NAIVE VERSUS POSTMODERN CRITICISM: AN EXCHANGE

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In Search of ~~Wonder~~ Naive Criticism: Some Objections to Baudrillard and Bukatman

It is interesting to consider Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz's *Science Fiction and Postmodern Fiction* in relation to contemporary science-fiction criticism. Originally published in Germany in 1986, it was not translated into English until 1992, but its concern with the relationship between sf and postmodernism is very much a propos of sf criticism in the 1990s. Puschmann-Nalenz remarks: "Ideological criticism and scientific interpretation of SF represent two approaches which in spite of all the differences have one thing in common: they are founded upon the content of sf and neglect its aesthetic and literary characteristics, as they themselves admit. By doing so they continue the old dilemma of sf-criticism, which for a long time has isolated itself from the methods of literary criticism" (26), and, "the most obvious characteristic of sf-criticism has been for a long time a lack of methods and conceptions" (15). Puschmann-Nalenz is looking for a critical method of discussing sf which is distinct to sf: tailored to the aesthetic, literary, and thematic concerns of sf. She is right to do so, for such a method was largely absent in 1986, and still is largely absent. In fact, the situation has worsened. Where Puschmann-Nalenz postulates some interesting criteria for sf criticism by examining sf texts *against* postmodern texts, to discover the differences, some contemporary sf critics have leaped on to the postmodern bandwagon, considering sf as just another version of postmodernism. Such critics overlook much that is relevant, indeed unique, to sf, and, in consequence, fail to do the texts full justice. Puschmann-Nalenz criticizes sf critics for a preoccupation with "the content of SF," rather than its "aesthetic and literary characteristics," but a genuinely useful and comprehensive approach should consider content *and* aesthetic and literary concerns. Aesthetic and literary concerns—in Puschmann-Nalenz's case, strictly formal concerns—can help illuminate a text, but a consideration of content is still necessary, and, I will argue, central to sf criticism.

As sf has been annexed by postmodernism, a number of critics have heralded sf as gaining its due recognition, comparing its innovative strategies with the experiments of Thomas Pynchon, William S. Burroughs, John Barth, Robert Coover, and others. These authors borrow strategies from sf "by engaging with the received, and authorless, structures of science fiction; Burroughs is able to excavate a new mythology, in which the avant-garde potentials of the genre are finally realized" (Bukatman 77), and Pynchon's "works are fabula-

tions which resemble sf under some interpretations" (Clute and Nicholls 981). There are links between sf and postmodernism. The postmodern author's use of genre sf materials comes as part of "the field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first" (Huyssen 216). Sf is linked with tradition and mass culture, of course, and the experimental techniques of the postmodern author are linked to innovation and high art. The supposed collapsing of these distinctions in postmodern times theoretically allows sf a new credibility. But, simply because postmodern authors borrow sf tropes, their work does not thereby become sf, nor does sf thereby become postmodern. Pynchon's work may "resemble sf under some interpretations," but *The Crying of Lot 49* is not sf by any useful definition of the term. Puschmann-Nalenz is right to set sf against postmodernism. There are similarities, true, but the essence of much sf is in the differences. Masses of secondary literature have been written on postmodernism; much current sf criticism tends to be more of the same and so isn't about sf at all.

One favorite notion is that the reading of sf automatically generates a linguistic gap between reader and text, a discontinuity which results in defamiliarization. This notion comes from Samuel R. Delany, whose work is unfortunately being appropriated to reduce sf to a facet of postmodernism. Scott Bukatman represents the extreme postmodern position: "the distance between the world of the reader and the diegetic construct is always an issue; the text therefore enacts a continual defamiliarization. At its best the language of science fiction, and the distance between its signifiers and the reader's referents, becomes its ultimate subject" (12). As much as I admire Delany, I think he (and later critics) put far too much emphasis on what Bukatman calls "continual defamiliarization." Quite the opposite is true for most sf. The average sf text—and here is where sf stands in direct contrast to postmodernism—works very hard to familiarize the reader with the sf world. Bukatman misses the point in the following passage:

> The reader of [Dick's] *The Simulacra* is exposed to the neologistic excess which characterizes the science fiction text. The first pages, frequently defamiliarizing in any SF novel, introduce a pattern of acronyms (EME), abbreviations (Art-Co), and new products (Ampek Fa2) which, in their abundance, render the text less readable. Each condensed form or typographical anomaly opens a hermeneutic gap while emphasizing the signifier's sign-function. These terms cannot be read *through*, for the unfamiliarity they engender is precisely their purpose (54).

But the initial defamiliarization is, paradoxically, designed to enhance familiarity with the diegetic world of the text. Yes, the first pages are frequently defamiliarizing, but only the first few pages. The reader has to work to make sense of strange references, but the ultimate result, and purpose, of this common technique is to force the reader to become immersed in the depicted world. By Bukatman's approach, all science fiction continually forces suspension of belief; but most science fiction is attempting to gain suspension of disbelief, to make the reader believe in the fictional world. Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* is difficult to read at first, as the reader struggles to come to grips with his happening world; but the novel follows a set pattern—the Happening

World, Context, Continuity, Tracking with Close-Ups. The unfamiliar becomes familiar through patterning and repetition. Brunner doesn't want the reader to be at a distance from the text. When Chad Mulligan is ranting, Brunner clearly is operating on a didactic level; didacticism works poorly when the reader is disengaged from the text. But the effect does not merely apply for didactically oriented sf. *Neuromancer*, that favorite text of postmodern sf critics, operates in the same fashion. Gibson hits the reader with a barrage of new terms, strange scenes, disorientations; the cumulative effect is to present a brilliant, detailed picture of life in the Sprawl. "It was a Sprawl voice and a Sprawl joke," we are told on the first page. But what does that mean? We don't know. Here is Bukatman's defamiliarization. But as the novel progresses, the reader puzzles things out, makes connections. The reader is handed a disassembled jigsaw; according to Bukatman, the pieces remain jumbled from beginning to end. Actually, the attentive reader puts the pieces together, forming a whole picture, becoming familiar with the fictional world. Sharona Ben-Tov notes something similar. Having mentioned Delany's ideas, she says:

> *Science fiction denies the possibility of otherness*.... It is a pseudoreality, a game, with automatically limited depth.... Samuel Delany's winged poodle is not a gap in the familiar context but, rather, a product of the heterocosm's artificial evolutionary theory, the rules of the game. Any element in the game points to the rules, and that is its whole meaning. We don't get a sense of otherness, for example, from a strange creature like Pac Man. We know what he's about (36).

Likewise, we don't get a sense of otherness from a strange creature like Case. By the end of the novel, we know what he's about. Ben-Tov is rather more dismissive of sf than I would prefer, but her point is valid. There is a game, a jigsaw puzzle, and every element in the game, every piece of the puzzle, leads to the rules, or familiarization—understanding of the other world. Most sf is inherently non-postmodern, a point made succinctly and accurately by the ever-useful John Clute:

> Sf readers have...grown accustomed to thinking that it was genre sf itself that dethroned the mimetic novel from its position of dominance in 1926, and that the continued popularity of "realistic" fiction is a kind of confidence game. We feel that something like the reverse is true: that genre sf...is essentially a *continuation* of the mimetic novel, which it may have streamlined but certainly did not supplant; and that the onslaught of Modernism (and its successors [i.e. Postmodernism]) on the mimetic novel was also an onslaught upon the two essential assumptions governing genre sf. The first assumption is that both the "world" and the human beings who inhabit it can be seen whole, and described accurately, in words.... The second assumption is that the "world"—whether or not it can be seen whole through the distorting glass of words—does in the end have a story which can be told.... What underlying story is being told is less important than the fact that, for writers of genre sf, some form of "metanarrative" lies beneath the tale, ensuring the connectivity of things (Clute and Nicholls 399-4OO).

I quote this at length because it cannot be overstated. This is the fundamental issue which some postmodern sf critics ignore, and which leads me to (over)-state that some postmodern sf criticism is not about sf at all. Postmodernism, in the words of the ubiquitous Fredric Jameson (he, Delany, Baudrillard, and Haraway are the idols of postmodern sf critics), is characterized by the "disap-

pearance of the sense of history" (125). A sense of history is equivalent to the "metanarrative," the connectivity of things. That has broken down in postmodernism, leading to the decentered subject, etc. As Clute has noted, a sense of history still underlies genre sf. Indeed it must, for to set a story in the future, you have to be able to get to the future. Linear time, the connectivity of things, is a predicate for getting to a "real" future, one with which we can become familiar. To be sure, not all sf authors assume this faith in the "metanarrative." But some postmodern sf critics are far too fond of writers like Ballard, who uses postmodern techniques but is an anomaly in the sf field. Ballard is not a useful representative of what sf is about. His assumptions and techniques are not those of the typical sf writer. Even the self-styled innovators of *New Worlds* should not be equated with Ballard. Writers like Michael Moorcock experimented with Ballardian and Burroughsian collage techniques, but were notably unsuccessful. Genre sf merges uneasily with postmodern approaches. Moorcock's experimental Jerry Cornelius short stories, such as "The Peking Junction," heavily influenced by non-linear Ballard narrative approaches, are among the worst things he has written. Moorcock has shown himself much more comfortable when taking an essentially traditional approach, with some sophistication of technique—as in *Gloriana, The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*, the DANCERS AT THE END OF TIME stories, and the COLONEL PYAT sequence. This "subdued" postmodernism, where the "meta-narrative" is perhaps questioned but not disowned, is typical of post-*New Worlds* sf. The New Wave writers were not all Ballard; later sf writers are not New Wave—it was a moment in sf history when postmodern techniques were foregrounded. They have since been largely abandoned, antithetical to genre sf as they are. For every Ballard there are ten Larry Nivens (the distinction here is not of quality, but of approach). Harping relentlessly on Ballard (as Bukatman and Baudrillard tend to do) is an indication of the problem with much postmodern sf criticism: an over-attention to details which loses sight of the wider picture. Ballard is one tree in a very, very large forest, albeit one of the few of towering height. Some sf writers do share his postmodern concerns; most don't.

