44] The form of childhood utopianism which I investigate here is thus one allied to Haraway's cyborg, which she describes as being 'oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence.'[45] Childhood has certainly been deployed in the service of purity discourses, as I elaborate below, but like the cyborg who is 'the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism,' the children of SF are frequently 'exceedingly unfaithful to their origins.'[46] In my reading, then,

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[41] Bloch, 'Entfremdung, Verfremdung', p. 124; James Russell Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), p. 73.
[42] Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 3.
[43] Shotwell, p. 5.
[44] Biss, p. 75.
[45] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 151.
[46] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 151.

even the seemingly pure child is shown to be 'already polluted,' thus undercutting the stability of all claims to purity or innocence.[47]

An overreliance on childhood as a utopian category is in fact dramatised in that foundational SF narrative, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Here, the Creature, rejected by everyone he has thus far encountered, is resting for a moment. He describes the scene as follows:

> At this time a slight sleep relieved me from the pain of reflection, which was disturbed by the approach of a beautiful child, who came running into the recess I had chosen with all the sportiveness of infancy. Suddenly, as I gazed on him, an idea seized me, that this little creature was unprejudiced, and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity. If, therefore, I could seize him, and educate him as my companion and friend, I should not be so desolate in this peopled earth.[48]

This dream of a communion with a child unsullied by the world is quickly dashed. The Creature recounts how 'as soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream.'[49] Far from being an 'unprejudiced' being with whom he might, to use Haraway's phrase, 'make generative oddkin' – a category of kinship operating outside of the heteronormative family and the logic of pure blood connection on which it feeds – the Creature finds this child to be as entirely hostile to him as all the sighted adults he has met.[50] The child denounces him at once:

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[47] Biss, p. 75.

[48] Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein, Or, The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*, ed. by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 116–17.

[49] Shelley, p. 117.

[50] Shelley, p. 116; Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 2.

> Monster! Ugly wretch! You wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces – You are an ogre – Let me go, or I will tell my papa […] My papa is a Syndic – he is M. Frankenstein – he would punish you. You dare not keep me.[51]

The fact that this 'little creature' was also created by a Monsieur Frankenstein does not here serve to unite child and Creature.[52] This is a child of Frankenstein who feels himself allied to the carceral state and protected by his claim to his father's name. He dashes the Creature's dream of the child as a pure, blank slate open to a utopian education, and demonstrates the validity of the distinction which Haraway draws between Shelley's Creature and her cyborg, namely that 'unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden [...] The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family.'[53]

To trust unthinkingly in the utopian potential of childhood is thus to ignore how the figure of the child, and through it actually existing children, have been used to uphold a white supremacist, capitalist system. When Frantz Fanon recounts an incident in which a white child pointed at him and said – 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' – it is clear that the fact that someone is a child is no guarantee that they are without prejudice.[54] Moreover, Fanon's account demonstrates how, not only are child actors made complicit in whiteness, but whiteness is frequently defined in terms of childhood innocence – an innocence which is then weaponised against people of colour. Gloria Wekker, in her monograph *White Innocence* (2016), discusses what Terese Jonsson has described as 'the pernicious construction of whiteness *as*

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[51] Shelley, p. 117.
[52] Shelley, p. 116.
[53] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 151.
[54] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 112.

innocence.'[55] Speaking of the formation of the Netherlands as an innocent and thus white, white and thus innocent, nation, Wekker discusses 'the association of innocence with being small: a small nation, a small child.'[56] In the white, Dutch imaginary this state of 'being small,' is translated into a need 'to be protected and to protect ourselves against all kinds of evil, inside and outside the nation' – a protection which, as Wekker notes, frequently takes the form of racist violence.[57] Here, childhood is only invoked in support of the status quo. As Wekker puts it, 'innocence is not as innocent as it appears to be' – an idea which is also of relevance what María Lugones has termed the 'infantilization of judgement.'[58] Lugones describes how, when confronted with their racism, white people – and in particular white women in academic spaces – turn 'into children, incapable of judgement, avoiding all commitment except against racism in the abstract […] wedded to their ignorance and arrogant in their guilty purity of heart.'[59] Whether operating on an interpersonal or a national level, childhood is here shown to be a tool of white supremacy, one which, significantly, is so closely identified with whiteness that the child of colour is entirely obscured. However, the utilisation of childhood within the logic of white supremacy is no more integral to childhood than the discourses of purity previously discussed. Indeed, Lugones qualifies her use of the terminology of infantilisation, writing: 'I use the word "child" here not because I think that young human beings are incapable of judgement, but because young human beings are *alleged* to be incapable of judgement.'[60] Again, then, it is not childhood per se but rather the association of childhood with innocence which transforms it into a tool of oppression, a fact which, I argue, leaves childhood open for

[55] Terese Jonsson, *Innocent Subjects: Feminism and Whiteness* (London: Pluto Press, 2020), p. 28. Emphasis in original.
[56] Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 16.
[57] Wekker, p. 17.
[58] Wekker, p. 18; María Lugones, 'Hablando Cara a Cara/Speaking Face to Face: An Exploration of Ethnocentric Racism', in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, ed. by Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990), p. 52.
[59] Lugones, p. 52.
[60] Lugones, p. 53. Emphasis in original.

reutilisation within a radical, utopian politics where children's curiosity and their capacity for learning would be privileged over their perceived incapacity and, as Lugones puts it, their 'guilty purity.'[61]

The danger of overemphasizing the utopian potential of childhood is, however, doubly felt in SF given the entanglement of the figure of the child as a bastion of innocence and that of the child as symbol of the future. Indeed, studies which address both childhood and SF have thus far almost exclusively focused on these dangers, frequently drawing on Edelman's *No Future* (2004). As previously mentioned, in *No Future*, Edelman argues that calls to 'fight for our children' are bound up with the logic of 'reproductive futurism,' where the ultimate good lies in propagating future generations and anyone perceived to be opposed to that project, namely queer people, are denounced.[62] Rebekah Sheldon has ably demonstrated how the practice of affirming the 'value so unquestioned, because so obviously unquestionable [...] of the Child whose innocence solicits our defense,' which Edelman has identified as structurally homophobic, has been deployed within SF.[63] Her monograph, *The Child to Come* (2016) analyses the role played by childhood within what Gerry Canavan calls 'necrofuturist' narratives, which 'anticipate the future as a devastated world of death, and yet simultaneously insist that this world of death is the only possible future.'[64] Sheldon asks 'why, when we reach out to grasp the future of the planet, do we find ourselves instead clutching the child?'[65] She analyses the ways in which SF creators use the figure of the child as a proxy for the planet they want to nostalgically restore to its former perceived glory. In this formulation the child becomes

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[61] Lugones, p. 52.
[62] Edelman, p. 2.
[63] Edelman, p. 2.
[64] Gerry Canavan, '"If the Engine Ever Stops, We'd All Die": Snowpiercer and Necrofuturism', *Paradoxa*, 26 (2014), 1–26 (pp. 9 and 8).
[65] Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come: Life after the Human Catastrophe* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. vii.

'a piece of the future lodged in and under the controlling influence of the present,' so tied to a reproductive and eco-conservative futurity that 'saving the child […] appears tantamount to saving the future.'[66] Where Sheldon's focus is on environmental politics, Alison Kafer has undertaken a similar study of childhood in relation to SF in her monograph, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013). Here, Kafer suggests that 'disability is seen as the sign of no future' – a designation which both adheres to Edelman's thesis and complicates it, as Kafer demonstrates that it is only the able child who possesses an 'obviously unquestionable' value within the logic of reproductive futurism.[67] In her exploration of 'crip futurity' she questions 'whether "utopia," by definition, excludes disability and illness,' given that so many utopian futures are 'made possible by advances in reproductive technologies' which are then used 'to screen out disability.'[68] As Kafer's argument makes clear, the logic of reproductive futurity is also that of eugenics. Asha Nadkarni, in her monograph *Eugenic Feminism* (2014), discusses how 'a language of eugenic reproductive futurity' is used 'as the motor of nationalist feminist politics,' including in the utopian writing of authors such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, to whose work I return in Chapter Three.[69] Here, Nadkarni demonstrates not only that many poor, lower caste children of colour are excluded from childhood when it is understood as the end goal of a process of 'purified reproduction' designed to 'assure a more perfect future,' but that the logic of eugenics and thus of reproductive futurity is predicated upon their exclusion.[70] As she puts it, 'the two seemingly opposed figurations of children are simply different sides to the same eugenic coin.'[71] Current scholarship which addresses childhood in relation to SF is thus shown to be focused on the many reactionary uses to which the figure of the child has been put.

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[66] Sheldon, pp. 4 and 24.
[67] Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 3; Edelman, p. 2.
[68] Kafer, pp. 3 and 21.
[69] Asha Nadkarni, *Eugenic Feminism: Reproductive Nationalism in the United States and India* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 1.
[70] Nadkarni, p. 10.
[71] Nadkarni, p. 5.

This thesis is by no means an effort to refute childhood's association with these eugenic, anti-queer, eco-conservative futurities. However, my central interest lies in the fact that childhood continually fails to carry the burden placed upon it within the various regressive discourses in which it is meant to simultaneously embody both the utopian future and the gilded past, while acting as a pure point of absolute innocence. Following Sheldon in her contention that 'it is not sufficient to renounce or to denounce the child,' I track these various, potentially utopian, moments of failure, where childhood can be seen to deviate from the narrow path to which it has been assigned.[72] I argue that these moments of failure are attributable in part to the fact that, while I agree with Edelman in his assertion that 'the image of the Child [ought] not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children,' I suggest that some children are far more easily confused with this idealised and highly valued child than others.[73] Only by acknowledging the whiteness, abledness, presumed heterosexuality, cisnormativity and wealth of the 'image of the Child' as theorised by Edelman, can its incompatibility with the broader category of childhood be fully understood.[74] My intention, therefore, is to synthesise the queer, ecocritical, feminist and decolonial approaches currently taken in discussions of the child's place within SF in order to demonstrate the fact which they sometimes obscure – that children too are policed by the figure of the Child. Taking inspiration from the black feminist movement to emphasise the revolutionary potential of mothering despite the many reactionary uses to which the figure of the mother has been put on the one hand, and 'the ongoing exclusion and criminalization of people of color, poor people, and LGBTQ people from the status of motherhood,' as Alexis Pauline Gumbs discusses, on the other, I work to emphasise the utopian potential of childhood while acknowledging the many

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[72] Sheldon, p. 21.
[73] Edelman, p. 11.
[74] Edelman, p. 11.

and various violences and exclusions committed in the name of the Child.[75] In the spirit of what Sophie Lewis calls 'the dialectic of "mothering against motherhood"' – which she in turn draws from Adrienne Rich's distinction between 'the old, institutionalized, sacrificial, "mother-love"' and 'courageous mothering' – I work to theorise childhood against the Child.[76]

It is not, therefore, the child as embodied by the young William Frankenstein who is my primary object of interest, but rather the Creature, whose figuration as the child of Dr Frankenstein gives him no access to either reproductive futurity, eugenic purity or, as Haraway puts it 'organic wholeness.'[77] Rather, he is a child in the sense that the world is strange to him, he is strange to the world, and he is made continually aware of the conditions of his own construction. I see my work as following in the footsteps of science-fictional thinkers such as Susan Stryker, who states that she 'find[s] a deep affinity between [herself] as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*,' in that they both 'war with nature.'[78] Writing of the queer community who attended her partner while she was giving birth, Stryker describes them as 'venturing into the heart of civilization itself to reclaim biological reproduction from heterosexism and free it for our own uses.'[79] It is in this way that I attempt to excavate the utopian potential of SF's strange children – an excavation which is only possible if one adopts an expansive understanding of childhood, one large enough to encompass the various 'adult bab[ies],' as Lewis puts it, of SF.[80] Marah Gubar has argued, with regard to

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[75] Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 'M/Other Ourselves: A Black Queer Feminist Genealogy for Radical Mothering', in *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, ed. by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), pp. 19–31 (p. 29).

[76] Sophie Lewis, 'Mothering Against the World: Momrades Against Motherhood', *Salvage*, 2020 <http://salvage.zone/in-print/mothering-against-the-world-momrades-against-motherhood/> [accessed 31 December 2020]; Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995) Kindle edition. Ch. IX, Section 8.

[77] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 150.

[78] Susan Stryker, 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1.3 (1994), 237–54 (pp. 238 and 239) <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-3-237>.

[79] Stryker, p. 245.

[80] Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now* (London: Verso Books, 2019), p. 160.

Golden Age children's literature, that '"child" and "adult" start to seem less like binding biological categories and more like parts open to players of all ages,' and I argue that this performative understanding of childhood can be usefully applied to the fields of utopian and SF studies.[81] Rather than isolating childhood as a period of inherent exception, I take seriously the fact that, as Bloch puts it, 'it can no longer be said that old age, despite its reflectiveness, is simply reactionary, youth, despite its freshness, simply progressive.'[82] Instead, I follow him in emphasising how 'a person's later years' can 'contain' youth, meaning that 'the phases of life [...] lose their isolated sharpness.'[83] To this end, my work also explores the various intergenerational communities and queer, gestational labour practices within which children always necessarily exist and which have led Lewis to claim that 'we are all revealed to be disconcertingly pregnant, multiply pregnant,' with one another.[84] My conception of childhood is thus not that of the pure, white innocence weaponised against Fanon, but rather that of his own utopian dream: 'I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together.'[85] This is a model of childhood which can be actively assumed and embodied as part of a utopian politics of collective world building.

The terminology which I use to refer to childhood in this thesis reflects its shifting and unstable construction within the texts under discussion. There is no agreed upon, shared definition of childhood utilised by the writers whose work I examine, meaning that, for example, while Bloch frequently treats *child* and *young person* as near synonyms, the creators of vampire fiction which I discuss in Chapter Four draw a firm line between hard working

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[81] Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 203.
[82] Bloch, I, p. 40.
[83] Bloch, I, p. 39.
[84] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 162.
[85] Fanon, p. 113.

youth and feeble and incompetent childhood.[86] I address these differing definitions as they arise, but it is worth delineating my understanding of the most frequently used terms here. The first of these is *the Child*, a term which is always capitalised when I am discussing Edelman's work and its legacy in SF criticism. While I move beyond Edelman's exclusive focus on the Child's role within queer politics – engaging, as I do, parallel studies of eugenic racism, imperialist expansion, and the family understood as a capitalist institution – I remain indebted to his theorisation of the Child as an emblem of unquestionable value. However, as previously stated, it is my contention that the Child is a category which continually fails to encompass all that childhood has to offer. I use the term *childhood*, or *the figure of the child*, therefore, to refer to that which is connected to childhood but which fails to conform to the image of *the Child*. Childhood, in my usage, is neither an inherently utopian nor an internally coherent conceptual category. Rather, it is a loose grouping of associations which are demonstrative of the variety of uses to which the figure of the child is put in SF – a variety which gives the lie to the perceived simplicity of the Child.

In service of this expansive understanding of childhood I use both the terms *childish* and *childlike* to denote those behaviours and attributes which are associated with childhood. I use these terms interchangeably in order to combat the pejorative connotations of *childishness*. As Claudia Nelson has argued, in discussions of childhood 'the distinction between good and bad,' is often 'semantically expressed via the distinction between *childlike* and *childish'* – a

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[86] The scope of this study prohibits a thorough historicisation of each invocation of childishness discussed here, ranging as they do from turn of the century British scientific romances to contemporary US short stories. Further, while I have tried to include historical contextualisation where appropriate this is primarily a theoretical study. For relevant histories of childhood see Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Kincaid, *Child-Loving*; Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Philip L. Safford and Elizabeth J. Safford, *A History of Childhood and Disability* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1996); Chaim M. Rosenberg, *Child Labor in America: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013).

moralising binary which I argue obscures the complexity of childhood.[87] The reclamation of childishness is particularly important in a study of SF where, as I discuss in Chapter One, dismissals of frivolousness, naivety or immaturity are frequently couched in terms of a rejection of childishness. Alongside the terms *childish* and *childlike*, I analyse the notion, drawn from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, of 'becoming-child.'[88] This concept, which is discussed more fully in Chapter One, serves to distance childhood from the perceived fact of material age and open it up as a practice which can be actively taken up. Rather than setting childhood up as a state of exception from which adults are definitionally barred, I suggest that the process of becoming-child is accessible throughout one's life through the assumption of childish roles such as student, non-worker and inheritor. When I refer to the *strange children* of SF I am not, therefore, merely referring to the prepubescent characters imagined in SF texts. Rather, I refer to all those who become-child in various diverse and, as I go on to argue, utopian ways.

While it is not my intention to formulate a definition of childhood in this thesis, certain aspects of childishness, as it is constructed within SF, have more relevance to a study of the genre's utopian potential than others. Chief among these relevant features is curiosity. The notion that childhood as it is constructed in SF is centrally related to curiosity forms the core of my first chapter. However, as this is a concept to which I continually return in this thesis I outline my understanding of the term's importance here. I have chosen to focus on curiosity for two central reasons. The first is that curiosity acts as an acknowledged conceptual arena where childhood and SF meet. Studies of the genre continually highlight the significance of curiosity to SF while the idea that it is childlike to desire to investigate the world around oneself

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[87] Claudia Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 8. Emphasis in original.

[88] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1988), p. 275.

is commonly accepted in childhood studies. Curiosity thus opens a pathway for connecting childhood and SF. The second reason for including curiosity so prominently in this study lies in Bloch's work. In what I have identified as a key moment of *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch describes a 'relentlessly curious' child who searches for 'the freshness […] of which we dream,' for 'that which is not yet here.'[89] In Bloch's work, curiosity, even a relentless curiosity, is evocative neither of the endless hunger for capitalist innovation, nor of the colonial imperative of expansion, both of which I discuss in Chapter One. Rather, Bloch frames relentless curiosity as a means of accessing the utopianism of 'the Here and Now.'[90] To be relentlessly curious is to refuse the notion that novelty is solely located on the colonial frontier or in the most ground-breaking of laboratories. In Bloch's formulation, relentlessness is an indicator of a determination to perceive strangeness in that which is presented under the guise of normality. Such a curiosity has the potential to be wielded in violent ways or to become so undiscriminating as to be worthless. Indeed, Bloch warns against precisely this notion of undifferentiated novelty in his critique of Henri Bergson's theorisation of experience as 'a stream of surprise' – a stream in which, Bloch argues, 'everything is in fact pre-arranged' so that 'where everything ought to be constantly new, everything remains just as it was.'[91] However, I argue that this threat of flattening experience is outweighed by the possibility of redefining what one can question, which relentless curiosity promises. It is a focus on defiant ignorance of what is commonly accepted as normal, therefore, that I centre in my understanding of relentless, childish curiosity and which I go on to apply to the concepts of the family, reproductive labour and kinship, which are central to my later chapters.

Genre

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[89] Bloch, I, p. 21.
[90] Bloch, I, p. 180.
[91] Bloch, I, p. 140.

My understanding of SF owes much to Suvin's definition of the genre. However, I take issue with the formalism which drives this definition. Following John Rieder, I adopt a historical definition of SF in which it is understood that 'SF has no essence, no single unifying characteristic, and no point of origin.'[92] Rather than seeking to produce a definition of SF, Rieder argues that 'an historical approach to genre seems to undermine any fixed definition,' due to the fact that, as Rick Altman puts it 'genres are not inert categories shared by all […] but discursive claims made by real speakers to particular purposes in specific situations.'[93] While Suvin's formalist definition of the genre involves the exclusion of '90 or even 95 percent of SF production' – which he dismisses as 'strictly perishable stuff' without any capacity for estrangement – Rieder provides a capacious framework for discussing the many and various 'discursive claims' to science-fictionality made by authors, critics, fans and academics throughout SF's multiple histories.[94] In this way he argues for an approach to SF which incorporates SF criticism in studies of the genre – in which, for example, 'Suvin's definition becomes part of the history of sf, not the key to unraveling sf's confusion with other forms.'[95] In this thesis I adopt Rieder's historical approach in order to demonstrate that a formalist definition of the genre which is built around the distinction between possibility and impossibility, as Suvin's is, necessarily renders children – who are frequently unable to distinguish between the impossible and the '*not-impossible*' – anti-science-fictional.[96]

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[92] John Rieder, 'On Defining Sf, or Not: Genre Theory, Sf, and History', in *Science Fiction Criticism: An Anthology of Essential Writings*, ed. by Rob Latham (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 74–93 (p. 76).

[93] Rieder, '"On Defining Sf, or Not"', p. 74; Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), p. 12.

[94] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. vii; Altman, p. 12.

[95] Rieder, '"On Defining Sf, or Not"', p. 15.

[96] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii.

By adopting such an expansive understanding of SF there is a danger of rendering it meaningless as a designation, in that it may then encompass texts which share no significant features. However, the remedy for this kind of conceptual uncertainty does not lie in attempts to defend the genre's boundaries from unwanted interlopers. Rather, such uncertainty is best met with an appeal to the fact that all knowledge claims are, as Haraway puts it, 'situated.'[97] Following Haraway in her contention that 'we need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life,' I suggest that we must think of SF as constructed of a mass of necessarily partial perspectives, not in order to deny its meaning but in order for it to have a chance for life.[98] As Rieder argues, the real problem with such tautological definitions of the genre as 'whatever we are looking for when we are looking for science fiction,' is not their expansiveness but rather that they do not 'mean anything much unless "we" know who "we" are and why "we" are looking for science fiction.'[99] Haraway's approach allows for an understanding of this science-fictional 'we' as 'the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position,' which does not aspire to 'the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere.'[100] By emphasising the role of what she calls the 'politics of positioning' within knowledge production, Haraway provides the means for interrogating Suvin's insistence that the political efficacy of SF is reliant upon the fact that the world of the text is 'perceived as *not impossible* within the cognitive […] norms of the author's epoch.'[101] In Suvin's analysis, the question of who is involved in this act of perception, and indeed in the definition of what the cognitive norms of an epoch might consist of, is left

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[97] Donna J. Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (1988), 575–99 (p. 575) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

[98] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', p. 579.

[99] Rieder, '"On Defining Sf, or Not"', p. 75; Rieder is here paraphrasing Damon Knight's famous definition of SF as 'what we point to when we say it.' Damon Francis Knight, *In Search of Wonder; Essays on Modern Science Fiction* (Chicago, Advent Publishers, 1967), p. 19.

[100] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', pp. 590 and 581.

[101] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', p. 586; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii. Emphasis in original.

unaddressed. Where elsewhere he is attentive to the historical specificity of his definition of the genre, as I discuss more fully in Chapter One, here his appeal to a universalised perception obscures the fact that, as Haraway puts it, 'vision is always a question of the power to see – and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices.'[102] By centring the epistemological position of the child – whose perception of both the boundaries of possibility and the cognitive norms of an epoch are radically different from that of the presumed adult norm – I demonstrate that Suvin's hugely influential theorisation of the genre depends upon a very specific, situated, subject position.

It is important to note that the boundaries of SF extend beyond the borders of fiction. As Justine Larbalestier discusses in her work on feminist SF, 'sf is not a genre exclusively made up of written texts but a community or series of communities.'[103] While I do not engage substantially with SF's publishing history, I do work to read the fiction under discussion in conversation with the political, autobiographical and scientific writing that its authors were producing and reading. I refrain from drawing a firm genre boundary between these nonfictional works and the novels and short stories more commonly designated as SF – taking Haraway's argument that 'science fiction is political theory' as a prompt to read theoretical and other nonfictional writing as a form of SF.[104] This expansive definition of the genre is reflective of my interest in SF's ties to embodied, activist praxis. Tom Moylan has famously argued that what he calls the 'critical utopias,' produced during the 1970s, were created in direct response to, and indeed as part of, the simultaneous surge of radical political organising during that

[102] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', p. 585.
[103] Justine Larbalestier, 'The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction: From the Pulps to the James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award' (University of Sydney, English, 1996), p. iii <https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/401> [accessed 1 January 2021].
[104] Donna J. Haraway and Thyrza Goodeve, *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Donna Haraway* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 120.

period of US history.[105] He argues that 'these tales of awakening and action were the operative mediation between the larger political process and the individual consciousness-raising and agency needed to take radical social change forward.'[106] However, there are many similar, less widely acknowledged, moments of connection between SF and activism. These include: Stryker's 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix' (1994) in which she draws on her alliance with Frankenstein's Creature in order to name herself a 'herald[s] of the extraordinary;'[107] jazz musician and Afrofuturist Sun Ra's repeated insistence that he was born on the planet Saturn, a statement which he uses to undermine the colonial logic of border controls and the nation state;[108] and Imarisha's designation of herself and her co-editor of *Octavia's Brood* (2015) adrienne maree brown, as 'SF walking around on two legs,' a designation which marks the fact that the idea that black people in the US could live freely would, for a vast swathe of American history, have appeared impossible, indeed science-fictional.[109] What these examples of activists living science-fictionally demonstrate is that to reserve the moniker 'science fiction' to a series of texts is to artificially curb the extent of the genre's political significance. It is to ignore the radical, science-fictional possibilities, not merely of describing the variously (not-)impossible worlds of SF, but of attempting to bring them into existence. As I discuss more fully in Chapters Three and Five, these acts of embodying SF are frequently framed in terms of childhood, whether that means naming oneself the child of a particular literary tradition, or framing oneself as what Stryker terms 'a creature […] a created being, a made thing.'[110] It is with this in mind that I centre the extra-literary elements of SF – elements which I contend speak directly to the practice of utopian

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[105] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), p. xvi.
[106] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, p. xv.
[107] Stryker, p. 240.
[108] For a discussion of Ra's disruption of border controls see Ajay Heble, *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2000), p. 136.
[109] Imarisha, p. 5.
[110] Stryker, p. 240.

prefiguration which Davina Cooper has defined as that of 'materially enacting in the present a future that is longed for in order to both gain the benefits of this longed for future and hasten its arrival.'[111] I bring this understanding of the utopianism of 'the Here and Now' to my reading of SF, understood as a genre constituted by the communities who create it, critique it and embody it.[112]

My focus on SF as a mode of thought tied to activist praxis means that my research is not exclusively dedicated to texts which were published explicitly as SF. I read texts published in SF magazines and imprints alongside both those produced before Hugo Gernsback's coinage of the term 'scientifiction' in 1926 and those which would sit more neatly in the traditions of Fantasy, the Gothic or Utopian literature.[113] By including such texts within a study of SF it is not my intention to ask whether, as Rieder puts it, any given text 'is or is not a legitimate member of the genre.'[114] Instead, following Rieder's historical approach, I question 'how the identification of [these texts] as sf challenges and perhaps modifies the accepted meaning of the term.'[115] Sheree Renee Thomas, writing as recently as 2000, has noted that 'like dark matter, the contributions of black writers to the genre of sf have not been directly observed or fully explored,' while Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe) has described SF as a genre 'profoundly intertwined with colonial ideology.'[116] These critical silences and implicit erasures in SF's history go some way to explaining why so many texts produced by minoritised writers do not cohere to traditional definitions of the genre. In this context, to claim that writers of colour and

[111] Davina Cooper, *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 219.

[112] Bloch, I, p. 180.

[113] For a discussion of the various, disputed origins of the genre see Patrick Parrinder, *Science Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

[114] Rieder, '"On Defining Sf, or Not"', p. 77.

[115] Rieder, '"On Defining Sf, or Not"', p. 77.

[116] Sheree R. Thomas, 'Introduction: Looking for the Invisible', in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*, ed. by Sheree R. Thomas (New York, NY: Warner Books, 2000), pp. ix–xiv (p. xi); Grace L. Dillon, 'Imagining Indigenous Futurisms', in *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, ed. by Grace L. Dillon (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2012), pp. 1–14 (p. 2).

white women, queer, trans and disabled writers have *also* produced SF quickly becomes an exercise in assimilation which does nothing to challenge white, Western masculinity as the science-fictional standard. As Dillon has discussed, the 'science' in 'science fiction' is frequently aligned with that of capitalist techno-modernity as opposed to what she terms 'Indigenous scientific literacies.'[117] In discussing the work of minoritised writers alongside those which sit firmly within the SF canon - reading Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood; or the Hidden Self* (1903) alongside H G Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), for example - I aim to demonstrate that, as Dillon discusses in relation to Indigenous science, the scientific knowledge practices of minoritised peoples are 'not just complementary to a perceived western enlightenment but [are] indeed integral' to a well-rounded understanding of SF.[118] When I use the term SF I follow Haraway in her assertion that these two letters suggestively include 'science fiction [and] speculative fabulation,' alongside the Navajo 'string figure games […] called na'atl'o',' and that all these various SFs only encompass what has been created 'so far.'[119] SF is best understood as a continually expanding collection of communities, texts and collective making practices. As Haraway puts it, it is an 'opening up [of] what is yet-to-come in protean entangled times' pasts, presents, and futures.'[120]

This is a study of childhood as it is represented within and utilised by SF creators. It is not a study of children's SF. As such I do not address SF explicitly marketed at children or young adults, although the critical work of Farah Mendlesohn and Joe Sutliff Sanders in this field has informed my exploration of childhood's current position within SF criticism, as discussed in Chapter One.[121] I consider it to be instructive that many of the most significant SF

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[117] Dillon, p. 7.
[118] Dillon, p. 3.
[119] Haraway, 'SF'.
[120] Haraway, 'SF'.
[121] See Farah Mendlesohn, *The Inter-Galactic Playground: A Critical Study of Children's and Teens' Science Fiction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009); Farah Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as

authors, from Le Guin to Joanna Russ, have also written for children and I have noted with interest how many writers and critics discuss how their 'route into science fiction' lay, as Mendlesohn puts it, '*not* through the material produced for children and teens, but directly through the adult genre.'[122] Nor is this childhood engagement with SF reserved to that of reading. Octavia Butler, for example, has described herself as 'a forty seven year old writer who can remember being a ten year old writer.'[123] My focus on the utopian politics of SF has, however, led me away from a study of how children engage with the genre and toward an exploration of the various uses to which childhood is put by SF creators and critics. As previously mentioned, my understanding of SF is that it exists, as Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint put it, as a series of 'fluid and tenuous constructions made by the interaction of various claims and practices by writers, producers, distributors, marketers, readers, fans, critics and other discursive agents.'[124] I approach childhood in a similar way – as a series of claims and practices undertaken by a wide variety of agents including SF critics and creators. As Kincaid has argued, 'what a "child" *is* [...] changes to fit different situations and different needs,' and my interest lies in establishing what a child *is* within the context of SF.[125]

The texts which I have selected to form the core of this study make for a strange and unruly collection. They are not selected on the basis that they are centrally concerned with childhood, nor that they typify SF's engagement with the figure of the child. This is not a

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Children's Science Fiction?: A Position Piece', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 28.2 (2004), 284–313 <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.2004.0022>; Joe Sutliff Sanders, 'Young Adult SF', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Sherryl Vint and others (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 442–51; Joe Sutliff Sanders, '"Blatantly Coming Back": The Arbitrary Line Between Here and There, Child and Adult, Fantasy and Real, London and UnLondon', in *China Miéville: Critical Essays*, ed. by Caroline Edwards and Tony Venezia (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015), pp. 119–38.
[122] Mendlesohn, *The Inter-Galactic Playground*, p. 1. Emphasis in original.
[123] Octavia E. Butler and Jelani Cobb, 'Interview with Octavia Butler', in *Conversations with Octavia Butler*, ed. by Conseula Francis (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), pp. 49–65 (p. 56).
[124] Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint, 'There Is No Such Thing as Science Fiction', in *Reading Science Fiction*, ed. by James Gunn, Marleen S. Barr, and Matthew Candelaria (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 43–51 (p. 48).
[125] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 5.

history of representations of childhood within SF. Rather, the texts I have chosen are those which resonate with the various uses to which Bloch puts the figure of the child. My expansive understanding of both childhood and SF has led to some perhaps unexpected choices. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), for example, does not include prominent child characters, nor is it frequently featured in studies of SF. However, as I discuss in Chapter Four, the hungriness, idleness and dependence of Stoker's vampires does place them in the needy position of 'the suckling' child, as theorised by Bloch.[126] It is this kind of fruitful and surprising connection which I highlight in this study, arguing not that the texts under discussion are intrinsically or naturally connected through their focus on childhood but that they can be usefully brought together in order to demonstrate childhood's far-reaching influence in SF. Indeed, by selecting texts which vary so significantly in terms of date and location of publication, form and content, I have demonstrated that childhood is not only relevant to the niche subset of SF texts which centre on child characters, but rather is a concern for writers working across the genre. By bringing together texts from self consciously divergent traditions I have attempted to avoid the critical tendency to isolate feminist, queer and black SF traditions from more canonical, mainstream texts. As Kodwo Eshun has argued, the practice of 'forc[ing] together separated systems of knowledge,' has the effect of 'disabus[ing] apparatuses of knowledge of their innocence,' and it is with this in mind that I, for example, put *Herland* into conversation with transfeminism, or read the work of Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman in relation to twenty-first century anti-work politics. [127]

My desire to avoid the formation of a clearly defined family of child-centric SF texts is reflective of my investment in the utopianism of family abolition. A key contention which I

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[126] Bloch, I, p. 51.
[127] Kodwo Eshun, 'Further Considerations on Afrofuturism', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3.2 (2003), 287–302 (p. 297) <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2003.0021>.

advance in this thesis is that a theoretical consideration of childhood necessitates a concomitant re-evaluation of the family and its role in the production and maintenance of capitalism. As I discuss in Chapter Five, this re-evaluation has direct consequences for the language used to discuss the formation of literary traditions and publishing communities. Rather than viewing allusions to literary birthing, midwifery, and inheritance as merely symbolic, I am interested in taking those relations seriously and thinking of the reformulation and potential abolition of the family as something which takes place not only within the imagined worlds of SF, but off the page, in the communities of those who create and curate literary texts. It is with this in mind that I piece together this selection of texts. They are not related by any naturalised law or connection. Instead, they must be actively held together as part of a commitment to forging new, speculative lines of inheritance despite the pressing risk that they will ossify along conservative, essentialist lines. This family abolitionist approach to literary history renders historical genre formations malleable. If one views the act of claiming an inheritance from a particular text or subgenre – of, in other words, claiming to be a child of a particular lineage – as potentially transformative then the original, *ancestor* texts are in danger of being transformed. In this way, while *Dracula*, to return to my previous example, may not have been published as an SF text, once Octavia Butler has written a self-consciously science-fictional vampire story which draws on Stoker's work, *Dracula*'s relationship to the genre is destabilised.

It is, then, in the spirit of crafting a speculative genealogy which is disrespectful of existing literary relations that I have selected the texts discussed in this thesis. Aware always of the role that critics have in formulating literary relations I both trace the tentative paths of inheritance which I argue connect these very different texts while myself attempting to claim

what Bloch calls a 'dialectically useful "inheritance"' from them.[128] In this way, I extend my engagement with Bloch's work from the content of my analysis to the formulation of my methodology. In her discussion of Bloch's literary criticism, Caroline Edwards has noted his 'unorthodox commitment to unearthing utopian traces within each literary period and form, no matter how seemingly retrogressive,' and it is just such a commitment that I intend to honour in this thesis.[129] While I am conscious, therefore, that the inheritance I draw from the texts under discussion will often be one characterised by tension, conflict, illegitimacy and unfaithfulness, I remain determined to uncover what Bloch termed 'gold-bearing rubble' from this unnatural, intergenerational community of SF texts.[130]

Chapter One

In my first chapter I address the relative silence on the subject of childhood in SF criticism. Focusing on what Williams has called 'the Suvinian paradigm,' I track the ways in which SF's association with childhood has been obscured in favour of what Suvin calls 'mature SF.'[131] Against this tendency, I argue for childhood's relevance to SF and specifically to the utopian potential of the genre. I emphasise Suvin's debt to Bloch's utopian philosophy, and in particular to Bloch's understanding of childhood as a site of relentless curiosity. I draw out the doubled meaning of curiosity – which signifies both inquisitiveness and strangeness – in order to produce a thoroughly relational model of science fictional novelty which retains Suvin's insistent focus on the epistemological radicalism of the genre while refuting his rejection of childhood. The chapter concludes with an exploration of a number of SF texts which explicitly

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[128] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 2.
[129] Caroline Edwards, 'Uncovering the "Gold-Bearing Rubble": Ernst Bloch's Literary Criticism', in *Utopianism, Modernism, and Literature in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), pp. 182–203 (p. 190) <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137336620_11>.
[130] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 116.
[131] Rhys Williams, p. 618; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 10.

centre the figure of the child, among them John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957) and the short stories of Kris Neville and Zenna Henderson. I read these texts as examples of the utopian possibilities opened up when SF authors are unashamed of the genre's connection to childhood. The child characters depicted in these texts both observe and embody strangeness, thus troubling any definitive division between the real and the unreal, the possible and the impossible. Drawing on the writing of utopian theorists Paolo Freire and Miguel Abensour, I demonstrate that one can learn to adopt the doubly curious positions occupied by these strange children – positions from which the world which is currently presented as *normal* and *real* appears strange. In this way, the figure of the relentlessly curious child is shown to speak directly to Suvin's understanding of SF as the literature of 'estrangement and cognition,' while avoiding his reductive focus on maturation.[132]

Chapter Two

In my second chapter I begin to explore the temporal consequences of including childhood in the critical conversation surrounding SF. I suggest that the investment in maturity within SF criticism, examined in Chapter One, ought to be read as an indication of a broader investment in narratives of linear, progressive development within science-fictional thought. These narratives include both the teleological model of history proposed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, which has so influenced subsequent Marxist thinking, and the school of thought within evolutionary biology, exemplified in the writing of T. H. Huxley, in which evolutionary change is considered to be a process of linear progress. In these models of historical and evolutionary time, childhood is frequently invoked as a marker of the undeveloped, static and primitive past. In this chapter, however, my focus is on childhood's affinity with non-linear, utopian

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[132] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 3.

temporalities which disrupt these narratives of progress. Following Bloch, I read the child as a figure of 'the future in the past' – a figure which provokes speculation about possible futures by way of excavation of the latent utopian potential of the past.[133] I apply this understanding of childhood, first to Hegel's theorisation of historical time, and then to the models of linear time around which much evolutionary thought is structured. These critiques then feed into my reading of H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood; or The Hidden Self* (1902-03). Using these texts as the basis of my analysis, I explore both the influence of linear time on SF and the genre's ability to undermine the temporal security which linear temporalities ostensibly offer to the wealthy, white, Western gentleman. The ability to travel through and warp historical time – central to both Hopkins' and Wells' writing – is here read in conversation with childhood's ability to evoke both the past and future simultaneously.

Chapter Three

Where in Chapter Two I endeavour to counter childhood's erroneous association with a static and primitive past, in Chapter Three I address the equally harmful tendency within SF to hold up the child as a symbol of the ever-receding future. In this I am heavily influenced by Edelman's theorisation of 'reproductive futurity' in which the Child is identified as the means of perpetuating the heteronormative present while queer people are deemed to be un-productive enemies of the future.[134] In this chapter I explore how SF narratives have perpetuated the logic of reproductive futurism and, conversely, how they might be used to illuminate the failings of this logic. I begin with an analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) where childhood is held up as an absolute good and the telos of all social development. *Herland*, I

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[133] Bloch, I, p. 9.
[134] Edelman, p. 2.

argue, is an example not of the child-centric utopianism I have identified in Bloch's thought, but rather of what Asha Nadkarni has called 'eugenic reproductive futurity.'[135] As Nadkarni demonstrates, it is only those children who can be conscripted into a white supremacist narrative of national and evolutionary progress who are valued in Gilman's utopia. It is these children, who fail to conform to the image of the Child, who interest me. Drawing on the work of queer theorists of childhood Jack Halberstam and Kathryn Bond Stockton, I argue that the failures of these children – including the failure to mature, to grow up and to reproduce – facilitate an uneasy coalition between queerness and childhood. It is just such a coalition that I argue James Tiptree Jr.'s imagined cyborgs embody. While Gilman's 'eugenic feminism' has been profoundly influential on the genre, I argue that Tiptree's work provides a critique and reformulation of this form of reproductive utopianism.[136] By depicting children who are defiantly non-innocent and impure, who are continually reborn and who, like Haraway's cyborg, are 'exceedingly unfaithful to their origins,' I suggest that Tiptree makes a place for both childhood and utopianism within an oppositional queer politics – a place which the framework of reproductive futurity would seem to render untenable.[137]

Chapter Four

My fourth chapter addresses childhood in relation to the gestational and reproductive labour of those who care for children. While there is a temptation to ground a queer defence of childhood in a rejection of reproduction, I argue that such a rejection obscures the utopian potential of queer kinmaking. Drawing on the work of utopian theorist Sophie Lewis, in this chapter I discuss childhood within the networks of queer kinship and care which children both require

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[135] Nadkarni, p. 1.
[136] Nadkarni, p. 10.
[137] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 151.

and sustain. While there are many SF narratives which address mothering directly, I have chosen to approach reproductive labour through the figure of the vampire. I argue that the vampire, who feeds from the breasts of others and feeds them in turn, denaturalises reproductive labour and highlights the violence involved in sucking one's nourishment from another person's body. By providing a framework in which absolute dependence upon one's carer is not naturalised within the heteronormative logic of the nuclear family, the vampires of SF provide a means of critiquing said logic without denying the validity of the need for care. This chapter begins with a discussion of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) which I read in relation to Bloch's theorisation of the utopian potential of hunger. It is my contention that a Blochian reading of Stoker can be used to combat the more traditional Marxist reading of the vampire as what Steve Shaviro has called a 'capitalist monster.'[138] I expand upon this argument in my reading of the short fiction of two of Stoker's contemporaries, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, whose stories, which centre child-like women's hunger for care, demonstrate the relevance of the politics of reproductive labour to discussions of vampirism. The final section of this chapter is devoted to the vampiric feeding practices depicted in the fiction of Octavia Butler. I argue that Butler's reimagination of earlier vampire texts, and her presentation of the vampire as an ethically complicated figure who disrupts the boundaries of the nuclear family under capital, opens a path towards the utopianism of what Lewis calls 'the gestational commune.'[139]

Chapter Five

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[138] Steve Shaviro, 'Capitalist Monsters', *Historical Materialism*, 10.4 (2002), 281–90 (p. 281).
[139] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 29.

In the final chapter of my thesis I examine how SF creators have, to differing degrees, adopted the queer kinmaking practices their novels and stories depict in their own editorial and writing practices. Specifically, I look at how contemporary authors have framed themselves as the inheritors, or indeed children, of their literary forebears, and how this could be read as a utopian strategy. My understanding of inheritance as potentially utopian is drawn from two central sources. The first is Bloch's *Heritage of Our Times* (1935) in which he argues for the political efficacy of excavating a 'dialectically useful "inheritance"' from past generations.[140] The second is derived from Kirsty Dotson's theorisation of 'deliberate acts of inheritance,' which she identifies as an important element of black feminist cultural production.[141] Rather than inscribing essentialising, heteronormative categories of familial relation onto literary traditions, these thinkers demonstrate that the language of inheritance – of ancestors and descendants, parents and children – can be usefully deployed as part of a radical, utopian politics which subverts linear narratives of progressive development and refuses to consign former generations to a necessarily static and reactionary past. I begin this chapter with a reading of Suzy McKee Charnas' Holdfast Chronicles where I focus on different modes of inheritance within queer, feminist spaces. My emphasis is on the family unit as a heteronormative, capitalist institution, and the ways in which Charnas uses the figure of the child-as-inheritor to subvert, and potentially abolish, said unit. I then move to a discussion of how the vision of a child-centric, family abolitionist utopianism imagined in Charnas' writing can and has been mapped on to SF publishing communities. My central example is the collection of short fiction written by activists who have been inspired by the writing of Octavia Butler: *Octavia's Brood* (2015). By reading the literary and critical work of writers such as adrienne maree brown, Walidah Imarisha and Alexis Pauline Gumbs as both contemplations

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[140] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 2.
[141] Kristie Dotson, 'Radical Love: Black Philosophy as Deliberate Acts of Inheritance', *The Black Scholar*, 43.4 (2013), 38–45 (p. 38) <https://doi.org/10.5816/blackscholar.43.4.0038>.

on, and examples of, a dialectically useful, deliberate inheritance I work to demonstrate how centring childhood allows SF creators to put their utopian imaginings into practice.

Throughout this thesis my focus is on childhood's role in developing a utopian, science fictional politics. Moving between discussions of curiosity and hunger, through the temporalities which structure SF and on to a consideration of reproductive labour as it applies to literary inheritance, I stress the sheer variety of ways in which childhood has been drawn upon by SF creators and critics. By taking this approach I by no means attempt to have the last word on childhood's relevance to the genre. Rather I simply work to demonstrate that childhood *is* relevant to SF, and, further, that acknowledging this relevance is crucial to recognising the genre's subversive, radical, utopian potential.

Chapter One

Inquisitive and Strange: The Relentlessly Curious Child

> People think it's stuff for kids, high-class comic books, and not that high class. And they've grown out of that. Anything science fiction couldn't possibly be good.
>
> - Octavia E. Butler[1]

> [Curiosity] evokes "care"; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way.
>
> - Michel Foucault[2]

The first story published by SF author Zenna Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!' (1951) begins with the following passage:

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[1] Octavia Butler in H. Jerome Jackson, 'Sci-Fi Tales from Octavia E. Butler', in *Conversations with Octavia Butler*, ed. by Conseula Francis (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), pp. 43–48 (p. 48).
[2] Michel Foucault, 'The Masked Philosopher', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow, trans. by Robert Hurley, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984 (New York, NY: The New Press), I, 321–28 (p. 325).

I don't like kids - never have. They're too uncanny. For one thing, there's no bottom to their eyes. They haven't learned to pull down their mental curtains the way adults have. For another thing, there's so much they don't know. And not knowing things makes them know lots of other things grownups can't know. That sounds confusing and it is. But look at it this way. Every time you teach a kid something, you teach him a hundred things that are impossible because that one thing is so. By the time we grow up, our world is so hedged around by impossibilities that it's a wonder we ever try anything new.[3]

Here, in her first foray into the field, Henderson – who went on to write many stories about childhood – encapsulates both the distrust and the fascination which SF writers and critics alike have directed toward the figure of the child. The 'confusing' epistemological position of the child, as described in this passage, disturbs any attempt to definitively divide the possible from the impossible – a project which has long been at the heart of SF criticism.[4] The child's lack of knowledge could, in other hands, be used to mark them as irrelevant to a genre often defined in terms of the 'cognitive demands' it places on its readers.[5] However, in Henderson's writing, it is precisely this lack which grants the child access to 'lots of things grownups can't know.'[6] Unconfined by the restriction of knowing where the line between possibility and impossibility lies, the child is shown to have a direct affinity to the 'epistemological radicalism of the fantastic mode's basic predicate,' which China Miéville has identified as the fact 'that the impossible is true.'[7]

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[3] Zenna Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', in *The Anything Box* (London: Panther Books, 1969), pp. 81–89 (p. 81).
[4] Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', p. 81.
[5] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 284.
[6] Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', p. 81.
[7] Miéville, 'Editorial Introduction', p. 42.

This chapter explores how the figure of the child, as depicted within SF texts, impacts what Rhys Williams has called 'the Suvinian paradigm' – a method of theorising SF in terms of its utopian potential, named for Darko Suvin.[8] From Suvin's insistence that the subject matter of SF be 'not impossible,' to his reliance upon Ernst Bloch's theorisation of the 'Not-Yet' possible, and on to Miéville's re-imagining of the Suvinian paradigm in terms of the 'impossible-but-true,' Marxist SF criticism has been dominated for decades by the question of how best to navigate the boundary between possibility and impossibility.[9] Here, I argue for the efficacy of using the epistemological position of the child – who is not 'hedged around by impossibilities' – as a tool in the negotiation of this boundary.[10] I suggest that what Bloch refers to as the 'relentlessly curious' child, offers a way of reconceptualising the supposedly rigid division between empirical reality and the non-impossibilities of SF, while maintaining an emphasis on the genre's utopian potential.[11] By providing a model of the SF reader – who inquisitively investigates what Suvin calls the 'novum,' or 'strange newness,' of the SF text – and simultaneously embodying that same strange novelty, I argue that the figure of the relentlessly curious child provokes interaction between the world of the text and that of the reader.[12] In this chapter I analyse the form this provocation takes in terms of the doubled meaning of curiosity, which signifies both inquisitiveness and strangeness. I suggest that the fact that the child is represented in these science-fictional texts as both embodiment and observer of the 'still inchoate, utterly habit-free' science-fictional novum – a term originating in Bloch's philosophy – opens up the possibility of harnessing the genre's 'inchoate' potential and thus connecting it to a radical form of utopian politics.[13]

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[8] Rhys Williams, p. 618.
[9] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii; Bloch, I, p. xxvii; Miéville, 'Editorial Introduction', p. 42.
[10] Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', p. 81.
[11] Bloch, I, p. 21.
[12] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4.
[13] Bloch, I, p. 129.

This chapter is designed to supply a theoretical foundation for my thesis. To this end, I begin with an examination of the relative critical silence on the subject of childhood within SF criticism thus far. This silence is here understood as a product, both of the anxiety among critics regarding the genre's political and literary legitimacy, and of their faith in what Samuel Delany refers to as 'the adult episteme.'[14] By reading Suvin's work alongside that of some of his key interlocutors I aim to establish the value of including childhood in critical conversations surrounding SF and, in particular, in those which address the genre's utopian potential. This point is further solidified in the chapter's following section which introduces the concept of *relentless curiosity*, both as it is addressed in Bloch's work and as it applies to SF. I argue that, far from precluding a Marxist approach to the genre, the child's curious questioning provides a model for science-fictional estrangement as such. While this proposed reorientation – from the novum to the relentlessly curious child – dispels neither the genre's colonial legacy nor its alignment with the capitalist drive toward innovation, I suggest that curiosity, when understood as a marker of strangeness as well as inquisitiveness, does contribute to the 'reversal of [...] the colonial gaze,' as theorized in relation to SF by John Rieder.[15] The chapter then concludes with an exploration of a number of SF texts which explicitly centre childhood, including John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), Kris Neville's 'From the Government Printing Office' (1967) and Henderson's 'The Anything Box' (1956). These texts are taken as examples of the utopian possibilities opened up by including childhood within an SF framework. Drawing on the work of utopian theorists Paolo Freire and Miguel Abensour, I endeavour to articulate childhood's role within what Abensour has called 'the education of desire.'[16] The strange children depicted in these texts do not mark an inaccessible site of distant hope, but

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[14] Samuel R. Delany, *Triton* (London: Grafton, 1976), p. 336.
[15] John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 10.
[16] Miguel Abensour, 'William Morris: The Politics of Romance', in *Revolutionary Romanticism*, ed. by Max Blechman (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1999), pp. 125–62 (p. 145).

rather provide pathways into utopian action. While Istvan Csicsery-Ronay argues that SF is best understood as 'an essential mode of imagining the horizons of possibility,' what these child-centric texts demonstrate is that one need not stop at the imagination of those horizons.[17] Read in relation to my theorisation of relentless curiosity I argue that these strange children provide opportunities for reshaping the horizons of possibility.

The Repudiation of Childhood in Science Fiction Criticism

SF criticism has a fraught relationship with childhood. The belief that acknowledging any affinity between SF and childhood will, as Joe Sutliff Sanders puts it, guarantee SF's 'residence in the academic gutter,' can be felt throughout the field.[18] Consequently there has been a widespread impulse to repudiate 'the old shibboleth about the Golden Age of sf being not a particular era but the age of adolescence.'[19] This impulse is evident in Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), the publication of which marked the end of a decade which had seen an acceleration in, as Roger Luckhurst has noted, the 'institutional consolidation' of SF.[20] Suvin – whose definition of the genre Gerry Canavan has argued provides a 'consensus starting point' for SF criticism, a field which he states '*is* Suvinian, or at least post-Suvinian' – is unequivocal in his rejection of childhood.[21] He writes:

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[17] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), p. 1.
[18] Sutliff Sanders, 'Young Adult SF', p. 442; There is a similar, although less pronounced, tendency among utopian studies scholars to avoid addressing the popular conception that, as Alex Zamalin puts it, 'utopia is [...] something that is embraced at youth but abandoned at maturity.' Alex Zamalin, *Black Utopia: The History of an Idea from Black Nationalism to Afrofuturism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 3.
[19] Sutliff Sanders, 'Young Adult SF', p. 442.
[20] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p. 167.
[21] Gerry Canavan, 'Introduction', in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, by Darko Suvin, ed. by Gerry Canavan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. xi–xxxvi (p. viii); Canavan, 'Introduction', p. vii.

SF has historically had one of its roots in the compost heap of [...] juvenile or popular

subliterature, and in order to develop properly it has had to subsume and outgrow it –

the quicker the better for its generic affirmation'[22]

In Suvin's model, then, both SF's integrity as a distinct genre and its connection to Bloch's

utopian politics – which Suvin argues are integral to the genre's literary and political

significance – are made contingent upon a disassociation of 'mature SF' from any trace of

childhood.[23] Canavan's introduction to the 2016 edition of *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*

suggests the need for 'a collective return to origins' in SF criticism, by which he means a return

to Suvin's seminal text.[24] In this chapter I go further, and suggest the need for a return to the

juvenile 'compost heap' in which SF is supposedly rooted. For me, this is not a question of

examining the overlaps between children's literature and SF. Those overlaps are certainly both

significant and complex, particularly given the wealth of SF that is specifically marketed at

younger readers, from Robert Heinlein's and Andre Norton's juveniles in the twentieth century

to the vast, growing field of YA SF. [25] These overlaps are further compounded by the fact that

as C. W. Sullivan III has noted, 'young sf fans can "move indiscriminately between young

adult and adult science fiction".'[26] However, the focus of this chapter is primarily on the

relentlessly curious child understood as a tool which can be usefully deployed in the analysis

of adult SF. I suggest that childhood in fact facilitates the Suvinian interpretation of the genre

as a utopian mode of expression which, at least potentially, contributes to what Tom Moylan

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[22] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 22.
[23] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 10.
[24] Canavan, 'Introduction', p. xvi.
[25] For an overview of early young adult SF see *Science Fiction for Younger Readers*, ed. by C. W. III Sullivan, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction & Fantasy, 56 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1993); For more recent studies of YA SF see Joseph W. Campbell, *The Order and the Other: Young Adult Dystopian Literature and Science Fiction* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2019); Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games: 13* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).
[26] C. W. Sullivan III cited in Sutliff Sanders, 'Young Adult SF', p. 443.

has called 'the revolutionary movement toward and achievement of an actually transformed society.'[27] It is my contention that Suvin's rejection of the juvenile reader has led to a concomitant but unacknowledged neglect of the hermeneutic function played by the figure of the child within SF, and it is this neglect which this chapter works to combat.

The influence of Suvin's repudiation of childhood as a significant element of SF can largely be felt in terms of the subsequent critical silence upon the subject.[28] However, this repudiation has also had more direct results, as is evident in Farah Mendlesohn's article: 'Is There Any Such Thing As Children's Science Fiction?' (2004).[29] Here, Mendlesohn describes the genre as being definitionally opposed to the epistemology of childhood. Although she insists that 'it is possible to generate science fiction for young children,' the majority of the article dwells upon the many incompatibilities that she perceives between SF and childhood.[30] These incompatibilities revolve around the supposed inability of 'a small child' to understand the 'cognitive dissonance' of an SF text, in other words 'that this is a "what if[?]".'[31] As her emphasis upon 'the ideological and cognitive demands of science fiction' suggests, there is a heavy reliance upon Suvinian theory in Mendlesohn's writing – Suvin having famously defined SF as a literature of 'estrangement and cognition.'[32] This reliance can also be felt in the strict division between fantasy and SF that both critics enforce. For example, Mendlesohn notes that 'of the titles that were initially suggested as science fiction, too many when scrutinized turned out to be fantasy' – a genre which she continually defines as 'consolatory,' and which Suvin dismisses as 'a subliterature of mystification' involved in 'shamefacedly passing off a *juvenile*

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[27] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, p. xviii.
[28] For an exception to this rule see Westfahl and Slusser.
[29] Mendlesohn later expanded this article into a monograph. See Mendlesohn, *The Inter-Galactic Playground*.
[30] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 285.
[31] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 285.
[32] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 284; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 3.

idea of magic for cognition.'[33] Here, childhood is not only framed as being insignificant to a critical understanding of SF, it is actively allied to a reactionary politics of 'mystification.'[34] Therefore, although Suvin rarely references childhood directly, Mendlesohn's application of his theory to the field of children's literature demonstrates that the language of juvenility and immaturity is essential to his definition of so-called 'mature SF.'[35] By distinguishing SF from on the one hand the supposed juvenility of fantasy and, on the other, from the '90 or 95 per cent' of the genre which he considers to be without aesthetic significance, and which he describes as being 'read by the young generation,' Suvin defines SF as quintessentially anti-child.[36] Within the Suvinian paradigm childhood is that which demarcates the borders of SF, so that being child-like is regarded as synonymous with being anti-science-fictional. Moreover, as Mendlesohn's focus upon the 'cognitive demands' of SF demonstrates, it is the child's perceived lack of cognitive abilities – specifically of the ability to distinguish the possible from the impossible – which is used to justify this (mis)use.[37]

It is important to note, however, that even within the texts discussed here the repudiation of childhood in SF criticism has been far from seamless. Indeed, in one of her many efforts to define what she calls 'full SF,' Mendlesohn argues that the curiosity of the child is in fact integral to the genre's structure.[38] She writes:

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[33] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', pp. 284 and 291; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 8 and 24. Emphasis added; During his tenure as editor of Science Fiction Studies, Suvin codified this distinction into the study of SF, as can be seen in the frontmatter of the first issue, which stipulates that the journal will not, 'except for purposes of comparison and contrast,' publish articles relating to 'supernatural or mythological fantasy.' Anonymous, 'Front Matter', *Science Fiction Studies*, 1.1 (1973), 1–3 (p. 3).
[34] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 8.
[35] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 10.
[36] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. vii.
[37] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 284.
[38] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 286.

