REVIEWS

David A. Davis. *World War I and Southern Modernism*. UP of Mississippi, 2018, 234 pages.

In his last book, *World War I and Southern Modernism,* David A. Davis demonstrates how the European theatre of war in 1914-1918 informed the intellectual and cultural landscape of the South, initiating processes which ultimately culminated in the region's embrace of modernism, and its entrance into a period of social transformation and departure from literary conventions. Davis's monograph, published by the University Press of Mississippi in 2018 and winner of the Eudora Welty prize, makes a compelling argument for how the complex amalgam of novel ideas and attitudes brought forth by the war had a profound impact on the cultural, social and artistic idiom of the South. To an already existing plethora of paradoxes associated with southern culture, Davis adds another, arguing that effectively, in the South, "modernism preceded modernity" (6). In this monograph, he succeeds in showing how in the South, a society that was largely cut off due to World War I looked back at the antebellum period and the Civil War through the lenses of a romanticized narrative, found itself in a situation of cultural and historical disruption, one that yanked the region from its provincialism and separationist tendencies, and forced it to embrace progress.

This hurried evolution of the region was fuelled by a number of socio-economic factors: by the northern and southern soldiers training side by side in military camps on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line, by the throngs of workers leaving the South and going north, lured by the prospect of jobs in factories struggling with labour shortages, or by new technologies in agriculture which began to substitute obsolete practices, gradually pushing the region from agrarianism to agricultural-industrial ways. Davis stresses that all these processes took place in the South too quickly for the region to find adequate ways of accommodating modernity. In his words, because of World War I, "southerners experienced the effects of modernity often before the region actually modernised: they experienced cities before they urbanized, they worked in factories before they industrialized, they used new technologies before the South had electrical or communication infrastructure, and they made contacts with populations that held more progressive ides before they liberated" (11).

Davis views the war as a catalyst which wrenched the region from the grip of nostalgia, thrusting it into modernity before its time. A number of regional dichotomies, like industry and agriculture, urbanism and ruralism, cosmopolitanism and provincialism, progressivism and conservatism, localism and globalism arose in the wake of the war, and began to preoccupy and contextualize the ambitions and fears of the region. Understandably, to conservative mind-sets, these processes were nothing other than corruptive and damaging – they were viewed as a direct threat to a southern identity which sustained white supremacy and Jim Crow. The advocates of the lost cause (Davis, as he explains, purposefully uses low capital letters for fear it might reify the term and thus reinforce the idea behind it) launched a series of attacks

at the inevitable changes. In consequence, while Europe was consumed by the theatre of World War I, the South was subject to the conflicted disruption of identity. It is the crux of Davis's argument in *World War I and Southern Modernism* that a number of southern writers were responding to the social and economic disruption by seeking new forms of artistic engagement. In his monograph, Davis identifies five central areas of modernist disruption and demonstrates how they were confronted by a number of southern authors: interstate contact, southern soldiers fighting oversees, African-American soldiers returning to the South, the fight for women's rights and rapid changes in southern agriculture. Each disruption is discussed in a separate chapter and such an organization allows Davis to show how complex and multifaceted the impact of the war was upon the region.

In the first chapter, "The Forward Glance," Davis discusses how the intensified interstate travel which accompanied World War I influenced the southern literature. With southern isolationism crumbling, the intellectual and social barriers between North and South weakened. As argued by Davis, the contact "between northerners and southerners exploded the northerners' regional stereotypes of the South and dissolved much of southerners' lost cause enmity towards Yankees" (25). Here, Davis's discussions of Faulkner's first novel, *Soldier's Pay*, as well as of selected works by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Dos Passos, shows how the interregional exchange impacted the perception of the South.

In the second chapter, Davis demonstrates how many white male southerners who served in Europe during the war came to feel deeply conflicted about their regional identity. Between America's declaration of war in 1917, and the demobilisation of the army of occupation in Germany in 1919, nearly a million southerners served in the military, accounting for almost a quarter of American military personnel—the highest demographic of all regions of the US. Raised by the sons and grandsons of Confederate veterans, surrounded by the lost cause mythology, these soldiers had difficulty identifying themselves as both American and southern. Davis shows how different southern writers dramatized this conundrum of allegiance in their works. William Alexander Percy's coping strategy was to defend and endorse traditional southern ways in his writings. Paul Green went in a different direction. His stay in France allowed him to develop a much more liberal and progressive outlook, which he expressed, among others, in his pacifist play *Johnny Johnson*. The third text discussed by Davis, Donald Davidson's poem *The Tall Man,* written three years before the publication of *I'll Take My Stand,* is more aligned with Percy's thinking and constitutes another excellent illustration of how conservative agrarianism proclaimed modernity to be the region's nemesis.

For the advocates of racial integration and critics of Jim Crow, the war seemed like an opportunity to make their case for civil rights. Having experienced relative racial equality overseas, African-American soldiers drafted into the American army felt entitled to make a claim for citizenship upon their return. In the third chapter, Davis draws a painful image of disillusionment and violence, opening this section of the book with the example of Wilbur Little, an African American soldier, who having returned to Georgia from his service in World War I, was lynched when he wore his uniform in public. Again, Davis gives three examples of African American writers who portray black southern soldiers fighting for freedom and equality after their

homecoming: Victory Daly, Walter White and Claude McKay.