Even then, Ballard is not as postmodern as some (like Baudrillard) would have him be. The danger of postmodern and post-structuralist thought—the ideology that pervades the work of a writer like Baudrillard—is that, as Martha Nussbaum writes, ethical concerns have "been constrained by pressure of the current thought that to discuss a text's ethical or social content is somehow to neglect 'textuality,' the complex relationships of that text with other texts; and of the related, though more extreme, thought that texts do not refer to human life at all, but only to other texts and themselves" (60). Nussbaum is criticizing contemporary literary theory—poststructuralism—and its lack of "the sense that we are social beings puzzling out, in times of great moral difficulty, what might be, for us, the best way to live—this sense of practical importance, which animates contemporary ethical theory and has always animated much of great literature" (60-61). Her criticism of post-structuralism relates also to a problem with postmodernism, with its notion that we can no longer define what is 'real.' Baudrillard writes, "there is no real and no imaginary except at a distance" (309), and "*there is no more fiction*" (310), and "the era of

hyperreality has begun" (311). Bukatman writes, "the world has been refigured as a simulation within the mega-computer banks of the Information Society.... A new subject has emerged: one constituted by electronic technologies, but also by the machineries of the text" (22). The real and the fictional collapse; we don't control the technology—it controls and conditions us. At which point, when there is no real and no fictional, nothing has any meaning. One must believe that there is some meaningful reality to believe anything at all. The real is the basis for any form of social or ethical concern. Thus, like poststructuralist criticism, much postmodern art and theory refuses to talk about human lives as if they had any meaning. We are subjects constructed by the media landscape—end of story. Such an outlook leads to statements like this: "contrary to what the author himself says in his introduction when he speaks of a new perverse logic, one must resist the *moral* temptation of reading *Crash* as perversion" (Baudrillard 315). I do not care to meet the person who doesn't read *Crash* as perversion; the ethical and social implications of Baudrillard's statement epitomize the dangers of postmodern thought. The real and the meaningful are eliminated, leaving no room for moral readings, moral judgements, and moral interpretations. The only reason I can justify spending several hours reading *Crash* is that I believe Ballard when he says, "needless to say, the ultimate role of *Crash* is cautionary, a warning against the brutal, erotic and overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively from the margins of the technological landscape" (6). Yes, Ballard sounds very postmodern with statements like "the most prudent and effective method of dealing with the world around us is to assume that it is a complete fiction—conversely, the one small node of reality left to us is inside our own heads" (5). Again, I protest against the conflation of reality and fiction—it is an extremely dangerous mode of thought that leads to the sort of amoral perception that Baudrillard advocates. But, Ballard does allow us "one small node of reality." Baudrillard doesn't. That is where he misses the point, and where Ballard remains, however far removed, an sf author. For Baudrillard, everything is now on "the margins of the technological landscape." There is no center, no meaningful reality. For Ballard, the margins are still on the margins, and there is a center —a moral center. *Crash* is perverse: we must read it as such, in moral terms, contrary to what Baudrillard says, for it to have any meaning. As a self-styled "pornographic novel based on technology" (6), *Crash* is not pornographic in the sense of soft-porn titillation, but is appropriating hard-core pornography which is extremely perverse and, one hopes, disturbing to the average individual. There is a moral judgement implicit in *Crash*—it has a cautionary role, a somewhat didactic purpose—and although it is not sf, it reveals something which lies at the heart of sf. Most sf has an explicit or implicit didactic thrust, however weak or disguised. Its fundamental concerns are the social and ethical concerns Nussbaum looks for and finds lacking in poststructuralist literary theory. When Baudrillard writes, "true SF...would not be a fiction in expansion, with all the freedom and '*naïveté*' which give it a certain charm of discovery. It would, rather, evolve implosively, in the same way as our image of the universe. It would seek to revitalize, to reactualize, to rebanalize fragments of simulation—fragments of this universal simulation which our

presumed 'real' world has now become for us" (311; my emphasis), he is completely wrong to use the term "true SF." For me at least, true sf, as Clute has said with regards to genre sf, still presumes a "meaningful 'real' world" which is not simply a "universal simulation." There is a center, a continuity of things, in most sf. And when there isn't, as in Dick's *Ubik*, the search for the center *matters*. Baudrillard wants us to stop searching; true sf, as I define it, is always searching. There is a moral concern in Dick's work, for all its postmodernity, which is completely lacking in Baudrillard. Baudrillard, epitomizing the extremes of postmodernism, has given up questions of 'real' meaning as meaningless. Dick—and this is what makes him an sf author, not a postmodernist—hasn't given up. Baudrillard uses the word "*naïveté*" with regard to the old, false sf. It is a key concept. Sf, on the whole, is a naive literature, and when it ceases to be so, it is no longer typical of sf. Baudrillard acknowledges this, saying that *Crash* is "the contemporary model for this SF which is no longer SF" (312). Well, *Crash* is not sf by any definition, nor is it the "true SF" Baudrillard is looking for. Baudrillard's "true SF" is not sf at all, and should be called something else entirely. Bukatman, evaluating Dick's work, says that "with a reduced emphasis on the broader social formations through which 'reality' gains meaning, works such as *VALIS* (1981) are, to my mind, less compelling and surely less relevant [than the earlier, more fractured works]" (55). This judgement of Dick's work is based on one criterion: how postmodern is it? The earlier novels have layered realities, multiple protagonists, fractured point of view; the later *VALIS* trilogy is more convinced of a central reality, and determined to understand its meaning. More naive, in other words. When the moral, Christian theological underpinnings of Dick's earlier work come to the fore, it is no longer "compelling and relevant." Perhaps it is true of these novels. What should be acknowledged is that the naiveté was always present, in one form or another. For all the postmodern complexity, the underlying thought that the search for reality matters is always there. But that most valuable element in Dick, whether it be *The Man in the High Castle, Martian Time-Slip*, or *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said,* that moral and philosophical questioning, is missing from Bukatman's discussion. "Dick's subject was always ontological" wrote Kim Stanley Robinson (qtd Bukatman 53), and Bukatman agrees. But for Bukatman, ontology is strictly a matter of the way in which technology produces us; he praises Dick for "foregrounding the quest for elusive meaning" (55), but doesn't praise him for seeking the elusive meaning. But the issue of moral certitude, not simply the difficulty of gaining moral certitude, is crucial to Dick's work. I also think it is crucial to sf as a whole; like Ballard, Dick allows for there to be a meaningful center. We may not be able to find it, but it is meaningful, it is 'real,' to try to do so.

Other critics have commented on the dangers of conflating postmodernism and sf. Roger Luckhurst observes that "the movement has traditionally been to find an entry for SF in the mainstream, a move which of its nature leaves the mainstream intact and necessitates the distortion of SF texts" (365). This is precisely my point; the postmodern sf critic is distorting sf, stripping it of its own values, in order to accommodate it to the postmodern mainstream. As

Luckhurst points out, "the specificity of SF, its forms, temporality, and modes of enunciation, must be retained in order to say anything meaningful about it. Its generic status cannot be evaded" (365). Jenny Wolmark takes Jameson to task for regarding "SF as very much part of the 'increasing dehumanization' of life, rather than a genre capable of making meaningful social and cultural interventions. This view fails to recognize the potential of science fiction to offer alternative and critical ways of imagining social and cultural reality" (10). Notably absent from Luckhurst's critique is any definition of "the specificity of SF." Wolmark takes a step in the right direction. "Meaningful social and cultural interventions"—stressing "meaningful"—are not allowed by the postmodern critic, be it Jameson or Baudrillard. The ability to imagine social and cultural reality implies a difference between imagination and reality, likewise denied by the postmodernist. Sf is an "alternative and critical" way of approaching the world—it is an alternative to postmodernism. That is one of its strengths. Baudrillard denies ethical reality; most sf affirms it, often in a "naive" manner. Sf critics seem to shy away from this because, applying a sort of double standard, the "naive" beliefs which underlie sf are not permissible in the postmodern value system (if such a thing is not a contradiction in terms). But if you don't want sf to be the same as postmodernism, don't apply postmodern standards, such as the refusal to accept the "metanarrative" or the denial of any central moral meaning. Sf accepts these things as basic premises; naive it may be, but there's nothing wrong with a little naiveté once in a while. Sf is, for me, a welcome antidote to the absurdities found at the extremes of postmodernism. One of the great strengths of sf, one of its justifications as a genre, has always been the ability to dramatize metaphysical, eschatological, and philosophical issues in a way realistic fiction cannot—"one of the qualities of sf that sometimes baffles new readers is the relative infrequency, despite its label, with which it deals with the hard sciences; indeed, sf deals as often with metaphysics as with physics" (Clute and Nicholls 803). One has to allow metaphysics some sort of meaning for this to be valuable; postmodernism denies the validity of this reality, never mind a higher one, thus making contemplation of metaphysical questions an absurdity. Yet contemplation of metaphysical questions animates much great sf: *Childhood's End*, the works of Olaf Stapledon, *A Voyage to Arcturus*, *Solaris*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, to name just a few of my favorites. Such issues have become "naive" in the postmodern world, yet they remain at the heart of sf. As Ursula K. Le Guin writes, "Fantasists, whether they use the ancient archetypes of myth and legend or the younger ones of science and technology, may be talking as seriously as any sociologist—and a good deal more directly—about human life as it is lived, and as it might be lived, and as it ought to be lived" (53). Sf becomes just another branch of postmodernism when it loses such speculation entirely. Cyberpunk is leading sf that way; Brian Aldiss's critique of *Neuromancer* raises some issues which have not been considered often enough:

> It's a garishly violent book with a wholly unsympathetic protagonist. Case is a cold fish with more in common with his console than with the equally degraded humans around him. Such coldness between people is somewhat reminiscent of William

> Burroughs's *The Wild Boys* (1971).... What makes it a remarkable debut, other than a remarkable novel, is Gibson's style ....
>
> There is also a doubt as yet concerning Gibson's range: he has still to write much that falls outside his near future scenario, or to provide a moral or philosophical dimension even to that (411-3).