> The ideological direction of science fiction is fundamentally the drive to ask questions. It is rarely put this way, but while mimetic fiction is often in the business of supplying answers to the questions we all hold in common [...] science fiction is the small child saying "Mu..um . . . ?" while working out which "why" to ask next.[39]

Here, not only is childhood framed in relation to SF, SF itself is directly identified with the curious child. Even amidst her discussion of the barriers faced by those attempting to create children's SF, Mendlesohn does not seek to provide an unequivocal distancing of childhood from the genre. Instead she acknowledges the child's position as a definitionally curious subject, thus connecting it to 'the basic human and humanizing curiosity,' which Suvin argues 'gives birth to SF.'[40] The notion that curiosity is an important element of SF is widespread in criticism of the genre. Csicsery-Ronay, for example, has called SF 'an art that […] calls into question all verities, except curiosity and play.'[41] However, by connecting these qualities explicitly to childhood, Mendlesohn demonstrates a tension in SF criticism which on the one hand defines the genre in terms of curious questioning and, on the other, associates it with the accumulation of quantifiable knowledge regarding the empirical 'norms of the author's epoch.'[42] As the quotation from Henderson's 'Come On, Wagon!' with which this chapter opens suggests, the unique position of the curious child whose ignorance 'makes them know lots of […] things grownups can't know,' troubles the epistemological security with which these 'norms' are described.[43] The cognitive processes of the child whose mind is not 'hedged around by impossibilities,' put pressure upon the distinction between impossibility and non-

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[39] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 297.
[40] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 5.
[41] Csicsery-Ronay, p. x; I return to the non-innocence of curiosity and its ties to colonialist and technocapitalist forms of knowledge later in this chapter. For a critical overview of curiosity as a scientific concept see Sundar Sarukkai, 'Science and the Ethics of Curiosity', *Current Science*, 97.6 (2009), 756–67.
[42] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii.
[43] Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', p. 81.

impossibility and so raise the question of how confidently any reader confronting an SF text, regardless of age, can know that 'this is a [non-impossible] what if.'[44]

By arguing for the centrality of curiosity, and thus of the child, within SF criticism I am not attempting to distract from the genre's utopian potential. Indeed, Suvin's most significant critical innovation lies in his insistence upon this potential and on SF's association with 'the rise of subversive social classes and their development of more sophisticated productive forces and cognitions.'[45] As has previously been mentioned, it is his contention that SF accesses its utopian potential through the concept of 'cognitive estrangement,' that is through the production of radical difference which is 'simultaneously perceived as *not impossible.*'[46] Suvin argues that without 'a return and feedback' to 'the author's empirical environment,' SF is only able to provide a reactionary form of escapism without any significant political content.[47] This, he suggests, is the case with regard to the 'majority of what is published as SF,' which, in another dismissive reference to childhood, he claims 'is still in [a] prenatal or, better, regression-to-womb stage.'[48] This insistence can, in part, as Suvin himself acknowledges, be attributed to 'the historical epoch [he] lived through.'[49] Not only did Suvin, in his role as editor of *Science Fiction Studies* from 1973 to 1980, directly contribute to the academic legitimisation of SF as a field of study, he also played a vital role within the corresponding process of political legitimisation of a genre widely considered to be reactionary. Suvin has stated that the fact that he spent his youth in what was then the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was directly

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[44] Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', p. 81; Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 285.

[45] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. ix.

[46] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii. Emphasis in original. On SF's relationship to Marxist political theory and praxis see also Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*; Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso Books, 2005).

[47] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 53.

[48] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 23.

[49] Suvin in Darko Suvin and Horst Pukallus, 'An Interview with Darko Suvin: Science Fiction and History, Cyberpunk, Russia....', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18.2 (1991), 253–61 (p. 254).

influential upon his belief in the political relevance of SF. For example, speaking of Philip K.

Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), he notes that in what was then Yugoslavia 'it was

very clear what would happen if Hitler won the war: one didn't need to read Philip K. Dick to

know it.'[50] Here, the non-impossibility of Dick's text is clearly of crucial importance, not

merely in terms of the definition of genres, but in the determination of world history. In this

light, Suvin's insistence upon SF's engagement with these pressing historical realities seems

to be the only politically justifiable position. However, what Suvin's comment in fact suggests

is that it is precisely during these moments of political crisis – when a vital utopian politics is

most crucial – that the boundaries between actually existing reality and science-fictional non-

impossibility are hardest to identify. As Suvin himself puts it, living through the rise and fall

of Nazism in Eastern Europe made it 'very easy to think of alternative time-streams, of

alternative histories, because we all lived them.'[51]

This fissure – between Suvin's apparently strict empiricism on the one hand and his

awareness of the fluctuations of the boundaries of possibility on the other – has been identified

by later critics engaging with his writing. In recent work dedicated to reimagining 'the Suvinian

paradigm,' critics have focused on Suvin's aforementioned rejection of fantasy as a genre

which supposedly lacks the process of 'empirical validation' present in SF.[52] For example, in

a direct criticism of Suvin, Miéville has argued that 'sf must be considered a subset of a broader

fantastic mode – "scientism" is just sf's mode of expression of the fantastic (the impossible-

but-true).'[53] Miéville counters Suvin's denigration of fantasy by insisting that to distinguish

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[50] Suvin in Suvin and Pukallus, p. 254.
[51] Suvin in Suvin and Pukallus, p. 254.
[52] Rhys Williams, p. 618; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii; For a selection of critical reassessments of the Suvinian paradigm see Mark Bould and China Miéville, *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 2009); Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2000); Miéville, 'Editorial Introduction'.
[53] Miéville, 'Editorial Introduction', p. 43.

one from the other on the basis of their relationship to 'scientism' is simply to believe 'capitalist science's bullshit about itself.'[54] However, this re-evaluation need not imply that the epistemology of SF is somehow irrelevant to the genre's utopian potential, nor that the process of 'return and feedback,' as Suvin put it, into historical reality ought to be neglected.[55] Indeed, in Miéville's reading, an interest in the fantastic involves an engagement with, rather than a retreat from, the actually existing 'alternative time-streams' of Suvin's politically turbulent youth.[56] Put simply: 'Changing the not-real,' whether fantasy or SF, 'allows one to think differently about the real,' in terms of both 'its potentialities and actualities.'[57]

Given the close links drawn between magic and juvenility within the Suvinian paradigm, it follows that this recent re-evaluation of 'the fantastic' ought also to involve a reintroduction of the figure of the child into critical readings of 'the impossible-but-true.'[58] The fact that Young Adult and Children's Literature critic Sutliff Sanders has demonstrated an active interest in Miéville's writing reinforces this idea. Indeed, Sutliff Sanders has examined *Un Lun Dun* (2007) – one of Miéville's fictional works marketed specifically to children – explicitly in order to trouble, as he puts it, 'the arbitrary line between here and there, child and adult, fantasy and real.'[59] It is Sutliff Sanders' contention that Miéville's novel 'complicates old standbys of children's fantasy,' by avoiding the often repeated mandate 'that children must leave the world of magic after the crisis of that world has been solved.'[60] In *Un Lun Dun*, Miéville's protagonist Deeba proudly proclaims that she is '*blatantly* coming back' to the

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[54] China Miéville, 'Afterword: Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory', in *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, ed. by China Miéville and Mark Bould (London: Pluto Press, 2009), pp. 231–48 (p. 240).
[55] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 53.
[56] Suvin in Suvin and Pukallus, p. 254.
[57] Miéville, 'Editorial Introduction', p. 45.
[58] Miéville, 'Editorial Introduction', p. 42.
[59] Sutliff Sanders, '"Blatantly Coming Back": The Arbitrary Line Between Here and There, Child and Adult, Fantasy and Real, London and UnLondon', p. 119.
[60] Sutliff Sanders, '"Blatantly Coming Back": The Arbitrary Line Between Here and There, Child and Adult, Fantasy and Real, London and UnLondon', p. 119; Sutliff Sanders, '"Blatantly Coming Back": The Arbitrary Line Between Here and There, Child and Adult, Fantasy and Real, London and UnLondon', p. 123.

magical world of Un Lun Dun – a fantastic version of London which people only claim is neatly divided from its 'real' counterpart 'cos [they] sort of think [they] should.'[61] In Miéville's writing it is not that children *cannot* distinguish between the real and the not-real, but that they refuse to do so. Deeba is figured as a disrupter of generic boundaries. She is a child who will not accept the arbitrary lines designed to contain her. In *Un Lun Dun*, Miéville can thus be seen to combat Suvin's dismissal of 'juvenile fantasy' on two, interconnected fronts: that of fantasy versus SF, and that of adult versus child.[62] Although it has not previously been explicitly framed as such, the inclusion of childhood within SF criticism can therefore be viewed as the next logical step in what Williams has called 'the broadening of critical attention from generic sf and utopia to the whole of fantastic fiction.'[63] Moreover, the fact that Deeba's insistence upon her continued ability to travel between London and Un Lun Dun literalises Suvin's theoretical notion of a 'return and feedback' process between reality and non-reality demonstrates that connecting SF to a broader fantastic mode need not distract from its utopian potential.[64] Rather, as Williams puts it, utopia 'should become immanent to the critical lens we turn on all fantastic texts.'[65]

Relentless Curiosity and Blochian Utopianism

While the idea that childhood is in some way apolitical is widely accepted within the Suvinian paradigm, this idea is utterly out of place in Bloch's utopian philosophy. As I have demonstrated in my introduction, childhood plays a central role in Bloch's theorisation of the utopian potential of radical novelty. Indeed, he states that 'any young person who feels some

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[61] China Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2008), pp. 510–11.
[62] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 200.
[63] Rhys Williams, p. 618.
[64] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 53.
[65] Rhys Williams, p. 618.

hidden power within him knows what [the New] means,' in the form of 'dawning, the expected, the voice of tomorrow.'[66] The affinity between youth and the strangely new quality of the Blochian novum has been noted in several important studies. For example, in the introduction to their translation of *The Principle of Hope* (1954-59) Paul Knight and Stephen and Neville Plaice state: 'The visions and longings of the child are for Bloch the emotional inklings of the spirit of 'venturing beyond' which he esteemed so highly in thinkers and innovators, and without which the New is inconceivable.'[67] Wayne Hudson also discusses the drive towards a utopian future as theorised by Bloch, as an aspect of youth. He writes: 'For Bloch, adolescence provides the paradigm for the human condition, with its unidentified desires and unarticulated wants, pregnant with future content and half conscious of something to come.'[68] The centrality of childhood to Bloch's theorisation of the human condition brings Suvin's reading of Bloch into question. While Bloch's understanding of strangeness and novelty is intimately tied to his interest in childhood, Suvin seeks to embrace the novum while simultaneously rejecting childhood, childishness and immaturity. By recentring Bloch's writing, therefore, I seek to demonstrate that Suvin's repudiation of childhood is the product of a highly selective, and ultimately unsustainable, interpretation of Bloch's thought.

Bloch's discussion of childhood speaks most directly to science-fictionality as a utopian theoretical mode in its own right – a means of holding up a 'shocking and distancing mirror' to the strangeness of reality under capital – when he addresses the radical potential of curiosity.[69] In the opening section of *The Principle of Hope,* Bloch writes:

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[66] Bloch, I, p. 117.
[67] Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 'Translator's Introduction', in *The Principle of Hope*, by Ernst Bloch, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), I, xix–xxxiii (p. xix).
[68] Hudson, p. 93.
[69] Bloch, 'Entfremdung, Verfremdung', p. 124.

> A child grasps at everything to find out what it means […] is relentlessly curious and does not know what about. But already here the freshness, the otherness lives, of which we dream. [...] Nobody could name it or has ever received it. So what is ours slips away, is not yet here.[70]

Far from being cast as external to the political, the child and its 'relentless curiosity' are here shown to provide a model for the utopian process as such. The child's curious searching is taken to be indicative of childhood's proximity to the utopian time of the '*Not-Yet*' [Noch-Nicht] – a concept designed to articulate the fact that for Bloch, not only is the utopian future 'not impossible,' it currently exists in a state of immanent emergence.[71] In Bloch's philosophy utopian futurity is, as Hudson puts it, 'partially actual now,' in much the same way that, as he interestingly adds, adulthood is prefigured in 'the child' who is 'not yet a man.'[72] One does not need to mature, therefore, to access this kind of utopianism. Indeed, it is specifically in the immaturity of the child, the fact that they are 'not yet a man,' that they are able to access the already existing 'otherness' of Bloch's utopianism.[73] Moreover, by describing the child's attempts to grasp the Not-Yet, Bloch not only frames childhood as a site of mediation between possibility and impossibility, he also frames the child as an active participant in this mediation. Here, a degree of uncertainty about the stability of empirical reality – the child 'does not know' what they are curious about – is framed as a sign of connection to, rather than inability to engage with, a radical, utopian politics.[74]

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[70] Bloch, I, p. 21.
[71] Bloch, I, p. 308. Emphasis in original. and Suvin, p. viii.
[72] Hudson, p. 19.
[73] Hudson, p. 19; Bloch, I, p. 21.
[74] Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', p. 81.

While utopian 'phantasies' of this kind hold an uneasy position within Marxist thought – with, for example, Friedrich Engels critiquing the 'childlike simplicity of character' of those nineteenth century utopian socialists whose plans for social reform 'to-day only make us smile' – Bloch is firmly convinced of the revolutionary potential of such utopian speculation.[75] Although he by no means suggests that all acts of daydreaming, for example, are revolutionary, his understanding of utopianism is an expansive one. In this passage, the child's curious grasping is not, or not yet, articulated as revolutionary politics, but its openness to the 'otherness […] of which we dream' is indicative of its potential for transformation and susceptibility to a utopian education.[76] Where Suvin attempts to ally 'mature SF' with Engels' scientific socialism by denouncing what he calls 'undirected inquisitiveness,' I suggest that in Bloch's writing the lack of direction of this childish curiosity is precisely the point.[77] This is not a form of utopianism which is predicated on definitive knowledge of the relationship between the strange object of observation and empirical reality. What Bloch provides is a framework in which the child's ignorance, their 'unfinishedness,' is not perceived as a lack which precludes political engagement but, on the contrary, is the spur necessary to such engagement.[78] This is a utopianism whose 'otherness' cannot be mastered through growth or the acquisition of knowledge, but must rather be grasped at from a position of avowed incompleteness.[79]

The fact that Bloch locates utopianism within the relentlessly curious attitude of the child, rather than in the object of their investigation – in other words, that his focus is on what Ruth Levitas calls 'utopia as a hermeneutic method' rather than the outlining of so-called

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[75] Friedrich Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (London: W. Swan Sonnenschein & Company, 1892), pp. 12 and 20.
[76] Bloch, I, p. 21.
[77] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 10 and 5.
[78] Bloch, I, p. 308.
[79] Bloch, I, p. 21.

'blueprint utopias' – is instructive when discussing the utopian potential of SF.[80] For Suvin, the aspect of Bloch's work which is most applicable to SF is that of the novum. He argues that '*SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional "novum" (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic*.'[81] The task of the SF critic, determined to ascertain the boundaries of so-called 'valid SF,' seems here to be predicated upon an assessment of the degree to which the novum of the SF text – the non-realist feature of it which distinguishes it from mimetic fiction – is, as Suvin puts it, 'something new and truly different.'[82] Arguing against this approach, I propose that it is the figure of the relentlessly curious child, rather than that of the novum, which is the most pertinent aspect of Bloch's philosophy to scholarship of SF. Where previous efforts to reimagine Suvin's definition of the genre have focused on the distinction between SF and fantasy, in this thesis I attempt to move away entirely from the task of assessing the novelty of the world of a text, whether fantastic or science-fictional. Such a move is made possible by the figure of the relentlessly curious child. While the act of locating SF's radical potential in the novum places the emphasis on a given text's content and its distinction from the 'empirical environment' in which it was produced, the child's relentless curiosity – as imagined by Bloch – emphasises the moment of confrontation with strangeness.[83] Fredric Jameson has argued that utopian texts are able to posit alternatives to capitalism 'by forcing us to think the break itself, and not by offering a more traditional picture of what things will be like after the break.'[84] In a similar way, by focusing on the process of curiously investigating the 'strange newness' of SF, rather than the degree of *true* strangeness achieved by a given SF creator, I hope to reorient the conversation around science-fictional novelty.[85]

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[80] Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing, 2013), pp. 25 and 7.
[81] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 63. Emphasis in original.
[82] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 64 and 82.
[83] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4.
[84] Jameson, p. 232.
[85] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4.

This reorientation is designed to achieve two, related goals. Firstly, by refusing to measure the novelty of SF nova I attempt to distance my understanding of the genre's utopian potential from the endless search for 'something new and truly different' among SF creators and critics – a search which, as I go on to discuss, dangerously mirrors both the colonial imperative to conquer new lands and the capitalist drive for continual innovation.[86] By paying attention to the curious child's receptivity to the strange novelty of the 'Here and Now' – which exists entirely independently of the latest technoscientific faux-revolution – one can, as Mark Fisher puts it, 'contest capitalism's appropriation of "the new".'[87] This reorientation is in fact in line with Suvin's own critique of 'bourgeois value-free science,' from which, as Williams has noted, Suvin distinguishes that 'scientific *practice*,' which 'strives to refute and disabuse nominalist essentialisms and dogmatic teleologies' – a practice which is usefully thought of in terms of curiosity.[88] This leads to the second function of relentless curiosity, that is that it facilitates the development of a relational model of novelty in which the strangeness of a given text cannot be assessed as though it were either immutable or universally applicable. Rather, strangeness is shown to be dependent upon the positionality of the onlooker, reader, or otherwise curious observer. Far from advancing an atomised understanding of SF as dependent upon the individual experiences of specific readers, I argue that this focus on what Donna Haraway has called 'situated knowledges,' lays bare the many differences within and between the various conflicting epistemes which make up what Suvin erroneously calls 'the norms of the author's epoch.'[89] Writing of the radical potential of non-realist literature, Miéville notes that 'the real and the not-real are constantly cross-referenced in the productive activity by

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[86] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 82.

[87] Bloch, I, p. 180; Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Alresford: John Hunt Publishing, 2009), p. 28.

[88] Darko Suvin, 'On Two Notions of "Science" in Marxism', in *Brave New Universe*, ed. by T. Henighan (Ottowa: Tecumseh Press, 1980), pp. 27–43 (p. 33); Alun Rhys Williams, p. 26. Emphasis in original.

[89] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', p. 575; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii.

which humans interact with the world,' and it is this understanding of 'social reality' as, as Haraway puts it, 'a world-changing fiction,' shaped by the intertwining histories of colonialism and capitalism, which I highlight in my investigation of the utopian function of SF's strange novelties.[90]

One instructive example of the benefits to be gained from drawing upon the child's relentless curiosity in this way can be found in Bloch's own writing. In a piece titled: 'The First Locomotive' (1969) Bloch tells the 'wild legend' of the invention of the first 'mobile boiler' which acted as the prototype of George Stephenson's locomotive, and thus of the steam powered train.[91] As Bloch tells it, the scene proceeded as follows:

> He [Stephenson] pulled the first mobile boiler out of the shed. The wheels turned, and the inventor followed his creation down the evening street. But after just a few strokes the locomotive sprang forward, ever faster, Stephenson helplessly behind. From the other end of the street there now came a troop of revelers who had been detained by beer; young men and women, the village preacher among them. Toward them the monster now ran, hissing past in a shape that no one on earth had ever seen, coal-black, throwing sparks, with supernatural velocity. Even worse than the way the old books portrayed the devil; nothing was missing, but there was something new.[92]

In some senses this scene adheres to Suvin's understanding of the novum. What Bloch describes is a phenomenon which is 'truly different' – a scientific novelty which acts as the

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[90] Miéville, 'Editorial Introduction', p. 45; Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 149.
[91] Ernst Bloch, *Traces*, trans. by Anthony A. Nassar (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 124.
[92] Bloch, *Traces*, pp. 124–25.

precursor to the many inventions which fill the pages of SF texts.[93] However, Bloch frames this novelty always in relation to those who are observing it. It is in the reactions of the witnesses that, he argues, one is able to 'see how one of the greatest revolutions in technology looked before one got used to it.'[94] Here, Bloch suggests that the revolutionary nature of the locomotive would still be visible to a contemporary audience if only they had not grown accustomed to it. Novelty is thus shown to lie, at least in part, in the eye of the beholder. Moreover, what this passage demonstrates – if one reads it as a science-fictional text in its own right – is that the SF author need not invent 'a shape that no one on earth had ever seen' in order to declare that 'there was something new.'[95] Instead, what is required is the invocation of the perspective of, for example, these 'young men and women' who have never before seen a locomotive.[96] I argue that this is the perspective of the relentlessly curious child, whose receptiveness to radical novelty is not dependent upon technoscientific progress. What Bloch offers, therefore, is a fundamentally relational model of utopian novelty, one which is attuned to the dependence of the novum on those who curiously encounter it.

The relevance of this model to a discussion of the role of the child within SF becomes clear if read alongside the Appendix to Samuel Delany's novel *Triton* (1976) – included in Tom Moylan's four exemplary 'critical utopia[s]' produced in the mid-1970s and arising out of the political unrest and radical activist movements of that period.[97] In this Appendix, Delany advances a definition of SF. His interest is primarily in SF as a language object and thus he sees the task of defining the genre as that of analysing 'the encounter between objects-that-are-words (e.g. the name "science fiction," a critical text on science fiction, a science-fiction text)

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[93] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 82.
[94] Bloch, *Traces*, p. 125.
[95] Bloch, *Traces*, p. 125.
[96] Bloch, *Traces*, p. 125.
[97] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, p. 11.

and processes-made-manifest-by-words (another science-fiction text, another critical text, another name)' – a task which he suggests is 'as complex as the constantly dissolving interface between culture and language itself.'[98] However, he attempts to shed light on this process and he does so through the description of a child's first encounter with another monstrous machine, in this instance a fire engine. Delany writes:

> Consider a child, on a streetcorner at night, in one of Earth's great cities, who hears for the first time the ululating sirens, who sees the red, enamelled flanks heave around the far, building edge […] The child might easily name this entity, as it careers into the night, a Red Squealer.[99]

Delany describes how this name might later be justified – the squealer must squeal so that people can move out of its way, red is a traditional colour for squealers – but argues that such a justification is an attempt to retroactively embed the Squealer in 'a web of functional discourse.'[100] Such an embedding is 'satisfying because of the functional nature of the adult episteme,' but it does not speak to the strange novelty experienced by the child who gives this object its new, science-fictional name.[101] Again, then, it is the relentlessly curious position of the child onlooker, rather than any inherent strangeness in the object itself, which renders it strangely new.

The child's receptiveness to this strangeness is not, in Delany's writing, presented as dependent upon her understanding of the degree of separation between 'the norms' of her

[98] Delany, *Triton*, p. 334.
[99] Delany, *Triton*, p. 334.
[100] Delany, *Triton*, p. 336.
[101] Delany, *Triton*, p. 336.

'epoch' and the science-fictional sight she is witnessing.[102] Indeed, Delany explicitly privileges the 'wonder' she experiences over any comprehensive 'understanding' of this strangely new machine.[103] It is this wonder which, he argues, 'may initiate in the child that process which, resolved in the adult, reveals her, in helmet and rubber raincoat, clinging to the side-ladders, or hauling on the fore- or rear-steering wheel, as the Red Squealer rushes toward another blaze.'[104] While this direct kind of inspiration is not necessary to the production of novelty discussed here, Delany's vision of the child's future career as a firefighter does stress that the initial 'awe and delight' which she experiences in the face of strangeness is a potential provocation to future action.[105] Further, while Bloch's locomotive is the first ever created, Delany's Red Squealer is by no means the first fire engine. It is merely the first fire engine seen, or noticed, by this particular child who, in curiously observing it and giving it a strange new name, renders it science-fictional. In this way the idea that novelty is only meaningful if it is a universal novelty – a global first – is disrupted and replaced with a complex web of relations in which novelty is never absolute and in which childhood plays a crucial role. As Bloch writes: 'The good New is never that completely New.'[106] Rather than the familiar association between a speeding engine and the 'historical inevitability' of progress, both Delany and Bloch, by focusing on the response of their curious onlookers, instead force us to recognise the contingency of historical development – the fact that, as Gerry Canavan puts it, 'someone laid the tracks, someone built the train, someone is even now driving the cars and stoking the engine.'[107]

Curiosity and Colonialism

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[102] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii.
[103] Delany, *Triton*, p. 341.
[104] Delany, *Triton*, p. 341.
[105] Delany, *Triton*, p. 341.
[106] Bloch, I, p. 7.
[107] Canavan, '"If the Engine Ever Stops, We'd All Die"', p. 3.

One of the central risks when centring childhood in a discussion of SF lies in the ties between the curiosity of the child and that of the colonial explorer. As Patrick Brantlinger has argued, colonial exploration provided a setting wherein 'British men […] could behave like boys with impunity,' thus lending 'an adolescent quality' to 'imperialist literature.'[108] Here, a childish curiosity about new worlds is utopian only in the sense that as Karl Hardy has argued, 'the modern utopian tradition ha[s] had (and, importantly, continue[s] to have) [...] specific and substantial effects [...] on settler colonial formations.'[109] To forefront the role of the curious investigator in one's reading of SF is thus, necessarily, to engage with the genre's colonial history. Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe) has noted that SF is 'a genre that emerged in the mid-nineteenth-century context of evolutionary theory and anthropology, profoundly intertwined with colonial ideology.'[110] This intertwining, and its concomitant effect on SF criticism, is evident in Suvin's discussion of 'the basic human and humanizing curiosity that,' he argues, 'gives birth to SF.'[111] His understanding of what he sees as a science-fictional 'curiosity about the unknown beyond the next mountain range (sea, ocean, solar system), where the thrill of knowledge join[s] the thrill of adventure,' is essentially wedded to a colonial imaginary.[112] As Andrew Ferguson has convincingly argued, this uncritical investment in the allure of the frontier colours the Suvinian novum as it is deployed throughout SF criticism.[113] The child's affinity with curiosity and thus with novelty is not, therefore, a guarantee of its place within a radical, utopian politics – or at least not within the 'differentiated form of utopianism,' advocated for by Hardy, which seeks to 'unsettle' utopia.[114] In order to distinguish the relentless curiosity of Bloch's utopian child from that of the colonial explorer, I argue for the

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[108] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 190.
[109] Karl Hardy, p. 124.
[110] Dillon, p. 2.
[111] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 5.
[112] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4.
[113] Andrew Ferguson, 'Decolonizing the Novum' (presented at the Beyond Borders: Empires, Bodies, Science Fictions Conference, London, 2020).
[114] Karl Hardy, pp. 127 and 128.

significance of curiosity's secondary meaning – that of strangeness. The fact that the child is strange to the world – an object of curious investigation rather than just a curious subject – means that it can be used to enact the kind of 'reversal of [...] the colonial gaze' which Rieder suggests lies at the heart of SF's subversive relation to the colonial logics of domination.[115] The science-fictional child looks and is looked at, thus disrupting the coloniser/colonised dyad and opening up a more utopian understanding of curiosity – one in which it is acknowledged that the repeated appeals to purity and inherent good in Western scientific defences of curiosity obscure the fact, explicated by Sundar Sarukkai, that 'there is little that is "natural" about curiosity.'[116]

Discussing the 'satirical impulse to turn things upside down and inside out' which he locates in early SF, Rieder argues that 'the colonial gaze' is often reversed within the genre.[117] He takes H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1897) as his example and suggests that the fact that Wells likens the Martian invasion of Earth to European colonization of Tasmania places the Englishmen who comprise both the text's characters and its primary readership into the position of colonised peoples. SF texts can thus be understood to provoke 'colonizers [to] imagine themselves as the colonized.'[118] As Rieder writes, in his discussion of *The War of the Worlds*:

> The narrator no longer occupies the position usually accorded to the scientific observer, but instead finds himself in that role historically occupied by those who are looked at and theorized about rather than those who look, analyse, and theorize. [119]

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[115] Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 10.
[116] Sarukkai, p. 767.
[117] Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 10.
[118] Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 5.
[119] Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 7.

In this way, he suggests that 'science fiction exposes something that colonialism imposes.'[120] The science-fictionality of the text is here shown to lie, not merely in the curious investigation of strange newness which it encourages, but in the notion that the strangely new might be looking back.

The utopianism of this reversed colonial gaze is evident when one returns to Bloch's 'The First Locomotive.' Here, following his description of the locomotive itself, Bloch states:

> The Indians saw horses for the first time with the white man, about which [Nobel prize winning author] Johannes V Jensen has remarked, If we knew how they had seen it, we would know how a horse looks.[121]

This example serves to complicate the location of novelty in this short piece in two important ways. Firstly, it demonstrates that it is the fact that a particular object is novel *to the people who are looking at it*, rather than because it is an entirely original invention, that it is associated, in Bloch's thought, with utopianism. To the white, European, colonising forces horses would have been a familiar sight, but to the Indigenous peoples of Latin America they were new – a fact which, Bloch suggests, makes these peoples better able to see the horse as it is. This troubles any universal definition of 'the author's empirical environment,' and demonstrates that knowledge, like novelty, is culturally specific.[122] Secondly, this text – much like *The War of the Worlds* – provokes its readership to place themselves in the position of the colonised as opposed to that of the coloniser. Novelty is not located in the mystery of the frontier – 'the

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[120] Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 15.
[121] Bloch, *Traces*, p. 125.
[122] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 236.

unknown beyond the next mountain range' – but rather in the presence of the colonising European forces and the horses they brought with them to the Americas.[123] This piece can thus be understood as providing an alternative model to the colonialist one upon which much utopian literature and theory is founded. Working against an imaginary in which it is always the perspective of the coloniser which defines novelty, Bloch attempts to render horses anew by drawing upon the perspective of Indigenous peoples.

It is my contention that the figure of the child plays a significant role in this science-fictional, utopian reversal of the colonial gaze. Colonised peoples have repeatedly been associated with childhood. A key tactic of colonial aggressors has been the infantilisation of Indigenous peoples. From Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's dismissal of Africa as 'the land of childhood' in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837), to the interpersonal relations between colonised and coloniser in Martinique which led Frantz Fanon to state that 'a white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child,' adults living under colonial rule have continually been dehumanised via attempts to liken them to children.[124] One means of countering this association which has been deployed by anti-colonial theorists is to stress the maturity and sophistication, in other words the adulthood, of colonised peoples. There is a utopian potential in this refusal of the colonial narrative. As Fanon argues, 'a black man who says to you: "I am in no sense your boy, Monsieur. . . ."' opens up the possibility of 'something new under the sun.'[125] However, there is a limit to the radical potential of this approach. Its acceptance of a narrative of maturation – of linear progress from the primitive to the civilised – risks reinforcing the very model of colonial history which it seeks to refute. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two, this narrative is of particular significance to the history of SF,

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[123] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4.

[124] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J Sibree (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2012), p. 109; Fanon, p. 19.

[125] Fanon, p. 21.

which is intimately tied to that of evolutionary biology – a field which is frequently invoked in discussions of the supposed superiority of the white, Western man. In this thesis, then, I follow Fanon in his refusal to argue that colonised peoples are *just as* civilised, mature or adult as those who colonise them. He writes: 'When someone else strives and strains to prove to me that black men are as intelligent as white men, I say that intelligence has never saved anyone.'[126] I suggest that the same can be said of adulthood. Rather than denying any connection between childhood and colonised peoples I instead intend to refute the colonial logics which suggest that such a connection is evidence of the inferiority of either of these vast, diverse, and overlapping groups. In this way I hope to demonstrate that the doubled curiosity of childhood facilitates the reversal of the colonial gaze advocated by Rieder. Both looked at and looking, a figure of the past and the future, the child refuses to fit neatly into the colonial narrative it has been enlisted to support.

This disruption of colonial power, via the figure of the child, can be felt directly in James Tiptree Jr.'s *Brightness Falls From the Air* (1985). Tiptree's narrative is set on the planet Damien. The Dameii are a humanoid species who have been brutally exploited by colonising humans. Early settlers of Damien discovered that they could extract a nectar from the backs of the Dameii which could be distilled into an exquisite tasting liquor. This nectar was extracted by torturing captured Dameii in front of one another as it was discovered that the liquor, named Star's Tears, became more delicious the more emotional pain the Dameii experienced. The novel is set after the trade in Star's Tears has been made illegal and features a party of tourists who have come to visit the Dameii under the strict supervision of the three military personnel who now both guard and study them.

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[126] Fanon, p. 17.

Throughout the novel the Dameii are continually likened to children. Their features are described as being 'slight and smooth, unhuman but as appealingly modeled as a human child's,' while elsewhere it is suggested that the Dameii 'look child-size,' as they have large wings, 'though they're actually over man height.'[127] The fact that their child-likeness is insisted upon even when it is acknowledged that they are larger than adult human men points to the ideological motivation for this comparison. To liken the Dameii to children is to frame them as helpless, in need of protection and to rob them of their agency. It is to depict them as 'weak, pitiable, inferior mortals who need to be shown the light,' which, as Brantlinger notes, was a common practice adopted by European missionaries writing of their expeditions to 'Africa.'[128] Such a description also serves to connect the current postcolonial regime of guardianship depicted in Tiptree's novel to the earlier era of colonial terror, as it was the Dameii children who were tortured most extensively during the extraction of Star's Tears. Here, the colonised subject is connected directly with a tortured child and, more specifically, a tortured child who is being watched. Colonial violence and capitalist extraction thus take the form of looking at a colonised child – a fact which inflects the tour guide's observation that 'beautiful as the adults are, they are surpassed in sheer exquisiteness by their children.'[129] In this way, Tiptree's portrayal of the Dameii can be read as an exploration of the weaponization of childhood under colonial rule – both in terms of the infantilisation of colonised subjects and in material violence to colonised children. In each of these instances the colonial gaze and the fact that it forces those subject to it into the position of children, regardless of their age or size, is crucial.

However, in Tiptree's narrative it is also the child – understood as the strange object of observation – who serves to reverse the colonial gaze. After the tour group have observed the

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[127] James Tiptree Jr., *Two Great Novels: Up the Walls of the World & Brightness Falls From the Air* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2016), pp. 377 and 376.

[128] Brantlinger, p. 181.

[129] Tiptree Jr., *Two Great Novels*, p. 379.

Dameii to their satisfaction they are approached by a number of Dameii elders. The tour guide offers this translation of the message they bring:

> They say that since we come to look at them, they, too, wish to look at us. The learning shouldn't be all so one-sided, they say […] they want to inspect us individually *without clothes*.[130]

This request aligns directly with the understanding of the dominating, white gaze put forth by Hortense Spillers. Spillers argues that 'the fact of domination is alterable only' when it is understood that 'the dominated subject [...] is certainly seen, but she also sees.'[131] She adds: 'It is the return of the gaze that negotiates at every point a space for living, and it is the latter that we must willingly name the counter-power, the counter-mythology.'[132] In Tiptree's narrative, children are crucial to the production of this counter-mythology. The members of the party who respond to the elders' request are the four teenage porn actors – whose youth and beauty are continually stressed, with one described as 'a silver-blonde dream of a young girl' – who have come to the planet to shoot a film.[133] They immediately take off their clothes and allow themselves to be inspected by the Dameii, with one of them stating: 'I guess this is the only worthwhile stripping I've ever done.'[134] This reversed inspection is very detailed and suggestive of a great curiosity on the part of the Dameii – a curiosity which has thus far gone unsatisfied. The tour guide describes the scene thus: 'Two go down on all fours to view the kids' toes and ankles; another takes out a small glass to inspect their nails and eyebrows,

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[130] Tiptree Jr., *Two Great Novels*, p. 386. Emphasis in original.
[131] Hortense J. Spillers, 'Interstices: A Small Drama of Words', in *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 152–75 (p. 163).
[132] Spillers, 'Interstices: A Small Drama of Words', p. 163.
[133] Tiptree Jr., *Two Great Novels*, p. 343.
[134] Tiptree Jr., *Two Great Novels*, p. 388.

handing it around in turn.'[135] He suggests that this spectacle 'would be hilarious [...] if it hadn't been so serious for the Dameii-Human future.'[136] It is by presenting themselves as naked children, vulnerable and open to scientific investigation, that the humans are here able to reverse the colonial gaze and move towards a more equitable relationship with the Dameii. The curiosity of these young people who fortuitously form part of the group takes the form of both inquisitiveness and strangeness, and I argue that it is because it does so that they are able to, in a necessarily partial manner, subvert the colonial gaze which utopianism and SF have historically both imposed and exposed. It is this understanding of childhood as it relates to utopianism and SF that I bring to the texts under discussion in this thesis.

The Children of SF

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to SF texts which are centrally concerned with childhood. I do not endeavour, in this thesis, to provide a history of SF texts with prominent child characters. However, by selecting a number of texts which explicitly address childhood I mean to demonstrate both childhood's relevance to SF, and its connection to the genre's utopian potential. These texts – including work by Wyndham, Neville, and Henderson – offer a unique opportunity to examine the figure of the child as a constitutive element of science-fictionality. Here, SF and childhood are not considered to be mutually exclusive interests and thus these texts are without much of the tortured and contradictory reasoning exhibited by SF critics intent on denying childhood's significance to the genre. Roger Elwood, in his introduction to one of the two collections of SF stories which explicitly centre childhood, notes that 'none of these stories fits into a specific classification,' and it is the aim of the remainder

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[135] Tiptree Jr., *Two Great Novels*, p. 388.
[136] Tiptree Jr., *Two Great Novels*, p. 388.

of this chapter to demonstrate that the pressure these texts put upon classification boundaries of all kinds – adult and child, SF and fantasy, possibility and impossibility – is directly facilitated by the figure of the child and, more specifically, by its utopian curiosity.[137]

The Children and the children – *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957)

John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* is significant to any consideration of the role played by the figure of the child within SF. Brian Aldiss' famous description of Wyndham's novels as 'cosy catastrophe[s],' suggests both the middle class, rural veneer with which Wyndham overlays the strangeness of his SF worlds, and the significance of the small, the domestic and indeed the childish to his writing.[138] *The Midwich Cuckoos* is no exception. Here, Wyndham takes a typically cosy approach to the SF trope of alien invasion. Set in the small, English village of Midwich, the novel tracks 'the more than curious situation' of the villagers, who spend twenty-four hours unconscious in what they call 'the Dayout.'[139] When they awaken, they discover that all of the people of the town who are capable of bearing children have mysteriously become pregnant. The 'Children,' who they subsequently give birth to and who, as the narrator notes, require 'an implied capital C, to distinguish them from other children,' are continually defined by their strangeness.[140] With the ability to control the minds of others, and a shared group identity, the Children are described as the work of 'some Outside power,' as 'animal[s],' and, as the novel's title suggests, as 'changeling[s].'[141] Excluded from humanity, Wyndham's Children seem to adhere to the SF trope noted by Jenny Wolmark, whereby 'the

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[137] Roger Elwood, 'Introduction', in *Demon Kind*, ed. by Roger Elwood (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1973), pp. 11–12 (p. 11).
[138] Brian Wilson Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1973), p. 293.
[139] John Wyndham, *The Midwich Cuckoos* (London: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 62; Wyndham, p. 47.
[140] Wyndham, p. 103.
[141] Wyndham, p. 204; Wyndham, p. 73; Wyndham, p. 106.

alien becomes the expression of a culture's simultaneous fear of and desire for the other.'[142]

Their position as children is used to emphasise the fact that, as Wyndham writes, they are a

sign of 'something very, very strange.'[143]

In this way, the Children can be seen to reinforce the 'arbitrary line' between child and

adult, fantasy and reality, which Sutliff Sanders has argued is a product of the conservatism of

traditional children's fantasy.[144] Where in Bloch's philosophy the figure of the curious child

serves as a point of access into the utopianism of the Not Yet possible, Wyndham, in contrast,

appears to frame his Children as an unwelcome incursion of the impossible into the mundanity

of little England. The Children are an alien other whose strangeness prefigures a suspected plot

of foreign invasion and is used to excuse deadly violence against them. One is here reminded

of the tendency within children's literature criticism to suggest that the child's experience is

utterly unknowable from an adult perspective. This tendency can be traced back to Jacqueline

Rose's seminal text *The Case of Peter Pan; or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984),

in which she makes the claim that it is 'more or less impossible to gauge' the experiences of

the child due to 'the impossible relationship between adult and child.'[145] This impossible

relationship maps onto Wyndham's Children, who appear similarly unknowable even to the

women who have given birth to them. They are 'image[s] of eternal allure,' who are 'curious'

only in the sense of being, as James Kincaid might put it, 'enigmatic, unexplaining […]

Other.'[146] Wyndham's Children, when viewed through this lens, seem to mark the limits of the

possible in terms of relations between humans and aliens. In *The Midwich Cuckoos* it is posited

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[142] Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1994), p. 3.

[143] Wyndham, p. 68.

[144] Sutliff Sanders, '"Blatantly Coming Back": The Arbitrary Line Between Here and There, Child and Adult, Fantasy and Real, London and UnLondon', p. 119.

[145] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1994), p. 9; Rose, p. 1.

[146] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 236.

that even if aliens were included within human families from the moment of conception their strangeness would be incommensurable with human existence and would necessitate their extraction. Read as a dramatisation of the encounter between 'the author's empirical environment,' in the form of the perceived normality of village life, and the strange worlds of SF, represented by these alien Children, this novel seems to undermine any hope of the 'return and feedback' between the two which Suvin suggests is the necessary foundation of the genre's utopian potential.[147]

This, however, is only one aspect of Wyndham's representation of the Children. While their strangeness is often used to reify the boundaries between possibility and impossibility, adult and child, Wyndham's narrative also includes efforts to dissolve said boundaries through communication with the Children. This is particularly evident in his focus on the Children's eyes. The narrator notes that it is their eyes in which their strangeness is primarily located. The first Child to be born, for example, is described as looking 'perfect, 'cept for the golden eyes.'[148] The strangeness of Wyndham's Children, that which provokes the curiosity of those around them, is thus connected to their own potential role as curious observers – to the idea that they might return a curious gaze. Moreover, those who acknowledge this role find that it is entirely possible to communicate with the Children. This is shown by the character Gordon Zellaby – described as the person who knows the Children 'better than anyone else does' – who dedicates himself to teaching them and who retains their trust precisely because he values their role as curious observers.[149] As Zellaby notes, due to their group identity if one Child was to watch each of the educational films in his collection all of the others would absorb that information,

[147] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 53.
[148] Wyndham, p. 89.
[149] Wyndham, p. 214.

and yet 'they all very much prefer to see [each film] with their own eyes.'[150] It is in their capacity as onlookers, then, that the Children are shown to be most like human children. When gathering together to watch an educational film they become far more than an articulation of the sinister collectivity attributed to the Red Threat of communism. Here, their childishness overwrites their role as an alien 'fifth column.'[151] Indeed, when viewed as curious onlookers, the Children offer the promise of communion with the alien other in the form of a collectivity which is not, or not only, designed to mark them as, as Andrew Hammond puts it, 'allegorical Russians.'[152] As the narrator notes, it is when they are getting ready to watch one of these films that he is able 'to appreciate that the Children had 'a small "c", too.'[153] By troubling the distinction between child and Child, Wyndham is here able to use the partial, shifting strangeness of the children to defamiliarise, and thus to reveal the utopian potential latent within, the social relations around which *normal* English life is structured.

It is by presenting his aliens as Children that Wyndham is able to demonstrate how the doubled effect of curiosity – which includes both inquisitiveness and strangeness – operates in a process of 'return and feedback' of its own.[154] The children's desire to watch and learn is tied to their strange, golden eyes, which in turn provoke the curiosity of those who watch them. By reading the relentless curiosity of these Children as an articulation of science-fictional, utopian thinking I am proposing a mode of encountering strangeness in which the inquisitive viewer of any given strange object is framed as always potentially themselves a strange object of investigation. Here, the supposed epistemological security afforded to the empirically

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[150] Wyndham, p. 203.
[151] Wyndham, p. 115.
[152] Andrew Hammond, '"The Twilight of Utopia": British Dystopian Fiction and the Cold War', *The Modern Language Review*, 106.3 (2011), 662–81 (p. 671) <https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.106.3.0662>.
[153] Wyndham, p. 216.
[154] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 53.

knowable environment inhabited by those approaching an SF text – the *real* world – is shown to be open to the influence of that same text's strangeness. *The Midwich Cuckoos* thus makes thinkable the politics of estrangement advocated by Haraway, who claims that 'the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.'[155] This kind of science-fictionality does not allow for any firm, empirical ground from which to safely determine how science-fictional a given text is. Rather, this is a mode of science-fictionality where the oscillations between strange object and inquisitive subject trouble the arbitrary line separating possibility and impossibility, adult and child. In this way a path is opened towards what Bloch calls 'real possibility' – a demarcation which encompasses not just social reality but 'the properties of reality which are themselves utopian, i.e. contain future.'[156]

They're Still Making Me – 'From the Government Printing Office' (1967)

Wyndham's narrative retains the relative epistemological security of the perspective of an adult narrator. This narrative positioning enables his depiction of the Children as objects of the curiosity of others and obscures the inquisitiveness which inspires their own curious investigations. However, this is not the approach taken by Kris Neville. Indeed, Neville's short story, 'From the Government Printing Office,' is told entirely from the perspective of a three-year-old child, while his novel *Bettyann* (1970) – first published as a short story in Elwood's child-centric SF anthology *Young Demons* (1972) – is focalised through Bettyann's perspective from her early infancy. 'From the Government Printing Office' is the story of a day in the life of Neville's young narrator. It is a text with substantial ties to what Bloch has called the 'Here and Now.'[157] Indeed, although Neville in his afterword to the story writes that he 'tried to

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[155] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 149.
[156] Bloch, I, p. 145.
[157] Bloch, I, p. 180.

project a future in which the education of children involves striking terror into their hearts in the hopes of producing more creative individuals,' he immediately goes on to reflect that 'perhaps this is not unlike what we have always done.'[158] This sense, of 'not unlike[ness],' is what impresses itself on Neville's reader, as his child narrator describes a life spent playing in a nursery playground, watching television and trying to go to sleep.[159] The effect of this relative mundanity on Neville's writing is that the novum of the text is located solely in the fact that the narrator is a child. This means that, far from providing an epistemologically secure position through which to observe 'strange newness,' the narrator in Neville's story embodies the text's strange novelty.[160] He is both the eternally Othered child, as described by Kincaid, who believes that he will be 'three and a half forever,' and a proxy for the SF reader who is continually confronted by strangeness.[161] By casting a child as his narrator, therefore, Neville demonstrates that not only is an otherwise *normal* childhood a legitimate subject for an SF author, but that the position of the curious child has structural similarities with that of the SF reader.

This structural similarity has an importantly utopian dimension. This is evident in Neville's description of his narrator's confrontation with the 'strange little world' of a desk drawer – a scene directly reminiscent of Bloch's 'relentlessly curious' child seeking to 'unpack the box' in front of them.[162] Neville writes:

Open a drawer. One of the big bastards does it without thinking, doesn't really care what's in there, is looking for a special thing and he closes the drawer and hasn't seen

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[158] Kris Neville, 'From the Government Printing Office', in *Dangerous Visions*, ed. by Harlan Ellison (London: Gollancz, 2012), pp. 483–91 (p. 491).
[159] Neville, p. 491.
[160] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4.
[161] Neville, p. 489.
[162] Neville, p. 485; Bloch, I, p. 21.

anything in it. Tiny hands, eyes peering over the rim, sees a strange little world in the

drawer.[163]

Here, the child's inability to distinguish between 'special' and mundane objects leads, not to

his exclusion from the utopian potential of SF, but rather to his being granted a particular ability

to see the 'strange little world' of the text.[164] Nor is this ability a sign of his magical, fantastic,

or otherwise otherworldly status. Rather, Neville frames the child's affinity with strangeness

as an explicitly cognitive process. His unnamed narrator describes the inability to see

strangeness exhibited by the adults around him as a product of their lack of thought. He states:

'They used to be like us. Something happened to them that made them forget how to think.'[165]

In this story it is adults, rather than children, who are not capable of meeting 'the ideological

and cognitive demands' of the genre.[166] Even if one holds to the strict, Suvinian definition of

SF with its central emphasis upon cognition, therefore, one can see that Neville's story justifies

the positioning of the curious child as a utopian subject. When the narrator notes that, for adults

'what passes for thinking is habit,' he allies himself with the 'still inchoate, utterly habit free'

character of the Blochian novum, thus carving out a central position for the child within theories

of science-fictional utopianism.[167]

This is not the only way in which the child, as represented by Neville, speaks to Bloch's

utopian philosophy. Neville's narrator self-consciously identifies himself as involved in a

process of becoming. He writes: 'I'm not really me yet. They're still making me.'[168] Here,

Neville appeals not to a fixed image of childhood purity but to what Gilles Deleuze and Félix

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[163] Neville, p. 485.
[164] Neville, p. 485.
[165] Neville, p. 490.
[166] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 284.
[167] Neville, p. 483; Bloch, I, p. 129.
[168] Neville, p. 490.

Guattari call the process of 'becoming-child.'[169] They argue that childhood is, to use their terminology, an 'assemblage,' meaning 'an aggregate whose elements vary according to its connections, its relations of movement and rest,' rather than a state of being inherent to young people.[170] In this way childhood is defined by its own mutability. As they put it: 'the child do[es] not become; it is becoming itself that is a child.'[171] This understanding of becoming-child is of central importance to the 'unfinishedness' which Bloch believes characterises 'the world itself.'[172] Bloch's understanding of utopianism as an unfinished process, coupled with Deleuze and Guattari's conception of becoming, throws new light on the role of the child's doubled curiosity in excavating the utopian potential of SF. It is not just that within these science-fictional representations the figure of the child is made to move between the positions of strange object and inquisitive subject, thus disturbing the boundary between possibility and impossibility. Rather, each of these textual positions is shown to be involved in its own process of continual becoming, meaning that neither position is definitively fixed nor finished. By attempting to inhabit the perspective of a child Neville frames 'From the Government Printing Office' as an experiment in identity formation, where the narrative voice is itself involved in continual acts of self-discovery. By reading this unfinished narrator as a stand-in for the SF reader one can, I argue, access a relational model of utopianism – one in which the observer of strangeness is just as unfinished and 'inchoate' as the novum before them.[173]

Additionally, Neville demonstrates in this story is that the gaze of the curious child does not merely respond to, but rather produces, strangeness. Like Delany's child gazing in wonder at a fire engine, Neville's narrator is able to see 'a strange little world' in a drawer, not because

169 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 275.
170 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 256.
171 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 277.
172 Bloch, I, p. 221.
173 Bloch, I, p. 129.

there is anything 'new and truly different' within it, but because they are a child to whom everything is new.[174] The curious child is thus placed in an analogous position to that of the SF creator who, as Miéville has described, possesses a 'fantasticating eye' which allows them to develop an 'antenna for the lived fantasies of everyday life.'[175] These 'lived fantasies' – the naturalised, but ultimately fantastic strictures of capitalist life – are centred in Neville's narrative.[176] From the perspective of his child narrator, having to go to school and being sent to your room are strange mechanisms of disciplinary control. This focus on the potential strangeness of normality connects 'From the Government Printing Office' to *The Midwich Cuckoos*. Although, as has been previously discussed, the majority of Wyndham's text focuses on the strangeness of the alien Children, the novel's opening section takes place before the Children's birth. After a meeting of the mystified would-be mothers one of the pregnant women, Angela Zellaby, describes her terror at the fact that 'there's something growing' in her body.[177] To her this is a strange and horrible occurrence – an alien invasion. However, as she discovers when she gives birth, this alien growth is in fact an entirely human child with, as she puts it, the tell-tale 'Zellaby nose.'[178] The fact that she is unable to tell the difference between Child and child while she is pregnant suggests that there is a strangeness, a curious quality, in pregnancy itself – an idea more fully explored in the work of Sophie Lewis to which I return in Chapter Four.[179] However, when read alongside Neville's narrative, one can see that the curiosity associated with childhood – implying both inquisitiveness and strangeness – has an estranging, science-fictional effect even if nothing has *actually* changed. The baby need not be a literal alien to be unnerving, just as the drawer need not be a portal to produce the effect of a

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[174] Neville, p. 485; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 82.
[175] Miéville in KODX Seattle, *China Miéville - October: The Story of the Russian Revolution*, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnL2XQVUumw> [accessed 23 February 2021].
[176] Miéville in KODX Seattle.
[177] Wyndham, p. 73.
[178] Wyndham, p. 90.
[179] See, in particular, Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*.

'strange little world.' Rather, it is when these scenes are read in the context of SF that the doubly curious child is shown to be a figure capable of producing such strangeness.[180]

Teacher Stories - 'The Anything Box' (1956)

While Henderson's 'The Anything Box' is not told from the perspective of a child, its engagement with the interconnected nature of inquisitiveness and strangeness is directly reminiscent of Neville and Wyndham's texts and, moreover, this strangeness is here articulated in explicitly utopian terms. Much like the drawer in which Neville's narrator locates 'a strange little world,' or the box which Bloch's relentlessly curious child attempts to unpack, the titular 'anything box' of Henderson's story is figured as a repository for the utopian longings of the child.[181] Told from the perspective of her Teacher, the story follows Sue-lynn, a quiet member of the class who is marked as strange because of her 'Looking.'[182] As one character states: 'I call it abnormal to stare at nothing.'[183] Here then, once again, it is the fact that children have 'eyes with no bottom' which marks them as strange.[184] Indeed, in 'The Anything Box,' Henderson actually tracks the process whereby Sue-lynn's eyes transition from being markers of strangeness to being markers of inquisitiveness. She describes the moment when 'the shutters came down inside' Sue-lynn's eyes as one which granted her 'the air of complete denial and ignorance children can assume so devastatingly,' thus cutting off the possibility of communication and demonstrating her strangeness.[185] However, later on Sue-lynn adopts a 'share-the-pleasure look,' and the narrator notes that 'Sue-lynn's eyes brimmed amusement at

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[180] Neville, p. 485.
[181] Neville, p. 485; Zenna Henderson, 'The Anything Box', in *The Anything Box* (London: Panther Books, 1969), pp. 9–22 (p. 9).
[182] Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 10.
[183] Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 14.
[184] Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', p. 81.
[185] Henderson, 'The Anything Box', pp. 9–10.

me.'[186] Henderson thus uses her eyes as a method of alternately presenting her as a strange object to curiously observe, and a fellow observer whose strange Looking they are invited to join.

The utopian character of this oscillation is made all the more explicit when it is revealed what Sue-lynn is in fact 'Looking' at, that is, her 'anything box,' so-called because in it she can see 'anything she wants to.'[187] In that this box is connected to her 'heart's desire,' rather than merely to the strangeness of Neville's drawer, or the unspecified 'freshness' of Bloch's box, the 'anything box' can be seen as the most explicitly utopian of all of these childish wish-containers.[188] Further, the idea that it is her Looking which actively creates the strangeness which Sue-lynn observes is also brought to the fore, at least as a possibility, in Henderson's story. No one else can see the anything box. It exists only for Sue-lynn when she puts her fingertips together to form a frame with her hands. The Teacher describes Sue-lynn's relationship to her 'anything box' in the following way: 'Out of her deep need she had found – or created? Who could tell? – something too dangerous for a child.'[189] Sue-lynn's curiosity is here presented as a tool that she is actively deploying towards utopian ends. Indeed, at one point Sue-lynn tries to climb inside her anything box and thus physically inhabit the strange little world of her own creation in an active attempt to move between the realms of possibility and impossibility and thus, like Deeba in *Un Lun Dun*, to dramatize the Suvinian 'return and feedback' process.[190]

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[186] Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 9; Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 11.
[187] Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 10.
[188] Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 13; Bloch, I, p. 21.
[189] Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 19.
[190] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 53.

Henderson's focus upon Sue-lynn as an active agent can partly be ascribed to the emphasis which she places upon education. Herself a schoolteacher, many of Henderson's stories work to explore the ways in which education inspires children to, frequently utopian, action. For example, 'Turn the Page' (1957) tells the story of a 'magic' first grade teacher who shows the children in her class 'something strange and wonderful, but more wonderful than strange.'[191] This teacher, who plays on her student's science-fictional curiosity about strangeness, endows them with a sense of 'promise and hope,' which is remembered '*forever after.*'[192] It is useful to read Henderson's writing as an example of what Lisa Yaszek calls 'teacher stories.'[193] Primarily written by women working in the mid-twentieth-century, these texts typically feature a classroom setting and focus on a teacher/student relationship. Yaszek has noted that the authors of teacher stories – among them Henderson, Rosel George Brown and Anne McCaffrey – were frequently infantilised in an explicitly gendered manner. She notes that they were accused of being 'a gaggle of housewives' writing 'diaper stories.'[194] As I explore more fully in Chapters Four and Five, and as these women experienced, the act of centring childhood is continually coded as feminine and therefore as uninteresting or even unscientific. Indeed, as Annegret Ogden has noted, the rise in institutional research into the practice of child rearing during the 1950s meant that motherhood itself was written off as a paradoxically childish pursuit. Ogden writes:

Ironically the role of supermother, in which women of the fifties put so much stock for personal fulfillment and social recognition, was really the role of an obedient child

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[191] Zenna Henderson, 'Turn the Page', in *The Anything Box* (London: Panther Books, 1969), pp. 142–49 (p. 142).