The fourth chapter of the monograph is dedicated to the impact of World War I on women's rights in the South. The region's notorious Victorian-like decorum of femininity began to change during the war and immediately after its end. Davis stresses the paradox of culture which venerated the belle as a paragon of respectability, and simultaneously subjugated her completely through patriarchy, depriving her of legal as well as social subjectivity—the "praise of virtues such as devotion, humility, charity, commitment, sacrifice, loyalty, and chastity inscribed an image of the southern woman as the angel in the house, an image that became a cultural icon and a social problem" (119). The influx of early feminist ideas exposed and engaged with these paradoxes—especially, when the war and the social challenges it entailed caused profound changes in gender demographics. Understandably, in the conservative social environment, truly herculean efforts to stop the advance of gender rights were made. Here also Davis gives three examples of novels written by female authors: Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *He Sent Forth a Raven*, Ellen Glasgow' *Vein of Iron* and Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* which succeeded in exposing the makeshift social schemes devised to curate the patriarchy and to prevent it from dissolution.

The fifth area of modernist disruption is discussed in the chapter "Mules and Machines" and concerns the region's economy. Due to the notorious labour shortages resulting from an exodus of people, the agricultural landscape of the South was fundamentally changed in the wake of the war. The traditional way of life in the region, one associated with rural agriculture, became visibly obsolete, and the dichotomy of the eponymous "mules" and "machines" from the title of the chapter came to epitomize the ambivalent suspension of the region between the past and the present. Here, Davis discusses the writings of Ellen Glasgow, W. J. Cash and William Faulkner, to show how the abrupt and violent changes in the agricultural landscape of the region in the wake of the war translated into the issues of identity.

Davis's *World War I and Southern Modernism* is a vital study for Southern Studies, providing insights into how the transatlantic war context informed southern culture at the most basic level, and how the inevitable socio-economic changes shaped both the themes and techniques of the southern literary idiom. The five areas of disruption identified by Davis serve well to illustrate the extent to which discussions of the "nation's region" (to borrow the title of Leigh Anne Duck's insightful study on American modernism and the South) cannot be divorced from the transatlantic context in the 1920s. The texts selected by Davis to illustrate this point mostly represent novels – although he does include singular discussions of other genres, ranging from poetry (Davidson), journalistic-sociological comment (Cash) to drama (Green). However, this strong focus on novels does not change an overall highly positive assessment of the monograph as a well-researched and comprehensive study of the subject. In all of his erudite discussions, Davis remains adept at demonstrating to his readers how the encroachment of modernity forced southerners to rethink the founding principles of race, gender and economy which the region held as the basis for its quotidian world.

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Harri Veivo, Petra James, and Dorota Walczak-Delanois, editors. *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe*. Brill, 2019, 320 pages.

Bringing together twelve essays by a host of European scholars, *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe*, edited by Harri Veivo, Petra James and Dorota Walczak-Delanois, offers the newest contribution to the transnational turn in understanding the Beats and marks another attempt of international Beat academics to, perhaps even literally, open up new routes for Beat studies. The trailblazing efforts to map Beat sensibility as a global network of shared aesthetic choices and correspondences can be traced back to *The Transnational Beat Generation* (2012) edited by Nancy M. Grace and *The Routledge Handbook of International Beat Literature* (2018) edited by A. Robert Lee. Veivo, James, and Walczak-Delanois' collection joins both of the aforementioned to seal the fact that the days of confining Beat to, be it, Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs—"the usual suspects," to use Lee's parlance (1)—or second-tier American Beat writers such as Holmes, Huncke, or Solomon, are gone for good. To refer once more to Lee's book and Kerouac's words serving an epigraph to its introductory chapter, while the major Beat figures will undoubtedly remain the focus of scholarly interest, "[t]here appears to be a Beat Generation all over the world" (1) which finally needs to be given long overdue recognition.

Whereas Lee's volume first and foremost wished to identify a bulk of writers from around the globe whose oeuvres resonate with Beat sensibilities and who could be welcomed to the Beat canon, *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* narrows down the scope of its focus to the Old Continent while simultaneously expanding the objectives to mapping translation, reception (also by retracing American writers' in-person European forays) and appropriation of Beat literature and the cultural impact surrounding it from the 1950s to the most recent present. The chapters discussing twelve countries, by order—Iceland, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Greece, Portugal, Poland, Spain, Hungary, Austria, Norway and Belgium, are not grouped in sections; instead, the editors prefer to see them as "a rhizomatic constellation" (6) at work, a network reflecting the fluidity of the movement thrown against the backdrop of "a Europe… divided by many frontiers" (1). Nevertheless, what recurs as a constant point of reference and the chief demarcation line shaping historical contexts is the Iron Curtain (6), which, as pointed by the editors, reverberates in the ways of disseminating Beat in a modern-day Europe (8).