Neuromancer is much overpraised as a novel, despite many excellent qualities; the lack of a moral or philosophical dimension perhaps explains why it is so favored by the postmodern sf critic, as is the subgenre it booted up, cyberpunk. Nicholas Ruddick muses, "there is always the possibility that we are in an age in which style *is* content...of which the characteristic artistic product is beautiful, but thematically empty. Perhaps this is what William Gibson's *Neuromancer* really exemplifies" (180). Ruddick may be right. Cyberpunk is so postmodern and fashionable because of its frequent postmodern reality-denying, subject-denying nihilism. It is not especially "naive," and as such, is not particularly true to the spirit of sf. What seems to have escaped a number of critics, including Bukatman, is that cyberpunk is *not* the only sf being written today. Many critics seem to think so, or else (worse) think that everything else is uninteresting. Cyberpunk is so close to postmodernism that it may soon become more postmodern than science-fictional, but it remains sf for the moment because of certain essential sf qualities. This is noted by Bukatman: "there is a reactionary face to cyberpunk, as technology becomes incorporated with a subject position that is strengthened but otherwise unchanged—a highly romantic view" (315). Bukatman notes this, but fails to discuss the fact at any length, preferring to discuss the postmodern qualities of cyberpunk, ignoring the values which make cyberpunk a branch of sf, not postmodernism. Bukatman's point is worth discussion, if only in Sharona Ben-Tov's terms. She criticizes *Neuromancer*, and cyberpunk in general, for postulating that "the body isn't only mere natural matter, the diametric opposite of human identity; it's also a consumer commodity. In *Neuromancer*'s world the body, eroticism, and generativity are the sites of alienated nature" (179). She sees cyberpunk as a participant in a nigh-universal sf ideology which alienates the natural and elevates the technological transcendent. But the technological is not transcendent, here; "in Case's vision people don't generate information; information generates people" (180), which sounds like Baudrillard and Bukatman. But Ben-Tov realizes that in "the cyberpunk novel cyberspace fulfills every promise that space travel did, in a fashion as ideologically orthodox as any space romance" (177). Cyberpunk attempts to fulfill the promise, but undermines its own premises: when "information generates people," the fulfillment of the promise is much less satisfying than an orthodox space romance, and much more troubling. It raises questions of the subjects' autonomy, their "reality," questions whose answers are generally, generically taken for granted in much sf. As Ben-Tov rightly points out, the technological transcendent is false, but she is wrong to think that all sf bases its transcendence on contradictions. Much of it doesn't—including the novels I listed earlier as examples of metaphysically oriented sf. And the pre-cyberpunk sf which does feature technological transcendence—*Dune*, for example—does so in violation of its own desires. *Dune* carries the generic assumptions of sf—that the individual and the

world can be "told"; it works against itself by failing to note the inherent contradiction which Ben-Tov shrewdly notes. But Ben-Tov has a much too narrow, Suvinesque definition of sf (although it is never stated outright), and much sf features some sort of mysticism or irrationality carried over from the fantastic tradition it is so closely allied with. Thus, works like *Childhood's End* do not fit Ben-Tov's schemata. My point is that there is a quality to most sf, cyberpunk and otherwise, which can be described as a non-postmodern naiveté which is ingrained in its fundamental assumptions about the world. Those works may unwittingly work against themselves, as do *Dune* and others discussed by Ben-Tov, but they are notably going against the grain of postmodernism. And, like Ben-Tov, I believe that these issues are rooted in the question of natural, transcendent Nature vs technological, dead Machinery or the mystic vs the postmodernist. As Bruce Sterling has noted, "cyberpunk has risen from within the SF genre; it is not an invasion but a modern reform" (xiii). The reform is to strip sf of its naiveté, replacing it with a postmodern sensibility—no longer do people generate information; information generates people. In earlier sf, the subject constructed—in cyberpunk, the subject is constructed. How postmodern it really is is an interesting question, too, for the cyberpunk ethos tries to reconcile genre sf's assumptions with postmodernism's assumptions—but as Ben-Tov demonstrates and Bukatman mentions in passing, the attempt fails. While postmodern sf critics seize upon the postmodern elements in cyberpunk, they do so (as always) by ignoring the sf elements, which are still present. And it is not only metaphysical issues that animate sf, and thereby separate it from postmodernism; there is also a prevalent concern with socio-ethical issues.

Sf's historical links to utopian fiction have often been noted: "SF is at the same time wider than and at least collaterally descended from utopia; it is, if not a daughter, yet a niece of utopia—a niece usually ashamed of the family inheritance but unable to escape her genetic destiny" (Suvin 61). From Ben-Tov: "Science fiction inherits the structure and the ideology of utopia" (23). Wolmark writes, "the clear-cut distinction between utopia and dystopia...does little to explain the way in which feminist science fiction both contests the dominant ideology to celebrate female agency but also recognizes the profound limitations on that agency. This is the 'doubled vision' that makes it difficult to label the narratives either utopian or dystopian—they are essentially a mixture of the two modes" (90). Her remarks on feminist sf are relevant to sf as a whole. Taken together, Suvin's, Ben-Tov's, and Wolmark's statements point to an important factor in sf: its relationship to utopian/dystopian writing. As Suvin points out, this is part of sf's genetic destiny: unavoidable. For, when one sets a narrative in the future, there will always be an implicit (and often explicit) comparison with our world, here, now. This value judgement—weighing the worth of one time and place against another—is inherent in sf, and confers upon the subject (the reader) the ability to make meaningful judgments, something which many postmodern critics deny. Again, we find sf's implicit ideas run contrary to those of postmodernism; again, they are more "naive," as construed by postmodern theory.

The utopian/dystopian element is also linked to sf's fundamental reliance

upon "meta-narratives" and the belief that the world and its inhabitants can be accurately described by words. What's the point of writing a utopia or dystopia if you don't have faith in words—if you don't believe that the society you imagine can be truly described? A great deal could be said about the difficulties of reconciling utopian/dystopian literature with postmodern theory—the basic assumptions of the two sides are almost mutually exclusive. Thus, in the case of sf, generically and genetically related to utopia/dystopia, there is a fundamental element of the genre strongly resistant to postmodern thought—something that Bukatman and others largely ignore. Of course, relatively little sf, strictly speaking, is outright utopia or dystopia. But as Wolmark points out (and her remark applies to most sf), sf is essentially a mixture of utopian and dystopian narratives. When one imagines the future, things are going to be different—and whenever there is difference, there is comparison. Even a work which attempts to portray a society which is realistically complex, no more utopian or dystopian than our world, will nevertheless be judged according to the values of the reader, regardless of the author's intentions. Much sf contains overt utopian and/or dystopian elements. *Stand on Zanzibar*, many Philip K. Dick novels, and myriad near-future scenarios (including cyberpunk) are overtly dystopian; alien planets are explicitly contrasted with our world in many works, such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, or *A Case of Conscience*; other works present social developments which will improve matters, as in *More than Human* or *The Chrysalids*; even a work which shows history repeating itself, such as *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, urges an ethical judgment upon our society, which is recapitulated in the future. The variations are numerous, and by no means simplistic—irony and ambiguity abound—but an sf text is almost inevitably positioned in some sort of utopian/dystopian discourse, by virtue of being set elsewhere. Comparison is unavoidable. Even works which seemingly have little didactic socio-political content cannot evade the utopian/dystopian issue. Lem's *Solaris* and *The Invincible*, for example, say little about their future societies, seeming to concentrate on other issues. But the fact that there are no women astronauts in either of Lem's future scenarios may well invite value judgements on his future worlds. "Pure" utopian/dystopian discourse would seem to depend upon a belief in narrative, linear historical time—to extrapolate into the future, you have to be able to get there. Whether it's *Looking Backward*, *1984*, or *Venus Plus X*, a past situation and a future situation are linked by a progression through time; a "metanarrative" links past, present, and future. While postmodernism may question such historical narratives, utopian/dystopian works depend upon them, and, given its strong links to the utopian/dystopian genre, sf also depends upon the existence of narrative continuity. Even a work like *1984*, which calls into question the meaning of "reality" in very postmodern terms, nonetheless is based upon a belief in narrative. Winston may be a postmodern subject, whose reality, identity, and past history are capable of being completely remade, but the nature of the work itself asks the reader to look at what has happened in the novel, the progression of events from Orwell's 1948 to the future, and question the possible consequences of certain courses of action. The existence of a "metanarrative" is implied in the novel's title; there must be a linear, continuous

progression of time if 1984 is to be reached from 1948. The "metanarrative" lies behind all utopian/dystopian literature, and likewise is behind much sf.

Thus, the postmodern sf critic who discusses sf from a purely postmodern approach, appropriating the genre as "cutting edge," does so by ignoring two fundamental principles of sf: the "naive," pre-postmodern belief in words and meta-narratives and the autonomy of the subject and the correspondent ability to make meaningful moral and social judgments. The second element is bound up with the famous "conceptual breakthrough" and/or "philosophical apocalypse" which occurs in much sf. When one writes of a conceptual breakthrough, when one attempts to show our world in a different light, there is an implicit belief that this matters, that a "truth" can be revealed. In postmodernism, there is no truth: everything is relative. The conceptual breakthrough represents a fundamental, often metaphysical, truth (as in *A Voyage to Arcturus*) or a step on the path to a fuller understanding of the ultimate truth (as in *The Man in the High Castle*). Either way, even when the author is being ironic (for then, a truth is merely being posited in reverse, so to speak—pointing obliquely to truth by undermining or mocking what is not true), sf has faith in the ability of words to convey truth. Such a viewpoint doubtless seems exceedingly naive to a postmodernist, and the postmodernist, wanting to complicate everything, therefore ignores the obvious. I believe some rather obvious, simple points about sf are being ignored by critics because they refuse to take anything simply. An example is this passage from Bukatman: "the body in science fiction can be read symbolically, but it is a transparent symbol (as well as a symbol of its own transparent status), an immanent object, signifying nothing beyond itself. It is literally objectified; everything is written upon its surface.... the body has become a machine, a machine that no longer exists in dichotomous opposition to the 'natural' and unmediated existence of the subject" (244). For something that signifies "nothing beyond itself," the body certainly signifies a great deal. The one thing Bukatman, in true postmodern fashion, does not allow the body to be is simply a body: everything has to be elevated to a realm of abstract discourse removed from the real world. Metaphorically speaking, most sf allows a body to be a body. That is but one example; it is not true of cyberpunk, but it is true of much other sf. Sf allows the simple, everyday reality—the familiarity and comprehensibility of everyday things—that postmodernism denies. Most sf is concerned with the "meat" that the cyberpunks leave behind. While the postmodern critic and the cyberpunk live happily ever after in their meaningless, disembodied postmodern cyberspace, most sf (and most literature in general, except for the minority of aggressively postmodern texts) continues to debate fundamental issues in life, granting those issues the possibility of real meaning. Sf uses its many tropes to debate those moral, social, and metaphysical issues in ways unavailable to "mundane" fiction—this is its strength. To reduce sf to being of interest only for the postmodern elements of the cyberpunk genre is to ignore the genre's most compelling works: the cyberpunk movement has notably failed to produce many genuinely superior works of science fiction. They may be postmodern, but they are not profound. Perhaps because they are postmodern, they cannot be profound. Cyberpunk has had a useful influence on the genre, but cyber-

punk is decidely a subgenre, an isolated movement: not the apotheosis of sf, as Sterling and others would have us believe.

