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The Future Has Already Passed

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Abstract:

The article describes the unique position science fiction has acquired in relationship with temporality, especially futurity. It is suggested that this position stems partly from a strategic position "popular literature" in general occupies in western culture. Niklas Luhmann and his theory of autopoietic social systems serve as a starting point that allows the author to view temporality as a human construct. This is further demonstrated by describing the impact the formulation of second thermodynamic law had on popular imagination of the 19th century and how it led to the formulation of the basis of theory of information in the first half of the 20th century. In order to illustrate the capacity of science fiction vocabulary to deal with the present, seemingly a-historic situation of the world, the "technological fate of humanity", and "information society", DeLillo's non-fiction article "In the Ruins of the Future", devoted to the events of 9/11, has been chosen.

Abstrakt:

Budoucnost už byla

Studie se pokouší popsat jedinečnost přístupu, již science fiction v západním kulturním prostoru nabízí ve vztahu k temporalitě, především pak k budoucnosti. Jedinečnost této pozice vychází částečně z funkce, kterou „populární kultura" obecně v euroamerickém kulturním prostoru hraje. Jisté východisko úvah o vztahu science fiction a času představuje Luhmannova teorie autopoietických sociálních systémů; dále je popsán dopad druhého termodynamického zákona na běžné představy o čase v devatenáctém století a jeho vliv na formulování teorie informace v první polovině století dvacátého. Za účelem demonstrovat schopnost jazyka science fiction vypořádat se se zdánlivě ahistorickou situací, „technologickým údělem lidstva" a některými důsledky „informační společnosti" byl

vybrán článek Dona DeLilla „In the Ruins of the Future", reagující specifickým způsobem na události 11. září.

Claiming, as does the title of my article, that the future will not be because it has supposedly already materialised in one form or another and has thus become the present we are experiencing every day, might seem just a cheap trick to capture the reader's attention – at best a metaphoric turn of phrase. However, I would like to attempt to take the idea as literally as possible and outline some consequences of such a reading, stressing the factors that make it possible in the first place. Several preconditions have to be met before it can be argued, more or less reasonably, that "the future has already passed". The language, ideas and concepts that allow us to make such a statement are quite recent – modern, so to speak. What I am especially interested in is, on the one hand, their relationship to science fiction genre, and, on the other hand, the influence of science fiction on their general usage, meaning, and definition.

One might ask: "Why science fiction?" There are the obvious reasons: typical genre topics such as time machines, speculations about further evolution of the human race (which often incorporate androids, robots, cyborgs, and AIs), stories about the future of the Earth and the whole Universe (more often than not offering rather pessimistic scenarios), sub-genres like alternative histories and retrofuturism. Apart from the employment of time and temporality (with considerable stress on futurity) as *a*, or probably *the* science fiction topic, science fiction accommodates a special place within Western culture in general. I assume also that it shares this position with other literary works or groups of works (intentionally avoiding the term popular literature or popular genre) and they together occupy and delimit a specific place in the Western socio-cultural field(s). What I am suggesting is not that the specifics of works belonging to such genres cannot be identified by textual or narrative analysis – undoubtedly we can talk about themes, plots, characters, and narrative techniques. Neither am I denying that the components of science fiction narratives, unearthable by corresponding analysis, instigate specific readers' responses, at the same time constituting and being constituted by "genre expectations" – these expectations can be said to sediment into a set of beliefs or rules often understood as necessary as far as the proper reading enjoyment is concerned. However important these features might be, they are not my main concern. I am going to try to identify one of the specifics of science fiction that

connects it to its social, historical and cultural context, namely its relationship with temporality.

I would like to illustrate the above-mentioned specificity of a certain group of literary works and genres (though the medium itself is not really relevant here) by quoting Gilles Deleuze. He describes the uniqueness of crime novels, stressing the importance (in French cultural context) of Gallimard's *La Série Noire*, coming to the conclusion that "[a] society indeed reflects itself to itself in its police and its criminals, even while it protects itself from them by means of a fundamental deep complicity between them" (DELEUZE 2004: 83), while "La Série Noire introduced us to a politics-crime combo that, despite the evidence of History past and present, had not been given a contemporary literary expression" (DELEUZE 2004: 84).