As most of the chapters evince, Beat is now perceived as a force responsible for inducing the modernization of national literary scenes, especially those of the Nordic countries. These, as observed by Anna Westerståhl Stenport and reiterated by Harri Veivo in his overview of Beat in Finland, were for years locked between "ideologies of margin and centre, import and export, … nation and cosmopolitanism" (45). Similarly, Beat was interchangeable with "modernist" and "avant-garde" in Greece, where Ginsberg's and Lamantia's poems, among those by other Beats, went side by side with the works of surrealists in literary magazines such as *To allo stin techni* and *Pali* (109). In their corresponding chapters on Portugal and Poland, Nuno Miguel Neves and Dorota Walczak-Delaois further point to the fact that Beat often constituted merely a part of a wholesale literary influx from the United States. With

regard to the former country, the first anthology of Beat writing included poems by Ginsberg, Corso and Ferlinghetti, but also Barbara Guest, Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery (140); as for the latter, the space shared by the Beats and other hallmarks of twentieth-century American literature in a highly influential journal *Literatura na świecie* "formed the basis for the reception of… Western literature in general" (162).

In the most cases Beat was warmly welcomed by the literary milieus of receiving cultures just as when it could offer, respectively in Communist Czechoslovakia and Poland, "a revolt against the alienating features of everyday life" (64) and some invigorating intensity and mobility coming with hitchhiking in "a situation of uncertainty and insecurity" (161) as noted by Petra James and Dorota Walczak-Delanois. Obviously, wherever censorship was an issue, Beat literature that leaked through it was praised and trusted for its countercultural potential to shake the socio-political landscapes of authoritarian regimes, the pre-1974 Greece being an example alongside the countries of the Eastern bloc. In Chapter 5 Maria Nikolopoulou demonstrates that Ginsberg's and Burroughs' political activity following their recognition as international countercultural icons in the 1960s lent to a political reading of their texts by wider Greek audiences, which in turn foreshadowed social and political changes arriving with the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974 (101, 116). However, the reception of the Beats in Europe also happened to be less favorable. József Havasréti claims that in Hungary Beat would eventually lose its impetus and magnetism after the fall of communism (204). Pondering the ultraconservative post-war realities of Austria, Thomas Antonic brings up the popular image of the figure of "a beatnik" as a serious threat to law and order. Correspondingly, German and Austrian literary critics of that time, here epitomized by Magnus Enzensberger and Gerhard Fritsch, emerge as a bastion of the bourgeois tastes and ignorance as when bereaving Kerouac of any talent and rebuking his works as a "terrible mixture of hectic, overheated adolescence and hard-boiled nihilism" (237). As discussed by Franca Bellarsi and Gregory Watson in the closing essay, it was also Belgium that sat in complex relation with Beat aesthetics. Illuminating the complexities of Beats' reception in the Lowlands, the scholars argue that the arrival of Beat in both Flanders and Wallonia may be likened to "unexploded bombshells" (275), untimely and failed injections of subversion in a place where it appeared to be no longer anticipated. After all, could the Flemish/Dutch-speaking part of the land, a "home to some of avant-garde crucibles" (275), Bellarsi and Watson ask, be electrified by its later-day derivative or could Beat match the radicalism of Flemish *Kulturkampf*? Having been keenly attuned to Paris for years, Belgian Francophones would not be either taken by storm by the Beat diction, the scholars continue to eventually conclude by characterizing Beats' overall impact on the literatures of the Lowlands as the indeterminable (non-)subversion.

A phenomenon which spreads throughout the entire collection and rhymes well with a strand of publications devoted to the Beats in the last couple of years (the instances being Simon Warner's *Text, Drugs, and Rock'n'Roll* (2013) and Casey Rae's *William S. Burroughs and the Cult of Rock'n'Roll* (2019)) comes with the significance of rock and punk as long-lasting forces amplifying Beat subversiveness in Europe and being, one might argue, as complementary to Beat sensibilities as jazz music. It is attested by the underground scene of the Finnish Turku, it is clear from how

closely associated to the Beats a Spanish countercultural rock music magazine *Star* was, and it is evident from the works of an Estonian writer Mati Unt and the Estonian punk. Looking further, Ginsberg's growing interest in performing poetry with rock musicians finds its counterpart in Leonidas Christakis, a Greek writer who became rock musician, as well as László Földes, an underground singer, with whom the American poet gave concerts and had a studio session in Hungary (217). Also, no different than the American Beat, the European Beat/Beat in Europe would not have flourished and expanded without local networks and alternative channels of communnication. The entire collection, thus, may well be read as a tribute to institutions (the Vienna Poetry School, echoing Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics), clubs and studios (Club 7, Zum blauen Apfel and Skippergata in Oslo; the early-1960s happenings in Greek cafés) and alternative periodicals (the before mentioned Greek *To allo stin techni* and *Pali*, the Portuguese *Almanaque*), all of which played a substantial part in familiarizing audiences with Beat voice.

The book succeeds in accomplishing its objective to keep up the trend in transnational Beat studies and is recommended to anyone interested in retracing the evolution of Beat reception and dissemination across the European continent. The twelve chapters reveal the book's overall resourcefulness in learning more about the immense body of texts, such as first translations, reprints, literary tributes and a bulk of scholarly work, which earned Beat some proper recognition in the discussed countries. Occasionally, the book appears to expand Beat studies when and where no one would expect just as by mentioning Ginsberg's appearance in a Hungarian 1981 feature film *Kopaszkutya* ("bald-head dog") (dir. G. Szomjas), a detail most likely unrecorded in any publication devoted to Beat presence on screen thus far. Perhaps the biggest value of *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* lies in demonstrating to the reader that Beat aesthetics and Beat legacy may be and should be looked from a great deal of angles, translation studies and global geopolitics being but a few, so that Beat studies continue to be on the go.