But postmodern sf criticism is not the only form of sf criticism being practiced these days—feminist criticism is the other favorite at the moment. And feminism is much truer to the "naive" spirit of sf than postmodernism. Feminism engages with the real world in the same way that sf does: "feminist fabulation concerns female writers who create postmodern work *relative to real-world women*" (Barr xviii; my emphasis), as opposed to postmodernism's use of "Woman as catalyst to discourse that male theorists generate" (Barr xviii) —theorists like Bukatman and Baudrillard, "infatuat[ed] with the 'crisis of the subject' and the 'feminine' as a pre-oedipal discursive mode" (Catherine Stimpson, qtd Barr xviii). Socio-ethical issues are a vital concern; the struggle to establish meaning and truth animates both feminism and much sf. They were made for each other; the strength of sf, as I have said, resides in its recourse to other ways of representing the world than mimetic, realistic fiction. In that way, it is a perfect vehicle for feminist argument, as Le Guin, Russ, Tiptree, Piercy, Charnas, Sargent, McIntyre, Butler, Delany, Varley, and others have amply demonstrated: "only in science fiction can feminists imaginatively step outside the father's house and begin to look around" (Roberts 2). Russ's *The Female Man* may use a fractured, experimental narrative style—very postmodern and chic—but in contradiction to postmodernism's nihilism, her style is secondary to the uncompromising didactic feminist thrust of her novel; the *meaning* of *The Female Man* is more important than its stylistic liberties. Russ does not fragment her narrative in order to refute the possibility of fixed meaning, but rather to reinforce her point from a variety of perspectives. At the center of her novel there lies an expression of truth, one which Russ dares the reader to refute. Not just the possibility of truth, here, but rather the certainty of truth is manifest. Russ has overt socio-political concerns, and her polemical novel hopes to inspire change. Feminism has allowed itself to become diverted by postmodern overcomplication; however, at the heart of the movement, and of fiction like *The Female Man*, lies an engagement with the real world which presumes that human beings matter, that they can make change, and that there are certain things in life that are true (for example, women being equal to men). Consequently, feminist sf criticism shows an engagement with real issues which postmodern critics like Baudrillard ignore. Baudrillard dwells in the realm of the hyperreal; feminist sf remains in touch with the real. Thus, Sharona Ben-Tov's *The Artificial Paradise* is a far more useful critical work than Bukatman's *Terminal Identity,* for the latter remains wholly removed from any sense of a tangible, meaningful real world, while Ben-Tov discusses fiction in relation to the real world. Bukatman conflates real and fictional, body and information, thereby precluding the possibility of the fictional illuminating, changing, or representing the real, because fiction and reality, for him, are one big, tangled, indistinguishable mess. Ben-Tov, a feminist critic, allows for fiction to be a reflection of the real, or indeed a shaper of the real, but still allows the real, the true, to exist independently.

This essential difference, epitomizing the difference between feminist and

some postmodern criticism, lies in their approach to the notion of the transcendent, the numinous, the natural. Bukatman is uninterested—these things, for him, smack of the metaphysics which imbue most sf, but not the hip, postmodern cyberpunk. Georges Bataille writes, "faced with a precarious discontinuity of the personality, the human spirit reacts in two ways.... The first responds to the desire to find that lost continuity which we are stubbornly convinced is the essence of being. With the second, mankind tries to avoid the terms set to individual discontinuity, death, and invents a discontinuity unassailable by death—that is, the immortality of discontinuous beings" (qtd Bukatman 281). Bukatman's response: "both methods of coping with the discontinuity of being have analogues within SF" (281). True enough, but Bukatman never discusses the first method. The second method is the rational, technological approach of the cyberpunk: get rid of the limited body, and live forever as disembodied consciousness in cyberspace. The first method is the mystical, natural, transcendent approach—the approach of *Childhood's End*. Bukatman isn't interested. Yet, most sf, with its conceptual breakthroughs, its metaphysics, its trust in the "meta-narrative," is indeed attempting to recuperate "that lost continuity which we are stubbornly convinced is the essence of being." That excellent phrase sums up the spirit of sf, for me; Bukatman isn't interested in spiritual notions, however, and is therefore uninterested in the spirit of sf. Ben-Tov, on the other hand, is interested in how sf attempts to deal with Bataille's first option; her conclusion is that sf offers a false resolution, which is in truth an enactment of the second option disguised as the first. She is right, regarding the texts she has chosen—but she limits herself, rather like Bukatman, to texts which fit the Darko Suvin definition of sf, thereby ignoring the masses of sf with quasi-mystical/fantastic elements. Ben-Tov, like Suvin, has "attempted to define the genre of sf in terms which would in fact logically *exclude* most genre sf from serious consideration" (Clute and Nicholls 484). But, significantly, Ben-Tov considers relevant sf issues which Bukatman ignores, just as most feminist critics discuss relevant issues which postmodernists ignore. The meaningful approach to sf taken by feminists, granting the genre socio-ethical relevance, is an approach that comes closer to sf s real concerns; as opposed to the postmodern approach, which is a self-perpetuating debate about mostly superficial matters. What would be useful for sf criticism would be an approach that mimics feminist criticism, but with a wider scope. Whether or not one believes in notions of the transcendent, the sublime, the apocalyptic conceptual breakthrough, the existence of central truth, one cannot ignore the preoccupation of sf with those issues, and one misrepresents the genre by focusing exclusively on whatever is fashionable in contemporary literary theory. That is not, fundamentally, what sf is about; take it or leave it as it is. I began with Puschmann-Nalenz, and the conclusions of her study, defining sf by its differences from postmodernism, are wholly appropriate:

> SF assumes functions formerly fulfilled by the "realistic novel" and enhances its objectives: "the representation of an orderly and explicable universe..., enlightenment by insight into the nature of the reality"....
>
> "Innocent realism," as Stephan Kohl calls it, has become alienated to postmod-

> ern fiction. In spite of innovative tendencies which are fully grown into *New Wave* SF I come to the conclusion that there is a specific affinity between SF—the literature of change—and the skills and crafts of writing a "good story," with characters, *plot*, and *closure*. The postmodern "surfiction" or "metafiction" is still separated by a gap from SF, but this gap is narrowing.... The more demanding and intricate products of SF are postmodernizing [i.e. cyberpunk], so that it is certainly unjustified to call the whole genre "trivial." On the other hand the conventional way of narrating a story, which still characterizes the bulk of SF, is not a sign of "triviality," it is more a sign of lack of those innovative inclinations that often lead to auto-destructive fictional texts (225-6).

Indeed. I would substitute "naiveté" for "triviality," but agree wholeheartedly with Puschmann-Nalenz's argument, although having reached her conclusion from a different direction. Her comments illuminate a crucial point about sf which is being ignored by many postmodern sf critics but understood to some extent by feminist sf critics. But, for a criticism that does justice to the genre, on its own terms, more critics will have to appreciate this truth.

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Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.

We're Not in Kansas Anymore: On Naivete in SF and Criticism.

I was not one of the editors of SFS who favored publication of David Dalgleish's article, "In Search of ~~Wonder~~ Naive Criticism: Some Objections to Baudrillard and Bukatman." In my view, the author conceals, perhaps from himself, his lack of critical rigor behind the hectoring of an outraged moralist. Yet there is no denying that the article is topical, and represents views of a number of readers and critics of sf. Many scholars and readers, weary of fashionable jargon being trotted out by academics who feel compelled to show they can hold the current tiger at least by the tail, believe that an elitist, esoteric industry of interpretation has buried the living genre under an avalanche of verbiage. Some feel that academic sf criticism has ignored the real history of sf as a popular genre, its fan base and the great mass of popular works of sf for the sake of a few extraordinary texts that exemplify certain privileged theories.[1] Some hold that the definition of sf should be limited to works belonging to the pulp tradition established with Gernsback's coinage of the term, which would exclude most genre-theoretical approaches to sf.[2] These are common-sensical, richly debatable conservative critical positions. But when such arguments are expanded to imply that it is wrong to apply current theoretical ideas to sf because sf is putatively too archaic/mythological, too populist, or, as Dalgleish would have it, too "naive," we reject that as *faux* naivete.

It is hard to know whether to treat "In Search of ~~Wonder~~ Naive Criticism" as a work of real or *faux* naivete. Dalgleish makes claims for a simple definition of sf that would, if accepted, bypass many of the problems that theorists of sf have faced since they began trying to answer the question "what is science fiction?" Some of these claims have support from other sf critics, others are nothing more than personal opinions inflated into general truths. Whether Dalgleish's "naive" definition is worth entertaining, or merely a simplistic opinion backed by aggressive rhetoric, we can only determine by examining how he supports it. Since so much of his definition is tied up with his attack on postmodern criticism, we must examine how accurately he represents his enemies' positions. Finally, since the title of his essay refers to the naivete of criticism rather than of sf, we must examine whether Dalgleish is practicing naive criticism, and whether critical naivete is a good or a bad thing. On all fronts, I expect to show, Dalgleish has played fast and loose with concepts, positions, and aims. He has set up straw men, cut philosophical corners, and refused to consider nuances and problems.

We have seen the enemy, and they are...? There is, at first reading, much to agree with in Dalgleish's essay. Postmodern writing does often seem at odds with the generic protocols of sf. Postmodern theory does sometimes make claims that seem contrary to common sense and moral consciousness. Postmodern sf critics do appear at times to read sf works as no normal reader of

sf ever would. The simplicity of much sf writing may well come as a relief from the constant problematizing of contemporary criticism. Much feminist criticism does attempt to restore agency and commitment that other postmodern criticism appears to bracket out. But Dalgleish wants it all. For him, *all* postmodern writing is incompatible with *all* sf. Postmodern theory is, *in essence*, nihilistic, demoralizing, and wrong. Sf is, *in essence*, simple, fresh, and innocent. Sf is "an antidote to the absurdities found at the extremes of postmodernism" (85).