As I understand it, what strikes me here most is that crime and violence as topics of detective genre are not regarded aberrant, unlawful, contemptuous or marginal; they are not supposed to entertain, thrill or enthral the reader. Deleuze seems to suggest that crime novels depict crime and violence as a necessary part of the very functioning of official state institutions, guaranteeing that people abide the law; they are an essential part of human sociability. Crime novels produce violence as an aesthetic, cultural fact or artifact, which does not mean that the reader is confronted exclusively with this "aesthetic" form of violence – through crime novels the very possibility of violence is being domesticated and naturalised inside a given culture, while at the same time pointing at exactly this process of "naturalisation" as one of the most important constitutive elements of modern Western society. In other words the situation corresponds to Walter Benjamin's critical ideas in his essay "Zur Kritik der Gewalt" (as PETŘÍČEK 2000 suggests in his insightful reading of the "hard-boiled-school" of detective story) aimed at the functioning of "law" in human society.

The question then would be whether something similar can be said as regards the relationship between modern human society, the future, science fiction, and institutions that claim to have a privileged role in predicting the future (mainly economic and political institutions). We can start by considering an event, which might seem anecdotal, as described in Ballard's note in the 1990 annotated edition of his *The Atrocity Exhibition*. In a comment accompanying the text "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan" Ballard claims: "At the 1980 Republican Convention in San Francisco a copy of my Reagan text, minus its title and the running sideheads, and furnished with the seal of the Republican Party, was distributed to the delegates. I'm told it was accepted for what it resembled,

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a psychological position paper on the candidate's subliminal appeal, commissioned by some maverick think-tank" (BALLARD 1993: 170). Let us leave aside the question whether Ballard can or cannot be counted among science fiction authors. A general, rather obvious interpretation of the above-mentioned situationist happening can be offered: science fiction has/had lost its capacity to disturb, arouse, and provoke its audience, as if both the probably most frequently used term to describe the main effect of science fiction on its readers – "sense of wonder" – and Darko Suvin's own term invented to replace "sense of wonder" by a "more sophisticated" "cognitive estrangement" (SUVIN 1979), were made a part of everyday reality. Or, even more disturbingly, as if no "wonders" and "estrangements" were attainable, any chance of subversion on a social and political level was nullified, equal to a hallucination. Donna Haraway remarks in a different context: "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (HARAWAY 1991: 149). If that is at least partly the case, then wanting to use "cognitive estrangement" as a term, its application becomes limited to a description of anticipations triggered by genre labelling. If the genre label is missing, it does not materialise.

Jean Baudrillard's comment on Ballard's work arrives at conclusions he finds similarly far-reaching. In his notes to Ballard's novel *Crash* he claims that

> *Crash* [...] constitutes without doubt the contemporary model for this SF which is no longer SF. *Crash* is our world, nothing is really 'invented' therein, everything is hyper-functional: traffic and accidents, technology and death, sex and the camera eye. Everything is like a huge simulated and synchronous machine; an acceleration of our own models, of all the models which surround us, all mixed together and hyper-operationalized in the void. What distinguishes *Crash* from almost all other SF, which still seem to revolve around the old (mechanical/mechanistic) duo of function vs. dysfunction, is that it projects into the future along the same lines of force and the same finalities as those of the 'normal' universe. Fiction can go beyond reality (or inversely, which is more subtle), but according to the same rules of the game. But in *Crash*, there is neither fiction nor reality – a kind of hyperreality has abolished both. And therein lies the defining character, if there is one, of our contemporary SF. [...] In point of fact, SF of this sort is no longer an elsewhere, it is an everywhere: in the circulation of models here and now, in the very axiomatic nature of our simulated environment (BAUDRILLARD 1991: 312).

Baudrillard talks exclusively about science fiction that he calls "contemporary". The question is whether this blending of fiction and reality was not always, at least latently, part of the functioning of the genre. I want to indicate how this

could be true by determining some of the aspects of the genre's relationship to temporality, especially futurity. In order to allow for that an important precondition has to be fulfilled – "time" must be viewed as a constructible phenomenon, as "fiction" and "reality" at the same time. Science fiction can be said to both eagerly incorporate the idea of "fabricatable" temporality and relish in speculating over possible consequences of such a vision of temporality (for example, in "alternative histories"). Niklas Luhmann sums up the idea:

> The temporal structure of time repeats itself within itself and only this reflexivity makes it possible to renounce stable and enduring presence. By a slow process of evolution the semantics of time has adapted to these conditions. [...] Only the modern society recognizes itself – and consequently all previous societies – as constituting its own temporality. The structural differentiation of society as an autonomous autopoietic system requires the coevolution of corresponding temporal structures (LUHMANN 1990: 11).