Work Cited

A. Robert Lee, editor. *The Routledge Handbook of International Beat Literature*. Routledge, 2018.

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Denijal Jegić. *Trans/Intifada: The Politics and Poetics of Intersectional Resistance*. Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019, 329 pages.

Denijal Jegić's *Trans/Intifada: The Politics and Poetics of Intersectional Resistance* offers a useful overview of the Israel-Palestine conflict between 1947 and the present along with an evaluation of the literary movements that the violence inspired. While the discussion is heavily weighted toward exegesis of the conflict's roots and lasting cultural effects, and only about a third of the book is devoted to literary analysis, the author makes a convincing argument overall about the activist energy that Palestinian and African-American writers share in the twenty-first century.

Jegić begins his study by defining Palestinians, African Americans, and other culturally marginalized groups as "transnationally continuously (re)produced as subalterns" (8). While each group's ethnic background and history are unique, their experiences with social prejudice and violence have motivated them to declare public support for one another over the past several decades. Recent developments in social media have further accelerated movements toward cross-cultural solidarity and collective resistance. Jegić points out that Palestinian culture is transnational by nature; writers' own experiences with dispossession and diasporic existence encourage them to speak out in favor of domestic rights and the value of home. Such themes add an activist tone to the work of many Palestinian writers.

In making his argument, Jegić focuses on the colonialist relationship between Zionist Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, noting that new developments in Palestinian cultural studies draw parallels between "engagements with settler-colonialism" in Palestine and in the United States (22). Such cultural-studies analyses offer critiques of extremist Zionist politics, which tends to position Palestine as a barbaric, undeveloped part of the world. Jegić points out that Zionist immigration policy formed during the creation of Israel did not welcome immigrants unilaterally but discriminated against anyone not of Eastern European descent. This discrimination has created a fragmented, transnational Palestine. Zionist aggression toward Palestinians has taken many different forms, including domestic terrorist tactics, resettlement, destruction of entire communities, reforestation of Palestinian land with non-native species, use of the Hasbara public-relations ministry, and promotion of a "collective criminalization and identification of the Palestinian people as an enemy" (94). United States interventions in the Middle East and its own history of colonial practices have also contributed to Zionist control over Palestine. Public prejudice against persons of Arabic descent increased significantly after the 9-11 attacks, resulting in a widespread social perception of Palestinians as "others," while Zionists have perpetrated myths about their preordained homeland that resemble American settlement myths. Palestinians thus function as both "colonized subjects" and "test objects" (125) in the eyes of Zionists and sympathetic Americans alike.

Jegić argues that the United States' consistent promotion of Zionism as official state policy has helped to foster solidarity between Palestinian activists and American black nationalists. Both groups base their activism in anti-colonial thought and transnational community, in part because of Israel's support of South African apartheid. Israel and the United States also share a common public-policy language that focuses on anti-terrorism efforts and the military-industrial complex. As a result, US police targeting of African Americans and Israel's ongoing war against Palestinians living in Gaza have spurred the two groups on to collective action and protest. These actions have taken the form of "a new wave of written, spoken, and performed statements" that are "characterized by an intersectional analysis and have resulted in demands for transnational resistance" (170). Palestinians and African Americans recognize civil-rights violations that occur on both continents and articulate shared goals, often through the lens of W.E.B. DuBois's notion of double consciousness.

Jegić's assessment of the literary movements that react to social injustice in Palestine and the United States centers on the work of Palestinian-American

writer Suheir Hammad, African-American writer June Jordan, and Israeli-Palestinian hip-hop artists DAM (Da Arabian MCs). These performers, according to Jegić, "articulate a confluence of autobiographic narration and a de-colonial activism" (187). They use a range of different languages and dialects to highlight the political histories that their work represents, and they rely upon several diverse artistic genres to convey their messages. These strategies reflect the ways in which today's writers of color emphasize their unique ethnicities in the service of transnational identification. Palestinian writers, for instance, focus on "experiences with expulsion, ethnic cleansing, settler-colonialism, and the many forms of structural violence" (199). Poetry in particular offers these artists an ideal forum for transnational self-expression. They explore several central themes, including the concept and implications of home, which in their work may connote a physical space, an abstract idea, or a personal value; the high rates of African-American and Palestinian incarceration; the ongoing oppression of women; and the need for social revolution. Hammad, Jordan, and DAM all examine the parallels that exist between the United States' and Israel's governmental policies, producing both critiques of current conditions and calls for social change.

Jegić's study ultimately concludes that the work of Suheir Hammad, June Jordan, and DAM constitutes a "trans/intifada" (an internationally situated "shaking-off") that seeks to map out and change "common experiences of subjugation among Blacks, Palestinians, and *Others* more generally" (273; italics in original). These writers criticize the extremist values of both Zionists and conservative US nationalists and highlight the dangerous results of United States-Zionist collaboration. Their work in a variety of genres, including written poetry, spoken-word performance, essays, and social-media posts, have helped to strengthen Black-Palestinian solidarity and to create counter-histories of the two regions. Together they reimagine the concept of home as a welcoming and creative space, in opposition to mainstream military rhetoric; they become activists by "revealing human rights violations, and formulating equality and solidarity" (278).

