EXPLORING THE FEMINIST UTOPIA
A posthumanist study of science fiction

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to propose science fiction as a tool to develop alternative political discourses that oppose the ontological and political shifts involved in late capitalism. I want to argue that literary science fiction works can provide ways to identify what is going on in our societies, as well as linguistic and stylistic tools that question the patriarchal ideas of normativity and unity. These tools include deviations from the canon that suggest new ways of representing our subjectivities and our relations with others, based on vulnerability and interconnections rather than on power and exploitation. Some science fiction themes, like time-travelling, encounters with aliens, or representations of utopias and dystopias, constitute powerful tools to imagine other ontological possibilities for ourselves, as well as political and ethical alternatives to fight the neoliberal machine that puts capital flow, instead of life, at the front. To develop this idea, I will analyze three science fiction works: Joanna Russ’s *The female man*, Ursula LeGuin’s *The dispossessed*, and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. Each of these works illustrates different points that I believe are useful to build these new discourses of interactive encounters with others (be them human or nonhuman), based on intersectionality, vulnerability, and affect. I will draw on philosophical approaches described by Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway, Derrida and Braidotti, among others; as well as on science fiction critics, like Suvin or Vint, and the writers themselves. I ultimately want to state the power of science fiction languages and narratives to describe the affirmative political system that I believe we need in order to overcome the system of domination in which we are embedded.

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo proponer la ciencia ficción como una herramienta para desarrollar discursos políticos alternativos que se opongan a los cambios ontológicos y políticos del capitalismo tardío. Quiero argumentar que el subgénero literario de la ciencia ficción puede facilitarnos la identificación de lo que sucede en nuestras sociedades, así como proporcionarnos herramientas lingüísticas y estilísticas que cuestionen los conceptos patriarcales de normatividad y unidad. Estas herramientas incluyen desviaciones del canon que sugieren nuevas formas de representar nuestras subjetividades y nuestras relaciones con los demás seres, basadas en la vulnerabilidad y las interconexiones, en lugar de en relaciones de poder y explotación. Algunos temas de
la ciencia ficción, como los viajes en el tiempo, el encuentro con extraterrestres, o la representación de utopías y distopías, constituyen poderosas formas de imaginar otras posibilidades ontológicas, así como alternativas políticas y éticas para luchar contra la máquina neoliberal que da prioridad al flujo de capital en vez de a la vida. Para desarrollar estas ideas, analizaré tres novelas de ciencia ficción: The female man (Joanna Russ), The dispossessed (Ursula LeGuin) y Oryx and Crake (Margaret Atwood). Cada una de estas obras ilustra diferentes temas que considero útiles para construir estos nuevos discursos de encuentros interactivos con otros seres (humanos o no humanos), basados en la interseccionalidad, vulnerabilidad, y afectividad. Emplearé propuestas filosóficas descritas por Deleuze y Guattari, Haraway, Derrida y Braidotti, entre otras, así como en ideas de críticos y críticas enfocadas en la ciencia ficción, como Suvin o Vint, y de las propias escritoras. Con todo ello quiero afirmar el poder de los lenguajes y las narrativas de la ciencia ficción para describir la política afirmativa que creo que necesitamos para superar el sistema de dominación en el que estamos atrapadas.
She goes to poetry or fiction looking for her way of being in the world...
    she is looking eagerly for guides, maps, possibilities.

    Adrienne Rich

No political revolution is possible without a radical shift
    in one’s notion of the possible and the real.

    Judith Butler

Don’t for a minute think that there are no material effects of yearning and imagining.

    Karen Barad
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INTRODUCTION
Science fiction: old and new worlds

Science fiction seems to have been relegated in the collective imagination to geeks, teenagers wearing T-shirts with monsters and spatial memorabilia or Super 8 films from the 80s. However, we have recently witnessed a new wave of SF cultural products, from Netflix series to literary sagas and films, some of them paying tribute, like the successful *Stranger things* (2016), to SF classics like *Alien* (1979), *E.T. The extra-terrestrial* (1982) or *Gremlins* (1984). Some of these movies and others, like *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Independence day* (1996) or the *Star wars* trilogy (1977, 1980, 1983), have made it into the top ten moneymakers. Thomas Disch (1998) argues that it is becoming increasingly difficult in media to distinguish between SF and reality, since dinosaurs in the movies look as real as elephants, and children’s toys are morphing into weapons.

Some of these products have often been used as carriers of highly philosophical questions, or to denounce political matters in a more or less direct way: recent series like *Orphan black* and *Westworld* bring to the forefront the issue of human cloning, which, besides being not so far from reality, is connected to less fanciful topics such as reproductive freedom or the rights of subjects considered as non- or less-than-human. Perhaps one of the most successful SF visual products in the last years has been *Black mirror*, whose episodes tackle ethical matters related to war, surveillance systems, or social networks. Actually, however scary *Black mirror* presents its (alternative?) reality, the truth is that many of its thematic resources are actually real. The episode *Hated in the Nation* from the 3rd season (2016) shows small robots in the shape of bees that are secretly being used for governmental monitoring, and which are later hacked and set to attack people. We probably should not breathe a sigh of relief at the end of this thrilling episode, since the very same insects are being developed as small drones called RoboBees by Harvard University for potential uses in crop pollination, rescue missions or surveillance (Poole, 2013). In *Nosedive*, also from the 3rd season of *Black mirror*, a new social network allows its users to rate other people and be rated by them, which then lets them (or forbids them to) perform social actions like taking a flight. Something similar is going on in China, where, in an Orwellian turn of events, the government has announced the launch

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1 SF refers to science fiction. A list of abbreviations is provided at the end of this work.
2 *Matrix* being one of the key representatives of this trend, as shown in the discussions about human freedom, A.I. or mythology in the 2003 edited collection by Yeffeth and Gerrold, or in the articles about computer simulations and free will in *Science fiction and philosophy* (2009).
of a “social credit”, a score system to test the trustworthiness of its citizens in order to evaluate whether they can use public transport, for instance (Ma, 2018).

The literary world has also seen this fashion fill bookshelves with successful sagas like Suzanne Collins’s *The hunger games* (2008), with a highly political content; the resurgence of political SF queen Margaret Atwood3 (due also to the release of the series *The handmaid’s tale*, based on her homonymous novel); or post-apocalyptic and spatial adventures like *The road*, *World war Z* or *The Martian* (all of them with their corresponding filmic adaptations). However, the future announced in SF is not just close to our era, it is happening right now. In the wake of *The handmaid’s tale* success, Atwood stated:

I’m not a prophet. Let’s get rid of that idea right now. Prophecies are really about now. In science fiction it’s always about now. What else could it be about? There is no future. There are many possibilities, but we do not know which one we are going to have (Allardice, 2018: no page).

When we talk about climate change, for instance, there is the feeling that it is still far in the future, that our roads are not full of people fleeing for survival and that there is still drinking water in our taps. But that is not true for all of the world population. In 2013, Yeb Sano, the Philippines delegate in the UN, recriminated his fellow delegates who were not taking climate change seriously and dared them to go to the Philippines, which a hurricane had just struck, turning climate change into “a matter of life and death as food and water become scarce” (2013). It seems as if the future of some advantaged people is already the horrifying present of others.

SF is also being used as a rhetorical device to talk about social challenges. Donna Haraway (1991) said already in the 80s that the boundary between SF and social reality was actually an illusion4. In her recent book about the election of Donald Trump as US president and the world we will inhabit if we do not do anything to stop big businesses from taking over world governments, Naomi Klein expresses that “the current crops of mainstream dystopian books and films reimagine the same Green Zone/Red Zone future over and over again” (2017:168). She makes a comparison between the unequal districts

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3 Although she has stated that she does not like being turned into an icon (McCrum, 2010), much less a science fiction one, a genre that she considers to be only about “talking squids in outer space”, monsters and spaceships; and she prefers the term “speculative fiction”, which describes things that could actually happen (Mancuso, 2016). More about this terminology will be developed in chapter 2.

4 Her transcendent “Cyborg manifesto” was published in 1984, but I will be using her collection of essays *Simians, cyborgs and women* from 1991, which includes other texts relevant for this work.
in *The hunger games* and Iraq’s war field compared to the area built for soldiers as an oasis in the middle of hell, with pools, gyms, and saunas. The televising of the violence exercised upon Syria, with Tomahawk missiles raining over civilians and watched from Trump and their associates’ luxury mansions—an image described by Rosi Braidotti as the tele-thanatological machine (2013)—also recalls for Klein the poor districts of Collins’s saga fighting to death under the eyes of the millionaires from the rich Capitol (the contrast of Trump’s luxurious way of life with the reality of the majority of the world population is very well represented in the picture taken by Paul Needham in 2014; see Figure 1). Klein continues: “the point of dystopian art is not to act as a temporal GPS, showing us where we are inevitably headed. The point is to warn us, to wake us—so that, seeing where this perilous road leads, we can decide to swerve” (2017:168).

![Figure 1. Trump Tower advertisement in Mumbai](image)

What I want to formulate in this work is the power of SF to, on the one hand, represent what is going on in our dystopian present and, on the other hand, offer new
possibilities for alternative political projects to change the world we live in. Post-industrial capitalist societies have posed important challenges to the conception of work and our subjectivities, producing shifts that postmodern authors like Haraway (1991) and poststructuralists like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980) have engaged with in order to imagine other ontological possibilities.

Chapter 1 collects the views on this late capitalist, computer-led society, as well as liberation proposals to these fractured subjectivities, like the cyborg or rhizomatic identities. This chapter will look at new language and philosophical possibilities to confront the era in which everything gains its meaning through the logic of capital exchange. Posthumanism and the ethics of care claim for the end of the (hu)man as the centre of thought and propose new ways of understanding subjectivities, ethics and political action, to overcome our anthropocentrism and find interconnections with the nonhuman realm.

Chapter 2 narrows down the focus towards the study of the SF subgenre within literature: the definition of the term and its formal characteristics, its historic exclusion from the patriarchal literary canon, and the situation of female writers during the development of this genre. The subsequent three chapters deal with feminist SF works: Joanna Russ’s *The female man* (1975), Ursula LeGuin’s *The dispossessed* (1974), and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003).

My interest in *TFM* appeared after my reading of Haraway’s “Cyborg manifesto”, where she uses the figure of the female man as an example of the cyborg. This interest increased when I read the novel and reflected on the use of language, the similarities that I could draw between the SF strategies employed and some modernist techniques, and also thinking about the subversive possibilities of the theme of time travel. Chapter 3 describes the worlds that Russ portrays in her novel, focusing on time travel as a powerful cognitive shift from our everyday assumptions; the language features that contribute to the estrangement, making connections with literary modernism and the stream of consciousness, and the challenge that they pose for the humanist patriarchal canon; and finally the meaning of the utopia that Russ describes.

Regarding *TD*, I read *The left hand of darkness* some years ago and was thrilled by Le Guin’s use of language to unveil the constructed category of gender and her imagination of a society without gender differences. Wanting to deal with utopia in this work, I decided to include her other major work, also as a humble tribute to one of the most important figures in feminist SF, due to her death earlier this year. Chapter 4
therefore focuses on utopia and utopianism through LeGuin’s novel. I will explain why I consider that the novel itself is a cyborg in Haraway’s sense. Like in Russ’s case, this chapter will also deal with the linguistic possibilities explored by LeGuin in the novel, specifically through the invention of alien languages that provoke an estrangement in our normative ones. Finally, I want to reflect on the ways in which the idea of utopia has been idealised when it is actually a very complex discourse that can in fact lead to nightmarish dystopias.

Finally, my choice of O&C was due to my interest in including nonhuman animals in the discussion of the subversive power of SF. Chapter 5 addresses particularly this theme of the nonhuman animal within this subgenre, grounding my reflections on the works of Sherryl Vint, Jacques Derrida, and the feminist approaches to animal ethics, among others. When analysing O&C, I want to focus on the genetically modified beings of the novel through Braidotti’s theory of “zoe/bios”, Giorgio Agamben’s notion of “bare life”, and the idea of joining forces with the nonhuman (both literally and metaphorically) in order to produce a resistance to the capitalist logics described in chapter 1. This resistance would be the result of making interconnections with each other, realizing the common points between our oppressions and developing new languages that honour these alliances and lead to better futures for all of us.

Though different, these novels are connected through the idea of utopia/dystopia (and how unstable and unreliable these terms often are); the possibilities of language to represent, but also produce, new worlds where hierarchy and domination are substituted by connection and embodiment; and, in general, the main idea conveyed in this work: that SF offers a rich source of possibilities to be looked at, enjoyed and used in our emancipating movements. I want to explore how we can shift the focus from individuality and capitalist productivity towards the opening of new conversations that privilege embodiment and vulnerability instead of relations of exploitation and domination. I ultimately want to argue that this shift can be creatively imagined through SF due to its linguistic and thematic possibilities, employing posthumanist ethics intertwined with the ethics of care and critical animal studies.
I. Situating myself: where I come from and where I stand now

I consider that any analysis and political practice that define themselves as emancipatory should at least consider two points: broadly speaking, intersectionality and a questioning of traditional forms of knowledge. The concept of intersectionality was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw and developed by other writers like Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and bell hooks (1982). Concerning knowledge, we must bear in mind the contributions pointed out from feminist epistemologies such as Sandra Harding’s standpoint theory (1986) and Haraway’s situated knowledges (1991), or the objections made from decolonial writers like Chela Sandoval (1995). She draws on Haraway’s cyborg ontology to compare it with what she calls the methodology of the oppressed, built on fluid identities like the “mestiza”5. Both Haraway and Sandoval denounce White feminism as a descendant of patriarchal colonialism, which states its knowledge as universal and totalizing, resulting in a paternalistic and biased approach. Acknowledging this means taking into consideration practices and theories that had been deemed as of lesser value, unimportant or not suitable for academic discussion (and therefore left aside from the most crowded discussion centres like conferences or university lectures, as happens with indigenous or unconventional approaches to knowledge). I believe it is the responsibility of each of us within humanities to situate our voice, describe our circumstances and the oppressions and privileges that cross us, and avoid a too-quick universalisation of our statements. What follows is my attempt to situate this work.

As a researcher, but also in my personal life, I have learnt to deconstruct the idea that academia requires allegedly–impersonal texts that make reason prevail over emotion, and objectivity above subjectivity, in an aseptic tone. I agree with Haraway (1991) when she states that all knowledge is subjective since it comes from a specific person under specific circumstances. This is not incompatible, though, with a political practice that observes established patterns of actions or behaviours and then extracts a conclusion such as the existence of gender violence as a product of patriarchal society (or the existence of patriarchy itself). As Harding states,

5 The mestiza refers to those “who live and are gendered, sexed, raced, and classed ‘between and among’ the lines” (Sandoval, 1995:45). The concept also draws from the work of authors like Gloria Anzaldúa, author of Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), Audre Lorde or Cherrie Moraga.
the goal of feminist knowledge-seeking is to achieve theories that accurately represent women’s activities as fully social, and social relations between the genders as a real—and explanatorily important—component in human history (Harding, 1986:138).

Like Haraway, Harding thinks that a feminist standpoint will necessarily be partial (because there is no such thing as a universal essence of “the woman” from which an absolute “female experience” can be extracted, but rather a multiplicity and diversity of realities that women in the world experience), and that a vision from below can produce better understandings, as well as being materially more complete:

A feminist epistemological standpoint is an interested social location (“interested” in the sense of “engaged,” not “biased”), the conditions for which bestow upon its occupants scientific and epistemic advantage. The subjugation of women’s sensuous, concrete, relational activity permits women to grasp aspects of nature and social life that are not accessible to inquiries grounded in men’s characteristic activities. The vision based on men’s activities is both partial and perverse—“perverse” because it systematically reverses the proper order of things: it substitutes abstract for concrete reality; for example, it makes death-risking rather than the reproduction of our species form of life the paradigmatically human activity (Harding, 1986:148).

