Transmedia Worlding in Marine Serre's *FutureWear*

Smin Smith

Defining Science Fiction Art

The term *science fiction* as critic Adam Roberts states "resists easy definition […] it is always possible to point to texts consensually called SF that fall outside the usual definitions" (2006:1). This makes the process of defining science fiction particularly difficult, especially as an artist. The *science fiction art* we produce often falls *outside* of definitions which centre literature, film and television narratives.

When I started *Vagina Dentata Zine* in 2015 (a print publication documenting the relationship between fashion and science fiction), I had Norman Spinrad's definition in mind: "science fiction is anything published as science fiction" (quoted in Roberts, 2006:2). I am particularly drawn as an artist to understandings of science fiction that prioritise multiplicity, and ultimately reclamation. Having been involved in queer, feminist zine publishing for a number of years now, I regularly witness visual science fiction beyond film and television — beyond the "mainstream white supremacist capitalist patriarchal cinema" (hooks, 1996:107) that criticism still prioritises. It seems more important than ever to move science fiction studies beyond these constructs, to let the emergent and more generative science fiction happening on the fringes into academia.

Here I think particularly of the Afrofuturist legacy, a potent multimedia project that encompassed "the theoretical and the fictional, the digital and the sonic, the visual and the architectural" (Eshun, 2003:301). We do speculation a disservice when we limit its reach. Thanks to the work of multiple artists, zines and journals like *Vector,* science fiction criticism is finally expanding its remit to encompass the various modes of science fiction art.

My understanding of science fiction art has also been shaped by convergence culture, a contemporary phenomenon affecting both science fiction and the arts. Transmedia studies of science fiction identify a phenomenon where the "boundaries between media have blurred to the point at which it makes little sense to foreground fundamental distinctions between contemporary media" (Hassler-Forest, 2016:4-5). Narratives are simultaneously built across (but not limited to) films, television shows, books, comic books, video games and toys.

Similarly, contemporary art necessarily involves a convergence of media, building "a general field of activities, actions, tactics, and interventions falling under the umbrella of […] a single temporality" (Medina, 2010:19), that of the *contemporary.* For both Hassler-Forest and Medina, convergence has liberatory potential; as Medina puts it "[…] there is some radical value in the fact that "the arts" seem to have merged into a single multifarious and nomadic kind of practice that forbids any attempt at specification" (2010:19). As a fashion stylist once confined to the genre of visual culture, blurring the boundaries of *art, science fiction*, and *science fiction art* specifically feels especially productive.

Samuel R. Delany once proposed that "we read words differently when we read them as science fiction" (2012:153). This essay declares that we read art differently when we view it as science fiction, specifically fashion design and imaging practices.

Science Fiction in Fashion

My first introduction to aliens, technology and futurity didn't come in the form of a film or television show. I instead discovered science fiction through Alexander McQueen's SS10 collection:

Marine Serre, from *Marée Noire* campaign

Plato's Atlantis. The show featured reptilian prints, hair sculpted horns, and towering scaled shoes (later popularized by Lady Gaga). The models became cyborg-like biological hybrids between humans, reptiles and sea mammals. Meanwhile, two looming cameras tracked the models' movements across the catwalk, tying the presentation to the science fictional theme of surveillance.

This wasn't the first time Alexander McQueen had delved into the science fictional. Whilst helming Givenchy in the late 1990s, McQueen sent a model down the AW99 runaway in a circuit board bodice and cap, and glow-in-the-dark circuit trousers as a response to the Y2K bug. This robotic look echoed the earlier work of Thierry Mugler, whose *Metropolis*-inspired robot suits debuted in AW95. Mugler's 1990s collections are a masterclass in fashion as science fiction, with models dressed as motorbike-hybrids, bugs, and feathered aliens.

I therefore understand fashion to be part of what Adam Roberts terms "the long history" of science fiction, rather than a "relatively *recent* development in human culture" (Roberts, 2011:3). This history includes notable costume design engagements like Paco Rabanne's work on *Barbarella* (1968), Jean Paul Gaultier's designs for the *The Fifth Element* (1997), Kym Barrett's costumes for *The Matrix* (1999), or more recently Duran Lantink's iconic "vagina trousers" for Janelle Monáe's music video *Pynk* (*Dirty Computer,* 2018).