Denijal Jegić labels these actions a kind of "subaltern narration" that makes resistance and real change possible (285). *Trans/Intifada: The Politics and Poetics of Intersectional Resistance* draws together a comprehensive assessment of Israel-Palestine struggles, the violent fracturing of the Palestinian community, and the roots of Zionist conservatism in order to make the argument that modern-day Black and Palestinian poetry is inspired by a sense of shared experience and a drive toward social change. As an intervention in the field of American studies, the book offers a compelling evaluation of the political history and social factors that undergird the literature. Its literary analysis is shorter and less substantial than the study's other discussions but helps to support the argument in general. Recommended for any readers wishing to gain not only a detailed understanding of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Middle Eastern political history but also insight into the creative literatures that reflect on that history.

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Stefan Schubert. *Narrative Instability: Destabilizing Identities, Realities, and Textualities in Contemporary American Popular Culture.* Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019, 301 pages.

Judging from the popularity of various recent movies, series or video games, being duped or tricked is a source of particular enjoyment for modern audiences. Twists, which put into question the "reality" presented to viewers or gamers, force them to interact with texts (understood as cultural documents), to watch or play them again, and try to either reconstruct the stories, or check if the turning of the tables could be expected. In a way, the audience not so much watches or plays during the first watching or gameplay, but simply learns in order to apply the knowledge gained during the initial contact with the text to fully understand and appreciate the same text. This occurs despite the fact that the only new thing the second time around is the change of perception, so desirable that it becomes the ultimate (and sometimes only) cause of engaging with a text. The commercial success of such works as *Fight Club*, *Bioshock* or *Westworld*—which, despite their differences, are constructed the same way and use the same techniques, with the ultimate goal being to trick—positions them as notable and important, hence worthy of an in-depth analysis. The main appeal of these texts is not so much about the story itself, but more so about how it is presented, serving as proof of a certain sophistication characterizing present-day viewers and gamers. The narrative tools are primarily concerned with experience, one's subjective perception of events, with *what* one is experiencing considered to be secondary. This allows modern audiences to indulge in such narratives, allowing them to understand the complexity of their own situation.

This transmedial trend is identified and characterized by the titular phrase of Stefan Schubert's book, *Narrative Instability*. Within this trend the author recognizes three types of instabilities, regarding: identities, realities and textualities. The texts concerning unstable identities usually revolve around the mental state of their subjects, in consequence questioning the notion of "self" as something more than a social construct. An important characteristic of these texts is their relationship with the idea of the norm, being understood as that of white, male and middle-class characters. The norm, conveniently, is in agreement with the idea of a stereotypical American citizen, who finds himself threatened by the narratives of minorities that have come forward only recently. Whether confronting a different race, gender or class, the normative subject has to constantly affirm himself of his importance in these supposedly unstable times. Presenting the second type of instability, an unstable reality, is quite a task, as when it comes to books it can be conveyed through words, with the constructive work left to the imagination of the reader, while the movie/series or game must be more persuasive, due to the common notion that seeing is believing. To witness something means that one has proof of its physical existence. To achieve that, Schubert argues, one must focus on the relationship between time and space, as these two are crucial in duping the viewer. In games there is another factor at play, which involves perspective—FPP, first–person perspective, allows the player to believe that it is himself who finds himself in a particular world performing particular actions. The third type of instabilities, regarding textualities, are based on

understanding narration as experience. In these texts the narration influences our perception of the world, knowingly pointing our attention to the importance of stories. This applies to texts well aware of their narrative potential, using instability as a device to engage the viewer or gamer by redirecting him to other sources, stressing their own status as texts.

Schubert's thorough analysis of selected cultural works highlights an important development in the postmodern world, involving the adaption of narrative devices used by esteemed experimental authors in earlier decades to other, visual media. By focusing solely on American texts, he highlights the influence American culture has on global consciousness, as well as global understanding of the present-day moment. This is in accordance with the idea of norm, which permeates the book, further embedding the analysis in the discourse about the state of the national consciousness. Since all the stories have seemingly been told, it is the way they are told that now comes to the forefront. The fact that modern audiences derive such pleasure from analyzing and appreciating the tools used to tell stories is representative of a new way of thinking about the world. Schubert's suggestion is that the focus should be precisely on instability, as it is the willingness to be tricked, the hunger for twists, that disrupts the appeal of linearity.

Schubert divides his book into four sections (plus a conclusion), the first of which serves as the theoretical basis for his discussion of the idea of narrative instability. In this chapter he presents various approaches towards and explanations of the declining popularity of regular narratives, in favor of devices and tricks which were first introduced in the sixties and seventies by postmodern writers. The theoretical part is followed by three analytical chapters, each devoted to the aforementioned types of instability, in regards to: identities, realities and textualities. The second chapter is a discussion of three texts: *Fight Club, Bioshock* and *Black Swan*. The protagonists of the three are in the wrong when it comes to their understanding of who they are, which, in consequence, influences the viewer's/gamer's perception of the world presented in these works. It is only after a big reveal that the audience truly learns that it fell victim to an (unintentionally) unreliable narrator. The fourth chapter is about unstable realities, so texts which purposely trick the audience that things are a certain way, only to expose that they are indeed quite different. The works analyzed in this chapter are: *Interstellar*, *Inception* and *BioShock Infinite*. *Inception* is more concerned with disrupting the notion of space, while *BioShock Infinite* achieves its goal by misguiding the audience's understanding of time. *Interstellar* combines both of these characteristics, hence is a perfect introduction to that notion. The fifth chapter stresses representation, as it highlights the importance of narration in/to the stories presented. Two video games, *The Stanley Parable* and *Alan Wake,* either use devices from literary texts or simply allude to them, underlying their own status as texts. The final work analyzed in this work, *Westworld*, serves as an example of the rising importance of instabilities in television series, which are the main source of entertainment for modern audiences.