This idea has also been developed by Marxist feminists like Nancy Hartsock (1983) and Jane Flax, who argue that women’s position within society provides them with an epistemic advantage to “uncover how patriarchy has permeated both our concept of knowledge and the concrete content of bodies of knowledge” (Flax, 1983:269). I think we should make an effort to situate ourselves in our context when we talk about privileges and oppressions, but without losing sight of the material conditions that surround us and that shape our identities. This effort implies losing our fear of using the “I” in academic texts and of building our reflections upon not only theory but also personal experiences and practices, adding them to our writings. Perhaps Michel Foucault has been as relevant for your personal politics as your mother, or the reading of Judith Butler as fruitful for your feminist position as that conversation with a friend over a coffee, or that tweet you read once that made you reconsider your thinking about a specific issue. I believe all of those should be acknowledged as much as the list of references at the end of each academic work, because they too are part of its production. This might not be as orthodox as some would like it, but I believe (auto)biographies should be valued and we should give credit to herstories as well as to History. What it lacks in orthodoxy we might gain in emancipation.
I write as a middle class woman⁶ who has been mainly considered as White during her whole life, although this perception has changed sometimes as I went up north in Europe, where I might have been considered more as southern-European or Latin/Hispanic. However, as Portuguese psychiatrist Grada Kilomba states, “white is not a color. White is a political definition, which represents historical, political and social privileges of a certain group that has access to dominant structures and institutions of society” (2012:no page). I have enjoyed the privilege of free and easy mobility across borders and I know that I have fallen, however unconsciously, into oppressive attitudes with regards to non-White groups throughout my life, as a result of my development within a still-colonialist and racist society. I have gone through the higher education system, obtaining a Bachelor and –soon– a Master’s degree, and I consider that my political practices have been influenced by my academic environment, as well as a network of social circumstances throughout my life. All of this has led me to build the lenses through which I perceive the world, which is made of a radical feminist analysis, a passionate and sometimes emotionally-damaging antisciencesism and a Marxist perspective of socio-political relations. I bear in mind, however, that changing those socio-political structures is not enough for liberation, and we also need a change in the way we think about ourselves, the others and the world (which I think happens, to a large extent, by focusing on language). Broadly speaking, I follow poststructuralist linguistic theory in that language shapes our way of being in the world: this does not mean that there is no reality outside of language (I believe another being is there independently of us and our perception), but rather refers to the way in which we understand or process this reality (I believe we filter it through discourse, language and performance, making out that being as “person”, “animal”, “man”, “woman”, “Black”, etc; descriptions that later on get assembled within social hierarchies and power relations). I am also indebted to the reading of postcolonial theorists who engage with literary studies, like Edward Said (1978) or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), whom I bear in mind when dealing with

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⁶ I use “woman” not a biological description or an identity but rather as a political position, drawing on theories like the social construction of gender by De Beauvoir (1949), the difference between men and women based on power and powerlessness by MacKinnon (1987) and Pateman (1988), or approaches from Marxism and intersectionality theories that point out the relevance of the gender aspect in oppressions together with class (Hartsock, 1983) or race (Crenshaw, 1995; Hill Collins, 2000). I think it is important to maintain the material categories of “man” and “woman” just as we keep talking of “White” and “Black” (or “racialised”), or of “working class” and “elites” because, as Racoona Sheldon writes in “The screwfly solution” (1977), “being killed selectively encourages group identification”. When I write “women” in this text I am thus referring to the political category that groups those who have been categorised on the basis of having a specific reproductive system and exploited on the same grounds.
representation and the construction of discourse by hegemonic powers. My literary analysis in this work (and also in general) draws on these ideas, as well as Pierre Bourdieu’s theories on language as a mechanism of power (1991) or Foucault’s theorisation of the Nietzschean concept of genealogy (1977), in order to unveil the processes that result in our discursive constructions. Like Monique Wittig (1992), I see language as a tool whose constituent structures can be unveiled, deconstructed and later re-thought in order to express a new political order.

My present work is a product of the aforementioned circumstances, but some specific readings and happenings were perhaps more incisive. I became vegan two years ago, and it was a long process from which I am still learning to (de)construct myself. I feel part of the vertiginous change that veganism has meant in the last decades in the West, and I have found in animal rights the catalyst of my innate zeal for making things fairer. But it has also brought me despair for not seeing change fast enough and being witness to the selfishness with which we act upon other creatures. The antispeciesist perspective that I take in my work (reflected in the use of language and the inclusion of the species aspect in my intersectional approach) is a result of that aim to bring justice to nonhuman animals, and I owe my early reflections on that to the reading of Carol Adams (1990) and Jonathan Safran Foer (2010), and the witnessing of the work in animal sanctuaries and shelters.

With perspective now, I can see how my first year studying a gender studies master’s influenced my methodologies and tore up the few ideas that I had about epistemology. Especially the reading of Haraway’s “Situated knowledges” and the “Cyborg manifesto” were turning points for both my practice and my interest in cyborg identities and narratives. I became interested in SF as a tool to imagine other possible worlds and to perceive our own incoherence and the arbitrariness of the social constructions and performances that we generally take for granted. This idea is what I will try to develop within this work.

II. Intersectionality: offense or necessity?

There has been a lot of reticence to apply intersectionality to issues related to nonhuman animals. Many voices, like ecofeminist author Karen Warren (1990), have argued that anymals\(^7\) should not be considered under an intersectional approach because

\(^7\) This terminology is intentional and will be explained in section III.
they cannot be compared to humans, or because this means equating them with women or racialised people, and this would be sexist or racist, since it recalls the racist and patriarchal comparisons that have been made between these groups. But this is a speciesist complaint, for it still maintains the view that being compared to an anymal is offensive, since they are inferior to us. Katarzyna Beilin explains that human/animal comparisons are not to be viewed as degrading for the human, but rather as an attempt to look afresh at life in order to overcome the works of the ‘anthropological machine’ that built an abysmal and unjustifiable difference between the human and the animal realms (Beilin, 2015:130).

The anthropological machine is a term coined by Giorgio Agamben to describe the production of man through the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman [which] necessarily functions by means of an exclusion (which is also always already a capturing) and an inclusion (which is also always already an exclusion) (Agamben, 2004:37).

This machine is the dualistic creation of “man” within a logic of rejection of what does not fit in its boundaries, and therefore considered as non-human or less-than-human. As Braidotti states, “the human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination” (2013:26). The truth is that comparisons between oppressed groups have happened since the creation of these categorisations (e.g. Black people and women were grouped together as inferior to White men, and therefore could not vote), as Adams (1995) has shown. Nonetheless, the liberation of these groups has not implied lowering any of them in order to place the other in a superior position and therefore closer to the White male, on the grounds that one group must be liberated because they are different from another that must still be placed in a lower position. However, this is what many continue to do with nonhuman animals.

An intersectional approach that includes feminism, antiracism, antispeciesism and, in general, the fight for liberation and civil rights, does not imply that these oppressions are equal or that they work exactly alike, nor that the analytical tools that are specifically used for one will be useful for another. I am not talking about robbing the experiences of a group to explain the oppression of another. This is not about appropriation of suffering, as Adams (2007) explains, but rather about understanding that speciesist, racist and capitalist patriarchy makes use of similar ways of classifying bodies into groups so that
it can then establish a hierarchy where the dominant ones exploit the oppressed Others and turn them into disposable “bare life” (Agamben, 1998).

Intersectionality studies have shown that the experience of multiple oppressions within one body is not a fragmented reality, but rather a complex one: identity is not additive, for addition models have their roots in the dualistic either/or (man/woman, Black/White, human/animal) conceptions. Thinking in terms of additions implies that there is an essential humanity lying “above and beyond all the differences of race, sex, class and history” (Colebrook, 2002:135), instead of seeing ourselves as a compound of circumstances that cannot be analysed separately and later added to each other. An intersectional approach understands identity as a complex constituted through what bell hooks called “interlocking systems of domination” (qtd. in Adams, 1995:79), where oppressions interconnect and produce the individual experience of the body in which they meet. Within these interlocking dominations we can at the same time be a victim and an oppressor, so it is essential to include all these categories (gender, species, race, class, sexual orientation, sexual identity…) to get the whole picture and avoid fragmented analyses that might then sway our political actions.

Posthumanist scholar Cary Wolfe compared in a 2009 lecture at the University of Wisconsin the animal rights movement with the movement for civil rights in what concerns women and people of colour. On the one hand, he compared the fact that vindications for the rights of these groups were met with scandal, since it was absurd to even suggest that they could have the same rights as White men (because they were different, something else); and the fact that nowadays many people react in a similar fashion when someone compares nonhuman animals to human oppressed groups. On the other hand, Wolfe compared the process of enlargement of the ethical consideration of Others, first to these human groups and now (though not in full political or material terms yet) to nonhuman ones, as a logical conclusion if we care for the other’s vulnerability and capacity of suffering (Beilin, 2015:xvii). Wolfe argues that we need to overcome our anthropocentric perspective, and that this might lead to a reconsideration of our categorisation of human and nonhuman in order to produce an emancipation from violence against the Other (an Other that, when it is human, has probably been animalised). In fact, Wolfe explains that the animalisation manoeuvre “is effective because we take for granted the prior assumption that violence against animals is ethically permissible” (2009:567).
Haraway has also contributed to the linking of the othering of humans and nonhumans, arguing that “the discursive tie between the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal […] is at the heart of racism and flourishes, lethally, in the entrails of humanism” (2008:18). Georgina Dopico Black (2010) also tackles humanism, stating that if we do not question this worldview in which the human is located as superior, we will never be able to challenge the hierarchies of power and subjugation. This task of overcoming anthropocentrism is hard because it is within language (which we need in order to address this issue) that our anthropocentrism is embedded. In Beilin’s words:

Unless we stop thinking altogether we will never stop thinking like humans, but we may strive for a humanity that does not harm nonhuman life in the name of our alleged superiority but rather rejoices transcending toward the nonhuman perspectives with care, leading to an alternative biopolitics. […] The struggles about concepts are in fact about reality (Beilin, 2015:17).

III. About the use of language

In the previous section I have used the phrase “nonhuman animals” in order to avoid the term “animals”, which, most often than not, is used without meaning to include humans. This, apart from being conceptually incorrect (we are also animals), falls again into the dualism that separates humans and nonhumans, and which lies at the basis of the hierarchy that is established between both. Saying “nonhuman” or “other-than-human” is positive in the sense that it reminds us that we are also animals, but it is negative in its use of the words “non” and “other”, which still maintain the divide between “humans” and “everyone else”. Joan Dunayer has stated that “with equal validity we could categorize animals into giant squids and non-giant-squids” (qtd. in Kemmerer, 2006:11). Lisa Kemmerer sees that problem and, acknowledging Ludwig Wittgenstein’s idea of language as a moral matter that shapes our understanding of the world, proposes the term “anymal” to refer to “any animal who does not happen to be the species that I am” (2006:10). Given that my work deals to a large extent with the breakage of the conventional use of language in order to imagine other political possibilities, I will be using this term because I consider that it contributes to open a discussion about the subjects that we are talking about, and to challenge the conventional views on the division and relations between beings. Following Deleuze, if our aim is to transform life through our philosophy, this philosophy itself must be flexible and creative to open up new
pathways. As he and Guattari believed, effective politics should not appeal to what we already are, but to what we might become.

Employing a feminist methodology implies making use of inclusive language, and this is why I will use different strategies to abandon the androcentric language I was taught, either in the form of inclusive plurals and pronouns or, when this is not possible or if it sounds too repetitive, using the feminine grammatical form to draw attention on the still-extensive use of the masculine in texts of all kinds: just like many readers would not feel represented by my use of “she/her”, they must realise that others do not feel represented either in the use of “he/him”, and that we should ultimately abandon them altogether in favour of a genderless use of pronouns (“they”) when such distinction is unnecessary. Until that happens, and after reflecting on how best to express my words, these are the forms I have come up with for my writing. Although using the Harvard style for referencing, I have decided to include the authors’ names instead of just their initial, for I believe that we must acknowledge women in academia as much as we can, since still, whenever we see an initial of someone we have not heard of, it is quite probable that our patriarchy-indoctrinated minds think first of a male author, which I think is yet another way of appropriating women’s labour.
CHAPTER 1
Looking for a paradigm for late capitalism

1.1. Introduction

This chapter presents current challenges that are found in our latest capitalist era, which has followed the Second World War and which develops certain characteristics that show the need for stronger paradigms to resist it. Post-industrial societies entailed a breakage of the concepts of “labour”, “worker” and even “human”, something that motivated the development of theories dealing with unfixed borders and flexibility in our understanding of the world and our subjectivities. The humanist concepts of plenitude and solidity around the androcentric and anthropocentric human subject from the Enlightenment and Renaissance were challenged, as well as the notions of objectivity and scientific truth. Whereas capitalism sought to imprint its economic logic on all aspects of human life, approaches from ethics of care or environmental studies (often intersecting with feminism or antispeciesism) have shown that this expansive and growth-at-all-costs dynamic is destructive and cannot be maintained much longer, denouncing the loss of human and nonhuman lives that derives from the exploitation and contamination inherent to this capitalist logic.

1.2. The re-shaping of identities in the post-industrial era

Post-industrial societies have posed a challenge for human identities and political actions. Capitalism and neoliberalism have provided a new framework of conceptualisation and understanding of our own bodies and the way we exist and co-exist in the world. Alison Phipps explains that “the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist capitalist production has intersected with and informed processes of embodiment in a number of important ways” (2014:30): while in the Fordist era there were just a few producers in the market, and consumers had little choice, in post-Fordist times the range of producers has gone sky high and the issue of choice itself has taken a whole different direction. As a consequence of the widening of the market and the paradigmatic change, labour has been

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8 Fredric Jameson (1990) explains that the term “late capitalism” finds its origin in the Frankfurt School, for instance in the writings of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, stressing two features: a tendential web of bureaucratic control, and the interpenetration of government and big businesses. Even if there are specific features in this era, Jameson remarks the fact that the term implies continuity with what preceded it, rather than a rupture with it, as also does Ernest Mandel (1976).
transformed, becoming more flexible and adaptable, and therefore more precarious and feminised. Haraway argues that this feminisation stands for the work being made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day (Haraway, 1991:166).

That is, the traditional characteristics of the work that women have always done inside the home are now seen in paid labour. Richard Gordon calls this situation a “homework economy” (qtd. in Haraway, 1991:166). Labour is made vulnerable and timetables become ductile between the fingers of the high spheres of power. Work is hardly ever recognised; instead, the labour force efforts to maintain high productivity levels while avoiding mental breakdowns are taken for granted. Legal coverage fades away and the conception of work itself becomes something to be disassembled and reassembled, like inert gears of the large capitalist machine. Celia Amorós exemplifies this process with the work inside Mexican maquilas, companies that receive foreign capital and raw materials to manufacture a product that is later sent to the country that provided the capital, and which are located in already-precarious peripheries and are sadly famous for their low salaries and unsafe conditions (Amorós and Quesada, 2011:148). Maquilas are also known for the rotation nature of labour, due to the stress conditions and health problems of the workers. This labour force is therefore made exchangeable as pieces of machines that are substituted when they start to fail.

Globalisation, which for Braidotti means “the commercialization of planet Earth in all its forms through a series of inter-related modes of appropriation (2013:7), has also accentuated the differences between hegemonic centres and excluded borders. Despite the global configuration of post-industrial societies and its network organisation (what is called network society or globalisation), Gustavo Cardoso and Manuel Castells explain that, “in this early 21st century, it excludes most of humankind, although all of humankind is affected by its logic, and by the power relationships that interact in the global networks of social organization” (2005:5). It is not a matter of resources, but rather of efficiency: “the global economy and the network society work more efficiently without hundreds of millions of our co-inhabitants of this planet” (2005:19). The economic activity in this global system functions as a “network of networks” where the company abides as the legal and capital accumulation unity, but where the operational unity is the business
network, of which the company is just the “connecting node” between production and accumulation (2005:9). Just like the nodes in computing networks, workers are also added, erased or exchanged when the aim of the programme—or company—requires so. Like Haraway, Cardoso and Castells establish a comparison between this change in labour and gender relations:

These networks are those that hire and fire workers on a global scale. It follows structural instability in the labor markets everywhere, and a requirement for flexibility of employment, mobility of labor, and constant re-skilling of the workforce. The notion of a stable, predictable, professional career is eroded, as relationships between capital and labor are individualized and contractual labor conditions escape collective bargaining. Together with the feminization of the labor force, we can say, summarizing numerous studies, that we have evolved from “the organization man” to the “flexible woman” (Cardoso and Castells, 2005:9).

1.3. Philosophical responses to fractured identities

Perhaps one of the most powerful symbols within postmodern theoretical contributions surrounding this identity change in capitalism is Haraway’s image of the cyborg. Just like feminism has been defined as the andro- and Eurocentric Enlightenment’s illegitimate child (Valcárcel, 2000), Haraway states that the cyborg is the illegitimate offspring of patriarchal militarism, capitalism and state socialism, but, as with feminism, “illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins” (1991:151). She defines the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (1991:149). The cyborg is the opposite to the paradigm of unity and objectivity that humanism put on its pedestal: it is a creature that lives in the limits of our understanding and which poses a threat to everything that we take for granted regarding our subjectivities and how we build ourselves as separated from the Other(s)9. Amorós (2010) considers that this cyborg identity is dirty in comparison with the traditional “clean” ontology: it belongs to the queer imaginary and it makes previous assumptions about humanity shiver. But, as Braidotti states, “if power is complex, scattered and productive, so must be our resistance to it” (2013:27). And this is where its power lies: cyborgs are open identities that prefer to stay this way than to enter into the limited categories that modernity has established.

9 Margrit Shildrick (2001) employs the figure of the monster to challenge the parameters of the subject as defined within logocentric discourse. Like the cyborg, the monster also implies ontological uncertainty and an anxiety about boundaries. Many nonhuman animals, aliens, ghosts or, in general, non-normative beings have always been considered monsters (constructed in opposition to the human) in literature and popular culture, and perhaps it is the fact that “the monstrous is not only an exteriority” (Shildrick, 2001:1), but rather part of us, what ultimately scares us the most.: the Other may be not so “other”.
Haraway also uses the cyborg to build her contribution to epistemology, arguing that the best position is a partial and open one, without aiming at universalizing our view:

The permanent partiality of feminist points of view has consequences for our expectations of forms of political organization and participation. We do not need a totality in order to work well. [...] Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos (Haraway, 1991:173).