According to Dalgleish, postmodern critics have "annexed" sf (79), appropriating discussion of the genre for their own project. This project is alien to the true essence of sf, which is that of a "naive" literature reflecting naive assumptions about reality and human beings. Postmodernism is founded, by contrast, on three absurd principles: the indistinguishability of reality from fiction, the denial of meaning, and the denial of the autonomous subject capable of making meaningful moral and social judgments.

For a critic who espouses respect for certainty, Dalgleish is disturbingly ambiguous about who his targets are. The enemies are in some spots "postmodernism," "postmodern critics," and "the postmodern critics" taken as a unified class—i.e., *all* postmodern critics, *every* aspect of postmodernism; in others it is "some" (79, 81, 82, 91) or "many" (92) of them. The confusion could have been avoided, for Dalgleish does not identify any postmodern critics of whom he approves. As his title indicates, the battle is between schools of thought. There is no room for nuances. Ultimately, Dalgleish takes on only two or three postmodern sf critics: Scott Bukatman, Jean Baudrillard, and, in passing, Fredric Jameson. The absurd assumptions representative of postmodernism are allegedly to be found in Bukatman's *Terminal Identity*, Baudrillard's "Two Essays" on sf and Ballard's *Crash* (published in SFS #55), and in Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* These texts are the only pieces of postmodernism Dalgleish engages with.

Questions arise immediately. Where is this imperious body of postmodern sf criticism? Why do most of the critical articles published in (and indeed submitted to) anthologies, SFS, *Foundation*, *Extrapolation*, *The New York Review of Science Fiction* appear so, well . . . un-postmodern? Why are Bukatman, Baudrillard, and Jameson Dalgleish's only examples of postmodern sf criticism? Why does he not engage also with other, differently-minded sf critics concerned with postmodernism and sf? He makes no mention of Brian McHale, whose *Constructing Postmodernism* includes two of the most influential essays on the relationship between sf and postmodernist writing. Then there's Samuel Delany. Dalgleish laments that Delany's "work is unfortunately being appropriated to reduce sf to a facet of postmodernism" (80). One wonders how Delany's work could *not* be so appropriated, since he is perhaps the single critic most responsible for *establishing* postmodern criticism of sf. Similarly absent are Veronica Hollinger, Damien Broderick, Teresa de Lauretis, Constance Penley, and several contributors to SFS's special issue on postmodernism and sf. These critics do not all agree with Baudrillard (if indeed Baudrillard's mode of writing allows for anything resembling logical agreement) and in fact might agree with some of Dalgleish's points. Would

Dalgleish wish to define them out of postmodern sf criticism as he might wish to define some sf texts out of sf?

Further, why are Bukatman and Baudrillard treated as if they espoused exactly the same views, whereas *Terminal Identity* attempts to place Baudrillard's ideas (among others) as attempts to humanize the relationship between human beings and machines, a tactic inimical to Baudrillard's analysis of the "strategy of the object?" *Terminal Identity* is ultimately about defensive strategies taken by artists in the face of an overwhelming wave of technological transformation. Dalgleish also pits Bukatmanian nihilism against feminist positivity, conveniently ignoring the fact that *Terminal Identity* concludes with an evaluation of the potentials precisely of feminist criticism, noting the importance of feminist theory for postmodern criticism of sf.

One cannot escape the conclusion that Dalgleish is merely writing down his angry reactions to certain ideas he believes he has come across in his reading. Despite the apparent prudence of the second half of his title, it is not enough for him to attack Bukatman and Baudrillard alone, since that might leave room for other postmodern theorists with less extreme views. Dalgleish exaggerates his reactions into a tirade against a school of nihilists undertaking a hostile takeover of his cherished genre. They are "annexing" it. They have made postmodernism and sf "indistinguishable" (79). They "reduce sf to being of interest for the postmodern elements of...cyberpunk" (89). They engage in "a self-perpetuating debate about mostly superficial matters" (91). They do not "do justice," they do not "appreciate truth" (92).

It is quite astonishing that Dalgleish manages more than 13 pages without once exploring the concepts of postmodernism except as some cartoonish nihilism. Aside from *The Crying of Lot 49* he does not mention a single work of postmodern fiction. He does not quote a single postmodern theorist at length. He evades having to discuss the putative postmodern axioms with an interesting rhetorical ploy: after quoting a phrase from one of Jameson's essays, on the disappearance of the sense of history, he follows with "That has broken down in postmodernism, leading to the decentered subject, etc." (82). Like the wave of a conjurer's hand, that "etc." distracts us from the question, what does Dalgleish really know? (Later we will see that this light dismissal of the "decentering of the subject, etc." makes feminism much more of an enemy to Dalgleish than he seems to realize.) Every ostensibly informed claim he makes about postmodernism turns out to be derived from some other, usually critical, commentator's interpretations. Even in this Dalgleish is highly selective. He relies on Marleen Barr and Jenny Wolmark for his information about feminist sf, even though Barr explicitly places her own feminist fabulation among postmodern genres, and Wolmark, in addition to noting the significance of feminism's and postmodernism's "shared theoretical moment" (Wolmark 20), takes her operative definition of sf from Donna Haraway, whom Dalgleish contemptuously dismisses as one of "idols of postmodern sf critics" (81). His understanding of American literary postmodernism seems to have come from Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz's German study (rather than, say, McHale)—who, as it happens, holds views quite opposite Dalgleish's; for Puschmann-Nalenz, sf begins to gain in literary value as it approaches postmodern practices. One

might conclude that Dalgleish's knowledge about postmodernism is based on Bukatman's book, Baudrillard's two essays, and a whole lot of critical hearsay, selectively read.

No mention is made by Dalgleish of the philosophers and anthropologists of postmodernism, from whom the principles of postmodern sf criticism must have derived, other than Baudrillard. Students of contemporary criticism might wonder from which contexts Dalgleish has abstracted these axioms. Even among anti-foundationalist "nihilists" there is a good deal of difference between Deleuze-Guattari, Foucault, Baudrillard, Rorty, Derrida, Haraway, and others—and the differences relate to precisely what sorts of agency, what sorts of powers to create meaning can be imagined. For Dalgleish, there are no differences. Perhaps he believes he has cut through the smoke-screens to the heart of things, distilling postmodernism's toxic essence. The various routes to anti-foundationalist, anti-metaphysical conclusions are not important. Evidently, these postmodern thinkers, along with Barthes, Levinas, Cixous, McLuhan, Judith Butler, Lacan, Virilio, and their ilk, are involved in a "self-perpetuating debate about mostly superficial matters" (91). For Dalgleish evidently only practical moral conclusions matter. Postmodernism's calling things into question simply means, for him, eliminating them, leaving readers without moral compass.

> I do not care to meet the person who doesn't read *Crash* as perversion; the ethical and social implications of Baudrillard's statement [i.e., *Crash* should not be read as perversion] epitomize the dangers of postmodern thought....
>
> Again, I protest against the conflation of reality and fiction—it is an extremely dangerous mode of thought that leads to the sort of amoral perception that Baudrillard advocates. (83)

Postmodernism's misprision of sf is *dangerous*.

Demon #1: Bukatman. Bukatman is Dalgleish's most available adversary, so it is worth taking a closer look at Dalgleish's critique of his ideas. Bukatman's sins are many. He conflates, Dalgleish alleges, sf and postmodernism; he considers interesting only those aspects of sf that relate to postmodern concerns about the mediation of the subject by electronic technologies He occupies the "extreme postmodern position" (80). He claims that the human subject is constructed by electronic technologies (83). He "largely ignores" the central utopian/dystopian dimension of sf (88). He overcomplicates things, he "does not allow the body to be simply a body" (89). He is "infatuated with the 'crisis of the subject' and the 'feminine' as a pre-oedipal discursive mode" (90). Bukatman "conflates real and fictional, body and information, thereby precluding the possibility of the fictional illuminating, changing, or representing the real, because fiction and reality for him, are one big, tangled, indistinguishable mess" (90). He is not interested in metaphysics and "spiritual notions" (91), "ignoring the masses of sf with quasi-mystical/fantastic elements" (91).

I have only identified the sins Dalgleish links specifically to Bukatman, though contextual clues make it clear that most of the absurd positions Dalgleish attributes to postmodernism in general are probably shared by him. But

does *Terminal Identity* really make the extreme claims Dalgleish says it does? What does Bukatman himself say?

> The newly proliferating electronic technologies of the Information Age are invisible, circulating outside the human experiences of space and time. That invisibility makes them less susceptible to representation and thus comprehension at the same time as the technological contours of existence become more difficult to ignore.... In this time of advanced industrialism coupled with economic exhaustion, a deep cultural ambivalence has made itself evident across a range of phenomena. Fredric Jameson has labeled the resultant ambivalent, and sometimes contradictory, formations of postmodernism "the cultural logic of late capitalism." There has arisen a cultural crisis of visibility and control over a new electronically defined reality. It has become increasingly difficult to separate the human from the technological, and this is true rhetorically and phenomenologically. Within the metaphors and fictions of postmodern discourse, much is at stake, as electronic technology seems to rise, unbidden, to pose a set of crucial ontological questions regarding the status *and power* of the human. It has fallen to science fiction to repeatedly narrate a new subject that can somehow directly interface with—and master—the cybernetic technologies of the Information Age, an era in which, as Jean Baudrillard observed, the subject has become a "terminal of multiple networks." This new subjectivity is at the center of *Terminal Identity*. (2)

The unholy trio of Bukatman-Baudrillard-Jameson is present in Bukatman's paragraph, but where is the bold overstatement that Dalgleish accuses Bukatman of? Bukatman writes of "deep cultural crisis," because electronic culture has posed "a set of crucial ontological questions" about humanity. Sf has been called upon to "*narrate* a new subject that can somehow directly interface—*and master*—the cybernetic technologies...." (italics mine). Where Dalgleish finds absurd assertion—the rejection of reality, of "metanarrative," of human subjects searching for meaning and control over their destinies—Bukatman actually writes of a new historical-cultural reality, sf's special power of narrative, and the construction of a human subject trying to control its own destiny in a new world. What, exactly, is lacking here?