[192] Henderson, 'Turn the Page', pp. 148-149. Emphasis in original.

[193] Lisa Yaszek, *Galactic Suburbia: Recovering Women's Science Fiction* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2008), p. 69.

[194] Lisa Yaszek, 'Stories "That Only a Mother" Could Write: Midcentury Peace Activism, Maternalist Politics, and Judith Merril's Early Fiction', *NWSA Journal*, 16.2 (2004), 70–97 (p. 77).

following rules drawn up by someone else – an authority figure in a far-off university laboratory.[195]

The fact that so many women continued to write SF stories about childhood given the pressure to distance themselves from domesticity's infantilising effects demonstrates the importance of childhood to their conception of SF. Moreover, that they chose to do so within a classroom setting suggests that education played a significant role within this conception.

I argue that these teacher stories can be usefully read through the lens of Freire's theory of critical pedagogy. Freire theorised what is variously translated as 'conscientization' and 'consciousness raising' – from the Portuguese 'conscientização' – which Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren have defined as 'recognition of the world, not as a 'given' world, but as a world dynamically 'in the making'.'[196] In this he builds on Bloch's conception of the 'unfinishedness' of the world, which, as has already been noted, has significant overlaps with the figure of the science-fictional child who is involved in a continual process of becoming.[197] This becoming is, in Freire's writing, shown to ally the figure of the child with hope itself. He writes: 'Hope is rooted in men's incompletion, from which they move out in constant search.'[198] By focusing upon learning as a process which transforms the epistemological positioning of both teacher and student – positions which Freire brings together in the figure of 'teacher learners' – these texts reveal that the utopian potential of childhood is reliant upon the child's engagement with a model of education which 'is simultaneously an act of knowing, a political act, and an artistic

[195] Annegret Ogden cited in Yaszek, *Galactic Suburbia*, p. 12.
[196] Paolo Freire cited in Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, 'Paulo Freire, Postmodernism, and the Utopian Imagination: A Blochian Reading', in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, ed. by Tom Moylan and Jamie Owen Daniel (London: Verso Books, 1997), pp. 138–64 (p. 145).
[197] Bloch, I, p. 221.
[198] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), p. 72.

event.'[199] In these texts childhood is not inherently utopian, rather it is the child's propensity for engagement in learning and in continual processes of self-renewal – Freire writes that 'the capacity to renew ourselves everyday is very important' – that endow them with utopian potential, that is, the potential for 'learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.'[200]

This potential is accessed in a number of ways. Firstly, rather than simply replicating what Freire has identified as the 'fundamental *narrative* character' of education – which is structured around 'a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)' – stories such as 'The Anything Box' depict students as active subjects in their own right.[201] Education is thus shown to be, not a method of accumulating knowledge 'about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable,' but a way of troubling the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, adult and child, impossibility and possibility.[202] As Freire puts it, both adult and child 'are simultaneously teachers *and* students.'[203] Interestingly, Freire represents the current education system, in which 'the teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite,' in terms of 'receptacles.'[204] Writing of students operating within this hierarchical system, he notes that they are turned 'into "containers", into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher.'[205] Another utopian function of these teacher stories can thus be understood in relation to the reconceptualisation of the child-as-receptacle. The representation of the wish-containers imagined by Neville, Henderson and Bloch offer a striking, utopian alternative to Freire's image of utter passivity on the part of the

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[199] Paulo Freire, 'Reading the World and Reading the Word: An Interview with Paulo Freire', *Language Arts*, 62.1 (1985), 15–21 (pp. 16–17).
[200] Freire, 'Reading the World and Reading the Word', p. 15; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 17.
[201] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 52. Emphasis in original.
[202] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 52.
[203] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 53. Emphasis in original.
[204] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 53.
[205] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 53.

student/receptacles. The site of 'strange little world[s]' which feed the curious questioning of those who observe them, these wish-containers are not defined by either emptiness or lack.[206] Rather, they are figured as sites of strangeness to be examined, questioned and even, in Sue-lynn's case, inhabited. Moreover, even when the children, or rather their eyes, are described as containers, they defy attempts to fill them up. Whether they are described as having 'no bottom,' 'brimm[ing],' or with their 'shutters […] down,' the curiosity observed in the eyes of Henderson's child characters refuses to be satiated by an accumulation of facts about 'static, compartmentalized […] predictable' reality.[207] Once again this is shown to be a way to engage more fully with the cognitive character of SF, rather than an attempt to avoid the genre's 'cognitive demands.'[208] As Freire writes: 'Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information.'[209]

It is this pedagogically driven utopianism into which the figure of the relentlessly curious child can be usefully incorporated. This is a form of utopianism oriented towards what Abensour has called 'the education of desire,' articulated by Bloch when he writes that utopianism is 'a question of learning hope.'[210] Here, the utopian subject is conceived of as a student and thus, at least potentially, as a child. As Moylan has noted, this is not the only form of utopianism theorised by Bloch. Indeed, Moylan argues that in Bloch's work there is 'a dialogic tension between a historically entrenched orthodox Marxism [...] and an unorthodox

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[206] Neville, p. 485; For a discussion of the queer, feminist resonances of this reimagination of receptacles see Bini Adamczak, 'On "Circlusion"', trans. by Sophie Lewis, *Mask Magazine*, 18 July 2016 <http://www.maskmagazine.com/the-mommy-issue/sex/circlusion> [accessed 17 March 2021].

[207] Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', p. 81; Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 11; Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 9; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 52.

[208] Mendlesohn, 'Is There Any Such Thing as Children's Science Fiction?', p. 284.

[209] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 60.

[210] Abensour, p. 145; Bloch, I, p. 3.

understanding of the fragmentary and disruptive play of utopia.'[211] Moylan suggests that Bloch

'often presents a version of utopia that draws on metaphors of *maturity* and *perfection* achieved

at the end point of the *totality* of history,' which is essentially opposed to his theorisation of

utopianism as 'open process.'[212] Rather than simply applying Bloch's thought to SF criticism,

then, I am interested specifically in what might be thought of as the immature strand of his

thought and its legacy in Freire and Abensour's work. Christine Nadir has noted that when

Abensour argues that 'desire must be taught to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above

all to desire otherwise' – a quotation which has been deeply influential on the field of utopian

studies – he is not advocating for all imperfect or process-oriented utopias.[213] As she puts it:

'His work nowhere suggests that imperfect utopias automatically accomplish heuristic projects

in that they educate and stimulate desire just because they avoid sociopolitical blueprints.'[214]

With this in mind, it is important to stress that these child-centric SF texts are not utopian

because children are flawed in some abstract way. Rather, I argue that by dramatising the

process of encountering strangeness through these curious children, who are themselves

strange, these texts invite the reader into the kind of 'lateral play' in which Abensour was

invested.[215] Although they were not serialised in radical journals in the manner of Abensour's

key example of an 'experimental utopia,' William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1890) – where

readers would comment on and correct Morris' writing, thus putting his 'utopia to the test' –

texts such as 'The Anything Box' do work to revise 'the distinction between author and

reader.'[216] Abensour argues that the dialogic publication history and form of *News from*

[211] Tom Moylan, 'Bloch Against Bloch: The Theological Reception of Das Prinzip Hoffnung and the Liberation of the Utopian Function', in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, ed. by Tom Moylan and Jamie Owen Daniel (London: Verso Books, 1997), pp. 96–121 (p. 112).

[212] Moylan, 'Bloch Against Bloch: The Theological Reception of Das Prinzip Hoffnung and the Liberation of the Utopian Function', p. 112. Emphasis in original. .

[213] Abensour, p. 146.

[214] Christine Nadir, 'Utopian Studies, Environmental Literature, and the Legacy of an Idea: Educating Desire in Miguel Abensour and Ursula K. Le Guin', *Utopian Studies*, 21.1 (2010), 24–56 (p. 27) <https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.21.1.0024>.

[215] Abensour, p. 129.

[216] Abensour, pp. 127 and 128.

Nowhere meant that 'the reader [was] invited to participate in the act of writing utopia,' and I suggest that, despite its relatively traditional publication in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Henderson's investment in education as a means of communication and mutual transformation ensures a similar effect in 'The Anything Box'.[217] Sue-lynn is both the creator and the audience of a strange and utopian world. Her attempt to share, and finally to occupy, that world provides a dramatisation of how Henderson's readers might as Abensour puts it, 'inscribe written utopia elsewhere than on paper.'[218]

It is the unfinishedness of the child characters imagined in these texts, their willingness to learn and their doubly curious receptiveness to strangeness, which facilitates this mode of experimental utopianism. However, the notion that these childhood imaginings will serve a utopian function 'elsewhere than on paper' is only made possible because childhood is not here set off as an exceptional state from which adults inevitably fall.[219] In 'The Anything Box,' for example, Sue-lynn's Teacher is not content to passively watch the child's utopian dreaming. Rather, she attempts to create an Anything Box of her own. Looking at Sue-lynn holding her anything box, the Teacher notes:

> She had her thumbs touching in front of her on the table and her fingers curving as though they held something between them – something large enough to keep her fingertips apart and angular enough to bend her fingers as if for corners. It was something pleasant that she held – pleasant and precious. You could tell that by the softness of her hold.[220]

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217 Abensour, p. 128.
218 Abensour, p. 128.
219 Abensour, p. 128.
220 Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 9.

The Teacher sees this pleasant and precious, but seemingly unreal, box, and attempts to access it for herself. She asks:

> Could I make one for myself? Could I square off this aching waiting, this outreaching, this silent cry inside me, and make it into an Anything Box? I freed my hands and brought them together thumb to thumb, framing a part of the horizon's darkness between my upright forefingers.[221]

This is a utopian effort and, although it is inspired by the curious child, it is not reserved to her. Both adults and children can, potentially, create anything boxes for themselves, in much the same way that Deleuze and Guattari have argued that 'children draw their strength from […] the becoming-child of the adult as well as of the child.'[222] The relentlessly curious child is thus shown to be 'the becoming-young of every age' – a fundamentally teachable mode of engaging with the strangely new.[223]

Eyes Forever New

In this chapter I have developed the figure of the relentlessly curious child as a hermeneutic tool in the exploration of science-fictionality. I have argued that SF creators who centre and acknowledge the importance of childish curiosity are better able to activate the genre's utopian potential. In these texts the child's willingness to curiously question the world around them – thereby rendering both it and themselves strange, and opening both up to the possibility of radical change – is shown to be something which can be learned. While it may be tempting to

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[221] Henderson, 'The Anything Box', p. 14.
[222] Deleuze and Guattari, p. 277.
[223] Deleuze and Guattari, p. 277.

dismiss this kind of childish utopianism as naively hopeful, I argue that to do so would be to ignore the radical potential of Bloch's heuristic of naivety. In Bloch's understanding of utopianism, an acknowledgement of one's own naivety is the only path to a critical engagement with the world. As Freire puts it: 'In order for students to go beyond their naivety, it is necessary for them to grasp their naivety into their own hands.'[224] I argue that one can learn to grasp naivety in this way by studying the curious children of SF. By reading these short stories, whose authors share Bloch's 'reverence for the small as well as the great,' as exemplary 'experimental utopias,' I have endeavoured to demonstrate the utopian potential made accessible by centring children's capacity for learning within SF.[225] The education which these teacher stories provide may not be precisely what Suvin had in mind when he described SF as 'an educational literature [...] irreversibly shaped by the pathos of preaching the good word of human curiosity, fear, and hope.'[226] However, what they do offer is a means of enacting precisely the kind of radical, utopian estrangement which Suvin has always associated with the genre.

In her story 'And a Little Child–' (1959) Henderson suggests that to see through the eyes of a child is to 'see everything new, everything fresh, everything wonderful, before custom can stale or life has twisted awry.'[227] This focus on the utopian potential of (childish) looking is, I argue, crucial to SF's political significance. If the genre is to be understood, at least in part, as 'a way of thinking about the world, made concrete in many different media and styles, rather than a particular market niche or genre category,' as Csicsery-Ronay argues it ought to be, then the process of transforming otherwise *normal* phenomenon into the strange, new and fresh

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[224] Freire, 'Reading the World and Reading the Word', p. 16.

[225] Zipes, 'Introduction: Toward a Realization of Anticipatory Illumination', p. xvii; Abensour, p. 127.

[226] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 36.

[227] Zenna Henderson, 'And a Little Child-', in *The Anything Box* (London: Panther Books, 1969), pp. 160–77 (p. 160).

matter of SF must be of central importance to the SF critic.[228] Having explored the utopian potential of the strange children discussed in this chapter, I argue that childhood has a significant part to play in the science-fictional recognition that strangeness is potentially accessible even in what Abensour calls 'the glimmer of daily life.'[229] If one seeks to, to use Moylan's phrase, 'demand the impossible,' one must trouble the line between possibility and impossibility and insist on the potential utopianism of our present moment.[230] I argue that it is through the perspective of the relentlessly curious child that this intervention is made thinkable, in which one might be able to inhabit, as well as perceive, 'the still inchoate, habit-free character' of the science-fictional novum.[231] To return to the words of Henderson: 'Maybe that's what Heaven will be – eyes forever new.'[232]

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[228] Csicsery-Ronay, p. ix. While I find Csicsery-Ronay's theorisation of 'science-fictionality' useful I feel he is too quick to dismiss the potential of 'genre categor[ies]' to facilitate this kind of thought. See my Introduction for a fuller discussion of genre.
[229] Abensour, p. 137.
[230] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, p. i.
[231] Bloch, I, p. 129.
[232] Henderson, 'And a Little Child-', p. 160.

Chapter Two

The Future in the Past: Imperialist SF and the Subversion of Linear Time

> Incredible how the top dog always announces with such
> an air of discovery that the underdog is childish, stupid,
> emotional, irresponsible, uninterested in serious matter,
> incapable of learning – but for god's sake don't teach him
> anything! – and both cowardly *and* ferocious […] Once
> I learned the tune I stopped believing the words – about
> *anybody*.
>
> - James Tiptree Jr.[1]

When H. G. Wells' unnamed Time Traveller first steps into the London of 802,701 AD he is greeted by the citizens of the future. The first of these is described as 'a slight creature – perhaps four feet high,' who is swiftly joined by a group of other 'pretty little people,' who conduct themselves with 'a graceful gentleness, a certain child-like ease.'[2] Further, the Traveller states that these 'Eloi' are 'on the intellectual level of one of our five-year-old children.'[3] Here, the citizens of the future – as depicted in a text from which Darko Suvin has argued all subsequent SF has 'sprung' – are imagined to have the appearance, demeanour and intellects of children.[4] In this chapter I use the childlikeness of Wells' citizens of the future as a prompt to discuss the temporal implications of including childhood in the critical conversation surrounding SF. In Chapter One I argued that the exclusion of childhood from 'the Suvinian paradigm' has

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[1] James Tiptree Jr. cited in Julie Phillips, *James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon* (New York, NY: Picador, 2015), p. 171. Emphasis in original.
[2] H. G. Wells, 'The Time Machine', in *Selected Short Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1958), pp. 7–83 (pp. 24–25).
[3] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 26.
[4] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 242.

contributed to a widespread though unacknowledged presumption that 'the empirical norms of the author's epoch' provide a fixed and unified state against which the various non-impossibilities of SF can be measured.[5] I have suggested that the epistemological position occupied by the curious child disrupts this perceived fixity and in this chapter I discuss the temporal dimension of this disruption. My focus is on how in the early SF texts under discussion childhood undermines the temporal security attributed to those white, wealthy, Western subjects who consider themselves to embody, as Wells' Traveller puts it, 'the ripe prime of the human race.'[6] Childhood in these texts is made to represent both the past and the future, while children's infectious capacity for curious questioning trouble the distinction between the two. I argue, therefore, that childhood has an important role to play, both in the science-fictional reimagination of time as an arena for travel, and in what Bloch calls 'the philosophy of the future in the past,' by which he means the philosophy of Marxist utopianism.[7]

Childhood's relationship to time cannot, however, be discussed without acknowledging the many ways in which the figure of the child has been used to support and uphold imperialist narratives of progressive development. Within the overlapping fields of evolutionary biology, cultural anthropology and imperialist literature, childhood has frequently been used as a marker of primitivism, stunted growth and proximity to humanity's evolutionary ancestors. In Havelock Ellis' *The Criminal* (1890), for example, he writes that 'the child is naturally, by his organisation, nearer to the animal, to the savage, to the criminal, than the adult.'[8] Similarly, as Patrick Brantlinger notes, Anthony Trollope has likened 'colonies settled by British immigrants,' to 'children whom the parent country should expect one day to grow up.'[9] These

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[5] Rhys Williams, p. 619; Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. viii.
[6] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 55.
[7] Bloch, I, p. 9.
[8] Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal* (London: Walter Scott Limited, 1892), p. 212.
[9] Anthony Trollope cited in Brantlinger, p. 5.

associations can in large part be ascribed to the linear narrative of teleological development used to justify European expansionism. To describe colonised peoples as children is, as Kodwo Eshun has argued, to 'condemn[ed] black subjects to prehistory,' thus (supposedly) justifying their lack of agency and need for supervision from the only available adults – the colonising European forces.[10] As Carolyn Steedman has argued: 'The lost realm of the adult's past [...] came to assume the shape of childhood from the end of the eighteenth century onward,' and this held true not merely in the context of an adult's individual, psychological past, but also in the perceived past of civilisations, and indeed of humanity as a species.[11]

The model of time used to support this ideology is of central relevance to SF. John Rieder has argued that 'early science fiction lives and breathes in the atmosphere of colonial history and its discourses,' while Donna Haraway notes that 'the colonial and imperial roots & routes of SF are relentlessly real and inescapably fabulated.'[12] I in no way contest this description of the genre. Indeed, much of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of the persistence of imperialist narratives of development within SF. However, I do contend that the imperialist weaponisation of childhood – wherein the child is understood as a marker of the regrettable past – is neither the only, nor the determining, role which childhood plays within SF. Instead, I suggest that childhood's affinity for non-linear temporalities means that even when the child is made to represent the beginning of a fixed path of progressive maturation, this representation is unstable. In this I follow Sally Shuttleworth who notes that, although the nineteenth century psychological texts which form the basis of her study represent the child as 'a figure who is by turns animal [and] savage,' childhood is importantly distinct from these

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[10] Eshun, p. 297.
[11] Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. viii.
[12] Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 3; Haraway, 'SF'.

analogously connected temporal others.[13] As Shuttleworth puts it, the child 'is located not in the distant colonies, nor in the mists of evolutionary time, but at the very centre of English domestic life.'[14] This proximity to white, Western masculinity grants childhood a unique position from which to challenge the temporal security which an imperialist ideology assures to the British gentleman. Within the various imperialist understandings of historical time which describe colonised peoples in terms of temporal otherness the coloniser is presumed to be immune from any temporal fluctuations. However, childhood makes thinkable a model of nonlinear time in which white, Western masculinity is *not* granted a secure temporal footing from which to distort the 'chronopolitical terrain,' to use Eshun's term, inhabited by colonised peoples.[15]

This chapter begins with an examination of the uses to which childhood has been put within imperialist models of progressive development. Specifically, I focus on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837) in which he describes 'Africa' as 'the land of childhood,' and thus, as Charles C. Verharen has discussed, as 'the land of the past.'[16] I explore how Hegel's infantilisation of colonised peoples feeds into a narrative in which black subjects are excluded from the historical present. Verharen argues that Hegel can be understood as the thinker who 'articulates [...] most clearly and powerfully' the 'insult,' that is this imperialist model of history, and thus I suggest that his work provides a convenient basis for a broader critique of linear narratives of maturation – narratives which would go on to influence fields as diverse as evolutionary biology, cultural anthropology, Marxist philosophy

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[13] Shuttleworth, p. 4.
[14] Shuttleworth, p. 4.
[15] Eshun, p. 289.
[16] Hegel, p. 109; Charles C. Verharen, '"The New World and the Dreams To Which It May Give Rise": An African and American Response To Hegel's Challenge', *Journal of Black Studies*, 27.4 (1997), 456–93 (p. 457) <https://doi.org/10.1177/002193479702700402>.

and indeed SF.[17] Having established childhood's role within these narratives, I then work to theorise the various ways in which childhood fails to uphold, and indeed can be actively used to undermine, what Bloch calls 'the banal, automatic belief in progress as such.'[18] To this end I focus on Bloch's critique of Hegelian time, which frequently draws on the figure of the child, and which I read as indicative of how childhood can be used to extract the utopian potential from otherwise reactionary temporal models. I then turn to an examination of Bloch's own theorisation of historical time, reading his work alongside that of his contemporary and sometime collaborator Walter Benjamin in order to establish an anti-Hegelian, Marxist temporality.

The final section of this chapter focuses upon Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self* (1903). By tracing the moments in these texts in which childhood, youth and curiosity are alluded to, I mean to demonstrate childhood's relevance to early science-fictional conceptions of time. Specifically, I am interested in how childhood, as imagined in SF narratives, works to undermine the linear logic of progress which was so influential within SF of this period. It is at the moments in which these texts allude to childhood that such narratives are, to use Karl Hardy's phrase, 'unsettled.'[19] Refusing to remain confined to a prehistoric past, childhood disturbs the neat division between past and future upon which imperialist temporalities rely, thus establishing a more utopian method of playing with, and travelling through, time.

The Inexorable Plot of Racism and Hegelian Philosophy

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[17] Verharen, p. 456.
[18] Bloch, I, p. 199.
[19] Karl Hardy, p. 133.

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel describes 'Africa' as 'the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night.'[20] This marks the beginning of a diatribe directed at the peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa, who are, in Hegel's writing, not only excluded from historical time, but thereby robbed of their humanity. He writes:

> The Negro [...] exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality — all that we call feeling — if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.[21]

This aspect of Hegel's work has been analysed and denounced by a number of critics. Robert Young's *White Mythologies* (1990) for example, takes as one of its central subjects Hegel's complicity in what Hélène Cixous has called 'the inexorable plot of racism.'[22] Verharen, Ronald Kuykendall, Babacar Camara and Susan Buck-Morss have all also, in various ways, challenged what Camara calls 'the falsity of Hegel's theses on Africa.'[23] Hegel's designation of Africa as the land of childhood inevitably encourages discussions of the figure of the child in these texts. Verharen, for example, notes that Hegel, 'speaking before the dawn of evolutionary theory and genetic racism […] could attribute the "childish" condition of Africans in part to tropical heat,' while Camara denounces Hegel's denigration of Africans, 'whom he sees as children in the forest, unaffected by the movement of history.'[24] Childishness is here

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[20] Hegel, p. 109.
[21] Hegel, p. 111.
[22] Hélène Cixous cited in Robert J. C. Young, *White Mythologies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 33.
[23] Babacar Camara, 'The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa', *Journal of Black Studies*, 36.1 (2005), 82–96 (p. 82); See also Ronald Kuykendall, 'Hegel and Africa: An Evaluation of the Treatment of Africa in The Philosophy of History', *Journal of Black Studies*, 23.4 (1993), 571–81; Susan Buck-Morss, 'Hegel and Haiti', *Critical Inquiry*, 26.4 (2000), 821–65.
[24] Verharen, p. 458; Camara, p. 82.

shown to be a solely negative characteristic, used to support Hegel's 'gross misinterpretation' of African history.[25] However, as none of these challenges focus specifically on childhood, in this chapter I supplement this critical conversation, both by exploring how Hegel has used childhood to reinforce his teleological model of historical time and by salvaging the utopian, temporal potential of childhood from his work. I argue that his invocations of childhood mark moments of tension in his thought – moments which are susceptible to utopian intervention. To this end I combine my reading of Hegel with an examination of Bloch's theory of non-linear time. I understand Bloch as providing a critique of Hegel's model of historical time, one which preserves his usefulness to the project of Marxist utopianism while demonstrating the many failings in his thought. By focusing on childhood's role within Bloch's critique of Hegel I hope to clarify the temporal position of the child and establish its potential for combating the 'universalizing narrative of the unfolding of a rational system of world history,' which Young has argued characterises much white, Western, Marxist thought and which is also evident within the SF I later discuss.[26]

The figure of the child plays a significant role throughout Bloch's philosophical writing, including his work on non-linear temporalities. As Paul Knight and Stephen and Neville Plaice discuss, Bloch is centrally concerned with the idea that 'new meaning and fresh synthetic combinations can be extracted from the thinking of the past.'[27] This conviction offers an obvious challenge to the teleological model of progress which is found in Hegelian thought specifically, and in imperialist discourse more generally. Where the past is denigrated within such narratives in favour of the revolutionary (or imperial) future, Bloch refuses to separate past events from their still potentially existent, utopian futures. Interestingly, he explicitly

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[25] Kuykendall, p. 580.
[26] Young, p. 33.
[27] Plaice, Plaice, and Knight, I, p. xxvii.

connects the 'unbecome future […] visible in the past,' with childhood.[28] As he puts it: 'The light of youth, productive light, which can even find affinities in ancient events, as if they were not ancient at all, but new proclamations, keeps the morning in the world awake even in times of darkness.'[29] It is this 'light of youth,' and the ways in which it disrupts linear constructions of time, which Bloch draws upon in his critique of Hegel, and which I discuss here.[30] However, it must firstly be acknowledged that Bloch was, to an extent, an Hegelian philosopher. As such he shares in the 'element of racism implicit in official Marxism,' which Buck-Morss identifies with 'the notion of history as a teleological progression,' and the concomitant propensity to consider black and Indigenous peoples as 'premodern' and thus 'relegated to the past.'[31] When Bloch writes that 'nothing coarser, nastier, more stupid has ever been seen than the jazz-dances,' the legacy of this kind of Hegelian racism in his work is clear.[32] This chapter in no way intends to excuse this position on Bloch's part. Bloch was heavily influenced by Hegel's philosophy and this includes his philosophy of time. This characterization of jazz, for example, aligns precisely with the Eurocentrism of Hegel's contention that, as Verharen puts is, 'America is the land of the future and Africa is the land of the past without a past,' and that neither are worthy of serious philosophical contemplation.[33] However, if one does examine Bloch's extensive critique of Hegelian thought, one can see that it is precisely on the subject of progress-as-maturation that his thought diverges from Hegel's. When Bloch distinguishes between what he calls 'the closed-circuit thinker Hegel, the antiquarian of what is unalterably already existing,' and 'the dialectical process-thinker Hegel,' it is the linearity of Hegel's

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[28] Bloch, I, p. 8.
[29] Bloch, I, p. 121.
[30] Bloch, I, p. 121.
[31] Buck-Morss, p. 850.
[32] Bloch, I, p. 394.
[33] Verharen, p. 457.

understanding of time with which he takes issue, and the figure of the child which he uses to express his criticism.[34]

The 'dialectical process-thinker Hegel' is continually identified in Bloch's writing as someone interested in the utopian potential of youth.[35] When Hegel writes that 'it is [...] not difficult to see that our time is a time of birth and transition to a new period,' Bloch notes that 'where there is a time of "birth," there is also the womb of a real Possible from which it springs.'[36] Here, then, in Bloch's estimation, Hegel has accessed 'the Front of the world process,' where new, utopian futures are 'born.'[37] It is this child-centric version of 'utopian hiddenness which exists in embryo or In-itself, and which bursts through again at every stage of the Hegelian process,' that Bloch values.[38] Moreover, it is when Hegel deviates from this model of youth as symbolic of utopian potential that Bloch critiques his position. For example, Hegel compares 'a baby's first breath,' which 'after a long period of silent nutrition, breaks the gradualness of merely continuing growth – a qualitative leap – and the baby is now born,' to 'a flash which all at once erects the structure of the new world.'[39] This comparison, wherein history is framed as a series of qualitative leaps, is read by Bloch as a sign of Hegel's position as a 'non-philosopher of the future.'[40] Bloch writes that 'the flash of the new beginning,' described here, is 'merely' a question of 'opening up, where the closedness of what is opening up has long since been decided.'[41] Rather than acknowledging the utopian potential of childhood understood as part a process of ongoing gestation – which in Bloch's writing acts as a reminder of 'how much youth there is in man, how much lies in him that is waiting' – Hegel

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[34] Bloch, I, p. 270.
[35] Bloch, I, p. 270.
[36] Hegel cited in Bloch, I, p. 246.
[37] Bloch, I, p. 247.
[38] Bloch, I, p. 140.
[39] Hegel cited in Bloch, I, p. 139.
[40] Bloch, I, p. 245.
[41] Bloch, I, p. 139.

uses the child as a marker of absolute, progressive change from one state to another.[42] Here, there is no room for the kind of dialogue between adult and child which, as I argued in Chapter One, Bloch's exploration of the relentless curiosity of childhood encourages.

Childhood can thus be seen to form a continual point of contention in Bloch's reading of Hegel, one which destabilises the surety of Hegel's understanding of historical time as progressing from one discrete stage to the next. While Bloch, to my knowledge, does not discuss Hegel's designation of Africa as the land of childhood directly, it seems not unreasonable to argue that, in Blochian philosophy, a land of childhood would not be a space devoid of historical process or 'capable of no development or culture.'[43] Indeed, in *A Philosophy of the Future* (1963) Bloch explicitly critiques 'the location to which […] Hegel assigned the Near-Eastern civilizations.'[44] Where Hegel claims that the regions of 'India and China,' to which one could add Africa, were 'immersed in the past,' Bloch notes that 'their influences were felt quite contemporaneously,' and denounces Hegel as a 'developmental philosopher[s].'[45] Thus, when Hegel states of 'Africans,' that 'as we see them at this day, such have they always been,' he marks himself out as what Bloch terms a 'cycle-dialectician of the past or, which amounts to the same thing, of that which is eternally occurring' – a conflation which Bloch sees as the greatest flaw in Hegelian philosophy.[46] This kind of timelessness has no place in Bloch's writing, where anticipation and what he terms the 'Not-Yet-Conscious,' are paramount.[47] Writing again of Hegel's theory of 'the sealed nature of the universe,' which must 'open up' if progress is to be achieved, Bloch states:

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[42] Bloch, I, p. 195.
[43] Hegel, p. 116.
[44] Ernst Bloch, *A Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by John Cumming (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 135.
[45] Bloch, *A Philosophy of the Future*, p. 135.
[46] Hegel, p. 116; Bloch, I, p. 245.
[47] Bloch, I, p. 56.

The world-mystery itself does not lie in a kind of cosmo-analytic rubbish pit, but in the horizon of the future to be attained, and the resistance which it offers to its being opened is not that of a sealed chest […] but the resistance here is that of fullness which is still itself actually in process, and not yet manifest.[48]

In light of this emphasis on the 'Not-Yet' as a constituent element of what Wayne Hudson has called Bloch's theory of 'open process,' Hegel's positioning of *Africa* in prehistory takes on new meaning.[49] Hegel's contention that 'in Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has *not yet* attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence' would, in Bloch's philosophy, suggest a utopian 'fullness which is still itself actually in process,' rather than the stagnation and incapacity for development implied by Hegel's framing.[50] Moreover, his use of the metaphor of the 'sealed chest' suggests that the utopian wish containers which the science-fictional children discussed in Chapter One variously explore, embody and inhabit, might provide a useful alternative to Hegel's understanding of historical time – denying, as they do, the duality implied here between open and closed, known and unknown.[51]

Bloch's reimagination of childhood's value is thus shown to be a part of his critique of the 'stagist understanding of history' which Buck-Morss identifies with '(white) Marxism,' and which has its roots in Hegel's 'relegat[ion] to the past' of Africa and all African peoples.[52] In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1805-06), Hegel argues that 'while the child only

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[48] Hegel cited in Bloch, I, p. 131.
[49] Hudson, p. 68.
[50] Hegel, pp. 110-11. Emphasis mine; Bloch, I, p. 131.
[51] Bloch, I, p. 131.
[52] Buck-Morss, p. 850.

has capacities or the actual possibility of reason, it is just the same as if he had no reason,' and that 'the whole variation in the development of the world in history is founded on' the distinction between this child and the adult who 'in himself is rational.'[53] The distinction between possibility and actuality, around which so much of Bloch's thought is structured, is shown in Hegel's writing to rely upon the distinction between childhood and adulthood and, concomitantly, 'between the Africans and the Asiatics on the one hand, and the Greeks, Romans, and moderns on the other.'[54] The act of reimagining the position of the child is thus shown to involve reimagining both the chronopolitical positioning of black subjects in Western thought, and the value of utopian speculation. In this light, Bloch's statement that 'there is only Karl May and Hegel […] everything in between is an impure mixture,' seems particularly fitting.[55] By asserting the importance of childhood through the figure of Karl May – the author of the adventure stories which, as Vincent Geoghegan has argued, 'both stimulated and helped to feed the utopian hunger of the young Bloch' – Bloch critiques Hegel even as he professes his debt to him.[56] Bloch's 'life-long love affair' with the stories of his childhood exemplify his antipathy to Hegel's emphasis on maturation – an antipathy which, I argue, can be used to rethink the position of the so-called land of childhood within Marxist, utopian understandings of historical time.[57]

Utopianism and the Temporality of Childhood

What Bloch's work offers, then, is a form of Marxism indebted to, but not determined by, a Hegelian model of history. While his use of childhood to complicate and critique Hegel's

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[53] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures On The History Of Philosophy*, trans. by Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane, 3 vols (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), I, p. 21.
[54] Hegel, I, p. 21.
[55] Bloch cited in Plaice, Plaice, and Knight, I, p. xix.
[56] Geoghegan, p. 10.
[57] Geoghegan, p. 10.

thought has already been enumerated here, the role which it plays in his construction of his own non-linear understanding of time remains to be established. Before turning to the writing of Hopkins and Wells, therefore, I explore how childhood, as conceived in Bloch's work, renders his formation of utopian temporalities thinkable and, crucially, frames them as open to active intervention. For Bloch, time is not merely something which one passively passes through. Rather it is a 'chronopolitical terrain,' which can be mapped and reshaped, and within which childhood plays a significant role.[58]

In *The Principle of Hope* (1955-59) Bloch challenges the linear logic of maturation in a number of ways. Perhaps the most direct among these is Bloch's reversal of the association drawn between childhood and the past. In Bloch's philosophy it is the future that childhood evokes. He presents youth, not as a regrettably immature origin point, but rather as a position which allows access to what he refers to as 'the voice of tomorrow.'[59] By characterising youth in this way Bloch grants it a central position within his philosophy more broadly. This can be seen in the commitment to futurity with which he begins the first volume of *The Principle of Hope*: '*Philosophy will have conscience of tomorrow, commitment to the future, knowledge of hope, or it will have no more knowledge*.'[60] Bloch's interest in the future is one of the elements which has always attracted SF critics to his writing. The emphasis which Suvin, for example, places on Bloch's concept of the novum as a central element of the poetics of SF is explicitly justified in relation to the future-orientation of both SF and Bloch's thought. As Suvin puts it: 'a novum is fake unless it in some way participates in and partakes of what Bloch called the "front-line of historical process".'[61] It is not this focus upon the future, therefore which is surprising in terms of Bloch's relevance to what Istvan Csicsery-Ronay has termed the

[58] Eshun, p. 289.
[59] Bloch, I, p. 117.
[60] Bloch, I, p. 7. Emphasis in original.
[61] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 81.

'radically, future-oriented' field of SF.[62] Rather, it is Bloch's insistence that the radically 'New' is best accessed by 'any young person' and that 'youth and movement forwards are synonymous,' which challenges linear narratives of maturation in all their forms.[63]

For Bloch, those who are young are defined by the fact that they are not 'in league with the putrefaction of yesterday,' and that, for them, 'life means tomorrow.'[64] However, the connection established here, between childhood and the future, and indeed the value which Bloch ascribes to *the future* as a category which can be meaningfully separated from *the past*, is put into question when read in the wider context of Bloch's work. For example, *The Principle of Hope* ends with the following passage:

> Once man has established his own domain in real democracy, without depersonalization and alienation, something arises in the world which all men have glimpsed in childhood: a place and a state in which no one has yet been. And the name of this something is home [Heimat].[65]

Here, the utopian future is associated with childhood, but this association is made in decidedly equivocal terms. Childhood is posited as a place from which this future state can be glimpsed but it is also clearly figured as the past – as something which *men* now look back upon from their adulthood. The dual temporal perspective encouraged here by the figure of the child, which involves simultaneously glimpsing the future and looking back to the past, evokes precisely the kind of queer, non-linear temporality which José Esteban Muñoz has argued is

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[62] Csicsery-Ronay, p. 3.
[63] Bloch, I, p. 118.
[64] Bloch, I, p. 117.
[65] Bloch, III, p. 1376.

fundamental to a utopianism founded upon 'a backward glance that enacts a future vision.'[66]

Bloch's use of the child can thus be seen to imply, not only a reversal of the association encouraged by a linear understanding of time, between childhood and the past, but an undermining of any narrative predicated upon the fundamental separation of past and future. As Knight, Plaice and Plaice note in their introduction to *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch theorizes 'the mutual presence of the past and future in each other' – a coexistence which the child, who provokes both a looking forwards and a looking backwards, renders far more easily thinkable.[67]

It is not, therefore, childhood alone which a reading of Bloch's philosophy can serve to salvage from the reactionary fate which it has been assigned within teleological narratives of progress. *The past* itself, as both temporal category and vast historical period, is reconceived in Bloch's philosophy as a source of revolutionary hope – as a repository of the 'unbecome future.'[68] This is not an indication of Bloch's position as an isolated or eccentric thinker – although he undoubtedly fits that description – but rather of a far broader construction of time within Marxist philosophy. As Bloch writes:

> Marxist philosophy, as that which at last adequately addresses what is becoming and what is approaching, also knows the whole of the past in creative breadth, because it knows no past other than the still living, not yet discharged past. Marxist philosophy is that of the future, therefore also of the future in the past.[69]

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[66] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), p. 4. I return to Munoz' thought in Chapter Three where I work to establish childhood's place within his understanding of queer utopianism.
[67] Plaice, Plaice, and Knight, I, p. xxxi.
[68] Bloch, I, p. 8.
[69] Bloch, I, p. 9.

Bloch's analysis of the interconnectedness of past and future in Marxist philosophy, as seen here, has been most extensively analysed in Hudson's *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (1982). Hudson writes of the 'tension' he observes in Bloch's work 'between the attempt to be futuristic and the attempt to make the past live again.'[70] Here, although he does not explicitly discuss the connection between the temporal positioning of childhood and this notion of 'the future in the past,' Hudson does himself use the figure of the child as a rhetorical device.[71] In his description of the 'future determination of something that is partially actual now,' Hudson plays off the temporal potentiality contained in the figure of 'the child [who] is not yet a man.'[72] By revaluing the image of the child who has the 'actual possibility of reason' – who Hegel argues therefore has 'no reason' – Hudson demonstrates childhood's role in distinguishing Hegelian from anti-Hegelian Marxist thought.[73] This function is directly alluded to by Bloch when he writes of 'the light of youth [...] which can even find affinities in ancient events, as if they were not ancient at all.'[74] Here, youth is not merely imagined as a symbolic representation of a non-linear model of temporality, rather, it is shown to be a way of actively accessing the 'unbecome future' which Bloch believes is to be found in even the most reactionary of pasts.[75]

The idea that youth can be actively harnessed in order to better access a utopian, non-linear model of time is not reserved to Bloch's writing. Indeed, his suggestion that Marxist philosophy is a philosophy of 'the future in the past' is lived out, in particular, in Benjamin's writing.[76] Benjamin's best known theorisation of time, found in his essay 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940), is fiercely critical of a linear conception of time. More

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[70] Hudson, p. 19.
[71] Bloch, I, p. 9.
[72] Hudson, p. 19.
[73] Hegel, I, p. 21.
[74] Bloch, I, p. 121.
[75] Bloch, I, p. 8.
[76] Bloch, I, p. 9.

specifically, Benjamin's critique is targeted at 'the concept of the historical progress of mankind,' which, he argues, 'cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time.'[77] It is not the content of history alone which the Marxist thinker must critique, according to Benjamin's argument, but 'the concept of progress itself,' which is deemed to be inextricably connected to a destructive understanding of temporality driven by capitalist ideology.[78] As an alternative, Benjamin endorses the work of those with 'the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past.'[79] To note that Benjamin and Bloch are in dialogue here, or that Benjamin is an advocate of a non-linear, 'layered, intertwined, vertical temporality,' is commonplace in criticism of their work.[80] What is less frequently recognised, however, is that Benjamin's contention that 'past things become futural,' or that during 'the time of the self […] all future is past' – which adheres precisely to Bloch's description of Marxist philosophy – is to be found in some of his earliest writing, most significantly in 'The Metaphysics of Youth' (1913-14).[81] In fact, Benjamin's involvement in German youth politics and the extent to which his early writings are devoted to 'youth' as a politically charged category mean that his contribution to the 'philosophy of the future in the past' acts as a direct challenge to the models of maturation under discussion here, not only in terms of the theoretical value of the figure of the child, but in terms of the value of youth in a praxis led, Marxist politics.[82]

The fact that Benjamin's memoir *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* (1938) is dedicated exclusively to his childhood years demonstrates his interest in the child as a figure who ought not to be simply left behind in the past. Along with numerous anecdotes regarding his

[77] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), p. 252.
[78] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 252.
[79] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 246.
[80] Howard Eiland, 'Translator's Introduction', in *Walter Benjamin: Early Writings 1910-1917*, by Walter Benjamin, trans. by Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 1–13 (p. 9).
[81] Walter Benjamin, 'The Metaphysics of Youth', in *Walter Benjamin: Early Writings 1910-1917*, trans. by Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 144–60 (p. 156).
[82] Bloch, I, p. 9.

experiences of the city as a child – which he remembers, or imagines, in vivid detail – this text contains many of Benjamin's most significant explorations of the temporal implications of including childhood within one's philosophy. For example, Benjamin describes the way in which the garden of a school friend who had died in childhood was 'wove[n] together so intimately with [her] beloved name,' in his mind, that he came to think of it as the site of her grave.[83] Here, the figure of 'the departed child' is not neatly confined to the past.[84] Rather, her presence is still felt, not where her remains were literally interred, but where she spent her childhood years. The time of childhood is thus spatialised and embedded within the city's present. Moreover, Benjamin also connects this garden to the future. He writes: 'In those days, the shoreline of adult life appeared to me just as cut off from my own existence, by the river course of many years, as that bank of the canal on which the flowerbed lay.'[85] In this image, childhood grants precisely the kind of dual temporal perspective theorised by Bloch. The young Benjamin looks into the future of adulthood and the past of 'departed' childhood simultaneously, as both have become identified with this particular geographic location. To centre childhood's role in *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* is thus to read Benjamin's text both as a reflection on his own departed childhood, and as the means of laying claim to the city's future. Once again, childhood is shown to make space for 'a backward glance that enacts a future vision.'[86]

This autobiographical work not only demonstrates Benjamin's commitment to giving childhood a central role in his efforts to complicate linear narratives of temporality, it also acts as a continuation of some of his earliest writing. A dedicated member of the German youth

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[83] Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, trans. by Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 68.
[84] Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, p. 68.
[85] Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, p. 68.
[86] Muñoz, p. 4.

movement in the early decades of the twentieth century, Benjamin's attempts to challenge what he called 'the great age-complex,' were first addressed in his 1913 essay 'Youth Was Silent.'[87] In this commentary upon the First Free German Youth Congress of the same year Benjamin bemoans the silence of youth in the face of 'that mighty ideology: experience-maturity-reason-the good will of adults.'[88] Youth, in Benjamin's early writings, is regarded as a radical motivating force. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that 'from youth alone radiates new spirit.'[89] The fact that this emphasis upon the radical potential of youth spanned his career – *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* being one of the last texts he worked on before his death in 1940 – signifies its importance to Benjamin's broader theorisations of time. While SF critics working within the Suvinian paradigm may ascribe to a Marxist political horizon similar to that upheld by Benjamin, Suvin's dismissal of youth – evident in his assertion that SF must 'outgrow' its 'juvenile' origins, 'the quicker the better for its generic affirmation' – are antithetical to Benjamin's conception of time.[90] The idea that SF's youth is something to be outgrown runs directly counter to Benjamin's criticism of the '"philistine" or "bourgeois" conception of experience,' which, as Howard Eiland has argued, Benjamin identifies with an ideology focussed upon 'the outgrowing of youth – youth as merely a transition to the practical realities of adulthood.'[91] Not only does childhood, in Benjamin's thought, provide a significant way of thinking about the mutual constitution of past and future, therefore, it also speaks directly to the child's relevance to SF as a symbol of, and provocation to, radical political commitment. To Benjamin, as to Bloch, childhood is far more than a steppingstone to a more sophisticated and brighter future.

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[87] Walter Benjamin, 'Youth Was Silent', in *Walter Benjamin: Early Writings 1910-1917*, trans. by Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 135–38 (p. 136).
[88] Benjamin, 'Youth Was Silent', p. 136.
[89] Benjamin, 'Youth Was Silent', p. 136.
[90] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 22.
[91] Eiland, p. 4.

Linear Time and its Limits – *The Time Machine* (1895)

While my aim in this thesis is to excavate the utopian aspects of SF's engagement with childhood, I do not do so under the presumption that there are no ties between childhood and the genre's conservative, imperialist tendencies. In fact, I contend that it is precisely because childhood is frequently employed in efforts to reinforce imperialist temporalities within SF that an excavation of its utopian potential – which lies in its failure to uphold those narratives – is needed. With this in mind I now turn to *The Time Machine* and Wells' indebtedness to evolutionary thought. My understanding of the role which childhood plays within *The Time Machine* is intimately bound up with 'the theory,' which was prevalent in evolutionary thought of this period, that, as Brantlinger puts it, 'man evolved through distinct social stages – from savagery to barbarism to civilization.'[92] Evolutionary thinkers frequently drew on the figure of the child to articulate this idea. For example, anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor's theory of 'cultural evolution' – that is, 'a social theory which states that human cultures invariably change over time to become more complex' – includes repeated references to maturation understood as a model of cultural development.[93] Not only does Tylor, in his study *Primitive Culture* (1871), equate contemporary indigenous people with prehistoric man – arguing that the 'hypothetical primitive condition' of early man 'corresponds in a considerable degree to that of modern savage tribes' – he describes both groups as being child-like.[94] Sylvia Hardy, in her study of mythology in *The Time Machine*, notes that Tylor regards 'the savage' as 'a representative of the childhood of the human race.'[95] To discuss childhood in relation to

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[92] Brantlinger, p. 186.
[93] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. i.
[94] Tylor, p. 19.
[95] Tylor cited in Sylvia Hardy, 'The Time Machine and Victorian Mythology', in *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine: Selected Essays from the Centenary Conference "The Time Machine: Past, Present, and Future", Imperial College, London July 26-29, 1995*, ed. by George Edgar Slusser, Patrick Parrinder, and Danièle Chatelain (St Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), pp. 65–75 (p. 80).

evolutionary thought is thus to discuss evolutionary thought's ties to a racist, colonialist temporality characterised by progressive, linear development.

This same progressive narrative of maturation is also apparent in the writing of T. H. Huxley, who taught at the Normal School of Science where Wells was a student. In his influential essay 'Evolution and Ethics' (1893), first given as a speech at the University of Oxford, Huxley writes: 'We have long since emerged from the heroic childhood of our race, when good and evil could be met with the same "frolic welcome".'[96] While Huxley presents childhood in a 'heroic' light here, he also excludes it from any participation in either the civilised present or the ethical future. Meanwhile, his belief that 'the influence of the cosmic process on the evolution of society is the greater the more rudimentary its civilization,' demonstrates the implicit racism in this stance.[97] Not only is Huxley prepared to view evolution as a process of improvement, with humanity its most perfect result – a theory which, as Elana Gomel has discussed, is at odds with Charles Darwin's theory of 'evolution-as-contingency' – he views some humans as decidedly more perfect than others.[98] Brantlinger has noted that 'Huxley repeatedly cites evidence that suggests a proximity between African, chimpanzee, and gorilla.'[99] Huxley can thus be considered as a thinker for whom 'evolution itself,' as Ziauddin Sardar puts it, 'moves from black to white,' and it is this imperialist understanding of time which informs his theory of devolution – a theory which was highly influential on Wells' writing.[100]

[96] Thomas H. Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics', in *The Major Prose of Thomas Henry Huxley* (St Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), pp. 309–44 (p. 330).
[97] Brantlinger, p. 186; Huxley, p. 327.
[98] Elana Gomel, 'Shapes of the Past and the Future: Darwin and the Narratology of Time Travel', *Narrative*, 17.3 (2009), 334–52 (p. 338).
[99] Brantlinger, p. 185.
[100] Ziauddin Sardar, 'Foreword to the 2008 Edition', in *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon (London: Pluto Press, 2008), pp. vi–xx (p. xiii).

The impact that the theory of devolution had on Wells' scientific romances can hardly be overstated. Indeed, Suvin has convincingly argued that Huxley's work was one of Wells' key influences. In Suvin's reading of *The Time Machine*, Wells' adoption of a devolutionary model of development is presented as a critique of 'the ideal reader's norm of a complacent bourgeois class consciousness with its belief in linear progress.'[101] This is in accordance with Wells' own description of the text as one which combats 'the placid assumption,' which Wells identified in his readers, 'that Evolution was a pro-human force making things better and better for mankind.'[102] However, rather than denouncing the ideological character 'of progress itself,' as Benjamin advocates, Suvin argues that Wells simply replaces this optimistic evolution with Huxley's opposite, but equally linear, theory of devolution – that is 'progress from a condition of relative complexity to one of relative uniformity.'[103] By simply inverting the trajectory of imperialist maturation, this mode of thought fails to challenge the association between childhood and primitivism, simply transposing the infantilised image of the childish 'savage' from a less evolved past into a devolved future.

In *The Time Machine* the Traveller's journey into the future maps precisely onto a linear narrative of devolution. His passage is marked by the appearance of increasingly uniform life forms, resembling firstly two varieties of early hominids – the Eloi and the Morlocks – then giant crustaceans, and finally a single, amorphous, marine creature. Moreover, this narrative of devolutionary decline is articulated explicitly in relation to childhood. Having descended beneath the ground into a space inhabited by Morlocks – 'queer little ape-like figures[s]' who hunt and eat the Eloi – the Traveller engages in a lengthy description of the future he is traversing.[104] Frustrated by 'the childish simplicity' of the Eloi, he theorizes that the Eloi and

[101] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 223.
[102] Wells cited in Gomel, p. 338.
[103] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 252; Huxley cited in Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 224.
[104] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 45.

the Morlocks are 'two species that had resulted from the evolution of man,' and that they are actively in the process of devolving, or 'sliding down,' the evolutionary ladder.[105] He then goes on to reassure himself with regard to his ability to escape from this terrifying future by arguing that the fact that he 'came out of this age of ours, this ripe prime of the human race,' will ensure his safety.[106] Here, humanity's adulthood is conflated with the late Victorian present. The Traveller, a 'bright, aggressive, White, middle-class male,' as Suvin describes him, is the sole representative of this present and thus stands as a lone adult surrounded by the less evolved, childish citizens of the future.[107] Here, the Traveller is implicated in precisely the kind of 'racial chauvinism,' which Kirby Farrell has argued dominated evolutionary thinkers' conceptualisations of childhood at the turn of the century.[108] By connecting the Eloi and the Morlocks 'both with children and with the apes popularly imagined to be our ancestors,' Wells reinscribes imperialist visions of 'the land of childhood' onto his distant and devolved future.[109] Rather than a utopian site of 'strange newness,' this future seems best understood as, as John Huntington puts it, 'a return to the past, to the childhood, so to speak, of human society.'[110]

Despite the centrality of this model of (d)evolutionary time to *The Time Machine* it is important to stress that this is far from the only understanding of time operating within evolutionary thought of this period. The embryological studies of Ernst Haeckel, for example, offer an alternative to linear time precisely by drawing attention to the temporality of

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[105] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 54.

[106] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 55.

[107] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 218.

[108] Kirby Farrell, 'Wells and Neoteny', in *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine: Selected Essays from the Centenary Conference "The Time Machine: Past, Present, and Future", Imperial College, London July 26-29, 1995*, ed. by George Edgar Slusser, Patrick Parrinder, and Danièle Chatelain (St Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), pp. 65–75 (p. 69).

[109] Farrell, p. 69.

[110] John Huntington, *The Logic of Fantasy: H.G. Wells and Science Fiction* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 45; The Traveller views both the Eloi and the Morlocks, despite their many differences, as childlike. For a discussion of Wells' class politics and their influence on his representation of the aristocracy, represented by the Eloi, and the working poor, represented by the Morlocks, as children see Shuttleworth.

childhood. Initially, Haeckel's work appears to be very much of a piece with the narratives of development endorsed by Tylor and Huxley. For instance, Haeckel describes 'the history of man' as 'the history of his *progressive development.*'[111] However, his contention that 'the history of individual development, or Ontogeny, is a short and quick recapitulation of palæontological development, or Phylogeny,' presents an alternate model of evolutionary time.[112] The idea that the development of any one individual acts as a microcosm of the development of a species – derived from Haeckel's observation that human embryos are 'scarcely distinguishable from the tailed embryos of dogs' – suggests that evolutionary development is not best understood as linear transformation, from the past to the future, but rather is begun again, as it were, with each individual's birth.[113] Here, the embryo offers a way of spatialising time – of collapsing the 'immense spaces of time,' which usually separate one stage of evolution from the next and thus exemplifying an iterative, rather than a progressive, model of development.[114]

While Haeckel's ontogenetic theories provide an alternate model of time to that seen in Huxley's and later Wells' writing, Gomel argues that Charles Darwin's understanding of evolution more directly combats this notion of linear progress. She notes that Darwin 'elegantly undermines the idea of progress by pointing out that "naturalists have not as yet defined to each other's satisfaction what is meant by high and low forms",' thus 'effectively denying teleology.'[115] This position is, in fact, reiterated in Huxley's essay where he states that, although '"fittest" has a connotation of "best" [...] in cosmic nature [...] what is "fittest"

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[111] Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation: Or the Development of the Earth and Its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, trans. by E. Ray Lankester, 2 vols (Norderstedt: Hansebooks, 2016), I, p. 282. Emphasis in original.
[112] Haeckel, I, p. 10.
[113] Haeckel, I, p. 295.
[114] Haeckel, I, p. 310.
[115] Charles Darwin cited in Gomel, p. 337.

depends upon the conditions.'[116] The fact that Huxley's own thought is so conflicted on this point demonstrates the conceptual contortions necessary to maintaining a strictly linear understanding of progress. Interestingly, it is in a reference to childhood that these contortions are most apparent. In a final address to his audience, Huxley states: 'It remains to us to throw aside the youthful overconfidence and the no less youthful discouragement of nonage. We are grown men, and must play the man.'[117] Such a statement, read in combination with Huxley's professed intention to 'be something better than a brutal savage,' can be read as a further reiteration of the supposed ties between childhood, primitivism and humanity's less evolved ancestors (or devolved descendants). However, although childhood is certainly used as a marker of inferiority here, and Huxley wants to consign it to the prehistoric status of 'nonage,' he frames this consignment as a task which 'remains to us.'[118] By actively inviting his white, Western, wealthy audience to 'play the man' Huxley raises the possibility that they are not already members of 'the ripe prime of the human race.'[119] Further, I suggest that the possibility of playing the man brings with it that of 'becoming-child,' thus undermining the temporal security of existing within the heart of empire which white Londoners might otherwise have presumed themselves assured of by virtue of their position on the evolutionary ladder.[120]

What we see here, then, is the difficulty of the task which evolutionary thinkers assigned to themselves – that of attempting to maintain the fixity of the evolutionary ladder. The possibility that alternate temporal models might vie with, and undermine, the central narrative of teleological development is also felt in Wells' writing, in particular in his theorisation of time travel. Explaining the workings of his time machine, the Traveller

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[116] Huxley, p. 327.
[117] Huxley, p. 330.
[118] Huxley, p. 330.
[119] Huxley, p. 330; Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 55.
[120] Deleuze and Guattari, p. 275.

describes time as a fourth dimension. He states: '*There is no difference between Time and any of the three dimensions of Space except that our consciousness moves along it*.'[121] Like Benjamin – who argues that it is only our positioning within time that encourages us to see it as a linear narrative, or 'chain of events' – Wells is here arguing for an understanding of time in which it only appears to be linear due to our movement through it.[122] This is an aspect of the text which Suvin has actively dismissed, arguing that it is of minimal importance. In an early edition of *Science Fiction Studies*, Suvin writes:

> Wells's heart, and the *raison d'être* of his early SF, was in menacing sociobiological and cosmological evolution. Thus the vague non-sequiturs about the fourth dimension in *The Time Machine* seem to me quite subordinate to, in fact not much more than plausible motivation for, the Time Traveller's sequence of horrific visions.[123]

If, however, one accepts the Traveller's role as someone who physically moves through time as though it were space as a significant element of the text – rather than an attempt on Wells' part to 'hoodwink' his readers into believing that time travel is 'not manifestly impossible' – it becomes clear that time travel, as a concept, provides a model of time which cannot be accounted for within a linear logic of maturation.[124] By moving swiftly between periods of history supposedly separated by thousands of years, the Traveller destabilizes the divisions drawn between past and future, thus reminding the reader that the evolution of a new species does not, in fact, involve the extinction of all, supposedly less-evolved, animals. The Traveller's journey may appear to neatly separate humanity's descendants into rungs on a

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[121] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 8. Emphasis in original.
[122] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 249.
[123] Darko Suvin, 'In Response to Mr. Eisenstein', *Science Fiction Studies*, 1.4 (1974), 306–7 (p. 306.) Emphasis in original.
[124] Suvin, 'In Response to Mr. Eisenstein', p. 306.