Western logos is also what Deleuze, hand in hand with Guattari, has been critical with, along with the key question of whether we could achieve a way of thinking that encompassed the forces of becoming and difference that produced the world. According to him, the problem with Western philosophy is transcendence and the representational mode of thought, by which it is implied that the real world is out there, in a specific form and with defined characteristics, and that we can represent it in a more or less accurate way. For Deleuze though, life creation does not lie outside of it: life is the creative power and process itself. The world is not something stable or fixed, but rather an ensemble of possibilities or becomings, in his own terms. This has a different meaning from the usual use of “becoming” in our daily language, by which we understand the changes or transformations of a prior subject. Deleuze rejects the existence of this prior matter (as he rejects any essence that would exist prior to our self-recognition within society) and defines these becomings as all the possible ways in which difference could be expressed through life. In Deleuze’s model, as opposed to the Hegelian understanding of difference as a requisite for the construction of the subject (things exist in opposition to others), difference is not something that we apply to a being or a thing that is already-existing (as happens with the imposed difference men/women upon the pre-established concept “human”, for instance): difference is infinite, and what we do when we think or talk is group all these differences or possibilities into categories so that we can organise life (otherwise it would be just a chaotic mesh of potentialities). He exemplifies this with genetic differences: all of them are part of life, both the ones that are accomplished – mutations– and those that are not – genetic possibilities of what something might become–, and we just synthesise them (we territorialise them) into more specific terms like “men” or “women”. In this way, we are not creating difference when we distinguish men and women, we are reducing it, by coding all these differences into recognisable groups. Deleuze’s aim is, therefore, to free life from fixed models through philosophy, which he understands as not a mere theorisation of life, but the roots of its transformation. As Claire
Colebrook puts it, “by thinking differently we create ourselves anew, no longer accepting already created and accepted values and assumptions. We destroy common sense and who we are in order to become” (2002:xvii). Deleuze advocates for the erasure of hierarchical structures (what he calls arborescent, imagining the hierarchical relation between a tree trunk and its branches) and the embracement of rhizomatic modes of relating, where all the parts are related in messy and anarchic flows.

If this is what life is, a multiple virtual10 fabric of becomings, then life cannot be represented through images or words, for life is not just one of these differences, or possibilities, that we choose among the others and establish as “the real”. Deleuze insists that “we can only transform life if we transform the power to think, no longer thinking according to some already given logic or system” (in Colebrook, 2002:50). He rejects the rational (hu)man as the standard of what we are, or what our life is, and includes other bizarre or unusual possibilities to point out what life might become, rather than what life is.

1.4. Everything can be sold and bought (even liberation)

In contrast to Haraway’s metaphorical sense, Phipps deals with the feminisation of the workforce in its literal sense (that is, the entrance of women in paid work) when she accounts for the effects that the post-industrial economy has had on social identities (2014). She explains that labour fragmentation, as well as the entering of women into the workforce, has had an impact in the construction of masculinity, generating a crisis and a sense of self-devaluation and frustration that has accentuated male violence against women. Besides, neoliberalism has also contributed to the re-shaping of identities, through the discourse of the “rational and self-interested economic actors with agency and control over their own lives” (2014:36). Katrine Marçal (2015) has criticised the logic that underlies the concept of the homo economicus, as has been represented by Daniel Defoe’s character Robinson Crusoe, from the 1719 homonymous novel, who survives on an island for 26 years after a shipwreck. Economists have used Crusoe to show the allegedly innate human capacity to get by alone, fostering the idea of the rational individual that acts following his interests, and who, when placed in a society with the rest of rational actors, would act in such a way that their joined actions would lead to the greatest good for everyone –the basis of liberal economic theories, as defended by the

10 Deleuze insists that philosophy has to undo the hierarchy between what is considered as real (actual) and as virtual (possibility), stating that the virtual is also real in the shape of possible becomings, with the difference that some are territorialised and the others are not (yet).
Chicago school following Milton Friedman (1962) or Gary Becker (1964). Marçal’s criticism signals that the supposedly individual society that economists have praised in Crusoe’s story was actually not that individualistic, since Crusoe was using materials and tools from the ship (depending, therefore, on the previous work of the people who manufactured them) and, more importantly, he was exploiting Friday, a native of the island whom Crusoe enslaves. Marçal denounces the tendency that many economists have to praise stories like Crusoe’s, without realising that their abstract models do not take into account that the actors in their stories are actual people, with feelings and the capacity of care:

Another story about shipwrecked men is often used by economists to illustrate the principle that value is determined by demand. Imagine two men on a desert island: the one has a sack of rice and the other has 200 golden bracelets. At home on the mainland one golden bracelet could have bought a sack of rice, but now, the two men aren’t on the mainland. The men are shipwrecked, and the value of the goods has changed. The man with the rice suddenly can ask for all of the golden bracelets in exchange for just one portion. He may even refuse to trade at all. […] Economists love to tell this kind of story; they nod and think they’ve revealed something profound about how mankind functions. These stories never allow for the possibility that two people abandoned on a desert island would start talking to each other, that they might be feeling lonely. Scared. Might need each other. […] After discussing this for a while, they’d probably share the rice (Marçal, 2015:33).

Within capitalism, everything, from our identities to our emotions, is understood from an economic point of view, since “capitalism does not work by ideology or belief; capitalism is not a set of moral or political values. […] Any ‘belief’ can circulate if it sells and […] if it produces a further flow of capital” (Colebrook, 2003:129). The debates between the neoliberal right and the left are not just a matter of ideologies. There is a part of belief in what refers to the human nature (individual vs. social), but not when the discussion turns to means: neoliberalism does not mind aligning itself one day with liberation movements like feminism (as in the example shown in Figure 2 about a business’s opposition to sexual harassment based on the economic losses of the company) or LGBT+ vindications and with neoconservative and Catholic values the day after, because it is not a matter of ideology, but of capital flow. H&M and Dior sell t-shirts with feminist messages that were manufactured by poor women in Southeast Asia. Neoliberal and corporatist parties proudly support gay rights when it comes to legalising surrogacy. Political emancipatory movements should take with a pinch of salt these messages that are being thrown in the name of equality, since corporative objectives that lie behind these
parties surely differ a lot from what liberation movements actually fight for, as denounced by authors like Ryan Conrad (2014), Lisa Duggan (2003) or in the posthumous work of Shangay Lily (2016).

1.5. Beyond the human: posthumanism, affect and the ethics of care

The rupture with the idea of the (hu)man as the central subject of thought has also been explored within the area of animal ethics. Wolfe (2009) worries that animal studies may in fact sustain the human/animal divide that they should be precisely challenging, leaving the anthropocentric subject of knowing unquestioned. For him, critical animal studies means, besides a thematic realm, an epistemological shift away from the model of human subjectivity that, nonetheless, antispeciesist authors like Peter Singer or Tom Regan have extended towards animality, taking the human as the definitive perception start point instead of as just one kind among other possible ones.

Josephine Donovan (2007) recalls what Singer (probably the best-known voice on animal rights theory) complained about when a woman told him that in her house they very much liked animals, just like he did, since they were fond of their dog, while she was eating a ham sandwich. Singer argues that animal advocates should not be understood as people who like or care about animals, but rather about people who care about justice. In the same fashion, Regan, who develops his theory of rights (as opposed to Singer’s utilitarianism) in The case for animal rights (1983), also argues that considering that people who stand out for animal rights are more emotional is damaging for the struggle.
Donovan however points out the patriarchal bias that these affirmations show. The dualisms mind-body, reason-emotion and nature-culture lie not only at the basis of the patriarchal ideology, but are also the core of the Cartesian way of thinking that makes a speciesist differentiation between human and nonhuman animals. Donovan, as well as other ecofeminists like Val Plumwood (2002) or Vandana Shiva (1997), considers it quite ironic that the two main authors of antispeciesist thought rely on the same dichotomies that Descartes did when he defended experimentation on alive dogs. She therefore stands out for a revalorisation of the ethics of care when dealing with animal rights. Why should we try to bury the feelings that we have when we see a dog beaten up, or a pig on her way to the slaughterhouse, craving for water while trapped in a truck with hundreds of her mates? Why try to leave those empathic feelings aside and seek an aseptic theory that is more valued due to its alleged objectivity and rationality? We are not talking about acting solely upon decisions made in the heat of the moment, or about leaving theoretical approaches or abstract thinking aside. But these cannot be the only source of our political practice, simply because they are not. Our practice is never fully coherent with our theoretical conclusions. Ethics does not happen in a vacuum. We cannot establish a logical inference and expect it to work in all the possible cases in which it could be applied.

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11 Shiva specifically worries that extending the humanist idea of individual rights from the human to the nonhuman might result in the same commodification that some people suffer for not being considered “human enough” and therefore not as worthy of these rights as others. This idea is well expressed by Orwell’s statement in his 1945 *Animal farm* “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” (2004:229).

12 The valorisation of traditionally feminine traits like caring, affect or emotion was brought into the debate with Carol Gilligan’s 1982 study of the feminine approach to ethical problems. While other authors concluded that women were less able to be rational than men, Gilligan demonstrated that these conclusions were biased because the question was created by and for men, and therefore women could not reply in the way that these men expected. The female response to the ethical problem that was proposed was more relational than individualistic, and this was related to the different social construction of men and women: while men are taught to be competitive, individualistic and to reject emotions, women are encouraged to care for the others, to establish more interdependent connections, and to focus on the emotional bonding within the community, and not on themselves alone. While these social constructions are, in a broad sense, harmful and discriminatory, Gilligan argued that women were not simply “not as rational as men”, but rather that their approach to ethics was different.

13 Adams has also criticised the assumption of a rational and independent individual within the field of animal ethics: “the articulation of animal rights philosophy presumes an autonomous individual, traditionally a “man of reason”, the Enlightenment idea of the autonomous seeker [but] the idea of autonomy is an illusion, because it depends on the invisibility of women’s caring activities” (2007:200).

14 The problem with abstract accounts of ethics is that we should also pay attention to the context where moral dilemmas occur. We often talk about ethics in abstract terms, discussing situations that are unlikely to happen and then drawing conclusions from them in disembodied terms. But when we are faced with an ethical problem in real life we find out that what we agreed on in theory does not work that easily in practice. An example of this is Regan (1983)’s lifeboat case. In order to discuss which life is more important, that of a human or that of a nonhuman animal, Regan imagines a situation where four people and a dog are left in a lifeboat which has only space for four. If no one is jettisoned, they will all die. Regan argues then that
Abstract accounts of morality which leave context aside seem to equate human beings with machines that work individually and who will behave always in the same way when the circumstances are alike, something that is not true because humans have emotional as well as rational capacities, and it is difficult to erase one of them when faced with an ethical decision. These ideas come from the scientific views of the world as a mechanism where all things can be measured and predicted according to some parameters. These views were criticised by Haraway (1991) and Harding (1986), as well as by Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), who criticise the erasure of any difference and particularity within this mechanistic view described by Edmund Husserl as the “mathematization of the world” (qtd. in Donovan, 2007), based on structures of domination. In our capital-based society, this view is still maintained so that labour performs as machines and not as persons: patriarchal capitalism is not interested in valorising caring tasks and emotional bonding within communities because this would mean protecting the workforce and caring about their well-being (something that is in direct opposition with the pursuit of maximum economic benefit), as well as placing value on caring tasks (and therefore investing capital on it, which also leads to economic loss, especially if we take into account that women have been doing them for free for centuries, as represented in Figure 3).

Relationalist perspectives of ethics, like Palmer’s (2010) advocate for a holistic rather than individualistic perspective, taking into account context, feelings and relations, since this is ultimately what morality is about: as Palmer states, it is not about single individuals, but rather about the relationship between them and the outcomes of their interactions. Relationality lies also at the core of social understandings of affect. The affective turn (Clough, 2007) within social research has focused on the embodiment, repetitions and energy flows that occur in interactive relations between human and non-human beings and objects. Margaret Wetherell summarises what an affective practice is: “an organic complex in which all the parts relationally constitute each other” (2012:19).

what should be done is throw the dog out of the lifeboat for a series of reasons that would be long to explain here. But what is important is that perhaps in a real-life situation where the dog is Regan’s all life long companion animal, and the four people are murderers, perhaps that decision would not be as easy for him to take. Therefore, theorists like Clare Palmer (2010) argue that context matters.
Figure 3: “Capitalism also depends on domestic labour”

Affect has also meant an epistemological and ontological paradigm shift “away from research based on discourse and disembodied talk and texts, towards more vitalist, ‘post human’ and process-based perspectives” (Whetherell, 2012:3), based partly on the philosophy of Deleuze or Baruch Spinoza. Following Spinoza, Deleuze argues that all that exists does it through connections (what he calls “desire”) and interactions (what he calls the process of “assemblage”): wholes do not pre-exist connections (Colebrook, 2002:xx). However, connections between the visceral and the social, or lived experience and theoretical accounts, have proven to be quite difficult to develop due to the lack of links between biology and the social sciences, which appear as different ontoverses (Whetherell, 2012:10). According to Beilin, “it is the humanities’ lack of engagement with the processes considered to be the domain of the sciences that may have contributed to the political and environmental crisis that we are facing today”, and she adds, “science is too important to be left to scientists” (2015:9). The biopolitical turn in social sciences aims to bring together both realms, arguing that they cannot be separated because in our current era, baptised as Anthropocene by chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000 (a term further developed by social theorists), humans have become a geological force that affects

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15 Although some scholars have produced thrilling works joining the fields of humanities and sciences, like Karen Barad’s study of philosophy and quantum physics (2007).
everything on Earth\textsuperscript{16}. Bruno Latour (1993, 2005) has criticised this split between social science and biology, and society and nature, advocating for a new naturecultures discourse that acknowledges their inseparability and interconnectedness, as well as our own vulnerability in relation to the nonhuman realm (like water or sunlight). Latour has proposed the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) as an interdependent “mesh” (to borrow Timothy Morton’s term) of relations and interactions between humans, animals, objects, etc. Latour understands the actors in this theory as flows rather than fixed identities, which recalls Deleuzian ontology.

\textbf{1.6. Conclusion}

The claws of capitalism have forced us to reshape and rethink our identities with its profit-thirsty mechanisms that act upon our bodies. The breakage of the workforce into individual and exchangeable gears of the productive machine have meant, on the one hand, a merciless fragmentation and a deep precariousness of our lives; but, on the other hand, it has opened the door to theorisations about the fixedness and stability of our subjectivities. From Haraway’s cyborg to Deleuzian-Guattarian rhizomatic identities, there have been ontological approaches that put into question the unity of the subject proposed by Western humanism and advocate for new, creative ways of understanding ourselves and of relating with others in order to overcome domination and classificatory modes. Posthumanism’s aim is also to decentre the humanist protagonist of a History built over oppressions, and to embrace our connections with the nonhuman. In order to do so, we need new dialogues and new languages that leave totalising discourses behind. We should acknowledge our embodied selves, which are emotional as much as rational (as the feminist approach to ethics has pointed out), contextual and interrelated, inserted into affective relations and unable to separate the components that form our identities (feelings, reason, relations, sensations, knowledges, and so on).

My purpose in what follows is to look at examples from literary SF as a way to develop these new dialogues, discourses and languages in order to give up dominance and replace it with vulnerability and interconnections. SF can be useful to question the ideas that we have been taught to take for granted through its use of language and its narrative devices; and it can show us roads to better futures, together with methodological aspects that teach us to be careful with utopias that can easily be turned into dystopias,

\textsuperscript{16} Jason Moore (2017) prefers the term Capitalocene.
and to always bear in mind our intersectional liberation objectives if we want to get rid of abusive power structures.
CHAPTER 2
SF: the genre, possibilities and language of utopia

2.1.Coming up with a definition of science fiction

The first problem when dealing with this genre is its conceptualisation. The only thing that theorists and writers seem to agree on is the fact that they do not agree in how to name it or how to set its boundaries, failing at establishing any set of features that may define it. Adam Roberts (2000) points out how, even if almost everyone has a sense of what SF refers to (and this is made clear by the fact that every bookshop or library has a section on SF with mainly the same kind of books), the term resists easy definition. While some theorists, like Edward James, fall into simple tautologies—“SF is what is marketed as SF” (1994:3)—, there seems to be some characteristics that, though not crystal-clearly definitive, are pretty intuitive in relation to narrative devices or plot elements. Generally speaking, SF “distinguishes its fictional worlds to one degree or another from the world in which we actually live” (Roberts, 2000:1).

Early writers of what we could today consider SF, like Jules Verne or H.G. Wells, attempted to denominate it as “voyages extraordinaires” and “scientific romance”, respectively. However, the creator of the first SF magazine (Amazing Stories, in 1926), Hugo Gernsback, is considered the one to have provided the first proper name for the genre: scientifiction (Gunn, 2005). About the shortenings of “science fiction”, James Gunn explains that the term sci-fi is not really used within the academic community, since it is normally used to describe bad science fiction movies, and that the short term SF is preferred. Samuel Delany has contributed to the debate stating the impossibility of this genre to be defined (Gunn, 2005). Others have tried to provide some descriptions, like Gunn himself, who defines it as “the literature of change”:

It is about the future –except when it is about the past or the present. It can incorporate all the other genres […]. It is the literature of change, the literature of anticipation, the literature of the human species, the literature of speculation, and more. And because it is the literature of change it is continually changing; if it remained constant, it would be no longer science fiction (Gunn, 2005:xi).

There are some points to be made from Gunn’s definition. From a gender perspective, Veronica Hollinger has importantly pointed out that
although sf has often been called ‘the literature of change’, for the most part it has been slow to recognize the historical contingency and cultural conventionality of many of our ideas about sexual identity and desire, about gendered behaviour and about the ‘natural’ roles of women and men (Hollinger, 2003:126).

What Hollinger is pointing at is that for many male authors of the SF Golden Age (the 1940s and 50s), it was easier to imagine a spaceship travelling faster than light speed to a faraway planet inhabited by green aliens than a woman performing a role other than an object. So it is important to question these definitions and continually ask ourselves: which change? For whom? According to which standards of what is considered the usual state of things?