According to Jameson the problem that arises in approaching temporality in this way is that of the value that can be ascribed to a scientific term, on the one hand, and to a fiction narrative, on the other hand:

> We must resist the reflex which concludes that the narrative fantasies which a collectivity entertains about its past and its future are 'merely' mythical, archetypal and projective, as opposed to 'concepts' like progress or cyclical return, which can somehow be tested for their objective or even scientific validity. This reflex is itself the last symptom of that dissociation of the private and the public, the subject and the object, the personal and the political, which has characterized the social life of capitalism (JAMESON 2005: 282).

In my view science fiction does not primarily offer "mythical fantasies" about the future, but considerably blurs the opposition between scientific and fictional discourse (which in naïve reading is equal to the opposition of real and mythical). And, unlike Jameson, I do not think that especially with time concepts their choice is a question of (logically, cognitively deduced) priorities, but more of their function, application, and interaction at an everyday life level.

Thus what I understand under futurity is not entirely a social construct; it does not exclude the individual dimension of temporality. It is a dialectical process where time is a concept that is politically and culturally constructed by a community an individual is born into, but he/she can later challenge the prevailing definition. "What is an organism? A sheaf of times. What is a living

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system? A bouquet of times" (SERRES 1982: 75). The unique position of science fiction lies in its capability to provide narratives that can capture the whole process, acting as an *observer*, as it were, whose position is central in autopoietic social systems proposed by Luhmann (who himself adapted Maturana's and Varela's ideas about the autopoietic nature of living organisms). This view puts into a different perspective the observations made by Jameson, who concludes on the development of literary modernism in general:

> The breakdown of traditional cultural institutions, in particular the social 'contract' between writer and reader – has had as one significant structural consequence the transformation of the cultural text into an *auto-referential* discourse, whose content is a perpetual interrogation of its own conditions of possibility (JAMESON 2005: 292; italics Jameson).

He continues to ascribe this feature to science fiction (utopian narrative, as he calls it) as well:

> As the true vocation of the utopian narrative begins to rise to the surface – to confront us with our incapacity to imagine Utopia – the centre of gravity of such narratives shifts towards an auto-referentiality of a specific, but far more concrete type: such texts then explicitly or implicitly, and as it were against their own will, find their deepest 'subjects' in the possibility of their own production, in the interrogation of the dilemmas involved in their own emergence as utopian texts (JAMESON 2005: 293).

The different perspective offered by our own individual experience of (future) time (with death as the model of the individual future events or as the "events horizon") lies in the fact that we always experience and structure future as a fable.

Probably the most explicit and somewhat extreme example of the autoreferential relationship between individual and social "futures" is Gibson's short-story "The Gernsback Continuum". The protagonist of the story is hired to make photos of the remnants left by different American architectural designs envisioning a possible future. It should not be surprising that the United States has been chosen intentionally to illustrate the different attitudes entertained by different parts of the Western world in relation to futurity and to indicate the differences between the attitudes to future in Europe and the USA. Jameson has noted in one of his interviews (pointedly commenting on architecture) that "one can't discuss either Europe or Japan without talking about the United States, which is the real form of the future" (JAMESON 1992: 34). Don DeLillo

argues: "We like to think America invented the future. We are comfortable with the future, intimate with it" (DeLILLO 2001: 39).

The main character of Gibson's story gives a different perspective to this intimacy:

> The Thirties had seen the first generation of American industrial designers […] After the advent of the designers, some pencil sharpeners looked as though they'd been put together in wind tunnels. For the most part, the change was only skin-deep; under the streamlined chrome shell, you'd find the same Victorian mechanism. Which made a certain kind of sense, because the most successful American designers had been recruited from the ranks of Broadway theatre designers. It was all a stage set, a series of elaborate props for playing at living in the future (GIBSON 1986: 25).