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Aldona Kobus and Łukasz Muniowski, editors. *Sex, Death, and Resurrection in Altered Carbon: Essays on the Netflix Series.* McFarland, 2020, 198 pages.

This short but skillfully edited collection of essays offers a close study of the recent Netflix science fiction production *Altered Carbon* (2018-), based on the 2002 cyberpunk novel by American writer Richard Morgan. It takes place in a dystopian future San Francisco (known as Bay City), a visually arresting neo-noir metropolis arguably more than reminiscent of the retro-futuristic vision of Los Angeles presented in Ridley Scott's seminal *Blade Runner* (1982). The first series, which is the subject of the collection, explores this world through the eyes of Takeshi Kovacs, an ex-mercenary and alleged war criminal brought back to life in order to solve a criminal mystery—the murder of the aristocrat Laurens Bancroft. In this far-future world, a person's life does not necessarily end with death. Thanks to the technoscientific revolution known as the "stack-and-sleeve technology," a person's consciousness—thoughts, memories, experiences—is digitalized in the form of a "cortical stack," located at the back of the skull. This small device can be removed from the "original" body and places in "sleeves," human (or artificial) bodies that, when uploaded with the necessary hardware, act as a host body. When one's body dies the world of *Altered Carbon,* their "stack" can be "re-sleeved" into another body, rendering death only a temporary state—at least for those who are able to afford this procedure, and prolong their life, potentially reaching immortality.

Sex, Death, and Resurrection in Altered Carbon, co-edited by Aldona Kobus and Łukasz Muniowski, consists of thirteen essays divided into three sections. In the introduction to the volume, the reader is presented with the impressive methodological diversity of the book. The authors offer a concise summary of the series' mixed critical reception and most commonly addressed flaws—also examined in detail in the following chapters—and point to the many interesting theoretical perspective it nevertheless invites to pursue. Despite *Altered Carbon*'s problematic position in the contemporary landscape of science fiction, the thirteen collected essays prove that this seemingly derivative reenactment of the 1980s cyberpunk aesthetic carries in fact much intellectual weight, and offers its viewers a fascinating look at our very modern struggles with identity, gendered bodies, sex and sexuality, mortality and morality, and the neoliberal regimes of biopower.

The first section on "Sex" consists of three essays. Alexander N. Howe proposes to examine the series' engagement with embodiment and technology through a focus on the character of Kristin Ortega, a detective who becomes the protagonist's unlikely ally and romantic partner. Locating her within both the neo-noir and the hard-boiled traditions of female detectives, a far less popular figure than the tough-talking, street-smart male detective from hard-boiled fiction, Howe discusses Ortega's subversive role in *Altered Carbon* from the perspective of critical posthumanism and psychoanalysis. Focusing on her relationship with Kovacs, the ex-Envoy resleeved in the body of her former lover, the article fuses a discussion of the gender fantasies of neo-noir cyberpunk with a Lacanian reading of the uncanny love triangle. Despite the claims that the sleeve and stacks technology liberates humans from the constrains of embodiment, the author views it rather as a complication of the relationship between

identity, desire and technologized bodies, fulfilling a comment made by Kovacs, used as the title for the essay, that "technology advances but humans don't."

In his highly engaging, theoretically dazzling essay Kwasu David Tembo continues the exploration of the show's interweaving of sexuality, biotechnology and biopower, particularly in relation to the neo-futuristic world's monstrous ultra-elite's obsession with sex, death, and power. Michel Foucault's concept of the limit-experience, defined as "the point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living, which lies at the limit or the extreme," serves as the organizing theoretical foundation for Tembo's multilayered analysis of "Meth-eroticism." Named after the Methuselah of the Old Testament, the Meths are the top one-percent echelons of the futuristic society, a class of wealthy entrepreneurs-aristocrats possessing unlimited financial resources and political power. Contrary to the rest of society, the "grounders," the (literally) sky-occupying Meth elite not only can afford endless resleeving—exchanging of sleeve bodies, including limitless access to their own clones—but they also can remotely store digitized back-up copies of their consciousness, practically becoming centuries-spanning, immortal beings almost completely detached from the rest of humanity. The author asks an intriguing question: in a world where technology allows the individual to escape subjectivity and function as multiple embodied, self-reproducing self, is it also possible to transgress the ethical and moral restrictions imposed on (post)human sexuality? *Altered Carbon* depicts Meth sexuality as excessive, sadistic, fueled by power fantasies of sexual violence and eroticized death, realized both in virtual reality and on the bodies of others. In the author's eyes, the liberation from "normal" boundaries—namely, from the fear of death as the end of existence—pushes the limit-experience of Meths beyond mortality and morality, into the domain of an erotic power dynamic predicated upon the elite's biopolitical control over the bodies of their victims. The stack and sleeve technology offers no escape from embodied and gendered violence for those people who are used for the fulfillment of sexual fantasies of the elites.