Still, I do like the denomination “literature of change” because it refers to the important issue pointed out at the end of Gunn’s quotation: it is continually changing and does not remain constant. While I believe that Gunn referred to the fact that the genre would continue to be impossible to define because new things could be incorporated into it, broadening its boundaries, I think that this issue can be extended to the idea that SF is open to infinite narrative, stylistic and linguistic possibilities. Besides this, I do not agree with Gunn’s anthropocentric statement that SF is the literature of the human species, and prefer to think of it as a genre that can contain and inspire our posthuman and rhizomatic dreams. We can accept that it is still difficult to set the limits to which works are considered SF and which are not: is Mary Shelley’s 1818 *Frankenstein* the first SF work? Is it Thomas More’s 1516 *Utopia* instead? Can we speak of SF to describe texts before its authors used the term and were rather labelling their texts as Gothic or as “scientific romances”? Are Wells or Verne considered SF or proto-SF writers? But perhaps a key question here is: to which extent does this matter? My reflection is that maybe what lies at the core of this genre is this difficulty at setting the limits and pure definitions, and that it is this confusion that gives it its socially disruptive power.

2.2. Differences between SF and other genres: the novum

Another problem that critics seem to be concerned with is how to distinguish SF from its closer genres, like fantasy, magic realism or surrealism. They all deal to some extent with unreal happenings, non-existent places that operate in different logics and strange situations that have no easy explanation. Roberts’s answer to this is that these changes with regard to our everyday lives are “made plausible within the structure of the
[SF] text” (2000:5), whereas in other genres, like fantasy\(^{17}\) or magic realism, the changes are not explained in any way by the author.

Roberts exemplifies this with Franz Kafka’s 1915 Metamorphosis. In the story, Kafka does not explain the mechanism through which the transformation of the protagonist into a giant bug is done, nor is that the focus of the narrative. The metamorphosis is what motivates the narrative and the focus is on the happenings and reflections triggered by it. The strange happening is a tool for the story, not the story itself. On the other hand, SF stories make an effort to present the reasons why the strange happening is taking place, and these reasons are generally scientific (even if they are not scientifically possible according to our everyday science). If the change is related to the supernatural or magic, we would be talking rather about fantasy, as in The chronicles of Narnia or Harry Potter, where the cupboard connecting two worlds or the flying broomsticks are not explained through any scientific grounds. Roberts gives another example of this through the comparison of a pair of novels: John Updike’s Brazil (1994) and John Kessel’s Good news from outer space (1989). In the first one, a couple made up by a Black boy and a White girl sees their skin colours exchanged through the story. In the latter, a new drug that allows altering the skin pigmentation is launched in the United States. Roberts highlights how, even if both novels deal with the arbitrariness of racial discrimination through skin colour, only the second one is considered SF because it gives a scientific explanation (even if also unreal) for this change.

It is important to note in this regard that these explanations do not need to be possible according to our scientific knowledge. SF is sometimes deemed stupid or absurd just because the changes that it narrates could not actually happen. This is what happens in Jurassic Park (1990)\(^{18}\), with the possibility of creating dinosaurs from the DNA kept in a piece of amber. Michael Crichton creates a story and tries to give it an explanation that fits within the pseudo-scientific advances described in the novel. Gwyneth Jones explains that the point is not to express scientific accuracy, but rather to command the language of science to make it look possible: “the point about the science in SF is not ‘truth’, but the entry into a particular, material and often rational discourse” (in Roberts, 2000:9).

\(^{17}\) Samuel Delany explains the difference between fantasy and SF, stating that, while fantasy deals with what “could not have happened”, with images and happenings “too bizarre to be explained by other than the supernatural”; SF deals with events that “have not happened”, and this is an important difference (2009:11). Among these, there are events that have not happened but could in the future, or events that have not happened and will not (and these, Delany calls them science–fantasy stories).

\(^{18}\) This date refers to the novel, not the film.
This entry is usually made through what Roberts calls “point of difference” and Darko Suvin (1979) has denominated “novum”: a new apparatus that serves to be able to connect the “estrangement” and the “cognition”. As Suvin theorises, SF must be the coupling of both things: if it was only about estrangement, the reader would not be able to understand it; if it was only about cognition, we would be dealing with plain realism. These nova (no matter if actually possible or not) are therefore the connection between both aspects, which provides the explanation to the strange happenings. For instance, the time machine in Wells’s story, or the DNA extraction technology in Jurassic Park. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. explains the novum in the following way:

[It is a] historical innovation or novelty in an sf text from which the most important distinctions between the world of the tale from the world of the reader stem. It is, by definition, rational, as opposed to the […] fantastic. In practice, the novum appears as an invention of a discovery around which the characters and setting organize themselves in a cogent, historically plausible way (Csicsery-Ronay Jr., 2003:118-119).

Robert Scholes argues that SF is a “fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way” (qtd. in Roberts, 2000:10). Following Suvin, Roberts explains that “it is this co-presence that allows SF both relevance to our world and the position to challenge the ordinary, the taken-for-granted” (2000:8). It is precisely this position that critic Damien Broderick talks about when he argues that

SF is that species of storytelling native to a culture undergoing the epistemic changes implicated in the rise and supercession of technical-industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal (Broderick, 1995:155).

Roberts continues,

Specific SF nova […] provide a symbolic grammar for articulating the perspectives of normally marginalised discourses of race, of gender, of non-conformism and alternative ideologies. We might think of this as the progressive or radical potential of science fiction (Roberts, 2000:28).

In relation to this potential, Joanna Russ states that “science fiction is what if literature”, as it shows “things not as they characteristically or habitually are but as they might be” (2017:200). She takes Delany’s idea of SF as the genre of “what has not happened” to say that “one would think science fiction the perfect literary mode in which
to explore (and explode) our assumptions about ‘innate’ values and ‘natural’ social arrangements” (2017:200). SF involves, therefore, narratives that challenge our preconceptions about the world we live in, and shows options for the world we could also be living in.

2.3. The literary canon is too small for spaceships

In her 2000 reflection about the sources that writers use for their work “Where do you get your ideas from?”, Ursula LeGuin reflects on why most Americans place more value on realistic narratives than on fictional ones. The more fictional something is (the more dwarves or dragons it includes, or the farthest the planet is located), the more a piece of writing is despised as “not serious” or childish. She explains that, from 1974 (when she wrote an article called “Why are Americans afraid of dragons?”) to the new millennium, Americans continue to infantilise fantasy. She points out that The lord of the rings has been treated with condescendence, or directly ignored by critics, because “they know if they acknowledge Tolkien they’ll have to admit that fantasy can be literature, and that therefore they’ll have to redefine what literature is” (2014:169). With the pre-eminence of realism among the works valorised by critics and teachers, all the other forms of fiction (including SF, of course) are “sent to the ghetto [no matter] that the ghetto is about twelve times larger than the city” (2014:170). This value on realism explains the high status that is also given to biographic and memoir styles, because it is assumed that the more a work imitates life (or what critics understand by “life”), the more elevated it gets. But LeGuin points out that there is not a single way to represent aspects of reality. In a beautiful quote she states:

There’s no such thing as pure invention. Invention is recombination. We can work only with what we have. It all starts with experience. There are monsters and leviathans and chimeras in the human mind; they are psychic facts. Dragons are one of the truths about us. The only way we may be able to express that particular truth is by writing about dragons—admitting their existence. People who deny the existence of dragons are often eaten by dragons. From within (LeGuin, 2014:173-174).

LeGuin had already tackled this issue in 1976, in an exercise of intertextuality in the essay “Science fiction and Mrs. Brown”, where she wonders whether a writer of SF can be considered a good writer, or is condemned to be considered a “pulp fiction” writer. She reflects on Virginia Woolf’s ideas about the novel (Mrs. Brown is a character from Woolf’s essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”). Woolf had stated that a novel depicts
characters rather than ideas, and this was the main difference between SF and novels (implying that SF works could not even be considered as such). Tony Burns points out that this idea is shared by many critics, like Kingsley Amis, who argue that SF does not deal with characters as individuals but as static types who work as “representatives of their species rather than as individuals in their own right” (qtd. in Burns, 2010:130), and this substantially differentiates SF from “ordinary fiction” (Burns, 2010:130). Other critics like Franz Rottensteiner state that “science fiction is a minor branch of fiction, minor at least in artistic terms” and that “any writer who would write only science fiction can only be a minor writer” (qtd. in Burns, 2010:132). Besides, other critics highlight the difference in intention between SF writers and novelists, arguing that the first are not worthy of being called “good writers”. LeGuin agrees with the idea that the aim of novels concerns mainly the development of characters, and accepted that there could be a kind of contradiction in the phrase “science fiction novel” (Burns, 2010:131). In fact, in the essay where she replies to Woolf, she concludes: “there are no Mrs. Browns in Utopia” (1979:104).

However, I believe SF does not only represent cyborg characters like alien, androids or enhanced humans, but it is also a cyborg genre itself. The criticism to the patriarchal, exclusionary literary canon by scholars like Toril Moi (1993) (to be explained in more depth in chapter 3) argues that literary criticism was taken up by male critics for a long time, therefore including an important bias which was nonetheless presented as the result of “objective” knowledge. In this way, the works of male writers colonised literary studies and even the concept of literature itself, and it was only through the work of feminist criticism –what Raffaella Baccolini refers to as “the intersection of gender and genre” (2004:519)– that the works of female writers were rescued (from the void of anonymity, for instance) and critically considered in literary studies. Besides this, the conceptions of “good” literature as that which allegedly represents “real” experience is put into question, arguing that this idea of “real experience” is inherently biased depending on the critic from whom it comes (male critics, White feminists, etc). Baccolini draws on Jameson and Celeste Schenck to argue that genres “have been traditionally one of the measures against which to judge a work’s, and a writer’s, greatness”: the literary institution that conforms

19 On the Antipodes of these restrictive views, other critics like Carl Freedman argue for an extension of SF “beyond the boundaries of literary genre to encompass philosophical theory” because, in his view, SF “is the genre whose essence is critical utopian imagining, and thus even nonfictional critical theory might be considered a form of sf” (qtd. in Csicsery-Ronay Jr., 2003:120).
a genre states which is the proper way of using and representing it, but of course genres are not “mere aesthetic markers” but rather instruments of ideology (2004:519). In relation to SF, the fact that it seems to challenge the established ideas about literature and the novel (as LeGuin expressed regarding the consideration of Tolkien within “good” literature), as well as the difficulty involved in its definition and its boundaries recalls for me the cyborg as a being with blurred limits and dirty ontological implications. As I argued at the end of the first section of this chapter, I believe that the difficulty in setting the limits of SF, as well as its linguistic possibilities and the seismic movements that it produces at the core of a literary canon still rooted in humanist and patriarchal ideas, are key points of this genre. My suggestion is that SF has as an essential feature the impossibility of being completely defined and circumscribed, as well as the possibility of developing creative alternatives that makes the tools of patriarchal capitalism shiver.

2.4. Conclusion: difficulties and possibilities for female writers in SF

As much as Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley could be considered the first SF author, the truth is that the genre has left women behind, both as main characters and as authors. SF seems to have flawlessly followed the trend of neglect of female writers that has been going on for centuries and the idea of literature as a masculine realm where women were sometimes accepted under very specific circumstances. While critics have accepted that the SF of the “pulp era” (1929-1956) has been mainly a “male enclave”, feminist critics have been wit to add that actually, “all literature has been a male enclave” (in Disch, 1998:115). SF has not been an exception to Woolf’s famous statement where she complains that “Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman” (1928:57). Early authors like Catherine L. Moore or Judith Merril published under male pseudonyms. As LeGuin stated in an SF convention in Washington:

The Women’s movement has made most of us conscious of the fact that SF has either totally ignored women, or presented them as squeaking dolls subject to instant rape by monsters… or, at best, loyal little wives or mistresses of accomplished heroes. Male elitism has run rampant in SF. But is it only male elitism? Isn’t the “subjection of women” in SF merely a symptom of a whole which is authoritarian, power-worshipping, and intensely parochial? (in Disch, 1998:126)

Taking the example of Shelley, even male critics who support the idea of Frankenstein being the first SF work highlight the influences that Shelley had to write her masterpiece. Brian W. Aldiss argues that, besides the influence of the Industrial revolution, theories of evolution and natural selection and, in general, the “changes in
man’s attitudes to his own kind” (2005:168), Shelley had an important “debt” to John Milton, Johann W. von Goethe and Erasmus Darwin, whom he calls the “father” of the first real SF novel (in Disch, 1998). So whereas Aldiss stands for Shelley as the originator of the genre, he does not seem to give much credit to her authorship and remarks her debt to other (male) writers. Mario Praz even stated that “all Mrs. Shelley did was to provide a passive reflection of some of the wild fantasies which were living in the air around her” (qtd. in Moers, 1978:144). The use of the word “passive” points to what Russ denounced as a denial of the agency of female writers, or, as she puts it, the idea that the book “wrote itself” (1983:21) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. A mistake by a publishing house states Frankenstein as the author of Mary Shelley. Ironically, this mistake happens in the only book in the bookshelf written by a woman.

In relation to narratives, women were only allowed in the story to play the role of damsel in distress or silent wives, in the style of Lois Lane or the unnamed wife in Well’s The war of the worlds. Russ complained in her essay “The image of women in science fiction” that “there are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women” (2017:91). Disch (1998) recalls a 1954 short story by Tom Godwin where a woman is allowed a slightly different role: Godwin presents the conflict of a spaceship crew that has to decide what to do, since the excessive weight of the craft (due to the presence of a female stowaway) will not let them land safely. The girl is finally jettisoned from the spaceship in order to lighten the machine. It is interesting that the person who
should not be among the crew is a woman, being ultimately expelled from the spaceship. Perhaps it could be read as a metaphor of the genre.

Disch himself seems to keep a patriarchal bias in his analysis of female writers. He gathers the names of three important female authors: Anne McCaffey, Vonda McIntyre and LeGuin, but goes on to explain that their narratives succeeded in attracting female readers because of the inclusion of feminist issues in their narratives but also of “escapist fantasies tailored specifically to the female imagination” (1998:122). While Disch admits that SF was for long a “celebration of the Destiny of Man” (1998:116), he fails to see that these stories were for years tailored specifically to the male imagination and rather points out a divergence from traditional fantasies in the writings of female authors. Once more, the writings by male authors are presented as the measuring rod of all fantasies, from where the pen of McCaffey, McIntyre and LeGuin diverged. Why are their stories “specifically tailored” and not considered as universal fantasies? Or the other way round: why are male fantasies considered as the literary yardstick and not tailored for their patriarchal dreams of unity and domination? As Jeanne Cortiel acknowledges,

feminist speculative texts have generated more than just images of women that female readers can recognize and identify with; they have resisted the reproduction of the stories patriarchal societies tell about women and instead envision stories that thoroughly displace them (Cortiel, 1999:5).

Russ begins her sharp book *How to suppress women’s writing* (1983) imagining a world called Glotolog where an art form called *frument* is performed by only one group of the population (the Whelk-finned), since the rest of contributions by other individuals (Crescent-finned, Spotty or Mottled) have been systematically ignored by historians on the basis of aspects such as the lack of structure or mediocrity. She is describing the situation that women (along other oppressed groups) have had to endure when they wanted to write, publish, and see their work recognised, just like men (regardless of their works’ quality) were:

It is a traditional and widely held Glotolog belief that the behaviour and outward appearance of the Spotty, Crescent-finned, Spiny and Mottled Glotolog […] indicate that the central essence […] differs from that of the Whelk-finned Glotolog, whose superior essence […] enables it to constitute not only the artistic but also the social and economic aristocracy of the planet and thereby to enjoy advantages too numerous and varied to be listed here (Russ, 1983:3).
Russ later recalls an anecdote that happened to Delany in 1975, while he was having lunch with an editor in London. Delany asked the editor about Russ, to which he replied that the publishing house that he was working at had told him to reject her books because “women science fiction writers don’t sell” (1983:24). Delany then wonders why this publishing house was publishing LeGuin’s works at the time. The answer of the editor was to change LeGuin’s pronoun alternatively from “she” to “he”: “oh well, I haven’t read LeGuin, but he’s supposed to be very good” (1983:24). It seems as if there was a difficulty in acknowledging that an SF writer who was good, and who was selling very well, could indeed be a woman. The editor’s mind map where SF is a masculine realm and SF writers are male was clouding his judgement making him say “he” instead of “she” when pronouncing the words “science fiction writer” and “successful” in the same sentence.

In relation to the demographics of the genre, Roberts has acknowledged that “until recently, SF was dominated by a fan culture of young white males” but that, in spite of this, “the genre has always had sympathies with the marginal and the different” (2000:28). Gary Westfahl agrees with him, arguing that, even if it has had a masculine predominance, “in fact SF has what he calls a ‘feminine’ aura” (in Roberts, 2000:29), which he related to the sensitivity towards issues of difference: “American SF from the 1940s or 1950s – the so-called ‘Golden Age of SF’ – demonstrated remarkable sensitivities on the subjects of gender and racial diversity” (2000:29). Roberts continues arguing that “in societies such as ours where otherness is often demonised, SF can pierce the constraints of this ideology by circumventing the conventions of traditional fiction” (2000:30). Sarah Lefanu, an earlier SF critic who worked on the connections between feminism and SF, has the same view:

The stock conventions of science fiction – time travel, alternate worlds, entropy, relativism, the search for a unified field theory – can be used metaphorically and metonymically as powerful ways of exploring the construction of ‘woman’ (in Roberts, 2000:91).