(d)evolutionary ladder, but the text of *The Time Machine* compresses them into a mere five pages. Indeed Wells, in a passage which was cut from the final text, writes: 'There is no reason why a degenerate humanity should not come at last to differentiate into as many species as the descendants of the mudfish who fathered all the land vertebrates.'[125] This sprawling model of evolutionary development demonstrates that the idea that evolution could be mapped onto a linear temporal sequence is, like narrative time itself, plausible only as long as one views time from a single, limited, perspective.

It is important to note that Wells, in later life, was strongly opposed to any reading of *The Time Machine* which focused upon this spatialisation of time, or aimed to cast the text as a prefiguration of Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Suvin's dismissal of the 'vague non-sequiturs' regarding the fourth dimension can be traced back to Brian Aldiss' contention that the Traveller's 'eponymous machine is a McGuffin, and what powers the story are the unseen mechanisms of evolution' – a statement which is itself a reiteration of Wells' own contention that, in *The Time Machine*, 'the reader was bluffed past the essential difficulties of the proposition entirely for the sake of the story.'[126] W. M. S. Russell, however, has convincingly argued for the inclusion of temporal physics in the conversation surrounding *Time Machine*. His essay 'Time Before and After *The Time Machine*' (1995) clearly demonstrates the relevance of the science-fictional device of time travel to a field in which, as Einstein himself

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[125] H. G. Wells, 'The Further Vision', in *The Time Machine*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 89–91 (p. 91).

[126] Suvin, 'In Response to Mr. Eisenstein', p. 306; Brian Wilson Aldiss, 'Doomed Formicary versus the Technological Sublime', in *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine: Selected Essays from the Centenary Conference "The Time Machine: Past, Present, and Future", Imperial College, London July 26-29, 1995*, ed. by George Edgar Slusser, Patrick Parrinder, and Danièle Chatelain (St Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), pp. 188–94 (p. 190); Wells cited in W. M. S Russell, 'Time Before and After The Time Machine', in *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine: Selected Essays from the Centenary Conference "The Time Machine: Past, Present, and Future", Imperial College, London July 26-29, 1995*, ed. by George Edgar Slusser, Patrick Parrinder, and Danièle Chatelain (St Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), pp. 50–64 (p. 58).

states, 'the division into past, present and future has merely the meaning of an albeit obstinate illusion.'[127]

While Russell's focus is on Wells' conceptualisation of time as an example of his engagement with temporal physics, my interest lies in the use to which Wells puts childhood within this conceptualisation. In his initial description of time as a fourth dimension Wells does, in fact, make explicit reference to childhood. Discussing the simultaneous presence of child and adult in each person, his narrator, the Traveller, states:

> Here is a portrait of a man at eight years old, another at fifteen, another at seventeen, another at twenty-three, and so on. All these are evidently sections, as it were, Three-Dimensional representations of his Four-Dimensioned being, which is a fixed and unalterable thing.[128]

Here, Wells uses the child, or 'man at eight years old,' to elucidate the non-linearity of time.[129] Rather than seeing childhood as a transition which ought to be swiftly passed through, Wells figures it as part of the 'fixed and unalterable' nature of each person.[130] This spatialisation of time is not only 'not manifestly impossible,' it is actively prosaic, made strange only by Wells' science-fictional framing in a manner reminiscent of the child-centric texts discussed in Chapter One.[131] Russell, meanwhile, applies this conception – of the simultaneous presence of child and adult in each person – to Wells' habit of repudiating his own youthful writing later in his career. Russell's article refers to Max Beerbohm's cartoon, 'Mr H. G. Wells' (1924), in

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[127] Albert Einstein cited in Russell, p. 58.
[128] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 9.
[129] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 9.
[130] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 9.
[131] Suvin, 'In Response to Mr. Eisenstein', p. 306.

which an older Wells encounters his younger self and, instead of answering his questions about the future, says to him: 'You Don't Know Very Much About The Past, Do You[?].'[132] As Russell points out, this is an example of the older Wells failing to apply his professed ability to articulate 'the Whole Past of Mankind on This Planet – and the Whole Future Too,' to his own life.[133] In other words, he is failing to fully comprehend that his science-fictional imaginings cannot be neatly confined to the realms of impossibility, and thus that his theorisation of time as a fourth dimension requires a radical reappraisal of the relationship between youth and age. Russell uses this cartoon to argue that 'the four-dimensional being of Herbert George Wells may be a "fixed and unalterable thing," but we are free to choose our section, or "Three-dimensional representation".'[134] He does so in order to argue for the value of temporal physics to Wells' early writing despite the elder Wells' disavowal of this reading. However, I suggest that this argument can also be applied more broadly to a reappraisal of youth as a significant category in science-fictional understandings of time.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that 'a becoming,' is 'the opposite of a childhood memory. It is not the child "before" the adult, or the mother "before" the child: it is the strict contemporaneousness of the adult, of the adult and the child.'[135] It is this contemporaneity that the *man of eight years old* represents. Wells' spatialisation of time means that childhood cannot be kept at a secure temporal distance from adulthood. Rather, child and adult are considered to be continuous with one another, indeed implied by and contained within one another. This conceptualisation of childhood speaks to the tendency which Marah Gubar has identified among authors of children's literature working

[132] Max Beerbohm, *Mr H. G. Wells*, 1924, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/99636610-bcf4-0131-a3d1-58d385a7b928> [accessed 18 March 2021].
[133] Beerbohm.
[134] Russell, p. 58.
[135] Deleuze and Guattari, p. 164.

during the fin de siècle, of viewing '"child" and "adult",' less as 'binding biological categories and more [as] parts open to players of all ages.'[136] Wells' friendship with Edith Nesbit – whose children's book *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) documents the travels through time of a group of children who meet a child named Wells in the future – and his description of himself as a 'second Barrie,' are here endowed with greater significance.[137] Gubar argues that these Golden Age children's authors were, during this period, moving away from the 'static, highly idealised picture of childhood as a time of primitive simplicity,' found in earlier Victorian literature.[138] And indeed, one can see in Barrie's introduction to *Peter Pan* (1904) a similar tendency to spatialise time in order to reconceive childhood's relationship to adulthood. Barrie writes:

> Some say we are different people at different periods of our lives [...] but I don't hold with it; I think one remains the same person throughout, merely passing, as it were, in these lapses of time from one room to another, but all in the same house. If we unlock the rooms of the far past we can peer in and see ourselves, busily occupied in beginning to become you and me.[139]

Here, neither childhood, nor the past for which it is made to stand, can be neatly consigned to a distant and irrelevant period which has now been lost. Rather, they persist and are shown to be contemporaneous with adulthood. It is my contention that this conceptualisation of childhood provides a radical challenge to the linear narratives of maturation which childhood has elsewhere been used to support. If childhood cannot be neatly identified with 'a time of primitive simplicity,' it follows that the stability of 'primitive simplicity' itself, understood as

[136] Marah Gubar, p. 203.
[137] H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934), p. 427.
[138] Marah Gubar, p. vii.
[139] J. M. Barrie, 'To the Five: A Dedication', in *Peter Pan: And Other Plays*, by J. M. Barrie, ed. by Michael Cordner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 75–86 (p. 78).

a marker of temporal otherness, is undermined when it is connected to childhood.[140] Wells' man at eight years old prompts the question: If a white, Western, adult man can be childish, what other supposedly primitive, or simple identifiers might he be associated with?

Return to the Land of Childhood – *Of One Blood* (1903)

The possibility of drawing upon the nonlinear temporalities evoked by childhood as part of an effort to disrupt colonialist narratives of progress is more directly addressed in the writing of Pauline Hopkins. In her novel *Of One Blood*, Hopkins tells the story of Reuel, a young American doctor who passes as a white man but has both white and black ancestry. Reuel falls in love with and marries a black singer named Dianthe, who has recently lost her memory, and travels to Ethiopia on an archaeological expedition in order to earn enough money to support his new bride. In part, Hopkins' representation of Ethiopia can be understood as a challenge to the Hegelian model of history which denies the significance of ancient African civilizations. Hopkins depiction of Dr Stone, the head of the expedition, makes this plain. He gives a speech to his team in which he states: 'Undoubtedly your Afro-Americans are a branch of the wonderful and mysterious Ethiopians who had a prehistoric existence of magnificence, the full record of which is lost in obscurity.'[141] Hopkins' novel acts as an effort to rescue this magnificent Ethiopian history from obscurity, thereby providing contemporary black Americans with a claim to a grand and ancient lineage. The temporal significance of this claim is further compounded by the fact that Ethiopia is not only an exemplar of prehistoric magnificence, it is shown to be a site of potentially utopian futurity. Although the ancient city of Meroe is ruined, Reuel discovers that these ruins conceal a hidden city, Telassar, within

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[140] Marah Gubar, p. vii.

[141] Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self*, Ebook (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 2004) Ch. XII. Overdrive edition.

which a utopian civilization has been developing for centuries. Nisi Shawl has pointed to the significance of the fact that 'unlike the countries discovered in H. Rider Haggard's famous genre exemplars *She* and *King Solomon's Mines*, [...] the inhabitants of this secret land are black.'[142] Hopkins can thus be understood to be simultaneously establishing the 'incomparable historical significance' of black communities, and demonstrating their relevance to the future.[143] On his arrival in Telassar, Reuel is greeted as a reincarnation of an ancient king, destined to 'restore to the Ethiopian race its ancient glory.'[144] One can see here the roots of what would become Afrofuturism, a mode of writing within which, as Lisa Yaszek has argued, SF creators have 'projected noble pasts for people of color while carefully crafting a heroic black face for the future as well.'[145]

The sense of utopian possibility which Hopkins' cultivation of black pasts and futures opens up stands in stark contrast to the invocations of Africa in Wells' writing. When Wells' Traveller is introducing his tale of the future he invites his audience to 'conceive the tale of London which a negro, fresh from Central Africa, would take back to his tribe.'[146] He then goes on to exclaim: 'Think how narrow the gap between a negro and a white man of our own times, and how wide the interval between myself and these of the Golden Age[!].'[147] Here, the distance between Africa and Britain is compared to that between Wells' present and the distant future, which the Traveller assumes will be highly technologically and socially developed. While this spatialisation of time is, in some respects, reminiscent of the image of the man at eight years old, or indeed of Bloch's philosophy of the future in the past, its utopian potentiality

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[142] Nisi Shawl, 'What Men Have Put Asunder: Pauline Hopkins' Of One Blood', *Tor.Com*, 2018 <https://www.tor.com/2018/06/04/what-men-have-put-asunder-pauline-hopkins-of-one-blood/> [accessed 11 February 2021].
[143] Shawl, 'What Men Have Put Asunder'.
[144] Hopkins Ch. XIV.
[145] Lisa Yaszek, 'Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future', *Socialism and Democracy*, 20.3 (2006), 41–60 (p. 46) <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300600950236>.
[146] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 40.
[147] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 40.

is short lived. The Traveller's momentary identification with this imagined tourist – in which, as John Rieder puts it, Wells invites 'the colonizers [to] imagine themselves as the colonized' – is undercut by the citizens of the future, who refuse to fit into his preconceived notion of futurity as an exaggerated version of white, Western modernity.[148] As Rieder argues, 'in his dealings with the Eloi [the Traveller] seems more like a European confronting the enigmatic inhabitants of savage Africa,' than an African tourist in London.[149] It is, therefore, clear that nonlinear temporality is not in itself a guarantee of either utopian or decolonial potential. Indeed, when Wells uses this contemporary African traveller as an emblem of the supposedly primitive past, the anachronism created is entirely in line with the imperialist project of 'ma[king] space into time,' understood as a means of legitimising colonialist expansion and, once again, 'condemn[ing] black subjects to prehistory.'[150]

Despite the decidedly imperialist form of nonlinear time exhibited here, however, I remain invested in exploring the utopian potential of those nonlinear temporalities which provide a committed challenge to linearity. I suggest that the Traveller's identification with this imagined African tourist fails to challenge imperialist models of time precisely because it is so fleeting. Where Reuel is encouraged to make connections with the citizens of Telassar and view them as his contemporaries – whom he meets in the present but who also connect him to both a magnificent past and a hoped for future – the Traveller does not take his connection with this unnamed tourist seriously. Indeed, the fact that the society of the Eloi and the Morlocks is not the bastion of civilization which he expects it to be means that he is able to underscore his perceived dissimilarity from that of a visitor to London 'fresh from Central Africa.'[151] A similar dynamic can be observed in the work of many of Wells' contemporaries

[148] Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 5.
[149] Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 87.
[150] Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 6; Eshun, p. 297.
[151] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 40.

who were, supposedly, interested in studying 'primitive man.'[152] As W. B. Drummond elaborates, in his *An Introduction to Child Study* (1907), this was an era in which:

> The philologist [...] turns to baby linguistics in the expectation of gaining a better understanding of the origin of human speech. The anthropologist, unable to discover a living representative of primitive man, turns to the child as his nearest representative. The archaeologist finds valuable material in the child's attempts to draw.[153]

Here, a perceived connection between childhood and humanity's evolutionary ancestors is used to underscore the primitivism of both groups. This is a form of nonlinear temporality which shields the white, Western adult from any meaningful contact with supposedly less developed peoples. To Drummond's anthropologist, children are 'representative,' not of their parents, nor of the adults they will soon grow into, but of 'primitive man' – a cognitive leap which in fact requires deep faith in the narrative of linear progress thought to separate adult from child on the one hand, and whiteness from humanity's 'primitive' ancestors on the other.[154]

Such a belief is untenable in Hopkins' writing. Writing of *Of One Blood,* Claudia Tate has noted, that the 'underlying point [is] that there is no scientific basis for the arbitrary separation of the races.'[155] In a series of revelations, Hopkins' characters are made to realise that they are all literally 'of one blood,' as Reuel discovers that he, Dianthe and his friend turned love rival Aubrey Livingstone all share the same mother. [156] Further, this kinship extends

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[152] W. B. Drummond, *An Introduction to Child-Study* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018), p. 4.
[153] Drummond, p. 4.
[154] Drummond, p. 4.
[155] Claudia Tate, 'Pauline Hopkins: Our Literary Foremother', in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition*, ed. by Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 53–66 (p. 64).
[156] Hopkins Ch. XVIII.

across the sea, as the queen of Telassar is shown to have the face of Dianthe, while Reuel is

thought to be a reincarnation of his ancestor, a king of Meroe. When Hopkins brings her

contemporary Americans into contact with this ancient Ethiopian civilization, therefore, it is

not to emphasise their superiority to these inhabitants of the so-called *land of childhood*. Nor

does this contact serve as a mere fleeting similarity which is later evaded. Rather, in Telassar

Reuel finds a society with which he feels kinship, and whose people are willing to claim him

as one of their own. The past and the future are brought together in a manner which reveals

that their separation was always illusory. As Deborah E. McDowell has argued, in *Of One

Blood* Hopkins presents a 'philosophy of history that renders the past as prologue, as harbinger

of emphatically urgent matters in the present.'[157] Reuel's engagement with the past, understood

as the source of potential black futures, thus provides a model of committed nonlinearity, which

is not merely used as a fleeting diversion from, or contrast to, linear, progressive time.

This distinction is evident in the manner in which Hopkins and Hegel differently

represent the figure of the Sphinx. In *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel describes

the Sphinx as 'an ambiguous form, half brute, half human,' and claims that it represents the

'symbol of the Egyptian Spirit […] as it begins to emerge from the merely Natural.'[158] Hegel

perceives the ambiguity in the Sphinx's hybrid form which brings together human and

nonhuman animals, and yet he is determined to map this hybridity onto a narrative of linear

progress. Hegel uses the Sphinx as a model of 'the History of the World,' which he argues

'travels from East to West,' with Egypt acting as the point of convergence between the two.[159]

However, even in his own writing, this understanding of world history is put under pressure.

In attempting to divorce Egypt from Sub-Saharan Africa, Hegel is forced to acknowledge the

[157] Deborah E. McDowell, 'Introduction', in *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self*, by Pauline Hopkins, Ebook
(New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 2004).
[158] Hegel, p. 218.
[159] Hegel, p. 121.

fact that 'Egypt probably received its culture from Ethiopia; principally from the island Meroe.'[160] By setting her story in Meroe and describing her Sphinx as 'Ethiopian,' as opposed to Egyptian, Hopkins can thus be understood as reclaiming the Sphinx's potential affinity with non-linear time.[161] This reclamation is further supported by her choice of quotation to adorn the Sphinx, which she draws from Ecclesiastes 3:15: 'That which hath been, is now; and that which is to be, hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.'[162] Rather than attempting to 'tear itself loose' from the 'fetters' of its animal self – as Hegel describes – Hopkins' Sphinx celebrates the fact that, to use Amiri Baraka's phrasing, 'both the past and the future only exist in the present and as speculative continuum of the is.'[163]

Hopkins' interest in nonlinear time is also evident in the various uses to which she puts childhood in *Of One Blood*. As previously stated, Reuel's discovery of Telassar in a land in which it was previously believed there was 'no future' acts as a refutation of Hegel's dismissal of 'the land of childhood.'[164] Hopkins' African American hero who will 'restore to the Ethiopian race its ancient glory,' acts as evidence of the very fact which, as Verharen has argued, 'Hegel could not imagine' – that is 'that America's greatest contribution to the future may spring from her African past.'[165] However, the utopian potential of Hopkins' model of historical time lies not only in the challenge which it poses to Hegel's philosophy, but also in the temporal agency with which she endows the citizens of Telassar. In *Of One Blood*, age is shown to be a tool which can be used in decolonial struggle, and her Ethiopian utopians do just that. For example, Ai, the prime minister of Telassar and Reuel's guide, states: 'In many things

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[160] Hegel, p. 220.
[161] Hopkins Ch. XIV.
[162] Hopkins Ch. XV.
[163] Hegel, p. 218; Amiri Baraka, 'The "Blues Aesthetic" and the "Black Aesthetic": Aesthetics as the Continuing Political History of a Culture', *Black Music Research Journal*, 11.2 (1991), 101–9 (p. 103) <https://doi.org/10.2307/779261>.
[164] Hopkins Ch. XII; Hegel, p. 109.
[165] Hopkins Ch. XIV; Verharen, p. 457.

your modern world is yet in its infancy.'[166] The citizens of Telassar, meanwhile, are described as belonging to a civilization which is 'the most ancient source of all that you value in modern life.'[167] In Hopkins' writing, then, it is the people of Meroe who use childhood to disarm the colonising explorers. Moreover, they do not do so from a position of naturalised seniority, but from one of ambiguity and uncertain age. This is evident in Hopkins' representation of Ai, who is described as having a 'patriarchal bearing,' despite the fact that, as Reuel notes, 'in years [Ai] was still young.'[168] The categories of youth and age are thus made strange, as their combination within a single figure detaches them from linear time, thus making them accessible as tools which can be actively deployed within the Telassarian, decolonial struggle.

While the decolonial, utopian potential of such temporal manipulation is most clearly visible in the 'lost world' narrative which takes place in Telassar, the temporal fixity of Hopkins' American characters is far from assured.[169] If, for example, one examines the figure of Dianthe – Reuel's wife and, as she discovers to her horror, his sister – these temporal fluctuations become apparent. Much could be said of how Dianthe exactly resembles Queen Candace, the 'virgin queen' of Telassar who is one of a long line of Queens 'all having the same name,' who select their successors from among their peers 'at intervals of fifteen years.'[170] This form of reproduction outside of the heterosexual dyad serves as an ironic commentary on the mystifying exoticism with which, in *She* (1887), Haggard presents his eternally young African queen, Ayesha. This self-replacement is precisely the way in which the indigenous Amahagger in Haggard's text believe Ayesha is able to remain young. However, as I dwell extensively on the subject of non-heteronormative reproduction in Chapter Five, in

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[166] Hopkins Ch. XV.
[167] Hopkins Ch. XI.
[168] Hopkins Ch. XIV.
[169] Shawl, 'What Men Have Put Asunder'.
[170] Hopkins Ch. XVI.

this chapter my primary interest is in Dianthe's own childishness. Initially, Dianthe's proximity to childhood may appear to disempower and infantilise her. Indeed, when she loses her memory and is symbolically reborn – Hopkins writes: 'Her life virtually began with her awakening at the hospital' – Dianthe is seemingly utterly without agency.[171] The men around her patronise her continually, referring to her as 'a true child of song.'[172] This description reflects the recent discovery which Hopkins wryly observes among white people in the post-Civil War North, 'that the Negro possessed a phenomenal gift of music.'[173] However, while Dianthe lacks individual agency, her childlikeness suggests an affinity with strange novelty. When Dianthe agrees to marry Reuel, for example – which she does 'with the sigh of a tired child' – Hopkins writes that, 'all things had become new to him and in the light of his great happiness the very face of old Cambridge was changed.'[174] Here, the 'temporal complications and anachronistic episodes that disturb the linear time of progress,' which Eshun has identified in the disruptive 'temporal logics' of Afrofuturism, are shown not merely to adhere to particular objects or locations in Hopkins' writing – the futuristic Ethiopian city, for example.[175] Rather, such 'temporal complications' are created by her characters' interactions with one another.[176] The reader is able to see the truth, that humans are all 'of one blood,' precisely because they are encouraged to view accepted truths through new eyes, indeed through Dianthe's eyes, 'soft as those of childhood.'[177]

A Schoolmaster Among Children

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[171] Hopkins Ch. VII.
[172] Hopkins Ch. VI.
[173] Hopkins Ch. II.
[174] Hopkins Ch. I and Ch. VII.
[175] Eshun, p. 297.
[176] Eshun, p. 297.
[177] Hopkins Ch. XVIII and Ch. II.

The infectious quality of Dianthe's childishness, which prompts those who come in contact with her to see the world anew, is also of relevance in Wells' writing. In the final section of this chapter I directly address the construction of childhood in *The Time Machine* in terms of its relationship to science-fictional curiosity, as discussed in Chapter One. I have previously examined how Wells' conception of time travel jars with Huxley's model of devolutionary progress. As Roger Luckhurst has argued, each of the Traveller's theories about the future prove to be wrong and, as this is a text which 'does not pretend to master its contradictions,' this leads to a series of contradictory temporalities which vie for prominence in the text.[178] However, in this conclusion my primary focus is not on these conflicting temporalities but on the Traveller's more immediate relationship to childhood. I examine how the Traveller not only conceives of the Eloi as children, but actively fosters their childish behaviours, before exploring those moments when he himself acts in childish ways. I suggest that it is in their shared childishness that the Traveller and the citizens of the future are connected and that, although the Traveller continually refuses to recognise them as such, the Eloi are potential collaborators in his and indeed Wells' curious, science-fictional speculations.

I have already noted the contemporaneity of childhood and adulthood in the figure of the man at eight years old. The utopian potential of this temporal compression – disrupting, as it does, the imperialist narrative of progressive development – can also be felt in the many slippages between child and adult which the Traveller himself engages in. For example, he describes himself as a 'schoolmaster amongst children' when surrounded by the Eloi – a description obviously meant to stress his superiority to them – and yet this statement comes when he is trying to learn their language.[179] In actuality, then, it is he who is playing the role

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[178] Roger Luckhurst, 'Introduction', in *The Time Machine*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. vii–xxvi (p. xvii).
[179] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 28.

of the child and they that of his unwilling teachers. The Traveller is thus forced into the role of one of Paolo Freire's 'teacher-students,' whose teaching relations are necessarily reciprocal as both teachers and students are understood to be involved in 'a mutual process' of education.[180] In affirming his own superiority by relying upon the ill-fitting label of schoolmaster, Wells' Traveller in fact demonstrates his proximity to his unwilling students. Similarly, although he insists that the Eloi were 'like children,' in that upon meeting him, 'they would soon stop examining [him] and wander away after some other toy,' he is immediately forced to admit that 'it [was] odd, too, how speedily [he] came to disregard these little people.'[181] Once again he and the Eloi are shown to be more alike than dissimilar, a fact which suggests that the supposedly childish failure of curiosity on the part of the Eloi is not a product of genetic difference but rather is a shared function of their relationship with the Traveller. He too describes his 'curiosity' as being 'entirely defeated' after having spent only a small amount of time with them.[182] Far from providing a simple microcosm of evolution, therefore, where children are considered to be less evolved than adults, child and adult are thus framed as shifting positions attached to specific behaviours. Indeed, when he cannot find his Time Machine, the Traveller describes himself as 'bawling like an angry child.'[183] In this context it seems reasonable to read the act of becoming-child as one of the many 'conflicting interpretations of temporality' which Gomel argues structure *The Time Machine* – a temporality which operates within, and troubles the linearity of, the grand plot of historical, evolutionary time.[184]

[180] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 80; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 7.
[181] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 28.
[182] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 40.
[183] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 35.
[184] Gomel, p. 336.

It is my contention that not only is the Traveller himself shown to be child-like, but the childlikeness of the Eloi and Morlocks is brought into question. I suggest that their childish behaviours are revealed to be a feature, not of their fixed temporal positioning, but rather of the Traveller's active attempts to cultivate their ignorance. This tendency is nowhere more evident than in the Traveller's attitude to Weena, the only named Eloi who oscillates in his perception between the position of 'a little woman,' and that of a figure 'exactly like a child.'[185] When Weena is weeping out of fear of the Morlocks, the Traveller states:

> They were the only tears, except my own, I ever saw in the Golden Age. When I saw them I ceased abruptly to trouble about the Morlocks, and was only concerned in banishing these signs of her human inheritance from Weena's eyes. And very soon she was smiling and clapping her hands, while I solemnly burned a match.[186]

Huntington notes that it is 'concern for Weena's innocence,' which motivates the Traveller to not only treat Weena as a child, but to actively cultivate her childishness by 'preventing [her] from learning' – and one might add, by refusing to learn from her.[187] Such a possibility is stifled, not by any inherent incapacity on Weena's part – she is, after all, exhibiting 'signs of her human inheritance' – but by the Traveller's own adherence to a static model of childhood.[188] This adherence is evidence of the Traveller's complicity in the tendency which James Kincaid has identified in adults, from the Victorian era to the present, to defend adulthood from the figure of the precocious child. Kincaid writes that 'if the child is not distinguished from the adult, we imagine that we are seriously threatened, threatened in such a

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[185] Wells, 'The Time Machine', pp. 42 and 43.
[186] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 49.
[187] Huntington, p. 49.
[188] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 49.

way as to put at risk our very being, what it means to be an adult in the first place.'[189] The Traveller insists on the impossibility of teaching the Eloi in an effort to preserve a narrative of linear development which places him, and his ability to manipulate both time and fire, as 'the ripe prime of the human race.'[190] While he is able to travel through time he thinks of both the Eloi and the Morlocks as existing in a state of 'languor and decay,' and what transformations they are engaged in are at the pace of evolutionary development.[191] However, as Kincaid argues: 'By insisting so loudly on the innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child, we have created a subversive echo.'[192] The signs of her human inheritance which Weena exhibits demonstrate her connection to the Traveller and thus her propensity to grow, learn and, potentially, travel through time as he does, and this propensity remains as a latent potential in the text, despite the Traveller's efforts to extinguish it.

This deliberate cultivation of childhood ignorance is all the more significant given the fact that, as Huntington notes, 'in *The Time Machine* fire defines civilized humanity.'[193] The Traveller's matches are the one significant technology, aside from his time machine, which he brings with him from his present. They are not a technology which the Eloi share. The Eloi eat only raw foods and retreat inside to sleep as soon as the sun sets. The ability to traverse between the day and the night by use of artificial light is, therefore, an important feature of the Traveller's difference from either the diurnal Eloi or the nocturnal Morlocks – many of whom he later kills in a fire. In this context, the Traveller's use of matches to distract Weena are indicative of his position as an imperialist explorer. He uses his technology to entertain, and perhaps to seduce, the indigenous young women of the land he has travelled to, but he is not

[189] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 7.
[190] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 55.
[191] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 33.
[192] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 4.
[193] Huntington, p. 47.

willing to share this technology or to use it within a mutually beneficial 'teacher-student' relation.[194] Moreover, there is a specifically utopian kind of curiosity – as discussed in Chapter One – which the Traveller is stifling here. Wells describes fire as 'an altogether new and strange thing to Weena.'[195] It is one which delights her and which forefronts her role as a curious subject rather than merely the strangely new object of the Traveller's investigation. Wells' readers are left to wonder what might have happened were Weena able to pursue her curiosity, rather than being tragically and entirely unnecessarily killed in a fire started by the Traveller.

The Traveller's insistence on the childish incapacity of his audience, and the effect which this has on their ability to engage in science-fictional thought of their own, can also be felt in his first encounter with the Eloi. Here, the Traveller describes his attempts to tell these small citizens of the future that he has come from the past and 'hesitating for a moment how to express time, [he] pointed to the sun.'[196] The Traveller then receives an immediate response from one of the 'quaintly pretty little figure[s]' around him, who succeeds in 'astonish[ing]' him by also pointing to the sun and 'imitating the sound of thunder.'[197] This leads the Traveller to immediately conclude that this Eloi is 'on the intellectual level of one of our five-year-old children,' as he believes that he has just been asked whether he 'had come from the sun in a thunderstorm[!].'[198] Putting aside the question of whether it is more reasonable for the Eloi to presume that the Traveller had arrived via space rather than via time, it is significant that the Traveller is immediately confident of what the Eloi means. As he puts it: 'The import of his gesture was plain enough.'[199] This denies the possibility of the Eloi understanding that by the sun, the Traveller had indicated time – the very thing which the Traveller professed to be trying

[194] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 7.
[195] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 66.
[196] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 25.
[197] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 25.
[198] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 26.
[199] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 25.

to communicate – while also denying that the Eloi is engaging in a science-fictional enterprise. When confronted with the fantastic nature of reality, in the appearance of a time traveller, this Eloi speculates in an equally fantastic manner as to how such a reality may have come about. Moreover, he asks a question of the Traveller – which is never answered – and thus demonstrates much the same kind of 'curiosity' which the Traveller claims 'took complete possession of' him when he was first able to glimpse the 'beautiful and curious world' of the future.[200] Rather than allowing these children of the future to engage in his science-fictional spatialisation of time through the image of the sun, or his small acts of time travelling via matches, the Traveller precludes their involvement in such curious speculation, although he is unable to entirely dispel the possibility of their own temporal speculations.

The Eloi's question – and the story of interplanetary travel by way of thunderstorm which it creates – connects him to both Wells and the Traveller as creators of SF stories. Not only does the Traveller narrate his tale of time travel to his friends once he has returned home, he also has a history of entrancing them with various non-realist stories, as remembered by one guest who asks whether the time machine is 'a trick – like that ghost you showed us last Christmas.'[201] By casting this Eloi as a fellow creator of SF, Wells undermines white, Western manhood's monopoly on both utopian curiosity and the ability to manipulate time. The Eloi's fantastic speculation performs a comparable role to that played by Reuel's 'occult powers' in *Of One Blood*.[202] Here, Hopkins refuses to separate the 'mysticism […] of Ethiopia's power,' which allows Reuel to see ghosts, from his scientific research.[203] In this way she undermines the primacy of contemporary American epistemologies. The significance of mysticism and the occult to the people of Telassar does not prevent Reuel from concluding that 'in the heart of

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[200] Wells, 'The Time Machine', pp. 21 and 36.
[201] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 15.
[202] Hopkins Ch. XV.
[203] Hopkins Ch. XV.

Africa was a knowledge of science that all the wealth and learning of modern times could not emulate.'[204] A similar destabilising effect is achieved by Wells' Eloi, who challenges the Traveller's position as the sole scientific and science-fictional thinker in this future. Reading the Eloi's gesture as a form of speculative thought suggests that the ability to question, and potentially intervene in, the nature of time is reserved to the Traveller not because of his superior genetics or his civilised, scientific knowledge, but because he refuses to acknowledge any speculations which do not originate with him. On first sighting the Traveller, the Eloi address him 'in a strange and very sweet and liquid tongue.'[205] However, he decides that his 'voice was too harsh and deep for them,' and so does not deign to reply, instead pointing to his ears and shaking his head.[206] The fact that he has just signalled to them that he cannot hear does not prevent him from, in the following paragraph, claiming that 'they made no effort to communicate with me.'[207] Here, then, we see the work required to figure these children of the future as incurious and helpless. When the Traveller looks into faces characterised by a 'Dresden-china type of prettiness,' and claims 'I fancied even then that there was a certain lack of interest I might have expected in them,' he has to actively ignore the 'soft little tentacles,' which are their hands, and which are curiously and insistently exploring both his body and his time machine.[208]

These determined refusals to engage in meaningful exchange – which include a bizarre, feigned deafness – denaturalise the temporal security which the Traveller believes himself to enjoy. Where the various imperialist anachronisms which use childhood as a cypher for *primitive man* leave the colonising subject aloof from the compressions and disfigurations of

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[204] Hopkins Ch. XVII.
[205] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 25.
[206] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 25.
[207] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 25.
[208] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 25.

time, the Traveller's obvious connections to the Eloi render such a separation unthinkable. While *The Time Machine* is without *Of One Blood's* explicit, decolonial messaging I argue that one can excavate utopian potential from these moments of stifled curiosity, and shared childishness. By filling the future with children; by putting childhood at the centre of his science-fictional reimagination of time as a fourth dimension; by making his Traveller so continually child-like, Wells removes any possibility of secure temporal ground from which to observe the citizens of the future as safely distant, temporal others. Time travel is made ubiquitous – presented not as a technology which marks the pinnacle of human civilization, but rather one which reveals the nonlinearity of time and can be found in actions as small as 'bawling like an angry child,' or lighting a match.[209] As Wells writes, in a piece on evolution titled 'Zoological Retrogression' (1891), time does not function as 'some steadily-rising mountain-slope.'[210] Rather, it is 'far more like a footway worn by leisurely wanderers in an undulating country' – a footway made more easily navigable when one considers childhood as a significant site of utopian and science-fictional thought.[211]

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[209] Wells, 'The Time Machine', p. 35.
[210] H. G. Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression', in *The Time Machine*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 92–99 (p. 93).
[211] Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression', p. 93.

Chapter Three

Children are the Future? Reproductive Futurism and Queer Time

> *If I could describe a "human being" I would be more*
> *than I am – and probably living in the future, because I*
> *think of human beings as something to be realized*
> *ahead… But clearly "human beings" have something to*
> *do with the luminous image you see in a bright child's*
> *eyes – the exploring, wondering, eagerly grasping,*
> *undestructive quest for life.*
>
> - Tiptree/Sheldon[1]

One possible method of countering the association of childhood with a static, primitive, distant past is the assertion of childhood's connection to futurity. Given that within the imperialist temporalities discussed in Chapter Two childhood is used to, as Kodwo Eshun puts it, 'condemn[ed] black subjects to prehistory,' there is a temptation to proclaim, along with Whitney Houston: 'I believe the children are our future.'[2] Such an approach is particularly applicable to discussions of childhood's place within what Istvan Csicsery-Ronay has called a 'radically future-oriented' genre.[3] However, the relegation of childhood to the past is not the only way that childhood has been weaponised in service of a conservative hegemony. Indeed, queer theorist Lee Edelman's influential work *No Future* (2004) is dedicated to the idea that it is childhood's association with futurity that 'impose[s] an ideological limit on political discourse as such.'[4] In Edelman's reading, the fact that it is almost impossible 'to conceive of

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[1] James Tiptree Jr., *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2014), p. v. Emphasis in original.
[2] Eshun, p. 297; Whitney Houston, *Greatest Love of All* (New York, NY: Arista, 1986).
[3] Csicsery-Ronay, p. 3.
[4] Edelman, p. 2.

a future without the figure of the Child' is not an opportunity to harness the utopian potential of childhood.[5] Rather, he suggests that the association of child and future is integral to the preservation of 'the absolute privilege of heteronormativity.'[6] A politics oriented towards 'the protection of children' is one in which the perceived non-reproductivity of queer people is considered as an affront to the public good.[7] In such a framework queer people are defined as 'those *not* "fighting for the children",' while, as Edelman argues, 'politics […] remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child.'[8] For Edelman, then, including childhood within the conversation surrounding science-fictional futurity does not prompt either the denaturalisation of existing reality or the creation of new, more utopian worlds. Instead, the child encourages movement towards an ever-receding horizon where the future is merely a replication of the conservative present.

The project of establishing childhood's position within the utopian politics of SF is thus shown to be incomplete if it is only concerned with combating childhood's weaponization as a symbol of the static, distant past. One must also address childhood's association with an equally static and distant (reproductive) future. In this chapter I demonstrate both how childhood as it is envisioned within SF draws upon the logic of reproductive futurity, and how SF creators have used the figure of the child to resist this oppressive, anti-queer logic. Edelman's discussion of SF is reserved to what Sophie Lewis has called the 'sterility apocalypse.'[9] He argues that in texts such as P. D. James' *The Children of Men* (1992) – where the dystopianism of the world of the text lies in the fact that no children have been born for over a decade – the

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[5] Edelman, p. 11.
[6] Edelman, p. 2.
[7] Edelman, p. 1.
[8] Edelman, pp. 2 and 3. Emphasis in original.
[9] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 11.

condemnation of the supposedly horrifying sex between barren heterosexual couples is part of a broader condemnation of all 'sex without procreation.'[10] Non-reproductive sexualities are, in James' writing, framed as 'sterile, narcissistic enjoyments,' which endanger both childhood and the future for which it stands.[11] As the protagonist of James' novel puts it:

> Without the hope of posterity, for our race if not for ourselves, without the assurance that we being dead yet live, all pleasures of the mind and senses [...] seem to me no more than pathetic and crumbling defences shored up against our ruins.[12]

From Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) to Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* (1998) and on to the ecocatastrophes discussed by Rebekah Sheldon, childhood within this dystopian strand of SF is shown to stand 'in the place of the species,' and thus to coordinate humanity's 'transit into the future.'[13] Any attempt to oppose the child, or to refuse to procreate, is thus understood as an attack on humanity – one which must be firmly opposed.

I do not contest this reading of the sterility apocalypse. However, my focus in this chapter is on a different, although related, aspect of SF's relationship to reproductive futurity. I am specifically interested in what Asha Nadkarni calls 'eugenic reproductive futurity' as it has manifested in the writing of authors such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose work has been foundational to the genre.[14] In Gilman's writing one can see the influence of reproductive futurity in her insistent focus on 'the Child' who, as Edelman puts it, is considered to represent

[10] Edelman, p. 118.
[11] Edelman, p. 13.
[12] P. D. James, *The Children of Men* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), p. 13.
[13] Sheldon, p. vii; Andreu Domingo has named this strand of dystopianism, which is characterised by concern about population demographics, 'demodystopianism.' For his analysis of this form of dystopianism see Andreu Domingo, '"Demodystopias": Prospects of Demographic Hell', *Population and Development Review*, 34.4 (2008), 725–45.
[14] Nadkarni, p. 1.

'the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights "real" citizens are allowed.'[15] What Nadkarni's framing makes clear, however, is that this vision of the ideal child is not the only use to which childhood is put within eugenicist narratives. As her study shows, eugenicists such as Margaret Sanger and Sarojini Naidu rely on two, diametrically opposed, models of childhood in order to further their related projects of nation building, on the one hand, and solving 'the population problem,' on the other.[16] Of the children of wealthy white or upper caste families they happily say, along with Houston, that: 'Children are our future.'[17] However, the children of the poor 'are transmogrified from "glories" into "maggots".'[18] They are seen as a problem – an example of, as Lewis puts it, an 'imaginary hyperfecundity [...] among subaltern classes.'[19] What Nadkarni's framing demonstrates is that to use the Child as a symbol of the future is not only to maintain a heteronormative present, but to invest in a specifically eugenicist politics oriented towards the construction of racially *pure* nation states. Moreover, she argues that the 'two seemingly opposed figurations of children' required to further this project – scarce and valued glories on the one hand, overabundant maggots on the other – are not in fact distinct from one another.[20] Rather, they are 'simply different sides to the same eugenic coin.'[21] To denounce 'the Child' as a symbol of reproductive futurity is thus, I argue, to address only one side of this coin; it is to ignore the fact that, as the Out of the Woods collective write, we need 'a cyborg praxis [that] gives us the space to understand difference, to see that reproductive futurism desires little white settlers for children, and seeks to destroy all those who are young and outside of this category.'[22] It is with such a cyborg praxis in mind that I approach childhood as it is

[15] Edelman, p. 11.
[16] Nadkarni, p. 3.
[17] Margaret Sanger cited in Nadkarni, p. 3.
[18] Nadkarni, p. 3.
[19] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 11.
[20] Nadkarni, p. 5.
[21] Nadkarni, p. 5.
[22] Out of the Woods, 'The Future Is Kids' Stuff', *Out of the Woods*, 2015 <http://libcom.org/blog/future-kids-stuff-17052015> [accessed 13 February 2021].

imagined in SF – moving beyond the eugenic utopianism of Gilman's white supremacist nation state towards a resistant model of childhood which is accessible to '*all* those who are young,' and indeed, as I go on to demonstrate, to those who are not.[23]

In my reading of Gilman's *Herland* (1915) I work to demonstrate how childhood is both held up as an ideal future on whose behalf nonreproductive sexualities must be sacrificed, and used to infantilise and thus dehumanise black and Indigenous people, and people living in poverty. In Gilman's writing the influence of the imperialist narratives of progress which I discussed in Chapter Two is also evident, and in part this chapter serves to address the ties between imperialist narratives of progressive development and what Elizabeth Freeman calls '*chrononormativity*, or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity.'[24] Freeman argues that attempts to reinforce chrononormativity frequently take the form of inserting 'the family into, and [making] the family into an image of, the nationalist march of "progress".' [25] She thus demonstrates the relevance of a queer theorisation of time to my previous critique of those narratives of progressive development which have underpinned so much scientific, philosophical, and crucially, science-fictional thought. Gilman's explicit desire to intervene in evolutionary development through eugenic breeding practices highlights the reliance of evolutionary time upon normative constructions of gender and sexuality, as well as the previously discussed narratives of supposed racial progress. In the first section of this chapter I demonstrate the temporal consequences of supplementing my existing theoretical framework with this queer, feminist approach – reading childhood on the one hand as the embodiment of what Edelman calls 'the telos of the social order,' and on the other as 'the hitch

[23] Out of the Woods Emphasis added.
[24] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 3. Emphasis in original.
[25] Freeman, p. 22.

in national progress,' which, as Nadkarni discusses, eugenic feminists such as Gilman were determined to eliminate.[26]

However, this expansion of Edelman's framework – designed to demonstrate the fact that, as the Out of the Woods collective put it, 'the fetishism of the child and the mother in the abstract is inseparable from the actual and total violence perpetrated against children and their kin' – is not the sole goal of this chapter.[27] I intend also to explore the queer, utopian potential of childhood which remains latent within SF, despite the many oppressive uses to which the figure of the Child has been put. In Chapter Two I argued that the child – who exists within the wealthy, white, English family and yet is tied the colonised 'land of childhood' – undermines the temporalities of imperialism from within. In much the same way, here I suggest that childhood can be used to both reinforce and subvert what Jack Halberstam calls 'family time.'[28] I follow Cathy Cohen in her contention that 'the unchallenged assumption of a uniform heteronormativity from which all heterosexuals benefit,' exhibited in much white queer theory and politics, obscures 'the relationships – especially those based on shared experiences of marginalisation – that exist between gays and straights, particularly in communities of color.'[29] Building on Cohen's theorisation of the potential alliances between 'punks, bulldaggers and welfare queens,' I argue for an alliance between queerness and childhood where both are understood as potentially obstructing the chrononormative narrative of maturation, and thus opening up the possibility of more utopian temporalities.[30] As Adam Phillips writes: 'It is not the child […] who believes in something called development.'[31] I mean to show that one can

[26] Edelman, p. 10; Nadkarni, p. 3.
[27] Out of the Woods.
[28] Hegel, p. 109; Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2005), p. 152.
[29] Cathy J. Cohen, 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 3.4 (1997), 437–65 (p. 450) <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3-4-437>.
[30] Cohen, p. 438.
[31] Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery: On Curiosity and Other Appetites* (New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010), p. 21.

be deeply committed to a queer politics designed to combat 'reproductive futurism,' while simultaneously working to salvage the utopian potential of childhood.[32]

To this end I follow my reading of *Herland* with an analysis of the writing of James Tiptree Jr., also known as Alice Sheldon.[33] I read Tiptree's fiction alongside her autobiographical writing in order to demonstrate how her explorations of cyborg regeneration and the queer lives of children facilitate the alliances between queerness and childhood theorised by Halberstam and Kathryn Bond Stockton. I argue that Tiptree uses SF within her own queer self-fashioning, thereby forging an identity for herself which moves beyond the heteronormative, cisnormative 'reproductive matrix' discussed by Donna Haraway. By depicting queer children who refuse to grow up and who cannot be easily enlisted to support the logic of reproductive futurity, Tiptree collapses Edelman's distinction between queers and children. In this way her work demonstrates that feminist utopianism need not be beholden to Gilman's eugenic legacy. Rather, her writing is allied to the trans utopianism theorised by Caterina Nirta and put into practice by Susan Stryker – a utopianism which, as discussed in my introduction, takes up the mantle of Frankenstein's Creature and stands in opposition to the disciplinary image of the Child.

The Fit and the Unfit – *Herland* (1915)

Despite the limitations of Edelman's theorisation of the Child, it is important to note how significant the influence of reproductive futurity has been on the development of SF. Gilman's

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[32] Edelman, p. 2.

[33] In her essay 'Everything but the Signature is Me,' compiled from a number of letters discussing her creation of Tiptree, Sheldon writes: 'I was very careful about pronouns' when discussing Tiptree, 'things likes "child" instead of "boy," etc.' For this reason, I use feminine pronouns when discussing Sheldon despite the transmasculine resonances of her writing. James Tiptree Jr., *Meet Me at Infinity* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), p. 311.

Herland is perhaps the quintessential example of an SF text which engages with reproductive futurism. In Gilman's writing the creation of children is not only considered to be an absolute good – it is framed as the ultimate goal of all political progress. This is exemplified by the image used to illustrate the front cover of the first issue of Gilman's self-published magazine, *The Forerunner*, in which *Herland* was first published.

Figure 1. *The illustrated front cover of the first issue of* The Forerunner, 1:1 (1909).

In this image, the future of the planet, represented by a globe, is equated to the future of the child who stands atop it, and both are positioned at the centre of Gilman's progressive politics. Similarly, in the all-female country of *Herland*, whose citizens are able to reproduce parthenogenetically, children are considered to be 'the raison d'etre' of the entire society – a

position which reflects the fact that the Herlanders are described as 'ignor[ing] their past and buil[ding] daringly for the future.'[34] One Herlander states:

> "The children in this country are the one center and focus of all our thoughts. Every step of our advance is always considered in its effects on them – on the race. You see, we are *Mothers*," she repeated, as if in that she had said it all.[35]

Here, the alignment between social good and the production of children is absolute, as all individual identity is overwritten by a collective duty to procreate.

Herland, then, is another foundational SF text, like *The Time Machine* or *Of One Blood*, in which the relevance of childhood to SF is evident. Indeed, it is in Gilman's writing that childhood is directly engaged as a utopian subject. For Gilman, the creation of utopian futures is intrinsically connected to the creation of new generations. However, while the utopian potential of childhood as I have theorised it in this thesis is tied to a decolonial politics, Gilman's focus on childhood is explicitly eugenic. While her framing of the three male explorers as 'like small boys, very small boys,' in the face of this lost civilization evokes the reversed colonial gaze theorised by John Rieder, the potential critical engagement with 'the ideological and epistemological framework of the colonial discourse,' suggested here, is far outweighed by Gilman's attempts to harness colonial and evolutionary narratives on behalf of white womanhood.[36] The assumption that the inhabitants of a South American plateau would be 'on the plane of children, or of savages,' voiced by the male adventurers, is never challenged in *Herland*.[37] The inexplicably 'Aryan' women who inhabit Herland are clearly presented as

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[34] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), pp. 51 and 111.
[35] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 66. Emphasis in original.
[36] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 19; Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 10.
[37] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 85.

exceptions to this rule, and Gilman's writing does nothing to challenge the equation of Indigenous peoples with children.[38] Indeed, as Patrick B. Sharp has argued in his study of early women's SF, Gilman's 'clear embrace of positive and negative eugenics coupled with her use of racial hierarchies,' is part of a wider trend in this field in which 'a feminine form of colonisation,' predicated upon the reproduction of whiteness, was developed – one which explicitly drew on linear narratives of teleological, evolutionary development.[39]

In my reading of *Herland* I follow Dana Seitler, who argues that 'eugenic conceptualizations of motherhood,' such as those held by Gilman, 'not only served certain white feminist goals, buttressing national expansion and concurrent nativist ideologies, but they also brought about new narrative models through which reproductive ideologies were sedimented.'[40] I argue that these narrative models operate as historical antecedents for the contemporary reproductive dystopias analysed by Edelman, Sheldon and Lewis. As Bernice L. Hausman has noted, for Gilman, 'sexual activity for its own sake' is framed as a kind of evolutionary mistake – treated with incredulity and disgust by the Herlanders who are horrified when they learn that in the rest of the world 'when people marry, they go right on doing this [having sex] in season and out of season, with no thought of children at all.'[41] In *Herland*, Seitler notes that 'mothers, burdened with the cleansing of the future, must eschew sexuality for reproductivity,' while 'the male creature whose desires quite ignore parentage' is vilified.[42] The anti-queer impetus which Edelman has identified in contemporary sterility apocalypses can thus be traced back to what Sharp calls the 'Darwinian feminism' of these fin de siècle

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[38] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 55.
[39] Patrick B. Sharp, *Darwinian Feminism and Early Science Fiction: Angels, Amazons, and Women* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018), pp. 96 and 10.
[40] Dana Seitler, 'Unnatural Selection: Mothers, Eugenic Feminism, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Regeneration Narratives', *American Quarterly*, 55.1 (2003), 61–88 (p. 62).
[41] Bernice L. Hausman, 'Sex before Gender: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Evolutionary Paradigm of Utopia', *Feminist Studies*, 24.3 (1998), 489–510 (p. 503) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178576>; Gilman, *Herland*, p. 127.
[42] Seitler, p. 73; Gilman, *Herland*, p. 138.

utopian texts.[43] In a letter to her friend, palaeobotanist Lester Frank Ward, Gilman argues that 'we, as a race, manifest an excessive sex attraction, followed by its excessive indulgence; an excess which tends to pervert and exhaust desire as well as to injure reproduction.'[44] In her child-centric utopianism there is thus no space for the perversion or exhaustion of desire – or for those considered responsible for such non-procreative luxuries.

The Herlanders' rejection of sexuality is intimately tied to their attempts to actively intervene in so-called evolutionary progress. As Seitler has argued, Gilman does 'not so much strive to repress female sexuality,' as much as she compels 'the incorporation of female desire into the regulatory ideals of heterosexual reproduction.'[45] These ideals are explicitly oriented to eradicate disability.[46] For example, one Herlander states: 'We have, of course, made it our first business to train out, to breed out, when possible, the lowest types.'[47] This unabashed eugenicism is framed as a means of extending the women's control over their own sexual urges to the future of their nation. Van, Gilman's narrator, notes that the Herlanders 'had this dominant thought of building up a great race through the children,' and that 'all the surrendering devotion our women have put into their private families, these women put into their country and race.'[48] Nor is this a viewpoint reserved to Gilman's fiction. In her study of gender and religion, *His Religion and Hers* (1922), for example, Gilman writes that 'whatever qualities she [the white American woman] finds desirable she can develop in the race, through her initial function as a mother.'[49] Here, Gilman lays claim to Darwinian theory in a way which – as Elizabeth Grosz has argued in relation to twenty first century Darwinists – goes far 'beyond

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[43] Sharp, p. 88.
[44] Gilman cited in Seitler, p. 78.
[45] Seitler, p. 69.
[46] For a study of the connection between feminist utopianism and the ableist desire to eradicate disability through eugenic control of reproduction see Kafer.
[47] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 82.
[48] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 95.
[49] Gilman cited in Seitler, p. 63.

the boldness of Darwin's own conjectures.'[50] Where the women of Herland have 'no respect

for the past' and are confident in their ability to predict what will constitute the characteristics

of a 'great race' in the future – as one Herlander puts it, 'if we are not beyond [the citizens of

the past], we are unworthy of them – and unworthy of the children who must go beyond us' –

Darwin's own writing is hardly so decided.[51] Rebekah Sheldon has noted that in Darwin's own

thought he acknowledges that: 'What will count as strong and useful in the future "no man can

predict, for we know that many groups formerly most extensively developed have now become

extinct".'[52] Gilman's, then, is an understanding of evolutionary progress far more invested in

both progress and a knowable future than Darwin's findings can be thought to justify.

The idea that the mothers of Herland owe a duty of care, not only to their children but

to the nation and indeed the race which they are identified with, is accompanied in Gilman's

writing by an increased antipathy to those perceived to be '*not* "fighting for the children".'[53]

This can be felt in the conduct of the male visitors to Herland, who find themselves continually

embarrassed as they are forced to confess to the perceived weakness and foolishness of the

women of their country to the hypercompetent inhabitants of Herland. At no point are these

men more ashamed than when having to tell the Herlanders about abortion and infanticide: acts

they consider to be equally morally reprehensible. When describing how in America people

sometimes 'destroy the unborn,' Gilman's narrator is met with a 'look of ghastly horror,' which

he claims he will never forget.[54] For the Herlanders there is no greater crime than the

endangerment of a child, and Gilman uses this belief as a key way to distinguish these,

supposedly utopian, women from their American counterparts. By setting the giant 'nursery,

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[50] Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 111.
[51] Gilman, *Herland*, pp. 95 and 111.
[52] Charles Darwin cited in Sheldon, p. 52.
[53] Edelman, p. 3. Emphasis in original.
[54] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 69.

playground and workshop' that is Herland, where children's lives are 'smooth and happy,'
against a country populated by 'criminal types of women – perverts, or crazy, who had been
known to commit infanticide,' Gilman works to naturalise her politics.[55] She aligns Herland
with the safety and happiness of the child and thus forces her readers into a position in which
to oppose her is to promote violence against children. This is precisely the strategy which
Edelman traces through contemporary American politics in which the good of the
heteronormative, nuclear family is presented as 'an ideological Mobius strip, only *permitted*
one side.'[56] The connection which Edelman draws in the opening pages of his monograph
between people seeking abortions and queer people is of central relevance here. By
unquestioningly valuing the (white) child, Gilman 'produces *non-reproductive* sexualities as
waste,' as Seitler argues, and frames any opposition to the chrononormative, white supremacist
logic of productivity within the text as a child safety concern.[57]

In *Herland* the racism attendant to this eugenic, child-centric philosophy is partially
veiled. While Gilman happily writes about breeding superior peoples, this is always within the
context of the monocultural Herland society and thus its racial implications are obscured. The
Herlanders are pale skinned like H. Rider Haggard's Ayesha. These women are 'of Aryan
stock.'[58] They are '"white," but somewhat darker than our northern races because of their
constant exposure to sun and air.'[59] While their history is recounted as one of fighting 'savage,'
formerly enslaved men in an effort to preserve the perceived purity of their bloodline, their
subsequent efforts to improve their society through selective breeding and education are insular
and they do not concern themselves with people of other races.[60] Gilman's belief that one can

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[55] Gilman, *Herland*, pp. 94, 103 and 70.
[56] Edelman, p. 2. Emphasis in original.
[57] Seitler, p. 83. Emphasis in original.
[58] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 54.
[59] Gilman, *Herland*, pp. 54–55.
[60] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 85.

actively intervene in the process of evolution – tied to the related Lamarckian fields of eugenics and euthenics, that is 'race improvement through environment' – is not here tied to an explicitly colonial directive.[61] However, the racist implications of this kind of project become apparent when Gilman is read in the context of the eugenic feminism of her peers. Katherine Fusco, for example, reads Gilman's work in relation to films such as *Where Are My Children*? (1916) in which, as she puts it, the film makers are involved in 'prescribing birth control to the lower classes and encouraging breeding in the upper classes,' in an effort to combat the spectre of 'race suicide,' discussed by Alys Eve Weinbaum.[62] The belief held by Gilman and described by Kristen Egan, that 'the undesirable would outbreed the desirable,' thus 'ruining the American race,' demonstrates clearly that it is not children in general who are unquestioningly valued in this kind of eugenic thought, but rather a specific kind of white, middle class, child.[63] As Sanger stated in 1919: 'More children from the fit, less children from the unfit.'[64]

Gilman expands on the potential real-life applications of her eugenicist theory of progress in her essay: 'A Suggestion on the Negro Problem' (1908). Here, she makes clear that she sees the project of consciously manipulated evolution to be of particular relevance to the white supremacist management of the African American population. As she puts it, 'the evolution of society, while based on natural conditions and forces, has long since reached the stage where it is directly promoted by society's own efforts' – a statement which leads her to conclude that 'the African race' can be made to progress via contact with 'our [white

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[61] Kristen R. Egan, 'Conservation and Cleanliness: Racial and Environmental Purity in Ellen Richards and Charlotte Perkins Gilman', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 39.3/4 (2011), 77–92 (p. 82).
[62] Katherine Fusco, 'Systems, Not Men: Producing People in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "Herland"', *Studies in the Novel*, 41.4 (2009), 418–34 (p. 426); Alys Eve Weinbaum, 'Writing Feminist Genealogy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Racial Nationalism, and the Reproduction of Maternalist Feminism', *Feminist Studies*, 27.2 (2001), 271–302 (p. 277) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178758>.
[63] Egan, p. 81.
[64] Sanger cited in Seitler, p. 67.