The last article in this section, written by Michał Klata, offers a provocative, but insightful defense of the series' critical reception. At the time of the premiere, the first season of *Altered Carbon* was accused by many critics of relying too much on unnecessary sex scenes, verging toward gratuity particularly in its emphasis on presenting female nudity. Klata's essay proposes a formal analysis of several sex scenes from show, read closely not only in their relation to the overall plot—such as foreshadowing future narrative twists—but also focusing on sequencing, sound editing, the use of close-ups. His sex-positive reading employs Sergei Einstein's theory of montage, coupled with Laura Mulvey's influential concept of the male gaze. According to the author, when analyzed more thoroughly and without bias, the sex scenes in *Altered Carbon* can be seen as serving many different functions in the narrative. Klata's argument, as well as his careful analysis, certainly demonstrates the value of applying theoretical frameworks to film criticism—something that is sadly missing in many mainstream reviews of popular genre productions.

The second section titled "Sleeves" turns attention to the corporeality of bodies and identities. It consist of six essays which, even though their authors pursue diverse theoretical directions, engage in an intertextual discussion with each other. The first article, co-written by Esra Köksal and Burcu Baykan, critically interrogates

the series' vision of a posthuman disembodied futurity attained through revolutionary technological advancements. At first glance, it is a world that seems to privilege the mind (stacks) over the body (sleeves), since what they call "a floating consciousness" can exist without corporeality in the separated dimension of virtual reality, and humans are essentially techno-organic hybrids, malleable mixtures of information and the flesh, human and non human agents. While Köksal and Baykan agree that the characters depicted in the show are a quite literal representation of what Donna Haraway calls "cyborg subjectivities," they are in fact still strongly and affectively attached to their material bodies. As their essay convincingly argues, despite promising a liberation from embodiment, in the world of *Altered Carbon* the body "cannot be regarded as a piece of clothing that can be easily switched, replaced or discarded, as each resleeving has its own consequences, creating a sense of doubt or confusion about one's sense of self." This attachment to the materiality of posthuman identity aligns the series with N. Katherine Hayes' conceptualization of posthumanism: a postulated future in which the technological, digitized and hybridized reconfigurations of our identities will not eradicate our material embodiment—the body will still matter.

Lars Schmeink's article also explores the theme of the mind/body relationship, noting the primacy of the biological as opposed to the virtual, but focuses on the commodification of bodies. His chapter mixes an analysis of the show's aesthetical choices, namely its obsessive reproducing of violent images of bodily harm (including its problematic gender politics), with a reading of the two contradictory approaches to the body. Whereas members of lower classes such as Kovacs and Ortega are shown as caring for theirs and others' sleeves, the aristocratic Meths represent a radical reimagining of what Schmeink calls "the capital, neoliberal notion of human ownership and mastery of the body." This vision of cybernetic posthumanism is one certainly not liberated from embodied differences of race, gender, class—especially the latter, as the economic and political hegemony of the Meths allows them to enact violence on other bodies, and then pay off their transgressions as property damage fees.

Approaching the subject of the commodification of the body from yet another angle, Łukasz Muniowski proposes to read the Meths' consumer practices—their unending quest for obtaining the healthiest, most physically attractive sleeves—in parallel with the recent phenomenon of the wellness movement. Wellness culture dictates that health is a personal choice, and caring for oneself is an individual task governed by the regimes of healthy eating, dieting, training. The perfect body becomes a testament to one's success in life, a statement of control and, as Muniowski aptly states, a reflection of present-day narcissism, permeating Western culture. For Meths, this ideal of wellness can be obtained through their access to clone copies of themselves. It is a luxury commodity not available to "grounders," who, if their original body is destroyed, can continue embodied existence only through resleeving in either organic or synthetic sleeves. Access to health is another aspect of the stack and sleeves technology that on closer inspection seems less futuristic, but grounded in the realities of late capitalism.

Aline Ferreira's essay examines the biopolitics of the series from a philosophical perspective centered around the fantasy of escaping death. In some way it reads as a companion piece to the previous three entries, as the author brings into focus the idea

of a posthuman future promised as a way of prolonging life *ad infinitum,* but still grounded in the corporeality of the body. The idea of radical life extension through sleeve and clone technology is examined from multiple angles, including a discussion of the role of gender in the futuristic society—arguably a theme that is either ignored by the creators of the series, or sadly downplayed in the narrative and world-building—and the question of distributive justice in access of life-prolonging technologies. Ferreria's reading of the series' portrayal of the dream of immortality, deeply embedded in the fixed class structuring of the futuristic society, perfectly encapsulates why the world *Altered Carbon,* despite following a seemingly utopian impulse of eradicating death, is in fact a technologically-dependent dystopian nightmare.