These views lead to the point that, even if SF has not been the most welcoming genre for women (either as authors or as readers), it does provide feminism with great options for its emancipating objectives. Russ explains her choice of SF as follows:

Convinced that I had no real experience of life, since my own obviously wasn’t part of Great Literature, I decided consciously that I’d write of things nobody knew
anything about, dammit. So I wrote realism disguised as fantasy, that is, science fiction (Russ, 1983:127).

Roberts points out the growth of the popularity of SF written and read by women in the 1960s and 70s, and the fact that some of this literature put an “emphasis on the affective, the personal, rather than the technological” (2000:95). He exemplifies this with Star trek, which “represented, in the first instance, human interaction and the social dynamics as being at the heart of the SF story” (2000:95). The encounter with the alien in this series and other novels written by women (as the case of Octavia Butler’s Bloodchild or Marge Piercy’s Women on the edge of time) also pointed to issues of difference and otherness. The next chapter will focus on Russ’s The female man, as a text which makes use of time-travelling and alien encounters (including clashes of languages) in order to question the social assumptions surrounding gender.
CHAPTER 3
Joanna Russ’s *The female man*

3.1. The J’S

*TFM* was written in 1970 and published in 1975, and is perhaps Russ’s most famous novel, acclaimed and controversial at once. Russ had started her career as an SF writer at the age of 22, with her short story “Not Custom Stale” (1959). According to Cortiel, Russ became “one of the forces which revolutionized the genre in the 1960s and ‘70s. This revolution transformed science fiction from a bastion of masculinism to one of the richest spaces for feminist utopian thinking and cultural criticism” (1999:1). Russ was definitely committed to the writing of feminist SF during the 70s, as shown in her other novel *We who are about to...* (1977), or the short story “When it changed” (1972). The first presented a group of survivors on a planet, with the men of the group wanting to colonise it and the only woman refusing to be used for populating purposes, ultimately resolving to kill them in order to avoid rape. The latter won the Nebula Award in 1972 and was also nominated for the Hugo Award in 1973, and introduces Janet Evason, who is also one of the main characters of *TFM*. This one was published later on, so the short story anticipated this character and the utopian society of Whileaway, where a plague killed all men and only women remained, with significant consequences for its society. This same scenario is provided in *TFM*, intertwined with three other women with their corresponding local and temporal contexts:

Jeannine is a woman who lives in the 1970s in what appears to be our Earth, but where history did not run as we know it, the Second World War never happened and inequalities strike in a much stronger way: Jeannine represents the women who suffered from what Betty Friedan called “the problem that has no name” in 1964, based on the dissatisfaction that they suffered from the social expectations about femininity. Jeannine is being compelled by her family to get married, up to the point that her brother tells her, very seriously, to marry “anyone” (1975:114). Jeannine feels confused because she has a lover, Cal, but does not actually want to marry him, and instead she thinks, “Somewhere is The One. The Solution. Fulfilment. Fulfilled women. Filled Full. My Prince. Come. Come away, Death” (1975:123). This moment is followed by a fragment that reflects the

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20 Both prizes are awarded to SF and fantasy narratives.
wide range of options that men have for their vital experiences, whereas the only option that remains for women is marriage:

- Men succeed. Women get married.
- Men fail. Women get married.
- Men enter monasteries. Women get married.
- Men start wars. Women get married.

Another one of “the J’s”, as the group of women is referred to in the novel, Joanna, is identified with Russ herself, a declared feminist whose circumstances we can more easily identify with, since her world is the most similar one to our own.

Finally, Jael is a warrior from a future world where men and women are at war and society is more divided than ever. Jael explains that after the radicalisation and the formation of some social groups, a war started between the Haves and the Have-nots, that is, men and women, showing in this nominalisation the root of the battle: the power relationship between those whom society benefitted and those others who were not in the privileged position. We end up discovering that these four women are in a way the same person at different stages of their—possible—history, in what Cortiel has described as a fractured, multiple self [which] does not negate the self as member of a sex-class and the self reaching out to other women, but supplements them. The new, fluid subjectivity created by the simultaneous presence of a unified identity and its disintegration, contains the (desire for a) utopian space beyond gender antagonisms (Cortiel, 1999:10).

Jael asks Jeannine and Joanna for help to set bases and hide weapons in their worlds (which belong to the present for them, but to the past for Jael) in order to win the future war: “It will get things moving. The long war will start up again. We will be in the middle of it and I—who have always been in the middle of it—will get some decent support from my people” (1975:158). It can be said that this victory has already happened, since Janet’s world comes from it: Jael reveals to her that her dear society, Whileaway, is a result of the war that they are fighting in the present, since Janet is the furthest of them all in a timeline:

Let me give you something to carry away with you, friend: that “plague” you talk about is a lie. I know. [...] Your ancestors lied about it. It is I who gave you your “plague” [...] I and the war I fought built your world for you, I and those like me gave you a thousand years of peace and love and the Whileawayan flowers nourish themselves on the bones of the men we have slain (Russ, 1975:205).
3.2. Time-travelling and infinite becomings

Gwyneth Jones explains in the 2010 preface to the novel that the parable of time-travelling has been a major theme in SF since the concept emerged in the 1950s. Time-travelling is related to the setting of parallel universes, which enables the exploration of different temporary moments “without offence to causality” and also “allow SF writers to play dress-up, and still claim they are not writing fantasy” (2010:ix).

Time-travelling can also be understood as a form of re-writing history and literature (inasmuch as the latter reflects historical discourses)21: the traveller (or the writer) goes back to the past and changes it (that is, re-writes it), together with the consequences that this had in our present and ultimately our future. Conversely, re-writing canonical texts and contesting the hegemonic historical discourses is like travelling backwards and editing the memories that we have of it. What remains from the past is mainly a memory, but it also has material implications. Just like if we travel in time and change something from the past, our present memory and circumstances will also change. To set an example, when someone plunges into postcolonial studies, she might find her memories of the past changed. When we learned that Columbus’s invasion of America was indeed a colonisation and not a discovery or a civilizing mission, our memory of the past changed. And together with the past, we changed the present (raising awareness about the rights of indigenous peoples and improving their conditions, for instance).

About time-travelling, Russ states in her novel that

every choice begets at least two worlds of possibility [and] it’s possible, too, that there is no such thing as one clear line or strand of probability, and that we live on a sort of twisted braid, blurring from one to the other without even knowing it, as long as we keep within the limits of a set of variations. Thus the paradox of time travel ceases to exist, for the Past one visits is never one’s own Past, but always somebody else’s; or rather, one’s visit to the Past instantly created another Present (one in which the visit has already happened) and what you visit is the Past belonging to that Present –an entirely different matter from your own Past. And with each decision you make (back there in the Past) that new probable universe itself branches, creating simultaneously a new Past and a new Present, or to put it plainly, a new universe (Russ, 1975:6-7).

This is what happens between the four different universes or strands of probability in the novel:

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21 About the strategy of re-writing as a way out of imperialistic power discourses, see McLeod (2000), Said (1994) or Spivak (1985). The first one is an introduction to postcolonial theory that contains a chapter on re-reading and re-writing canonical texts. The second ones engage in specific analyses of some of these texts, like Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park and Charlotte Brônte’s Jane Eyre, respectively.
it is probable that Whileaway—a name for the Earth ten centuries from now, but not our Earth, if you follow me—will find itself not at all affected by this sortie into somebody else’s past. And vice versa, of course. The two might as well be independent worlds. Whileaway, you might gather, is in the future. But not our future (Russ, 1975:7).

The universes are not located in a single temporary line of causality, but rather intertwined with the others in what Russ described as a “braid”, and every decision made in a particular moment opens up new worlds where the fact of doing one thing or the other completely modifies (or rather, defines) the characteristics and the happenings of this world: if one travels from the future towards the past, a new possibility (where this visit does happen) is instantly created, so a new strand is added to the multiverse. In Guattari’s words, this would constitute a “chaosmos”, a universe of becomings in the Deleuzian-Guattarian sense of unfolding of virtualities (in Braidotti, 2006). Like Russ’s “worlds of possibility”, for Deleuze and Guattari history is not a single line of development, but rather overlaid plateaux (Colebrook, 2002). They consider that the virtual and the actual are different aspects of “the real”, in opposition to the anthropocentric representational way of thinking that privileges the actual. Time-travelling as represented in TFM illustrates what Deleuze and Guattari argue, since the strands of probability (either part of the past or the future) from where the protagonists come are all part of the same “reality”.

3.3. Cognitive estrangement and the construction of a new language

We might agree at this point about the difficulty to conceptualise these notions about becomings, infinite strands of possibilities and the idea of time-travelling in our Earthly, 21st century imaginations, and I believe this is the result of the powerful potential that SF has for questioning, subverting and ultimate creating a different imaginary. Through the cognitive estrangement defined by Suvin, and framed in narratives that put into question our conceptions about the world, our “stable” dimensions of time, space and even what we understand as possible are challenged down to their roots. In the case of TFM, we are presented with a society that works with no men and only women. When Janet is interviewed in an American TV show (after she mysteriously appears in the New York of 1969 and claims to be from another planet), the host asks her how they have managed to live for eight centuries without men. In an outstanding moment of the novel, the host also wonders how they have managed to expel sexual relations from their lives, which completely confuses Janet. She replies that they do have sex, and goes on to
innocently explain how they do it, being immediately cut off by commercials. This moment puts on the table the absurdity of heterosexual normativity that assumes that no sexual encounter is possible without men. This exemplifies how SF narratives contest pre–conceived ideas about the world by plainly introducing characters who perform different activities than these which we are used to, and acknowledging that completely different organisations can also work out (especially in the case of utopias, like Whileaway or Anarres, which will be introduced in the next chapter).

Russ continues exemplifying the constructed nature of the heterosexual institution (Rich, 1980) with the character of Laura, the daughter of a family with whom Janet stays during her visit in the Earth. Although she ends up having sex with Janet, we can witness Laura’s previous thoughts on the matter:

I’ve never slept with a girl. I couldn’t. I wouldn’t want to. That’s abnormal and I’m not, although you can’t be normal unless you do what you want and you can’t be normal unless you love men. To do what I wanted would be normal, unless what I wanted was abnormal, in which case it would be abnormal to please myself and normal to do what I didn’t want to do, which isn’t normal. So you see (1975:67).

Russ masterfully projects the absurdity of heteronormativity on Laura’s words. Laura pretends to sound completely logical and natural, like society has taught her that heterosexuality is, but her logic ends up sounding bizarre and unintelligible. That last “so you see” could mean that Laura wants to end her monologue emphasising that “this is something everyone could see: so you see” or rather that she realises how messy and illogical her speech is: “what I am forced to believe sounds as senseless as that: so you see”.

Susan Ayres explains that TFM operates like what Monique Wittig has called a literary “war machine” whose goal is “to pulverize the old forms and formal conventions. [...] Her purpose in The Female Man is to trick the reader into recognizing the problem of contrarieties” (1995:22). Ayres also points out Wittig’s novel Les guérillères, another utopian work which also presents a war between men and women that is ultimately won by the latter. These women are “concerned with finding a new language and with rewriting their history, which has been falsely invented by men”, and through that, Wittig “universaliz[es] the point of view of elles [and] illustrates how language can be used to destroy the mark of gender” (1995:26). The question of language and the search for a new one that could accommodate the experience of women was a matter of discussion between French theorists during the 70s, like Julia Kristeva (1974) and Luce Irigaray (1977).
While the first argues that poetic language can be used to modify the male, Symbolic realm of the law of the father; the second has argued that “the feminine” can never be expressed through the masculine language, since the feminine will always constitute a lack within this language, as well as an opposition to the ontology of the substance because the feminine is conceptualised as the radical difference to this substance.

Wittig however thinks that language is not intrinsically masculine, but rather a tool which is only misogynistic in its use, not in its nature; and which can therefore be reappropriated by women to express their experiences and discourses. As Judith Butler puts it, “Wittig is clearly attuned to the power of language to subordinate and exclude women. As a ‘materialist’, however, she considers language to be ‘another order of materiality’, an institution that can be radically transformed” (1990:26). Ayres illustrates how Russ’s “war machine” works by reappropriating language in diverse ways. This reappropriation is exemplified with three particular moments of the novel.

Firstly, Janet makes us realise that our words and meanings are constructs and that they could have any other sense. She explains to the other women that in Whileaway, surnames are formed with the name of the mother and the suffix –son, whose meaning we assume as that opposed to “daughter”. That would seem quite incongruent for a society entirely made up by women. However, Janet states very clearly that “Evason [her surname] is not ‘son’ but ‘daughter’. This is your translation” (1975:17).

Secondly, Joanna decides to become a man because she wants to be universal, and not particular. When she explains how she turned into a “female man”, she explains that, first, she had to become a woman. She then puts together all the gender rules that she had to endure throughout her life, acknowledging that, as de Beauvoir (1949) put it, one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. For this purpose, Joanna mocks the supposed female language and, as Ayres points out, “rejects [it] because it is another (false) mark of gender” (1995:26):

You will notice that even my diction is becoming feminine, thus revealing my true nature; I am not saying ‘Damn’ anymore […]. I am writing in these breathless little feminine tags, she threw herself down on the bed, I have no structure (she thought), my thoughts seep out shapelessly like menstrual fluid, it is all very female and deep and full of essences, it is very primitive (Russ, 1975:133).

Joanna goes on to say “then I turned into a man. This was slower and less dramatic. I think it had something to do with the knowledge you suffer when you’re an outsider”
Wittig has argued that “there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the "masculine" not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general” (1983:64). Wittig explains that “one must understand that men are not born with a faculty for the universal and that women are not reduced at birth to the particular. The universal has been, and is continually, at every moment, appropriated by men” (1992:80). Joanna thus recognises that “man” is “the proper study of Mankind” (1975:135) so, in order to affirm that her experience is also universal, she declares herself a man. Ayres explains that “through language women can kill the myth of woman and abolish the class of women (and the class of men)” (1995:32).

In the third example, Jeannine shows resistance towards the female stereotypes that her society makes her enact in her utterances, providing new sentences that sound alike but have very different connotations. She struggles against the female stereotypes of the 1960s, by which she ought to be married and abide by the conventions of her sex. When she is having a conversation with her family about marriage, she answers with some utterances that she then transforms in her head. When an “I” (who we might assume is Janet) tells her that she should appreciate more the efforts that her family makes towards her, she answers “I know”, though in her head she is rebelling to it and says “Oh no”. When she is told that she should marry someone who is able to take care of her, Jeannine answers “don’t care”, but she does in fact care, and considers it “not fair” in her head. The “I” keeps on, asking her what is it that she is waiting for, to what Jeannine replies “for a man”, being this in her thoughts “for a plan”. Although Jeannine can hardly struggle against social conventions out loud, Russ shows us how she masks her real thoughts with answers that sound much alike.

3.4. Modernism and SF: the virtual streams of reality

*TFM* presents a kind of stream-of-consciousness where most of the time there is no omniscient narrator who explains to the readers whose thoughts are the ones that we are witnesses to. The novel is organised in chapters, but within these we find fragments arranged with numbers, and in many of them we do not know who is narrating the story. Sometimes the reader can assume who the “I” is because of the references made in her monologue, but no guide is provided in order to follow the narrative more easily. Ayres provides a fragment that, in her opinion, “illustrates this confusion”, but I would say that rather than illustrating it – in the sense of unveiling the unclear narrators – it acknowledges the confusion provoked by the multiplicity of voices as something consciously
constructed by the writer: “I said goodbye and went off with Laur, I, Janet; I also watched them go, I, Joanna; moreover I went off to show Jael the city, I Jeannine, I Jael, I myself” (qtd. in Ayres, 1995:23).

This fragmentation and multiplicity of points of view has been the cornerstone of some criticisms that assumed that reality was out there to be represented, and that writers who called themselves feminists, or who wanted to make a change in society, should make clear reference to this reality. Moi exemplifies this with the criticism that Elaine Showalter made of Virginia Woolf’s writing, alleging that “Woolf refuses to reveal her own experience fully and clearly, but insists on disguising or parodying it in the text” (in Moi, 1993:3). Showalter follows the humanist representational thought of critics like George Lukács, a Marxist theorist who thought that a “proletarian humanist” should work to represent the human experience (assuming that there is a single, universal one) out of the misleading hands of modernism and its subjectivism. Moi explains that “an insistence on authenticity and truthful reproduction of the ‘real world’ as the highest literary value inevitably makes the feminist critic hostile to non-realist forms of writing” (1993:47). However, both literary modernism and SF defeat this notion of singleness and universalism of experience, advocating for an understanding of it as something open, multiple and heterogeneous. This certainly challenges the Western male phallogocentrism –in Derrida’s terms– that sets value in that which has the allegedly positive characteristics of the phallus (especially when compared to the assumed chaos or fragmentation of the female genitalia): unity, integrity, totality; and sets aside anything else that is, in phallocentric terms, not a transcendental signifier in Western culture (1993:67).