Bukatman is not innocent of some rhapsodic formulations of this crisis, but any attentive reader of Bukatman knows that he draws at least as much on the work of Guy Debord and Maurice Merleau-Ponty for his analysis of the postmodern condition as on the demonic postmodernists. Neither Debord nor Merleau-Ponty can be accused of ignoring social reality.

Further, Bukatman comes in for special contempt because of his interest in cyberpunk. A case can certainly be made that many critics have overvalued cyberpunk in general and *Neuromancer* in particular. The jury will be out on the issue for some time. But Dalgleish makes it seem as if Bukatman's *Terminal Identity* were about cyberpunk exclusively; he does not consider it important to note that it is primarily about sf in other media more spectacular than writing—films, video, comics, architecture. Bukatman is concerned to describe the new cultural scene in which sf has gained a new audience, and in which sf plays a central role. He collects, more exhaustively than any critic before him, the theoretical statements and aesthetic works that treat this new cultural formation as a *new reality*. This indeed may define a postmodernist: anyone who believes that fundamental questions have been posed to human

cultures by the conjunction of historical and technological forces in the second half of the twentieth century. A postmodernist might be anyone who believes that fundamental humanistic verities have been *problematized* by new technologies and economies, that the questioning of so-called "eternal truths," long put in question by modernist philosophers and psychologists, are now in question at the level of everyday experience.

What is Dalgleish's response to this formulation? He appears either to be unaware of the situation, or to consider it too trivial to mention. At best, it is *etc.* Where he actually deigns to discuss technology in sf, it is to join in Sharona Ben-Tov's disparagement of the "technological transcendent" in sf. This is a curious moment in Dalgleish's essay. He employs Ben-Tov's interesting but exceedingly narrow thesis from her *The Artificial Paradise* for criticizing the whole genre's tendency to create myths of transcendence via technological innovations and projects. It serves Dalgleish's purpose for criticizing *Neuromancer*, but he turns around immediately to affirm the value of transcendence-fictions of the mystical/fantastic sort. Thus the only form of transcendence Dalgleish condemns is the artificial transcendence of technology. Technology, bad. Nature-mysticism, good; "...natural transcendent Nature vs technological, dead Machinery" (87).

There is not one sign that Dalgleish agrees that high technology's second-nature has altered social reality enough to warrant a new approach to representation, nor that he understands the arguments for it. If the post-World War II world culture is not significantly changed from earlier ones, what would Dalgleish accept as an example of historical-cultural change? We will have more to say about this when we come to the question of metanarratives and history in sf.

In the last pages of his essay, Dalgleish takes Bukatman and cyberpunks to task for overcomplicating things, and ignoring simple facts of life.

> Sf allows the simple, everyday reality—the familiarity and comprehensibility of everyday things—that postmodernism denies. Most sf is concerned with the "meat" that the cyberpunks leave behind. While the postmodern critic and the cyberpunk live happily ever after in their meaningless, disembodied postmodern cyberspace, most sf (and most literature in general, except for the minority of aggressively postmodern texts) continues to debate fundamental issues in life, granting those issues the possibility of real meaning. (89)

I am sure this passage expresses many of Dalgleish's sincere sentiments. But what can he possibly be thinking of? Nowhere does Dalgleish list the everyday things he thinks sf traditionally considers comprehensible and real. Perhaps he means the search for meaning, power, vice, virtue, adventure, romance; perhaps he means shopping, clothing, money, work, crime, family life, technology, love and sex in the real world. Which genre, we might ask, is more scrupulously realistic about the latter set, cyberpunk or traditional sf? And where do anti-gravity, faster-than-light travel, extraterrestrial sentience, galactic civilizations, alternate biologies, and Star Makers figure on the scale of everyday comprehensibility? Bukatman quotes Ballard on Burroughs: "Whatever his reservations...about some aspects of the mid-20th century...Burroughs accepts that it can be fully described only in terms of its own language, its

own idioms and verbal lore" (78). Who would you rather trust to describe the human condition on the cusp of the millennium, Dalgleish or the unholy postmodernists? As for living happily ever after in a meatless world, perhaps Dalgleish should read more of Gibson than *Neuromancer*, perhaps "The Winter Market," some Cadigan, some Shiner. Is it possible that Dalgleish has read so little cyberpunk that he believes it is an unambiguously techno-utopian genre?

Demon #2: Baudrillard. I will not dwell on the dispute between Dalgleish and Baudrillard. It's not a fair fight. Baudrillard is a notoriously easy target, indeed a sort of lightning rod, making a career of attracting the outrage of righteous people by making wild prophecies about the demolition of many of the most sacred humanist categories. He has called himself a nihilist and an intellectual terrorist. As an anthropologist and sociologist, a writer of obvious imagination and style, he is a traitor to the humanistic tradition. But although Baudrillard is easy to attack, he is hard to hit.

Dalgleish cites only Baudrillard's "Two Essays" in SFS #55, and he does not appear to be familiar with any of the rest of the Baudrillard's work. He seems completely unaware of Baudrillard's characteristic style—the high-theoretical surrealist sf/poetry articulating marrow-deep ambivalence about the destruction of western philosophical culture by the communications revolution, expressed with withering, poker-faced irony. Baudrillard is an *agent provocateur*, dedicated to deflating the bourgeois intelligentsia, challenging them to defend their ethical positions under dramatically new conditions. Dalgleish believes "Baudrillard wants us to stop searching" for the truth (84). What is the large and stimulating, and constantly changing, body of Baudrillard's writing but a search and a challenge to search with new tools of thought?

Dalgleish is particularly outraged by Baudrillard's provocations regarding the death of meaning and the absorption of reality by the culture of hyperreal simulations. It is not clear whether Dalgleish has reflected on what Baudrillard means by the hyperreal. As we have seen in Bukatman's case, Dalgleish has no time for the idea that a techno-economy can change human beings' lived experience of reality. Baudrillard's entire philosophy, such as it is, is based on the notion that reality is never perceived innocently. This view has roots in Durkheim and Weber, not to mention Marx. Although Baudrillard's formulations develop the radical modernist premises to an unnerving extreme, righteous indignation is probably the most inappropriate response to them. Many critics have taken Baudrillard to task before Dalgleish. Their critiques, like his, are almost all predicated on the idea that Baudrillard is writing a commentary on the postmodern condition that can be logically and discursively challenged. I have argued elsewhere that Baudrillard should be read less as a critic of sf than as a sf writer who constructs sf scenarios about the present in the language of theory.[3] His interpretations of simulation culture, including his writings on sf, are written in a profoundly ironic mode with more affinities to fiction and poetry than to argument.

Let us note that treating Baudrillard seriously requires us to expand the object of sf criticism beyond not only Dalgleish's ultra-narrow sense of written sf-texts, but beyond sf artifacts in general, to a nebulous mode of conscious-

ness, "science-fictionality," where the fictions of sf overlap with everyday consciousness.

Concerning sf. Dalgleish begins his essay lamenting the lack of a clear definition of sf and a clear critical method appropriate to it. In the absence of these, he tells us, postmodern critics have annexed the genre. In an effort, I suppose, to liberate the genre from the usurping world-view, Dalgleish claims that sf is a whole other species of thing than postmodernism, worthy of critical self-rule, a sort of East Timor or Chechnia of literature. Paradoxically, this different species worthy of critical independence is characterized by its "naiveté," its uncritical acceptance of certain simple axioms about the nature of the world. These axioms are, one can infer, not only true, but also the ones shared by Dalgleish himself. There is one real world; the truth can be known through language; free subjects can better the world; the search for natural transcendence gives meaning to existence. By explaining the simple purity of sf's heart, Dalgleish makes the implicit plea that it be returned to the bosom of traditional ethical criticism. If it must be only a semi-autonomous region (too naive to develop its own reflective criticism), then the right place for it is Ethical Empire, where Dalgleish lives and plies his trade.

Although there is much one might agree with in this view, there would be three main objections to defining sf as a naive literature. The first is that it seems willfully to exclude a large number of works considered by most sf critics as the most interesting in the genre. The second is that it seems to ignore history—global history, the history of art, and the history of the genre. Is it sensible to claim that sf writers have not reflected on the body of works that were written before them in the genre, becoming more self-conscious (hence, not naive) as a result? The third is that it invents a hypothetical reader-author relationship for sf, custom-made to be used as a norm.

For Dalgleish, sf is ultimately a genre of comfort, truly a literature of escape. It defamiliarizes only to refamiliarize. It tells straightforward stories that are not "disturbing to the average individual" (83). "True sf, as I define it, is always searching" for moral and philosophical certitude (84). Metaphysical speculation is a necessary condition. And since it descends from utopian writing, it is concretely concerned with prevailing social and cultural issues (which are, of course, cast in refamiliarizing forms). Works that purport to be sf that do not adhere to these principles are not sf.

At first glance, this appears to be a reversal of Suvin's standard of selection. Where Suvin excludes 99% of what is commonly held to be sf, keeping only the most abstract and literary texts, Dalgleish appears to exclude only the most interesting ones, those that tend to generate sf-theory in the first place. (Similarly, where Suvin emphasizes estrangement and cognition, Dalgleish appears to emphasize reassurance and faith.) It should not be difficult then to categorize what is true sf and what is not: anything experimental, overly ludic, anti- or nonhumanistic, "subject-denying nihilism" is not sf. Ballard is still in (barely) because even in *Crash* "there is a center—a moral center" (83). Dick is in, solidly, because "the issue of moral certitude, not simply the difficulty of gaining moral certitude, is crucial to Dick's work" (84). *Neuromancer* must

be out because of its cyberpunk nihilism; but is cyberpunk really out? After all "it tries to reconcile genre sf's assumptions with postmodernism's assumptions" (87). Dalgleish doesn't get around to clarifying what these genre assumptions are in cyberpunk and *Neuromancer*. Perhaps the promise of technological transcendence criticized by Sharona Ben-Tov? In any case, "the attempt fails." So, in or out? *Voyage to Arcturus* is in, which might surprise some readers. *Female Man* is in, because "at the center of her novel lies an expression of truth," and the novel has "overt socio-political concerns" (88). Who is out, then? Waldrop? Womack? Crowley? Delany? Ryman? Banks? Powers? Noon? Calder? Hoban? Rucker? Jeter? Blaylock? Shiner? Turtledove? Gene Wolfe? Gwyneth Jones?—none are mentioned by Dalgleish. Dalgleish identifies only Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius stories as possible usurpers who might have snuck into the house of sf under false pretenses. (Or is the problem that they are "unsuccessful?" [95]) It may be that it is sufficient for a writer to fulfill just one of Dalgleish's conditions of naiveté to be included in the genre: moral seriousness. If *VALIS* and *Female Man* can be considered naive works, and *Neuromancer* as borderline sf, perhaps the only category that really counts is: does it affirm the dignity of the human subject or not? (Further, this would dictate how a given work should be interpreted. *Solaris* must be in if we read it as an affirmation of the human spirit; it's out if we read it as a satire on human pretensions. *Roadside Picnic* is in if the protagonist is granted his concluding wish; it's out if the whole thing is a hoax.) Or perhaps it's an even simpler matter: does it depress Dalgleish or not?