Since 2015 however, there has been an overwhelming increase in the production of science fiction fashion beyond this "costume" remit — with even larger houses like *Chanel, Gucci* and *Moschino* engaging with the subject. For me, transformational science fiction is largely being produced by emerging designers. RCA graduate AUBRUINO's debut collection for example included "feeding machine" (2017) space helmets.

Marine Serre, from *Marée Noire* campaign

The designer Dilara Findikoglu has released a collection engaging with the utopian (specifically *Dilaratopia*), using the press release as a manifesto for the future (Findikoglu, 2018). Elsewhere Christian Stone, the backpack-shoe designer and self-proclaimed "posthuman transhumanist" (2020) frequently collaborates with Pierre-Louis Auvray on collaged catwalk imagery. In these images, various characters from science fiction and fantasy games are pasted over the bodies of runway models. Similarly, Christian McKoy (@bbychakra92) collages pre-existing fashion imagery into cyborgs, aliens and angels as "an open love letter to cis and trans, dark-skinned females" (Vickery and Morgan, 2018).

It is into this present landscape that Marine Serre's *FutureWear* has emerged. A *transmedia world* built across catwalk presentations, campaign imagery, fashion films and clothing garments.

Transmedia Worlding

The art of "building new, freer worlds" (Imarisha, 2015:3-4) in science fiction has a rich history. Historically the terms *world-building, world-making* or *worlding* have been used, to define the "invention of imaginary places, societies and worlds with logics, structures and histories" (Burrows & O'Sullivan, 2019:256). I will be using Haraway's term "worlding" (2016:48) from this point onward to describe this phenomenon.

In *Science Fiction, Fantasy and Politics: Transmedia World-Building Beyond Capitalism* (2016), theorist Dan Hassler-Forest identifies two narrative strategies that encourage worlding: a lack of narrative closure, and the process of immersion. Hassler-Forest lists "television series, comic books and pulp literature" (2016:8) as examples of a lack of narrative closure. Whilst videogames

that engage with "spatial exploration, collaborative interaction, and kinetic immersion" (2016:8) are tied to immersive worlding.

Fashion as a contemporary phenomenon feels particularly attuned to transmedia worlding. Narratives are built across fashion presentations or catwalks, press releases, invitations, campaign imagery, fashion films, social media posts and clothing garments; and these narratives span indefinitely across seasons deferring "narrative closure" (Hassler-Forest, 2016:5). Many transgressive fashion presentations equally involve the viewer's "spatial exploration, collaborative interaction, and kinetic immersion" (Hassler-Forest, 2016:8). Thus, transmedia fashion practices can be understood to *world,* and in the right hands this *worlding* has political potential.

Marine Serre's FutureWear

For the designer Marine Serre, a post-apocalyptic world is being built across campaign imagery, fashion films and catwalk presentations. As Kathryn O'Regan describes, the label "doesn't so much as anticipate apocalypse as much as it lives it" (2019); it forces us to acknowledge the multiple apocalypses that have happened and are happening in reality. Take for example the breathing masks that feature heavily across Serre's collections; as *Dazed* described in 2019 "the reality quickly sank in that it's likely designers really will have to start incorporating items like this into their collections in the not-so-distant years to come" (Davidson, 2019). As I write this in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, that reality feels more present than ever.

The apocalypse weighs heavily upon Serre's AW19 collection *Radiation,* where recycled microchips, shells and coins adorn models. These reclaimed "valuables from the trash heap of history" (Serre, 2019) are re-contextualised as accessories. Here, Marine Serre is "digging the future out of the archive" (Gunkel & Schrade, 2017:195); building an alienated world from the paraphernalia of the present. On a more material level, recycling has been a common feature across the designers' *FutureWear,* with 50% of her SS20 collection for example being made from upcycled materials.

But Marine Serre doesn't simply reflect the present apocalypses, the label *propagates* "new ways to live" (quoted in Davidson, 2019) into being.