In relation to this fragmentation, Russ introduces some parts in her novel that recall the modernism of Woolf, James Joyce or T.S. Eliot. The latter is evoked in a moment of the novel where Russ uses the word “wasteland” (1975:177). In his famous poem, Eliot introduces a multiplicity of voices within monologues or dialogues in a fragmented structure that does not provide the reader with any kind of guide to follow the juxtaposition of images. Moi explains that the modernist poem, with its abrupt shifts, ellipses, breaks and apparent lack of logical construction is a kind of writing in which the rhythms of the body and the unconscious have managed to break through the strict rational defences of conventional social meaning (Moi, 1993:11).
The same also happens aside from poetry: in *Ulysses*, Joyce experiments with language up to the point of, for instance, including a whole chapter, “Penelope”, without periods. In part 5 of chapter 3, Russ writes:

Burned any bras lately har har twinkle twinkle A pretty girl like you doesn’t need to be liberated twinkle har Don’t listen to those hysterical bitches twinkle twinkle I never take a woman’s advice about two things: love and automobiles twinkle twinkle har May I kiss your little hand twinkle twinkle twinkle har. Twinkle (Russ, 1975:49).

The fragment finishes giving rise to the 6th chapter without further explanation. There are scarcely no periods, no commas, and we can observe an apposition of discernible messages (about burning bras or not listening to women’s advice) with intangible perceptions like “twinkle” and even an invented word (“har”). The stream of consciousness has been described from posthumanism as a way of capturing the whole of the surrounding world, and of being aware of the affective flows of ideas (real or virtual), feelings and words. The artist thus tries to capture “the totality of an assemblage of elements, in an almost geographical or cartographic manner, like the shade of the light at dusk, or the curve of the wind” (Braidotti, 2006:145).

Russ’s fragmentation includes incorporating her thoughts into the narrative, not only as the character of Joanna, who reflects her experience, but also as the writer. In another example of stream-of-consciousness-like writing, she includes a long paragraph with the critical comments made to her novel, such as “maunderings of antiquated feminism”, “needs a good lay”, “twisted, neurotic”, “no characterization, no plot”, “really important issues are neglected”, “another of the screaming sisterhood”, “hardly girlish”, “feminine lack of objectivity”, “the usual boring obligatory references to Lesbianism”, “the inability to accept the female role” or “just plain bad”. Russ comments on these criticisms saying that “they are liars and the truth is not in them” (1975:136-7). I understand that this refers to those critics who assumed that there was indeed a truth and it could be portrayed in literature.

### 3.5. Conclusion: the utopia of Whileaway

Russ presents a call in her narrative for women to unite and re-make history in order to fight patriarchy, as Jael does when she asks Joanna and Jeannine for help to win the battle. Russ has explained that utopias are written to
supply in fiction what their authors believe society [...] and/or women, lack in the here-and-now. The positive values stressed in the stories can reveal to us what, in the authors’ eyes, is wrong with our own society (Russ, 1981:81).

Ayres also quotes Jean Pfaelzer, who says that utopia “deconstructs our assumptions about social inevitability through representations that provoke a cognitive dissonance between the present as lived and the potentialities hidden within it” (qtd. in Ayres, 1995:30). Even if SF utopias, in the same way as modernism, have been criticised for their lack of representation or reality, or barely any loyalty to human experience, this is one of their most important values. Their sometimes unusual structures and narratives challenge our assumptions about what is right or what is real, and provide images of other worlds and other societies from which we might learn to improve ours.

Russ also states a strong message against patriarchy, providing the example of a society where men do not exist and where things run happily and smoothly:

There’s no being out too late in Whileaway, or up too early, or in the wrong part of town or unescorted. You cannot fall out of the kinship web and become sexual prey for strangers, for there is no prey and there are no strangers [...] In all of Whileaway there is no one who can keep you from going where you please [...], no one who will follow you and try to embarrass you by whispering obscenities on your ear, no one who will attempt to rape you (Russ, 1975:80-1).

I do not think that Russ’s final statement is that we should get rid of half of our society22. But what is true is that almost every woman has experienced the kind of things that does not occur in Whileaway. Russ has explained that, “if men are kept out of these societies, it is because men are dangerous” (1981:77). “Men” refers to the gender construct of masculinity, and Russ is ultimately vowing for the elimination of gender roles and the erasure of power relations between them. Russ expresses her opposition to gender roles and to the unitary, masculine mode of thought through the fragmentation of language that recalls, on the one hand, the literary modernism of Woolf or Joyce, and on the other hand, the theories about (female) language by French poststructuralists like Kristeva and Irigaray.

Russ is perhaps a more radical thinker than LeGuin in terms of gender and this leaves traces in her narratives. While Russ focuses on the material conditions of

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22 Wittig has made an important point about this, signalling that Womanland (the women-only society where Jael lives and which is fighting Manland) is a dystopia that “shows the danger of substituting women for men” (1992:55). This mixing of utopia and dystopia is connected to LeGuin’s idea of the utopiyan and utopiyang and Atwood’s concept of ustopia (to be explained afterwards).
discrimination that women (the Have-nots) and men (the Haves) possess in society and uses SF to narrate an open battle and a more violent “solution” in order to denounce this situation, LeGuin prefers to explore the ways in which gender can be subverted and categories blurred through SF linguistic and narrative possibilities. The next chapter deals with her views on SF and utopia.
4.1. *The dispossessed* as a cyborg novel

From Thomas More’s island that gave origin to the word, to far-off planets or cities under the sea, isolated places that build their societies without any contact with our world have been the preferred scenarios to imagine utopias. British writer China Miéville writes in his introduction to the 2016 edition of More’s *Utopia* that insularity is a core of utopian thinking, but we must remember that More’s island is joined to the mainland by a thin stretch of terrain. We can imagine utopias as far away as we like (even in other galaxies), but we cannot completely separate them from the world where they are originated. LeGuin (2016b) refers to this incongruity as the “utopiyan” and “utopiyang”, arguing that every utopia contains a dystopia and vice versa. This is seen very clearly in her work *The dispossessed*.

Burns interestingly points out that the original subtitle of *TD* was *An ambiguous utopia* (2010:118). His argument, departing from LeGuin’s ambiguity towards her own novel and the utopian literary genre (as well as the concept of utopia itself), is that *TD* is not actually a novel about a utopian society, but rather a novel about utopianism in politics (2010:116). LeGuin herself had acknowledged that she was unsure about whether *TD* was, on the one hand, a novel and on the other hand, a utopia. For her, the contraposition of Urras and Anarres (the confronted worlds described in *TD*) spoke rather about the contradictions, incongruities or incoherencies that appear in every search of political projects, however aimed at improving the lives of people within them. LeGuin argues that when we think about utopia, we should bear in mind that there are yin and yang parts that cannot function independently of the other. She states that utopian speculation has been Euclidean, European and masculine (2016a:317), a yang type that is bright, dry, strong and hot, and that has tried to deny its independence on the yin kind, which would be “dark, wet, obscure, weak, yielding, passive, participatory, circular, cyclical, peaceful, nurturant, retreating, contracting and cold” (2016a:321-322):

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Her issues about denominations in the SF genre were dealt with in section 2.3.
In the Yang-Yin symbol each half contains within it a portion of the other, signifying their complete interdependence and continual intermutability. The figure is static, but each half contains the seed of transformation. The symbol represents not a stasis but a process (LeGuin, 2016b:350).

In relation to utopian thinking, LeGuin argues that

The kind of thinking we are, at last, beginning to do about how to change the goals of human domination and unlimited growth to those of human adaptability and long-term survival is a shift from yang to yin, and so involves an acceptance of impermanence and imperfection, a patience with uncertainty and the makeshift, a friendship, with water, darkness, and the earth (LeGuin, 2016b:354).

This way of seeing utopia interrelates with various modes of thought, like ecofeminism, Braidotti’s idea of zoe (2006), or Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic becoming-minoritarian (1980). It also has a clear connection with Haraway’s “Cyborg manifesto”, especially in the sense that LeGuin criticises the separation of the yin and yang types as an alienation from the actual nature of utopias with the aim of positing one kind over the other: “the drive to separate the two is connected not with the search for balance and integration, but with a struggle for dominance” (Burns, 2010:115). Haraway was also concerned with this search for integration, which often hid an underlying system of domination. While trying to build a unitary subject for the aims of consciousness and political struggle, some socialist and radical feminists fell in totalizing and exclusive constructions like “Woman” (which did not include Black or Chicana women, for instance). Reflecting on feminist roadmaps, Haraway argues that

we do not need a totality in order to work well. The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one. In that sense, dialectics too is a dream language, longing to resolve contradiction (Haraway, 1991:173).

In this way, these feminisms did little more than replace the humanist colossus of the white rational Man with another figure whose pedestal was the construction of sex/gender and the reproductive exploitation, and which left aspects like race out of the picture. As Haraway puts it, “it’s not just that ‘god’ is dead; so is the ‘goddess’” (1991:162). LeGuin is equally worried that her thoughts on utopia and her criticism of “Euclidean utopia” as masculinist could be twisted and lead to the conclusion that the
utopias she is trying to approach can only be inhabited by women in an essentialist and simplistic sense (something that she considers “intolerable”) (2016a:320).

LeGuin explains that “we’re in a rational dilemma, an either/or situation as perceived by the binary computer mentality, and neither the either nor the or is a place where people can live” (2016a:345). Haraway approaches this dilemma calling her cyborg a “ironic” figure, since “irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true” (1991:149). *TD* would then be an “ironical” cyborg narrative, all the more since Haraway understands irony to be both a rhetorical strategy and a political method. The novel is located in the middle of the tension between the yin and the yang, the utopia and dystopia. As a couple of characters state in the novel:

“I never thought before,” said Tirin unruffled, “of the fact that there are people sitting on a hill, up there, on Urras, looking at Anarres, at us, and saying, ‘Look, there’s the Moon.’ Our earth is their Moon; our Moon is their Earth.”
“Where, then, is Truth?” declared Bedap, and yawned.
“In the hill one happens to be sitting on,” said Tirin (LeGuin, 1974:37).

As Burns explains, Anarres is “only a utopia for those who look at the world from the standpoint of the Anarresti” (2010:121). Anarres is supposed to be a more egalitarian society, but its inhabitants undergo harsh situations like famines and rationing of resources, so it is far from being an ideal place. If *TD* is located in this tension of opposed imaginary locations (the yin and the yang, the utopia and dystopia that we cannot even locate in specific places) to describe where people actually live, then the novel is itself a cyborg in Haraway’s sense. The cyborg being “a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction […] our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction” (1991:149), and *TD* being a fiction about social reality and social relations (which for Haraway are equivalent), we might argue that, in the sense that *TD* is a creative fiction with blurred boundaries (just like I argued that SF genre itself was a cyborg), this is not just a novel about cyborgs or representing cyborg dialectics, but also a cyborg in itself.

“Social reality is lived social relations”, Haraway argues. LeGuin is precisely concerned about the spaces that actual people occupy, rather than on virtual possibilities or abstract representations of political thought. As an anarchist herself, she is aware of where her preferred utopia would be located, but as a writer she chooses to place her character Shevek in the contradictory, liminal space between two ideas, because that is
what reality is ultimately composed of: not of pure, cleanly-achieved ideas, but rather of incoherent and messy steps towards them. As H.G. Wells stated in his 1905 *A modern utopia*, “Utopia is either everywhere at the same time […] or it cannot exist at all” (qtd. in Burns, 2010:125). Perhaps the basic characteristic of utopias is that they can never be reached (although the political struggle that tries to reach that place does exist). In this sense, for LeGuin to be utopian is to be unrealistic. In Burns’s words,

> it is to envisage, not a state of affairs which though possible is not yet actual, but rather a state of affairs which is “impractical” precisely because it is not empirically possible for such a state of affairs ever to occur (Burns, 2010:117).

### 4.2. On propertarian and anarchist languages

Aside from its ambiguous utopia, *TD* has been commented upon in relation to aspects concerning language (Delany, 2009) and political discourses (as shown in the 2005 edited collection by Davis & Stillman, which includes texts related to ecological political theory, anarchism or revolution). Just like with *TFM*, I am interested in seeing how LeGuin manages language(s) in order to provoke estrangement in the readers and make them question their assumptions, this time not so much about gender (as she did in 1969 with *The left hand of darkness*, where she imagined how a society without gender would work), but rather about politics.

LeGuin introduces the confronted worlds of Anarres and Urras. The first houses an anarchist community where babies are taught that “nothing is yours. It is to use. It is to share” (1974:26) and property is not even conceived in their vocabulary. In Pravic, the Anarresti language, there are no words to conceive anything related to possession or exclusivity. LeGuin introduces at one point a grammatical explanation for Pravic that exemplifies this avoidance of possession marks:

> The singular forms of the possessive pronoun in Pravic were used mostly for emphasis; idiom avoided them. Little children might say, “My mother”, but very soon they learned to say “the mother”. Instead of “My hands hurts”, it was “The hands hurts me”, and so on; to say “This one is mine and that’s yours”, in Pravic one said, “I use this one and you use that” (LeGuin, 1974:50-51).

On the opposite side, Urras employs the Iotic language. When talking about this society, a character states: “the propertied class (the Iotic words were used, as there was no equivalent for either word in Pravic) lie on the sand all day until dinner is served to them by people of the unpropertied class” (1974:38). Also about Pravic, we are explained in a footnote that
a small child may call any adult *mamme* or *tadde*. Gimar’s *tadde* might have been her father, an uncle, or an unrelated adult who showed her parental or grandparental responsibility and affection. She may have called several people *tadde* or *mamme*, but the word has a more specific use than *ammar* (brother/sister), which may be used to anybody (LeGuin, 1974:42).

This use of the footnote by the narrator to explain the use of specific words can be explained through Suvin’s description of estrangement in SF. In Suvin’s words, “a representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (2005:25). This means taking a fictional hypothesis and developing it with a kind of scientific rigour, what provokes a confrontation with our own normative system implying a new set of norms. Following Suvin’s theory, what LeGuin does is introduce elements in the narrative that seem strange to the readers’ understanding (as a language where speakers say “the hands” instead of “my hands”). Besides that, there is a sort of meta-estrangement in the sense that Shevek is surprised by the social aspects that he witnesses in Urras: Urras is a capitalist society, a *propertarian* system according to the Anarresti, which presents extreme hierarchies and social categorisations in terms of class and gender, so we might feel more close to them than to Anarres. But Shevek, as an Anarresti, experiences different feelings that rank from astonishment to admiration and finally despair when confronted with the elements that are so opposed to those of his own world. Thus, we as readers are doubly estranged: first by the description of Anarres and Pravic; and second through the fact that the character who narrates the story (Shevek) is estranged when faced with a world that we are more familiar with. Shevek’s estrangement, like Janet’s in the American TV show, distances us from our everyday contexts and behaviours, and makes us question the construction of our accepted normality.

Delany has highlighted the way in which the novel provokes an estrangement when our specific languages (shaped by our living scenarios and learning conditions) are faced with the language of the novel, exploring what can be gained by writing in SF languages (2009:112). *TD* is also concerned with the issue of time, a theme that affects both its content and its structure. Just like the novel deals with the possibilities raised in liminal political positions, it also reflects on how different sets of ideas (like the sequential vs. the simultaneous nature of time, as both are defended by different scientists in Urras and Anarres) can be opposed without any of them being necessarily on top of the other. Shevek’s goal is to develop a General Temporary Theory that joins both ways of
understanding time, as an arrow (sequence) and as a circle (simultaneity). This goes back to LeGuin’s ideas about yin/yang and the need to acknowledge that our visions are partial in order to get a full, more complete picture. For Delany,

the conflicting “Sequency” and “Simultaneity” theories of time reflect the macro-structure of the novel itself, with its ordered, pendulating chapters, crossing time and space which is, by semantic extension, the goal of Shevek’s theory (Delany, 2009:112).

4.3. Conclusion: dangerous utopias

As contradictory or complex as utopias might be, as Eduardo Galeano stated in 1993, we do not need to reach them (because that might be simply impossible), but they are useful as a method to walk. Miéville agrees and considers it a given for activism, since “if an alternative to this world were inconceivable, how could we change it?” (2016:27). But, as in the yin/yang confrontation, Miéville warns about the danger of utopias when they are integrated into the logic of the capitalist system or, as Baccolini points out, when they are “conflated with materialist satisfaction and thus commodified and devalued” (2004:518). She recalls Suvin’s concept of the “Disneyfication strategy”, where the pursuit of individual happiness is set at the centre and this leaves aside the “transgressive and radical nature” that SF works can have (2004:519). Miéville exemplifies the danger of these stories with the utopia imagined by Walther Darré, the minister of agriculture of the Third Reich, who imagined a “new world” called Blut und Boden (“Blood and Soil”), “a Nazi ecotopia of organic farmlands and restocked Nordic forests, protected by the pure-blooded peasant-soldier” (2016:40). If we think about it, Western society and its blistering development is utopian for its elites, which extract their massive wealth from the injustice and poverty that the masses are being subject to, and the more capital the tiny percentage of multi-millionaires accumulates, with their luxury complexes (built next to favelas and slums) full of casinos, artificial ski resorts in the middle of the dessert, golf camps and 24-hour available prostitutes, the closest their dreams of a world tailor-made for themselves will be. Urban theorist and sociologist Mike Davis reflects on these artificial Utopia-like islands after a visit to Dubai’s “emerging dreamworld of conspicuous consumption and what locals dub ‘supreme lifestyles’” (2005:62). In their luxury malls and complexes, visitors can fulfil their childhood fantasies, as Davis expresses it, sleeping in an underwater hotel that makes you feel as if you were Captain
Nemo in *20000 leagues under the sea*, or going to a *Jurassic Park*-like safari. However (and unsurprisingly), as Davis explains,

the Utopian character of Dubai, it must be emphasized, is no mirage. Even more than Singapore or Texas, the citystate is an apotheosis of neoliberal values. On the one hand, it provides investors with a comfortable, Western-style property-rights regime that is unique in the region. Included in the package is a broad tolerance of booze, recreational drugs, halter tops, and other foreign vices formally proscribed by Shariah. […] On the other hand, Dubai, together with its neighbors, has achieved state-of-the-art disfranchisement of labor. The freedom, say, to organize a union or publish a critical opinion goes unmentioned, as trade unions, strikes, and agitators are illegal, and 99 percent of the members of the private-sector workforce are immediately deportable noncitizens. Dubai lifestyles are supported by vast numbers of Filipina, Sri Lankan, and Indian maids, while the building boom is carried on the shoulders of an army of poorly paid Pakistanis and Indians working 12-hour shifts, six-and-a-half days a week, in the blast-furnace desert heat (2005:63-64).