Americans'] more advanced stage of evolution.'[65] For Gilman, this kind of social engineering is inextricably tied to the education of children, and the infantilisation of those adults she perceives to be in need of further development. She equates her proposed forced labour camps with 'compulsory education' – describing them as 'a continuous school for all ages,' in line with her 'plan of education that would make the whole race rise in social evolution.'[66] This eugenicist exploitation of mutability recasts my earlier discussions of Blochian utopianism as a politics oriented towards the 'unfinishedness' of the world.[67] An absence of development is at the core of Bloch's understanding of utopianism. Indeed, writing of the '*undischarged, undeveloped, in short, utopian*' character of dreams, he directly equates the undeveloped with the utopian.[68] However, as Gilman's investment in eugenic education demonstrates, to value education and to centre childishness – as I have suggested Bloch does – is insufficient to the advancement of an unsettled utopian politics. In Gilman's view, the perceived unfinishedness of children of colour does not offer an insight into the condition of 'the world itself,' which Bloch has argued is marked by 'a state of unfinishedness.'[69] Rather, in Gilman's thought, unfinishedness is solely an opportunity for eugenicist intervention.

The tendency in Gilman's writing to frame the mutability of childhood in terms of supposed racial progress, rather than utopian consciousness raising, can also be felt when she uses explicitly utopian terminology. For example, when she speaks of her 'hope for the future,' this hope is framed in terms of a eugenicist programme of white supremacy.[70] For example. writing 'regarding the children of immigrants,' she argues:

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[65] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'A Suggestion on the Negro Problem', *American Journal of Sociology*, 14.1 (1908), 78–85 (p. 80) <https://doi.org/10.1086/211645>.
[66] Gilman, 'A Suggestion on the Negro Problem', pp. 83, 84 and 85.
[67] Bloch, I, p. 221.
[68] Bloch, I, p. 102. Emphasis in original.
[69] Bloch, I, p. 221.
[70] Gilman cited in Egan, p. 83.

> Hope for the future is to be found in the conclusions of the immigration commission, that in one generation certain marked changes in stature and in head measurements have taken place in the children of immigrants of various nationalities, such changes as have hitherto been considered as the result of centuries.[71]

Here, one sees the compression of evolutionary time into the figure of the child, analysed earlier in relation to Ernst Haeckel's embryological studies. The idea that a developing human embryo 'passes through the same series of transformations which its animal progenitors have passed through, during immense spaces of time, inconceivable ages ago,' is here transposed onto the figure of the immigrant child whose development is attributed to 'the great law of progress and perfecting' which Haeckel believed to determine evolution.[72] In Haeckel's reading this law distinguishes 'the lowest tribes of nations,' in which, as he puts it, 'most of the individuals resemble one another so much that European travellers often cannot distinguish them at all,' from those same travellers.[73] Gilman's intention is to intervene in this process of perfecting and differentiating colonised peoples. She draws on the evolutionary theories of thinkers such as Haeckel in order to frame these children's potential for growth, and ability to compress evolutionary time, as a means of speeding up their assimilation into white America. Despite her appeal to the unfinishedness of these children, therefore, Gilman's framing of their potential does not adhere to Bloch's understanding of utopianism. Rather, her theorisation of progress in which, as Haeckel puts it, 'man continually removes himself further from his ape-like ancestors, and continually approaches nearer to his own ideal,' can be connected to Hegel's theorisation of 'the still sealed nature of the universe.'[74] Here, each stage of development,

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[71] Gilman cited in Egan, p. 83.
[72] Haeckel, I, pp. 310 and 282.
[73] Haeckel, I, p. 281.
[74] Haeckel, I, p. 282; Bloch, I, p. 131.

including future, projected stages, is 'extravagantly clear as daylight.'[75] Gilman can thus be understood as advancing a model of historical time which is neatly mappable, demonstrably hierarchical, and clearly defined into stages on the path to progress – a path which white people are considered to have walked 'inconceivable ages ago,' and which everyone else must now run along in order to catch up.[76]

Ultimately, although he fails to examine the racialisation of narratives of progress, Edelman's critique of reproductive futurism is useful in analysing the eugenicist impetus of the linear narrative of historical time upon which Gilman's work depends. His understanding of how both right and left wing politics are oriented towards an anti-queer future helps to explain the ways in which, as Daniel Bender has argued, 'one of the nation's best-known feminist voices' at the turn of the century could be so fully complicit in promoting a white supremacist worldview.[77] In Bender's reading, Gilman's framing of white, wealthy women at the top of a ladder of evolutionary development was entirely typical of a 'Progressive-era American' discourse which 'conceptualized labor history as "industrial evolution".'[78] *Herland* places a high value on women's labour only when that labour is reserved to the dignified, intellectual or domestic tasks a relatively wealthy, white, American woman might be presumed to do, with a particular emphasis on unpaid child-rearing. As one Herlander puts it:

Child-rearing has come to be with us a culture so profoundly studied, practiced with such subtlety and skill, that the more we love our children the less we are willing to trust that process to unskilled hands—even our own.[79]

[75] Bloch, I, p. 131.
[76] Haeckel, I, p. 310.
[77] Daniel E. Bender, 'In Women's Empires: Gynaecocracy, Savagery, and the Evolution of Industry', *American Studies*, 51.3/4 (2010), 61–84 (p. 61).
[78] Bender, p. 62.
[79] Gilman, *Herland*, p. 83.

This is a step towards the denaturalisation of reproductive labour discussed more fully in Chapter Four. However, Gilman does not extend this championing of labour rights to the work performed by black, immigrant and white working-class women. Bender notes that 'the logic that Gilman shared with reformist and socialist critics understood women's industrial labor as devolution to a primitive state' – a comparison which 'raised uncomfortable comparisons between working women and [so-called] savages.'[80] For Gilman it is solely misogyny, divorced from both colonialism and capitalism, which is considered to be objectionable, rather than the violence and injustice that these systems of intertwining oppression inherently replicate. The progress of women, and the valuing of women's reproductive labour, is, in her view, solely a question of white, middle class women's working conditions, with 'working women' and 'colonized peoples' considered as 'subjects to be examined for what they revealed about the process and perils of racial development but not as possible allies in common cause.'[81]

Gilman's Legacy

The idea that Gilman's work has had an impact on later SF, specifically on feminist SF, is rarely disputed. Joanna Russ, for example, argues that 'all but one of the utopian stories or novels,' which she discusses in her essay 'Recent Feminist Utopias' (1981), 'resemble not only each other but also […] Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*.'[82] The novel was reissued in 1968 and a more widely available printing was produced in 1979, which was met with a near ecstatic response. One reviewer at *The New York Times* went so far as to end her review with the

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[80] Bender, p. 75.
[81] Bender, p. 78.
[82] Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 133.

sentence: 'May the goddess smile on those who have rescued the book from its long oblivion.'[83]

Gilman's impact on feminist SF can thus be understood in relation to second wave 'feminist quests for a legitimate feminist "tradition".'[84] Weinbaum has argued, in relation to Gilman's work, that such quests demonstrate a preoccupation with 'ideals of genealogical "purity".'[85] Despite the wide range of women's science-fictional writing produced contemporaneously to *Herland* which does not endorse a white supremacist model of history – from the work of Pauline Hopkins to that of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain – it is to *Herland* that historians of feminist SF continually return. The eugenic fantasy 'that all Herlanders are descended from the same mother,' is here reinscribed onto the history of the genre, which sets Gilman up as the font of all subsequent feminist SF.[86]

An important counterexample to this trend, whereby feminist SF writers and critics fail to combat the eugenic reproductive futurity present in Gilman's legacy, can be found in the writing of James Tiptree Jr. The explicit queerness of Tiptree's writing is one element of this challenge. For example, in her short story 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read' (1976) the feminist utopia she depicts reads like a queering of *Herland*. In Tiptree's story, much like in Gilman's, three male adventurers find themselves in a world almost exclusively populated by women. However, in contrast to Gilman's sexless utopia, Tiptree depicts a culture of non-monogamous, queer sociality. Her narrator, Lorimer, describes watching the women of this world 'touch each other [...] laughing, vanishing quietly into shared bunks.'[87] For Tiptree's women, sexuality and reproduction are entirely divorced. They simply laugh at the suggestion

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[83] Louise Bernikow, 'Women Sans Men', *The New York Times*, 9 April 1979, p. 5 (p. 5).
[84] Weinbaum, p. 274.
[85] Weinbaum, p. 274.
[86] Sarah LeFanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 3; Weinbaum, p. 283.
[87] James Tiptree Jr., 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?', in *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever* (London: Gollancz, 2004), pp. 163–216 (p. 195).

that because their society contains no cisgender men – meaning that they no longer reproduce through heterosexual sex – they wouldn't have sexual relationships. As one woman puts it: 'How could people not love[?].'[88] This assertion of the potential queerness of feminist utopianism is not, however, my central focus in this chapter. The vast majority of feminist utopias published during this period – including those which Russ discusses in 'Recent Feminist Utopias' – centred queer sexualities.[89] What Tiptree offers is a form of queer utopianism which moves beyond this, where childhood is divorced, not merely from heterosexuality, but from the logic of reproductive futurity. By reading Tiptree's work through the lens of queer utopianism, queer studies of childhood and trans studies, I mean to demonstrate that utopian SF need not inherit Gilman's 'eugenic reproductive futurity.'[90] Though Tiptree is far from being an uncomplicated figure herself, her work demonstrates the possibility of productive alliances between 'queers and children' who, as Stockton puts it, 'are wedded to one another.'[91]

A Cyborg Child – 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1974)

Tiptree's short story 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1974) provides a useful basis for discussing the position of childhood within her writing. Initially, this text appears to uphold the conservative image of childhood theorised by Edelman. The story follows Philadelphia Burke, 'one rotten girl in the city of the future,' who is described as having a 'horrible body,' and whose extreme poverty has led to a state of grave ill health.[92] Following what is deemed to be

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[88] Tiptree Jr., 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?', p. 203.
[89] These include Russ's own The Female Man (1975), Sally Miller Gearhart's The Wanderground (1979) and Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time (1976). For more details see Russ, *To Write Like a Woman*.
[90] Nadkarni, p. 1.
[91] Kathryn Bond Stockton, 'Growing Sideways or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal', in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. by Natasha Hurley and Steven Bruhm (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 277–316 (p. 278).
[92] James Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', in *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever* (London: Gollancz, 2004), pp. 43–78 (pp. 43 and 47).

an illegal 'public suicide,' P. Burke is taken to hospital where she agrees to sign away her right to her 'horrible body.'[93] From then on, P. Burke is to all intents and purposes owned by the Global Transmissions Corporation, or GTX, an organisation which specialises in product placement, as explicit advertising is illegal in this particular future. P. Burke is 'plugged in' to a machine from which she can control and experience the world through the body of Delphi, who has no brain function as she has been grown by the company from a 'modified embryo,' meaning that 'without a Remote Operator [Delphi's body is] just a vegetable.'[94] P. Burke, as Delphi, proceeds to appear on 'holocam' shows, in order to model an opulent lifestyle, prominently featuring many expensive commodities.[95] On the surface this plotline appears to literalise 'the disciplinary image of the "innocent" Child performing its mandatory cultural labor of social reproduction.'[96] Delphi is continually defined by what James Kincaid might call her 'erotic innocence' – functioning as an emblem of an ever receding, impossibly perfect, future.[97] She is 'the darlingest girl child you've EVER seen,' a 'beautiful baby' with a 'delicious little numb body.'[98] Despite having been (unconsciously) alive for fifteen years, Delphi can nevertheless be read as the telos of the process of 'sacralisation of the Child,' which Edelman argues 'necessitates the sacrifice of the queer.'[99]

Indeed, the possibility that Delphi might operate as a 'queer child,' or indeed that she might experience sexual feelings of any kind, seems in this text to have been surgically removed.[100] In contrast to the queer sexual pleasures of the citizens of the future in 'Houston,

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[93] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', pp. 46 and 47.
[94] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', pp. 43 and 49.
[95] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 65.
[96] Edelman, p. 19.
[97] James Russell Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 54.
[98] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', pp. 48, 50 and 55. Emphasis in original.
[99] Edelman, p. 28.
[100] Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 6.

Houston, Do You Read?' this is a future in which, as P. Burke discovers, even the 'delicious' Delphi is permanently sexually 'numb.'[101] As she puts it: 'There's certain definite places where her beastly P. Burke body *feels* things that Delphi's dainty flesh does not.'[102] Further, along with this lack of sexual feeling, Delphi is continually shown to be a symbol of a conservative future – a future whose integrity relies solely upon unaffordable, and continually malfunctioning, consumer goods. When Tiptree writes that after 'one look at Delphi [...] the viewers know: DREAMS CAN COME TRUE,' the intimate alignment of these DREAMS and GTX's co-optation of the future as a realm dominated by capital, seems to epitomise the connection between the figure of the child and the reproductive futurism within which, Edelman has argued, all contemporary politics is grounded. [103] Just as Gilman's utopian vision of a land filled with perfect children is reliant on eugenic racism, so the dream-child Delphi is produced by an exploitative capitalist machine which plays upon the dreams of impoverished people such as P. Burke. These dreams of the future, which the beautiful, white child here represents, are an obvious facade for corporate greed. The products which Delphi sells corrode her body, literalising her position as a tool of consumer capital.

'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' can thus be read, in line with Edelman's work, as a critique of both childhood and the future, with neither one framed as even potentially utopian. However, such a reading obscures the fact that the instrumentalisation of the image of the child in the figure of Delphi is merely one narrative among many in this text. In Tiptree's writing we do not merely see the children of 'the fit,' as Margaret Sanger might put it, we also see those of 'the unfit.'[104] P. Burke, with her 'horrible body' – 'a tall monument to pituitary dystrophy' – also acts as a representative of childhood. Despite the confident tone in which GTX employee

[101] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 55.
[102] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 55. Emphasis in original.
[103] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 59. Emphasis in original.
[104] Sanger cited in Seitler, p. 67.

Mr Cantle declares that P. Burke 'must be older' than Delphi, she is only two years her senior.[105] Her exclusion from childhood, in comparison to the 'beautiful baby' Delphi, is thus not attributable to any significant differences in their ages.[106] Rather, P. Burke is not viewed as childlike precisely because her *value* is so directly in question. By dramatising this exclusion Tiptree denaturalises childhood as a category – demonstrating that childhood is only used as a marker of value when such a designation is in the interest of, in this instance, the corporate elite. 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' offers, not so much a critique of childhood, as much as a critique of those who would use the Child as a weapon against oppressed people such as P Burke. Moreover, in Tiptree's story it becomes impossible to neatly separate the children of the fit from those of the unfit. Explaining the mechanism which allows P. Burke to exist within Delphi's body, the narrator states: 'Delphi is in no sense a robot. Call her a waldo if you must. The fact is she's just a girl, a real-live girl with her brain in an unusual place.'[107] Here, the intimacy of the relationship between Delphi and P. Burke is clear. They are a being with one mind and two bodies – bodies which I argue correspond, not to that of queer adult and child, but to the 'two sides of the eugenic coin' theorised by Nadkarni.[108] By binding these two children together, Tiptree demonstrates how much effort is involved in keeping the Child insulated from the many young people who do not adhere to this image of static perfection.

As previously discussed in relation to Gilman's writing, the perceived value of children is directly tied to their position within racial capitalism. While P. Burke is never explicitly racialised, her poverty, along with her non-normative body, is repeatedly used as an excuse to view her, as Seitler might put it, 'as waste.'[109] The many illnesses from which she suffers

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[105] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', pp. 47, 44 and 52.
[106] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 50.
[107] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 54.
[108] Nadkarni, p. 5.
[109] Seitler, p. 83.

connect her to those SF stories of the mid-century which depict disabled children as monstrous. Anne McCaffrey's 'The Ship Who Sang' (1961), for example, tells the story of a child whose body is considered to be so outside of the norm that she could not possibly function in society. Instead she is permanently encased in a metal shell and plugged in, as it were, to a spaceship which she then controls with her mind. For this supposed privilege she must work throughout what will be an artificially extended life to pay off her debts to the shipping company. Judith Merrill's 'That Only a Mother,' (1948) meanwhile, features a world in which infanticide has become common, after children whose parents have been exposed to radiation are born without limbs. As she puts it 'only 2 or 3 percent of those guilty of infanticide are being caught and punished [...] today.'[110] P. Burke, then, can be seen as an older version of these children. Much like the Children envisioned by John Wyndham, whose strangeness is used to legitimise violence against them, P. Burke does not conform to Edelman's model of the Child.

Edelman's alignment of childhood with an idealised, hoped-for future is thus shown to be incomplete unless it is understood in relation to its shadow – the unwanted child who is a sign of reproductive excess. 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' brings both of these children together and demonstrates their necessary interdependence. The image of the beautiful, white child Delphi is reliant upon the labour of the 'gaunt she-golem' P. Burke. What 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' demonstrates, therefore, is that children too are policed by the disciplinary image of the Child. Delphi's ability to experience sexual feelings is stripped away so that she better aligns with GTX's understanding of childhood as providing 'porno for angels,' while having no sexuality of her own.[111] Meanwhile, P. Burke is subjected to violence precisely because she cannot be made to align with the image of the Child. Her youth is disregarded and

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[110] Judith Merril, 'That Only a Mother', in *Women of Wonder: The Classic Years* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), pp. 65–73 (p. 71).
[111] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 48.

implicitly opposed to queerness.[117] On the other hand, in Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley's important collection *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (2004) their revaluation of childhood as queer does not involve a concomitant revaluation of hope. Thus, while they are prepared to argue that 'the modern-day queer is unthinkable without the modern child,' their understanding of the figure of the child is that it is 'not the anti-queer, but its future is one we might do well not to predict.'[118] Where Muñoz rehabilitates utopian futurity, but not the child, Bruhm and Hurley do the reverse. In their reading 'the queer child' is considered to be queer to the extent that it does not 'conform to the wished-for way that children are supposed to be' – a definition which jars with Muñoz' understanding of queerness as 'an ideality […] the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality.'[119]

In order to address this tendency within queer theory – in which even Edelman's most active critics seem to concede that childhood and utopianism, when combined, are actively anti-queer – I have chosen to return to the texts which Edelman uses to structure his argument. The first of these is Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951). In his analysis of Hitchcock's film, Edelman reads the character of Bruno Antony as a queer figure who sets himself in opposition to both futurity and childhood. In one memorable scene Bruno bursts the balloon of a child standing next to him with his cigarette. This act, in Edelman's reading, positions Bruno as someone opposed to 'the sacralization of childhood.'[120] However, this moment of antagonism between queer masculinity – and for Edelman queerness is almost invariably masculine – and childhood does not in fact demonstrate a clean break between these two positions. By popping this child's balloon Bruno himself is acting childishly. This man, who does not have a job and who lives with his parents – with his father as his greatest

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[117] Muñoz, p. 11.
[118] Bruhm and Hurley, p. xxxiv.
[119] Bruhm and Hurley, p. x; Muñoz, p. 1.
[120] Edelman, p. 121.

antagonist – is often flamboyantly childlike. In this light, *Strangers on a Train* is revealed to be an example of the kind of homophobic, psychoanalytic narrative in which Bruhm and Hurley suggest it is common to insist that 'homosexuality *is* childhood played out in another place.'[121] This is not to say that Edelman's reading of the film as a critique of reproductive futurity is unfounded. However, Bruno's childishness ought not to be overlooked. Like many of Hitchcock's protagonists – from Brandon Shaw and Phillip Morgan in *Rope* (1948) whose characters are based on the famously young criminals Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, to Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960), who remains obsessively attached to his mother throughout his life – Bruno's queerness is tied to his proximity to childhood. What Bruno is doing in popping that balloon, therefore, is not attacking childhood, but rather inhabiting and claiming it. He is, as Halberstam might put it, engaging in a politics of refusal – a 'refusal to grow up.'[122]

The same connection observed here, between queerness and childhood, can be found in the SF novel which is most prominent in Edelman's writing: P. D. James' *The Children of Men*. While, as I have previously stated, Edelman is correct in identifying of James' horror in the face of mass sterility as an indicator of the text's investment in reproductive futurity I suggest that the rage against infertility expressed in this text is *not* a reaction to the absence of children per se. In fact, much of the anxiety in the novel can be attributed to the proliferation of childishness in this world without any young people. By not creating children – not progressing along the 'chrononormativ[e]' track of 'family time' into maturity – James' characters fail to become adults.[123] For some this is marked by a return to education or by getting into petty squabbles over dolls which act as imitation infants. But James also frames this failure to become adult as a planetary dilemma. For example, the narrator characterises

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[121] Bruhm and Hurley, p. xx. Emphasis in original.
[122] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 179.
[123] Freeman, p. 3; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 152.

humanity's reaction to worldwide infertility as follows: 'We are outraged and demoralized less by the impending end of our species […] than by our failure to discover the cause. Western science and Western medicine haven't prepared us for the magnitude and humiliation of this ultimate failure.'[124] Here, it is not the absence of children but the failure of an explicitly Western science to be as ultimately knowledgeable – as uncontestably adult – as it initially appeared which humiliates an embarrassedly incompetent humanity. Moreover, this failure to 'do what the animals do without thought,' and thus to prove humanity's evolutionary superiority, is met with a racialised global rivalry conducted via spy craft which, as James' narrator notes, functions as an 'intoxicating mixture of adolescent buccaneering and adult perfidy.'[125] Here, then, childhood is portrayed in a new light, as the act of not-reproducing is itself shown to be childlike. In James' writing, children are not merely the beneficiaries of the logic of reproductive futurity and childlikeness is not a solely aspirational trait. While James' narrative seems to be oriented towards an ultimately desirable, potential child embodied in the female protagonist Julian's pregnancy, this orientation is unsettled by the disgust which James' narrator expresses when faced with any display of childishness. In *The Children of Men* women who play with dolls are considered 'half-demented,' while 'centres for adult education,' which were once schools, are held up as painful reminders of a lost past.[126] If this is a text which rejects queer sex as a 'pathetic' pastime without 'hope of posterity,' it views childlikeness as similarly set against the future of the heteronormative family.[127]

It is this affinity, between queerness and childhood, which Halberstam discusses in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). He argues that 'success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth

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[124] James, p. 4.
[125] James, p. 6.
[126] James, p. 10.
[127] James, p. 13.

accumulation.'[128] To engage in queer resistance to reproductive futurity is thus, in Halberstam's formulation, not to reject childhood but rather to reject maturity. He suggests that refusing to mature 'allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods.'[129] The queer art of failure is thus understood as that which 'preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children.'[130] In this framework it is adulthood, understood as a marker of 'reproductive maturity,' and not childhood, which most closely embodies the anti-queer logic of reproductive futurity.[131] Halberstam thus opens a path for a queer reclamation of childhood, here understood as a tool which can be deployed in attempts to 'escape the punishing norms' of linear narratives of maturation.[132] One such potential avenue of escape has been theorised by Stockton in her monograph *The Queer Child* (2009). Here, Stockton discusses the possibilities opened up by what she calls 'growing sideways' – the 'gradual growth,' or 'slow unfolding' which she associates with the queer child.[133] To fail at 'growing up' is, in Stockton's understanding, not to refuse to grow, to move through time, but rather to grow differently.[134] She notes that the child's growth 'unhelpfully, has been relentlessly figured as vertical movement upward (hence, "growing up") towards full stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness.'[135] In contrast, '"growing sideways" suggests that the width of a person's experience or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age,' thus bringing '"adults" and "children" into lateral contact of surprising sorts.'[136] This is a form of childish temporality accessible to people of all ages and, crucially, it is one which

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[128] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 2.
[129] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 3.
[130] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 3.
[131] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 2.
[132] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 3.
[133] Stockton, *The Queer Child*, p. 4.
[134] Stockton, *The Queer Child*, p. 4.
[135] Stockton, *The Queer Child*, p. 4.
[136] Stockton, *The Queer Child*, p. 11.

explicitly deviates from the linear narratives of progress which shape the temporalities of imperialism and heteronormativity.

In working to salvage the queer potential of childhood neither Halberstam nor Stockton disregard Edelman's critique of the Child. Indeed, in *In a Queer Time and Place* (1993) Halberstam argues that 'queer uses of time [...] develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction' – a contention which is widespread within the field of queer temporality studies.[137] However, for Halberstam, as for Sheldon, 'it is not sufficient to renounce or to denounce the child.'[138] While Halberstam, like Edelman, is dedicated to unearthing the radical potentialities engendered by what he calls a 'life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing,' Halberstam uses this project as an opportunity, not to negate or reject childhood but rather to 'rethink the adult/youth binary.'[139] Arguing for a less oppositional understanding of the relationship between queerness and family time Halberstam quotes geographer Steve Pile, who writes:

> There is never one geography of authority and there is never one geography of resistance. Further, the map of resistance is not simply the underside of the map of domination – if only because each is a lie to the other, and each gives the lie to the other.[140]

In Halberstam's reading, queerness is not the opposite, or underside, of family time. Rather, queer temporalities serve to highlight the inability of family time to encompass or explain non-

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[137] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 1; See also Edelman; Freeman; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
[138] Sheldon, p. 21.
[139] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 2.
[140] Steve Pile cited in Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 1.

heteronormative lives. Not only is queerness not placed in opposition to childhood in this formulation, but resistance to family time is tied to the explicitly queer project of challenging 'conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility,' meaning that 'the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood' is undermined.[141] Combating reproductive futurism is, then, not so much a matter of combating 'the figure of the Child.'[142] Rather, it is a question of refusing to use so-called 'stage[s] of development' – which privilege an economically stable, productive, heteronormative, monogamous adulthood – as stable markers of identity. This is a project which benefits queer people and children alike.[143]

Halberstam is by no means unaware of the ways in which childhood has been weaponised as part of a homophobic campaign in which heterosexuality is positioned as the telos of all sexual development. For example, he notes that within psychoanalysis homosexuality has been theorised as 'a phase,' much like youth itself, 'that the adolescent will hopefully pass through quickly and painlessly.'[144] Queerness is here shown to be identified with, rather than against, childhood – an alliance which Halberstam makes clear is also 'racially coded.'[145] Writing of the tendency to associate people of colour with childhood, Halberstam quotes prominent literary critic Leslie Fiedler's metaphorisation of growing up. Fiedler argues that although 'we' are 'born theoretically white, we are permitted to pass our childhood as imaginary Indians, our adolescence as imaginary Negroes, and only then are expected to settle down to being what we really are: white once more.'[146] This is the time of teleological development, of reproductive futurism, in which maturity is synonymous with white

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[141] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, pp. 13 and 153.
[142] Edelman, p. 11.
[143] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 174.
[144] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 174.
[145] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 175.
[146] Leslie Fiedler cited in Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 176.

supremacy and the reproduction of the heteronormative, nuclear family. One way of combating this weaponisation of childhood is to claim 'the powerful space of adulthood, responsibility, and maturity for people of colour' and queer people.[147] However, as Halberstam notes, one can also work 'to dismantle the inevitability and mutually exclusive construction of youth/maturity.'[148] What he terms 'the stretched-out adolescence of queer culture,' can be understood as a tool in this dismantling process, within which there is an opportunity to '*depart from a normative model of youth cultures as stages on the way to adulthood*.'[149] Childhood has historically been, and continues to be, a construction which is used, in Edelman's words, to 'terrorise' queer white people and (queer) people of colour – the latter of whom are remarkably absent from Edelman's work – and yet, rather than fighting against this terrifying construction, Halberstam demonstrates that one can infiltrate it; challenge the model of time on which it is predicated; explore the ways in which it overlaps, and is continuous with, queerness.[150] As Halberstam puts it: 'For queers, the separation between youth and adulthood quite simply does not hold.'[151]

In the overlapping projects of Halberstam and Stockton it is evident that 'queers and children are wedded to one another,' not only in terms of their shared oppression but in their potential resistance to the logic of 'reproductive maturity.'[152] Moreover, this resistance is shown to have a specifically utopian function. Writing about the 'preadult, preidentitarian' figure of the child, Halberstam argues that they 'offer a set of opportunities for theorizing gender, sexuality, race, and social rebellion precisely because they occupy the space of the

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[147] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 176.
[148] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 176.
[149] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, pp. 153 and 174. Emphasis in original.
[150] Edelman, p. 29.
[151] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 174.
[152] Stockton, 'Growing Sideways or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal', p. 278; Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 2.

"not-yet," the not fully realized.'[153] Here, the connection between the queer child and Bloch's

utopian philosophy, in which he theorises the radical potential of the 'Not Yet,' is made clear.[154]

This resonance can also be felt in Stockton's description of even the presumed heterosexual

child as being 'not-yet-straight,' as well as in Muñoz's contention that 'queerness is not yet

here.'[155] In his monograph *Cruising Utopia* (2009), Muñoz writes: 'We have never been queer,

yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine

a future.'[156] By locating queerness in 'a backward glance that enacts a future vision,' Muñoz

evokes precisely the kind of mutually constitutive past and future theorised by Bloch, whose

utopian potentiality I discussed in Chapter Two.[157] The emphasis which he places on the

'enduring indeterminacy' of Blochian hope is precisely that of the 'not fully realized' queer,

utopian child theorised by Halberstam.[158]

This model of queer temporality as both child-centric and utopian is of direct relevance

to Tiptree's writing. As previously mentioned, in 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' GTX attempt

to weaponise the figure of the child in order to commodify their customers' hopes for the future.

This is an example of what Mark Fisher has termed 'SF capital,' which Kodwo Eshun describes

as 'the synergy, the positive feedback between future-oriented media and capital.'[159] However,

this effort fails precisely because the person who is both Philadelphia Burke and Delphi –

hereafter referred to as Phila(Delphi)a – does not desire to grow, mature, or endlessly increase

her consumption. Rather, her desire is simply to exist as her multiple selves. Phila(Delphi)a

refuses the logic of reproductive futurism, within which, as Edelman has argued, one is 'held

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[153] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 177.
[154] Bloch, I, p. xxvii.
[155] Stockton, *The Queer Child*, p. 7; Muñoz, p. 1.
[156] Muñoz, p. 1.
[157] Muñoz, p. 4.
[158] Muñoz, p. 12; Bloch cited in Muñoz, p. 3; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 177.
[159] Mark Fisher cited in Eshun, p. 290.

in thrall by a future continually deferred by time itself.'[160] Instead, she finds pleasure in what Bloch calls the 'Here and Now.'[161] When she is first plugged in, Phila(Delphi)a's body is described as 'quivering' with delight, and the narrator adds that 'she can't resist running her hands down her minibreasts and belly.'[162] This erotic delight in her body as it currently exists is aligned with Edelman's understanding of 'the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life.'[163] For Phila(Delphi)a the utopian future has already arrived and thus it becomes impossible for GTX to attempt to sell her a future promise of happiness. In this way her non-reproductive sexual pleasure serves to distance her from the image of the Child. However, as I hope I have demonstrated, this refusal to mature, to grow and to allow one's pleasures to be ceaselessly deferred is just as much a feature of childhood as of queerness (to the limited extent that it makes sense to divorce these two categories from one another). Phila(Delphi)a's disinterest in a reproductive future, and refusal to conform to the image of the Child cannot be ascribed to a lack of childishness on her part but rather to a surplus. Phila(Delphi)a is too childish to conform to the figure of the Child.

This excessive childishness is also reflected in Phila(Delphi)a's failure to become a productive GTX employee. It is her 'child-solemn' attitude which prompts her, when presented with faulty products which she does not believe people ought to buy, to refuse to model them.[164] Phila(Delphi)a is not concerned with future profit but with the way GTX products corrode and damage her body now. This refusal to engage in the 'ceaseless deferrals and substitutions' of reproductive futurism and SF capital, seen by Mr Cantle as a sign of her 'immaturity,' is driven by Phila(Delphi)a's childish curiosity.[165] Tiptree depicts her as a 'little girl making her idiotic

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[160] Edelman, p. 30.
[161] Bloch, I, p. 180.
[162] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 48.
[163] Edelman, p. 30.
[164] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 50.
[165] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 53; Edelman, p. 8.

doomed protest' against the mega-corp.[166] Far from precluding her from participating in acts of protest, Phila(Delphi)a's childishness, her naivety, ignorance and curiosity, drives her to ask uncomfortable questions. Much like the relentlessly curious children discussed in Chapter One the fact that, to use Zenna Henderson's phrase, 'there's so much [she doesn't] know,' makes Phila(Delphi)a a rebellious, rather than a compliant employee. Once again, then, her role as a strange child is shown to undermine the project of reproductive futurism. While Mr Cantle hopes to silence her questions with the tellingly worded rebuke – 'Now we're all straight, aren't we[?]' – in 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In,' queer, childish temporalities are never successfully straightened out. [167]

An Illegitimate Offspring

One aspect of the utopian potential of childhood, as depicted in Tiptree's writing, lies in the child's resistance to the linear temporality of 'reproductive maturity,' as discussed above.[168] In stories such as 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' one can see clearly how, as Stockton puts it, 'the figure of the child does not fit children.'[169] However, I contend that Tiptree's exploration of childhood goes beyond this temporal resistance. Specifically, I suggest that she conceives of childhood as a means of actively embracing one's position as, to use Susan Stryker's formulation, 'a created being, a made thing.'[170] In Stryker's famous essay 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage' (1994) she posits an explicitly science-fictional understanding of trans life in which the fact that one's body has been constructed, that one is a product of a process of creation, is of central

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[166] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 65.
[167] Henderson, 'Come On, Wagon!', p. 81; Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 52.
[168] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 2.
[169] Stockton, 'Growing Sideways or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal', p. 6.
[170] Stryker, p. 240.

importance. Stryker draws on the image of Frankenstein's Creature to explore her own constructedness and I argue that Tiptree's cyborg creations, Phila(Delphi)a prime among them, provide a similar function. By drawing on Stryker's scholarship, alongside that of Caterina Nirta and Donna Haraway, I argue that childhood, as it is conceived in Tiptree's writing, speaks not only to queerness understood as a refusal to grow up but to the utopianism of what Nirta calls 'transgender embodiment.'[171] Where in Halberstam's and Stockton's formulations both queerness and childhood constitute a failure to fulfil the logic of reproductive futurism, trans studies scholarship refuses to distinguish between future and present altogether. What Nirta demonstrates is that the process of self-conscious becoming – which is key to both trans life and to childhood – is a prefigurative form of utopianism. This mode of utopian practice has been defined by Ruth Levitas as an 'attempt not just to imagine, but to make, the world otherwise.'[172] I argue that this collapse of utopian futurity into the present can be usefully read alongside Haraway's contention that 'the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.'[173] Here, the question is not how to relate to utopian futurity and the child used to represent it *out there*, but rather how to deal with childhood and utopianism as they exist in 'the Here and Now.'[174] As Nat Raha has written: 'Another world is necessary and is already being created in which trans lives may flourish.'[175] It is in this context that I continue my reading of 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' and introduce Tiptree's autobiographical writing where she discusses the creation of her most extensively realised science-fictional creation – that of James Tiptree Jr. himself. In this way I mean to show both that the relation between queerness and childhood extends beyond the politics of refusal and failure theorised

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[171] Caterina Nirta, *Marginal Bodies, Trans Utopias* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p. 38.
[172] Levitas, p. 3.
[173] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 149.
[174] Bloch, I, p. 180.
[175] Nat Raha, 'The Limits of Trans Liberalism', *Verso Books*, 2015 <https://verso-prod.us-east-1.elasticbeanstalk.com/blogs/2245-the-limits-of-trans-liberalism-by-nat-raha> [accessed 14 February 2021].

by Halberstam, and that childhood and trans embodiment offer a means of bringing the 'strange newness' of SF off the page and into the present.[176]

Nirta argues for the utopian potential of trans temporalities in explicitly Blochian terms. Where Muñoz sets queer futurity against 'the quagmire of the present,' Nirta suggests that any distinction drawn between the present and the future is a false one.[177] In a direct critique of what she calls Edelman's 'manifest teleological approach towards the politics of the present,' Nirta theorises a queer temporality that centres trans life and 'transgender embodiment,' understood as 'a constant mode of *becoming*.'[178] Here, the indeterminacy of the queer child is proliferated throughout the lifetime of the trans adult and both are tied to the Blochian understanding of utopian hope which is only accessible to those 'who throw themselves actively into what is becoming.'[179] For Nirta this alliance is predicated on the temporality of utopianism. She argues that 'in order for utopia to keep its promise and be a generative force, it desperately needs to be located in the present and to be framed as an impulse of the now.'[180] However, for her this concern with 'the Here and Now' does not involve a rejection of futurity.[181] As she puts it:

Futurity should not be seen as [...] the ungraspable notion of something that from *there* will one day come *here* to us, or even, an idealised vision of what might be to look up to. Rather, it should be considered as the material act of progressing *now* towards

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[176] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4.
[177] Muñoz, p. 1.
[178] Nirta, pp. 45, 38 and 5. Emphasis in original.
[179] Bloch, I, p. 3.
[180] Nirta, p. 3.
[181] Bloch, I, p. 58.

something, of going *there*, where the *going there* is fully immersed in the present. We are *now*, at this moment, going there.[182]

Thus, when she describes 'transgender embodiment' as accompanied by 'a scent of futurity,' she is neither fighting for nor against the figure of the child and the future it supposedly unequivocally represents.[183] Rather, she argues that the future is embedded in, and only accessible through, an explicitly queer understanding of the present. This is not futurity understood as a safe reproduction of the present – a 'closed loop,' as Rebekah Sheldon puts it, formed 'on behalf of, but also through, the child.'[184] This is a utopian futurity which defies determination by, and yet is tangible within, the present.

Nirta's conception of utopianism as 'virtual' – embodying 'a forward-looking impulse derived from the future but which becomes real in the present,' as theorised by Deleuze and Guattari – can be used to explain the significance of Phila(Delphi)a's desire to be herself.[185] Set against the hopes for a 'great future' of 'capital appreciation,' with which the story's narrator, a GTX employee, ends the narrative, are Phila(Delphi)a's last words: 'I'm Delphi.'[186] She refuses to defer her desire to exist in this delightfully new body – a refusal which is not so much a rejection of futurity as a means of bringing her desired future into the present. Phila(Delphi)a is thus an example of what Tom Moylan has identified as the utopian practice of 'demand[ing] the impossible.'[187] A similar demand can be felt in the work of trans studies scholars, specifically that of Stryker. In 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein,' which was first delivered as part academic paper, part performance art piece, Stryker likens her experience as

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[182] Nirta, p. 26. Emphasis in original.
[183] Nirta, p. 38.
[184] Sheldon, p. 29.
[185] Nirta, p. 27.
[186] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', pp. 78 and 77.
[187] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, p. 1.

a trans woman to that of Frankenstein's creature. Both she and the Creature – referred to by Lewis as Shelley's 'adult baby' – are continually made aware of the 'unnatural' means of their own construction. [188] They do not adhere to fixed understandings of Nature, reality, or indeed possibility. In making this comparison Stryker is vividly aware that she risks allying herself with those who have weaponised monstrosity against trans people. Indeed, she recounts how one trans woman, named Filisa Vistima, described herself as 'a mutant, Frankenstein's monster' before ending her own life – an act Stryker attributes to her repeated exclusion from lesbian communities near her home on the grounds that she was deemed not to be a *real* woman.[189] Stryker's aim, in alluding to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), is to wrest back the power of the creature's rage from trans-exclusionary radical feminism. She sets herself against writers like Mary Daly, who suggest that trans women are part of 'the Frankenstein Phenomenon' – a 'necrophilic invasion' of female space.[190] To claim kinship with Frankenstein's creature despite this weaponisation is, for Stryker, an exercise in laying 'claim to the dark power of [her] monstrous identity without using it as a weapon against others or being wounded by it [herself].'[191] By getting up on stage at an academic conference and standing 'at the podium wearing genderfuck drag' while proclaiming – 'I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein' – Stryker refuses to separate out her lived experience from the imagined world of the text.[192] Her 'idea was to perform self-consciously a queer gender rather than simply talk about it, thus embodying and enacting the concept simultaneously under discussion.'[193] In this way she is attuned to what Bloch has called 'the properties of reality

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[188] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 160; Stryker, p. 238.
[189] Filisa Vistima cited in Stryker, p. 239.
[190] Mary Daly cited in Stryker, p. 238.
[191] Stryker, p. 240.
[192] Stryker, pp. 237 and 238.
[193] Stryker, p. 237.

which are themselves utopian.'[194] Like Phila(Delphi)a, who is determined to grasp the utopian dream of being Delphi even as her body is instrumentalised by GTX, Stryker defies a transphobic reality by asserting her identity within what Nirta has termed 'a utopia of the now, in the now and for the now.'[195]

What Stryker's framework demonstrates is that to use the Child as a symbol of a naturalised, static, hetero- and cisnormative future is to obscure childhood's affinity with consciously unnatural creatureliness. Where the createdness of cis-gender people is naturalised and obscured, Stryker argues that Shelley's science-fictional creature mirrors the transgender experience, in which the transgender person is continually made aware of their proximity to, and reliance upon, the technologies which have created, or recreated, them. As she puts it: 'The transgender body is an unnatural body.'[196] This is not a characterisation she rejects. Rather it is one she embraces, writing:

> When [writers such as Daly] tell me I war with nature, I find no more reason to mourn my opposition to them or to the order they claim to represent than Frankenstein's monster felt in its enmity to the human race.[197]

I would argue that this statement involves an underestimation of the complexity of the Creature's ambivalent relationship to humanity as it is explored in Shelley's text. However, the unabashed opposition to Nature expressed here can also be found in Haraway's writing on Frankenstein, which clarifies the Creature's position. Differentiating the cyborg from Shelley's Creature, Haraway writes: 'Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not

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[194] Bloch, I, p. 145.
[195] Nirta, p. 27.
[196] Stryker, p. 238.
[197] Stryker, p. 239.

expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; that is, through the fabrication

of a heterosexual mate.'[198] It is specifically insofar as the Creature accepts its position as a

child, a created being, rather than aspiring to be an adult and create future children, then, that

it is useful in the overlapping projects undertaken here by Stryker and Haraway.

While the cyborg, as imagined by Haraway, is not frequently associated with childhood,

Haraway does draw attention to its role as a created being. She describes the cyborg as 'the

illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state

socialism.'[199] Here, the cyborg is an offspring, a creature, a child, and yet, crucially, it is not

assumed to be allied to the violent conservatism which birthed it. Haraway writes: 'Illegitimate

offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins.'[200] This vision of a child's potential

rebellion mimics Stryker's assertion that 'the naturalized heterosexual order' is unable to

'guarantee the compliance' of trans subjects.[201] She writes: 'As we rise up from the operating

tables of our rebirth, we transsexuals are something more, and something other, than the

creatures our makers intended us to be.'[202] To accept one's creatureliness is thus not to accept

the reproductive logic which inspired one's creation. Rather, this claiming of creaturehood is

part of a challenge to what Haraway calls 'that masculinist reproductive dream,' that 'man'

could be 'an author to himself.'[203] A critique of this same 'reproductive dream' is articulated

by Stryker.[204] Addressing her largely cisgender, academic audience, she states: 'The affront

you humans take at being called a "creature" results from the threat the term poses to your

status as "lords of creation," beings elevated above mere material existence.'[205] It is this fantasy

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[198] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 151.
[199] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 151.
[200] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 151.
[201] Stryker, p. 242.
[202] Stryker, p. 242.
[203] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 152.
[204] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 152.
[205] Stryker, p. 240.

of control over reproduction – reminiscent of Gilman's eugenic dream of creating a race of white women from a single mother – rather than childhood, then, which in Stryker's formulation is conceived of as that which polices queer and trans life in the name of a reproductive future free of the messy materiality of reproduction.

This division – between creatures and 'lords of creation' – ought not, however, to be thought of as a means of creating a binary division separating cis and trans people.[206] Refusing the lure of setting trans life up in opposition to the 'uniform heteronormativity' critiqued by Cohen, Stryker is interested in denaturalising all claims to natural birth.[207] While Stryker's 'war with nature' is grounded in the specificities of trans experience, she does not claim that trans people are unique in their unnaturalness – exceptionalised outliers to an otherwise stable Nature.[208] This position is made clear when she writes:

> The Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic womb has birthed us both.[209]

Here, Stryker uses her own self-conscious unnaturalness to destabilise Nature as a whole. In Stryker's understanding, Nature is 'a lie' and thus any birth or rebirth, whether assisted by surgeon, midwife, or mad scientist, is shown to be a culturally determined act involving both scientific knowledge and gestational labour.[210] If Stryker feels kinship with Frankenstein's

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[206] Stryker, p. 240.
[207] Cohen, p. 450.
[208] Stryker, p. 239.
[209] Stryker, p. 240.
[210] Stryker, p. 240.

creature, due to the fact that they are both continually made to think about the circumstances of their own creation, she also extends this uncomfortable, unnatural kinship to cisgender people. By highlighting the culturally and technologically specific dependencies of all bodies, Stryker refuses to allow her investment in the specific struggles and beauties of trans identity to lead her to imply that transwomen are an exoticised, unnatural other whose experiences of birth or embodiment are utterly alien to a cisgender audience. Her stance is instead reminiscent of Haraway's, who writes: 'We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs.'[211] Both Stryker and Haraway use the science-fictional unnaturalness of those whose bodies rely on 'the scientific discourse that produced sex reassignment techniques,' along with the many other surgeries involved in making cyborg bodies, to provoke the question, voiced by Sophie Lewis: 'Why accept Nature as natural[?].'[212] For Stryker and Haraway, as for Paul B. Preciado, the task of social, cultural and scientific critics 'is no longer about discovering the hidden truth in nature; it is about the necessity to specify the cultural, political and technological processes through which the body as artifact acquires natural status.'[213]

The claim variously advanced here, that we are all cyborgs, ought not, however, to be used to erase the physical, cultural and medicalised abuse which trans people and disabled people – among other marginalised cyborgs – face when their bodies are read as unnatural. Jillian Weise warns against precisely this ubiquitous usage of the term 'cyborg' in her work on what she calls 'the tryborg'– the able person who is unable to distinguish their voluntary use of technology from that of the person with, for example, a prosthetic leg.[214] However, the

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[211] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 150.
[212] Stryker, p. 242; Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 7. Emphasis in original.
[213] Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie : Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York, NY: The Feminist Press, 2013), p. 35.
[214] Jillian Weise, 'Common Cyborg', *Granta*, 2018 <https://granta.com/common-cyborg/> [accessed 14 February 2021].

arguments made by both Haraway and Stryker that focus on the abolition of Nature as a category are not predicated on a naive understanding that all bodies have been subject to equal medical intervention, trauma or violence. For example, Haraway draws extensively on Audre Lorde's 'sister outsider' in her theorisation of the cyborg and specifically highlights the ways in which 'women of colour' could be thought of as 'a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities.'[215] For her, the racism which determines whose body is Natural and whose is unnatural, and thus expendable, is a crucial part of determining what a cyborg is and might be. Similarly, when Preciado compares ciswomen taking contraceptive pills to transpeople on hormone therapy, or when Lewis argues that 'a "surro-baby" is no more or less natural(ized) than any other,' their purpose is not to invisibilise the oppression faced by those whose bodies are deemed to be unnatural.[216] Rather, they mean to show that no one is untouched by the 'militarism and patriarchal capitalism' which Haraway identifies as the parent of the cyborg.[217]

What this denaturalisation of Nature demonstrates, then, is that the division between queer creature and child cannot hold. Natural birth, heteronormative parenting, and indeed the structures of chrononormativity in their entirety, are here shown to be insufficient defences against queer creatureliness. This is evident in 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In,' where the distinction between the 'real-live girl' P. Burke and the 'waldo' Delphi soon collapses.[218] As Phila(Delphi)a's final words – 'I'm Delphi' – suggest, the body she is plugged into is no less real to her than the one she was born in.[219] Further, the naturalness of her P. Burke body is radically questioned. P. Burke is a 'she-golem' who is described in explicitly cyborg terms as

[215] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), p. 1; Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 174.
[216] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 118.
[217] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 151.
[218] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 54.
[219] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 77.

a 'fantastic complex of circulation, respiration, endocrines, midbrain homeostasis.' [220] She is 'the greatest cybersystem' which the GTX technician whose job it is to maintain her has ever designed.[221] In Tiptree's story, the question of who is the cyborg and who is the child no longer makes sense. Both are both, a fact which opens up the possibility of a mutually beneficial coalition between those overlapping categories: trans person, cyborg and child. Just such an alliance is depicted in Stryker's essay. Here, she recounts the story of her lover giving birth. Stryker writes: 'I felt a child move out of another woman's body and into the world. Strangers' hands snatched it away to suction the sticky green meconium from its airways. "It's a girl," somebody said.'[222] In this moment of non-consensual gendering Stryker feels a kinship between herself and this infant child. The baby does not act as a symbol of the cisnormative heteropatriarchy which oppresses her. Rather, they are a fellow sufferer of this system. Far from setting herself up against childhood, Stryker describes herself and her queer and trans community as 'pioneering on a reverse frontier: venturing into the heart of civilization itself to reclaim biological reproduction from heterosexism and free[ing] it for [their] own uses.'[223] When she 'roar[s] gleefully away from [transphobic 'feminists'] like a Harley-straddling, dildo-packing leatherdyke from hell,' Stryker takes this newly born infant with her.[224]

The Double Life of James Tiptree Jr.

In the final section of this chapter I consider James Tiptree Jr. himself as a science-fictional, utopian creation. Tiptree was the pseudonym adopted by Alice Bradley Sheldon when she began her career as an SF author. Sheldon not only wrote numerous SF stories and two novels

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[220] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', pp. 76 and 78.
[221] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 78.
[222] Stryker, p. 244.
[223] Stryker, p. 245.
[224] Stryker, p. 239.

under this name, but created a life for Tiptree – conducting intimate correspondences over decades, writing travelogues for fanzines and even beginning a never completed autobiography tentatively titled *Tiptree's Dead Birds*.[225] This included constructing a biography for Tiptree as an 'ineluctably masculine,' to use Robert Silverberg's now much mocked phrase, ex-CIA agent and big game hunter, although in actuality these details were not fabrications but were facts about Sheldon's own life.[226] Sheldon also constructed a private life for Tiptree. As her biographer, Julie Phillips, has noted, she spent 'Tiptree's miniscule earnings on *his* expenses,' which included the purchase of a typewriter with a signature blue ribbon which was reserved for his exclusive use.[227] The moment at which, as Gwyneth Jones puts it, 'James Tiptree Jr. was unmasked as a woman,' is frequently discussed in terms of a revelation of hidden truth.[228] By learning the name and gender which Alice Sheldon was assigned at birth, those who Gardner Dozois described as being 'wild to know who Tiptree "really" is' were thought to have finally found what they were looking for.[229] And yet, it is my contention that this division between reality and the unreal, fictitious, or utopian does not hold when one reads Tiptree in the context of the trans utopian tradition previously discussed.

I am by no means the first person to suggest that a reading of Tiptree's work informed by trans scholarship might be of interest. As Cheryl Morgan has persuasively argued, although 'it is still by no means clear how she identified,' the feelings Tiptree expressed when it was revealed that 'she wasn't "really" a man' would be 'familiar to any trans person who has just been unwillingly outed.'[230] Tiptree's unpublished autobiographical writing further supports

[225] See Julie Phillips biography for full details Julie Phillips.
[226] Julie Phillips, p. 3.
[227] Julie Phillips, p. 327. Emphasis in original.
[228] Gwyneth Jones, 'Feminist SF', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould and others (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 484–88 (p. 487).
[229] Gardner Dozois cited in Julie Phillips, p. 1.
[230] Cheryl Morgan, 'Their-Stories: Interrogating Gender Identities from the Past' (presented at the What Is & How To Do LGBT History, Manchester, 2015)

this claim. In letters and diaries, she continually returns to her dissatisfaction with her assigned gender. For example, she notes in an early journal: 'I do not "fit" my body.'[231] While it is not the role of the literary critic to posthumously reassign the gender of an author – a project which could very easily fall back into the framework of unearthing who Tiptree *really* is – to insist that Tiptree is only a literary persona is to bely the significance of Sheldon's creation of what Phillips describes as 'a man who does not exist,' yet who is able to 'sit[s] down at a typewriter.'[232] While Sheldon's dissatisfaction with ciswomanhood has conventionally been read as frustration with misogyny, coupled with an expression of her repressed homosexuality, such readings tend to be predicated on the narrative of unmasking one's *true* self advanced by Jones. For example, Phillips begins her biography with an epigraph from Joanna Russ which reads: 'To learn to write at all, I had to begin by thinking of myself as a sort of fake man.'[233] This idea – that one's writerly, science-fictional self is in some way fake – fails to adequately represent the challenge which Tiptree poses to any division between the fake and the real. In one of her journals, Sheldon writes:

> All I want is man's life […] my damned oh my damned body how can I escape it I play woman woman I cannot live or breathe I cannot even make things. I am no damned woman wasteful god not to have made me a man.[234]

Here, it is Sheldon's supposedly Natural womanhood which is something she must play at and, perhaps disingenuously, perform. In contrast, her imagined manhood is associated with survival, with breathing, indeed with life itself. Like Delphi, then, Tiptree is a supposedly

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<https://www.academia.edu/11231216/Their_stories_Interrogating_gender_identities_from_the_past> [accessed 14 February 2021].
[231] Tiptree cited in Julie Phillips, p. 68.
[232] Julie Phillips, p. 1.
[233] Joanna Russ cited in Julie Phillips, p. xi.
[234] Tiptree cited in Julie Phillips, p. 99.

artificial creation who allows Sheldon to access the utopian dream which she here prays for. Not willing to leave her fate in the hands of Nature or a 'wasteful God,' Sheldon crafts a science-fictional identity for herself.[235]

Childhood also plays a role within this process of science-fictional self-creation. This is evident in Sheldon's account of her first experience with the genre. Sheldon describes how her uncle arrived home one day with a bundle of literary magazines out of which fell a magazine with 'a large green octopus removing a young lady's golden brassiere [...] the title was Weird Tales.'[236] She then recounts the following interchange:

"Ah," said Uncle Harry. "Oh. Oh yes. I, ah, picked this up for the child."

"Uncle Harry," I said, my eyes bulging, "I am the child. May I have it please?"[237]

Here, one can see the complicated beginnings of what Phillips refers to as Sheldon's 'performance as Tiptree.'[238] In one sense her identity seems clear. Indeed she explicitly affirms it in her statement: 'I am the child.'[239] And yet, the fact that it has to be stated – much like Phila(Delphi)a's profession of identity: 'I'm Delphi' – denaturalises this affirmation.[240] Sheldon is the child, and yet she is clearly not the intended reader of this magazine. By standing in for her uncle she identifies with the obvious fiction he has created about whom he has purchased this magazine for. This child is a useful fiction and, like Tiptree, a cover identity which she and her uncle later refer to as 'Our Secret.'[241] One must also consider the image on

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[235] Tiptree cited in Julie Phillips, p. 99.
[236] Tiptree Jr., *Meet Me at Infinity*, p. 309.
[237] Tiptree Jr., *Meet Me at Infinity*, p. 309. Emphasis in original.
[238] Julie Phillips, p. 7.
[239] Tiptree Jr., *Meet Me at Infinity*, p. 309.
[240] Tiptree Jr., 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', p. 77.
[241] Tiptree Jr., *Meet Me at Infinity*, p. 309.

the cover of the magazine. The possibility of desiring and/or identifying with both the woman and the alien is left open here. Sheldon is both the woman, in her role as 'hopeless xenophile,' and the alien who, like the twenty year old Sheldon, wants to 'ram [herself] into a crazy soft woman.'[242] These multiple points of identification are further complicated by the fact that this story is recounted in Tiptree's autobiographical essay: 'Everything But the Signature Is Me' (1978). Written in response to the revelation of what Phillips calls her 'double life,' this is the origin story of how both Sheldon and Tiptree fell in love with SF.[243] While it may appear natural for Sheldon to claim the identity of the child, the inevitability of that identification is undermined by the involvement of Tiptree – a person who came into being middle aged and thus who is both younger and older than Sheldon. Age is here destabilised, and child, woman, alien, and SF reader are shown to be intimately connected.