Serre uses her transmedia outputs to *world* post-apocalyptic realities. Worlds in which her models are adapting and surviving beyond the present disaster. Here Serre echoes Joanna Zylinska's notion of *feminist counter-apocalypses,* "[spaces] for an ethical opening to the precarious lives and bodies of human and nonhuman others" (2018:44). Marine Serre's SS20 show notes describe a world in which the "temperature has gone up radically, but more self-confident than ever, they adapt… to birth several clans, across generations, species and genders" (Cheng, 2019). This narrative of thriving non-human hybridity has clear ties to the theorist Donna Haraway.

NatureCultures

Marine Serre's SS19 *Hardcore Couture* show was accompanied by a series of short videos titled *Planet B*. The designer describes these videos as "[walking] us through dystopian landscapes hybridizing tech and nature… wandering through the hardcore pluriversal nature-culture of Planet B" (Serre, 2019). Natureculture is a concept developed by the theorist Donna Haraway, disbanding "the modern assumption of the Great Divide between nature and culture [as] not only ontologically false but also wrong-doing in its gendered, racialized and colonizing effects" (van der Tuin, 2018:270). Marine Serre's post-apocalypse overturns this ideological separation, calling into question those who benefit from separating nature and culture (Bell, 2007:93).

In the later film *Radiation* (2019), naturecultures are represented through visions of mutation, in which "people are transforming into something else and changing forms, and boundaries are fluid" (Serre quoted in Davidson, 2019). For Haraway, there was *pleasure* to be found in the process of disintegrating boundaries. The CGI world created by Rick Farin and Claire Cochran for *Radiation* embraces this *pleasure*, and we revel in scenes of the Arc de Triomphe overtaken by vines and neon smog.

But mutation isn't limited to the landscape, a silver otherworldly character exposes "the mutability of identities" (Hester, 2018:13) within this post-apocalypse. As the Xenofeminist Manifesto (2015) asserts, "nothing is so sacred that it cannot be reengineered and transformed so as to widen

Marine Serre, from *Marée Noire* campaign

our aperture of freedom" (Cuboniks, 2015). Serre's naturecultures visualise this transformation, asking: how will we mutate to survive?

In the more recent SS20 presentation *Marée Noire*, models walked across a seemingly-oil slick catwalk, built across swamplands and surrounded by silver industrial pipes. The CGI film of the same name features four parts: *Eden, The Drought, Breach* and *The Pass*. In 1998, Haraway posed that "the cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden" (151), but Serre's mutating characters are presented as having lived through and beyond it, adapting to the apocalypse and post-apocalypse that followed.

One notable addition to the SS20 narrative were dogs. Dogs feature heavily in Donna Haraway's work (and life), with "the story of co-evolution and cohabitation, of dogs and people" (2003:60) being a key example of the kinds of naturecultures happening in the present. Beyond their symbolism, seeing dogs thriving in the post-apocalypse

has a definite *affective pleasure*. As Jessica Heron-Langton describes in her catwalk review, "dogs still exist, because otherwise what's the point?" (2019). In the last scene of *Marée Noire*, the film accompanying this SS20 catwalk, a "land of dry dunes awaiting to be liberated, teases what's to be expected in the upcoming AW20 collection" (Bertolino, 2020). These types of ongoing, deferred narratives that Marine Serre is providing are clear examples of transmedia worlding, meeting all of the definition criteria identified by Hassler-Forest. Serre's natureculture worlding involves a process of convergence, immersion and deferred storylines. This worlding is used to propagate a feminist post-apocalypse into reality, calling upon us to mutate and survive.

When we read fashion practices as science fiction, we view them differently. By viewing Marine Serre's practice as science fiction we've unlocked its political potential. What else might critics unlock if we highlight more science fiction art practices?

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SMIN SMITH (THEY/THEM) IS A FASHION STYLIST, LECTURER AND PHD STUDENT AT UCA/UAL. OUTSIDE OF ACADEMIA THEY CURATE VAGINA DENTATA ZINE, A PUBLICATION THAT CELEBRATES STILL-IMAGE SCIENCE FICTION. SMIN'S RESEARCH BUILDS UPON THIS PRACTICE, DOCUMENTING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY FEMINISMS AND SCIENCE FICTION ARTWORK.