If there are so few—if any—works that fail to fit into Dalgleish's domain of naive sf, what is really in question in "In Search of ~~Wonder~~ Naive Criticism"? Not the naiveté or postmodernism of sf, but of criticism.

On sf-criticism. Dalgleish wishes to disqualify postmodernist criticism of sf on moral grounds. He does not like it and that's for sure. It makes him angry. But rather than arguing about the role of art in purveying traditional humanistic ethical values versus those of cynical, relativistic, nihilistic postmodernity—a tack that might force him to develop a theory of the relationship of art to the culture it grows up in—Dalgleish sets up an all-purpose dualism: there are naive forms of literature, and there are...postmodern ones? The classic version of this opposition is Schiller's distinction between naive and sentimental poetry. Naive poets were those with direct apprehension of nature, the original creative minds who drew on their direct experience as models for art—Homer, Shakespeare, Ossian. The sentimental poets are those who, alienated from nature by modernity, are forever seeking experience of nature, but are forced to create artificial forms for their poetry. They are the critical artists, who learn more from art and reflection than they do from life as lived. Schiller did not believe that naive poetry was possible in the modern age, other than in isolated pockets of the folk. Modern poetry was sentimental. Criticism is sentimental by definition.

Dalgleish does not invoke Schiller, which is unfortunate since he does not actually name any other attitudes toward art than the naive and the postmod-

ern. Would the same polarity exist between, say, naive sf and modernist criticism? Would modernist criticism be just as likely to distort and corrupt the essence of sf? Or is modern sf the same as naive sf? Delany makes a fascinating case in one of his interviews for linking sf to the Wagnerian origins of modernism;[4] and in any case it would be difficult not to view a genre of exploration-literature like sf as an aspect of modernity. Further, if we hold with Schiller even a little, then literary criticism is "in essence" also a sentimental/modern activity of consciousness. How then *should* literary criticism relate to a naive genre like sf? Should it strive to be naive, too, against its nature?

It is not at all clear whether Dalgleish has thought about these matters. Nowhere does he distinguish between the proper spheres of postmodernism and sf. Indeed, his contrast is between a form of fiction and a form of criticism, not two forms of fiction or two forms of criticism. We cannot be sure exactly what concrete linguistic activities we are comparing—he contrasts two abstract attitudes toward the life-world. Sf is naive, and naive means morally responsible and concerned with the dignity of the subject. Postmodern criticism is relativistic, nihilistic, subject-denying, amoral. Could the opposition be simplified further: naive fiction good, criticism bad?

Dalgleish is not much clearer when he formulates the elements of sf's supposed naiveté. Each of these categories may have some validity, yet each is riven by the same problem. Each is asserted by a critical view that purports to be naive itself, and yet must be conscious of the sophisticated, anti-naive categories it rejects. It must defend its naiveté against an intellectual adversary, without losing its naive faith. This is the old story of defending faith against the Subtle One. But where sophisticated critics and philosophers of faith, like Gabriel Marcel or Jacques Ellul, have been willing to wrestle with the modern demons of technology and existential despair, Dalgleish does not indicate that he believes that there are problems that sf, and literature in general, must deal with in the historical world.

Metanarrative. The irony of this is that Dalgleish bases his notion of sf's faith in metanarrative on his opposition to postmodernism's "disappearance of the sense of history." Since, Dalgleish argues, "a sense of history is equivalent to the 'metanarrative,' the connectivity of things" (82), postmodern writing eschews metanaratives. Naive fiction, therefore, holds with both history and metanarrative. Sf is devoted to the model of linear connection of events leading from the past to a putatively "real" future. This is a point where I agree with Dalgleish.

Allow me note here that Dalgleish's use of the term metanarrative is ambiguous. The standard use of the term metanarrative in postmodern discourse originates with Lyotardian critique of Master Narratives, i.e., those overarching cultural myths that inspired different ideologies of progress. A metanarrative is *meta* because of its difference from more local narratives that do not make global claims. Does Dalgleish mean that sf writers necessarily subscribe to Master Narratives of progress or apocalypse? Or is he merely using an inflated term for narrative itself, a discernible story that follows the traditional logic by which stories are told? We cannot know for sure, since Dalgleish

conflates the two meanings. Does the "connectivity of things" on the local level necessarily imply some global connectivity? Dalgleish's answer: "Linear time, the connectivity of things, is a predicate for getting to the 'real' future, one with which we can become familiar" (82). Sf's faith in narrative is thus actually faith in linear time. Any serious narrative entertainment of cyclical, looping, branching, reversing, spiraling time cannot be sf. I would be curious to read Dalgleish's interpretation of *Man in the High Castle*. Must alternate histories exit the genre?

It is also ironic that Dalgleish bemoans postmodernism's ahistoricity in precisely the same move in which he implies that "linear connectivity" has some transhistorical moral validity. Faith in the linear movement from a past to the future is required for real-world readers to cope with the "real" future. Where then does the communication revolution fit in Dalgleish's linear faith in the course of history? Is it a necessary condition? Is it an ontological illusion, an epiphenomenon with no historical substance? Does it have nothing to add to, or to say about, the human condition? Is it a fabrication by intellectuals and advertisers? Are the artists inventing it, as Ballard says? What role does historical change have in Dalgleish's "naive" polemical conception of postmodern ahistoricity?

Because Dalgleish doesn't actually excommunicate any particular sf text, it's hard to know how strict his notion of a science-fictional essence is. How strong, in terms of the history of the genre, is the distinction between naive and postmodern? Is all sf naive? Is some sf naive, and some sf postmodern? In the past, was all sf naive, but now some sf is postmodern?

Considering literary history, one would expect that sf would change as the culture in which it grows changes, with for example sf-appropriate versions of traditionalism, modernism, post-modernism, or other, similar historical categories. An essentialist definition that ignores historical changes—e.g., that sf is some transhistorical "naive" genre—is tantamount to Dalgleish saying sf is what *he* calls sf. He is like a jazz-traditionalist in the 50s who could say that be-bop is not jazz, because it doesn't sound like Dixieland or Swing; the non-naive, postmodern versions of sf (like *Neuromancer*?) are thus something else, postmodern or whatever, but definitely not sf, no matter what readers and critics might think.[5] Dalgleish wants to control the term to fit his taste, and to deny certain historical changes of the genre. Although he pretends to attack postmodernism's ahistoricism, he does it by trying to freeze the genre, and through it, to exclude postmodernism from historical legitimacy. In other words, postmodernism may be happening, but it *shouldn't* be, and sf will have none of it.

Metaphysics. Dalgleish writes, "one of the...justifications of [sf] as a genre, has always been its ability to dramatize metaphysical, eschatological, and philosophical issues in a way realistic fiction cannot" (85). It is indisputable that many of the greatest works of sf are saturated with metaphysical speculation and displaced religious yearning. Yet Dalgleish's notion of metaphysics has curious boundaries. Works that propose that human subjects are creations of information systems (like *Neuromancer*) are apparently not involved in

metaphysical speculation because (so Dalgleish argues) Case, data-determined, is not capable of transcendence. But surely *Neuromancer* raises a wealth of metaphysical questions. Is individual consciousness a spiritual or a material thing? Is there an essential difference? Can a machine intelligence attain self-awareness and freedom? Can a machine-generated virtual reality have the same status as our real reality? (I.e., can a machine have a soul? Can it make one? Can a soul make a machine?) Can human beings and machines combine to form entities different from either? If these are not metaphysical, what are they? Perhaps they are empirical, in which case the putative postmodern distaste for metaphysics is completely justified, since the problems of metaphysical contemplation have been materialized on earth and present problems of concrete knowledge and action. One suspects that Dalgleish would like to exclude all subjects but the humanoid from his naive metaphysics. Exit materialism, exit quantum reality?

Do Dalgleish's strictures against the technological determination of subjectivity apply to any determinism? Apparently not, for he includes *Star Maker* in his canon, a work that ends with an apocalypse surely no less deterministic than *Neuromancer*'s.[6]

Whatever these speculative ontological problems might be, they do not fit Dalgleish's notion of the metaphysical. For him, it must have to do with a higher *Nature*. Apparently, fundamental questions about the operation of *this* reality cannot be metaphysical, for the naive reason that Dalgleish does not allow for the problematization of the human subject and its relation to the world it creates. In his discussion of Ben-Tov's critique of technological transcendence in sf, Dalgleish illuminates this further. Ben-Tov, in his view, narrows her perspective only to sf that fits Suvin's exclusive category of works of cognitive estrangement. She would find works that narrate positive forms of transcendence if she would include in her sample works that feature "some sort of mysticism or irrationality carried over from the fantastic tradition it is so closely allied with" (87). It is a matter of "the mystic vs the postmodernist" (87) "The mystical, natural, transcendent approach" vs the "rational, technological approach of the cyberpunk" (91).

It is no help to mention that the gist of the entire postmodern project is the critique of the duality Dalgleish enthusiastically lays out here. This is aggressively naive criticism. It probably will do no good also to wonder what the conclusion of *Neuromancer* is if not mysticism? What is the whole cyberspace trilogy but a dialectics of mysticism? I can only speculate that Dalgleish will not even accept of that the phrase *technomysticism* has any meaning, for he does not entertain the idea that specific form of metaphysics that can imagine human beings creating beings of a higher order than themselves. What is there in organic given nature, one wonders (for that is surely what Dalgleish means by "Nature" and "the natural"), that precludes such transformations?