Tiptree can thus be seen to resist the logic of reproductive futurism, not only by failing to grow up – in the manner theorised by Halberstam and Stockton – but by collapsing the utopian future into the present, by re-creating herself as a science-fictional being. Her attitude to the name 'Tiptree' connects this act of self-creation to that of Haraway's illegitimate offspring and Stryker's rebellious Creature. While her choice of 'Tiptree' as a pen name is commonly attributed to a casual glance at a jar of jam, Tiptree's letters and other personal writings often belie this seemingly offhand attitude towards naming.[244] For example, in a letter to Joanna Russ, Sheldon notes that 'it was made clear to [her] early,' that her given name, Alice, '*belonged* to [her] mother, who chose it *because it had no nickname.*'[245] In defiance to this early inscription of parental identity onto the person of the child – which can be usefully connected to Stryker's affinity with the child she witnesses being involuntarily assigned a

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[242] Tiptree cited in Julie Phillips, pp. 124 and 303.
[243] Julie Phillips, p. 1.
[244] See Julie Phillips, p. 6.
[245] Tiptree cited in Julie Phillips, p. 7. Emphasis in original.

gender at birth – Tiptree relishes her subsequent, variously androgynous, nicknames: from Alli to Tip to Raccoona. As Sheldon writes in the same letter: 'One's nicknames – they are one's own.'[246] Refusing to take up her place within a linear narrative of progressive development in which her identity would become an extension of her mother's, Tiptree instead 'grows sideways' into the strange worlds of SF.[247]

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to show that the non-linear temporalities, queer failures and relentless curiosity produced and provoked by childhood undermine the temporal and epistemological security of white, Western, heterosexual, cisgender adulthood. In Tiptree's writing this supposed security takes the form of names bestowed by parents, global corporations who dominate the future and attempts to harness childhood in service of a heteronormative present. However, what Tiptree's writing also shows is that this security is illusory and that the incontestable reality it supposedly represents is fundamentally unstable. By creating a science-fictional persona and claiming her place as a creature, as opposed to a 'lord of creation,' Tiptree demonstrates that the strangeness of SF cannot be neatly confined to the pages of her fiction.[248] The queer, trans theoretical approach which her work inspires lays bare the fact that the 'laws of the author's empirical world' – against which the strangeness of SF is frequently measured – are tied to a static and essentialised model of Nature which denies the current realities of trans existence.[249] Stryker has argued that language is unable, or perhaps not yet able, to 'represent the transgendered subject's movement over time between stably gendered positions in a linguistic structure.'[250] A science-fictional utopianism which centres trans lives must thus be one which attends to strange novelty as it exists in the present, rather

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[246] Tiptree cited in Julie Phillips, p. 7.
[247] Stockton, *The Queer Child*, p. 9.
[248] Stryker, p. 240.
[249] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 8. For a more detailed discussion of Suvin's position see Chapter One.
[250] Stryker, p. 241.

than as it is deferred into an ever-receding future. Writing of Sheldon's 'double life,' Phillips

notes that 'masquerade and truth do not exclude each other, but comment on each other and

are interwoven.'[251] It is this act of interweaving which I argue is facilitated by including

Tiptree's strange children in the critical conversation surrounding the utopian potential of SF.

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[251] Julie Phillips, p. 386.

Chapter Four

Blood Children: Vampirism, Hunger and Care Work

> If you had a hunger, a great big gnawing-inside hunger
> and no money and you saw a bakery-shop window –
> which would you do? Turn your back on it? Or would
> you press your nose as close as you could against the
> glass and let at least your eyes feast? I know what I'd do
> […] And you know, you never can tell. The shop door
> might open a crack, maybe – someday.
>
> - Zenna Henderson[1]

> Utopia is born of the hunger for something better.
>
> - Marge Piercy[2]

When attempting to rehabilitate the figure of the child for a queer, utopian politics there is a temptation to consider the process of becoming-child as one of self-fashioning. In my analysis of the writing of James Tiptree Jr., for example, I have focused on how P. Burke, Delphi and indeed Tiptree herself are created in opposition to parental authority and the logic of reproductive futurity which that authority serves to propagate. Tiptree refuses the name her mother gave her and in so doing affirms the utopian potential of making oneself anew. Within

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[1] Zenna Henderson, *The People Collection*, ed. by Anne McCaffrey (London: Corgi Books, 1991), p. 118.
[2] Marge Piercy, 'Woman on the Edge of Time, 40 Years on: "Hope Is the Engine for Imagining Utopia"', *The Guardian*, 29 November 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/29/woman-on-the-edge-of-time-40-years-on-hope-imagining-utopia-marge-piercy> [accessed 24 August 2020].

this framework one can counter Lee Edelman's claim that the child is 'the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value,' in essence by arguing that children don't ask to be born.[3] Childhood, in this reading, is aligned with that 'illegitimate offspring,' the cyborg, and kept insulated from 'the reproductive matrix' which serves to reproduce the heteronormative present into the future.[4]

Such a framing, however, obscures the reliance of children upon what Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha calls 'care webs.'[5] In this chapter I argue that to ignore these care webs – the complex networks of people involved in doing the work, both paid and unpaid, of caring for one another – is to conceptualise childhood as a fantastic site of isolation and independence. In defending childhood from inherent complicity with the logic of reproductive futurity – by, for example, arguing along with Adam Phillips that 'it is not the child who believes in something called development' – one risks inadvertently assigning culpability for the maintenance of heteronormativity onto parents, and perhaps in particular onto mothers.[6] However, this kind of defence is only tenable if one disregards the necessarily interdependent nature of caring relationships. As Sophie Lewis has argued, in relation to the utopian politics of what she calls 'the gestational commune,' it 'takes a village' to raise a child.[7] For Lewis, utopianism is reliant upon the acknowledgement and cultivation of this communal understanding of care. Her utopian vision is oriented towards the 'interpenetration of all of what are currently called "families" until they dissolve into a classless commune,' organised around 'the best available care for all.'[8] This is a form of socialist, feminist utopianism in which

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[3] Edelman, p. 3.
[4] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, pp. 151 and 181.
[5] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), p. 35.
[6] Adam Phillips, p. 21.
[7] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 147.
[8] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 44.

'the family' is understood, as M. E. O'Brien puts it, as an institution which 'systematically enable[s] and permit[s] violence and abuse.'[9] What thinkers such as Lewis and O'Brien suggest is that Bloch's 'brilliant, even decisively spurring forward dream' of a world without capital must also be a world without the family and without the naturalisation of care work upon which the family is founded.[10] Where I have previously focused on the epistemological and temporal positions associated with childhood in utopian and science-fictional thought, in this chapter I read childhood in the context of the labour relations within which children always exist. I mean to demonstrate that the doubly curious speculations and utopian temporal experiments which I have previously associated with childhood are made possible by the, often invisibilised, care work which sustains the strange children of SF.

To this end I supplement my Blochian reading of SF's utopian potential with the family abolitionist framework supplied by Lewis, O'Brien and Haraway, among others – a form of utopianism which in both Haraway's and Lewis' work is rooted within SF. This framework is closely aligned with the socialist feminist project of demanding the recognition of reproductive labour as work. However, rather than using this recognition as a prompt to valorise reproductive labour, or to insist on the virtue of reproductive workers, I see family abolitionist utopianism as a means of making reproductive work strange. Once the act of caring for children, for example, is recognised as work it becomes possible to acknowledge that, as Silvia Federici writes: 'You work, not because you like it, or because it comes naturally to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live.'[11] The denaturalisation of care work is thus tied to its abolition. Lewis, discussing two frequently delegitimised forms of

[9] M. E. O'Brien, 'To Abolish the Family: The Working-Class Family and Gender Liberation in Capitalist Development', *Endnotes*, 5 (2020), 360–417 (p. 366).
[10] Bloch, I, p. 76.
[11] Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), p. 76.

work – surrogacy and sex work – argues that although 'it is hard to imagine how exactly either form of work would persist in any postcapitalist moment,' it is clear that 'their articulation *as work* in the first instance will be key to abolishing them (as work) in the long run.'[12] Here, the connection between family abolition and anti-work politics is evident. Lewis' understanding of the family as a capitalist institution which both requires work to maintain, and undergirds the industrialised labour which is the focus of more traditional Marxist critique, connects her utopian project to that of Kathi Weeks, author of *The Problem with Work* (2011). Weeks, whose anti-work philosophy is heavily influenced by Blochian utopianism, argues that there is a productivist strand of Marxism in which 'work is not just defended on grounds of economic necessity and social duty,' but rather is 'understood as an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation.'[13] Against this she proposes 'the refusal of work' as a utopian gesture.[14] In this chapter, I read this refusal of work as another form of the queer refusal to grow up, discussed in Chapter Three. I argue that, while the fact that children do not (usually) do paid work might preclude them from taking a central role within the worker-centric forms of Marxism critiqued by Weeks, such an exclusion fails to take into account both childhood's centrality to care work, and the utopian possibilities opened up by actively not-working. To be a non-worker is not, in my reading, to be irrelevant to the politics of labour, rather it is a means of denaturalising work and thus making its abolition thinkable.

Within SF, discussions of communalised care and non-nuclear familial structures have tended to focus on the writing of those feminist SF creators who Haraway has named 'theorists for cyborgs.'[15] One thinks of the utopian land of Whileaway where, as Joanna Russ puts it, 'the

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[12] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 42.
[13] Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 11.
[14] Weeks, p. 26.
[15] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 173.

kinship web [...] is world-wide,' or the community of Mattapoisett, depicted in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) in which one character states: 'We all became mothers.'[16] Such visions of 'classless commune[s]' have a direct relationship with the family abolitionist utopianism which I address here.[17] However, in this chapter, my focus is on how childhood – when it is read through this family abolitionist, anti-work lens – contains utopian potential even when it is not depicted within an explicitly utopian context. For this reason, I have chosen to explore the perhaps unexpected topic of vampirism. I am interested in the vampire as, as Jack Halberstam puts it, 'an idle and dependent other, who lives to feed and feeds to live.'[18] I connect this definitionally hungry, idle and dependent being to the figure of the child who is similarly reliant on sucking its sustenance out of those who care for it, while failing itself to do any work. Although Marxist critics have tended to associate vampirism with the indolence of the greedy capitalist, and indeed with the violence of capital itself – Marx famously defines capital as 'dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' – in this chapter I examine how the vampire's luxuriation in its own hunger and idleness can be read in line with an anti-work, utopian politics.[19] My aim is to supplement the vampire's association with capitalist greed and sloth by reading it also as a representative of all those who are hungry and yet unable or unwilling to perform the work demanded by capital. Where the child's needs as a non-worker are naturalised and encoded into the institution of the family, I examine the ways in which the vampire's needs are figured as monstrous, foreign and illegitimate. In this reading, the fact that the vampire's needs require those who care for them to be subject to bloody violence does not in fact distinguish them from those of the child. As Federici has famously argued, care work is 'one of the most [...] subtle

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[16] Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2010), p. 19; Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (New York, NY: Random House, 2020).

[17] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 44.

[18] Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 96.

[19] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 342.

and mystified forms of violence that capitalism has perpetrated against any section of the working class.'[20] Both vampires and children are thus understood as bloodsuckers and yet this does not preclude them from involvement in the utopianism of Lewis' gestational commune where the fact that 'bodies are always leaky, parasited, and non-unitary,' whether they are being fed upon by vampires or not, is not only acknowledged but celebrated.[21] By embracing an anti-work, family abolitionist politics I seek to supplement Marx's image of the vampire as monstrous other preying upon the vigorous and virtuous body of the worker with a reading of vampiric hunger as a utopian, and crucially a childish, demand to be fed even, or especially, when no food has been earned.

Hungry, Idle and Dependent

Hunger is often used to define vampires. Discussing the phenomenon of what she calls 'psychic vampires' – who 'refuse blood, but […] grow fat on human fellowship' – Nina Auerbach focuses specifically on the vampire's hunger.[22] For Auerbach the exemplary psychic vampire is the eponymous Girl of Fritz Leiber's 'The Girl with the Hungry Eyes' (1949). She reads the Girl – a model who takes America by storm and saps the life out of the men who adore her – as the personification of a collective masculine hunger for 'femaleness itself.'[23] This is the vampire as embodiment of corporate America's desires. The Girl is 'sheer display, devoid of name, home, and life.'[24] Auerbach's reading, which forms part of a critique of American masculinity at large, corresponds with the hypothesis formulated by Leiber's narrator as he struggles to unravel the mystery of this vampiric Girl. He muses:

[20] Federici, p. 76.
[21] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 162.
[22] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 109.
[23] Auerbach, p. 105.
[24] Auerbach, p. 105.

Suppose the identical desires of millions of people focused on one telepathic person. Say a girl. Shaped her in their image.

Imagine her knowing the hiddenmost hungers of millions of men. Imagine her seeing deeper into those hungers than the people that had them, seeing the hatred and the wish for death behind the lust. Imagine her shaping herself in that complete image, keeping herself as aloof as marble. Yet imagine the hunger she might feel in answer to their hunger.[25]

Here, the vampire is both a definitionally hungry subject and the object of others' hungers. The Girl's vampirism lies in her ability to navigate the dynamic relationship between these hungers. She feeds and is fed upon, meeting hunger with yet more hunger. In this chapter I want to maintain this focus on hunger while moving away from the form of psychoanalytic criticism it often invites.[26] Leiber's narrator suggests that when one investigates vampiric hunger one will find 'death behind the lust,' while Auerbach contends that 'in this America' the Girl 'is all girls.'[27] Against these somewhat abstracted readings of the death drive, or a universalised understanding of gender, I focus on the materiality of hunger – reading hunger as an expression of concrete need for care, and a means of expressing dissatisfaction with the insufficiencies of the capitalist present. With this focus in mind I turn, once again, to Bloch's utopian philosophy.

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[25] Fritz Leiber, *Horrible Imaginings* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2016).
[26] For an overview of psychoanalytic and psychological approaches to Dracula specifically see Roger Luckhurst, 'Dracula and Psychology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dracula*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 66–75 <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316597217.007>.
[27] Leiber; Auerbach, p. 106.

In *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch describes hunger as 'the simple drive to keep oneself alive.'[28] He argues that 'this drive is the self-preservation drive' – adding: 'it alone might be so fundamental […] as to set all the other drives in motion in the first place.'[29] For Bloch, hunger is 'the drive that is *always left out of psychoanalytical theory*,' and to centre hunger, as opposed to pleasure or death, is to ground psychoanalysis in social and economic materiality.[30] Bloch argues that Freudian theory has no place for the experiences of people living in poverty – a fact he explains with reference to the bourgeois status of Freud's patients. As he notes: 'In bourgeois déclassé Vienna, the notice hung on the wall of the psychological advice bureau: "Economic and social questions cannot be treated here".'[31] This is what Bloch calls 'the class-based limitation of psychoanalytical research,' which he believed could be combated through a centring of hunger.[32] Hungriness is not, however, just a means of historically and materially grounding psychoanalysis. Rather, Bloch places hunger at the centre of his theory of utopianism. Indeed, in *The Principle of Hope* he goes so far as to suggest that hunger is 'the main drive,' before elaborating on 'the way it proceeds to the rejection of deprivation, that is, to the most important expectant emotion: hope.'[33] Unlike the Freudian unconscious, in which there is '*nothing new*,' Bloch sees hunger as fundamentally oriented towards the future and thus towards the possibility of radical transformation.[34] He connects this to 'youth' and 'times of change,' as phenomena 'in which Unbecome is located and seeks to articulate itself.'[35] In this framework, hunger, understood as both an acknowledgement of a lack and a desire to supply that lack, 'becomes the force of production on the repeatedly bursting Front of an unfinished world.'[36]

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[28] Bloch, I, p. 64.
[29] Bloch, I, p. 64.
[30] Bloch, I, p. 64. Emphasis in original.
[31] Bloch, I, p. 66.
[32] Bloch, I, p. 66.
[33] Bloch, I, p. 11.
[34] Bloch, I, p. 56. Emphasis in original.
[35] Bloch, I, p. 11.
[36] Bloch, I, p. 308.

Within Bloch's writing hunger can be seen both to ground his utopianism in the material needs of people living in poverty and to facilitate his insistent orientation towards the utopian temporality of what he terms the 'Not-Yet-Become.'[37] Hunger is simultaneously that which is represented by the figure of 'the unemployed person on the verge of collapse, who has not eaten for days,' and experienced as 'longing, wish, will, waking dream, with all visualizations of the Something that is missing.'[38] Significant to my discussion of the place of childhood within his writing is the fact that Bloch locates hunger specifically in the figure of the breast feeding child. Commenting on the focus on the sex-drive in Freudian psychoanalysis, Bloch writes: 'The sucking of the suckling is supposedly connected with sexual pleasure and takes place largely for the sake of this pleasure. Even hunger is supposedly subject to the sex-drive.'[39] Against this sexualised reading, Bloch stresses the literal hunger of the child as a motivation for feeding. He suggests that the suckling – who, much like the vampire, is defined exclusively by its feeding habits – is not metaphorically satisfying a libidinal hunger by feeding; it is feeding because it needs to survive. By adopting a Blochian reading of hunger I do not mean to de-sexualise either the vampire or the suckling. Rather, I see Bloch's theorisation of hunger as a spur to expand Freud's libidinal framework to include a broader understanding of what Audre Lorde terms 'the erotic': 'an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire.'[40] For Lorde, to explore, celebrate and pursue the erotic is to combat 'the principle horror' of capital, that is the definition of 'the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need.'[41] She refuses to draw a firm boundary between the erotics of sexuality and those of feeding, or otherwise satisfying one's hungers – insisting that all

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[37] Bloch, I, p. 11.
[38] Bloch, I, pp. 65 and 309.
[39] Bloch, I, p. 51.
[40] Audre Lorde, 'The Uses of the Erotic', in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, by adrienne maree brown (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019), pp. 27–36 (p. 28).
[41] Lorde, 'The Uses of the Erotic', p. 29.

efforts to satisfy need have a place within her erotic challenge to a system which 'reduces work to a travesty of necessities, a duty by which we earn bread or oblivion for ourselves and those we love.'[42] To insist on the literal hunger for food of the suckling child, as Bloch does, is thus not necessarily a move away from the erotic. Rather, it demonstrates how the cries of a hungry child could be read as a demand to access that 'sense of satisfaction' to which, to use Lorde's utopian phrase, 'we know we can aspire.'[43] What I argue here is that the vampire, who is also defined by its need for a sustenance it has no intention of working for, can be read within a similarly utopian framework. For example, when Leiber's Girl states – 'I want your wanting me. I want your life. Feed me, baby, feed me' – I argue she can be read, not, or not only, as embodying 'her society's poisonous norm' of endless consumption, but as making a utopian demand which expands the scope of erotic hunger.[44]

It is in this context that I read the hunger of Stoker's Dracula who, as Van Helsing puts it, 'fear[s] want' and whose appetite knows no limits.[45] As I go on to argue, when Dracula feeds, he does not merely embody the endless greed of capital, or even of the aristocracy of which he forms a part. Rather, he engages in a potentially anticipatory act which connects him to the hungry people on whom he feeds. In *Dracula* the evidence of the Count's vampiric appetite is provided when Jonathan Harker discovers him sleeping in his coffin. Looking down on the vampire's newly ruddy face, Harker states: 'It seemed as if the awful creature were simply gorged with blood; he lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion.'[46] What Harker sees here is a monster whom he feels justified in violently attacking. However, Bloch's framework encourages a reading in which the Count's hunger is read in relation to that of his

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[42] Lorde, 'The Uses of the Erotic', p. 29.
[43] Lorde, 'The Uses of the Erotic', p. 28.
[44] Leiber; Auerbach, p. 105.
[45] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 327.
[46] Stoker, p. 59.

human antagonists. One can, for example, compare this scene of repletion with Dr Seward's account of one of the vampire hunters' meals:

> We had a sort of perfunctory supper together, and I think it cheered us all up somewhat. It was, perhaps, the mere animal heat of food to hungry people […] but anyhow we were all less miserable, and saw the morrow as not altogether without hope.[47]

Here the *animal* heat of food connects the hunters to the 'panther-like […] unhuman' Count while at the same time filling them with comradely hope.[48] The vampire's hunger can thus be read, not only as a sign of his nonhuman monstrosity, but rather as an unembarrassed intensification of this hopeful meal. The Count is also one of these hungry people. Indeed, in Stoker's novel, Dracula frequently appears to be starving. He is gaunt. He fasts. As Jonathan Harker states on his visit to the Count's home: 'It is strange that as yet I have not seen the Count eat or drink.'[49] In contrast, when he is able to eat, Dracula is rejuvenated, with his apparent health causing Harker to exclaim when he sees him on the streets of London: 'I believe it is the Count, but he has grown young.'[50] The vampire's hunger is thus tied, both to his body's need for sustenance and to his ability to become young again. While the potentially limitless nature of this feeding can certainly be connected to Marx's vision of 'dead labour,' which 'lives the more the more labour it sucks,' I argue that it can also be understood in relation to Bloch's utopian understanding of hunger as that which 'cannot help continually renewing itself.'[51] Vampirism thus becomes, not a straightforward embodiment of capitalist consumption, but rather a tool which, much as I have argued is the case with childhood, can be deployed towards

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[47] Stoker, p. 328.
[48] Stoker, p. 325.
[49] Stoker, p. 31.
[50] Stoker, p. 184.
[51] Marx, p. 342; Bloch, I, p. 75.

both reactionary or revolutionary ends. In my reading, the hunger of vampirism becomes a way to analyse how economic want and physical deprivation drive the formation of care relations and kinship structures. Writing of 'the unemployed person on the verge of collapse, who has not eaten for days,' Bloch argues that they have been 'led to the oldest needy place of our existence,' thus 'mak[ing] it visible.'[52] This is the function which I argue both vampire and suckling perform – making visible the desperate need for care beyond what has been earned within the 'travesty of necessities' that is the capitalist workplace.[53]

When discussing Bloch's theory of utopian hunger, it is of central importance that he situates the means of satisfying this hunger not in work but rather in desire. It is this aspect of Bloch's thought which Weeks takes up when theorising what she calls 'the political project of "life against work".'[54] Weeks argues that in certain productivist, Marxist theory, a defence of workers' rights becomes a defence of work itself. This, she suggests, is 'the trouble with the category of living labor,' which 'is haunted by the very same essentialized conception of work and inflated notion of its meaning that should be called into question.'[55] To oppose vampirism on the grounds that it feeds on 'living labour,' as Marx does, is here shown to be misguided.[56] In Weeks' analysis, it is work as such which must be rejected by the utopian anti-capitalist. She calls for 'the refusal of work,' which provides 'a model of resistance, both to the modes of work that are currently imposed on us and to their ethical defense.'[57] The idleness of the vampire – the fact that the horrifying image of Dracula 'gorged with blood' is one of rest – is thus endowed with utopian significance.[58] Part of Harker's disgust in this scene lies in the fact

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[52] Bloch, I, p. 65.
[53] Lorde, 'The Uses of the Erotic', p. 29.
[54] Weeks, p. 230.
[55] Weeks, p. 15.
[56] Marx, p. 342.
[57] Weeks, p. 26.
[58] Stoker, p. 59.

that the Count is resting, not after a hard day of work, but after a night of feeding – that, in other words, he is 'exhausted with his repletion.'[59] What Weeks' analysis demonstrates is that to read this disgust in the face of restfulness as a critique of the capitalist's exploitation of the worker is to implicitly engage in a defence of the virtues of work for work's sake. To locate the capitalist's guilt in his status as a nonworker is to risk complicity in the continual denunciation of working people's desire not to work. In his monograph *Race Rebels* (1996), Robin Kelley notes that efforts on the part of black workers to refuse to work outside of the boundaries of officially recognised unions have been read as markers of '"shiftlessness," "indolence," or a childlike penchant to wander.'[60] To denounce the capitalist as lazy is thus to refuse Kelley's call: 'Shiftless of the world unite!'[61] Rather than seeing indolence as a marker of 'immaturity, false consciousness, or primitive rebellion,' I argue that one can embrace this immature laziness as a utopian refusal of work – one which demonstrates that, as Kelley puts it, 'the working classes [are] so much more than people who work.'[62]

This idea of being in excess of one's position as a worker is also tied to another important function of idleness – that is the time which it frees for the purpose of dreaming. Weeks notes:

Daydreaming is often treated as an embarrassment, not only for the lack it represents — a lapse in concentration, a waste of time, an interruption of productive activity — but for what it reveals of our immoderate desires to be and have more.[63]

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[59] Stoker, p. 59.
[60] Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, And The Black Working Class*, Ebook (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996) Ch. 1.
[61] Kelley. Ch. 1.
[62] Kelley. Introduction.
[63] Weeks, p. 191.

The immoderate desires of the Count are thus reframed and shown to grant him the capacity for utopian dreaming. As Harker looks down at 'the mocking smile on the [Count's] bloated face,' he draws a connection between the vampire's restfulness and his ability to dream of, and indeed enact, a utopian future for himself – in this instance a future in which 'for centuries to come he [Dracula] might [...] satiate his lust for blood.'[64] Vampiric indolence is thus shown, not only to free the vampire from work, but to give him time to engage in that 'epitome of an 'idle indulgence,' the utopian dream.[65] Although this dream is horrific to Harker – whose fear of the Count's ability to 'create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons,' is tied to Stoker's construction of the vampire as a racially other, foreigner whose migration to London spells ruin for the city's white citizens – it is, nevertheless, a dream made possible by the vampire's (utopian) refusal of work.[66] What this scene demonstrates is how quickly Harker's disgust in the face of idleness becomes a disgust specifically for idle dreaming. Where in my previous discussions of the 'relentlessly curious' child as a utopian daydreamer the child's status as a non-worker is presumed, the vampire's daydream demonstrates the necessity of this lack of work to the practice of dreaming.[67] To follow Weeks in her suggestion that 'the daydream might be something to cultivate rather than outgrow,' is then, to follow her also in her refusal of work.[68]

After seeing the Count lying in his coffin, hungers satisfied, Harker reflects on his own position as Dracula's intended victim. He fears, with ample justification, that 'the coming night might see [his] own body a banquet.'[69] The critic who is endeavouring to excavate the utopian

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[64] Stoker, p. 60.
[65] Weeks, p. 190.
[66] Stoker, p. 60; For a discussion of the significance of race to Stoker's construction of vampirism see David Glover, 'Bram Stoker and the Crisis of the Liberal Subject', *New Literary History*, 23.4 (1992), 983–1002 <https://doi.org/10.2307/469180>.
[67] Bloch, I, p. 21.
[68] Weeks, p. 190.
[69] Stoker, p. 60.

potential of vampiric hunger is thus forced to account for the vampire's dependence on the bodies of others. For the Count to feed, someone must be fed upon. Initially, this hunger seems impossible to justify. The idea that an aristocrat should be permitted to 'batten on the helpless' of London in the name of utopianism seems ludicrous.[70] However, when viewed through the lens of socialist feminism, with its focus on reproductive labour, it becomes possible to incorporate even this kind of absolute, deadly dependence into an anti-capitalist utopianism. While Marx's theorisation of the capitalist's 'vampire thirst for the living blood of labour' is undoubtedly an indicator of the fact that, as Mark Neocleous has argued, 'capital, with its desire for endless and incessant accumulation, runs the risk of literally working the working class to death,' the violence of labour exchange is made much more complicated when the exchange in question is not between capitalist and worker but between carer and cared for.[71] The competing needs and messy interdependencies of Piepzna-Samarasinha's 'care webs,' or Lewis' 'gestational commune' – where she acknowledges that 'gestating is an unconscionably destructive business' – demonstrate that while being fed upon by Dracula is dangerous, that does not mean that it is a uniquely monstrous form of work.[72] Indeed, when placed within this framework, the violence of the vampire's need for care makes visible the fact that all needs for care involve a potentially violent dependence. As Federici notes, the socialist feminist who wishes to refuse the work of reproduction must face 'the fact that other people's lives depend on us.'[73]

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[70] Stoker, p. 60.
[71] Marx, p. 367; Mark Neocleous, 'The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires', *History of Political Thought*, XXIV.4 (2003), 668–84 (p. 681).
[72] Piepzna-Samarasinha, p. 35; Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, pp. 29 and 1.
[73] Federici, p. 83.

To grapple with the vampire's dependence is thus not a question of eradicating need but of mitigating the violence involved in unevenly distributed, individualised care work. It is to ask, along with the activists working on the Radical Access Mapping Project:

> Does interdependency mean we do the same for one another at all times [...]? Is it a gentle ebb and flow? What if my ebb will never match your flow? What if it's sometimes a torrential downpour and one of us is drowning? What do we do then?[74]

It is in conversation with these questions that I read Harker's horrified contemplation of his own body as the Count's future banquet as a sign that he is drowning in the face of the vampire's need for care but, crucially, that this does not imply that that care is not *really* needed. In his leech-like dependence, the Count acts as the 'ghost of the need for care' who, to use Piepzna-Samarasinha's phrasing, embodies both the 'deepest fate-worse-than-death fear,' of those currently able to conceal their dependence on others, and the utopian dream of 'what you want the most but [of which you] can't even let yourself speak.'[75] Auerbach has noted that children have often been identified as 'the first psychic vampires […] because children […] are by definition dependent,' and in this chapter I explore how the dependence of vampires on their victims mimics that of children on their carers.[76] I argue that, by providing a vision of absolute vulnerability in which one's dependence on others cannot, and need not, be concealed, both children and vampires facilitate a utopian refusal of productivity and independence – a refusal which is central to the project of family abolition.

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[74] radicalaccessiblecommunities, 'What Happens When We Can't Live Interdependency All the Time?', *Radical Access Mapping Project*, 2015 <https://radicalaccessiblecommunities.wordpress.com/2015/11/09/what-happens-when-it-feels-like-we-cant-live-interdependency-all-the-time/> [accessed 24 August 2020].
[75] Piepzna-Samarasinha, p. 33.
[76] Auerbach, p. 102.

Capitalist monsters

Despite the utopian resonances of vampiric hunger, idleness and dependence, a significant barrier to establishing the utopianism of vampirism remains. This barrier comes in the form of, what Steve Shaviro has called, the 'capitalist monster.'[77] As previously noted, in Volume One of *Das Kapital* (1867) Marx defines capital as 'dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.'[78] The vampire is thus enshrined as a symbol of capital. It is a parasite which embodies the capitalist's 'boundless thirst for surplus labour.'[79] Not working itself, the vampire instead consumes the labour of others, and this consumption puts the life of the worker at direct and deadly risk. Marx argues that the transition into capitalism occurs when the 'horrors of over-work,' which are 'exceptions in antiquity,' become factors 'in a calculated and calculating system.'[80] The rise of capital is thus identified with the universalisation of the practice of 'working [serfs] to death,' exhibited by certain pre-capitalist proprietors of the means of production, notable among them the 'Wallachian Boyard,' who Richard Walker has argued can be identified with that proto-vampiric figure, Vlad the Impaler.[81] The vampire here acts as an extreme example of the violent consumption which is codified and regulated under capitalism.

This understanding of vampirism is of central relevance to Stoker's text. As Walker puts it: 'Where Marx argues that capital is a vampire, in Stoker's *Dracula* the vampire is capital.'[82] The Count's dream of coming to London, with its 'teeming millions' of citizens, in

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[77] Shaviro, p. 281.
[78] Marx, p. 342.
[79] Marx, p. 345.
[80] Marx, p. 345.
[81] Marx, p. 346; Richard J. Walker, 'The Blood Is the Life: Bram Stoker's Infected Capital', in *Labyrinths of Deceit*, Culture, Modernity and Identity in the Nineteenth Century, 44 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 256–83 (p. 281) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vjbnd.18> [accessed 6 October 2020].
[82] Richard J. Walker, p. 282.

order to 'create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless,' can be read as a monstrous dramatisation of capitalist exploitation.[83] What Dracula plans to establish is what Neocleous has termed 'the political economy of the dead,' predicated upon the fact that, as Shaviro puts it, 'the vampire grows, not through any productive activity of its own, but by expropriating a surplus generated by the living.'[84] There are many moments throughout the text which can be drawn upon to support this reading of Dracula as a capitalist monster. The Count bleeds gold, he hoards treasure, he feeds on those whom he employs. However, nowhere is the vampire more identifiable with the inhuman monstrosity of capital than when he is preying on children, those most helpless of victims. In another scene in Dracula's castle, Harker, lying in a trance-like sleep, watches as three unnamed female vampires vie first with each other and then with the Count himself, to drink Harker's blood. However, it is after they have turned their attentions to a 'dreadful bag' on the floor that Harker describes himself as being 'aghast with horror,' because this is a bag which appears to contain 'a half-smothered child' – a child which they then feed upon and kill.[85] The arrival of the child's mother outside the castle on the following day marks the denouement of this horrific episode in which the vampire is absolutely opposed to the working people of Transylvania, embodied in the figure of mother and child. This mother's demands – voiced in the memorable phrase: 'Monster, give me my child[!]' – makes any hope of communion with the vampire seem not only impossible, but morally repugnant.[86] The vampire is shown to be the agent of what Marx terms 'the transformation of children's blood into capital,' and thus seems definitionally opposed to the project of Marxist utopianism.[87] The vampire is someone whom, to use nineteenth century psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's phrase, 'the finer feelings of man

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[83] Stoker, p. 60.
[84] Neocleous, p. 668; Shaviro, p. 281.
[85] Stoker, p. 46.
[86] Stoker, p. 53.
[87] Marx, p. 382.

revolt at the thought of counting […] among the psychically normal members of human society.'[88]

However, as my study of Edelman's writing in the previous chapter demonstrates, the fact that any and all appeals to protect children from harm are seemingly 'impossible to refuse' is a fact which itself must be questioned.[89] It is my contention that any effort to denounce the vampire's capitalist monstrosity must acknowledge the reactionary politics which inform Stoker's construction of Dracula as a paedocidal predator. Dracula, as presented here, is an enemy of the heteronormative family. He is marked as someone '*not* 'fighting for the children,'' and thus, as a definitionally queer figure.[90] Edelman has noted that denunciations of queerness are frequently cloaked in the language of anti-capitalism. Within the logic of reproductive futurity, the refusal to procreate is simultaneously the refusal to share one's wealth with future generations. Edelman discusses Charles Dickens' depiction of Ebeneezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) as a miser of this type – a 'stingy, reclusive and anticommunitarian' figure who refuses to either procreate or to share his resources with that epitome of the ideal Child, Tiny Tim.[91] What Edelman emphasises is that the insertion of childhood into this supposedly anti-capitalist narrative means that any critique of the structural inequalities of capital is instead replaced by a conservative defence of the heteronormative family and the logic of reproductive futurity, which in turn is tied to the capitalist imperative of growth. As Edelman puts it, the queer miser's crimes are only made visible 'when he stands exposed as that criminal by criminals themselves reviled: as the dreaded pedocide.'[92] By presenting the

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[88] Richard von Krafft-Ebing cited in Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 145.
[89] Edelman, p. 2.
[90] Edelman, p. 3. Emphasis in original.
[91] Edelman, p. 42.
[92] Edelman, p. 42.

vampire as an abuser of children, then, both Stoker and his Marxist critics risk the suggestion that it is only when capitalists threaten 'the Child whose innocence solicits our defence' that they can be read as monstrous.[93] What Lewis calls the 'slower and less photogenic forms of violence, such as race, class, and binary gender,' and one might add, the heteronormative family, are thus obscured and replaced by the call, impossible to ignore, to think of the children.[94]

Along with this anti-queer message, the monstrosity of the vampire is also intimately tied to contemporary anti-Semitic discourses. Again, the language of anti-capitalism is deployed here as a cypher for the Jewish other. For example, in what Halberstam has described as an 'overdetermined' incident, Dracula is attacked by the vampire hunters, his clothing is ripped and a stream of gold coins pours from the wound.[95] The idea that Dracula's monstrosity is tied to his relation to capital is here made painfully clear. As Halberstam writes:

> The creature who lives on a diet of blood bleeds gold when wounded; at a time of critical danger, the vampire grovels upon the floor for money; and then his departure is tracked by the "ting" of the coins that he drops during his flight.[96]

However, this flagrant display of the connection between vampiric consumption and capitalistic accumulation is not only a sign of Dracula's 'abuses of capital,' or 'avarice with money.'[97] Rather, as Halberstam argues, it 'also identifies Dracula within the racial chain of signification that [...] links vampirism to anti-Semitic representations of Jewishness.'[98]

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[93] Edelman, p. 2.
[94] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 14.
[95] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 104.
[96] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 104.
[97] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 104.
[98] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 104.

Halberstam notes that 'the traditional portrayal of the Jew as usurer or banker, as a parasite who uses money to make money, suggests the economic base of anti-Semitism and the relation between the anti-Semite's monster Jew and Dracula.'[99] Further, he goes on to stress the influence which 'Richard Burton, the author of a tract reviving the blood libel against Jews,' had upon Stoker.[100] The vampire's ties to anti-Semitism lie, therefore, not only in his parasitism but specifically in the danger which he poses to children. Like the Anti-Semite's vision of the monstrous Jewish predator, Dracula steals the blood of Christian children. Again, then, it is not so much his position as a capitalist which is denounced in Stoker's writing, but the threat which he poses to the pure, innocent, Christian child. The vampire may resemble 'British industry' which, as Marx argues, lives 'by sucking blood, and children's blood too,' but his position as a racial and sexual other clouds the anti-capitalism of this sentiment.[101] We see in the zeal of Dracula's hunters, not the revolutionary anger of the proletariat, but the violent fantasies of the anti-Semite and the homophobe.

Here it appears, once again, that the use of childhood as an analytic tool only serves to reinforce the binary between that innocent emblem of conservative futurity – the Child – and the monstrous, queer, racialised other who endangers said Child. However, I argue that it is in stressing the significance of childhood, against the ideality of the Child, that the potential utopianism of vampirism is made evident. Such a possibility becomes clear when one examines the vampire's connection to that other monster who preys on children: the paedophile. Seeming to follow the anti-capitalist framing of critiques of the queer miser or parasitical, Jewish banker, Dracula's position as a potential paedophile frames him as a member of the 'debased aristocracy' which, as Louise A. Jackson has argued, became emblematic of 'sexual abuse in

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[99] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 105.
[100] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 86.
[101] Marx cited in Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 102.

England from the 1860s onwards.'[102] Stoker's friend W. T. Stead – who campaigned for a bill raising the age of consent from 13 to 16 known as the Stead Act of 1885 – was a fierce proponent of this conception of the paedophile. As Jackson notes: 'Stead depicted the vices of a corrupt aristocracy as a threat to the people, uniting working and middle classes in a shared defence of morality and respectability.'[103] The Count's 'unhuman' animality, along with his status as an immigrant smuggled into the country illegally, compound his association with Stead's 'notion of the abuser as "dirty beast".'[104] Feeding on poor, Transylvanian children, before traveling to England to invade the bedroom of that 'poor child' Lucy, the Count's position as a paedophilic monster is enshrined, while the goals of his antagonists are aligned with 'the ideals of the late Victorian/early Edwardian paternalistic State,' which Jackson has argued are encapsulated in the inscription on the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey: 'Defend the Children of the Poor and Punish the Wrongdoer.'[105]

The result of figuring the sexual predator as a 'dirty beast' is, as Jackson has argued, that 'the possibility that he might be, after all, just a man, somebody's father or uncle or son,' is denied.[106] I argue that Jackson's insight – that denunciations of external monsters work to conceal the fact that the majority of sexual violence takes place within the family – can also be applied to the conversation around capitalist violence. Where constructions of a racialised, sexualised, external other who represents the violence of capital prompt defences of the family and the Child who said family serves to protect, the notion that the vampire might be 'somebody's father or uncle or son' changes this picture.[107] If the vampire's connection to the suckling child is taken seriously it becomes impossible to neatly extract the capitalist monster

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[102] Louise A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 6.
[103] Louise A. Jackson, p. 28.
[104] Stoker, p. 325; Louise A. Jackson, p. 32.
[105] Stoker, p. 164; Louise A. Jackson, p. 1.
[106] Louise A. Jackson, p. 32.
[107] Louise A. Jackson, p. 32.

from the family. What the vampire-as-child reveals, then, is that the family is not external to capital but rather is an institution central to the maintenance of capitalism and thus, as O'Brien puts it, 'as a site of personal subjugation, violence, brutality and alienation.'[108] Alongside the image of the vampire as a killer of children is, as I go on to argue, that of the vampire as a child, embedded in the family and involved in variously symbiotic, violent, care relationships with those around them. In this reading, the desire to mitigate the violence of the vampire's needs does not require them to be hunted in a manner which legitimises state sanctioned, queerphobic and anti-Semitic fears. Rather, I suggest it prompts the abolition of the vampire and the familial violence which they represent, where abolition is understood, as O'Brien argues, as 'a simultaneous preservation and destruction.'[109]

Vampires in the Gestational Commune

The notion that vampiric violence is a constituent element of the family under capitalism is brought to the fore in the pivotal scene in Stoker's novel in which the Count feeds on Mina Harker. On their return from one of many attempts to find Dracula's lair, the vampire hunters instead discover him *within their own home*, indeed within the very bedroom of 'dear Madam Mina.'[110] Narrated by Dr John Seward, the scene is depicted as follows:

> With his [Dracula's] left hand he held both of Mrs Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress.

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[108] O'Brien, p. 401.
[109] O'Brien, p. 361.
[110] Stoker, p. 361.

The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into

a saucer of milk to compel it to drink.[111]

This scene is often cited as one in which Dracula is painted as a foreign, invading force. Roger

Luckhurst, for example, describes it as 'a purposive act of the foreigner's defilement of Anglo

Saxon woman's blood.'[112] Further, it is transparently one of violent, sexual violation which is

watched by Dr Seward in horror. He states: 'What I saw appalled me.'[113] The young woman in

a bloodstained nightdress who is left weeping and supposedly morally dirtied by the encounter

with the strange man in her room is directly evocative of sexual violence. Moreover, Mina's

would-be rescuers appear anxious that they too will be thought guilty of an act of violation

even as they follow Dracula into her room. As one of them takes the time to state as they

prepare to break her door down: 'It is unusual to break into a lady's room[!].'[114] To this Van

Helsing replies that 'all chambers are alike to a doctor; and even were they not they are all as

one to me tonight,' thus securing the rescuer's status as professional care givers as opposed to

criminals.[115] Dracula is described simply as 'a tall, thin man,' and the other male characters

spend the scene struggling to emphasise that it is his vampirism, and not his maleness, which

makes him dangerous, predatory and a threat to 'poor Madam Mina.'[116]

However, overlaying this image of racialised sexual violence is a scene of gestational

labour. In the description cited above, the relationship between Mina and Dracula is far more

complicated than predatory man and female victim. In the first sentence Dracula's size and

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[111] Stoker, p. 300.
[112] Roger Luckhurst, *Blood Fractions: The Octoroon and Other Fantasies* (Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, 2015) <https://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2015/11/roger-luckhurst-blood-fractions-the-octoroon-and-other-fantasies/> [accessed 6 October 2020].
[113] Stoker, p. 300.
[114] Stoker, p. 300.
[115] Stoker, p. 300.
[116] Stoker, pp. 300 and 301.

strength are highlighted. The fact that he can hold 'both of Mrs Harker's hands' in one of his own while keeping her arms 'at full tension,' makes her appear far smaller than him and, I would argue, can usefully be thought to place her in the position of a child with her face held 'down on his bosom.'[117] In the second sentence it is the fact that they are mutually covered in blood which is highlighted, while Dracula's 'bare breast' and 'torn-open dress' mean that it is he, the figurative mother, rather than Mina, the victim of sexual assault, who is most obviously in a state of undress.[118] By the third sentence it is Dracula who is made to resemble a child, while Mina is excluded from humanity altogether – playing the role of a kitten. Nor does this shifting play of power relations pause there, as Dr Seward describes Dracula in the following passage as champing 'like a wild beast' who 'sprang at' the men, leaving Mina to give out a 'wild' scream.[119] Mina and Dracula are thus tied to one another. His promise to make her 'blood of my blood; kin of my kin' overlays the image of horrific violation with a more ambivalent form of, potentially erotic, connection.[120] Following the Count's departure, Mina recounts the whole experience as one of being half roused from sleep. Her actions are those of someone in a dream, and she notes that 'strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him.'[121] While she plays the role of 'bountiful wine-press for a while,' therefore, the vampire's promise that she 'shall be later on my companion and my helper,' seems almost immediately to come to fruition.[122]

These shifting positionalities make it far more difficult to assign Dracula and Mina neatly to the roles of vampire and victim. The two move between the positions of man and woman, human and animal, mother and child. Mina is made to feed from Dracula's bare breast

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[117] Stoker, p. 300.

[118] Stoker, p. 300. The fact that Dracula is here attempting to turn Mina into a vampire further reinforces his role as a mother rather than, or as well as, a predator in this scene. .

[119] Stoker, p. 301.

[120] Stoker, p. 306.

[121] Stoker, p. 306.

[122] Stoker, pp. 306–7.

and yet Dr Seward views this as childish behaviour on *his* part, with any suggestion of the vampire as mother replaced by the image of the vampire as selfish and cruel child. I suggest that this shift in perspective acts as an anxious erasure of the fact that this is not a scene of Dracula feeding on the blood of his innocent victims, but rather one where he is feeding them. By feeding Mina, Dracula reverses the flow of vampiric exploitation and demonstrates that it is only possible to view the vampire as a being who undertakes no 'productive activity of its own,' as Shaviro puts it, if gestational labour is deemed to be non-productive.[123] His position as a labouring mother in this scene, coupled with the fact that, when Harker is staying in Transylvania, the Count prepares his meals, makes his bed and cleans up after him, demonstrates that Dracula's perceived position as an enemy of the worker relies upon a severe underestimation of the importance of reproductive labour. The fact that Dracula promises Mina that she will be cared for by the band of vampire hunters she has herself endlessly mothered after her transformation, is here suggestive. He states: 'You shall be avenged in turn; for not one of them but shall minister to your needs.'[124] Part of being kin to a vampire, then, appears to involve having one's reproductive labours acknowledged.

Read as a whole, what this scene demonstrates is that vampirism is intimately tied to questions of care work, and in particular to the relationship between mothers and children. By alternately playing the role of mother and suckling child, Dracula serves to reveal the violent dependencies and gruelling care work upon which this relationship depends. Lewis has noted how frequently the language of parasitism is deployed in discussions of gestation and childrearing. For example, the protagonist of Elena Ferrante's *The Days of Abandonment* (2002) describes her children as 'two greedy bloodsuckers' who transform her body into 'a

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[123] Shaviro, p. 282.
[124] Stoker, p. 307.

lump of food that [they] chewed without stopping.'[125] The violent bloodiness of maternal caring relations is, however, naturalised. In children, the insatiable hunger which causes them to prey on the bodies of those workers who nourish them is not viewed as monstrous, and this is precisely because the labour it relies upon takes place *within* the family. To demonstrate that vampirism exists within the family, and can be read as a manifestation of the hunger, idleness and dependence of the child, is thus to denaturalise the intrafamilial labouring relations which serve to maintain the family as a capitalist institution. In much the same way that I have argued that childhood is imbricated within the queer temporalities, failures and refusals which supposedly menace the Child, so I argue that childhood and vampirism are inextricably intertwined.

Reading Stoker's vampires as carers of children or as childlike figures themselves also serves to connect them to Bloch's theorisation of hunger as a utopian form of desire. This is evident in the section of Stoker's narrative following the death of Lucy Westenra. After Lucy's death at Dracula's hand, Stoker's narrative turns to an excerpt from the *Westminster Gazette* detailing the phenomenon of the 'bloofer [beautiful or bloody] lady.'[126] Once again, the vampire is presented as a predator of 'the Children of the Poor.'[127] The paper details how, since Lucy's death, there have been many instances of 'young children straying from home or neglecting to return from their playing on the Heath.'[128] However, this episode does not end with a weeping mother demanding her child be returned outside the closed gates of a castle. Instead, after Lucy feeds on them, the children return to their games apparently unharmed. As Dennis Foster puts it: 'Whether beautiful or bloody, the bloofer lady does not frighten the

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[125] Elena Ferrante cited in Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 2.
[126] Stoker, p. 188.
[127] Louise A. Jackson, p. 1.
[128] Stoker, p. 188.

children. Rather, they follow her willingly when she calls.'[129] The main effect which Lucy has on the children appears to be that she inspires them to imitate her. The reporter notes that 'the favourite game of the little ones at present is luring each other away by wiles.'[130] The vampire is thus presented, not, or not only, as a monster who preys on children, but as a figure whom 'little children pretend – and even imagine themselves – to be.'[131]

Critics have thus far tended to read Lucy's predation of these children as demonstrative of the fact that, in Stoker's novel, vampirism 'perverts [women's] maternal instincts.'[132] However, if one takes seriously the desire of these children to become Lucy, another more utopian reading of the bloofer lady episode becomes possible. In this reading the children's imitative play is understood as part of a complicated web of utopian longing. The children who are fed upon imagine themselves to be the lady, both beautiful and bloody, who feeds upon them. However, the vampiric position they long for – to be able to feed on someone who cares for you despite the fact that you are not a worker yourself – is precisely that of the child. Thus, while the children play the role of bloofer lady, the lady in question is playing the role of a child. Moreover, up until her death, Lucy's youth and vulnerability are continually stressed, with Van Helsing referring to her exclusively as 'little girl.'[133] The slippage – suggested in the reporter's phrasing – between pretending to be, imagining oneself being and simply being a vampire is thus reflected in the continual shifting of positions between vampire and child exhibited by Lucy and her young imitators. Subverting the dyad of vampire and victim, Lucy and the children desire to be and to feed on one another, thus suggesting a connection between

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[129] Dennis Foster, ''The Little Children Can Be Bitten': A Hunger for Dracula', in *Dracula: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. by John Paul Riquelme (New York, NY: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), pp. 483–99 (p. 487).
[130] Stoker, p. 189.
[131] Stoker, p. 189.
[132] Sos Eltis, 'Corruption of the Blood and Degeneration of the Race: Dracula and Policing the Borders of Gender', in *Dracula: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. by John Paul Riquelme (New York, NY: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), pp. 450–65 (p. 456).
[133] Stoker, p. 246.

a utopian longing to be otherwise and vampiric hunger. Propelled by their relentless curiosity, the feeding practices of these hungry, vampiric children drive them towards a utopian mode of becoming.

Caring for Vampires – 'The Good Lady Ducayne' (1896)

In this chapter I have thus far focused on those moments in *Dracula* which serve to denaturalise care work and demonstrate that vampirism is embedded within the family unit. These moments are significant in that they draw attention to the various anxieties produced by the slippage between vampire-as-capitalist monster and vampire-as-child felt throughout the text. However, care work and familial relations are not Stoker's primary interest and it is for this reason that I turn to the writing of his contemporaries: Mary E Wilkins Freeman and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Neither Wilkins Freeman's 'Luella Miller' (1902) nor Braddon's 'The Good Lady Ducayne' (1896) contain vampires with the obviously supernatural powers of Stoker's Count. Rather, their vampirism lies in their parasitic need for care – their dependence on others and the damage which that dependence does to those who look after them. They are what Auerbach has termed 'those licensed parasites, women.'[134] As such, the connection between these vampires and the dynamics of care work is obvious. As Auerbach has argued, writing of 'Luella Miller':

> The vital fluid in "Luella Miller" is not blood, but work. A perfectly idle Victorian lady who exists to be helped, Luella is the exemplar of her class and time, the epitome of her age, not an outcast in it.[135]

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[134] Auerbach, p. 102.
[135] Auerbach, p. 108.

By figuring the vampire as a white, American 'Everywoman,' Wilkins Freeman makes explicit the relevance of care work, and the hungry, idle, childish dependence which drives it, to vampirism.[136] This more direct approach to the turn of the century care economy, and the labouring relations which sustain family life during this period, mean that the vampires of Braddon and Wilkins Freeman's writing lend themselves to the discussions of family abolitionist utopianism I have begun in relation to Stoker's work. Writing of the Wages Against Housework campaign, Federici has stated: 'To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it.'[137] It is insofar as they make care work visible that I read the hungry demands of these child-like vampires as part of a utopian politics.

Both 'Luella Miller' and 'The Good Lady Ducayne' play on the figure of the vampire-as-aristocrat, sucking the blood of working people. This motif is directly evoked in Braddon's story, in which Lady Ducayne steadily kills a series of young women working as her companions by having their blood transferred into her via transfusion while they sleep. Meanwhile, Luella Miller, while not herself an aristocrat, is also seemingly the cause of a string of deaths among her friends and family. In Wilkins Freeman's text a host of well-meaning carers are mysteriously drained of their strength while caring for, and performing the work of, Luella who 'lived like a queen' at their expense.[138] Both Luella and Lady Ducayne here embody the vampire as capitalist monster who, as Neocleous has argued, represents the tendency among

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[136] Auerbach, p. 108.
[137] Federici, p. 81.
[138] Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', in *The Wind in the Rose-Bush: And Other Stories of the Supernatural* (Chicago, IL: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1986), pp. 75–106 (p. 81).

capitalists of 'literally working the working class to death.'[139] The vampirism of Ducayne in particular is signified by her deathliness. Indeed, when the story's protagonist Bella first encounters Lady Ducayne her great age is the first thing which impresses itself upon her. As Braddon writes: 'Never had [Bella] seen anyone as old as the old lady sitting by the [...] fire.'[140] Braddon builds a picture of an unnaturally extended life as a monstrous thing, with Lady Ducayne's great age set against the beauty and good nature of her latest employee, the hard working Bella who is 'fresh, blooming, a living image of youth and hope.'[141] One character remarks, of Lady Ducayne, that 'people who live to be as old as she is become slavishly attached to life,' and the story culminates in a confrontation between the old lady and Bella's doctor and would-be suitor who states:

> I think you have had your share of the sunshine and the pleasures of the earth, and that you should spend your few remaining days in repenting your sins and trying to make atonement for the young lives that have been sacrificed to your love of life.[142]

Here 'the earth' and 'the sunshine' are part of an appeal to a natural world in which Lady Ducayne's wealth could not buy her more years above ground. Her interest in 'the newfangled theories,' and 'the modern discoveries' of medical research that, as she puts it 'remind one of […] medieval witchcraft,' is a marker of sin and a selfish privileging of her life over others.[143] In this way, Lady Ducayne propels herself into the future, using unnatural sciences to sap away the 'young lives' of would-be mothers in order to prolong her own existence.[144]

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[139] Neocleous, p. 681.
[140] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, 'The Good Lady Ducayne', in *The Cold Embrace and Other Ghost Stories* (Ashcroft, BC: Ash-Tree Press, 2000), p. 262.
[141] Braddon, p. 262.
[142] Braddon, pp. 266 and 276.
[143] Braddon, p. 276.
[144] Braddon, p. 276.

However, unlike Count Dracula, Lady Ducayne's intake of young blood does not magically restore her youth. Despite her efforts at rejuvenation she is incredibly frail, described as 'a small, bent figure' with 'a face that should have been hidden under a coffin lid years and years ago.'[145] Lady Ducayne is constantly accompanied by a large group of companions and maids, as well as a full time physician, whose care she is entirely dependent upon. Given her pressing need for care, I suggest that the horror expressed in the text at the great wealth of this 'withered old female Croesus' is used to veil an ableist valorisation of productivity, and an investment in reproductive futurity.[146] While to pass one's wealth to one's children is considered a natural act of generosity, the fact that Lady Ducayne uses hers to pay employees to care for her is seen as a sign of selfishness. At one point Bella overhears a wealthy guest at the hotel they are staying at denouncing Lady Ducayne for her longevity – stating that she hoards her wealth because she 'doesn't relish the idea of other people enjoying it when she's in her coffin.'[147] This characterisation stands in opposition to the fact that all of Lady Ducayne's employees regard her as an excellent employer. One observer remarks that 'she is very different from the average old lady, who is usually a slave-driver,' and it is her servants who call her 'the good Lady Ducayne.'[148] Moreover, at the story's close, Lady Ducayne reveals that she plans to leave her fortune to 'a home for indigent women of quality who have reached their ninetieth year.'[149] The need for such a home highlights the fact that the depiction of Lady Ducayne as an 'aristocratic witch' conceals the fact that there was no social support or care for the elderly during this period of US history.[150] These indigent women are unable to maintain

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[145] Braddon, p. 274.
[146] Braddon, p. 266.
[147] Braddon, p. 266.
[148] Braddon, pp. 272 and 266.
[149] Braddon, p. 276.
[150] Braddon, p. 266; For a history of US elder care see Kevin C. Fleming, Jonathan M. Evans, and Darryl S. Chutka, 'A Cultural and Economic History of Old Age in America', *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 78.7 (2003), 914–21 <https://doi.org/10.4065/78.7.914>.

the liberal individualist dream of the economically independent subject who can sustain themselves on the proceeds of their labour. Their existence points to the fact that while the labour undertaken by Lady Ducayne's constant companions, 'her French maid, her footman, her medical attendant, her courier,' may be in aid of a luxurious lifestyle, she does need material assistance to go on living – whether those around her consider her life to be worthwhile or not.[151] The anti-capitalism which would denounce her because she pays for care rather than giving away her wealth to her Natural children, is thus shown to be a productivist one which obscures the needs of disabled people. Rather than suggesting that Lady Ducayne no longer deserves to live because she cannot work, then, I follow Patty Berne who writes, of the members of the disability justice collective Sins Invalid: 'We are anti-capitalist, as the very nature of our mind/bodies often resists conforming to a capitalist 'normative' level of production. We don't believe human worth is dependent on what and how much a person can produce.'[152]

By having Ducayne feed directly on her employees I suggest that Braddon literalises vampirism's connection to capital. Lady Ducayne is not a monstrous figure who embodies the abstractions of capital. She is a hungry, idle and dependent capitalist who exploits both the bodies and the time of those who work for her, but also genuinely relies upon them. Read from this angle, what 'The Good Lady Ducayne' provides is not a story about a violent and exploitative employer, but rather one about waged labour itself as necessarily violent and exploitative. This reading is further reinforced by the fact that Bella's exploitation is ended, not by killing the vampire, but by gaining support from her community and having them agitate for better working conditions on her behalf. Such labour organising, even on a small and

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[151] Braddon, p. 262.
[152] Patty Berne cited in Piepzna-Samarasinha, p. 27.

informal scale, can be seen as an effort to, as Weeks has put it, 'make work at once public and political' in an effort to 'counter the forces that would naturalize, privatize, individualize, ontologize, and also, thereby, depoliticize it.'[153] In this way Bella utilises her position as a waged worker in order to, as Federici puts it, 'bargain and struggle around and against the terms and the quantity of that wage,' and thus to stress that she works not 'because it comes naturally to [her], but because it is the only condition under which [she is] allowed to live.'[154] It is work itself, rather than the particulars of this one working condition, then, which is resisted here. Just as Juno Mac and Molly Smith have argued that the recognition of sex work as work will 'see an end to all work,' so it is when the physical labour Bella undertakes as she unknowingly undergoes blood transfusion is recognised as labour that her friends are able to advocate on her behalf, thereby securing a future in which she will no longer be exploited.[155] Once again, the task of those seeking to combat the exploitation of vampirism is shown to lie, not in the glamour of the vampire hunt, but in the messy process of establishing, as Lewis puts it, 'the best available care for all.'[156] In Braddon's writing the vampire's victims are armed with the tools of the labour organiser – used to defend both their rights and their blood.