At first, it really seems that the only task of the protagonist is to provide witness to this "playing at future" by documenting the debris left behind. Yet one day he starts seeing hallucinations: the projects for future America that never materialised, and yet stayed encoded in the culture, so that he can experience them today as "existing". He gets the following explanation from his friend:

> I'd say you saw a semiotic ghost. All these contactee stories, for instance, are framed in a kind of sci-fi imagery that permeates our culture. I could buy aliens, but not aliens that look like Fifties' comic art. They're semiotic phantoms, bits of deep cultural imagery that have split off and taken a life of their own, like Jules Verne airships that those old Kansas farmers were always seeing. But you saw a different kind of ghost, that's all. That plane was part of the mass unconscious, once. You picked up on that, somehow (GIBSON 1986: 29–30).

The story depicts very vividly the multiple levels of temporality and it explicitly evaluates the model of futurity offered by the 1930s:

> Behind me, the illuminated city: Searchlights swept the sky for the sheer joy of it. I imagined them thronging the plazas of white marble, orderly and alert, their bright eyes shining with enthusiasm for their floodlit avenues and silver cars. It had all the sinister fruitiness of Hitler Youth propaganda (GIBSON 1986: 33).

It is America dreaming its white eugenic dream, still deeply rooted in Modernist thinking (see COGDELL 2003).

The modernist myth of progress that becomes the main protagonist of Gibson's short-story stems from the 19th-century political and scientific discourse

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centred around the belief in total scientific explanation of the material world. But from the very beginning the discourses of fiction and science were tightly interwoven and scientific findings adapted by popular imagination in diverse ways. Probably the most often quoted example is connected with the formulation of thermodynamics, especially its second law. The example of thermodynamics demonstrates that "scientific" concepts are at least potentially "mythical" at the same time – after Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory this notion was widely accepted by the scientific community. Consequently, the neutrality of scientific terms in natural sciences and the absolute position of the Cartesian subject have been questioned, hand in hand with the questioning of the axiomatic nature of mathematics by Kurt Gödel.

As Michel Serres explains it, with the formulation of the second law of thermodynamics and gradual introduction of different engines into practice, which were no longer possible to be regarded as static systems, there surfaced the understanding (disseminated among the public using science fiction imagery as well) that energy can be consumed during work, followed by the rise in entropy. The second thermodynamic law stood in direct contrast to mechanics, which was well-organized, exemplary, the lines of forces clearly visible and visualisable (SERRES 1982: 71–72). Serres claims that it is from this time on that time has been given a direction, becoming irreversible, and as it moves forward order changes into chaos:

> The second law of thermodynamics accounts for the impossibility of perpetual motion of the second type; energy dissipates and entropy increases. From this moment on, time is endowed with a direction. It is irreversible and drifts from order to disorder, or from difference to the dissolution or dissemination of a homogeneous mixture from which no energy, no force, and no motion can arise (SERRES 1982: 71–72).

Katherine Hayles points out that this understanding considerably influenced the visions of future then proposed:

> The popularization of thermodynamics during the 1860s and 1870s reinforced the antagonistic connection between order and chaos through predictions of a cosmic dissipation that would end with all heat sources everywhere being exhausted, resulting in the so-called 'heat death' of the universe. Countering this pessimistic scenario was the awareness that in the short run (that is, in the eons while life still continued on Earth), the release of thermal energy could run trains, fuel steamships, generate electricity (HAYLES 1990: 21).

Apocalyptic visions of the death of the Universe, on the one hand, and the modernist myth of technological progress, on the other hand, are illustrative of the inner tensions within Modernism. A substantial incoherence between human experience of the lived world and its theoretical description can also be deduced from these seemingly incompatible "myths".

During the 19th century science fiction fulfilled several complimentary functions (the list is by no means exhaustive): it attempted at naturalisation, popularisation, and domestication of the booming natural sciences, their findings, and technological applications in structurally the same manner Deleuze observed in connection with crime novels and violence. Apart from the pedagogical dimension of science fiction (without trying to answer in whose name this teaching was done), the instinctive interconnectedness between "modern" Man and technology is deepened even further – the intuitive notion that technology represented by microscope, telegraph, photography, train, and steam engine alter the very basics of social space, as well as the possibilities for its study and understanding the material world. The obvious successes of natural sciences and resulting technologies forced representation and representationalist thinking to play the role of the privileged instrument capable of capturing the people's relationship with the material world they were living in. Science fiction did exactly that but, at the same time, was able to point at the limits of such an attitude as a result of its above mentioned autoreferential quality. If natural science together with their technological applications defines the structure of social space, it becomes evident that "realistic" literature could not grasp this relationship completely.