As Miéville was warning, the system is also relying on the utopian discourse to sell these kinds of “paradise”. Davis gathers the words of Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohammed:

Sheikh Mo, who fancies himself a prophet of modernization, likes to impress visitors with clever proverbs and heavy aphorisms. A favorite: "Anyone who does not attempt to change the future will stay a captive of the past." Yet the future that he is building in Dubai –to the applause of billionaires and transnational corporations everywhere– looks like nothing so much as a nightmare of the past: Walt Disney meets Albert Speer on the shores of Araby. (2005:64).

What I want to conclude this chapter with is that, as Klein puts it: “politics hates a vacuum; if it isn’t filled with hope, someone will fill it with fear” (2017:259), but we have to be careful also with the hope of whom we are trying to fill this vacuum. We need utopias because we need a roadmap for change, but we need the knowledge and the analytical tools to realise if power elites are trying to lead us to their specific paradises (even using our own roadmaps, like feminism or LGBT+ vindications), because we will end up somewhere which might be the Garden of Eden for some, but a dystopian hell for

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24 Although these velociraptors are not created from genetic material kept for millions of years inside a piece of amber and they are “just” machines designed by experts from the British Museum of Natural History, I find it quite ironic that Michael Crichton’s novel did not convince us to stop trying to play genetics God, but rather gave some the idea of recreating this park in Dubai. I wonder if we should be grateful that the genes-kept-in-amber hypothesis has proven to be not scientifically possible and, for the moment, curious millionaire tourists have to be content with T-Rex automatons (See Figure 6).

25 Albert Speer was Hitler’s chief architect before becoming the Reichminister of Armaments and War Production during most of the Second World War (my clarification).
others (actually, for the majority). As Lyman T. Sargent says, “people suffer today so that others can live in the material eutopia of the world’s developed countries” (qtd. in Moylan & Baccolini, 2003:235). As Jameson argues,

insofar as our own society has trained us to believe that true disalienation or authenticity only exists in the private or individual realm, it may well be this revelation of collective solidarity which is the freshest one and the most startlingly and overtly Utopian (Jameson, 2005:230).

At the same time, we should also take care when imagining and designing our own utopias, because our privileges might produce incomplete islands, where less advantaged people may still be fighting to maintain themselves afloat while they try to reach the shore. The next chapter deals with how someone’s particular idea of utopia ends up turning into a dystopic world for others: Atwood shares LeGuin’s view on yin/yang utopias (Atwood specifically denominates this inherent contradiction as “ustopias”) and this is portrayed in the MaddAddam trilogy that starts with Oryx and Crake.
5.1. Can we imagine the anymal experience?

Sherryl Vint’s 2010 thrilling study of the presence of anymals in SF includes an analysis of the connection between SF and animal studies, where she argues that both fields share a concern about the construction and the limits of human nature, and its relation with alterity. She places this connection within the context described by Berger (1980), where post-industrial capitalism has changed not only our subjectivities but also our relationship with anymals and the natural world. Berger argues that in pre-industrial societies, humans were more aware of their interconnectedness and mutual relationships with the nonhuman world. Following him, Vint explains that, as a result of this, “we no longer encounter animals as fellow creatures who return our gaze” (2010:9). The issue of the gaze is central to Derrida’s (2008) observations about our relation with anymals. He points out the tradition of philosophers who have reflected on the anymal from an anthropocentric perspective, unaware of the option that the anymal could also reflect on the philosopher herself. This anymal gaze means removing the (hu)man from the epistemological centre in which he has placed himself and questioning other ways of knowing and communicating with the anymal Other, reducing the distance that philosophers like René Descartes or Martin Heidegger have built between us26.

Whether we can grasp the anymal experience from a humanist perspective and language is central to much theorising about the human-animal relation in terms of ethics, ontology or politics. Erica Fudge (2008) sees a humanist arrogance in the idea that our imagination can capture the anymal’s perspective. As Jameson wondered with regard to utopias: is it possible to even think about these possibilities? It seems that our language is, initially, rudimentary and useless to elaborate these concepts and allow us to reflect on such a distant Other (a distance that we ourselves have stubbornly built through centuries of erasure of “nature” from the subjectivity of “the human”27). Acknowledging the

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26 Descartes (1649) was the originator of the grounds for the abysmal difference between human and anymal in Western philosophical tradition, going as far as to say that anymals were like machines without emotions. Heidegger (1927) differentiated the Dasein (humans) from “life” (anymals or plants) on grounds like the relation of humans and language. For him, the first are aware of their existence in a context and are able to establish relations with their surroundings (and that is key for the exclusivity of humans and language, the tool that they use to develop these relations), whereas the latter just “exist” within their environment.

27 More specifically, of “the Man” understood as the subject of Eurocentric humanism and main character of the White, patriarchal capitalism. The discourse that grounds the separation between species has also been used to justify the exploitation of other humans, like women or Black people, so it is important to note
difficulty of our language to conceptualise this difference of experience, from the ethics of care to approaches that place the focus on the vulnerability that is unavoidable in embodiment, many authors have attempted to construct bridges between species on the basis of responsibility and relations, that may shed light on the ways to less dominance-based futures.

Ralph Acampora (2006) prefers to talk about symphysis (a connection based on the sharing of the embodied experience) rather than sympathy (a connection based on the sharing of feelings). Acampora goes a step further than other animal rights theorists like Singer or Regan, who were only concerned with rational approaches of ethics. But still, the preference of talking about an embodied experience instead of feelings seems to imply that embodiment could actually be separated from emotions. What is mainly argued by feminist approaches to animal ethics is that we cannot separate our rational from our emotional component. As Mary Midgley expresses, humans are “bonding-forming creatures, not abstract intellects” (qtd. in Palmer, 2010:54). We should acknowledge that we are embodied subjects interconnected in flows of affect that circulate relationally, generating encounters (Ahmed, 2014), and place value on that, rather than trying to bury them under an alleged abstract rationality that is not influenced in any way by our emotions.

If we understand the world in Spinoza’s monist sense, this means that we are part of a whole that does not work with separate, individual parts, but rather intertwined elements that make sense connected to each other. And of course we have to include the nonhuman there. Maybe if we realise that we are all vulnerable in our bodies and dependant on each other we can see how focusing on an abstract account of ethics that focuses on rationality is not enough to drive our actions. As Palmer says, “vulnerability is [...] to some extent ineliminable, a consequence of being embodied” (2010:91). Animal rights theorists have for long talked about sentience, pain, rights, contracts, etc, but what remains behind all of their agreements and disagreements is the fact that, as Donovan states, “we should not kill, eat, torture, and exploit animals because they do not wish to be so treated, and we know that” (1990:375). And we know it because we can be

that, when talking about the human as opposed to the anymal, this “human” concept has never even included all *homo sapiens*. Despite all the contributions from animal studies, some contemporary theorists are still determinate in their defence of humanism and, with it, a defence of the uniqueness of human life, arguing that this uniqueness is essential for the existence of ethics (Ferry, 1995; for instance).

28 Butler (2004) has also engaged in a defence of vulnerability as an ethical basis, since (reflecting after 9/11) she realises that feelings of loss or mourning put into question the autonomous, independent subject of liberal theory, and open a transformational process towards a relational self.
empathic, we can learn to communicate with them and we can read their signs of fear, pain or happiness, and all of these should be valued alongside rationality.

5.2. SF’S representations of alterity: a vantage point

J. M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* deals with animal rights discourses and the use of literature to convey them in two ways. On the one hand, *Elizabeth Costello* includes reflections on animal rights (very related to Derrida’s ideas) in the shape of lectures that Costello delivers. On the other hand, the novel itself represents the question of “whether or not literature can convey some truth of animal existence” (Vint, 2010:5). Coetzee’s conclusion seems to be that we should not reject these representations on the grounds that our languages would falsely portray the animal experience. In fact, *Elizabeth Costello* is an example of this representation with which he aims at producing a reflection in readers about our relation to animals. Oppositely, Thomas Nagel’s 1974 essay “What is it like to be a bat?” warns about the difference that exists between thinking that we can understand the way in which an animal behaves, and what it would really be like to be this animal. The first means filtering an observed behaviour through our limited human perspective and then reflect on it with our also limited conceptual frameworks and tools (language). The second means being “a fundamentally alien form of life” (1974:438), something that will never be possible. Vint seems to agree with Coetzee that

only the worldbuilding of fiction, something at which sf excels, is adequate for conveying the fullness of life before it has been contained within the reductive categories we use as shorthand to constrain the complexity of the world into units that can be grasped by rational thought (Vint, 2010:6-7).

N. Katherine Hayles agrees with Vint in her posthumanist approach to SF. She sees in this genre “a tool for thinking through questions of embodiment, subjectivity and ethics in concrete ways” (in Vint, 2010:11). Teresa Mangum (2007) also acknowledges the power of dystopias, specifically, to (either metaphorically or literally) speak about the violence that animals suffer under the technological wrongs of our era. For Haraway, SF writers (together with feminist anthropologists and theorists like Mary Douglas or Audre Lorde) were “our story-tellers exploring what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds. They are theorists for cyborgs” (1991:173).

If we are ever able to talk about the animal, then what would be the best means to do so? Vint argues that SF has large advantages in this sense, due to its “long history of
thinking about alterity, subjectivity and the limits of the human” (2010:2) and also because “its generic premises enable us to imagine the animal quite literary looking at us and addressing us from a non-anthropocentric perspective” (2010:6), either in the shape of an alien or in stories where modified anymals are able to communicate with humans. However, even if we accept literature and specifically SF as an accurate mode of representation of the anymal Other, we should be ready to accept that, if communication is ever possible, the anymal will probably tell us something that we do not want to hear. We should assume therefore that if we ever talk to our dog or cat, their visions on our cohabitation will probably differ from ours. And we should also reflect on our reactions if we find out that, for instance, our dog does not like being chained or being used as an emergency alarm in our summer house. Would we let them go?

Aside from this, the fact of making ourselves ask these questions, and of trying to come up with other ways of communicating with the Other means questioning ontological matters that have been key in humanism and therefore in the construction of some subjects on top of others. Wolfe (2003) argues that trying to communicate with an anymal means addressing a subjectivity that is beyond ours, and that is diametrically opposed to us according to our normative language parameters. This enables a Deleuzean becoming-animal, and a gate to virtual ways of existing with each other and of describing these ways with a new language. As Vint points out, the fact of focusing on language is also important in itself because language has been one of the key points that our philosophical tradition (departing from Descartes and grounded on others like Heidegger or Emmanuel Levinas31) has used to deny anymals the superior level that humans had. This point was based on the anymals’ lack of language, so just suggesting that anymals have language, only that we cannot understand them, is an important challenge of the species boundary.

29 Often explored through robot or AI characters, as Vint also highlights (2010:418).
30 These questions are obviously much more complex and cannot be discussed at length here. Acknowledging that our species took part in domestication and commodification processes of other species and that the enslavement and forced work of anymals were key in the construction of our societies (Hriba1, 2003; DeMello, 2007) does not mean that we should now leave stray dogs or cats in the street so that they can live as they please. My view on that is that precisely acknowledging these processes means taking responsibility—which for Derrida (1993) is the only way we could obtain justice– of anymals that cannot live on their own anymore and trying to give them the best life possible (and of course stopping the selling of companion anymals, together with any other economic transaction involving anymals in general, be it for spectacles, laboratories or any other ends).

31 Levinas’s effort to maintain humanity as something different and exclusive is better understood through his experience in a Nazi camp in WW2, which he narrates in his 1976 essay “The name of a dog, or natural rights”. Levinas is aware of the animalization of Jews by Nazi officials that goes on in the camp and wants to distance himself from that by stressing the difference that humans have with anymals (because making links between them could mean emphasising the animalization of prisoners and thus treat them as what Agamben described as “bare life”).
Vint also points at the fact that poststructuralism has taught us that it is language what shapes the world we experience; as well as the idea that, in order to challenge the speciesist system (or any system of oppression for that matter), trying to communicate with the other might result in conversations that lead us to a more ethical future.

5.3. Playing God: pigoons, rakunks and Crakers

Though *Oryx and Crake* does not deal with speaking anymals, it does portray genetically modified beings that humans consume in several ways, for food, organ donation\(^{32}\) or companionship. It also presents genetically bred humans whose creation was part of Crake’s aim to set up a better world. Focusing on these technologically-produced beings shows how human society produces, commodifies and also consumes other human beings; and also on how the utopias of a better future can easily go wrong and rot into scary dystopias.

Atwood has always stated that she does not write SF because she only talks about things that have already happened in history, or that are happening already. In fact, she has explained that her basic rule for writing *The handmaid’s tale* was: “I would not put into this book anything that humankind had not already done, somewhere, sometime, or for which it did not already have the tools” (2015:57). Eighteen years after the publication of *The handmaid’s tale* (in 1985), Atwood came back to writing dystopias with *O&C* (2003), which would be followed by two other novels, *The year of the flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013). As mentioned in the previous chapter, she considers the novel a *utopia*, since, as she argues,

*Oryx and Crake* is dystopic in that almost the entire human race is annihilated, before which it has split into two parts: a technocracy and an anarchy. And, true to form, there is a little attempt at utopia in it as well: a group of quasi-humans who have been genetically engineered so that they will never suffer from the ills that plague *Homo sapiens sapiens* (Atwood, 2015:64).

*O&C* presents two different times, performing what Jameson describes about speculative fiction, which “transform[s] our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come” (2017:217). One of the moments is the apocalyptic present that Jimmy/Snowball inhabits together with some genetically-engineered anymals (like pigoons or rakunks) and genetically-bred humans called Crakers in honour to their

\(^{32}\) The theme of breeding beings so that humans can eventually remove their organs and use them has been addressed also imagining that these beings are human, as in Kazuo Ishiguro’s 2005 *Never let me go* or Michael Bay’s 2005 film *The island.*
creator. The other temporal moment is Jimmy/Snowball’s past, which looks like the future of our society. The change of moments is signalled by the main character’s identity pre and post-apocalypse (in the first moment he is Jimmy, and in the second he is Snowball), marked at the same time by his traumatic passage from one time to the other. Katherine Snyder (2011) has pointed out that, in this sense, the use of the double temporality in SF bears resemblance to the double temporality of trauma.

In the past moment, Jimmy is the son of an engineer at OrganInc Farms and later at NooSkins, two companies that bred mutated anymals to extract biological material from them. At OrganInc Farms, they produced the so-called pigoons, a genetically-engineered giant pig in order to breed organs that can be then transplanted into human patients:

*Pigoon* was only a nickname: the official name was *sus multiorganifer*. [...] The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strands every year. A rapid-maturity gene was spliced in so the pigoon kidneys and livers and hearts would be ready sooner, and now they were perfecting a pigoon that could grow five or six kidneys at a time. Such a host animal could be reaped of its extra kidneys; then, rather than being destroyed, it could keep on living and grow more organs (Atwood, 2003:25-26).

Atwood is pointing in this quote to the transformation of living beings into breathing factories of biological material within a disembodied and soulless system that seeks productive efficiency above everything else. We learn afterwards that “the pigoons were much bigger and fatter than ordinary pigs, to leave room for all of the extra organs” and that “they were kept in special buildings, heavily secured: the kidnapping of a pigoon and its finely honed genetic material by a rival outfit would have been a disaster” (2003:29).

In his second job at NooSkins, Jimmy’s father also works with pigoons, but “these were smaller and were being used to develop skin-related biotechnologies” (2003:62). It is then when we realise that Jimmy’s mother does not completely agree with what her husband and his colleagues are doing:

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33 Some characters in the novel imply that pigoons are also used as food. They say that “within OrganInc Farms itself it was noticeable how often back bacon and ham sandwiches and pork pies turned up on the staff café menu. [...] “Pigoon pie again,” they would say” (2003:27). Taking into account that pigoons’ cells come from human cells, this could be considered a kind of cannibalism. MacCormack actually considers meat-eating as a form of “exocannibalism” (2012:58).
“It’s the neuro-regeneration project. We now have genuine human neocortex tissue growing in a pig. Finally, after all those duds! Think of the possibilities, for stroke victims, and…”
“That’s all we need,” said Jimmy’s mother. “More people with the brains of pigs. Don’t we have enough of those already?”
“Can’t you be positive, just for once? All this negative stuff, this is no good, that’s no good, nothing’s ever good, according to you!”
“Positive about what? That you’ve thought up yet another way to rip off a bunch of desperate people?” said Jimmy’s mother in that new slow, anger-free voice.
[…]
“We can give people hope. Hope isn’t ripping off!”
“At NooSkin’s prices it is. You hype your wares and take all their money and then they run out of cash, and it’s no more treatments for them. They can rot as far as you and your pals are concerned. Don’t you remember the way we used to talk, everything we wanted to do? Making life better for people—not just people with money” (Atwood, 2003:63-64).