I Can't Do the Work Myself – 'Luella Miller' (1902)

The idea of the economic vampire as a child requiring care is more explicitly addressed in Wilkins Freeman's 'Luella Miller.' Luella is a woman who cannot, or says that she cannot, do any work. This lack of work mysteriously leads to the death of anyone who cares for her or does the work which the story's unnamed narrator feels that Luella should be doing. Luella is

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[153] Weeks, p. 7.
[154] Federici, p. 76.
[155] Molly Smith and Juno Mac, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights* (London: Verso Books, 2018), p. 4.
[156] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 44.

initially introduced as an anti-child figure whose very memory is abhorrent to children, even those who could never have met her. Wilkins Freeman writes, of Luella's house, that 'young people [...] would stare with a shudder at the old house as they passed, and children never played around it.'[157] Luella, like Lady Ducayne, is a frail person who is set in opposition, both to these unnamed children and to the rival for her husband's affections who is also the person who recounts the story of her life within the text. This unnamed narrator is described, at the time of recounting, as 'a woman well over eighty, but a marvel of vitality and unextinct youth.'[158] Youth here appears synonymous with an ability to work and, time and again, Luella's inaction and inability is opposed to the zeal for labour of the town's young people: from Lottie Henderson, 'one of the big girls' at the school who 'used to do all the teachin',' on Luella's behalf, to Lily Miller, Luella's sister-in-law, who is described as being 'hardly past her first youth,' and who 'used to do all [Luella's] sewin'.'[159] And yet, unlike Lady Ducayne, Luella is a young woman herself. Her relationship with these various people whose health and youth she seems to sap is not that of employer and employee, or indeed aged aristocrat and young person working in poverty. Rather, these are her contemporaries, whose youth she shares. Luella is described as 'a slight, pliant sort of creature,' whose childishness – unlike that of Lottie and Lily with their girlish desire to work on Luella's behalf – is continually derided by Wilkins Freeman's narrator as a sign of incompetence.[160] Others work for Luella 'as if she had been a baby,' and this, to those of her neighbours not, as it were, under her spell, is a marker of deep unfairness and indeed villainy on Luella's part.[161] It is thus both the fact that she harms children

[157] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 75.
[158] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 77.
[159] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', pp. 79 and 81.
[160] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 78.
[161] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 84.

and young people and the fact that she herself is childlike that leads the story's narrator to describe Luella as 'a dreadful woman.'[162]

Luella is thus shown to bring the figures of vampiric predator and child victim together into a single person. As Auerbach puts it: 'It is the horror of "Luella Miller" that a loved woman and a ghoul are one.'[163] The 'poor little lamb' who always acted so 'innocent and surprised' at any accusation of wrong doing, 'lookin' like a baby in her ruffled nightgown,' demands to be cared for in a way which is parasitic and *therefore* childish.[164] Indeed, the narrator herself, despite her contention that Luella is 'a dreadful woman,' remains unsure about whether she ought to be held accountable for her actions or whether 'she wa'n't like a baby with scissors in its hand cuttin' everybody without knowin' what it was doin'.'[165] Luella is like 'a baby,' both in her inability to work and in her violent need for potentially deadly labour.[166] Wilkins Freeman's text can thus be read as a denaturalisation of unwaged labour – a means of understanding the fact that, as Federici puts it, reproductive labour 'had to be transformed into a natural attribute.'[167] When the narrator looks over to Luella's house and sees yet another person working themselves to death to care for her, one can hear echoes of Federici's notorious declaration: 'They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work.'[168] The question of whether one ought to care for Luella is thus shown to be a complicated negotiation of competing needs in which the refusal to work cannot be taken lightly. In this reading, the entitled and indolent faux-aristocratic Luella is overlaid by the image of the woman who ends the story alone and

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[162] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 96; For a further exploration of this theme in Wilkins Freeman's writing see her short story 'The Lost Ghost' (1903) in which a ghost child, who suffered deadly maternal neglect in life, saps the life from the women who attempt to care for her in death. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, 'The Lost Ghost', in *The Wind in the Rose-Bush: And Other Stories of the Supernatural* (Chicago, IL: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1986), pp. 201–38.

[163] Auerbach, p. 108.

[164] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', pp. 85 and 86.

[165] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 96.

[166] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 97.

[167] Federici, p. 77.

[168] Federici, p. 74.

unable to care for herself while her neighbour's speak of 'witchcraft' and watch her attempt to get to the shops – moving 'as if she hadn't learned to walk.'[169] It is easy to stand opposed to the figure of the economic vampire-as-capitalist, a person who refuses to work while living on the labour of others, less so when that person is unable to work – is like a child not in the sense that they are a hard working youth but in that they require care, and are still learning to walk. As demonstrated in Wilkins Freeman's description of the supposedly unreasonable work undertaken by Luella's husband – who 'did all the sweepin' and the washin' and the ironin' and most of the cookin'' – the work completed by those who care for, and are killed by, Luella is necessary work which any *normal* wife would be expected to do unquestioningly.[170] What Wilkins Freeman depicts in 'Luella Miller,' then, is the fact that housework is always potentially deadly.

Where 'The Good Lady Ducayne' denaturalises paid care work, 'Luella Miller' can thus be read as a study in the strangeness of unpaid labour. While one of the characters is described as doing jobs for Luella for free, no other financial transactions are mentioned in the story and there is only one character who seems to be actively in financial hardship – an old woman who dies in Luella's abandoned house at the story's opening because she 'had no choice between that and the far-off shelter of the open sky.'[171] Even here the woman's poverty is almost exclusively defined in terms of her lack of social relations and inability to rely on the care of others. She is described as 'a friendless old soul,' who 'had survived her kindred and friends.'[172] This woman's position mirrors that of Luella who it seems had no blood relatives or (surviving) friends. Unlike the ever-youthful narrator, Luella is unable to survive independently and thus must rely on the care of more able people. The many instances in the

[169] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', pp. 98 and 99.
[170] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 81.
[171] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 76.
[172] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 76.

text when people wonder whether Luella is more or less able to work than those working themselves to death on her behalf – such as when the narrator states of Luella that 'it seemed to her right that other folks that wa'n't better able than she was herself should wait on her' – here take on greater significance.[173] Whoever does this work will, it seems, be killed and the question of who is more deserving, along with all of the ableist, racialised and eugenicist associations which come with it, thus becomes a question of who deserves to live. The fact that, as Luella puts it, 'I can't do the work myself […] I never did,' is not deemed to be a good enough reason for Luella not to work.[174] Those who care for her are deemed to be *better* than her, and thus more deserving of life, because they are prepared to, literally, work themselves to death. Aunt Abby may be 'weak,' and the narrator states that Maria Brown 'wa'n't any too strong,' but Luella's victims work despite their lack of strength, thus earning their positions as people more worthy than Luella and marking them as noble workers – the 'living labour' on which the vampiric Luella feeds.[175]

A more sympathetic reading of Luella, in line with the utopian potential of vampirism discussed in this chapter, moves away from this productivist vision. Here, Luella's inability to work, her failure at being a competent wife and mother, is read as an example of Halberstam's 'queer failure' – the failure to mould herself after the productive, heterosexual worker.[176] When tasked with caring for others, Luella insists that it is she who needs care. In this way Wilkins Freeman highlights the dangers of either invisibilising or valorising labour. Like the maternal activists of Zoe Fairbairn's dystopian novel *Benefits* (1979), who leave their children outside of parliament in a refusal of unwaged, reproductive labour, Luella refuses to contribute to the unpaid workforce without which capital could not function. Like Lucy, who plays with the

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[173] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 98.
[174] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 95.
[175] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 94; Marx, p. 342.
[176] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 1.

children of Hampstead Heath rather than marrying any of her three suitors, what becoming a vampiric, child-like figure provides Luella with is the ability to refuse to work. Further, this refusal has a direct effect on the families of these two young women. Luella's needs are shown to supplant those of the biological children of her carers with Aunt Abby, for example, stating: 'Luella needed her and her married daughter didn't.'[177] Biological ties are thus overridden by a network of care relations bound by necessity, violence and affection – a network which Luella both desperately needs and desires. Similarly, Lucy's vampiric blood sharing practices can be read as an expression of her desire to go beyond the heteronormative family. Writing to Mina, prior to her transformation, Lucy bemoans the fact that she can only marry one of her suitors. She asks: 'Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble[?].'[178] Being bitten by Dracula resolves this dilemma. Van Helsing notes that the many blood transfusions which Lucy receives as part of his treatment – offered by each of her suitors in turn – have rendered 'this so sweet maid [...] a polyandrist.'[179] Vampirism thus offers Lucy access to the kind of communist utopianism Virginia Conn has identified in Alexander Bogdanov's advocacy of 'blood-sharing' – a form of comradely blood transfusion which provides the 'egalitarian answer to the question of sexual and social reproduction,' in that it offers a means of 'redistributing reproductive responsibility,' and thus abolishing 'bourgeois family structures.'[180] The refusal of work is thus shown to be intimately connected to the abolition of the family – an abolition which I argue these childish vampires make more readily thinkable.

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[177] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 84.
[178] Stoker, p. 67.
[179] Stoker, p. 187.
[180] Virginia Conn, 'The Body Politic: Socialist Science Fiction and the Embodied State' (Rutgers University, 2020).

To read the vampire as an agent of queer utopianism is not to endeavour to erase vampirism's association with capital, nor is it an effort to ignore the violence done by these childish vampires. These are texts in which a series of carers have been worked to death. However, what I have attempted to demonstrate is that the violence of care work depicted in these stories cannot be attributed to the exceptional monstrosity of their vampire characters. Rather, it is because these vampires are child-like, and because they therefore highlight the inherent violence of the capitalist family maintained via unpaid and unevenly distributed reproductive labour, that they contain so much death. As Auerbach puts it: 'Psychic vampires *are* normal.'[181] This is not to say that these texts merely serve to denaturalise care work. As I have discussed in relation to *Dracula*, an important element of vampiric utopianism lies in the idle vampire's freedom to engage in erotic, utopian dreaming. This also holds true in 'Luella Miller' – a text which concludes with a glimpse of what Lewis might call the 'gestational commune.'[182] After Luella dies, the narrator gives a description of the following fantastic vision. In the only moment in the text in which she suggests she might not be believed, she states:

> I saw what I saw, and I know I saw it, and I will swear on my death bed that I saw it. I saw Luella Miller and Erastus Miller, and Lily, and Aunt Abby, and Maria, and the doctor, and Sarah, all goin' out of her door, and all but Luella shone white in the moonlight, and they were all helpin' her along till she seemed to fairly fly in the midst of them.[183]

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[181] Auerbach, p. 109. Emphasis in original.
[182] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 147.
[183] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 102.

In this vision, care work can be undertaken without anyone suffering. Moreover, the help which Luella receives does far more than merely stave off her death until her next carer is exhausted. While this is only a partial and limited form of utopianism – requiring, as it does, the death of so many – it does offer some indication of what a community organised 'around the best possible care for all,' might look like.[184]

The affective bonds between Luella and her carers, stressed throughout the story, further underline the utopianism of this image and specifically its queer, erotic potential. Despite the narrator's contempt for Luella she is continually forced to admit that her connections to her carers are based on genuine emotion. Lily Miller, for example, is described as being 'devoted to her sister.'[185] As the narrator puts it: 'There was no doubt that she loved her with her whole heart, and was perfectly content in her service.'[186] Luella too seems to care for Lily. The narrator states: 'She did act real fond of Lily, and she pined away considerable, too,' following Lily's death.[187] While the inclusion of both of Luella's husbands in this vision provides an obvious connection between Wilkins Freeman's writing and Stoker's conception of the gluttonous polyandrist Lucy, the relationships between Luella and her female carers are also, potentially, erotic. As S. Bradley Shaw has argued, Wilkins Freeman's 'peculiar domestication of terror,' involves her utilisation of 'the paraphernalia of the gothic to explore and challenge late-nineteenth-century cultural images of women and family.'[188] This challenge includes her depictions of long term, domestic partnerships between women. While the validity, and even the reality, of these 'Boston marriages' has frequently been denied within

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[184] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 147.
[185] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 82.
[186] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 82.
[187] Wilkins Freeman, 'Luella Miller', p. 83.
[188] S. Bradley Shaw, 'New England Gothic by the Light of Common Day: Lizzie Borden and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "The Long Arm"', *The New England Quarterly*, 70.2 (1997), 211–36 (p. 212) <https://doi.org/10.2307/366701>.

what Rachel Hope Cleves has called 'the logic of impossibility,' Wilkins Freeman, who lived

with another woman 'for almost two decades,' repeatedly stresses the significance of these

relationships.[189] In her short story 'The Long Arm' (1895) Wilkins Freeman's character Phoebe

Dole, who as Shaw discusses 'lived with and cared for' her partner Mary 'nearly all her life,'

states: 'There are other ties as strong as the marriage one, that are just as sacred.'[190] In this

context, the concluding image of 'Luella Miller' can be read as a queer, utopian glimpse of life

beyond the heteronormative family. Flying amidst her network of carers and lovers, Luella is

not so much a vampire keeping her hold on her victims even after her death, but a woman who

has finally escaped from the crushing care economy of the family. Further, it is because of her

childish vampirism, her unabashed need, and her refusal of work, that this vision is brought

into existence. Once again, then, vampiric hunger is shown to be not only a hunger for care,

but a hunger for visions of how that care could be distributed in a more utopian society.

Bloodchildren and Fledglings

Thus far I have worked to excavate the vampire's anti-work, family abolitionist, utopian

potential from these turn of the century texts.[191] However, this understanding of vampirism is

far more directly addressed in the writing of more contemporary writers, foremost among them

Octavia Butler. Butler's work serves to reimagine and transform the normative understanding

of the family as a cohesive and naturalised unit – bringing to the fore the porousness of both

individual bodies and familial communities. In the conscious baby-making of the Ooloi, who

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[189] Rachel Hope Cleves, '"What, Another Female Husband?": The Prehistory of Same-Sex Marriage in America', *The Journal of American History*, 101.4 (2015), 1055–81 (p. 1057); Susan Koppelman, 'About "Two Friends" and Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman', *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910*, 21.1 (1988), 43–57 (p. 43).

[190] Shaw, p. 228; Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, 'The Long Arm', in *The Long Arm and Other Detective Stories* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1895), pp. 1–66 (p. 61).

[191] Family abolitionism plays an important but complicated role in the tradition of black feminist writing which Butler is working in. I discuss these complications, and the effect which they have on science-fictional constructions of childhood, in more detail in Chapter Five.

have evolved to genetically engineer their children using only their own bodies, or the obsessive reproduction of the Clayarks, infected by a virus-like organism from space, Butler's readers glimpse worlds in which heterosexuality has lost its hold on reproduction. In these texts, which foreground the work which her cyborg protagonists undertake to keep their communities together, Butler shows us that, as Lewis has stated: 'We are the makers of one another.'[192] The necessity of care – of, to use Haraway's terminology, 'parenting' which is 'about caring for generations,' as opposed to 'reproducing' which involves 'making more of oneself to populate the future' – is felt throughout Butler's work.[193] In stories such as 'Bloodchild' (1984) the bloody realities of gestational labour are laid bare and the naturalized figure of the mother who is, as Lewis puts it, 'working very, very hard at having the appearance of not working at all,' is rendered untenable.[194] Moreover, where in the vampiric texts previously discussed gestational labour always occurs off stage, if at all, Butler addresses the messy process of baby-making directly. In this way she makes clear the profundity of the compromises of bodily autonomy which the labour of caring for children, or indeed vampires, involves. The surgical blood transfusions of fin de siècle vampire literature are here replaced by bodies cut open by alien claws and maggots eating their way into warm flesh. Butler's messy, symbiotic communities demonstrate clearly that children cannot be neatly separated from the care webs which they depend on, while simultaneously highlighting the inherent violence of care work.[195]

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[192] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 19.

[193] Donna J. Haraway, 'Speculative Fabulations for Technoculture's Generations: Taking Care of Unexpected Country', *Patricia Piccinini*, 2007 <https://www.patriciapiccinini.net/printessay.php?id=30> [accessed 15 February 2021].

[194] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 59.

[195] Butler's interest in evolutionary biology diverts significantly from that of the SF authors discussed in Chapters Two and Three. For a discussion of the influence of Lyn Margulis' work on Butler, and its deviation from a teleological narrative of evolutionary development see Maria Aline Ferreira, 'Symbiotic Bodies and Evolutionary Tropes in the Work of Octavia Butler', *Science Fiction Studies*, 37.3 (2010), 401–15.

However, vampirism in Butler's writing exists in precarious relation to the variously symbiotic communities which she represents. While the surrogate, the symbiont and even the parasite are given a place in the messy but ultimately negotiable webs of relationships which she depicts, vampirism is often evoked as the *bad* version of bloodsucking. For example, Butler's early novel *Mind of My Mind* (1977) is structured around the opposition between a negative form of parasitism (embodied in the near God-like figure of Doro who breeds those he feeds on as part of a centuries long, eugenic master plan) to a positive one (that of Mary, the leader of the psychic network known as the Pattern). Mary Aline Ferreira notes that 'unlike Doro [...] who is recurrently portrayed as a "vampire" (441), Mary operates more altruistically, since, as she explains, "I give in return for my taking" (441).'[196] However, as Ferreira herself notes, Mary too is described as a 'kind of mental vampire' – a fact which forms the basis of Kendra R. Parker's exploration of vampirism in Butler's work.[197] To give in return for taking does not, then, preclude one from being a vampire and, as my concluding discussion of Butler's own vampire novel *Fledgling* (2005) suggests, vampirism is very much part of the care webs explored throughout her writing. Indeed, Parker has argued that in Butler's work 'mutual dependence and familial-like bond[s]' frequently appear 'under the guise of vampirism.'[198] This is the context in which I read Butler's work, arguing that her exploration of the vampire-as-symbiont works to dispel the lurking spectre of the vampire as capitalist monster altogether. Lewis may identify capitalism with 'a vampiric, zero-sum definition of need,' but what *Fledgling* makes clear is that vampirism is never zero-sum.[199] Butler's vampires always give in return for their taking.

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[196] Butler cited in Ferreira, p. 404.

[197] Ferreira, p. 404.

[198] Kendra R. Parker, '"I'm Not the Vampire He Is; I Give in Return for My Taking": Tracing Vampirism in Octavia E. Butler's Xenogenesis Trilogy', in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E. Butler*, ed. by Gregory J. Hampton and Kendra R. Parker (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 73–95 (p. 74).

[199] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 44.

In *Fledgling* the care which vampires require is specifically oriented around the child vampire. Where in *Dracula*, 'Luella Miller' and 'The Good Lady Ducayne' the vampires take on the roles of children or occupy child-like positions in relation to requiring care, Butler's protagonist has the literal body, experiences and social position of a child. Shori is an 'elfin little girl.'[200] The novel begins with her awakening from a trauma-induced bout of amnesia and she never regains her earlier memories. Thus, while she finds that she has been alive for over fifty years – which is still considered the age of a child among Butler's long-lived vampire species, the Ina – she ends the novel with memories only lasting a few weeks. In this way, as her father states: 'In fact, Shori is a child.'[201] Unsurprisingly, therefore, Shori, like the fin de siècle vampires previously discussed, requires the care commonly demanded by children. And yet her super-human strength means that she is also the care-taker of the group of humans she feeds upon – humans whom the Ina refer to as their 'symbionts.'[202] Shori's position is not easily legible within the structure of the normative family. Her ambiguous age means that her abilities and needs cannot be taken for granted even by humans already familiar with the Ina. For example, when she meets a group of humans who have been symbionts for years and saves them from the attackers who pursue her throughout the novel, they are surprised at her skills. As one puts it: 'Before I saw what you did today, I figured we'd be the ones taking care of you.'[203] To this, Shori replies: 'You will. Iosif called it "mutualistic symbiosis".'[204] Where they had previously viewed the Ina they were partnered with as their guardians, Shori's youth forces these humans to reckon with the symbiotic nature of their relationship. Her knowledge of her own vulnerabilities and needs – both of which are tied to her position as a child – mean that

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[200] Octavia E. Butler, *Fledgling* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), p. 60.
[201] Octavia E. Butler, *Fledgling*, p. 64.
[202] Octavia E. Butler, *Fledgling*, p. 80.
[203] Octavia E. Butler, *Fledgling*, p. 123.
[204] Octavia E. Butler, *Fledgling*, p. 123.

Shori is forced to view her human symbionts as comrades in her quest to improve Ina/human relations.

Shori's radical neediness – like the suckling child she is a victim to her own hunger, unwillingly killing and eating a human friend at the start of the novel – distances her from the construction of the vampire as a capitalist monster. While most of the Ina hail from Eastern Europe and have the aristocratic bearing and pale skins of Stoker's Count, Shori is the product of her parents' genetic experimentation. Her DNA is made up of genetic material taken from her Ina father, several Ina mothers and a human woman, one of her mother's symbionts. This human DNA, taken from a black woman, was designed to add melanin to Shori's skin so that she, unlike her Ina relatives, can travel during the day. For daring to include the genetic material of a black, human woman in their Ina child her parents are killed and Shori is hunted throughout the narrative. Shori thus demonstrates a deliberate and dramatic move away from what Parker terms 'the "traditional" Americanized vampire, modeled largely on Stoker's quintessential Count Dracula,' who plays the role 'of a white male seducing and penetrating (the neck of) a young white girl' – or, as previously discussed, of a child.[205] Shori, the young, black, child vampire, reverses this dynamic. Like Luella she plays the role of both vampire and child victim. Further, Butler forces her readers to engage directly with the spectre of the vampire-as-paedophile by highlighting the sexual aspects of Shori's hunger. Shori not only feeds on her human symbionts, she has sex with them in paedophilic scenes which prompt uncomfortable confrontations with the ethics of interspecies relations, particularly when a person's chronological age matches neither their appearance, their strength nor their mental capacity. In much the same way that I have argued that the scene where Dracula feeds Mina from his breast denaturalises the care required by the suckling child, positioning the vampire firmly inside the

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[205] Parker, p. 77.

family, so Butler prompts her readers to view Shori's sexual hungers as a product both of her vampirism and, uncomfortably, of her childishness.[206] In one scene where she feeds on her symbiont Celia, she smells that Celia had recently had sex with a human man. Shori narrates: 'He had kissed her between her breasts and taken her nipples into his mouth [...] I tried that, and she giggled.'[207] Here, the sucking of the suckling is initially distanced from the literal act of a child breastfeeding when it is framed as part of adult sexual play. However, it is then immediately brought uncomfortably back into proximity to the child, in Shori's sexualised feeding practices. Butler thus retains the vampire's connection to paedophilia but flips and subverts it, making it impossible to translate an opposition to the child abuser into a racist campaign against an externalised other.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of vampiric utopianism as it is presented in Butler's writing lies in her child-vampire's capacity for dreaming. Like Dracula, dreaming of sating his lust, or Lucy living out her polygamous dream through vampirism, Butler connects the vampire to utopian longing. Indeed, I suggest that this child vampire illuminates the connection between Bloch's understanding of utopian hunger and the position of the SF reader. *Fledgling* opens with the lines: 'I awoke to darkness. I was hungry – starving! – and I was in pain. There was nothing in my world but hunger and pain, no other people, no other time, no other feelings.'[208] This lack is what propels Shori to weave herself a family of symbionts and to find out what happened to her family, in the process paving the way for more equitable human/Ina relations. Chuck Robinson has discussed how this opening passage connects Shori to Butler's readership. As he puts it:

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[206] For a discussion of sexual agency and consent in Butler's writing see Elizabeth Lundberg, '"Let Me Bite You Again": Vampiric Agency in Octavia Butler's Fledgling', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 21.4 (2015), 561–84.

[207] Octavia E. Butler, *Fledgling*, p. 247.

[208] Octavia E. Butler, *Fledgling*, p. 1.

> As an amnesiac, [Shori] does not have a personal, cultural, or historical past to serve as a model. The opening sequence of the novel formally echoes this amnesia […] We experience a new beginning along with Shori, as she (and we) reconstruct a sense of persona and world bit by random and intense bit.[209]

Here, Shori's position – as a hungry, vampiric child – is likened to that of the SF reader who is similarly unable to rely on their 'personal, cultural, or historical past[s]' in order to orient themselves.[210] The only way to learn about the Ina is to read on and thus to follow Shori in her journey of knowledge acquisition, familial weaving and vampiric feeding. Butler can thus be understood as likening the SF's reader's lack of prior knowledge of the world of the text to that of Bloch's hungry utopian subject driven by 'visualizations of the Something that is missing.'[211] Butler makes it clear that considering the vampire in relation to childhood prompts, not only a denaturalisation of the family and the labour which it relies upon, but also a revaluation of utopian dreaming and science-fictional speculation as a means of supplying the lacks in our current care economy. Continually propelled by her curiosity for finding out more about her life – a curiosity which is driven by a desperate hunger – Shori's position as a vampiric child with no memories is painful but, ultimately, motivating. Through her, Butler demonstrates the high stakes of encountering strangely new worlds and the risk and reward of putting oneself in the position of the strange, vampiric child in order to do so.

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[209] Chuck Robinson, 'Minority and Becoming-Minor in Octavia Butler's Fledgling', *Science Fiction Studies*, 42.3 (2015), 483–99 (p. 489) <https://doi.org/10.5621/sciefictstud.42.3.0483>.
[210] Robinson, p. 489.
[211] Bloch, I, p. 309.

Chapter Five

Motherlines: Forging Intergenerational Communities Through Science Fiction

> Could we say, then, that the *feeling of* kinship is *not* inevitable? That it describes a relationship that appears natural, but that must be cultivated under actual material conditions?
>
> - Hortense Spillers[1]

> We are the grandchildren of the witches you failed to burn.
>
> - YaYa Bones[2]

To consider the child within SF is to consider the case for family abolition. In Chapter Four I argued that a child-centric reading of SF allows for the denaturalisation of both the family as an institution and the care work, both paid and unpaid, on which it relies. My aim was to position childhood within the context of labour relations, and thus to demonstrate that a utopian vision of childhood is intimately tied to that of the 'gestational commune,' as theorised by Sophie Lewis.[3] Ernst Bloch's vision of a world without capital, 'that all of us have glimpsed in childhood,' is thus, I argue necessarily, also a vision of a world without the family, understood as the institutionalisation of care work under capitalism.[4] In this chapter I extend my family

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[1] Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 220.
[2] YaYa Bones, 'Grandchildren', *YouTube*, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn-v3QjpKg4> [accessed 9 January 2020].
[3] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 29.
[4] Bloch, III, p. 1376.

abolitionist reading of SF beyond the 'care webs,' to use Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's term, of vampires and those they feed upon.[5] Returning to my discussion of science-fictional, utopian temporalities, begun in Chapter Two, here I work to explicate the temporal consequences of family abolition – of how it encourages one to rethink the function of inheritance, legacy and the possibility of intergenerational relations. Drawing on the queer temporality theory introduced in Chapter Three, including the queer critique of what Jack Halberstam has called 'the time of inheritance,' I work to salvage the utopian potential of inheritance by aligning it with the family abolitionist commitment, described by M. E. O'Brien, to pursue 'the universalization of queer love as the destruction of a normative regime, and an opening onto gender and sexual freedom for all.'[6] I argue that this utopian vision of 'the positive creation of a society of generalized human care' can be usefully used to reach beyond the family, not only in terms of how people living in community together might care for one another, but also in how they might care for their ancestors and potential descendants.[7] I am interested, then, in a utopian reworking of inheritance, no longer tied to essentialised constructions of biological heredity or the strictures of the capitalist family, in which the act of claiming to be a child of a particular tradition could be thought of as an act of care. I began Chapter One by referencing Michel Foucault's theorisation of curiosity as 'evok[ing] "care",' and it is this understanding of science-fictional curiosity as a means of creating caring relations through and against the many differing times of inheritance that I address here.[8]

To this end I address the utopian temporalities of childhood in relation to what Bloch calls 'a dialectically useful "inheritance".'[9] Drawing on his understanding of the non-linearity

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[5] Piepzna-Samarasinha, p. 35.
[6] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 5; O'Brien, p. 362.
[7] O'Brien, p. 417.
[8] Foucault, I, p. 325.
[9] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 2.

of utopian temporalities – discussed in Chapter Two – I examine moments of contact between people of distant generations and explore how such connections might form part of a utopian, science-fictional politics. In this I am heavily influenced by the work of Kristie Dotson, specifically her conceptualisation of the radical potential of 'deliberate acts of inheritance.'[10] Dotson argues that the work of the black feminist philosopher – and one might add creator and critic – lies in deliberately inheriting the work of past writers and leaving an inheritance for future generations. Her writing is founded upon an understanding of the concept of inheritance as intimately tied to a racialised and gendered understanding of historical time. In this context it is abundantly clear that the position of being a child of a particular tradition has taken on wildly different valences depending on the raced and gendered structures of said tradition. While Harold Bloom might feel the weight of 'the anxiety of influence' – being overburdened by literary inheritance – Alice Walker is forced to go out 'in search of [her] mothers' gardens.'[11] My analysis aims to bring Dotson's understanding of inheritance into conversation with Bloch's. In this way I hope to address the omissions in his thought and to demonstrate the centrality of race and gender to science-fictional constructions of inheritance.

After establishing the relevance of childhood to Bloch's and Dotson's respective theories of inheritance, and stressing the applicability of said theories to SF, I then turn to Suzy McKee Charnas' Holdfast chronicles. Focusing principally on the second novel in the series, *Motherlines* (1978), I argue that Charnas' queer, feminist, utopian text illustrates both the appeal and the danger of taking a family abolitionist approach to inheritance. I examine the desire for intergenerational community in this novel alongside the perils of conceiving of one's relationship with one's ancestors and potential descendants in essentialised, exclusionary and

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[10] Dotson, p. 38.
[11] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xxii; Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2011) Part III, I.

unchanging terms. Following the protagonist Alldera's conflicted relationship with the 'Motherlines' of the Riding Women she encounters, I argue that it is when Alldera embraces her position as a child both of her enslaved ancestors and of this new, utopian community who have rescued her, that she is able to create radical change.[12] I work to demonstrate that the act of deliberately accepting one's inheritance is facilitated by the doubly curious position of the science-fictional child, to whom I have returned repeatedly in this thesis. By investigating her relationship to the past and acknowledging her own strangeness, Alldera is able to find a place within the close-knit weave of the Motherlines – a place which her genetic difference from the Riding Women would seem to preclude.

I then turn to a consideration of childhood within SF understood, as Justine Larbalestier puts it, as 'a community or series of communities.'[13] Here, I argue that childhood is not merely an important motif within the texts which form the object of my research. Rather it provides a means of conceiving of the texts themselves, and those who create and critique them, as involved in dynamic, intergenerational relationships. By claiming the position of children of their literary ancestors I argue that SF writers have attempted to forge the kinds of utopian, extra-familial kinship structures which form such a frequent feature of the science-fictional worlds which they imagine. Against an understanding of authorship as the work of atomised, individual creators I propose a reading of SF creators as involved in the decidedly utopian process of deliberate inheritance. In this final section of the chapter I explore what it means to be a part of *Octavia's Brood* (2015), that is, what it means to claim one's place as a literary child of Octavia Butler. Bringing my research up to the contemporary moment with a consideration of the writing of Walidah Imarisha, adrienne maree brown and Alexis Pauline

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[12] Suzy McKee Charnas, 'Motherlines', in *Walk to the End of the World And Motherlines* (London: The Women's Press, 1974), pp. 217–436 (p. 263).
[13] Larbalestier, p. iii.

Gumbs, I argue that centring childhood in discussions of science-fictional community building is one important way of 'boldly dressing ourselves,' as Gumbs puts it, in the legacy of utopian SF.[14] It is by being a child of (literary) ancestors that one can grasp the 'strange newness' of SF which, as Bloch notes 'is never that completely new.'[15]

A Dialectically Useful Inheritance

Bloch's conception of utopianism is one centrally concerned with the past's relationship to a potentially utopian futurity. As Anson Rabinbach argues, 'for Bloch the past is a beacon within the present, it illuminates the horizon of that possibility which has not yet fully come into view, which has yet to be constructed.'[16] In this way Bloch resists the lure of an ever-receding, necessarily distant future. In the opening to *The Principle of Hope*, he writes: 'Real venturing beyond never goes into the mere vacuum of an In-Front-of-Us, merely fanatically, merely visualising abstractions. Instead, it grasps the New as something that is mediated in what exists and is in motion.'[17] For Bloch, then, utopian novelty is already apparent in the present. His is, as has been previously discussed, 'the philosophy of the future in the past.'[18] In Chapter Two I worked to establish childhood's role within this utopian conceptualisation of time, focusing on the dual temporal pull of the figure of the child who is simultaneously reminiscent of one's past and one's future. What I am interested in achieving in this chapter, however, is not demonstrating childhood's relevance to Bloch's understanding of *the past* or *the future*, understood as markers for vast swathes of historical time. Rather, my interest is in how Bloch

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[14] Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 'Introduction', in *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, ed. by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Mai'a Williams, and China Martens (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), pp. 9–11 (p. 9).
[15] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4; Bloch, I, p. 7.
[16] Anson Rabinbach, 'Unclaimed Heritage: Ernst Bloch's Heritage of Our Times and the Theory of Fascism', *New German Critique*, 11, 1977, 5–21 <https://doi.org/10.2307/487801>.
[17] Bloch, I, p. 4.
[18] Bloch, I, p. 9.

conceives of historical time as populated – made up of generations of people and the various traditions, legacies and inheritances which they carry and construct. As he writes: 'People, not things and not the mighty course of events outside ourselves [...] write history.'[19] By thinking of childhood as a position which can be taken up in relation to previous generations I hope to find a place for childhood within this populated conception of historical, generational time. When Bloch argues that 'the light of youth,' is a 'productive light, which can even find affinities in ancient events, as if they were not ancient at all, but new proclamations,' I suggest that it is because of the child's role as an inheritor that this reigniting of the past is made possible.[20]

Bloch addresses the question of inheritance and the relationship of one generation to the next most specifically in *Heritage of Our Times* (1935). Here, he discusses the 'lastingly subversive and utopian contents' of earlier, frequently counter-revolutionary periods of history.[21] He identifies the latent utopian potential of these past communities, customs and traditions as a manifestation of what he calls 'non-contemporaneity' [Ungleichzeitigkeit].[22] This is an understanding of time which, as Stephen and Neville Plaice have discussed, is structured around the idea that 'social and cultural structures of the past continue to flourish in the present alongside contemporary capitalist ones and those pregnant with the future.'[23] In the coexistence of these conflicting temporalities – which mean that the present moment is 'in decay and in labour at the same time' – Bloch sees the possibility for utopian intervention.[24] It is non-contemporaneity which makes it possible to lay claim to 'a dialectically useful

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[19] Ernst Bloch, *Man on His Own: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1970), p. 31.
[20] Bloch, I, p. 121.
[21] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 116.
[22] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 50.
[23] Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice, 'Translators' Introduction', in *The Heritage of Our Times*, by Ernst Bloch (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), pp. x–xv (p. xii).
[24] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 1.

"inheritance"' – that is, a form of inheritance which contributes to a revolutionary utopian politics.[25] This mode of inheritance hinges on the refusal to accept that the cultural production of a given period 'absolutely belong[s]' to the political and economic circumstances of its creation.[26] Bloch is interested, as Caroline Edwards has discussed, in unearthing the 'gold-bearing rubble' of these seemingly compromised cultural artefacts.[27] As Edwards writes, 'rather than nostalgically recalling utopian "gilded pasts" whose lost perfection precludes political mobilization in the here-and-now,' Bloch's dialectically useful inheritance is focused on 'a past that *lives on within the present*, which is "non-past" because its utopian ambitions remain unachieved.'[28] For Bloch, the past is not an inherently anti-utopian space whose influence must be severed if one is to progress to the utopian future. Rather, he is heavily invested in exploring 'the strangeness and dissolving density, now become so homeless, of works which even today totally lack the smug gallery tone, which still challenge their century.'[29] He can thus be understood, not only as himself inheriting the utopian content of the past, but as establishing inheritance itself as a utopian mode of cultural formation.

As I go on to demonstrate, Bloch's understanding of the utopian potential of inheritance does speak to the family abolitionist approach to intergenerational relations explored in such feminist SF texts as Suzy McKee Charnas' Holdfast chronicles. However, this is not to say that Bloch himself is producing feminist work. As Vincent Geoghegan discusses:

Bloch does talk about the role of women, the oppression of women and of some women's fantasies, but his analysis is usually and unselfconsciously focused on male

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[25] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 2.
[26] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 2.
[27] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 116.
[28] Edwards, 'Uncovering the "Gold-Bearing Rubble"', p. 3.
[29] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 7.

social actors, and even here, he does not seem to recognise the cross-cutting effect of gender on class relationships.[30]

This omission of feminism's role within utopian politics means that Bloch's continual references to pregnancy are not necessarily indicative of an engagement with gestational labour as work, or the family as a significant site of either capitalist exploitation or utopian resistance. Therefore, while I argue that his description of 'revolutions as the midwives of the future society with which the current one is pregnant' can be usefully made to speak to the project of family abolition – where midwives and doulas facilitate birthing as part of an effort to 'weave worlds' – it is important to note the disparity between his conception of pregnancy and that of writers such as Lewis and Charnas.[31] In Bloch's work, pregnant women are seen as representatives of an ahistorical, unthinking embodiment. For example, when writing of 'so-called instinct,' Bloch suggests that, although it is experienced by all people, it is 'particularly' felt by 'women, if not in love, then as caring mothers.'[32] The idea that mothers might have some insight into intergenerational relationships, or the utopian possibility engendered by a society being 'pregnant with a new one,' is not acknowledged in this framing of maternal care as purely instinctual.[33] Rather, motherhood is surrendered to the terrain of psychoanalysis, 'the fascist Jung,' and the archaic prehistory which Bloch so fiercely opposes.[34] For Bloch, images of 'the mother's amniotic fluid' are used only to evoke 'the primitive geological oceans in which life first arose' – a far cry from Lewis' 'amniotechnicians,' who are centrally concerned with gestational labour as an element of utopian community building.[35] To read Bloch in relation to queer, feminist utopianism, therefore, one must work to apply his own theories of

[30] Geoghegan, p. 114.
[31] Bloch, I, p. 247; Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 133.
[32] Bloch, I, p. 48.
[33] Bloch, I, p. 118.
[34] Bloch, I, p. 59.
[35] Bloch, I, p. 81; Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 163.

inheritance to his writing. In this chapter I claim a dialectically useful inheritance from Bloch, not by adopting his views as my own but by excavating the utopian potential, or 'gold-bearing rubble,' from his writing.[36] It is in this way that I hope to supplement his understanding of history as created by 'people, not things,' with Lewis' conceptualisation of utopian 'holders' – that is gestators, as opposed to 'delusional "authors," self-replicators, and "patenters"' – as those 'who truly people the world.'[37] It is this messy, watery, laborious understanding of historical time, marked by the relations between generations, that I bring to my reading of the children, literary and otherwise, of SF.

Revolutionary Mothering

I do not share Bloch's hesitancy about using the language of mothering to describe the utopian function of inheritance. Bloch argues that it is 'the degree of newness' that 'makes a work important, but the degree of antiquity' that 'makes it precious,' and that, 'in the work that claims as well as leaves a cultural inheritance both determinations go hand in hand.'[38] I argue that this is precisely the temporal position adopted by those practicing what Gumbs, Mai'a Williams and China Martens have called *Revolutionary Mothering* (2016). brown describes revolutionary mothers as those working 'on an intergenerational front line.'[39] These gestators and care workers are both 'holding hands with the future,' and, as Gumbs writes, 'flamboyantly activating the legacy' of the revolutionary mothers who have gone before them.[40] They can thus be understood as engaging with motherhood in both its 'antiquity' and its 'newness.'[41] As

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[36] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 116.
[37] Bloch, *Man on His Own*, p. 31.
[38] Bloch, I, p. 386.
[39] brown in Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams, *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), p. i.
[40] brown in Gumbs, Martens, and Williams, p. i; Gumbs, 'Introduction', p. 9.
[41] Bloch, I, p. 386.

Williams writes in her introduction to *Revolutionary Mothering*: 'This book came from a vision I had of mamas who believe in themselves and their children, in the future and the ancestors so fiercely they will face down the ugly violence of the present time and time again.'[42] Here, Bloch's theory of non-contemporaneity is put into practice as pregnancy, mothering, and the act of being a child – an inheritor of ancestors whose presence can still be felt – are shown to be revolutionary practices.

The language of mothering has also been of central importance to theorists of feminist literary traditions. To describe one's literary ancestors as mothers is partly a response to 'the metaphor of literary paternity,' which Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert identify as the foundation of Harold Bloom's influential work *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973).[43] In *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) Gilbert and Gubar define this anxiety as 'the artist's [...] fear that he is not his own creator and that the works of his predecessors, existing before and beyond him, assume essential priority over his own writings.'[44] Here, the perceived abundance or scarcity of literary ancestry is shown to be both gendered and racialised. In Gilbert and Gubar's framing one can see echoes of Susan Stryker's critique of those who take 'affront [...] at being called a "creature",' due to 'the threat the term poses to [their] status as "lords of creation".'[45] Gilbert and Gubar associate this anxiety primarily, 'even exclusively,' with male writers – an association which obscures their implicit privileging of a white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle class experience.[46] Despite these omissions in their framework, however, their counter-proposal of an 'anxiety of authorship' experienced by those writers who are seemingly without

[42] Mai'a Williams, 'Introduction', in *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, ed. by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Mai'a Williams, and China Martens (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), pp. 1–3 (p. 2).
[43] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 8.
[44] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 46.
[45] Stryker, p. 240.
[46] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 47.

predecessors – who are, in their terms, 'the daughter[s] of too few mothers' – remains instructive.[47] Their understanding of literary history not only centres the work of mothering as a means of understanding the creation and curation of literary traditions, it demonstrates clearly why inheritance might be valued as part of a feminist politics. Rather than representing a weighty, conservative history which is implicitly aligned with dominant structures of oppression, the unknown ancestors of these literary 'daughters of too few mothers' must be actively pursued.[48] This is not an inheritance that is *naturally* passed down, it is one which must be claimed.

The scarcity of ancestry is even more keenly felt within the literary traditions of black and Indigenous women and women of colour. As Audre Lorde writes in her 'Foreword' to *Wild Women in the Whirlwind* (1989):

> It is not that we [black women] haven't always been here, since there was a here. It is that the letters of our names have been scrambled when they were not totally erased, and our fingertips upon the handles of history have been called the random brushings of birds.[49]

This erasure is understood in the context of the racism of contemporary literary production and reception, but it can also be traced back through deliberate efforts to curtail black literacy. In her influential essay 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' (1983) Alice Walker asks:

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[47] Gilbert and Gubar, pp. 50–51.
[48] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 50.
[49] Audre Lorde, 'Foreword', in *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*, ed. by Joanne M. Braxton and Andree Nicola McLaughlin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. x–xv (p. xi).

How was the creativity of the black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century, when for most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write[?][50]

Her answer lies in the clandestine modes of storytelling adopted by black women – storytelling practices designed to foster connection across generations. It is on the work of these literary mothers that she focuses her attention, seeking to satisfy her 'desperate need to know and assimilate the experiences of earlier black women writers.'[51] For Walker, then, the work of inheriting is calculated to fulfil a desperate need to gather 'up the historical and psychological threads of life [her] ancestors lived' – a process which makes her feel 'joy and strength and [her] own continuity.'[52] Bloch's dialectically useful inheritance is thus shown to be an exercise in community building, of, as Walker puts it, 'being *with* a great many people.'[53] Indeed Marjorie Pryse, editor of the critical anthology *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition* (1985), makes this connection explicit. In her introduction to the anthology she argues that efforts to recover the 'scrambled' literary history discussed by Lorde and Walker involve linking 'black women's biological heritage with their powers of naming each other as literary models.'[54] The act of being, as Pryse puts it, part of a 'community of inheritors,' is thus understood as a means of engaging with a community of people, living and deceased, who exist in what Faith Holseart has called 'the context of generations.'[55]

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[50] Alice Walker Part III, I.
[51] Alice Walker Part I, I.
[52] Alice Walker Part I, I.
[53] Alice Walker Part I, I. Emphasis in original.
[54] Marjorie Pryse, 'Introduction: Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and the "Ancient Power" of Black Women', in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, ed. by Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 1–22 (p. 2).
[55] Pryse, p. 5; Faith Holseart in Gumbs, Martens, and Williams, p. i.

While the language of mothering is not common in SF criticism as a whole, those critics who address women's literary production within the genre often rely upon precisely this kind of maternal imagery. Indeed, Jane Donawerth has argued that female SF authors actively frame 'themselves as Frankenstein's daughters,' and thus as Mary Shelley's 'literary offspring.'[56] There is also an assumption, within many studies of the genre, that not only are early women writers usefully thought of as mothers, but that there are, as Gilbert and Gubar might put it, 'too few' of them.[57] This is an argument which Gubar herself puts forward in an article addressing 'the conventions of women's science fiction.'[58] Here, she draws attention to the popularity of anthologies of feminist SF during the 1970s, from Pamela Sargent's *Women of Wonder* series (1974-1995) to Vonda N. McIntyre's *Aurora: Beyond Equality* (1976). Gubar suggests that feminist SF authors and editors working during this period were actively attempting to establish the genre as a field in its own right. This involved bringing together feminist SF writers, publishing their work and putting them in conversation with one another. Rosy Mack, in her study of the Women's Press' SF list, describes this as a process of 'cohering' the genre.[59] However, this effort also involved publishers looking back into the history of women's writing for figures who could serve as literary ancestors. Gubar argues that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) 'set up an axis around which SF by women revolves' while, in a recent interview with Mack, LeFanu has stated: 'It just seems to me hugely important that we should salvage people from the past […] the more you do, the more that encourages young women because they see that it can be done.'[60] Here, then, the notion that literary inheritance

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[56] Jane Donawerth, *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. xviii.
[57] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 51.
[58] Susan Gubar, 'C.L. Moore and the Conventions of Women's Science Fiction (C.L. Moore et Les Conventions de La Science-Fiction Féminine)', *Science Fiction Studies*, 7.1 (1980), 16–27 (p. 16).
[59] Rosy Mack, 'The Women's Press: Printing Feminist Culture' (University of Texas, 2022).
[60] LeFanu cited in Mack.

is significant, and that it is tied to the project of community building across generations, is shown to be an explicit concern for the creators and curators of SF.

What the conversation surrounding feminist SF demonstrates is the utility of thinking about inheritance, in particular literary inheritance, in terms of mother/child relations. Such a framing facilitates the conception of historical time as populated, in the sense theorized by Bloch, as well as presenting the creation and curation of literary texts as a form of care work. Moreover, the fact that the canon, particularly the SF canon, is so dominated by white, male voices is here made visible. To speak in terms of daughters and mothers is one way of acknowledging the fact that, for example, 'in 1974 the female membership of the Science Fiction Writers of America was 18 percent.'[61] Joanna Russ, in her study of women's literary production *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983) neatly articulates the importance of considering an author's gender in discussions of literary inheritance. She writes:

> Models as guides to action and as indications of possibility are important to all artists – indeed to all people – but to aspiring women artists they are doubly valuable. In the face of continual and massive discouragement, women need models not only to see in what ways the literary imagination has [...] been at work on the fact of being female, but also as assurances that they can produce art without inevitably being second-rate or running mad or doing without love.[62]

While one does not, as Russ indicates, 'find the absolute prohibition on the writing of women *qua* women that has (for example) buried so much of the poetic and rhetorical tradition of black

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[61] Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983), p. 119.
[62] Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, p. 106.

slave America,' there have clearly been efforts to, as she puts it, 'suppress women's writing' – a point all the more keenly felt when one considers the doubled prohibition faced by black women writers.[63] The significance of gender to discussions of literary inheritance does not, however, justify an uncritical adoption of the language of literary maternity. In this chapter I follow Lewis, both in her family abolitionism, which necessitates a reconceptualisation of motherhood, and in her contention that 'there can be no utopian thought on reproduction that does not involve uncoupling gestation from the gender binary.'[64] When I write of literary mothers, then, my focus is on the act of mothering as a non-gender-specific mode of care between people of different generations. This is an understanding of mothering in which, as Loretta J. Ross puts it, 'the concept of "mother" is less a gendered identity than a transformative, liberating practice irrespective of historically determinist rigidities.'[65] S. Diane Bogus has articulated this concept in relation to what she calls the 'mom de plume.'[66] This moniker serves to connect Bogus' role as 'a second lady parent' to her lover's child with her creation of 'prosaic babies,' while simultaneously linking her to her own mother, suggesting that they are 'women of like feather.'[67] The mom de plume is, therefore, a mother who cares for children and creates literary offspring, who is 'holding hands with the future,' to use brown's term, in a manner which connects her to her own ancestry.[68] By adopting this term I mean to show that although motherhood, like childhood, has been used to reinforce the logics of reproductive futurity, the family and imperialist progress, such an association is not inevitable.

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[63] Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, p. 5. Emphasis in original.
[64] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 22.
[65] Loretta J. Ross, 'Preface', in *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), pp. xiii–xviii (p. xviii).
[66] S. Diane Bogus, 'Mom de Plume', *Lesbian Tide*, 7.3 (1977), 24–25 (p. 24).
[67] Bogus, p. 25.
[68] brown in Gumbs, Martens, and Williams, p. i.

My understanding of motherhood is thus aligned with Dana Ward's non-gender-specific conception of what he calls 'the many-gendered mothers of my heart' – a category which includes all of the writers and artists who have influenced him.[69] By conceptualising motherhood as many-gendered and closely tied to cultural production and curation, Ward distances the figure of the mother from Bloch's primordial maternal presence who exists outside of history. Leaving this ahistorical and essentialised form of maternity behind, Ward's vision of a poly-maternal, literary inheritance is instead aligned with the consciously unnatural motherhood theorised by Haraway. In 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985) Haraway suggests that Malinche, 'mother of the mestizo "bastard" race of the new world, master of language, and mistress of Cortés,' is a more appropriate maternal figure for the cyborg than Eve, 'the innocent and all-powerful Mother.'[70] Addressing the mother worship found in feminist thought of the 1970s and 1980s, Haraway argues that to critique patriarchy only to naturalise and reify the Mother in the father's place is simply to replicate the oppressive power structures of 'legitimate heterosexuality.'[71] In much the same way that her conception of the cyborg as an 'illegitimate offspring' involves a rejection of origins, Haraway's reading of Malinche as a cyborg mother is predicated on the fact that Malinche 'never possessed the original language, never told the original story [...] and so cannot base identity on a myth or a fall from innocence.'[72] The cyborg is thus one who refuses all 'right to natural names, mother's or father's.'[73] And yet this is not to imply that Haraway's cyborg is not, as she puts it 'needy for connection.'[74] The cyborg's distrust of original innocence is coupled with a desire for community. Haraway identifies Audre Lorde's conception of the 'sister outsider,' and the coalitional identity that is 'women

[69] Dana Ward, 'A Kentucky of Mothers', *PEN America*, 2014 <https://pen.org/a-kentucky-of-mothers/> [accessed 8 February 2021].
[70] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 175.
[71] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 175.
[72] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, pp. 151 and 175.
[73] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 175.
[74] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 151.

of colour,' as cyborg constructions.[75] Rather than severing all connections, then, Haraway's cyborg serves to denaturalise familial relations after the manner of thinkers such as Cherríe Moraga, who writes of the contributors to the women of colour feminist anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981): 'We are not so much a "natural" affinity group, as women who have come together out of political necessity.'[76] The revolutionary potential of mothering is here shown to lie in the ability of cyborg mothers to make visible the fact that literary lines of inheritance are not innate. Rather, they must be forged by those 'daughters of too few mothers' who seek to actively position themselves as the children of as yet unknown or obscured ancestral lines.[77]

Utopian, family abolitionist mothering is frequently conducted by those who have been, and continue to be, excluded from 'motherhood' as a legitimised category.[78] Where the cis, white, able bodied, heterosexual mother and child may have an 'unquestionable' value, as Lee Edelman argues, this is not the case for the many queer, working, black mothers and mothers of colour who, as Gumbs puts it, conduct 'the labor of mothering without the name mother.'[79] Spillers suggests that one significant aspect of enslavement and its legacies was that enslaved people were 'ungendered' and subject to '*kinlessness.*'[80] She writes:

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[75] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 176; For a fuller articulation of Lorde's theory see Lorde, *Sister Outsider*.

[76] Cherríe Moraga, 'Refugees of a World on Fire: Foreword to the Second Edition', in *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color*, ed. by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 2nd edition (Latham, NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), pp. v–viii (p. viii).

[77] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 50.

[78] For a discussion of 'mothering against motherhood' see Lewis, 'Mothering Against the World'.

[79] Edelman, p. 2; Gumbs, 'M/Other Ourselves: A Black Queer Feminist Genealogy for Radical Mothering', p. 29.

[80] Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, pp. 207 and 217. Emphasis in original.

The fact that the enslaved person's access to the issue of his/her own body is not entirely clear in this historic period throws in crisis all aspects of the blood relations, as captors apparently felt no obligation to acknowledge them.[81]

For black women, then, 'the "reproduction of mothering" [...] carries few of the benefits of a *patriarchalized* female gender.'[82] This is the reality which Cathy Cohen argues is often obscured within those queer political projects centred around white experience. When Queer Nation describe 'procreation' as 'the main dividing line' between the oppressed and the oppressors, Cohen notes that such a line is reliant upon the erasure of 'the lives of women – in particular women of color – on welfare, who may fit into the category of heterosexual, but whose sexual choices are not perceived as normal, moral, or worthy of state support.'[83] The historical and continuing exclusion of women of colour from the 'harmony of legitimate heterosexuality' renders the project of family abolition somewhat suspect.[84] Indeed, writing in the black feminist anthology *Home Girls* (1983), Barbara Smith notes that 'unlike some white feminists who have questioned, and at times rightfully rejected, the white patriarchal family, we want very much to retain our blood connections without sacrificing ourselves to rigid and demeaning sex roles.'[85] It is, therefore, a family abolition which is responsive to the desire to retain those 'blood connections' which have not been recognised within the white-centric institution of the family that I work to theorise here.[86] As Helen Hester has argued:

[81] Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, p. 217.
[82] Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, p. 216. Emphasis in original.
[83] Cohen, p. 442.
[84] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 175.
[85] Barbara Smith, 'Introduction', in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. by Barbara Smith (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp. xxi–liii (p. liii).
[86] Smith, p. liii.

The idea that families hospitable to otherness and synthesized across differences match or exceed those built on genetic coincidence alone – heads in the right direction, so long as we add the explicit caveat that so-called "blood relations" can *themselves* become xenofamilial through an ongoing orientation towards practical solidarity.[87]

By including this caveat one can, as O'Brien argues, 'distinguish the communist movement to abolish the family as a positive supersession, from the negative undermining of the proletarian family,' analysed by Spillers.[88] To retain the language of literary mothering while committing to the project of family abolition is my response to this conflicted history of the family as a site of both 'care and violent domination.'[89] In their dedication to *This Bridge Called My Back*, Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa write: 'For all our mothers, for the obedience and rebellion they taught us.'[90] It is with both obedience and rebellion – a desire to inherit the latent utopian potential of one's ancestry while defying its naturalisation – that I address the literary mothers of SF.

Deliberate Acts of Inheritance

This black feminist framework undergirds Kristie Dotson's theorisation of the radical potential of 'deliberate acts of inheritance.'[91] In an article which speaks directly to attempts to exclude black women from conversations surrounding legacy and heritage, Dotson discusses how 'black women's work and contributions are often subject to a number of practices of unknowing

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[87] Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), p. 65. Emphasis in original. .
[88] O'Brien, p. 369.
[89] O'Brien, p. 366.
[90] Moraga and Anzaldúa in *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color*, ed. by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 2nd edition (Latham, NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), p. i.
[91] Dotson, p. 38.

that serve to render [their] contributions invisible.'[92] Against these 'ignorance producing practices' she sets the work of the black, feminist philosopher, whose goal is '*to demonstrate radical love for black people by performing acts of inheritance of theoretical production created and maintained by black peoples*.'[93] For Dotson, inheritance does not merely involve taking on the already formulated mantle of an established tradition. This is not the 'time of inheritance' which Halberstam associates with the maintenance of familial and national stability.[94] Rather, in Dotson's formulation, inheriting involves 'the activity of stripping, shifting, and re-creating black cultural production.'[95] She writes:

> I do not take the appreciation of acts of inheritance to be something as simple as "one's work being read after one's death" or "one's work being taken seriously while one is alive." Rather, I understand acts of inheritance to concern serving our people by *actively* existing in a cultural and social life larger than ourselves, where our labor continues projects started before us and, hopefully, ending when such labor is no longer needed.[96]

This 'cultural and social life larger than ourselves' provides the 'context of generations' in Dotson's theorisation of black, feminist knowledge production.[97] Meanwhile, the emphasis that she places on the need to continue projects begun in the past while simultaneously leaving a legacy for those yet to come connects her work to Bloch's theory of utopian action which 'claims as well as leaves a cultural inheritance.'[98]

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[92] Dotson, p. 39.
[93] Dotson, pp. 39 and 38. Emphasis in original.
[94] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 5.
[95] Dotson, p. 40.
[96] Dotson, p. 42. Emphasis in original.
[97] Dotson, p. 42; Faith Holseart in Gumbs, Martens, and Williams, p. i.
[98] Bloch, I, p. 386.