Realist literature of the nineteenth century approached social, human space as a set of interpersonal relationships, as a structure that can be criticised from positions that transcend the given social structure – morally and ethically. In the nineteenth century, though, there appeared the possibility to understand people and culture primarily as the outcome of technology. This possibility was taken seriously, especially in science fiction. I am referring to the idea that will be given its most explicit formulation in the works of Bernard Stiegler. Stiegler views human identity (everything that is different from the biological foundation) as defined by technology – starting from the discovery of fire (Promethean myth), through writing, architecture to economy. This point of view suggests that there is no stable, unique human identity, but that it constantly changes with technological evolution – being "human" always already means to be "posthuman" (STIEGLER 1998). Talking about "posthuman" in connection

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with technology means that what is at stake in science fiction is not exclusively the "domestication" of science and technology, as suggested above, but at the same time the de-familiarisation thereof.

The posthuman

Robots, cyborgs, and androids first appeared in science fiction in the 19th century and seemed to be an outcome of and reaction to the industrialisation of urban life, culture, and human body (regarded a part of the industrial production process, replaceable by another human or machine) with society no longer viewed as an living organism, but rather a programmable, operatable machine. On a political level this situation gave rise to the eschatological projects of communism and fascism which heavily relied on the idea of programmability of history and human society. If Haraway points out that "[s]ocial reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction" (HARAWAY 1991: 149), then she is at the same time saying that the future will never be ours – before any predictions can be made about the future, people are already destined to move according to a certain predefined system of possibilities, which correspond to the structure that technologies and their usage imprint the society in question.

  This consequence is again pointed out by Serres who comments on the further development and usage of the imagery and vocabulary stemming from thermodynamics, stressing the influence it had on formulation of theory of information in the early twentieth century:

> At the beginning of the 20th century, communication theory introduced a series of concepts such as information, noise, and redundancy, for which a link to thermodynamics was rather quickly demonstrated. It was shown, for example, that information (emitted, transmitted, or received) was a form of negentropy. [...] [I]nformation theory was considered the daughter of thermodynamics (SERRES 1982: 73).

Serres argues that this further development was instigated by parallels that have been found between closed thermodynamic systems and living organism, which "is evidently a thermodynamic system, sometimes operating at very high temperatures, and tending toward death according to an unpredictable and irreversible time (that of ontogenesis), but going up the entropic stream by means of

phylogenetic invariances and the mutations of selection" (SERRES 1982: 73–74). Temporality is no longer the medium in which people move or that they construct by narratives of diverse kinds, but in the process changes into a kind of information as well:

> The living organism, ontogenesis and phylogenesis combined, is of all times. This does not at all mean that it is eternal, but rather that it is an original complex, woven out of all the different times that our intellect subjects to analysis or that our habits distinguish or that our spatial environment tolerates. [...] What is an organism? A sheaf of times (SERRES 1982: 75).

I consider this shift from (lived) temporality to (stored) information even more important than the shift from temporality to spatiality in the 1950s that Jameson finds defining (JAMESON 2005: 296–313). Even if it was taken for granted that temporality could be produced, constructed, and invented, time had never been a "technology". However, with the world reduced into quanta of information, it does become a technology, or rather a subsection of information technology. The question after futurity and human time is reduced into how to process this information and extract or de-code them in a situation when

> communications sciences and modern biologies are constructed by a common move – *the translation of the world into a problem of coding*, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange (HARAWAY 1991: 164; italics Haraway).

If we accept the idea of the above mentioned shift from temporality to information, a range of serious consequences arises. Probably the most disturbing of them would be the question after the role of narratives, always regarded an invaluable instrument in coming to terms with time and individual mortality. At present, when communication and information technologies are changing the very foundations of human sociability, there can be a feeling that the future "has already passed"; people do not need time, as they are not bound to the physical space of their own bodies, their identity disseminated through information networks and thus are seemingly indestructible. There exists a very strong feeling that the "future has collapsed into the present, the human into technology and science fiction into reality" (HEREC 2008: 147). Does science fiction end simultaneously with the end of time? I do not think so – but its function has probably undergone a serious transformation. Unlike any other

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literary genre science fiction is still capable – thanks to its self-reflective qualities mentioned above and the genre memory of the alliance between language, temporality, and technology – to critically deal with the present.