Jimmy’s mother ends up escaping from the highly secured building complex where they live and it is implied that she joins a kind of resistance group that uses violent direct action to oppose the development of these technological advances.

As horrific as the image of a giant pig full of livers or lungs waiting for transplantation might look, truth is that cloning and xenotransplantation are realities since at least the cloning of Dolly the Sheep. The Guardian published an article in 2006 with the innocent title “The billionaire and his cloning experts who have seen the future – and it’s fluffy”, where they explain that

Following the cloning of Dolly the sheep in 1997, a company called Genetic Savings and Clone (GSC), was set up to store tissue samples for future cloning of pets. Some cats have been cloned but dog cloning has proved more difficult (Sample, 2006: no page).

In the pre-apocalyptic time, Jimmy follows his training period, first at high school, where he meets a young man called Glenn (who later takes the name of Crake), and then at the Martha Graham academy to study humanities. The students at this academy are trained with the main aim of developing the propaganda linked to the technology that is developed in the science academies (like the Watson-Crick institute, where Crake studies bioengineering). The opposition of both characters recalls Latour’s complaint about humanities and sciences being separated when they should mesh with each other to arrive at more complete and balanced conclusions. Crake develops the Crakers project and his apocalyptic plan behind Jimmy’s back (although he drops some hints and we know that
Jimmy does not agree with Crake’s ideas), and Jimmy ends up wondering what he could have done to avoid his present situation.

In their younger years, Jimmy and Crake develop a friendship that includes playing online games related to massive extinctions and the apocalypse (one of them is called MadAaddam, which gives name to the third volume and also to the trilogy) and visiting other websites: “When they weren’t playing games they’d surf the Net […] or they’d watch animal snuff sites. […] Or they might watch hedsoff.com, which played live coverage of executions in Asia” (2003:93-94).

Reading how two young boys like to watch these kinds of videos in their spare time might come across as dystopian and Suvin’s estrangement is also at play here, but we should bear in mind that Atwood claims to be writing about real things. The Internet is currently full of the videos described in the quote above or similar ones (see Figure 7 as an example), and it is not just weirdoes in wet basements who look for and watch them.

Atwood expresses the first time they see Oryx in one of the porn sites that the boys also usually visit as follows:

The locations were supposed to be countries where life was cheap and kinds were plentiful, and where you could buy anything you wanted. This was how the two of them first saw Oryx. She was only about eight, or she looked eight. They could never find out for certain how old she’d been then. Her name wasn’t Oryx, she didn’t have a name. She was just another little girl on a porno site (2003:103).

The coldness of the last sentence of the quote seems to point to this estrangement and goes a bit further. If for Suvin the future imagined in speculative fictions must be at the same time recognizable and unrecognizable, Atwood masters the art of showing us our own present and making it look as a horrible dystopia, so that afterwards the realisation that what we are reading is actually real knocks us harder. As Roberts states, “SF does not project us into the future; it relates us stories about our present, and more importantly about the past that has led to this present” (2000:35). Snyder argues that, in the novel,
we find a near-future world that both approximates and projects forward from the political, socio-economical, technological, and climatological givens of our present moment [...] The futurist setting of the novel suggests that we are at risk of coming to such a pass, though some readers may feel that this is already substantially, if not literally, the way we live now (Snyder, 2011: 470-1. My emphasis).

Oryx’s presence in these videos is also made “strangely” normalised. We learn that she is placed in these videos with other children and older men after a transaction process in the poor village where she comes from. The man who buys Oryx is described not “as a criminal of any sort, but as an honourable businessman” (2003:136). In this way, the economic language perverts what is really happening in the village, which seems to be from the poor part of this world. Jimmy’s society is separated from the so-called

peeplands by a high-security wall. The part where Jimmy lives is compounded by luxury housing complexes and huge malls that house shops, pools, gyms and so on. The other side of the wall is never fully described in the novel34, but Atwood points to the poverty and hopelessness that surrounds it (again, this only describes real situations, as seen in Figure 8).

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34 The year of the Flood (2009) narrates the same story as Oryx and Crake from the other side of the wall: “its pre-disaster plot unfolds in neighbourhoods that the security forces—now melded with corporations—don’t even bother to patrol, leaving them to criminal gangs and anarchic violence” (Atwood, 2015:67).
5.4. Conclusion: becoming zoe

The combination of the literal consumption of the genetically-bred anymals and the metaphorical consumption of Oryx and other children in the porn sites recalls Adams’s theory of the similarities between the commodification of anymal and female bodies developed in her key text *The sexual politics of meat* (1990). Adams argues that within the patriarchal, speciesist capitalism (or “carnophallogocentrism” in Derrida’s terms), anymals bred for meat are sexualised, whereas women are animalised (see Figures 9 and 10). She analyses the discourses and portrayals of pornography and advertisement and states that, in both cases (anymals and women), there is a cycle of

objectification (which allows the oppressor to view the Other as an object instead of a subject); fragmentation (which leads to the consumption of the bodies, either metaphorically or literally); and finally annihilation of the referent as a subject of importance in itself.

Braidotti (2006) observes a separation within life in “zoe” (the half animal of the dualism, the natural or the nonhuman) and “bios” (the half political or discursive of the pair, the human). She explains that “zoe is the poor half of a couple that foregrounds bios as the intelligent half; the relationship between them constitutes one of those qualitative distinctions on which Western culture built its discursive empire” (2006:37). Agamben also connects “zoe” with a “liminal bodily existence of a life that does not qualify as human” and what he calls “bare life”, described as “that in you which sovereign power can kill. It is the body as disposable matter in the hands of the despotic force of power” (in Braidotti, 2006:39).
In a system that is not conformed with categorising relations in terms of capital, – be it economic, cultural or social (Bourdieu, 1986) – and with extracting the surplus value through our insertion in the capitalist productive system; it seems now that a new form of exploitation has been added to the traditional ones, and, filtered through the capital flow logics, Braidotti names it “organic capital” (2006:3). Regarding humans, genetic manipulation, eugenics and the surrogacy market follow the tracks of Victor Frankenstein in his becoming-God and creating life without the feminine (the privileged utopia of the ultimate masculine dream of the abandonment of the womb and the creation of selected life). As essentialist as this might come across, what I imply is that the hyper-rational dream of machinic (re)production is a masculinised utopia of power, alienation and individualism, where humans become single gears that are produced in a sort of assembly line and then connected to each other to keep the eternal productive process. This is the perfect marriage of patriarchy and capitalism. The feminine, unrelated here to women or to specific genitalia, but to the set of characteristics despised in patriarchal societies like care, interconnectedness, or sensitivity towards the others, is left aside. Genetic selection and the Human Genome Project are but an ultimate step in the hierarchical and discriminatory organisation of those beings who are worthy, or not, of simply existing. Surrogacy erases the woman behind the reproductive labour and turns her into an incubator that, as much as liberal discourses aim at selling as altruistic, mainly functions as a commercial exchange. As Braidotti puts it, our “geno-centric” (a term borrowed from Anne Fausto-Sterling) capitalism is making people worry not only about their economic or social capital, but now also about their “genetic capital” (2006:3). Linking patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism, Braidotti states that “the theft of the regenerative powers of women may well be the last act in this ultimate colonisation of living organisms by predatory Western science” (2006:124). Vincenzo Pavone (2012) denominates this process as the bioeconomy, where biological material – what Kaushik Sunder Rajan (2006) calls biocapital –, including the exchange of genetic material and organs between species, have become a large part of the economy through the development of biotechnologies (see Figures 11 and 12, shared by Twitter user @adamjohnsonNYC). Melinda Cooper argues that there is a manipulation of life itself in the sense that bodies are made to transcend their limits, so that these limits do not become an obstacle for the capital’s continued expansion (in Vint, 2010).
Pigoons and rakunks (the latter are used in Jimmy’s world as companion anymals) might be fantasies, but actual anymals have already discovered what this is about: they are bred and traded as living material for food, entertainment, scientific experiments, commodities (the illegal traffic of exotic anymals is the third largest trafficking system in the world, after arms and drugs and ahead of women), or for cloning experiments (Braidotti, 2006:98). Dolly the Sheep has already been mentioned, but this also includes the Oncomouse that Haraway refers to in her “Cyborg manifesto”, a patented genetically-bred mouse that scientists engineered so that he/she would develop cancer, in order to study this illness in living bodies.

Dolly, the Oncomouse or the pigoons are Braidotti’s “zoe” and Agamben’s “bare life” in the sense that they are owned and forced to endure tasks and deaths over which they have no choice; their bodies are commodified and used as means instead of ends; and their deaths are unimportant –not even considered “killings” but “reduction of livestock”, for instance (Dunayer, 2001)–. They are cyborgs in a literal sense because they are a mixture of organism and technology. But they are also cyborgs in a metaphorical sense, because their mixed and liminal existence opens the door to rethinking our subjectivities, becoming-minoritarian and intermingling with “zoe”, and proposing alliances between the human and the nonhuman because, ultimately, capitalism turns us all into disposable matter in the hands of power.
CONCLUSIONS

George Steiner states in After Babel that

it is the constructive powers of language to conceptualize the world which have been crucial to man’s survival in the face of [...] death. It is the miraculous—I do not retract the term—capacity of grammars to generate counter-factuals, ‘if’-propositions and, above all, future tenses, which have empowered our species to hope, to reach far beyond the extinction of the individual. We endure, we endure creatively due to our imperative ability to say ‘No’ to reality, to build fictions of alterity, of dreamt or willed or awaited ‘otherness’ for our consciousness to inhabit (qtd. in Mo ylan & Baccolini, 2003:235).

SF is the genre that provides us with the best tools to express this “no” to reality. These tools include the development of new languages to represent ourselves and to explore the possibility of a conversation with the Other, be it human or nonhuman. The postmodern subject is open and flexible, and while the capitalist machine makes use of these features to soak its neoliberal economic logic into our bodies, we can resist this by reclaiming this porosity of the self (against closed categories that rest on Humanist ideals) and vindicating this openness in order to intertwine ourselves with those who surround us. This mixing between humans, nonhumans, nature and even objects produces flows of affect that are always interactive and whose aim is not to reach any close conclusion or any hierarchical order of things. Rather, what is proposed is to be always on the move, providing information and receiving it from whomever we have in front of us, regardless of the previous categorisation that we might have learned. As Derrida (1993), Haraway (2008) or Levinas (1969) point out, the encounter with the other needs to be unexpected, always a surprise. If the encounter with alterity is based on previous definitions, this means that the other is experienced before the experience, and “an encounter with the preconceived is no encounter, but a reification of self through confirmation of opposition or commonality” (MacCormack, 2014:3).

While I acknowledge the political importance of using categories that define positions within systems of power inequalities (like “woman” or “White”), I believe that this is compatible with a criticism of those same categories so that we do not forget that they are not the final objective of our liberation struggles, but rather a tool to define the circumstances that still impede this liberation (like gender roles or race privileges). I consider that the polarised and often harsh discussions between radical and postmodern trends in ethical and political thinking do not stem from any ontological, unavoidable
opposition, but rather from the different points of departure of their theoretical lines. Broadly speaking (and this is something that I would like to continue reflecting on and developing in the future), I think that radical politics focus mainly on the traditional categories of analysis (like gender, race, or class), that is, the material conditions of the actual part of life. But as Deleuze shows, life is also made up by the virtual, the imagination about the possibilities of what is not physical (yet). Oppositely, postmodern theorisations of the subject propose a politics of trans-, post- and a- subjectivities, whose focus is on the reinvention of categories and whose weakest point lies perhaps on the lack of consideration of the material conditions that radical thought denounces. I believe that any of these positions in its most absolute form is not comprehensive and that they would end up in a dead-end at some point, where they will need to make use of other ways of thought.

We need to join the logic and the poetic; the material and the imagined; the analysis of the closed categories forced upon us and the creative re-imagination of these categories. We should pay attention to the breakages in subjectivities produced by late capitalism and its intention of turning our selves into machinic components of the productive system; and re-think the self as porous and movable, instead of clinging to precisely the same closed categories that we were forced to enter since the moment we were born in a specific social system. That is what the metaphors of the cyborg (Haraway), the monster (Shildrick), or the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari) advocate for. The limits become blurred, the boundaries are not something to overcome anymore, but rather the departure point to construct ourselves. Once these boundaries are embraced as part of us, instead of reinforced to distant ourselves from the Other, we become open and moving, and hierarchies are more and more difficult to maintain. The Humanist figure of (hu)man turns into posthuman or ahuman, giving up its historical privilege and merging with “zoe”. The human mixing with the nonhuman produces a whole new subject that is not human anymore, as this term recalls previous understandings related to domination and hierarchy. This new subject is relational and places its ontological priority on vulnerability and interconnection with the others, based on the realisation that we are finite and subject to suffering and death, as well as the acknowledgment that we all affect each other in innumerable ways and that our encounters are never indifferent or irrelevant.

While the Humanist subject was represented by unitary modes of thinking and writing, this new posthumanist subjectivity can make use of creativity and imagination to find new and subversive ways to represent herself and her relation with others. The Other
with capital letter then turns into “others”, plural, open and non-hierarchical. Deleuze proposes the rhizome as a symbol of this thinking that rejects order and which allows the development of a whole new understanding of life. Haraway warns us against the idea that we should achieve a common language for everyone, stating once again a monolith that allegedly represents every single being alive. Instead, the subject and her language remain flexible and its boundaries become a blurred line to be crossed whenever the encounter requires so. My proposal in this work has been to show how SF can be a useful tool to convey this openness, flexibility and malleability of language; as well as depicting narratives that warn us about the uses and misuses of utopian dreams of liberation; and also how its endless possibilities for creativity (in language, structure, or narrative) point to roads that can be used to explore how to relate to the others that have been traditionally placed in the position of the Other without any possibility for contact and equal exchange.

Russ’s *TFM* has served as an example of the use of structure and language in order to subvert the established order in society and literature (recalling the modernist literary techniques that were criticised by the patriarchal unitary canon). Also in relation to the subversion of language, *TFM* is used to illustrate different strands of thought from French feminist poststructuralists in relation to the construction of a female voice to resist the allegedly universal, masculine language. Furthermore, *TFM* presents an interesting use of the theme of time travel that has been connected with Deleuze’s idea of the plateaux as different strands of probability within life, placing the virtual and the actual at the same level of reality. Russ’s work has proven to be a fruitful text for plenty of feminist, posthumanist matters.

I have used Le Guin’s *TD* partly due to its also subversive treatment of language, but mainly because of its depiction of utopia, or rather, utopianism in politics. I wanted to explore the ways in which utopia is understood as a symbol of perfection, unity, totality and plenitude for everyone, as well as the criticisms made to this concept (by many writers of utopias/dystopias themselves, like LeGuin or Atwood), arguing that the ideas of unity or perfection can easily turn into totalitarian regimes where only some elites are well represented under this allegedly-utopian system. The criticisms of utopia make us reflect upon our privileges and how to build languages and alternative political discourses that do not rest in hierarchical categorisations and therefore where everyone is included. The terms utopia by Atwood or utopiyan-utopiyang by LeGuin show the deviations from the original concept of the perfect island, arguing that, just like the cyborg figure, perhaps our aim should not be to reach a utopian perfection because this might not even be
possible. Rather, we should seek to develop discourses where we acknowledge our contradictions and where people can actually live, instead of just dreaming about a place that can never become real.

Last but not least, Atwood’s *O&C* shows the possibilities for interconnections between bodies that have been turned into disposable matter under capitalism. The logic of the market and the focus on capital flow transform humans and nonhumans into production facilities or even products themselves. At the same time, capitalism develops a discourse where some lives are more important than others (and therefore there is a distinction between murder, killing and elimination), and the categorisations human, anymal or object become blurred. Some humans are equated to anymals in the treatment of their bodies, and also within the discourse of whom should be allowed to live and whom becomes just a number in the consumption chain of globalisation. Anymals and humans turn into objects in many discourses to justify the use and abuse of their bodies. Approaches from relational ethics, or Braidotti’s idea of “zoe”, propose that we use this blurring of identities in order to establish alliances between these kinds of bodies and also to focus on vulnerability and compassion as the basis of our ethical encounters. The ethics of care have shown that abstract, rational accounts of ethics are not enough nor comprehensive to understand the complexity of our interrelations, and vindicate the focus on feelings and emotions when dealing with others.

I believe that, as Braidotti (2013) argues, if the strategies of power are complex and productive, so must be our resistance to them. Late capitalism and neoliberal powers have tried to break and divide our subjectivities and alliances so that we become less resistant to the economic logic that allows an endless capital flow. Their discourses are flexible and fully adaptable to the circumstances that best allow this flow, and we are often not prepared enough to identify these discourses and thus fight them efficiently. I think that we need SF to show us the roads where these lines of thought could ultimately take us, and we also need it to build alternative discourses of intersectionality and liberation. I stand for affirmative politics that acknowledge material realities and intertwine these analyses with a powerful re-imagination of our position in the world. And, as Haraway states, “maybe sf worlding […] is the language I need” (2008:93).
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**ANNEX: Abbreviations**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>O&amp;C</td>
<td>Oryx and Crake.</td>
<td>Margaret Atwood</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Virago.</td>
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