Given these naive requirements for sf, it is not at all clear what distinguishes sf from fantasy. Dalgleish's idea of metaphysical speculation seems much more closely allied to fantasy fiction. Narrativity is also more closely tied to the traditional narrative base of quasi-mythic fantasy than to sf. Belief in the fundamental reality of this world as opposed to a "higher reality" comports

much better with fantasy than with sf which even in its most conservative forms entertains the idea that human beings' knowledge of the world can be influenced by material conditions and other human beings.

Utopia, sf and postmodernism. Dalgleish also argues that sf is naturally incompatible with postmodernism because of its deep roots in the genre of utopian writing, which is fundamentally incompatible with postmodernism. Utopian writing, according to Dalgleish, is concerned with real social arrangements (allegedly denied by postmodernism), the persuasive action of language on free subjects (ditto), and the implicit judgment about one society set against the one in the present (all such comparative judgments are supposedly rejected by unified postmodernism).

There are several flaws in this line of reasoning. First, even if utopian writing and postmodern criticism are viewed as mutually exclusive (a not implausible proposition), there is no reason why artists and thinkers would not strive to reconcile them. Every synthetic system or practice is an attempt to reconcile enormous exclusivities: one need only think of the Augustinian and Thomistic reconciliations of mysticism and ratiocination, or of the Romantic poets' attempt to reconcile language with the ineffable sublime, or melodrama's attempt to reconcile tragedy and comedy. Why should artists *not* try to reconcile utopia with postmodern decentering, even if it results in disturbing utterances?

But even this point is problematic. Dalgleish quotes Jenny Wolmark to the effect that sf is a mixture of utopian and dystopian elements, and implies that she would agree with the statement: "a great deal could be said about the difficulty of reconciling utopian/dystopian literature with postmodern theory—the basic assumptions of the two sides are almost mutually exclusive" (88). What does Wolmark really have to say on the matter?

> The inclusion of both utopian and dystopian characteristics within the same text is a feature of both feminist and postmodern writing, in which the totalizing tendencies of the dominant ideology are challenged from a variety of different perspectives. The novels under discussion in this section [Chapter 4: "Trouble in Women's Country"] are part of the struggle to articulate the emergence of the female subject in a context in which female agency continues to experience profound limitations. The postmodern uncertainty generated in the narratives derives from the disruption of genre expectations and also from the perspective the narratives provide on contemporary social and sexual relations. (Wolmark 91)

Wolmark may not have intended to continue her elision of sf and postmodern writing beyond the first sentence (the novels she discusses are not particularly postmodern by most people's definition), but she articulates clearly that the double perspective of utopia/dystopia is characteristic of both sf and postmodernism. Such utopian genealogy of sf is important for Dalgleish only in so far as it establishes sf's naivete about the efficacy of human choice and action, a morally clear, good position. What happens when a utopian sf text is so ironic as to be problematic? A problematized utopian narrative problematizes the present. The implicit or even explicit comparison between the utopian /dystopian elsewhere and the reader's here-and-now may not leave the reader

with a heightened sense of moral agency because narrative may not allow either the elsewhere, or the here-and-now a clear moral position. "Irony and ambiguity abound," Dalgleish allows, but pushed far enough, these create great problems. More's *Utopia* is itself so ironic it fits easily among postmodern writings (see Louis Marin's *Utopiques: Jeux d'Espaces*). How are we to assess the rottenness of our 16th century England if the ideal we compare it to is manifestly impossible, self-contradictory and lacking in grace?

Feminism. My final criticism of Dalgleish's "In Search of ~~Wonder~~ Naive Criticism" concerns his puzzling treatment of feminist criticism. He refers to Marleen Barr and Jenny Wolmark as exponents of anti-postmodernist sf-criticism. In the culture war, their brand of feminism is on the side of the naive sf camp, in strong opposition to the putative postmodern denial of the real world of women's poverty, rights, and oppression. Wolmark is a good ally to have. But tellingly, Dalgleish ignores Wolmark's more inconvenient comments, like the following in *Aliens and Others*:

> the decentering of the modernist legacy, along with the decentering of the unitary subject have been of immense importance as far as feminism and feminist cultural production have been concerned, enabling the question of gendered subjectivity to become part of the postmodern agenda. (11)

While Wolmark critiques the refusal of many male theorists of postmodernism to accommodate the problem of gender in their accounts, these remarks refer specifically to those who attempt to theorize the cultural scene as a whole. Elsewhere, Wolmark accepts Donna Haraway's definition of sf as her book's working definition: "Science fiction is generically concerned with the interpenetration of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others and with the exploration of possible worlds in a context structured by transnational technoscience" (2). The word postmodern does not appear in this formulation (which is why Dalgleish may have missed it), but a more postmodern definition can hardly be imagined.

Dalgleish has the curious illusion that feminism is a naive world view. One wonders what feminist theory he has read, and what of that he paid attention to. Wolmark clearly aligns feminism not only with traditional political concerns of women, but also with the recent projects of postmodern feminism, queer theory, and the cyborg, all linked by the problematization of power and identity via the problematization of the gendered subject. Unsurprisingly, Dalgleish believes that "feminism has allowed itself to become diverted by postmodern overcomplication...." (90)—in fact, by a complexity that stems from refusing to consider gender a naive category.

Any student of feminist literary theory knows that at least two of Dalgleish's privileged naive categories—metanarrative and metaphysics—have been subjected to thoroughgoing critiques by feminist theorists. The relationship of narrative to Oedipal myths of recuperative violence has not been as easily dismissed by feminist theorists as Dalgleish believes. And the entirety of feminist cyborg theory, perhaps the most science-fictional of all postmodern theories, is based on the critique of the myths of transcendence—*especially* the mysticism of "Nature."

Cynical or obtuse criticism? Here's a simple truth. If you claim that truth is simple, you also imply that those who deny this are wrong. Naiveté in criticism can only survive if it claims there are transparent, unambiguous objects—like sf texts—which offer themselves to be understood one way (the critic's way), unchanging over time. David Dalgleish's argument that sf is essentially "naive" is thus either true, obtuse (was: naive), or cynical.

If his claims for sf and postmodernism are simply true, I can say no more about them because I am outside its truth. It wouldn't be a matter of criticism any longer, but theology and mysticism. Nothing in Dalgleish's article has demonstrated this truth, but it still may be true.

The claims may only be critically obtuse. Perhaps Dalgleish believes that a text has meaning somehow independent of its readers, especially other critics. Otherwise, as soon as an audience views sf texts as rich and *problematic*, he must accept that the texts involve problems that he did not perceive *or* that all such problematizing is an illegitimate projection of (other) readers' concerns on an innocent text-screen. The only critically useful way to decide this is to entertain the putative problems, read the given texts with them in mind, and see whether interesting or useful claims emerge. One working definition of criticism might be: figuring out what problems make a text interesting. To refuse to entertain the logic of these problems is simply an ostrich-strategy. As criticism, it has no value, even if its basic propositions are demonstrated elsewhere to be true.

Dalgleish has no interest is understanding postmodern criticism. He would like to build a prophylactic wall around sf (one way to make a ghetto) to limit it to some readings, and absolutely prevent others. He might thus protect the genre's innocence, purity and simplicity from postmodern violation. But how do we know Dalgleish can tell whether the purity is an illusion or not, since he seems absolutely innocent of the notion of *problematization*? Criticism is dangerous and painful to the naif. It is about identifying illusions, and once simplicity has been exposed, you can never go home again. Unless, like fundamentalists, nationalists, and essentialists, one holds that questioning cherished illusions is the first step toward nihilism and democracy.

There are signs that Dalgleish is not always aware that criticism necessarily involves the formulation of abstract questions about concrete things. Or perhaps he is not aware that he is practicing criticism himself. He takes Bukatman to task for the typical postmodern habit of elevating everything "to a realm of abstract discourse removed from the real world" (89). What does Dalgleish believe he is doing himself in "In Search of ~~Wonder~~ Naive Criticism," singing a song? Although it definitely lacks the theoretical rigor of postmodern criticism, and though it may appear to be a defense of the real world, Dalgleish's essay is a piece of criticism about criticism. It is abstract, removed from the real world. Perhaps it is postmodern in its very naiveté.

Dalgleish's criticism may, however, be not obtuse, but cynical. He must know, since he is himself a practicing critic, that criticism involves questioning a text, and that the questions posed by texts and by critics change with time. Yet he still insists that some texts should be exempt from serious problematization. This way the emphasis is not on the blessed simplicity of sf, but on the

menace of certain critical views—against which the naiveté of sf texts has to be constructed. Dalgleish appears to have defended himself well against them, giving them little mental surface for purchase.

Is "In Search of ~~Wonder~~ Naive Criticism" then a work of willful naiveté?

A willful refusal to entertain complexity, to understand questions put to reality, does not equal innocence, but stubbornness, obtuseness, timidity. It is a disingenuous form of criticism, for it says "do not entertain certain ideas or you will lose your soul!" It says sophistication is bad, complexity is wrong. Though I might agree with Dalgleish that "there's nothing wrong with a little naiveté once in a while" (85) in art, in criticism there is plenty wrong with it, especially when the naivete is mostly bluff. Dalgleish would like it both ways: he would like to be a sophisticated defender of naivete, and a naif himself. How can the uneasy relationship of sf and postmodernism begin to compare with uneasy relationship of David Dalgleish with his own critical ideas?

NOTES

1. Edward James in a lecture entitled "After 50 Years: The Past and Future of SF Scholarship" at the *Speaking Science Fiction* conference, University of Liverpool and Sydney Jones Library, July, 1996.

2. Gary Westfahl, "On *The True History of Science Fiction*," Foundation 47:5-27, Winter 1989/90.

3. "The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway." SFS 18:387-404, #55, Nov 1991.

4. *Silent Interviews. On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics* (Hanover NH: Wesleyan UP, 1994) 192-93.

5. This problem arises with every mutation of the genre. The furor over cyberpunk seems silly now, since the mass of readers and critics naturally accepted it as a legitimate genre of sf. But the question of the fantasy-sf fusion, or horror-sf, is still on the table. Bringing the discussion closer to home, SFS has clear working protocols that exclude consideration of manuscripts dealing with fantasy. Although convenient, the definition of sf the protocol implies is not unproblematic, and will probably only become more problematic with time.

6. See Stanislaw Lem. "On Stapledon's *Star Maker*." SFS 14:1-8, #41, March 1987.

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