Science fiction is so deeply interwoven with temporality that, like no other type of discourse, it is capable of giving lie to all the futuristic debris still lying around and naive attempts at resurrecting utopian language. Ondrej Herec (2008: 121) points out a speech held by Mike Moore of WTO on 14 August 2000 in New Zealand. He opened his speech with these words: "I come to praise the future. There has never been a time in the history of our species when we have had such an opportunity to build better living standards and a safer and more secure world for all. Globalisation is a part of this opportunity" (MOORE 2000). In the few opening sentences there is no modality – the discourse is immediately identifiable as an attempt at prophecy, a late capitalist myth of a future that will never be. The same would apply to Fukuyama's predictions about "the end of history", on one hand, and his impassioned yet empty phrase stating that "time is on the side of modernity" (FUKUYAMA 2001), on the other hand. This "empty phrase" comes from Fukuyama's article defending his vision of "the end of history" face to face with a definitely "historic" event of the terrorist attack on WTC. This event is also the subject matter of Don DeLillo's article published in *Harper's Magazine* in December 2001, called "In the Ruins of the Future". It will serve as an example of a non-fictional text that borrows science fiction imagery to deal with the fate Western technology bestows upon the West (or at least America), accompanied by the question after the possibility of narrative in the present that is designated as a-historic and post-historic.

Jacques Derrida describes some of the problems we face if we attempt to talk about the event in his conversation with Giovanna Borradori:

> 'Something' took place, we have the feeling of not having seen it coming, and certain consequences undeniably follow upon the 'thing'. But this very thing, the place and meaning of this 'event,' remains ineffable, like an intuition without concept, like a unicity with no generality on the horizon or with no horizon at all, out of range for a language that admits its powerlessness and so is reduced to pronouncing mechanically a date, repeating it endlessly, as a kind of ritual incantation, a conjuring poem, a journalistic litany or rhetorical refrain that admits to not knowing what it's talking about. [...] The telegram of this metonymy – a name, a number – points out the unqualifiable by recognizing that we do not recognize or even cognize, that we do not yet know how to qualify, that we do not know what we are talking about (BORRADORI 2003: 86).

Earlier I have suggested that the discursive regime applied to individual future modelled on the "experience" with individual death can be described as a "fable" – it would be interesting to see how it relates to the "fable" of future Derrida talks about when referring to Total Nuclear War (the historic events that did not take place; see KLEIN 2008).

DeLillo explicitly confronts the problem of narrative and language in dealing with an event that more than a change of affairs seems to present a stasis, ongoing crisis that at the time of the occurrence seems to offer no possibility of stopping. Ironically, the timeless nature of the event was even strengthened by TV footage played over and over again, prolonging the actuality of the happenings: "The event dominated the medium. It was bright and totalizing, and some of us said it was unreal. When we say a thing is unreal, we mean it is too real, a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perceptions" (DeLILLO 2001: 38–39). DeLillo is talking about an event so "real" that it defies any attempts at describing it. Yet ironically he refers to a televised event at the same time – TV is by no way a neutral medium or language.

DeLillo desperately speculates about the function of language in post-historic, atemporal societies and about the role events and stories can still play:

> The event itself has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile. We have to take the shock and horror as it is. But living language is not diminished. The writer wants to understand what this day has done to us. Is it too soon? We seem pressed for time, all of us. Time is scarcer now. There is a sense of compression, plans made hurriedly, time forced and distorted. But language is inseparable from the world that provokes it. The writer begins in the towers, trying to imagine the moment, desperately. Before politics, before history and religion, there is the primal terror. People falling from the towers hand in hand. This is part of the counter-narrative, hands and spirits joining, human beauty in the crush of meshed steel. In its desertion of every basis for comparison, the event asserts its singularity. There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space (DeLILLO 2001: 39).

The irony of history, the impossibility to step out of it, does not end here: the "primal terror" has been initiated by somebody else's plan and will later become part of political, historical, conspirational and paranoid narratives. What seemed a raw fact turns into a story – reality and fiction become indistinguishable:

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For the next fifty years, people who were not in the area when the attacks occurred will claim to have been there. In time, some of them will believe it. Others will claim to have lost friends or relatives, although they did not. This is [...] the counter-narrative, a shadow history of false memories and imagined loss. The Internet is a counter-narrative, shaped in part by rumor, fantasy, and mystical reverberation (DeLILLO 2001: 35).