I argue that Dotson's emphasis on the future orientation of inheritance connects her work both to childhood and to SF. The fact that inheritances are left as well as claimed demonstrates the connection between revolutionary mothering and the act of being a child of past mothers. Such a connection speaks, in turn, to the 'calls for mothers and children to join together in struggle against patriarchal exploitation,' which Lewis locates in the science-fictional thought of Shulamith Firestone, who sees attempts to insulate childhood from adulthood as a significant element of capitalist exploitation.[99] In Dotson's thought, the potential for mother/child alliances is articulated most clearly in her discussion of the work of Bernice Johnson Reagon. In her contribution to *Home Girls*, Johnson Reagon writes: 'The thing that must survive you is not just the record of your practice, but the principles that are the basis of your practice.'[100] Here, the work of the black feminist creator is to understand the process of creation and make that process available to future inheritors. Moreover, as Dotson notes, 'Johnson Reagon identifies not only what one should expect to leave of themselves and their work, but also what one should expect to receive.'[101] This is what Johnson Reagon calls 'throwing ourselves into the future,' which Dotson argues 'requires one to trust that our ancestors have indeed thrown their theoretical production [...] into this century, as we, by engaging in black theoretical production and beyond, throw ourselves into future centuries.'[102] Again one can see Bloch's utopian process of both claiming and leaving an inheritance here. However, Johnson Reagon's formulation also clarifies the connection between this mode of inheritance and a particularly science-fictional conception of time. To throw oneself in the future is to enter the domain of SF and it is my contention that it is no coincidence that Johnson Reagon has since gone on to collaborate with her daughter, Toshi Reagon, in composing the

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[99] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 62.
[100] Bernice Johnson Reagon, 'Coalition Politics: Turning the Century', in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. by Barbara Smith (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp. 343–56 (p. 366).
[101] Dotson, p. 40.
[102] Johnson Reagon, p. 365; Dotson, p. 40.

opera: *Octavia E. Butler's Parable of the Sower* (2015). I suggest that to take seriously the idea of throwing oneself into the future is to engage in utopian speculation and it is to this speculation as it manifests within SF texts and the communities who create them that I now turn my attention.

Family Abolition in Utopia – *Motherlines* (1978)

Suzy McKee Charnas' Holdfast Chronicles provide a useful model for discussing inheritance, the family and their (often conflicting) positions within queer utopianism. In the first instalment of these chronicles *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) Charnas presents a society which revolves around 'the struggle between generations of males […] while mothers and daughters figure only as labor, brood mares and objects of aggression.'[103] The world of the Holdfast is populated by those who survived a nuclear holocaust in bunkers. The men who rule this world are the most privileged members of white society who have, in the ensuing centuries of depravation, created a mythos in which women are reduced to fems – slaves forced to labour for the men and gestate their young – while the rest of society revolves around the conflict between Father and Son thought to lie at the heart of what they remember of Christianity. In this understanding of a religion founded on a father's killing of his son, codified by the Holdfasters in 'the Law of Generations,' it is understood that 'old and young were natural enemies.'[104] Their culture is thus entirely predicated on severing intergenerational ties. Fems do not know their parents and are essentially left to raise themselves in 'wide, deep pits,' where they live 'bitter with hunger and struggles against others just as hungry.'[105] Meanwhile, men

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[103] Suzy McKee Charnas, 'A Woman Appeared', in *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Marleen S. Barr (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1981), pp. 103–8 (p. 104).

[104] Suzy McKee Charnas, 'Walk to the End of the World', in *Walk to the End of the World and Motherlines* (London: The Women's Press, 1974), pp. 1–215 (p. 43).

[105] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 251.

are specifically denied knowledge of their parentage as 'to know your father's identity would be to feel, however far off, the chill wind of death.'[106] Charnas' novel follows the life of the only man who knows his father's identity and is thus, seemingly necessarily, fated to find and kill him. The only imaginable relation between parent and child here is one of rivalry in which the parent (father) clings to power, fearing the day when the child (son) will rise up and defeat him.

It is my contention that Charnas' novel serves as a critique, not only of patriarchal control understood as the suppression of women, but specifically of a patriarchal model of inheritance characterised by what Bloom might call 'the anxiety of influence.'[107] The men of the Holdfast hold tight to their status as, to use Stryker's phrase, the 'lords of creation.'[108] They reject any acknowledgement, or indeed knowledge of, their own createdness and frame the position of child or inheritor as one of intrinsic weakness. Further, Charnas' focus on Alldera's oppression, rather than that of the young men who form a male underclass and, at the novel's close, rise up against the older generation, suggests that a revaluation of youth is not sufficient to revolutionise this system. Rather than replacing one oppressive generation with another, Charnas suggests that an entirely new model of kinship and inheritance is required to create a more utopian community. This revolution in kinship can, I argue, be usefully connected to the project of family abolition which O'Brien describes as 'the complete, almost inconceivable transformation of day-to-day life.'[109] It is just such a transformation that I argue Alldera finds in Charnas' second Holdfast novel, *Motherlines* (1978). Here, having walked away from the world she knew, Alldera, on the brink of death, is rescued by a band of 'Riding Women.'[110]

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[106] Charnas, 'Walk to the End of the World', p. 24.
[107] Bloom, p. xxii.
[108] Stryker, p. 240.
[109] O'Brien, p. 361.
[110] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 247.

These women refuse the fear of the father – or in Bloom's terms, of the earlier, older Author – in favour of what they call 'Motherlines,' that is living lines of ancestry which throughout the course of the chronicles are questioned, intervened in and, potentially, abolished.[111]

Where the people of the Holdfast are descended from those who could afford to shelter in nuclear bunkers, the Riding Women's ancestors were subjects in medical experiments. Nenisi Conor, one of the Women, offers Alldera the following explanation:

> The lab men didn't want to have to work with all the traits of both a male and a female parent, so they fixed the women to make seed with a double set of traits. That way their offspring were daughters just like their mothers, and fertile.'[112]

Nenisi describes how 'the daughters got together and figured out how to use the men's information,' and thus turned the lab men out and sheltered in the labs themselves until they could emerge, along with their horses, to live their current lives on the plains. In contrast to the men of the Holdfast then, the Riding Women are continually made aware of their relation to one another – of the 'whole strings of blood relations called Motherlines,' which mean that there are 'women who looked like older and younger versions of each other,' who 'were mothers and daughters, sisters and the daughters of sisters.'[113] Alldera admires and envies the relations made possible by these Motherlines. Looking at one woman standing with her 'blood

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[111] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 263; The Riding Women's Motherlines are sustained by the women's relationships with their horses, which include mating rituals whereby horse semen is used to stimulate the women's parthenogenetic reproduction. The inclusion of non-human animals within the motherlines necessarily complicates what is meant by blood relations in this society. There has yet to be a dedicated study of the complex ethical questions raised by these more-than-human kinship relations in Charnas' writing but for a relevant analysis of comparable questions in the writing of Octavia Butler see Elyce Rae Helford, '"Would You Really Rather Die Than Bear My Young?": The Construction of Gender, Race, and Species in Octavia E. Butler's "Bloodchild." (Black Women's Culture Issue)', 1994 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3041998>.
[112] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 273.
[113] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 263.

mother,' who exactly resembles her, Alldera thinks to herself: 'Imagine, being so easy and happy with a grown woman who had suckled you and with whom your relations stretched back through your entire life[!].'[114] She adds: 'It was wonderful to bask on the edge of the ease the women had with each other, the rich connectedness.'[115] Charnas has here created, not merely a world without men, but a world without the intergenerational power struggles which characterise the patriarchal society of the Holdfast. The society of the Riding Women is structured around the notion of continuity between one generation and the next. Examining them through the eyes of an outsider, Alldera observes that 'they were like some woven design in which each broad, clear thread could be traced in the image of each Motherline, repeated from individual to individual and from generation to generation.'[116] As Nenisi puts it: 'My ancestor, a woman almost exactly like me, stepped out of the lab and lived, and now though she's generations dead there are many of us Conors.'[117] The first Conor, a black woman experimented on by white men and the white 'lab women, who had learned to think like men,' finds new life in the survival of her descendants.[118] Rather than deadly rivalry, intergenerational relations passed through Motherlines are characterised by care, honour and a dedication to building on the stories of the women who went before.

It would be easy to naturalise this 'woven design,' marked by continuity between generations, into a narrative of biological determinism in which the 'xenofamilial' kinship ties theorised by Hester are prohibited.[119] Transforming rivalrous fear of the Father into unqualified adoration of the Mother does not constitute a rejection of the model of reproductive futurity and heteronormative conservatism upon which such determinate lines of inheritance are

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[114] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 264.
[115] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 264.
[116] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 269.
[117] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 275.
[118] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 272.
[119] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 269; Hester, p. 65.

predicated. The legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'eugenic feminism' can be felt in the genetically identical Motherlines of the Riding Women.[120] Within their society it is one's genetic similarity to one's ancestors that defines one's identity. Edelman argues that 'the future,' which within the logic of reproductive futurism takes the form of the Child, in fact 'marks the impossible place of an Imaginary past,' and these cloned women appear to literalise this connection.[121] When a new child is born to the Riding Women she does not bring strange novelty, but rather acts as a repetition of the past. This repetition serves not only to ossify the Riding Women's society, but to exclude anyone who deviates from these pre-established genetic patterns. When faced with the 'woven design' of 'each Motherline, repeated from individual to individual and from generation to generation,' Alldera recoils.[122] From her perspective, this is an explicitly exclusionary image. Charnas describes how 'she shook her head and blinked, frightened by this vision and the distance it put between herself and the women.'[123] As a fem, Alldera is not considered to be a woman, as to be a woman is to be part of a Motherline. Family is for her something which she only exists outside of, and indeed the Riding Women frequently use kinlessness as a marker of non-belonging. Nenisi, for example, says of the free fems who have escaped from the Holdfast that 'their beginnings and ours differ,' while Sheel, who is Alldera's main antagonist among the Riding Women, refuses to accept Alldera's child into their camp.[124] She states: 'A fem's child could never be a Riding Woman for a dozen reasons,' chief among them that 'the child will have no kin[!].'[125] To flee the intergenerational conflict of the Holdfast is not sufficient, then, to escape from the queerphobic, racist logic whereby everything external to the family – understood as a static, biologically determined group – is rendered dangerous. The Motherlines themselves might be

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[120] Nadkarni, p. 1.
[121] Edelman, p. 10.
[122] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 269.
[123] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 269.
[124] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 272.
[125] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 240.

woven from a practice of mutual care across generations, but the fems are excluded from this design. They have no kin.

This understanding of the family as a fixed state to be policed is directly dramatised in *Motherlines*. Sheel's first encounter with Alldera involves her attacking the pregnant fem as part of a border patrol force. She guards the borders of her nation in the same way that she guards the perimeter of her family – by defining Alldera and the fems as an outside, whose alterity depends upon their biological ancestry. In this way, Sheel prefigures the 'homonationalism' whose rise, Jasbir Puar has argued, has characterised the beginning of the twenty first century. [126] Puar argues that 'homonationalist' queer subjects have moved 'from being figures of death (i.e., the aids epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families)' – an incorporation into the nation-state entirely 'contingent upon ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity.'[127] The fact that the Riding Women are part of a lesbian utopia is thus shown to be no barrier to their adoption of an exclusionary, nationalist politics. Sheel's resistance to any efforts to include the fems within the web of Motherlines speaks to her conservatism. She seeks to guard against any threat to 'familial and national stability' in a manner typical to those intent on reinforcing 'the time of inheritance.'[128]

However, this is not to say that Sheel's view of the family is the only one upheld within the Riding Women's community. Indeed, unlike the society of Herland which is characterised by a cultivated homogeneity, the various camps of Riding Women, and the individual women within those camps, are far from united. When Sheel appeals to the supposedly shameful

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[126] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 1.
[127] Puar, p. xii.
[128] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 5.

ancestry of the fems she is firmly denounced. One of her kinswomen says to her: 'Women say that when you speak of fems you talk like a woman with no kin.'[129] Here, Sheel's insistence on the family as an exclusive institution designed to keep outsiders out is framed as demonstrative of her misunderstanding of the very concept of kinship. As penance for her animosity towards Alldera she is made to join with her as a 'sharemother' to her child and *The Furies* (1994), the third book in the Holdfast series, is dedicated to Sheel's re-evaluation of the fems as she travels with them back to the Holdfast.[130] In *Motherlines*, meanwhile, Charnas tells the story of Alldera's intervention into, and revolutionising of, the world of the Riding Women. While Sheel claims that Alldera's child will 'have no kin' as she does not have a Motherline, being the product of rape by a Holdfaster man, Nenisi responds: 'she'll have all the kin she needs.'[131] The Riding Women's commitment to being the sharemothers to this child demonstrates the possibility of forging new kinship ties rather than simply accepting those one is born with.

Throughout the novel Charnas demonstrates her commitment to making the family strange. This is evident in the radically collaborative mode of gestation employed during Alldera's pregnancy. Alldera, who suckles at the women's breasts in a drug infused sleep for most of her pregnancy, awakens into consciousness to experience the birth of her child – an experience in which she is entirely surrounded by women: 'People closed around her, patting her, whispering encouragement, holding her hands firmly. Her feet were gripped and braced against the backs of people seated on the heap of bedding.'[132] Alldera experiences this coming together as a powerful expression of collective love: 'She could not gather strength to reach out to any of them or answer in words, but she thought fiercely each time one of them

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[129] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 239.
[130] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 240.
[131] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 240.
[132] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 243.

approached her, I love you forever for this.'[133] This sharing of breast milk and sweat, along with the collaboration involved in their gestational labour, is precisely the kind of family abolitionist care I have previously connected to vampirism and the variously symbiotic relations which vampires encourage. It is also evocative of the 'crazy vision of affect-communism' which Lewis has identified in various speculative, utopian texts.[134] Writing of Ari Aster's film *Midsommar* (2019) – a tale of a Swedish 'bio-conservative cult' – Lewis notes:

> No one is an exclusive mother, father, sister, or brother; and every panic attack, fiery death, and even *orgasm* is heaved, embodied, and screamed, not just by the individual it is "happening to," but by a whole collectivity gathered around to share in the experience.[135]

As Lewis goes on to discuss, this vision of what Aster calls 'radical reciprocity' is particularly appealing to those 'refugees from the nuclear family,' who have experienced familial kinship only as alienation and exclusion.[136] Alldera is thus fully enclosed into the web of Motherlines as the women 'trampl[e] all over each other trying to take the best care of her that any baby of this camp has ever had.'[137]

This inclusion of Alldera does not, however, necessarily constitute an abolition of the family as Sheel understands it. The reason for Alldera's inclusion is that, as Nenisi points out, unlike the other free fems, who never arrived with viable pregnancies: 'You brought us a live

[133] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 244.
[134] Sophie Lewis, 'The Satanic Death-Cult Is Real', *Commune*, 2019 <https://communemag.com/the-satanic-death-cult-is-real/> [accessed 2 September 2020].
[135] Lewis, 'The Satanic Death-Cult Is Real'.
[136] Lewis, 'The Satanic Death-Cult Is Real'.
[137] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 247.

child […] that makes you kin to us.'[138] The women believe Alldera's child may share this ability to reproduce parthenogenetically as, as Nenisi explains to Alldera:

> We fed you the milk of our breasts and the food chewed in our mouths, the food of Motherlines that we feed our babies. We fed your child, through your blood while she was still in your womb. We think she's become like our own children.[139]

The inclusion of Alldera into the community of Riding Women does not, within this reading, revolutionise their kinship making practices. Rather, they have simply decided to include her child, which they feed while it is still in her womb, within their understanding of exclusionary blood relations. Such collaborative birthing does provide the family abolitionist function of 'debunking the dyadic model' of heterosexual reproduction, to use Lewis' phrasing.[140] However, as Alldera is all too aware, the family as an institution remains intact. Alldera observes how Nenisi is 'blind to how every word she spoke folded in Alldera's child but shut out Alldera herself.'[141] She states: 'I'm no more like you than [the] others fems are' – fems who all the Riding Women hold in disdain.[142] Like Pele, a member of the cult in *Midsommar* who, as Lewis notes, 'misjudges [the protagonist, Dani's] desire radically when he tries to sell her on the totalitarian life of Hårga by saying that what it offers is "real family",' Alldera finds *family* a frightening concept.[143] Just as 'the mere mention of the word "family" launches Dani into a panic attack,' so Alldera recoils when Nenisi tells her: 'You have family here': 'Family, kindred; suddenly Alldera was afraid.'[144] Simply folding Alldera into the pattern is not then,

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[138] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 274.
[139] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 275.
[140] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 23.
[141] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 275.
[142] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 275.
[143] Lewis, 'The Satanic Death-Cult Is Real'.
[144] Lewis, 'The Satanic Death-Cult Is Real'; Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 247.

sufficient, to challenge the exclusionary model of familial unity presented by Sheel. Rather, it is my contention that only when Alldera's position as a child is recognised that Charnas is truly able to imagine 'a mode of gestation' which might, as Lewis has argued, 'itself contribute[s] to family abolition.'[145]

Alldera is continually placed in the position of a child while she is with the Riding Women. When she first arrives at the camp she considers herself to be 'something of a child [...] carried along while everyone else rode.'[146] This position is not, however, one which associates her with an unchanging ignorance or weakness. Rather, it is one from which learning is made possible. Nenisi apologises to Alldera that her lessons about the history of the Riding Women are more suited to children. As she puts it: 'I'm used to talking about this with young girls just out of the pack. I hope it doesn't sound childish to you.'[147] Yet, Alldera's proximity to the child-pack in fact allows her to learn and grow. While the Riding Women 'change very little,' Alldera is full of the relentless curiosity of the utopian child.[148] It is not her child – the possible bearer of a new Motherline – who brings revolutionary change to the Holdfast. Rather, it is Alldera herself who, after much hardship, allies with the free fems and determines to return to free those left in captivity. This radical action is made possible by, to use Nenisi's phrasing, 'the way you see in fresh ways the things that are old to me.'[149] The fact that the world of the Riding Women is so strange and new to Alldera gives her access to Bloch's 'light of youth [...] which can even find affinities in ancient events, as if they were not ancient at all.'[150] Once again, the perspective of the curious child is shown to be a utopian one, which denaturalises accepted norms and opens the way for radical transformation.

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[145] Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 27.
[146] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 253.
[147] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 273.
[148] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 274.
[149] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 279.
[150] Bloch, I, p. 121.

Where the Riding Women have used their centuries of tradition to establish a fixed and exclusive society, Alldera sees in their connectedness the possibility for new relations outside of the biologically determined family. Further, she is able to use the example of the Motherlines to begin forming her own tradition. Her motivation for creating radical change in the future is based on the fact that she is the inheritor, or child, of a traumatic, collective past – that of the enslavement of the fems. Like many peoples who have been subjected to slavery, colonisation or forced migration, Alldera does not have knowledge of her own line of ancestry. However, despite this traumatic absence she still insists on claiming her position as the child of fems. Asked to compose a 'self-song' she deviates from the women's tradition of telling tales of individual glory and adventure by singing of her people's struggle:

I don't look like anyone here.

Where I come from there were many like me, sweating fear.

That's left behind, but I lived it.[151]

Here, Nenisi cuts Alldera off, telling her: 'No, that's not the idea at all. That song is all about fems, not about yourself.'[152] And yet, Alldera is determined to maintain this connection. Where Nenisi sees Alldera's life as starting when she met the Riding Women – stating: 'To me you are still something of a child. While you drifted in healing sleep, you sucked milk from me like a baby' – Alldera claims her descendance from the fems as well.[153] As she puts it: 'I wasn't wakened from a nightmare, you know […] The first life was real too. It's as you say – like being born twice.'[154] Alldera is thus doubly a child, a fact which allows her to introduce novelty

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[151] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 282.
[152] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 282.
[153] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 283.
[154] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 283.

into the Riding Women's camps while at the same time claiming a dialectically useful inheritance from the world she left behind. In this way she demonstrates that the project of family abolition does not solely involve novelty and breaking away from those 'blood connections' which, as Smith has argued, have often provided sustenance and community for oppressed peoples.[155] Indeed, it is precisely by naming herself as a child of two different traditions, and thus seemingly multiplying the familial bonds she exists within, that Alldera is able to defy the exclusive, essentialist logic of *the family*. Alldera does not run from the family. Instead, she takes agency over her position in it and thus explodes it from within. *Motherlines* ends with Alldera leaving the lands of the Riding Women to wage a revolutionary war against the Holdfast. On her departure she describes herself as being both 'grieved and […] comforted' by the women she sees around her and, although she remains determined to leave, she notes that her child 'Sorrel was not the only one whose world has been gladdened with kindred' in this land.[156] As O'Brien notes 'to abolish is not the same as to destroy' and what I suggest *Motherlines* offers is a mode of family abolition which 'conveys a simultaneous preservation and destruction.'[157]

In Search of Science-Fictional Mothers

Charnas' concern with the utopian potential of inheritance can be observed in her critical, as well as creative, writing. In her essay 'A Woman Appeared' (1981), in which she discusses the process of writing the first two instalments of the Holdfast Chronicles, Charnas notes that:

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[155] Smith, p. liii.
[156] Charnas, 'Motherlines', p. 436.
[157] O'Brien, p. 361.

> There were literary models for my men, who had begun as easily recognizable stock
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> figures […] But none of the females in the war stories, Westerns, or tales of exploration
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> and danger that I knew, helped me with Alldera. I had never read about a woman like
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> her in these sorts of books.[158]

Charnas does not even mention SF here, as if she assumes that a genre so heavily dominated by male voices would have no inspiration to offer her. In order to correct this erasure, and connect herself to a feminist tradition in which it was possible 'to make Alldera up,' Charnas draws 'not from literature but from life.'[159] As Sarah LeFanu has discussed, 'with no literary models for such a character' Charnas found that 'inventing her necessitated drawing on her own experience rather than other texts.'[160] The experiences Charnas is principally referring to are those of feminist organising. Charnas describes how she was 'reading books like Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* and *Sisterhood is Powerful* edited by Robin Morgan and participating in consciousness raising sessions with other women' while she wrote *Walk to the End of the World*.[161] Meanwhile, although she makes it clear that '*Motherlines* was [not] written by a collective,' her writing process is on an obvious continuum with her organising and she credits the success of her novels to the 'contributions of thought, time and encouragement' of friends who read her manuscripts.[162] This impression – of the significance of the feminist communities which Charnas discusses touching and being touched by – suggests a way of reading SF in which it is understood that, as Samuel Delany has argued, SF 'happens in response to the world: it does not merely exist in some timeless and innocent space of

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[158] Charnas, 'A Woman Appeared', p. 103.
[159] Charnas, 'A Woman Appeared', p. 106.
[160] LeFanu, p. 148.
[161] Charnas, 'A Woman Appeared', p. 104.
[162] Charnas, 'A Woman Appeared', p. 107.

abstract language possibilities.'[163] As Tom Moylan argues, 'the socio-political movements of the 1960s are the historical base' from which the 'critical utopianism' of SF of the 1970s emerged.[164] He notes that this was 'a time that produced a structure of oppositional, indeed utopian, feeling that not only led to the critical and creative fictions of which [he] wrote but also shaped the lives of many.'[165] Any genealogy of the genre, or study of how the genre reimagines the notion of genealogy, is thus shown to be insufficient if it focuses exclusively on the worlds within the texts. The creation of literary communities is not merely a metaphorical orientation, it is rather an embodied practice involving the many communities of writers and readers which make up what we think of as SF.

While Charnas felt that she was without literary models, the feminist SF communities in which she moved have provided a rich heritage for twenty first century SF creators to draw from. Joanna Russ' work, for example, has been taken up by the editors and contributors of the *Heiresses of Russ* (2011-16) lesbian SF anthology series. Jessa Crispin, meanwhile, in her introduction to a recent reissue of Russ' *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, explicitly emphasises the influence Russ has had on subsequent generations of writers. As Crispin puts it: 'We are all her daughters.'[166] However, it is my contention that it is in the legacy of Octavia Butler that the utopian potential of inheritance is made most clearly visible. Despite the emphasis placed on intergenerational community building within feminist SF of the 1970s it was an almost exclusively white field dominated by the voices of middle class and wealthy women. The genre's racist (ongoing) history is evident in the fact that the only work not produced by a white woman in the Women's Press SF series was Butler's *Kindred* (1988; first

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[163] Samuel R. Delany, *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), p. 188.

[164] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, p. 55.

[165] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, p. xii.

[166] Jessa Crispin, 'Foreword', in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, by Joanna Russ (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018), pp. xi–xvii (p. xvii).

published 1979) – the same series which reissued *Herland* and thus perpetuated the legacy of eugenic feminism within SF. Moreover, even those feminist SF visions which have anti-racist aims frequently participate in the culture of 'poaching,' as Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (Ojibway) puts it, the stories of Indigenous peoples in a manner which is only possible for white, settler authors 'because their governments outlawed Native languages and lifeways and punished those [Indigenous peoples] who resisted.'[167] In this context it is clear that inheritance itself is racialised and that efforts by white authors to claim the inheritance of women whose oppression they are themselves participating in do not have the radical potential Dotson associates with 'deliberate acts of inheritance.'[168] adrienne maree brown addresses this tension in a recent post titled 'a word for white people,' made on her website during the 2020 uprisings following the murder of George Floyd. brown writes:

> mary hooks has articulated a mandate for black people in this time – to avenge the suffering of our ancestors, earn the respect of future generations, and be willing to be transformed in the service of the work. the white people in my life must align with that mandate – put your lifetime in service of *undoing the work* of your ancestors, earning the respect of future generations, and being willing to be transformed in the service of the work.[169]

It is with this differential in mind that I return to the work of Octavia Butler and to that of the many deliberate inheritors who have taken her legacy forward. In this final section I examine

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[167] Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, 'Poaching: Is It Irresponsible to Appropriate Native American Stories?', *Utne Reader*, 62 (1994), 118–19 (p. 118).
[168] Dotson, p. 38.
[169] adrienne maree brown, 'A Word for White People, in Two Parts', *Adriennemareebrown.Net*, 2020 <http://adriennemareebrown.net/2020/06/28/a-word-for-white-people-in-two-parts/> [accessed 18 September 2020].

what it means to be a child of Butler – what utopian possibilities are opened up by becoming a part of her brood.

In *Octavia's Brood* editors brown and Walidah Imarisha present a selection of essays and stories written by activists. This collection is designed to respond to the work of Octavia Butler, using her writing as inspiration for what Imarisha calls 'visionary fiction' – 'a term we developed to distinguish sf that has relevance toward building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of sf, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power.'[170] By using Butler's work in this way they join a host of twenty first century activists and creators working to deliberately inherit Butler's legacy, including: Ayana Jamieson and Moya Bailey of the Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network, the musical collective The Sons of Kemet, and the various creators who have responded to Butler's statement 'there is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns.'[171] Indeed, *Octavia's Brood* is one of four short story collections which take Butler as an inspiration, including The Carl Brandon Society's *Blood Children* (2013), Marie Lecrivain's *Near Kin* (2014) and Nishi Shawl's *New Suns* (2019).[172]

In part, Butler's popularity among black and anti-racist activists can be ascribed to her position as the first black woman to come to prominence as an SF author. However, I argue that contemporary activists who consistently position themselves as Octavia's brood, her blood

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[170] Imarisha, p. 4.

[171] Octavia Butler in Gerry Canavan, '"There's Nothing New / Under The Sun, / But There Are New Suns": Recovering Octavia E. Butler's Lost Parables', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2014 <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/theres-nothing-new-sun-new-suns-recovering-octavia-e-butlers-lost-parables/> [accessed 10 February 2021]; The 'New Suns' Literary festival has taken place annually at the Barbican, London since 2018. For other work from Butler's deliberate inheritors see Ayana Jamieson and Moya Bailey, 'Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network', *OEB Legacy Network*, 2011 <http://octaviabutlerlegacy.com/> [accessed 27 March 2021]; Sons of Kemet, *The Long Night of Octavia E. Butler* (Salisbury: Naim Records, 2015).

[172] *Bloodchildren: Stories by the Octavia E. Butler Scholars*, ed. by The Carl Brandon Society (Seattle, WA: The Carl Brandon Society, 2013); *Near Kin: A Collection of Words and Art Inspired by Octavia Estelle Butler*, ed. by Marie Lecrivain (Los Angeles, CA: Sybaritic Press, 2014); *New Suns: Original Speculative Fiction by People of Color*, ed. by Nisi Shawl (Oxford: Rebellion Publishing Ltd, 2019).

children, are doing so in response to the politics of deliberate inheritance which her particular form of black, science-fictional feminism is attuned to and encourages. Imarisha, for example, makes a point to position Butler within the context of black feminism, writing:

> At a retreat for women writers in 1988, Octavia E. Butler said that she never wanted the title of being the solitary Black female sci-fi writer. She wanted to be one of many Black female sci-fi writers. She wanted to be one of thousands of folks writing themselves into the present and into the future.[173]

Again, it is clear here that Imarisha is not concerned with applying black feminism to SF, or SF to black feminism. Instead she wants to demonstrate their co-mingling – to show that Butler's desire to be surrounded by black female SF authors is fundamentally both a science-fictional desire and one motivated by black feminism. It is this black, feminist SF outlook which Imarisha and brown seek to inherit and thus carry forward.

In her introduction to the collection, Imarisha explicitly connects the work of creating SF to that of the gestational labourer. She writes: 'We want organizers and movement builders to be able to claim the vast space of possibility, to be birthing visionary stories.'[174] However, this birthing is concerned, not only with 'the vast space of possibility' identified with the future, but also with the past.[175] As well as birthing new child-stories, these writers are positioning themselves as children of Butler. Explaining this connection, Imarisha writes:

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[173] Imarisha, p. 5.
[174] Imarisha, p. 3.
[175] Imarisha, p. 3.

The title plays on Butler's three novel collection, *Lilith's Brood*, which is about adaptation as a necessity for survival. Changes will occur that we cannot even begin to imagine, and the next generation will be both utterly familiar and wholly alien to their parents. We believe this is what it means to carry on Butler's legacy of writing visionary fiction.[176]

What Imarisha is referring to when she says '*this* is what it means to carry on Butler's legacy' is not entirely clear.[177] Her referent may be the practice of embracing the change which comes with each successive generation, that of raising the next generation, or that of accepting one's own position as a member of that, simultaneously alien and familiar, next generation. This slippage is suggestive, as it connects the act of raising a child with that of being a child. It evokes the symbiotic interdependence of the vampiric communities imagined within Butler's fiction. However, Imarisha's phrasing extends that interdependence out of the fictional world of the SF text and into the communities of creators and readers which sustain those worlds. These chains of intergenerational relations are only accessible to those who accept both the strange novelty of the 'wholly alien' child and the fact that one's children will be 'utterly familiar,' precisely because they remind one of one's own position as a child.[178] brown and Imarisha can thus be thought of as taking up the kinmaking practices envisioned in Butler's fiction in their own activist and editorial practices. They work to become like Butler's alien children and cyborg mothers, thus expanding the scope of her SF worlds beyond the bounds of her texts. Further, by casting Butler in the role of Lilith rather than Eve, brown and Imarisha tap into the notion of cyborg motherhood against 'the innocent and all-powerful Mother,' as theorised by Haraway.[179] Haraway has argued that 'the post-[nuclear] holocaust reinvented

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[176] Imarisha, p. 3.
[177] Imarisha, p. 3. Emphasis in original.
[178] Imarisha, p. 3.
[179] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 176.

"families"' of Butler's SF act 'as tropes to guide "us" through the ravages of gender, class, imperialism, racism,' and the editors of *Octavia's Brood* put this guidance into action.[180]

While childhood is not explicitly named as a focus of this collection, the intimate relation between creating SF, gestation and becoming child-like is repeatedly gestured towards. For example, Bailey and Jamieson, of the Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network, write:

> We hope this is the first of many generations of Octavia's Brood, midwifed to life by such attentive editors. Butler could not wish for better evidence of her touch changing our literary and living landscapes. Play with these children, read these works, and find the children in you waiting to take root under the stars![181]

It is my contention that it is precisely because the work of editing is considered to be a form of midwifery, because both the stories and their creators are referred to as children, and because the reader is in turn encouraged to think of themself as a child, that the connection between 'literary and living landscapes' is made possible.[182] By adopting the practices of science-fictional inheritance modelled in Butler's writing, Butler's deliberate inheritors trouble the distinction between the literary and the lived.

This is a practice which Imarisha connects explicitly to their investment in and connection to the legacies of black feminism. She writes:

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[180] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 121.
[181] Moya Bailey and Ayana Jamieson in Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown, *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015), p. i.
[182] Bailey and Jamieson in Imarisha and brown, p. i.

For those of us from communities with historic collective trauma, we must understand that each of us is already sf walking around on two legs. Our ancestors dreamed us up and then bent reality to create us. For adrienne and myself, as two Black women, we think of our ancestors in chains dreaming about a day when their children's children's children would be free. They had no reason to believe this was likely, but together they dreamed of freedom, and they brought us into being. We are responsible for interpreting their regrets and realizing their imaginings.[183]

Here, Imarisha argues that oppressed peoples, and specifically black women, facilitate the connection between the worlds of SF and that of historical reality. She understands black women to embody SF, bringing it off the page and 'walking around on two legs.'[184] Again, I argue it is because of her appeal to childhood – in this instance her positioning of herself and brown as the 'children's children's children' of their enslaved ancestors – that this connection becomes thinkable.[185] Imarisha presents herself as a product of her ancestors' 'visionary legacy' – a child of their own science-fictional birthing practices – and sees this position as a responsibility to midwife more such visionary children into being.[186] While such a responsibility may risk falling back into the heteronormative logic of reproductive futurism, I argue that brown and Imarisha avoid this association. The principle of radical transformation which they draw from Butler's work – 'All that you touch you change, all that you change changes you' – means that their interest in childhood does not encourage the anti-queer reproduction of sameness which Edelman argues accompanies heteronormativity.[187] This responsibility to visionary legacy is not tied to the nuclear family, it is instead undertaken in

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[183] Imarisha, p. 5.
[184] Imarisha, p. 5.
[185] Imarisha, p. 5.
[186] Imarisha, p. 5.
[187] Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2007), p. 3.

the understanding that, as Spillers writes, kinship 'must be cultivated under actual material conditions.'[188]

The dual commitment, to both ancestors and heirs, voiced here in *Octavia's Brood* is evident throughout adrienne maree brown's writing. Along with *Octavia's Brood* she has authored and curated two other books: *Emergent Strategy* (2017) and *Pleasure Activism* (2019). In both of these works brown positions Butler as a primary influence. Writing of Butler, she stresses the connection she feels with this woman who 'decades before my birth, [...] was working these same edges in her heart, pendulum swinging between curiosity, possibility and hopelessness.'[189] Alongside her published books she is the co-author of 'The Octavia E. Butler Strategic Reader' (2010), the organiser of numerous workshops centred on Butler's work and the host of two podcasts inspired by and in conversation with Butler's writing: 'How to Survive the End of the World' (2017-Present) co-hosted with her sister, Autumn Brown and 'Octavia E. Butler's Parables' (2020-Present) co-hosted with Toshi Reagon. Butler's work undergirds and supports all of brown's diverse critical and creative activist projects. As she puts it: 'Octavia Butler […] is a bridge for many of us, between this world, and the narratives that pull us through to the next realm, or the parallel universe, or the future in which we are the protagonists.'[190] Here, brown advances the idea that Butler's role as a science-fictional ancestor is so powerful precisely because of the dual temporal pull she exerts on her readers in the present – between her own position in the past and the utopian 'future in which we are the protagonists.'[191] Butler's work is read as evocative, not only of the politics of deliberate, utopian inheritance discussed in this chapter, but also of the queer feminist temporalities

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[188] Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, p. 220.
[189] adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2017), p. 17.
[190] brown, *Emergent Strategy*, p. 163.
[191] brown, *Emergent Strategy*, p. 163.

theorised by Sam McBean. McBean argues that 'encountering feminism's multiplicities involves being open to an encounter with the past as that which still has life in the present,' and it is this sense of Butler's work, as still living and capable of gripping the present, that brown presents.[192]

Inheriting Butler's writing, as brown presents it, thus involves engaging with the dual function of inheritance. It involves both, as Gumbs puts it, 'boldly dressing ourselves in the legacy' of one's ancestors while simultaneously viewing oneself as what brown calls a 'future ancestor' of one's potential descendants.[193] This doubled mode of inheritance is not only evident in the symbiotic, gestational communities of Butler's writing, discussed in Chapter Four, it is also to be found in her own discussions of the political function of science-fictional dreaming. For example, in *Parable of the Sower* (1993) Butler writes that 'the destiny of Earthseed' – the religious community founded by her teenage protagonist, Lauren Olamina – 'is to take root among the stars.'[194] Here, the utopian dream which propels the novel involves a salvaging of space exploration from the complex web of colonial capital it has for so long been enmeshed in. The stars, which function as the goal towards which the Earthseed community is building, here represent the future, but a future which is rooted in past action and which is designed, in turn, to provide space for future rootings. In this way Butler posits a utopian function for futurity while refusing to advance a linear understanding of progressive time. This complex temporal positioning is reflected in the use to which Butler puts the titular parable. *Parable of the Sower* concludes with the fledgling Earthseed community arriving at the settlement which is to become their home. Olamina, who is also the novel's narrator, states: 'We buried our dead and we planted oak trees […] and decided to call this place Acorn.'[195]

[192] Sam McBean, *Feminism's Queer Temporalities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 2.
[193] Gumbs, 'Introduction', p. 9; brown, *Emergent Strategy*, p. 14.
[194] Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, p. 77.
[195] Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, p. 328.

The novel then concludes with the Bible verse which recounts the parable of the sower who 'went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down […] And others fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bore fruit an hundredfold.'[196] Here, the religion of Olamina's father, a Baptist minister, is shown to be the source of the new, science-fictional religion which she has founded. The seeds are provided by her ancestors, but the fruit is the stuff of the future. As brown and Gumbs write in 'The Octavia Butler Strategic Reader' one of the questions which Butler's fiction forces its readers to answer is: 'How can we raise our children recognizing they are totally separate/different/other beings[?].'[197] By using an SF novel to negotiate these differences – as well as the points of continuity which characterise intergenerational relations – Butler demonstrates the efficacy of adopting a science-fictional lens to consider these questions.

The concept of being 'rooted among the stars,' raised in Butler's writing, prompts a rethinking of plant growth as a model of kinship relations.[198] Many scholars of heritage draw on the image of the ancestral tree to explore intergenerational relations. For example, in Michelle Wright's theorisation of black time she writes: 'Our ancestral trees [...] can no longer be mistaken for a linear growth of branches stemming from one root; instead, we are presented with the tangled roots that theorists such as Paul Gilroy have defined as "rhizomatic".'[199] brown also takes up this image of tangled ancestral roots in her work in *Emergent Strategy*. She begins by arguing that 'there's no such thing as a blank canvas, an empty land or a new idea – but everywhere there is complex, ancient, fertile ground, full of potential.'[200] brown applies this

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[196] Luke, 8:5-8, Authorized King James Bible in Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, p. 329.

[197] adrienne maree brown and Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 'Octavia Butler Strategic Reader', *Adriennemareebrown.Net*, 2010 <http://d2oadd98wnjs7n.cloudfront.net/medias/882540/files/20130620110750-OctaviaButlerStrategicReader.pdf?1371751674> [accessed 16 September 2020].

[198] Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, p. 77.

[199] Paul Gilroy cited in Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p. 14. Gilroy is here thinking through the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

[200] brown, *Emergent Strategy*, p. 10.

idea to her theorisation of contemporary activist organising. She suggests that, if organisers were to acknowledge the richness of this ground, 'instead of starting up new ideas/organisations all the time, we would want to listen, support, collaborate, merge and grow through fusion.'[201] Crucially brown, like Wright. sees this growth as characterised by non-linearity. It is best thought of in terms of the growth of the mycelium: 'The part of the fungus that grows underground in thread-like formations [... which] connects roots to one another and breaks down plant material to create healthier ecosystems.'[202] Read in the context of Butler's SF – filled as it is with aliens made from 'communities' of plants, gene-splicing aliens who have a symbiotic relationship with their organic space ships and the 'wild seed' of untrained psychics – these evocations of plant life to discuss intergenerational relations can be used to reshape the prevalent metaphor of the family tree.[203] Further, brown does not merely examine mycelium in order to describe kinship relations. Rather, she actively urges her readers to adopt such relations. She argues that humans should learn from plants, thus placing themselves in the position of students, or perhaps children, before these nonhuman teachers. As brown argues, the process of 're-rooting in the earth, in myself and my creativity, in my community' accompanies a 'practice of humility – enough humility to learn, to be taught, to have teachers.'[204] This reimagination of the ancestral tree and investment in *re-rooting* more generally is thus shown to be a science-fictional mode of thought which centres the humble and curious position of the child.

This deliberate inheritance of Butler's work is most effectively encapsulated in Alexis Pauline Gumbs' story 'Evidence' (2015) which was written for *Octavia's Brood*. 'Evidence'

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[201] brown, *Emergent Strategy*, p. 10.
[202] brown, *Emergent Strategy*, p. 45.
[203] Octavia E. Butler, 'Amnesty', in *Bloodchild and Other Stories*, Second (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2005), pp. 147–86 (p. 147); Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2020), p. 1.
[204] brown, *Emergent Strategy*, p. 10.

is presented as an archive of the 'digital compilations' of Alandrix, a twelve year old from the future who is studying 'the time the silence broke.'[205] Overseen by 'the intergenerational council of possible elders,' Alandrix attempts to read as much as she can about her ancestor Alexis – a fictionalisation of the story's author.[206] She is interested both in learning from this ancestor who exists just prior to the revolutionary moment, and in positioning herself as an inheritor of the legacy which she represents. As the council of elders put it: 'Today the evidence we need is legacy.'[207] This, then, is a text in which the subject of deliberate inheritance is brought to the fore. Because she attempts to learn from Alexis – who is her creator, her ancestor and the object of her curation, simultaneously – Alandrix is celebrated. Gumbs writes: 'May the public record show and celebrate that Alandrix consciously exists in an ancestral context.'[208] Moreover, although her project is driven by a desire to commune with her biological ancestor Alexis, Alandrix insists that 'we do family differently [...] now' – adding 'maybe if you were here in the future with me we would just be comrades.'[209] Familial relations are thus denaturalised and reformed into a more utopian framework. Explaining that families are now organised along lines of desire, Alandrix states: 'Maybe you would choose me as family.'[210] Gumbs' story can thus be read as an example of fictionalised deliberate inheritance which is both explicitly utopian and science fictional. She imagines her descendants in order that they might insist to her that the utopian future 'is possible, does feel possible.'[211] The child of the future is conjured up, not in order to encourage the queer subjects of the present to 'sacrifice now for the sake of future generations,' as Edelman puts it, but rather as a provocation

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[205] Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 'Evidence', in *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, ed. by Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015), pp. 33–42 (p. 33).
[206] Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 33.
[207] Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 33.
[208] Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 33.
[209] Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 35.
[210] Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 35.
[211] Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 36.

to 'consciously exist in an ancestral context,' which stretches into the future as well as back into the past.[212]

The act of throwing oneself into the future is here shown to be an act which centres childhood. Not only is Gumbs' imagined descendant writing to her as a child, what she encourages is a childlike ability to grow. The utopian future is described as a place in which 'everybody is always learning how to grow.' [213] Indeed, Gumbs suggests that it is this ability which renders the future utopian. By curiously investigating the future, and portraying that future as populated by children who are curiously investigating her in turn, Gumbs posits a model of science-fictional thought in which the doubled curiosity of the child is of central importance. Her imagined descendant is both inquisitive and strange. She is the novum of Gumbs' text and yet for her, Gumbs, and the pre-revolutionary world she inhabits, is what is strange and new. Further, Gumbs shows that to embed this childish curiosity within 'the context of generations' is not, or at least not necessarily, to enlist the child in the service of a heteronormative, reproductive futurity.[214] Rather, Gumbs demonstrates that the act of creating SF stories can itself be thought of as an effort to 'liv[e] in an ancestral context' – one in which childlikeness is neither an immature embarrassment nor a marker of reactionary politics.[215] Just as Dotson's theorisation of deliberate inheritance involves her own efforts to inherit and pass on black feminist knowledge, so Gumbs' writing enacts the child-centred pedagogy upon which her utopian future is predicated.

In this, Gumbs' writing is aligned with Butler's own understanding of the curiosity of children, and its connection to speculative thought. Writing in a journal, now housed at the

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[212] Edelman, p. 31; Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 33.
[213] Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 39.
[214] Faith Holseart in Gumbs, Martens, and Williams, p. i.
[215] Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 33.

Huntington archives, Butler proposes a model for 'getting ideas.'[216] She writes: 'First, let everything touch you. Children do this. Everything is new to them.'[217] What Gumbs' effort to enact this childish perspective demonstrates is that children's affinity to novelty need not imply a cutting off from previous generations, or a dismissal of the labour involved in raising and caring for children – literary or otherwise. Rather, the fact that Alandrix exists in a utopian society where change and continual learning is valued – where she is no longer 'shackle[d] […] to sameness' – is precisely what prompts her to look to the past and attempt to reclaim its utopian contents.[218] Theorisation and practice are brought together as Gumbs uses SF as a means of existing in relation to her potential descendants. To these children of the future, everything is new and by 'throwing ourselves into the future,' Gumbs suggests that her readers can join with them in exploring the utopian novelty of SF.[219]

Beyond the Written Word

Throughout this chapter I have argued that including childhood in the critical conversation surrounding SF necessitates a re-evaluation of the role of inheritance in establishing the genre's utopian potential. Bringing together the family abolitionist emphasis on care networks which move beyond the heteronormative family, discussed in Chapter Four, with my previous work on the temporalities of childhood I have worked to demonstrate that abolishing the family has profound temporal consequences. Further, I have suggested that it is only when the child is understood as being embedded in a web of intergenerational caring relations that the utopian potential of the doubled curiosity of childhood is clarified. The child-as-inheritor is both a position which SF creators assign to their characters, as in Charnas' Holdfast Chronicles, and

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[216] Octavia E. Butler, 'Journal, July 11 1998' (San Marino, CA, 1998), p. 2, The Huntington.
[217] Octavia E. Butler, 'Journal, July 11 1998', p. 2.
[218] Gumbs, 'Evidence', p. 41.
[219] Johnson Reagon, p. 365.

one which they claim for themselves. As such, this understanding of childhood destabilises the boundary between the strange world of the text and the supposedly stable world of empirical reality. What the creators and curators of *Octavia's Brood*, for example, demonstrate, is that centring childhood within one's understanding of SF facilitates precisely the kind of 'return and feedback process' which Suvin has argued is necessary to the genre's utopian potential.[220] Alexis Pauline Gumbs and her imagined descendant Alandrix are involved in a dynamic relationship energised by their mutual curiosity regarding one another's strangeness. This is a mode of SF in which it is made abundantly clear that, as Haraway puts it, 'the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.'[221] In Chapter One I argued that depictions of childish curiosity in SF could be usefully read in relation to Miguel Abensour's understanding of the 'experimental utopia' in which 'the distinction between author and reader,' is revised.[222] What these self-professed children of Butler demonstrate is that this revision can be pushed further. Here, it is not only that the curiosity of the child depicted within the text aligns with that of the SF reader in provocative ways. Rather, these SF creators position themselves as children in their capacity both as readers of Butler and as creators of their own SF works. In this way they, to use Abensour's phrase, 'take a step beyond the written word,' and put their science-fictional utopianism into practice.[223]

In a recent conversation between adrienne maree brown and Ama Josephine Budge in which they discussed Butler's legacy I was able to ask them to discuss what it means to position yourself as a child of Butler, and what Butler's work tells us about childhood and inheritance. In her response, Budge noted that many of Butler's novels encourage their readers to find 'a different way to be in relation with one's parents, mentors, ancestors, than a patriarchal

[220] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 53.
[221] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 149.
[222] Abensour, pp. 127 and 128.
[223] Abensour, p. 128.

relation.'[224] For Budge, this non-patriarchal relation involves 'honour[ing] what [one's ancestors] achieved, what they believed, what they love, what they care about,' while also finding 'ways that you depart from them.'[225] brown pointed out that this idea is central to Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, and is expressed in an Earthseed verse which reads:

> *A tree*
>
> *Cannot grow*
>
> *In its parents' shadows*.[226]

Like Lauren, in *Parable of the Sower*, these 'children of Octavia' take from the parent tree and then move forward in order to become rooted among the stars.[227] This understanding of childhood's dual temporal pull, and the ambivalence of the child's connection to their parents, aligns with the understanding of childhood I have identified in the work of Bloch, Dotson and Charnas. However, what is particularly notable in this conversation is the use to which brown puts Butler's work. In stressing the need to depart from one's literary ancestors – in this instance the need to move away from Butler's writing – brown referred back to *Parable of the Sower*. She thus enacted the very ambivalence and conflicted temporal positioning which she herself was discussing – returning to Butler's work and feeding off it, even as she distanced herself from it. In the utopian community of the Riding Women*,* Charnas dramatizes the push and pull of intergenerational relations, Motherlines, which lure her protagonist in at one moment, and repel her the next. What Butler's inheritors have done is to take that step beyond the written word and to begin to *live* as the strange children of SF.

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[224] Ama Josephine Budge in adrienne maree brown and Ama Josephine Budge, 'The Parables of Octavia Butler' (presented at the New Suns: Feminist Literary Festival, The Barbican, London, 2021).
[225] Budge in brown and Budge.
[226] Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, p. 82. Emphasis in original.
[227] brown in brown and Budge.

Conclusion

> Take your first step out to outer space
>
> You're like a little baby who never walked before.
>
>
> - Sun Ra[1]

What Sun Ra captures here is the central relevance of childhood to the experience of encountering the SF text. As I have argued throughout this thesis, to be confronted by what Suvin calls the 'strange newness' of SF is to place oneself in the position of the child.[2] Further, as Ra's instruction to actively 'step out to outer space' suggests, this is a position from which utopian action is made possible.[3] By embodying the strangeness of SF at the same time as curiously investigating these new worlds, the children of SF trouble the boundaries of possibility. Childhood is not merely a static point from which to observe science-fictional strangeness. Rather, adopting the position of the child involves becoming strange, becoming science fictional, stepping out to outer space.

Building on this initial premise I have worked to emphasise the political significance of childhood's connection with SF despite the many instances in which the figure of the child has been used to support reactionary or oppressive ideologies. I have tracked how within SF childhood has been invoked to reinforce imperialist narratives of teleological development, which move from primitive to civilized; how childhood has been associated both with a necessarily desirable, definitionally conservative, reproductive future and with the supposed

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[1] Sun Ra, *Walking on the Moon* (Chicago, IL: El Saturn Records, 1971).
[2] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 4.
[3] Ra.

excesses of reproduction among oppressed communities; how calls to protect the child have been used to demonise racially and sexually othered subjects; and how the family, understood as a capitalist institution, has been built around the figure of the child. However, I nevertheless maintain that these oppressive usages cannot be combated by turning away from childhood. In her study of queer temporality *Time Binds* (2010), Elizabeth Freeman writes: 'That capitalism can always reappropriate [queer] time is no reason to end with despair.'[4] It is in this spirit that I insist on childhood's continuing relevance to the development of a science-fictional, utopian politics. I contend that each of these attempts to codify childhood into an oppressive vision of capitalist inevitability fail precisely because they are unable to negate the utopian aspects of childhood which I have located in the work of Ernst Bloch. From curiosity, to hunger; from a willingness to inherit the 'unbecome' potential of former generations to a capacity for deliberately idle, utopian dreaming, childhood continually defies the disciplinary function of *the Child*.[5] Indeed, I argue that even those texts in which the Child is used to represent a fixed state of isolation and purity fail to dispel childhood's affinity with Blochian utopianism. When Hegel dismisses 'Africa' as 'the land of childhood,' or Charlotte Perkins Gilman claims the Child as the symbol of her brand of eugenic feminism, the spectres of the strange children who form the object of this study are also invoked.[6] Appeals to the stability of childhood can thus be read as potential fractures in the oppressive temporalities, epistemologies and ontologies which the Child supposedly reinforces – fractures through which utopianism can seep.

This seepage is neither natural nor inherent, but rather is part of a disruptive motion which is actively encouraged by both the child's capacity for learning and the possibility of learning to become-child. I suggest that, far from marking the boundaries of an isolated state

[4] Freeman, p. xvi.
[5] Bloch, I, p. 8.
[6] Hegel, p. 109.

of science-fictionality, childhood provides a position which can be actively taken up regardless of one's age – a position which undermines the perceived epistemological, ontological and temporal security of the adult. This process of becoming-child is tied to the renunciation of one's status as what Susan Stryker calls a 'lord[s] of creation.'[7] To be a strange child is to embrace one's role as 'a creature [...] a created being, a made thing,' and thus to undermine any claim to superiority, control or stability on the grounds of maturity.[8] While I do not read Donna Haraway's claim that 'we are all […] cyborgs' as an assertion of a universally applicable cyborg identity, I do suggest that the cyborg position of being an 'illegitimate offspring [...] exceedingly unfaithful to their parents,' is not reserved to the young.[9] Instead, I have endeavoured to demonstrate that the position of a hungry, curious, idle child is one which can be actively claimed by people of all ages and, further, that the intergenerational connections represented within SF texts and modelled by SF communities facilitate just such a reclamation of childhood.

Claiming childhood is here understood as an act which necessitates the relinquishing of adulthood. In this thesis I have argued that the threat which childhood poses to the presumed security of 'the adult episteme,' as theorised by Samuel Delany, has far reaching effects.[10] Adulthood's instability leads to corresponding instabilities: in the 'laws of the author's empirical world,' against which Suvin measures the strangeness of SF; in the temporal security offered by those narratives of evolutionary or historical progress which have been fundamental to the development of the genre; and in any and all essentialised understandings of Nature.[11] When one takes childhood seriously as an element of SF one can no longer neatly divide the

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[7] Stryker, p. 240.
[8] Stryker, p. 240.
[9] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, pp. 150 and 151.
[10] Delany, *Triton*, p. 336.
[11] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 8.

Natural from the unnatural, the past from the future, the possible from the impossible. In this way, I suggest childhood as it is represented within SF speaks directly to the subversive potential of 'the unreal' discussed by Judith Butler.[12] In *Undoing Gender* (2004) Butler notes that 'what is considered real and true' is not easily decided.[13] She refuses to draw a line between the real and the unreal, the possible and the impossible, arguing instead that unreality 'is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality.'[14] Here, the process of 'return and feedback,' as Suvin puts it, between 'the reader's normality' and unreality is shown to be a dynamic one, with neither state privileged over the other.[15] Further, Butler's work provides a framework for granting that boundary crossing figure, the science fictional child, a central position within the politics of unreality. Writing of the subversive potential of unreality, she states:

> I think that when the unreal lays claim to reality, or enters into its domain, something other than a simple assimilation into prevailing norms can and does take place. The norms themselves can become rattled, display their instability, and become open to resignification.[16]

This is what I argue the strange children of SF provide – a rattling of the norms of adulthood, maturity and possibility. By depicting and embodying the perpetually curious position of the strange child, the creators of SF whose work I have explored in this thesis refuse to allow science fiction to remain solely a matter of fiction. In her defence of utopianism, Kathi Weeks writes: 'Whether or not utopianism as a type of speculative practice or mode of political

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[12] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Psychology Press, 2004), p. 24.
[13] Judith Butler, p. 27.
[14] Judith Butler, p. 29.
[15] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 53.
[16] Judith Butler, pp. 27–28.

aspiration is necessarily unrealistic, as its critics charge, depends on what counts as real.'[17] The utopianism which the strange children of SF make thinkable lies precisely in this contestation of the real.

In his defence of the political significance of utopian speculation, Rhys Williams cites Bloch's contribution to *Aesthetics and Politics* (1977). Challenging 'the false, self-crowned purity' of empiricism, Williams draws on Bloch, who writes:

> Are there not dialectical links between growth and decay? Are confusion, immaturity and incomprehensibility always and in every case to be categorized as bourgeois decadence? Might they not equally—in contrast with this simplistic and surely unrevolutionary view—be part of the transition from the old world to the new? Or at least be part of the struggle leading to that transition?[18]

For Williams it is the confusion and incomprehensibility of the 'post-genre fantastic' which must be rehabilitated, in line with Bloch's urging.[19] However, for me it is immaturity which forms a crucial part of 'the transition from the old world to the new.'[20] When Bloch writes that the utopian future is something which 'we have all glimpsed in childhood' I think that we must take this as a provocation to develop a robust conceptualisation of childhood, and endeavour to untangle the temporal, epistemological and ontological consequences of this claim.[21] It is just such an endeavour that I have embarked on here: a study of the utopian politics of

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[17] Weeks, p. 189.
[18] Rhys Williams, p. 626; Bloch in Walter Benjamin and others, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso Books, 2020), p. 23.
[19] Rhys Williams, p. 617.
[20] Bloch in Benjamin and others, p. 23.
[21] Bloch, III, p. 1376.

childhood predicated upon a refusal to frame childhood as that which is apolitical, ahistorical, anti-cognitive or otherwise outside the space of SF.

When you 'take your first step out to outer space/ You're like a little baby who never walked before.'[22] What I have tried to show in this thesis is that such a step does not move one further from reality, possibility, or the serious matter of political revolution. To step out to outer space, to be like a strange child, is to open the way into utopian action.

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[22] Ra.

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