The remaining two essays in this section move beyond the issue of embodiment or the promises of posthumanism, offering two very different perspectives. Damla Pehlivan is the author of the most surprising and original reading of the series' political conflict between the Meths and the Quellists—the latter side composing of rebels who oppose the idea that humans should have access to multiple life spans (and thus to immortality). She proposes to examine the conflict between materiality and spirituality from a Gnostic perspective, switching the philosophical inquiry to the question of transcendence and search of knowledge. The essay presents a very intriguing approach to deciphering the many layers of the show's politics. Dariusz Brzozek in turn analyzes the soundscape of the series, and asks who is speaking in and/or through the body of the other. His reading methodologically unites psychoanalysis with hauntology in examining the voices that speak and haunt the protagonists of *Altered Carbon.* To whom belongs the voice speaking in a rented sleeve—to the personality (stack) or the material body (sleeve)? Is it a voice of the living, or a haunting sonic memory of the dead? Brzozek's article deals with the ontological and metaphysical anxieties induced by radical (but inherently rationalized) technologies allowing these (dis)embodied voices to be heard, and provides an thought-provoking coda to the second part of the book.

The third section consists of four essays which interrogate *Altered Carbon*'s cyberpunk legacy. The initial lukewarm reception of the series among film critics troubles some of the authors in the collection, most certainly Adam Edwards, who opens the section with a discussion of the parodic elements of the series which he sees as crucial for understanding its complicated, critical engagement with the cyberpunk heritage. While acknowledging the Netflix series' existing aesthetical ties to *Blade Runner* (present both on screen and in marketing materials), Edwards contends that what this criticism fails to capture is how the creators of *Altered Carbon* are consciously entering in a dialogue with cyberpunk texts from the past, in order to recontextualize and update them, or, on the other hand, subvert the metatextual expectations of viewers. The scholar argues that instead of being an unoriginal revamping of an 1980s aesthetic, the series should be viewed as a parody of the cyberpunk genre. Important for his argument is Fredric Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche, the latter defined as a postmodern "imitation of dead styles," and the former as a style of producing imitations that remain respectful of the tropes and styles it wants to make fun of. According to Edwards, *Altered Cabron* is a self-conscious, ironic and, perhaps most significantly, critical repetition of seemingly used-up motifs and tropes of the cyberpunk. His analysis of selected scenes from the show supplies his argument

with valid examples of the parodic quality of the series' engagement with worn-out generic tropes and clichés (e.g. the hard-boiled tough detective, the grim neon-lit city, etc.). It also contextualizes them within not only the history of science fiction, but also in reference to the creators' intertextual plays with their (intended?) audience's expectations.

Kenneth Matthews' article deals with the idea of manufacturing history and ties the show's politics with the current political climate in the US. It discusses the relationship between the past and the present, focusing specifically on the questions of truth, and on who is able to controls the historical narrative—both in our present so-called post-truth era, and in the cyberpunk future of *Altered Carbon*. Matthews's analyzes the series' through the lens of New Historicism, recognizing the impact of literacy and linearity on the concept of time and history. His theoretical discussion of the historical specificity of cultural texts and their interpretation centers around the question of how the past is negotiated through a "selective tradition," which is ultimately a successful method of fabrication, pursued in the show by the all-powerful Meth elite.

The theme of how the past is constantly interfering with/in the present is continued in the next essay, written by Aldona Kobus, the co-editor of the volume. It examines the show from the perspective of Derridean hauntology, offering a multi-layered, insightful analysis of several cases of haunting: the ghosts of dead lovers, the ghost-like specters of artificial intelligences, or the frightening presence of those who return from the dead—and speak. Kobus argues convincingly that the future world of *Altered Carbon* is haunted by the past, as is the genre of cyberpunk itself. Once a fresh and original new wave of science fiction, today it is often berated for the staleness of its ideas and its over-use of worn-out aesthetical and political tropes. These different meta-textual specters of cyberpunk haunt the narrative of the show, either giving voice to counter-hegemonic narratives, or are silenced by those in power. Kobus's essay carefully constructs a very thoughtful critique of the genre's compulsive returning to the past to envision a future—perhaps even a retro-future, a future that had already taken place in the past—while also demonstrating the subversive elements present in the narrative which "is making us aware of the necessity of living with ghosts."

The last article, co-written by Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns and Emiliano Aguilar, examines the Netflix series' original interweaving of cyberpunk and the Gothic. Although the authors focus on the character of Edgar Allan Poe—an artificial intelligence running the Raven hotel—their essay also covers other emanations of the Gothic/Poesque in the narrative. It is the show's obsessive dance between life and death that is read through Poe's own dual fascination with the fear of death on the one hand, and the eroticism of death on the other. This contradictory perspective, the authors argue, is elevated in the show, as it challenges the neoliberal fantasy at its heart—the techno-scientific idea of prolonging life (at a certain price). Their essay brilliantly encapsulates both the show's and the reviewed book's investment in complicating, deconstructing and reevaluating the philosophical and political constrains put on the meaning and value of life and death.

The volume as a whole offers an intellectually captivating examination of a very recent American cultural text that succeeds in capturing present-day fears,

dreams and obsessions. Contributors to the collection employ an impressive array of theoretical frameworks that engage with the first season's multiple transgressive and subversive contexts, ranging from the issue of embodiment and sexuality, the past haunting the present, thanatophobia, up to the critique of late capitalist biopolitics and neoliberal fantasies of endless self-realization. Kobus's and Muniowski's edited collection is valuable not only for its immediacy and freshness, but most importantly for its skillful demonstration of the complexity that the science-fictional imagination brings to the discussion of the past, present, and future of Western technoculture.

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