Where does the concept of future disappear in a post-apocalyptic, traumatic situation? The future collapses into itself and the language that seemed to be the only suitable one to describe this breakdown is the language and concepts of ("Ballardian") science-fiction – as if only SF offered at least partly relevant and believable concepts for projecting, constructing, and comprehending the world of science and technology as the inevitable part of the postmodern, post-industrial, globalized capitalist world. In order to complement the would-be prophetic words of Mike Moore quoted above, DeLillo remarks:

In the past decade the surge of capital markets has dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness. Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and influential than governments. The dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the Internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment potential has no limit (DeLILLO 2001: 33).

DeLillo very explicitly describes here the process by which the information society changes the very foundations of the social order; he points out how information technologies, hand in hand with global capitalism, have effectively negated futurity as a temporal dimension that individual humans can freely project their ideas on. DeLillo continues:

But the primary target of the men who attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Center was not the global economy. It is America that drew their fury. It is the high gloss of our modernity. It is the thrust of our technology. [...] It is the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life, and mind (DeLILLO 2001: 33).

De Lillo seems to be close to a form of "technological determinism", at least in regards of the future:

Technology is our fate, our truth. It is what we mean when we call ourselves the only superpower on the planet. The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. We

don't have to depend on God or the prophets or other astonishments. We are the astonishment. The miracle is what we ourselves produce, the systems and networks that change the way we live and think. But whatever great skeins of technology lie ahead, ever more complex, connective, precise, micro-fractional, the future has yielded, for now, to medieval expedience, to the old slow furies of cutthroat religion (DeLILLO 2001: 37).

The vocabulary used by DeLillo in the quotes (Internet, technology, future, modernity, cyber, utopian) allows us also to suggest a parallel between narrative (as a text containing and/or delivering information) and the information society, where the main commodity and currency is precisely information. Haraway's description of the current situation in exact sciences, trying to ensure the translatability of the world into information, points out a terrifying consequence: reality can be changed by introducing information in the form of a virus into the existing system of "reality" (Will McIntosh in his novel *Soft Apocalypse* describes the slow mutation of a part of America into a bamboo jungle and how the chemical balance of human brain being changed results into modified perception of reality). Is the world transformed into a sum of information in the role of the main commodity and currency at the same time (across cultural, economic, and social capital) the world of the "future", or has it already become the world we are living in?

If America in 2001 corresponds to this description, there is at the same time an excess of meaning that withstands the coding into easily processable information:

We have fallen back in time and space. It is their technology that marks our moments, the small lethal devices, the remote-control detonators they fashion out of radios, or the larger technology they borrow from us, passenger jets that become manned missiles. Maybe this is a grim subtext of their enterprise. They see something innately destructive in the nature of technology. It brings death to their customs and beliefs. Use it as what it is, a thing that kills (DeLILLO 2001: 38).

Of course, as an alternative, it is unacceptable.

What will the future based on information, and not on events and stories, look like? The predictions are fairly similar. Haraway says:

[O]ur best machines are made of sunshine; they are light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable, mobile [...]. People are nowhere near so fluid, being both material and opaque. Cyborgs are ether,

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quintessence. The ubiquity and invisibility of cyborgs is precisely why these sunshine-belt machines are so deadly (HARAWAY 1991: 153).

DeLillo seems to suggest something very similar when he notes: "Think of a future in which the components of a microchip are the size of atoms. The devices that pace our lives will operate from the smart quantum spaces of pure information" (DeLILLO 2001: 38). It might be argued that DeLillo's essay is concerned with the trauma of a historic event rather than with science fiction and future. Consequently, by choosing words that seem to be part of science-fiction vocabulary I am taking them out of their proper context, violating the text. I agree. But at the same time it can be said that DeLillo is intending to illustrate the traumatic and tragic dimension of any human attempt to "look into the future" (i.e. project the consequences of a present event into the future).

What are, then, the typical features of science fiction? My answer would be that SF does not claim anything, it is not descriptive or analytical; science fiction creates the world or ways in which we interact with the world, simultaneously pointing out the possibilities and inevitability of such a process – the necessity to comprehend "reality" as the outcome of human endeavour. Science fiction does not offer solutions to problems (scientific, society, political), but relates them through narrative. And if my article puts science fiction in the context of the "posthuman" and partly "post-apocalyptic", it is to suggest that the idea of "time" (which interested me the most), and the definition of humanity is the outcome of a narrative act, vector of a fictional operation that science fiction is fully aware of.

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